SESSION 68: Working in the Shadow. Non-regular Economic Activities in Urban Europe (16th to early 20th Centuries)

Illicit artisan work as a political problem and as an epiphenomenon of economic crisis in early-modern German towns

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Denn die einen sind im Dunkeln
Und die anderen sind im Licht.
Und man sieht die im Lichte
Die im Dunkeln sieht man nicht.
(Bertolt Brecht, Dreigroschenoper)

Forms of non-regular economic activities have not been a major focus of social, economic or historical research. While some research has been done by social and economic scientists on “shadow” and “informal economies” in the last twenty years¹, historical studies on non-regular and illicit work in particular in pre-and early-modern societies are scarce.² One important reason for this has to be seen in the clandestine character of these economic activities. For the most part, they lie in the dark – to paraphrase Brecht – and therefore are not


or hardly visible and accessible for economic and historical research. Even for studies on present-day shadow economy activities, “it is very difficult to obtain accurate statistics (...). Hence, the estimation of shadow economy activities can be seen as a scientific passion for knowing the unknown”. And the obstacles are much greater, if we want to analyse non-regular economic activities in the past. In particular the classical questions of economics and economic history about the size and quantitative development of shadow economies are normally impossible to answer because of lack of data. Therefore, one of the central questions for historians, who want to work on this topic, is how we can shed some more light on the subject.

This paper will discuss some of the problems connected with illicit work in early-modern societies. It will concentrate on artisan industries in German towns, especially in Lübeck and Leipzig. Furthermore, it will focus mainly on political aspects, thereby examining the connections between the political and the economic level. As will be shown, from the second half of the 16th century we have enough records to analyse at least some central questions concerning the political dimension of illicit (artisan) work. First, the emergence and construction of illicit work as a political problem will be discussed: since when was illicit work regarded as a political problem, i.e. as a problem which affected the “common weal” and the “welfare” of urban societies and therefore had to be regulated and “policed” by the authorities? Second, illicit work as a topic of political communication will be analysed in more detail concentrating on the 17th century: in which periods did illicit work emerge on the political agenda as a problem of particular significance, and what are the reasons for this? In particular, the question will be discussed in how far economic developments and economic crises influenced the political debate on illicit work: Can they be seen as an epiphenomenon of economic crises? In this context, it will be examined how illicit work was perceived and evaluated by the political actors and in particular by the guilds as the most important political players in this field, in particular how they connected illicit work with economic developments. These questions will be discussed by comparing the situation in early-modern Lübeck and Leipzig.

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3 Schneider/ Enste, Shadow Economy, p. 4.
4 Because the political discourse on illicit artisan work was dominated by the guilds, most sources, especially petitions, stem from them. On the other hand, there are hardly any documents written by illicit artisans themselves.
Early-modern urban economies were characterized by a complex mixture between formal and informal forms of work. Not only in the great metropolitan centres of early-modern Europe like Paris or Vienna, but also in many middle-sized towns like Lübeck or Leipzig, there was a great variety of forms of non-regular and illicit work and the informal economy, i.e. those economic activities which took place beyond the regulated world of the guild-system, played an important role for the operation of the handicraft industries. Socially, economically as well as legally, the group of unincorporated artisans – in Germany they were called among others Störer, Böhnhasen, Stümpler or Pfüscher, in France faux ouvriers or chambrellans, in England chamberers – was very heterogeneous. There was no clear dividing-line between regular and illicit work and only a part of the unincorporated artisans were obviously and indisputably illicit. The differences between formal and informal, regular and irregular, legal and illicit were blurred, and the question which economic activity was illicit, was widely disputed. Rather, there was a broad transitional area, where the legal status of economic activities was unclear and work which was in the strict sense illicit was tolerated. The reason for the at first sight surprising high degree of tolerance towards unincorporated forms of artisan work in many early-modern towns is, that the non-regular economic sector had several important and often indispensable functions for the urban economy and society: among other, it was one and often the only possibility for poor people to earn their living beyond the institutions of public welfare and it constituted a reservoir of cheap labour. This increased the possibilities of the urban economic system to react flexibly on short term fluctuations. Therefore, the unincorporated sector of artisan work helped stabilize the regular and rather inflexible system of the guilds, especially in times of economic crisis. The other side of the coin was that the life of unincorporated workers was marked by a high degree of insecurity and precarious working conditions.

Quite in contrast to these diverse and ambivalent conditions of economic reality, on a discursive level cultural patterns were widespread in early-modern times, which clearly distinguished between the “honest and honourable” master-artisans and the illicit workers,

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thereby disguising the complexity of everyday life. They were used in particular by the guilds not only to gain economic advantages over their competitors but – even more important – to mark and reassure the political privileges and the distinct social position of the master-artisans in the cities as well as their domination in the field of the urban artisanship. Therefore, the social logic behind these patterns was not only an economic but also a political and cultural one. There is some evidence that such discursive formations developed and spread in many urban societies at the end of the 15th and in the first half of the 16th century. This is reflected by the more and more common use of new and discriminating terms labelling unincorporated workers, like Bönhasen, Störer, or Stümper. These cultural patterns stigmatised the unincorporated artisans and thereby excluded them from central areas of social and political life. As the antithesis of the guild artisan, the Bönhase or Störer combined several negative traits that stood in opposition to the values embodied by the masters and the “honest” citizens. They were labelled as asocial vagabonds, which did not belong to any rank (they were sans état), and thus marked as a disruption of the established social order and a severe danger to its stability. The “false workers” (faux ouvriers or chambrellans) were, as Steven L. Kaplan has pointed out, “(o)ne of the most serious threats to the control that the guilds exercised over their social and economic capital”, because “they created a world of parallel work, outside the corporate communities; they were considered to be socially illicit, politically seditious, morally corrupt, and technically incapable. The unlicensed workers were taken to be imposters and shammers whose work threatened society in general, as well as the order of guilds, because it was ‘fraudulent’ and ‘deceitful’”.

The spreading of these cultural concepts of differentiation and exclusion especially among the guilds has to be seen as an important precondition for the constitution of illicit work as a politicum in the course of the 16th century, i.e. as an issue which was regarded as affecting the “bonum commune” of urban societies and therefore had to be regulated and policed by the

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6 This aspect is also stressed by Ehmer, Traditionelles Denken.
7 This is closely connected to general developments, in particular the re-evaluation of work and especially manual work around 1500. According to Peter Blickle, in this time the organisation of work became a crucial political issue that was closely connected to central political, in particular the relationship between the authorities and their subjects: Peter Blickle, Arbeit als Politikum an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit, in: Hans-Jürgen Gerhard (Ed.), Struktur und Dimension. Festschrift für Karl Heinrich Kaufhold zum 65. Geburtstag, Bd. 1: Mittelalter und Frühe Neuzeit, Stuttgart 1997, pp. 244-255. Furthermore, there are parallels and close connections to the spreading of new attitudes towards poverty and begging and in particular to the criminalization of begging since the end of the Middle Ages and in the time of the Reformation.
8 The expression Bönhasen, meaning loft-rabbits, was commonly used in Lübeck and in other cities of Northern Germany to depict clandestine artisans, who had to carry out their work in hidden places because of its illegal nature.
9 See also James R. Farr, Artisans in Europe 1300-1914, Cambridge 2000, p. 43.
10 Kaplan, Guilds, pp. 355-6.
authorities. Through this politicizing process, which can be observed at least in several early-modern towns, the legal status of non-regular artisan work as a deviant behaviour changed: Illicit artisan work was not only seen as an infringement of the particular rights and liberties of the guilds, but also as a problem which affected the urban order and the public welfare in general. Thereby, the regulation of artisan and in particular non-regular artisan work was integrated into the broader context of the gute Policey or bonne police.\textsuperscript{11} This was manifested by the publication of general decrees which forbade illicit artisan work and set punishments for employing and accommodating illicit artisans. In Lübeck, such decrees were issued by the city council in 1569, 1570 and 1584. They were re-published and renewed several times during the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries. In this time, similar decrees against illicit work were issued in other towns, for example in Basel in 1567.\textsuperscript{12} Politically, the publication of such decrees was important, because the authorities acknowledged the problem of illicit work to be of general political importance and committed themselves to the prosecution of illicit artisans in the name of the “public good”. Overall, the second half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and especially the 1560s, which was in general a time of intensified regulation of social and economic problems in German cities, seem to have been a turning-point in the legal and political history of illicit work.

But such decrees which prohibited illicit artisan work and the employment of illicit artisans in general could not be found in every city. For example, in the Saxon town of Leipzig no such decree was published during the early-modern times. In early-modern Leipzig illicit work was regarded as a particular problem, which only affected single crafts, but not – as was the case in Lübeck – as a general political problem of the urban community as a whole. Corresponding regulations can therefore only be found in particular forms, either in the statutes of single guilds or as decrees issued by the authorities in favour of individual guilds.

Similar differences between Lübeck and Leipzig can be found if we look at everyday political communication and conflicts about illicit artisan work. Here, we are confronted with the problem that in the case of Lübeck and Leipzig there are hardly any sources before the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. It is only since this time, that we have a larger amount of records, especially

\textsuperscript{11} The emergence of new concepts of (urban) politics in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, centring round the concept of gute Policey or bonne police has been a central aspect of research in the last years in Germany. It circumscribes the general tendency that in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century the authorities increasingly regulated matters of every-day and in particular of economic life through statutes and general decrees.

\textsuperscript{12} Schulz, Störer, pp. 693-4.
petitions and complaints written by the guilds.\textsuperscript{13} An examination of the records since the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century shows that the significance of illicit work as an issue of political communication changed markedly. In Lübeck, there was quite a high level of complaints and conflicts during the 1580s and especially during the 1590s: this period was the first obvious climax of illicit artisan work as a political problem.\textsuperscript{14} On the other hand, during the first three decades of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the subject of illicit work nearly vanished from the political agenda, while in the course of the Thirty Years’ War this topic became again a relevant. From the 1640s on, we can find recurrent disputes and a constant stream of complaints about illicit work, culminating in the constitutional conflicts of the 1660s, when Lübeck was ridden by severe inner conflicts between the authorities and the citizens.\textsuperscript{15} After this climax, the significance of illicit work as a political topic diminished steadily through the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, but without losing its relevance for the guilds and urban politics altogether. In the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, illicit work was still a point of political and judicial conflict, but without the intensity it had had during wide parts of the former century.

While in Lübeck, the problem of illicit artisan work played an important role in political debates and had, at least during some periods, a high potential for political conflicts, in Leipzig the political significance of this problem was much less distinct. Although the extent of non-guild or illicit artisan work in Leipzig was not lower than in Lübeck and although there were many complaints from the guilds about clandestine craftsmen and lawsuits against them, the problem of illicit work did not have the same potential for political conflicts as was the case in Lübeck. But also in the case of Leipzig we can observe periods during which political communication and conflicts about illicit work intensified: first in the 1630s and 40s and the around 1700.\textsuperscript{16}

Besides these general developments, there were also differences between the two towns regarding which workers should be considered illicit artisans. Here, a process of differentiation can be observed during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. In Lübeck, since the 1630s the

\textsuperscript{13} The central reason for this has to be seen in a change of media during the second half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, when written forms of political communication became more and more common. Certainly, illicit work had been a point of political communication before, for example during the political conflicts in Lübeck between 1530 and 1535, when the guilds complained about abuses in the artisan economy of Lübeck and especially about the problem of illicit artisans. But the sources are too scattered to draw a precise picture.

\textsuperscript{14} Similar developments can be observed in Imperial towns of South-western Germany: see Schulz, Störer.


\textsuperscript{16} The observations for Leipzig are based largely on sources of the tailors' guild. The tailors were one of those crafts which were strongly affected by illicit artisan work.
problem of rural artisans working – in the opinion of the guilds – illicitly in the estates and villages around the city became more and more virulent, with a climax in the 1660s. Moreover, since the Thirty Years’ War, the employment of soldiers for artisan work was heavily criticised by the guilds. Finally, the employment of artisans, in particular journeymen, by well-off families as servants to do artisan work – a practice which became more and more common around 1700 – was regarded by the guilds as an economic threat and as a case of illicit work.

In Leipzig, we can find similarities as well as differences: On the one hand, since the 1630s there were many complaints against soldiers and from the beginning of the 18th century also against servants doing artisan work. On the other hand, it seems that the problem of rural artisans was of no great significance, at least in the case of the tailors. But there was one group of artisans against which the guilds and especially the tailors’ guild fought with vehemence during the 17th century: those craftsmen, who lived and worked in the buildings belonging to the university. Because it had a privileged status, the buildings and estates of the university constituted an autonomous space inside the town, which was not subject to the town council.17

II

How can we explain these developments as well as the differences between single towns as far as the legal status and the political significance of illicit work? Economic factors certainly play an important role. According to Knut Schulz the fact, that the problem of illicit work gained political significance in many towns of South-western Germany at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century, was an effect of the worsening of the economic situation in particular for the artisans.18 This led to a tightening up of the urban labour markets and to more restrictive conditions for the reception of new masters into the guilds, thus increasing the number of unincorporated workers.19 Certainly, we can also assume that under

17 Also in other towns, unincorporated artisans concentrated in such privileged and politically autonomous areas, which were beyond the rule of the institutions of the burghers’ city: the most famous example is the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris: see Kaplan, Faubourg.

18 In particular during the 1590s, there was a large increase of the grain prices which led to economic difficulties among the artisans and workers and to an increase of begging and vagrancy: see Wilhelm Abel, Massenarmut und Hungerkrisen im vorindustriellen Europa. Versuch einer Synopsis, Hamburg, Berlin 1974, pp. 104, 112; Wolfgang Behringer et al., Kulturelle Konsequenzen der „Kleinen Einzeit“? Eine Annäherung an die Thematik, in: ibid. (Eds.), Kulturelle Konsequenzen der „Kleinen Eiszeit“ – Cultural Consequences of the „Little Ice Age“, Göttingen 2005, p. 22; see also Robert Jütte, Klimabedingte Teuerungen und Hungersnöte. Bettelverbote und Armenfürsorge als Krisenmanagement, in: Behringer et al., Kulturelle Konsequenzen, pp. 225-238.

difficult conditions, when the conflicts about the distribution of the diminishing economic returns became more severe, the competition of non-guild artisans with the guilds became more tangible. In such circumstances the guilds’ strategy to drive out the illicit artisans was a reasonable way to secure the income of the guild-masters and their families. Therefore, it seems quite plausible, that in those times, when the urban artisan economies faced economic recession and crisis, there was an intensification of political communication and an increase in conflicts about illicit artisans. Furthermore, the differences between Leipzig and Lübeck can at least partly be explained with by economic aspects. Besides a few periods of economic crises, Leipzig was a prospering town in the early-modern period, while the economy of Lübeck stagnated and declined after the Thirty Years’ War. This limited the income and the prospects of the common artisan und therefore fostered negative attitudes towards competitors and especially unincorporated artisans.

Therefore, one can expect a rise in complaints and conflicts about illicit artisans in times of economic recession and crises. This hypothesis is validated if we look at our examples. In all those periods in which we can observe an intensification of political communication and debates about illicit work, the towns and in particular the artisan industries were facing economic difficulties. In Lübeck, this was the case in the 1590s and since the 1630s, especially during the 1660s, when the town was facing severe inner political conflicts. In Leipzig, the 1630s and 40s as well as first years of the reign of August “the Strong” (1694-1733) were times of economic troubles caused by external events: the Thirty Years’ War and the “adventures” of August to extend his political influence especially in Eastern Europe.

Although there are correlations between the economic situation and the problems concerning illicit work, we should not follow a one-sided economically determined view-point. Several other aspects, political as well as cultural ones, have also to be taken into account. Moreover, a multi-dimensional approach is necessary because the possibilities to analyse illicit work and the development of the “shadow economy” with classical tools of economic history are very much restricted, because reliable sources are lacking. The little information we have about the number and the working conditions of illicit artisans stems from the guilds themselves, which are normally crude estimations and not neutral because of their political implications.

Especially if we want to understand, why and how the problem of illicit work was dealt with in political and legal contexts, we have to analyse the structure of the political field and

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especially the political position of the guilds. In particular the organisation of the guilds and their possibility to establish a common identity is of crucial importance, as can be shown, if we compare Lübeck and Leipzig. In Lübeck, there was an institutional level above the individual guilds, on which all guild artisans were organised and represented as a united political force (the so-called Vier Große Ämter). Because of this, the guilds were able to formulate common interests and to promote them in the political arena. The ban of illicit artisan work was of particular importance, because it did not only affect the economic interests of the guild-artisans but it was closely connected to their cultural identity and political standing. It was therefore a suitable issue for forming a common political consciousness among the urban guild artisans beyond the particular interests of the individual corporations. This can help to explain, why in early-modern Lübeck illicit work was seen as political problem of general significance and why decrees were regularly issued since the 1560s, which forbade illicit work in general.

In contrast to this, in Leipzig there was no common organisation of the guilds, which could articulate and represent their interests as a whole. Rather, every guild acted on its own behalf. Due to this system of corporate separatism, the structural preconditions for developing a common political identity among the guilds were lacking. This led not only to a weak position of the guilds in the political field, but also to the guilds being unable to build up a common political identity and articulate common interests such as a general ban of illicit work. The fact that the struggle against illicit work remained the particular interest of those guilds that were chiefly affected by this phenomenon like the tailors has to be seen as a major reason why there were no general decrees issued by the urban authorities of Leipzig forbidding illicit artisan work or the employment of illicit artisans.

III

Besides economic and political aspects, the cultural dimension is of central importance, especially if we analyse the connection between economic developments and the significance of illicit work as a topic of political communication. If and in which way illicit work was put on the political agenda was determined significantly by the perceptions, expectations and evaluations, in particular by those of the guilds: how did they perceive and describe the economic situation; how did they evaluate illicit artisans; and how did they link both aspects? To find answers to these questions, we have to take a closer look at the records; first at several
 petitions written by the guilds of Lübeck in 1662/63 and addressed to the town council.\textsuperscript{20} Here, the guilds complained about the deplorable state of many of the guild-members, whose income (\textit{Nahrung}) was diminishing from day to day. They stated that should the development go on and no “remedy” be found, then all master-artisans as well as their families would be reduced to poverty, a fate some of them had already experienced in the past. The main reason for their desperate situation was - in their opinion - the high and increasing number of illicit artisans who lived and worked especially in the estates and villages around Lübeck. The guilds pointed out two central reasons for this development, a legal one and an economic one. The first was the widespread disrespect of the decrees, which forbade giving work and accommodation to illicit artisans, and the breaching of the rights and liberties of the guilds among the citizens and inhabitants of Lübeck. Moreover, the existing decrees and rules were not executed and implemented properly and with the necessary severity by the urban authorities. Illicit workers as well as those persons who gave work to them were hardly persecuted and, according to the guilds, there were even some members of the town council who employed illicit artisans especially on their rural estates.

Besides this perspective, which concentrates on legal aspects of “law and order”, there was a second, though rather secondary perspective in these petitions, that centres on economic factors. The guilds claimed that, while the citizens and especially the guild-artisans had to pay heavy contributions and taxes, the illicit artisans were free of those and other burdens and could work for less money. Therefore, they were more in demand and had an unfair economic advantage over the honourable citizen-artisans. The guilds also argued that the lack of income and the impoverishment of the masters and their families would diminish their ability to contribute to the “public good”, especially to pay their taxes. Furthermore, they had to dismiss their staff, in particular the journeymen, so that the “crew” (\textit{Mannschaft}) of the town would diminish. Here, the guilds connected their economic situation and their particular interests with the state of the whole town and with the public good.

If we look at the means the guilds proposed to take action against the problem of illicit artisan work, these were restricted on the legal level. For example, they did not demand a lowering of the tax and other burdens.\textsuperscript{21} Rather they applied for a renewal of the decrees, a better protection of their privileges and an intensified and more effective execution and

\textsuperscript{20} Petitions of the Vier Große Ämter to the city council, June 1662 (in: Stadtarchiv Lübeck, Altes Senatsarchiv, Ämter Allgemein 5/1), March 27\textsuperscript{th} 1663 (in: Ämter Allgemein 5/2) and September 1663 (in: Ämter Allgemein 7/1).

\textsuperscript{21} If we take into account, that in the 1660s Lübeck was close to bankruptcy, such a claim would have been unrealistic. But because a tax-increase had to be approved by the citizens, the guilds could link their consent with the demand, that the council had to support their interest in particular to diminish the number of illicit artisans.
implementation of the existing laws by the authorities through more controls and severer punishments.\footnote{The guilds regarded the praxis that they themselves searched for illicit artisans as the most effective means of social control: this privilege caused many conflicts with other citizens, because they often regarded this as an encroachment on their own civic liberties, in particular the protection of their “house-peace”, and was therefore restricted by the urban authorities. This again caused many complaints by the guilds.}

Similar patterns of argumentation can be found in several other petitions of the guilds of Lübeck as well as in many other early-modern towns, for example in Paris, Vienna or Leipzig.\footnote{See Kaplan, Faubourg, pp. 360-1; ibid., Turgot, pp. 191-2 (on Paris); Buchner, Möglichkeiten von Zunft, pp. 149-155 (on Vienna and Amsterdam).} In 1705, the tailors’ guild of Leipzig addressed two petitions to the city council of Leipzig.\footnote{Petitions of the tailors’ guild to the city council, February 17\textsuperscript{th} and March 27\textsuperscript{th} 1705 (in: Stadtsarchiv Leipzig II. Sektion S 680, f. 24-31).} In those, they drew a depressing picture of the general situation of their craft, applying means of rhetorical dramatisation: Several masters had already been ruined and many more were facing impoverishment due to lack of income. Only a few could earn enough money to pay taxes and contributions. Many guild members were so desperate, that they lamented about their situation with tears in their eyes before the heads of the guild. Again, in the opinion of the guild, the main reason for their difficult state had to be seen in the great number of illicit artisans. These \\textit{Störer} did not only steal their bread but were also criminals and vagabonds that sneaked away in times of danger and were of no use for the city but only contributed to the downfall of honest citizens, who endured hard times, and wars.\footnote{On such forms of defamatory rhetoric which can also be found in several other petitions in Leipzig as well as in Lübeck see Hoffmann, Bönhaserei, in particular pp. 195-7; and Buchner, Möglichkeiten von Zunft, pp. 147-162.} Again the high number of illicit artisans was put down to failures and neglects in the legal practice, in particular inadequate means of persecution and insufficient punishment. The guild claimed, that it could not remember one single case at least during the preceding five years of a person being punished because he gave work or accommodation to an illicit artisan according to the existing rules. Rather, in most cases, the penalties for working illicitly were remitted. The assertion that the illicit artisans had a relative economic advantage because they did not have to pay taxes and contributions was also put forward in the petitions. Among others, one effect of this was that the masters could not find journeymen who wanted to work legally, because they would prefer to do illicit work.

These examples make clear, that there was a set of concepts and patterns of argumentation used by the guilds to support their claims and legitimize their demand to take action against illicit artisans. The issue of illicit work is thereby put into more general contexts and
discursive frames especially normative ones. Apart from the dominating legal perspective, which stressed the character of non-regular work as a deviant behaviour and an offence against existing rights, the guilds tried to prove the political significance of the issue by showing the negative consequences which illicit work had on the public good, thereby linking their particular interests with the common weal. Another strategy was the use of rhetoric of defamation and social exclusion, which aimed at depriving the clandestine artisans from all rights and virtues characterizing the honourable citizen and guild artisan and excluding them from those social and normative contexts that were regarded as constitutive for well-ordered urban societies.

Moreover, it was a common assertion of the guilds that the illicit artisans were a or even the central reason for those economic troubles, the urban economy and in particular their own crafts were in. In this context it is important how the economic circumstances were perceived. In the petitions above, but also in many others, a view is dominant which describes the economic situation as being in a state of crisis. In the opinion of the guilds, it is in the first place the high and always increasing number of illicit artisans, which accounts for the economic crisis. And this was influenced by other factors, for example the lax judicial praxis. Therefore, the immediate remedy of these deficiencies could not only decrease the number of illicit artisans but also help to overcome the actual crisis.

Of course, this is a very plain explanation, assigning the illicit artisans the role of scape-goats. Deeper lying structural factors were not taken into account. Nevertheless, by looking at these small fragments of political discourse it becomes clear how the economic and political dimensions of illicit work were related. Hereby, cultural concepts functioned as intermediaries between the economic and the political spheres. Therefore, not the actual amount of illicit work was crucial for the political relevance of this issue, but how it was perceived, related to economic developments and translated into the political realm. Only if we take these relationships into account, we can discern the political debate on illicit work as an epiphenomenon of economic developments and crises.