

Discussions on informal work and eco-social welfare framework

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This paper aims to build conceptual and empirical bridges between the scholarships of eco-social welfare and informal work. One of the characteristics of the capitalism has been the perpetuation of precarious, flexibilised and informalised conditions of work. In May 2020, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) published a report stating that 2 billion workers earn their livelihoods in the informal economy, which is around 62% of the global working population (ILO 2020:1). While informal work is more visible in the Global South, studies show that short-casual work contracts with low remuneration are also increasing in the Global North (Mezzadri 2020). In such cases work may be officially within a formal establishment, however it may not include all the benefits usually associated with formal jobs, and thus becomes ‘informalised’ (Mezzadri 2020:156). This can imply work without sick leave, parental leave, paid vacations, health insurance at workplace and numerous other welfare measures which are usually included within standard formalised work contracts and environments. Hence, discussions on envisioning sustainable futures of welfare structures need to engage with the vast scholarship on informal work.

The world of work in general is always under constant transformation due to changing landscapes of technology, automation and to unpredictable aspects of climate change. Emerging fields of research studies such as future of work, eco-social welfare, just transition, post-work and degrowth, propose and argue for more sustainable solutions that include better working conditions (cf. Cherkovskaya et al. 2019; D’Alisa et al. 2015; Fitzpatrick et al. 2022; Koch and Buch-Hansen 2020). However, the vast span of research on informalised, precarious and low-income spaces of work largely remain marginal in these bodies of literature (apart from a few recent publications, see Tucker and Anantharaman 2020). Thus, this article aims to contribute to the discussions on work within eco-social welfare literature by bringing in perspectives from studies on informal work.

Activities such as paid care work, paid domestic work, waste collection and recycling, low-income subsistence farm work, repair and maintenance of everyday goods and services, street vendors, etc. across the globe, are largely sustained through informal work (Crang et al. 2012; ILO 2020). To carry out this research, this paper will focus upon a case study of informally employed waste pickers organisations based in Argentina (Allen and Morin 2012; Campos et al. 2022; Gutberlet et al. 2021). The waste pickers organisation in Buenos Aires were collectively able to create a grassroot initiative to educate urban dwellers on better waste management strategies (Gutberlet et al. 2021). Moreover, they were also able to demand safer work environments and better access to resources from the municipality for their

everyday ecological work (Allen and Morin 2012). The case of the Argentinian waste pickers offers insights into how grassroots mobilisation by informally employed workers can provide direction to local policy making to make measures that are inclusive of an ecological perspective and consider working conditions in low-income workspaces. This paper will examine how an eco-social welfare framework can further contribute to analysing this case and propose how such a model could be resourceful for other urban centres and local policy makers. A critical dialogue between eco-social welfare theories and studies on informal work can deepen discussions on who does and how care of humans and environment is facilitated every day. Therefore, the primary research question which guides this paper is: how can eco-social welfare framework help in designing policies which address issues of low-income and precarious work?

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