

International Lecture in Economic Geography

Socially useful production: transforming industries in past, present, and future?

23 October 2019, 6 pm

Alfred Philippson Lecture Hall, Institute of Geography, Meckenheimer Allee 166



Confronting new manufacturing technologies, industrial restructuring, and economic disruption in the 1970s and 1980s, a movement of workers in the UK – linked to similar initiatives in Scandinavia and Germany – proposed an alternative development path

based in 'socially useful production'. The emblematic 'Lucas Plan' inspired human-centred prototyping that anticipated democratic working practices and socialised markets, and which sought institutional commitments to social justice and environmental sustainability.

Today, Industry 4.0 presents another transformation in manufacturing – raising issues familiar to the movement for socially useful production. Prototyping today happens in many distributed and connected spaces: hackerspaces, makerspaces and fab-labs, commons-based platforms, and grassroots innovation networks. But what about their political and economic capacity to go beyond prototyping?

Drawing upon empirical research into socially useful production, makerspaces and grassroots innovation, the aim in the Lecture is to identify enduring themes in prototyping for sustainability. Whilst the themes will play out differently across shifting geographies and histories, are there any generic lessons for the design of institutions that can accompany and support such diverse activity?

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