

PRESS KIT

English Title: The Great Fallacy

Original Title: Der große Irrtum

A documentary film journey through five years in Germany

by Dirk Heth and Olaf Winkler

Germany, 2012

HD, 16:9, colour / black & white

Running time: 105 min.

Audio: Dolby Digital

Language: German

Subtitles: English

Crew

Script: Olaf Winkler

Camera: Dirk Heth

Sound design and mix: Raimund von Scheibner

Music: Melanie Barth, Wolfgang Adams

Music consultant: Guido Altendorf

Story consultants: Christian Frosch, Rick Minnich

Colour grading: Hanno Kunow

Directed, produced, recorded, edited by Dirk Heth & Olaf Winkler

Production: Contract 99 Filmrealisation Heth/Winkler GbR

Contributors

Diana Körtge

Marion Mertin

Irina Neupert

Helga Westholm

Rainer Bomba

Dennis Gutgesell

Lutz Gutgesell

Funders

DEFA Foundation

BKM

Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg

Filmbüro Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Filmwerkstatt Kiel

Synopsis

While searching for a new film project, a cameraman stumbles upon a peculiar point of view: the "market value of human beings." Spurred on by curiosity, he follows the dilemma of three women with a marginal "market value," as well as two politicians who are fighting their way through bureaucratic windmills in their search for pragmatic solutions. The cameraman believes to have found a vision which could change society. But by now, he has become afflicted himself and finds himself confronted with one of life's great fallacies ... A cinematic travelogue through five years in Germany – a time capsule addressed to the cameraman's children to open one day as adults.

Long Synopsis

In order to 'belong' to society, it is generally understood that we must squeeze ourselves through the narrow eye of a needle: In exchange for an income, we are continually obliged to exercise the 'market value' of our capabilities.

A traveling cameraman and father of three observes what happens when human skills no longer command a market value. What then? In his quest for an answer, he stumbles upon an experiment called 'civil work' and a somewhat different vocation – the 'civil worker'.

With skeptical ardour, the cameraman follows the 'civil work' project and its chief proponent Rainer Bomba (43) during their long journey through the system. Along the way, he revisits people from his previous film, who live in a town many considered doomed. He follows a civil worker, a freelancer, a 1 Euro worker and a volunteer employer, as well as a jack of all trades and his son – a passionate local politician in search of solutions similar to 'civil work' ...

Meanwhile, the cameraman has long since become afflicted himself, and finds himself confronted with one of life's great fallacies ...

A cinematic travelogue through Germany from 2007-2011 – a time capsule addressed to the cameraman's children to open one day as adults.

Chapters

Prologue

- 1 Reunion in Eggesin
 - 2 The Island of Excess
 - 3 The Restless Ones
 - 4 The Power of Ideas
 - 5 The Long Haul
 - 6 What Really Matters
 - 7 The Higher Level
 - 8 Working on Getting Work
 - 9 A Strange Loop
- Epilogue: The Story of a King

Quotations from the film

"Then there are those who are unskilled or have mismatched skills ... and the market says: Your value is zero. We don't need you." (Dennis, the mayor)

"We could use citizen labour to set up theatres, operate swimming pools, movie theatres, libraries. We could expand in that direction. These areas have really suffered the past few years." (Rainer, the labour market politician)

"It's total nonsense to say we're preparing people for the mainstream labour market, and getting them ready for Europe. Those are just goals concocted in some politburos. If you ask kids today what they want to be, they say: a Hartz IV [live off the dole]. (Lutz, the great improviser)

"Create a crisis and miracles can happen if you want to get over it. It means positive changes because you're the one in charge." (Marion, self-employed)

"I want a full-time job, a real job ... That's what I'd like for me and my kids." (Diana, the citizen labourer)

"My dream job? I don't know. Not any more." (Irina, the 1-Euro worker)

"Irina was lucky that I fought for her to stay. And that she's going to be a supervisor. Supervisors get 1.50 Euro/hour." (Frau Westholm, director of the local history parlour)

"I'd been on the lookout, waiting for a miracle to happen. And I could be free of the burden of scrambling for a market value. But I realize this moment isn't going to come during my lifetime." (the cameraman)

Beyond the Market Society - Directors' comments

The Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska once wrote: "We call it a grain of sand / But it calls itself neither grain nor sand. / It doesn't need this general, / special, temporary / constant, supposed / or proper name. / Our glances and touches mean nothing to it. / It feels neither seen nor moved." Something similar could be written about the "market value of human beings." Nearly everyone today is familiar with this emotional reality, or whatever one chooses to call it, and experiences it differently with various consequences.

When we completed our film "Eggesin ... Maybe" in 2005, we saw the small German town we portrayed, Eggesin, as a symptom of the severe crisis emerging in our economic system. Amputated from its largest employer, the community was left to fend for itself. Despite their efforts to make the best of the situation, the townspeople seemed to be succumbing to a process of bitter disillusionment. Their own strengths appeared to be weaker than they had expected and high politics more helpless than they had presumed. The city's downsizing and disintegration process seemed unstoppable. Powerless, we experienced together with the committed townspeople how the ruthless paradigm of unconditional marketability threatened to devour an intact city, where the unemployed sat around bursting with (bizarre) ingenuity. Something new seemed to be emerging: a parallel society where an increasingly unemployed and subsidized, but by no means idle, civil society was developing its own culture and mentality apart from the marketplace and economic growth. Still stigmatised by unemployment and inferiority complexes, the townspeople engaged in work for themselves and for their community (i.e. in clubs, volunteer work, neighbourly help). This citizen labour neither generated an income for the people, nor did its potential appear to attract any serious attention on a social or political level.

Newly sensitized, we began searching for traces of alternative ideas to the paradigm of absolute marketability which promised to be politically feasible. In Eggesin and Saxony-Anhalt, in the economically-strapped eastern part of Germany, we came across two similar projects. Patiently we followed their ups and downs between euphoria and skepticism, only to see them be undermined by the currently incontestable paradigm of market value. This "market value" seemed like a mystical figure which directly or indirectly seized everything in its path, inhibiting every new form of work.

At the same time, we made a sobering observation about our political landscape: it is filled almost exclusively with debates about income. The downside of (nearly) every form of income – work – is rarely discussed, however. So what exactly is it? Why, whenever the discussion turns to meaningful work – if it does at all – do we always immediately give the word to the treasurer: Who's going to pay for it? Are these income debates another symptom of an impoverished concept of labour? The paradigm of market value appears brazen and set in stone ...

The Directors

Dirk Heth

Born in Leipzig, Germany (GDR) in 1966. Married, three children, lives in Berlin. Worked as a floorman, meterman, delivery man. Military service. Camera assistant for GDR Television. Cinematography studies at the HFF "Konrad Wolf" in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Since 1996 freelance cameraman, producer and teacher. 2002-2007 staff member in the cinematography department at the HFF "Konrad Wolf."

Olaf Winkler

Born near Potsdam, Germany (GDR) in 1963. Three years of military service. Student of Marxism-Leninism in Leipzig when the Berlin Wall came down. Teleogramm messenger, newspaper carrier, fee collector, sociologist. Dramaturgy studies at the HFF "Konrad Wolf" in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Local journalist. Since 1997, freelance dramaturge, editor and scriptwriter. Father of three children.

Joint projects

- "Indian Diary" - 14 reports for ORB Children's television, 1998/1999
- "Indian Miniatures" - 9 reports for ORB/MDR, 1999-2001
- "Eggesin - The End of a Garrison Town" - TV documentary for NDR, 2003
- "Eggesin ... Maybe" - feature documentary, Filmkombinat Nordost, 2005
- "The Great Fallacy" - feature documentary, contract 99 Filmrealisation, 2012

Festivals

1999	<i>"Indian Diary - The Poster Painter"</i> Children's Film Festival "Golden Sparrow," Gera (Germany)
2006	<i>"Eggesin ... Maybe"</i> 8th International Film Festival Göttingen (Germany) 2nd Festival of German Films, Ludwigshafen (Germany) - nominated for the Film Arts Award 59th International Film Festival, Locarno ('Semaine de la critique') 15th DokumentArt Neubrandenburg ("Films from Mecklenburg-Pomerania") 49th International Documentary Film Festival Leipzig (German competition) - Honourable Mention; DEFA Foundation Prize
2007	28th Film Festival Max Ophüls Prize, Saarbrücken ('Heimatfilme' section) - nominated for the Baden-Württemberg Documentary Film Prize
2007/08	Film tour "The Day After Tomorrow" / Film Festival of the "Aktion Mensch!" organization
2012	<i>"The Great Fallacy"</i> 55th International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film - International Programme - Peaceful Revolution Foundation Film Award 'Leipziger Ring' - nominated for the 'Healthy Workplaces Film Award'

Contact

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APPENDIX 1 - CIVIL WORK

The Civil Work Project

The "Civil Work" project which the film follows was based on a four-tiered process:

1. Re-activation and profiling of all unemployed persons in a certain administrative district
2. Whenever possible: temporary placement in the primary labour market
3. Completion of lacking qualifications through continuing education, etc.
4. Civil work for everyone else who could not be placed in the primary labour market

The project began in 2006 with the placement of 20 civil workers at the Magdeburg Lebenshilfe gGmbH – a workshop for handicapped people. It continued in the small towns of Barleben, Bad Schmiedeberg, Kelbra, Gerbstedt and Hecklingen in Saxony Anhalt and in the town of Schmölln in Thuringia. The unemployment rate sank considerably, often by more than fifty percent. Under the name "Job Perspective Plus," the project continued in three Bavarian cities (Weiden, Hof und Coburg).

Municipalities, employment agencies and job centres jointly canvassed for civil work jobs. These could be only so-called "extra" positions which were in the "public interest." A catalogue of criteria ("Seal of Quality Civil Work") differentiated these jobs from so-called "regular employment."

Particularly eye-catching from our perspective: the enormous tempo of this process (2-3 months), increased advisory activities, partially mobile teams of placement officers, proper employment contracts for civil workers, a 30-hour week, paid holidays. The unemployment benefits of a "Hartz IV" recipient were basically transformed into a civil worker salary. But this reallocation of funds had some interesting legal snares. The greatest effect: "unsanctioned workers" who had been receiving unemployment benefits stopped registering themselves as unemployed.

The civil workers we met were happy about the opportunity to work despite the low wages. The political failure to put through indefinite civil work positions in municipalities had a demotivating effect on them, however. In 2010, the civil work project went nationwide, but with several alterations, most notably the restriction to three years. This job scheme is scheduled to run out in 2014. According to the Federal Office of Administration (BVA), 98% of the civil work positions which have been offered so far have been filled.

For more information about the civil work project, we recommend the following sources:

- German Wikipedia article – this provides a good overview of the concepts behind the term "civil work" as well as a good bibliography on the topic (<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bürgerarbeit>)
- Documents from the Federal Employment Agency (<http://www.arbeitsagentur.de>) - available in English
- www.bva.bund.de (Newsletter zur Bürgerarbeit - German only)

Civil Work-ABC

Unemployment

(Term defined in Germany according to articles §§ 16 und 119 SGB III) – An unemployed person is someone who a) is not currently employed, has employment of less than 15 hours/week or is temporarily employed; b) is utilizing the placement efforts of the Federal Employment Agency to search for employment subject to social insurance contributions; c) is registered as unemployed at the Federal Employment Agency; d) is striving to end their unemployment ("making efforts of one's own").

Levels of Care

A term used to describe the so-called "integration progress of an unemployed, employable, needy person" into the primary labour market. The levels of care are as follows: IF – far from integration: needs help and care; IG – needs stabilisation; IK – has special needs; IN – nearly integrated; I – integrated but still needs support.

Volunteer Work

Work which is exclusively for the public good and which does not follow any commercial goals.

Multiple Placement Obstacles

A term which describes the accumulation of obstacles which are preventing an unemployed person from becoming integrated into the primary labour market. The primary placement obstacles are: health restrictions, advanced age, lack of mobility, child-rearing, long-term unemployment, caring for relatives, immigrant background, lack of education and/or training, and insufficient language skills. It is said that each additional risk reduces the chance of placement by one half.

Non-Profit Sector (Third Sector)

All organisations which belong to neither the public nor the commercial sphere. Non-profit does not mean the lack of a profit orientation, but merely that the organisation re-invests its profits in its operations (not for profit) rather than paying them out to its members. The two most important kinds of non-profit organisations are internal labour organisations (which serve primarily their own members) and external labour organisations (which offer their services primarily to clients from outside the organisation). (<http://www.socialinfo.ch/cgi-bin/dicopossoide/show.cfm?id=141>). In Germany, the percentage of jobs in the non-profit sector is estimated at 4.6% of the total employment.

Civil Work Wages

During the period when we intensely followed civil work developments (2007-2009), the net monthly wages of civil workers was between 675 and 950 Euros for a 30-hour work week with 21 days of paid vacation per year.

Work Additionality

Jobs which would normally not be done or not done during this time or to this extent.

For Example

There were many discussions about separating civil work from the primary labour market. Civil work may not replace any real or potential income-producing jobs in a regionally delimitable "market," but may be only "supplemental" or "volunteer." The project makers created a "Seal of Quality" which not only listed delimitable criteria but also offered a catalogue of exemplary jobs:

- order and cleanliness in the public space
- work in tourism infrastructure
- assistance in local clubs and associations
- supporting volunteer tasks at the local level
- jobs in independent cultural work
- support for the regional offices of the Department of Heritage and Archaeology
- measures for environmental, landscape, nature and animal protection
- care of the elderly
- assistance and support of persons with disabilities
- jobs in child-care and youth work
- practical assistance in social care (assisting immigrants, the homeless, addicts, delinquents, and helping in information centres)

An Historical View of Civil Work

While subtitling the film, our translator Rick Minnich was faced with the challenge of how best to translate the term "Bürgerarbeit" into English – as "citizen labour" or "civil work"?

Rick pointed out an interesting historical connection: the "New Deal" in the USA during the 1930s – the massive economic and social reforms undertaken to combat the effects of the Great Depression (1928-30). One of the key governmental institutions of these reforms was the Works Progress Administration (WPA) – a job creation agency for the unemployed (citizens without a market value). The agency provided paid employment to impoverished artists and intellectuals, who worked on non-profit projects. Renowned writers such as John Steinbeck, Nelson Algren and Saul Bellow were among those employed by the agency. The term "civil work" was used to describe this kind of employment. The outbreak of World War II along with the subsequent boom in the arms industry and increased demand for troop reinforcements quickly decreased the unemployment rate and ushered in the demise of the WPA.

Another historical trace can be found in volume 3 of Karl Marx's "Das Kapital" (MEW 25, p. 142). Here the "Public Works Act" is mentioned in a short passage about the cotton crisis of 1861-65. From our novice academic perspective, it seems that an historical connection should be drawn when it comes to the topics of "workfare," "welfare," and universal basic income ...

By the way, we decided to translate "Bürgerarbeit" as "civil work."

Civil Work Expanded

To the best of our knowledge, the first descriptions and considerations of the "civil work" phenomenon date back to the writings of sociologist Ulrich Beck from the 1980s. In his book "The Brave New World of Work" (2000), Beck expands the term and places it within an alternative-supplementary, European context – as a response to the market society crisis.

His thoughts extend beyond the currently practiced "civil work" which we observed. Beck is not concerned with the (administrative) replacement of gainful employment, but with freely chosen and self-responsible civil work which would be financed by a universal basic income and integrated into a network of municipalities and initiatives.

He thus formulates a kind of farewell to the "gainful employment monopoly," which could provide a fluid transition from gainful employment to civil work, in which both social forms could co-exist side by side – the "working civilian" and the "civil worker."

We sympathize with these positions.

APPENDIX 2 - JURY STATEMENT

FILMPREIS „LEIPZIGER RING“

PRIZE OF THE JURY FOR THE STIFTUNG FRIEDLICHE REVOLUTION FOR THE BEST DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF DEMOCRACY

Dirk Heth and Olaf Winkler (Germany) for the film **Der Große Irrtum** (The Great Fallacy)

“Der große Irrtum” is a quiet, contemplative film which does not speak of civil war or bloody uprisings. Instead, the film asks, in the name of the following generation, how much is a human being worth, and if humans must serve the market, or whether it should be the other way round.

“Der große Irrtum” clears up both the myth that everybody can have a place in the so-called first labour market, i.e. the competitive labour market, and the mistaken belief that there is a working life outside the judgement of the market. The film attacks a blind spot in the public debate: the unemployment of European youth in the future, a topic which is rarely addressed so openly. The UN forecasts that 600 million jobs will have to be around the world in the next ten years.

Dirk Heth and Olaf Winkler take this perspective in their film and embark on a very personal search in Eggesin, a small town in one of Germany’s structurally weakest regions. There the film makers observe initial attempts to rethink – attempts to instigate a radical transformation process. People are portrayed over several years who have no other aim in life but to be of use to others. Under no circumstances do they want to live off the state, and so they bounce from one precarious job to another. Yet they never give up. They provide help to each other and they become inventive: the film explores the idea of civic work and shows politicians, from both East and West, who demonstrate considerable patience and passion dealing with the misery of people who seem to be of no use to society and yet who stubbornly defend their vision of a society in which each human being can be useful. The result of the filmmakers’ efforts are affectionate portraits of people who never resign, who maintain their dignity and who see the meaning of life in their work for others. We get to know strong personalities who are depicted in an almost tender pictorial language, and we also get to know authors who take questions about the value of human beings and the meaning of work personally when they ask them in the name of their own children. The result is a letter to children that is written in a literary format which, remarkably, resembles that chosen by the protagonists of the 1988 “Ecumenical Meeting” in the former GDR.

Eggesin asks the questions concerning the future of Europe’s youth, and the people there are trying to answer them in a patient and passionate way. Because passion needs stamina and patience.

(http://www.dok-leipzig.de/festival/preistraeger_2012/leipziger_ring_2012/?lang=en&)