



Industrial Relations Unit (IRRU)

Seminar Speaker Series – Autumn 2023 (Term 1)

Speaker:

Mat Johnson, Senior lecturer in Employment Studies, UKRI Future Leaders Fellow, Alliance Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester

Title:

Decent work and the city: Regulation from above and below

Date:

Wednesday 06 December 2023

Venue:

Hybrid (In-person: WBS room 1.001 and online: Zoom platform)

Time:

14:00 – 15:30 (GMT)

Abstract:

Given the seemingly intractable challenges of articulating and implementing the decent work agenda across varied national contexts (e.g., Burchell et al., 2014; Christie et al., 2021), there is growing interest in the role of cities in delivering the economic and social upgrading needed to ‘build back better’ from the covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, transforming this rhetoric into reality is likely to be shaped by the particular aspects of the decent work agenda that local political elites see as the priority (e.g., job creation or job quality) and the particular traditions of policy making and economic transformation within cities (e.g., state centred and top down or participatory and bottom-up). There are also broader questions about whether cities in isolation can resist the forces of neoliberal austerity and the global competitive market dynamics that act as a drag on worker rights and living standards (Davies, 2021).

This presentation will offer initial findings from a four-year project comparing decent work initiatives from six cities around the world (Bremen, Buenos Aires, Manchester, Montreal, NYC and Seoul) and reflect upon the varied ways in which issues of precariousness and inequality are being addressed within and across different city contexts. Our comparisons suggest that cities can operate as ‘spaces of progress’ where egalitarian and redistributive policies are enacted and implemented from the top down, both through the laws, licensing rules, and social investments of municipal government (Jacobs et al., 2021), and through the soft power of political leaders working in partnership with employers to deliver good jobs and inclusive growth (Johnson et al., 2022; Waite and Bristow, 2019). Conversely, cities are also ‘spaces of protest’ where worker-led and grassroots movements generate new mechanisms of regulation, enforcement and solidaristic action ‘from below’ to prevent the further deterioration of standards (Atzeni, 2018; della Porta, 2016; Fine and Bartley, 2018; Souza, 2006).

Our research suggests that in order to understand the changing nature of

work in cities, we need to look at the increasingly complex and nuanced horizontal relationships between workplaces and the wider communities within which they are located, and to explore the shifting sources of power and collective action that may transcend traditional industries, trade union structures and occupational groups. We also need to interrogate the strength of the vertical links that connect elite actors to grassroots activists, workers and citizens, and the channels of dialogue that shape the tone and substantive outcomes of regulatory debate at city level.

Registration:

Book now via Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/irru-202324-speaker-series-with-mat-johnson-tickets-754621562407?aff=oddtcreator>