

Call for papers: “Analysing the political economy of household services in Europe”

Dates: October 3rd-4th, 2013

Venue: Sciences Po, Paris, France

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Analysing the political economy of household services in Europe.

Since the 1990s, a number of European countries have set up policies to promote the development of household services through schemes designed to both lower the cost of labour and to subsidize the demand for household services, especially for childcare and elderly-care, through the introduction of cash subsidies or different socio-fiscal measures (social contribution exemptions and/or tax reductions). Some countries have gone even further in that they also subsidize non-care related household services such as cleaning, ironing, gardening, house-repair, etc. It thus seems warranted to speak of a ‘political economy of household services’, the delegation of household work and the development of household services being encouraged and structured through policy measures.

The aim of this seminar is to analyse this political economy of household services in Europe, looking both at the drivers behind this policy orientation of subsidizing the demand for household services and at its impact on labour markets and welfare states. Indeed, looking at the policy outcomes on labour markets and welfare states seems particularly warranted in light of the policy discourse and orientations that have been set at the EU level: since the early 1990s, the European Commission has been encouraging member countries to develop policies to foster employment in household services with the triple aim of reducing the cost of low-skilled labour, of reducing the scope and cost of public care services, and of ‘freeing’ the productive potential of the more highly-skilled. At a national level, job creation and responding to care needs have most often been used as justifications by the governments who have implemented policies to promote household services, although the specific policy objectives and framing of arguments may well vary between countries. Consequently, this seminar will be organized around three main sets of research questions:

1. Analysing the politics behind the policies for supporting household services.

What have been the key drivers (motives and actors) behind the policies implemented in the various countries across Europe? How have the issues been framed, what have been the arguments put forward and what debates have these policies given rise to?

In this context, analyses of processes of policy diffusion through the European Union and between countries can also help understand the development of similar policies in different welfare and labour-market regimes.

2. Analysing the impact of these policies on labour markets.

Through these policies, the state tries to direct household preferences towards the outsourcing of previously internalized tasks, in the field of care but also for other activities such as household cleaning, ironing, etc., household services being perceived as an important source of job creation. As such, one of the most striking aspects of these policies is that the measures implemented are intended to create jobs by turning a large number of individuals into employers. These policies thus promote new forms of employment and new employment relationships, and what is more they promote jobs that are very atypical in that they are carried out in a specific workplace, which is the private homes of individuals, where labour inspection is not allowed. What is the economic logic behind these policies? What are the implications of these new employment relations and this specific workplace? How do

these policies and new employment forms interact with existing labour market regimes, and to what extent do they modify them?

Analyses of the types of jobs created, the quality of these jobs, the working conditions of the people employed in this field, as well as the characteristics (gender, class, ethnicity, age) of workers in the formal household services sector are particularly warranted. To what extent do these policies contribute to the structuring of new dualisms or social cleavages on the labour market? To what extent do these policies provide a stepping-stone into employment for marginalized groups?

Since a central stated objective of these policies is to create employment, the analysis of the impact of these policies on job creation is also needed. Here attention to both actual job creation (and the ways this interacts with the informal market) and to the public cost of these jobs is particularly relevant.

3. Analysing the impact of these policies on welfare provision.

To what extent, and in which ways, do these policies contribute to a transformation of welfare states? Here a first hypothesis is that the introduction and development of policies to support the demand rather than the supply of services that are, to a large degree, aimed at fulfilling care tasks, contributes to the privatisation of welfare, although in a way which does not correspond to a simple roll-back of the state but which strongly modifies the modes of governance of welfare policy. A second hypothesis is that the increasing use of tax expenditures as a social policy instrument contributes to the institutional transformation of welfare states, impacting both on the modes of financing and on the redistributive profile of welfare states.

The anti-redistributive impact of fiscal welfare has been well-analysed by Howard (1997) or Hacker (2002) for the US where public social expenditure is low but where tax expenditures are high, forming what these authors refer to as the 'hidden welfare state', and which essentially benefit the middle and upper-classes. To what extent are these tax-expenditures for household services part of a wider move towards the fiscalisation of welfare states, and what is the distributive profile of these policies? This also raises the issue of the inequalities in access to these services.

If these tax expenditures alter the distributive profile of the welfare state, the withdrawal of the state from the direct funding and monitoring of the services actually provided also transforms the governance of social protection. In particular, while this mode of financing subsidizes the demand for services, it does not control the supply of services, which depends entirely on the existence or emergence of a local supply, directed by the market. These policies may thus participate in some form of decentralization of social policies, possibly generating strong geographical inequalities in access to services, and also raises concerns regarding the quality of the services provided.

We invite contributions addressing these different aspects from a variety of perspectives (economics, political science, sociology) across the different European countries.

Submission of abstracts and full papers:

Abstracts of maximum 1 page should be submitted by June 30th, 2013 to Clement.Carbonnier@u-cergy.fr and Nathalie.morel@sciences-po.fr

Notification of acceptance will be sent by July 10th, 2013.

Papers will be due on September 10th, 2013 so that papers can be read by all in advance.

Practicalities:

Transport and accommodation will be covered by the seminar organizers.

Publication:

The aim of this seminar is to prepare the publication of an edited book with an international publisher.