

Report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Spring School of the German Industrial Relations Association (GIRA):

**“Looking Outwards, Looking Inwards:  
Industrial Relations Research between Politics and Organizations”**

In the last week of March 2013, the Freie Universität Berlin – in cooperation with Hertie School of Governance and the Industrial and Labor Relations School of Cornell University – hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Spring School of the German Industrial Relations Association (GIRA). After a competitive application process, seventeen PhD-students from several European countries as well as some students from the United States were accepted not only to participate, but also to present and discuss their dissertation projects. In order to provide additional training in theory and methods for doctoral students and young researchers, professors from industrial relations, business studies, economics, sociology, political science, and labor law gave lectures and led discussions, focusing in particular on multi-disciplinary and international issues.

After a short introduction of all the participants, *Michael Fichter* (FU Berlin) opened the Spring School with his presentation on *Implementing International Labor Standards*. Arguing that the matter of standard-setting in terms of employment relationships is becoming more and more a global question, Fichter introduced and evaluated three different forms of transnational voluntary regulation concerning employment relations. He concluded that these instruments lead to a general improvement in employment relations on a global scale, but nevertheless have considerable limitations in terms of enforcement. The first day was completed with a session about *How to Get Published*, in which *Gregory Jackson* and *Jörg Sydow* (both FU Berlin) tried to give the participants an understanding of important aspects regarding publishing in leading international journals, among others by answering fundamental questions such as “what is interesting research?”

The second day started with a method section, in which *Gregory Jackson* (FU Berlin) spoke about the *Promise and Pitfalls of Cross-National Comparison*. Beside general advice on what should be considered when using cross-national comparisons as a method, Jackson presented different approaches and pointed out their strengths and weaknesses. In her presentation about *The Politics of Crossborder Labour Rights*, *Anke Hassel* (Hertie School of Governance) shed light on the emergence of Global Labor Governance by comparing traditional labor regulation with new forms and discussing the (changing) roles of the actors involved in this process. A role-play in a “fish-bowl” followed, in which every participant had to take a role (NGO-activist, unionist, manager, local or moderator) and to defend his or her position in face of

questions like “What are universal labor standards?”, “What is the role of the ILO?” and “What is the responsibility of a global firm?”

The third day focused on international labor law and was again opened by a session on methodology, this time dealing with the issue of *Bridging Law and Social Sciences in the Study of Labor*. In his presentation *Alex Colvin* (Cornell University) illustrated the relationship between the disciplines of law and social sciences. Colvin offered different examples from his own research to demonstrate the possible integration of the disciplines. *Claudia Schubert* (FU Berlin) followed with a presentation about the *Right of Collective Bargaining and Action in a Multi-level Legal System*. Schubert highlighted the complications in enforcing labor rights based on multi-level legislation. On the basis of three different examples (ban on strike for public officials in Germany, the Viking case, and the Palacio de la Villa Case) she demonstrated the interaction of legal guarantees. The third day was concluded with another session on scientific publishing in which *Carola Frege* (LSE), *Sarosh Kuruvilla* and *Alex Colvin* (both Cornell University), and *Gregory Jackson* and *Jörg Sydow* (both FU Berlin), reported from their experience as editors of various journals in the field of industrial relations research. In contrast to the first part, where the general form of a paper was focused, in this section the tutors spoke about the scholar’s decision in targeting a specific journal.

The motto of the next day was *Doing Field Research on MNCs and Global Value Chains*. In a mixture of theoretical and methodical questions, *Sarosh Kuruvilla* (Cornell University) talked about fundamental changes in terms of employment relations due to globalization. Arguing that there is a necessity for new theoretical lenses, Kuruvilla introduced potential alternatives with the perspectives of Global Production Networks as well as Global Value Chains and illustrated their influences on HR-practices with diverse examples. In a second part Kuruvilla offered insights into the first results of a study about the transformation of the labor market for lawyers in the US, UK and India. Kuruvilla argued that in the course of an offshoring and increasing fragmentation of activities due to the recent crisis, the profession of the lawyer is fundamentally changing. In the evening a roundtable-discussion was arranged at the Hertie School of Governance, where two practitioners reported from their organizations’ work. *Miriam Saage-Maaß* (ECCHR) talked about global working conditions – especially in the apparel industry – and her organization’s campaigns and law suits against multinationals. *Philipp Schwertmann* (DGB), with reference to a big construction project in Berlin, gave some insights into his organization’s struggle against human trafficking and precarious work.

The week was completed by looking at the subject of *Studying Work in Temporary Organizations*. By combining studies of work, organizations, networks and fields *Jörg Sydow* (FU Ber-

lin) offered an alternative perspective on industrial relations. On the basis of a study (TV production), Sydow illustrated the implications of projects for work. At the end of this part a paper by *Susan Christophson* (Cornell University) (who was not able to participate) was discussed by the participants. Using the example of “Hollywood” in the crisis the paper aims to reveal the critical role of the labor force in project-based industries.

All in all, the Spring-School offered all its participants a possibility to “look inwards” and view different (new) issues through the lens of their own discipline as well as to move beyond the borders of their “own” discipline and “look outwards” by viewing familiar issues through the lens of other disciplines.

Berlin-Dahlem, April 2013

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