



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

CALL FOR PAPERS

Time and place: 28–29 August 2025
Department of Economic and Social History
University of Helsinki

MAKING A LIVING IN THE MARGINS – PAST AND PRESENT Workshop on the concept of the makeshift economy

50 years has passed since British social historian Olwen Hufton first introduced the concept of the makeshift economy in her book, *The poor of eighteenth-century France*. Ever since, the concept has been widely applied in various contexts within social and historical sciences. It refers to economic activity in which impoverished or low-income individuals and families endeavor to make ends meet by combining incomes from multiple, often insecure and scarce, sources. The activity has been associated with short-term and possibly desperate subsistence strategies in times of crises, as well as more permanent means of survival for poor households. On a societal level, the makeshift economy can be conceptualized as an economic structure operating on the margins of the formal economy, akin to the shadow or informal economy.

The makeshift economy is a compelling yet challenging concept for academic research due to the difficulty in measuring its prevalence, often requiring innovative approaches to source materials for empirical study. However, it is undeniable that the concept is relevant, given the increasing prevalence of labor market insecurity, casual work, and piecework pay in today's economy. The concept is also a reminder of the importance of taking factors other than real wages into account when looking at the long-term living standards of poor and low-income people.

We invite scholars to participate in a thought-provoking workshop on plurioccupational activities and makeshift economies in Europe, spanning from the early modern period to the present day. The principal objective of the workshop is to bring together historians and social scientists whose research interests are in some way related to the makeshift economy and related phenomena, whether at the theoretical or empirical level. Furthermore, we are interested in stimulating discussion to what extent the concept of the makeshift economy, typically used in the context of early modern societies, is relevant when considering industrial and post-industrial societies. The workshop also aims to promote the production of a joint publication on the history and theory of the makeshift economy.

Research topics may relate to, but are not limited to, the following areas: 1) new sources and methods to investigate the prevalence of the makeshift economy on micro and macro levels; 2) causes and consequences of makeshift economy across societies and periods; 3) power, societal structures and the makeshift economy; 4) boundaries between the economy of makeshift and informal economy; 5) urban and rural forms of the makeshift economy (e.g. commons, subsistence economy, barter, and credit systems); 6) the makeshift economy and the welfare state.

Keynotes: Mayka de Keyzer (KU Leuven) and Mikko Jakonen (University of Eastern Finland)

Scientific committee: Leena Enbom, Sakari Saaritsa, Petri Talvitie and Tero Toivanen (University of Helsinki)

We invite abstracts of up to 300 words. Please include your name, affiliation, and contact information. Submissions should be sent to petri.talvitie@helsinki.fi by 10 April 2025. Decisions will be sent out by the end of April. For more information on the workshop, please contact petri.talvitie@helsinki.fi.

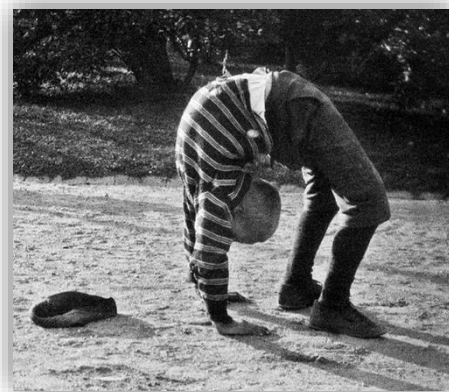


Photo: Ivan Timiriasev (1917)