

REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Title of Session: Towards a Sociology of the Welfare State in Times of (Global) Economic Domination

Name of Session Convener(s): *Mariusz Baranowski*, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Chair: *Mariusz Baranowski*, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Comments: -

I) Commodification of Work in the Postsocialist State

Tomasz Herudziński, Warsaw University of Life Sciences

II) Flexicurity as a New Form of Social Security

Krzysztof Bondyra, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

III) The Fall of Movements of Social Indignation

Jakub Napoleon Gajdziński, The School of Humanities and Journalism

IV) From Inequalities of Power to Power Inequalities. The Need for Sociology of Welfare State

Mariusz Baranowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Session description:

The undeniable fact is that the various social sciences and other disciplines constitute the research perspective, which relates to the practice of multidimensional phenomenon. The welfare state is an excellent example of such one, which in its nature unifies many theoretical and practical positions or approaches. It seems, however, that the economic dimension of the welfare state (as a conceptual or pro-social proposal) is disproportionately exposed both on the basis of scientific reflection and pragmatic approaches used by the institutions of the state. This tendency to think in economic terms, which incidentally is maintained for several decades, represents: (a) only one side of a complex social welfare, and (b) a significant reductionism, leading to the elimination of sociological, cultural, educational, psychological consequences of the functioning of the welfare state. This session is designed to reverse the trend of the dominant perception of the construct of the welfare state in economic terms (profitability, efficiency, investment etc.), and replace it with the highlight of the sociological (together with other non-economic determinants) dimension of this phenomenon. It does not mean abandonment of the economic dimension in general, as it is an integral part of the issue, but rather the perception of it from a sociological point of view (as well as other approaches). Taking into account the social consequences of diversity, different life chances, stratification, public confidence, and the like, should stimulate evaluation and analysis of the title proposal, because the economic efficiency might be considered rather as a consequence (and not the cause) of the above-mentioned components.

Abstracts:*1) Commodification of Work in the Postsocialist State*

Tomasz Herudziński, Warsaw University of Life Sciences

The paper describes the process of commodification focusing on the area of work. Commodification of work sphere in a country subjected to a process of transformation is illustrated by the example of Poland. The description of commodification processes will refer to two dimensions: normative and of consciousness. The first relates to changes in the labor law, the other to the state of consciousness in society. Incorporating the Polish labor market into transnational structures is examined here from two perspectives: regional and global scales. In a regional perspective there are the changes resulting from the Polish participation in the structures of the European Union. In a global perspective, I refer to the concept of "positive economic nationalism" by Robert Reich. In particular, the presentation will concern my own research. The subjects were young people with higher education living in Warsaw. In terms of social structure the paper refers to the concept of Guy Standing's precarity. The sphere of work is treated here as a key element of wider social reality. Commodification of labor in the context of society transformation from the central-autocratic to democratic market one described on Polish example, is treated as an essential issue of the welfare state, which is to serve as an institution protecting citizens against basic risks.

II) Flexicurity as a New Form of Social Security

Krzysztof Bondyra, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

The paper refers to the basic form of social security which is a work safety. The concept of flexicurity, which won particular popularity in Europe, is treated here as a tool of the welfare state subject to integration processes crossing national borders. Global processes such as the global economic crisis and demographic changes make it necessary to look for new security solutions on the labor market. Flexicurity is the answer to conflicting needs of society. Employers with an emphasis on competitiveness and social security of workers waiting. The high level of competitiveness is to provide flexibility understood as a smooth transition between different phases their careers. In particular: searching for their first job, job changes, assistance for the unemployed and the stage of retirement. Safety is treated here as a form employee's position in the labor market which is achieved inter alia through lifelong learning to the employee. The paper consists of two main parts. The first part focuses on the characteristics of the concept of flexicurity and presenting the results of research on the subject. The second part describes to the results of the research and presentation a good practices by describing specific examples of combining flexibility and employment security.

III) The Fall of Movements of Social Indignation

Jakub Napoleon Gajdziński, The School of Humanities and Journalism

The Indignados and the Occupy movements fell apart quickly. The peak of their influence didn't last longer than a few months. However they were a few mass movements of dissent besides their symbolic influence, they never really accomplished anything. None the less their experience is an important lesson to both, those who are studying and those who take part in the social movements as they should be recognized as the representation of rising precariat. The purpose of this paper is not only to analyze why these movements were unsuccessful, but also to put them into the wider spectrum of capitalist order. During the neoliberal counterrevolution, is it true that those movements really dissented against the system or, on the contrary, they unwillingly provided the legitimization for it? I was trying to answer that question by making a comparison between the structures of Indignados and Occupy movements and the Greek movement called PAME, including their organization, political ambitions and mode of action. To achieve this goal I went to both Greece and Spain to examine the phenomenon at its source. It seems that both Indignados and Occupy movements are lacking in structure, organization and political initiative. They simply couldn't survive, nor effectively influence the system. On the contrary PAME is still operating and growing because of their structure and organization. In conclusion from this it was evident that the beating heart of capitalist society is not the democratic process nor is it freedom of speech, but rather the creation of wealth and thus the ownership of means of production. In my paper I was trying to study such terms like "social movement" and connect it with the idea of "dissent".

IV) From Inequalities of Power to Power Inequalities. The Need for Sociology of Welfare State

Mariusz Baranowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

The standard approach to the welfare state issues is inextricably linked to its economic dimension, although the social component is present, but only as an epiphenomenon of the main factor.

Without denying the importance of the economic justifications for public policy, I would like to draw attention to the significant asymmetry in the approach and evaluation of the welfare state. The social dimension (here I am talking about the sociology of the welfare state), rather than economic efficiency or cost-effectiveness should underlie substantive discussion on the welfare state and welfare society. In addition, the economic determinism in assessing the welfare state, although under certain conditions a significant, should not be the sole factor in the assessment of social welfare (after all, society is not a company focused solely on profit in accounting terms). Especially in times of crisis (recession) it is clearly show that a certain level of prosperity (welfare) is able to inhibit progressive social stratification, which is the enemy of social cohesion, and – as some believe – the capitalist system itself, and thus returning to the socio-economic stability.