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**Proposal for the
XIII GLOBAL LABOUR UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE on “The Future of Work:
Democracy, Development and the Role of Labour”**

Sub-theme: 1. Structural Changes and Impacts on Labour

The Devaluation of Work through Digitization

Current changes in labor market policies as well as the introduction of new forms of work and employment shaped by new technologies (digitization) impact on requirements for training and qualifications. There is an ongoing controversy about the future prospect of upgrading versus devaluation of skills. Whereas some scholars expect an upgrading of qualification because digital competencies are considered to be a generalized requirement for most kinds of jobs, others assume the elimination of routine work/substitution through robots and a routinization of formerly higher qualified jobs through digitization. Furthermore, new forms of digitized work as the platform economy/crowd work or other IT-based forms of services like call/contact centers go along with a strong tendency towards precarized and low skilled work although the workers themselves are not low skilled. Many of them even dispose of academic degrees or are students.

In order to address the question in how far digitization impacts on requirements of skills and qualification the concept of “qualification” should be broadened. Debates usually refer to two aspects of qualification: the formal qualification (certificates etc.) and the requirements of skills in a specific work context. Nevertheless, changes in qualification(s) also go along with social and cultural processes such as professional prestige and payment (differences in payment, wage hierarchies), namely symbolic capital, but also regarding the associated social status of the actors. This *symbolic-social dimension* extends the qualification concept and links it with the social space. This allows for taking into account social effects of changes in qualification, focusing on new lines of interrelated social inequalities regarding categories as “class”, gender”, “age”, and race/ethnicity.

This is also crucial for the analysis of the relationship between precarization and digitization, here to be examined, as traditional ways of allocating social positions in accordance to “profession” seem to be challenged not only by a revaluation of qualification(s) through digitization but also through precarization of work and employment especially in digitized work environments like platforms. Compared with this, many empirical studies reveal a devaluation or polarization of qualifications and qualification requirements in the process of digitization of work. At the same time, and linked to this processes, a profound change in the forms of labour control can be noted.

The paper will be based on a literature study exploring results of empirical studies mainly focusing on the German debate.