

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

# Journal of Eurasian Studies

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/euras](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/euras)

## Introduction: The Failure and Future of the Welfare State in Post-socialism

Abel Polese<sup>a, d, \*</sup>, Jeremy Morris<sup>b</sup>, Borbála Kovács<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Dublin City University, Ireland<sup>b</sup> University of Birmingham, United Kingdom<sup>c</sup> Central European University, Hungary<sup>d</sup> Tallinn University, Estonia

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 16 October 2014

Available online 20 November 2014

#### Keywords:

Corruption  
 Informality  
 Informal Sector  
 Eastern Europe  
 Former Soviet Union  
 Social Policy  
 Social Welfare

### ABSTRACT

Debates on the post-socialist welfare state evolved in two main directions. While some scholars have maintained that they would eventually converge with Western European patterns, some others have pointed at the need of a more 'particularist' approach, seeking to demonstrate that post-socialist states might follow a different and non-traditional path, individually or as a region in terms of welfare provision. Our current work is an attempt to contribute to the debate on the direction of post-socialist welfare state adaptation by engaging with corruption and welfare state/public sector failure in post-socialist spaces. In particular, emphasis is put on the tactics and strategies used by public workers and citizens to cope with incomplete and inadequate public social welfare provision. Rooted in different disciplinary schools, and making use of diverse methodological and theoretical approaches, the papers of this special issue provide further evidence to rechart the relationship between the public welfare sector, citizens and the current economic transition, a commonality that allows us to point at alternatives to the capitalist model that for some time has been seen as the only option. In line with our previous works, in this special issue we explore the possibility that informality and formality are complementary or that informality may 'replace' formal processes and structures. In other words, where the welfare state does not penetrate, welfare might be spread also through informal channels and it might redefine the very dynamics underpinning of a society.

Copyright © 2014, Asia-Pacific Research Center, Hanyang University. Production and hosting by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This special issue of the Journal of Eurasian Studies devotes itself to the present and possible futures of the welfare state in post-socialist spaces and its intersection with informality, here defined as those unrecorded or unregistered activities that benefit a segment of the population, but fall outside the control of the state. The supposed

demise of centrally planned regimes and the attempts to introduce capitalist values, institutions and practices to a space stretching from Prague to Beijing has not only meant the marketisation of areas of everyday life such as health-care and education. It has also seriously challenged the longstanding public expectation of a social wage<sup>1</sup> and free-at-the-point-of-use welfare state provision in most of these countries. Societies, despite the political, social and

\* Corresponding author. Dublin City University, Ireland.

E-mail address: [abel.polese@dcu.ie](mailto:abel.polese@dcu.ie) (A. Polese).

Peer review under responsibility of Asia-Pacific Research Center, Hanyang University.

<sup>1</sup> Broadly understood. See: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emire/UNITED%20KINGDOM/SOCIALWAGE-EN.htm>.

economic traumas of the 1990s, have more or less adapted, at least superficially, to marketised reality, if typified by cartels, robber barons and state-capitalist institutions where the line between politics and business is hard to draw. In some cases societies have been able to enact 'domesticated' forms of marketised processes (Stenning, Smith, Rochovska, Swiatek, 2010) – sometimes through ongoing norms of mutual aid, solidarity, survival techniques of self-provisioning, and of course, informal economic activities.

As a result, the debates that have developed over the past years have indicated two different directions. A first group of scholars working in post-socialist spaces has suggested that welfare systems in the region would eventually converge with Western European patterns (Deacon, 1993, 2000), sometimes talking of 'Europeanisation' of social policy paradigms in post-socialist countries (Deacon and Stubbs, 2007; Greve & Stubbs, 2013; Lendvai 2008; Toots and Bachman, 2010) and eventually influencing some of the most distinguished scholars in the discipline (Esping-Andersen, 1996; Fenger, 2007). They have been contrasted by a 'particularist' approach, seeking to demonstrate that post-socialist states might follow a different and non-traditional path, individually or as a region in terms of welfare provision (Cerami and Vanhuyse, 2009; Draxler and van Vliet, 2010; Fajth, 1999; Hacker, 2009; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008; Kevlihan, 2013; Ledeneva, 2013; Manning 2004; Ó Beacháin, Sheridan, Stan, 2012).

This special issue is an attempt to contribute to the debate on the direction of post-socialist welfare state adaptation by engaging with corruption and welfare state/public sector failure in post-socialist spaces. The contributions to this special issue focus on the tactics and strategies used by public workers and citizens to cope with incomplete and inadequate public social welfare provision, and in particular in the healthcare sector, as well as with reforms whose key outcome has been the 'individualisation' (Ferge, 1997) of social welfare financing and provision, shifting the burden for welfare onto individuals and their families. We do this thanks to a wide range of case studies based on freshly collected material from the region.

The welfare state is possibly the biggest remaining pressure point of market reform, trapped between an outdated ideological position and a multitude of pragmatic – especially fiscal, economic and social – considerations. The ideological position that certain social services (especially healthcare and education – as part of the social wage) should be provided for free is challenged by reduced budgets devoted to these services, the low wages of service workers that fail to keep up with inflation, and a growing demand for these services that is not met through increased standards or demand-driven supply. At the same time, systematic, policy-driven processes of marketisation have been slow to take shape in these welfare domains, in part due to ideological 'frozen landscapes'. Despite these problems of public financing and provision, the state, through its institutions, remains the dominant welfare actor in these domains, but challenged from below by service users in the form of the well-documented phenomena of informal payments and

informal exchange, which have been dealt with in different ways.

Rooted in different disciplinary schools, and making use of diverse methodological and theoretical approaches, the articles in this special issue have, nonetheless, much in common. They all use empirical material to rechart the relationship between the public welfare sector, citizens and the current economic transition, a commonality that allows us to contend that the attitudes of individuals described in these contributions may be seen as derived from a different value system, based on different premises and assumptions, and pointing at alternatives to the capitalist model we have been brought to believe is the only option (Gibson-Graham, 1996).

To do this, the authors, and the special issue, have sought to rediscover the role of agency in post-socialism (Cook, 2007; Polese and Morris, 2015) as opposed to a focus on state-led policies (Majone, 2002), and challenging the conception of the state as 'one', instead seeing it as an arena for negotiating and balancing forces (Katzenstein, 1985). We refer here to the issues arising from the negotiation between the state, and its desire to standardise/homogenise, and its citizens, longing for a particularistic approach, which Scott (1998) has documented from a worldwide perspective. Informality in this respect may be seen not only as a 'weapon of the weak', of the marginalised, but as a widespread instrument of (post-socialist) society. In line with our previous works, in this special issue we explore the possibility that informality and formality are complementary or that informality may 'replace' formal processes and structures. In other words, where the welfare state does not penetrate, welfare might be spread also through informal channels and it might redefine the very dynamics underpinning of a society (Harboe, 2014; Kovács, 2014; Polese, Morris, Kovács, Harboe, 2014).

De facto 'privatisation' of certain sectors (Polese, 2006, 2006b) generates a potential conflict of competencies between the state and the citizens dealt with in a legal-illegal framework where payments are seen as bribes and corruption. Some studies have already challenged this normative vision (Polese, 2008, 2012, 2013; Polese and Rodgers, 2011) and this special issue is a further move in this direction, as our authors will show.

Our starting point is that current debates on welfare policies in post-socialism suffer from two major deficiencies. First, there seems to be a general assumption, among political scientists as well as economists, that systems – e.g. social welfare protection institutions – 'work' and, once a measure is adopted, it will be implemented, and implemented correctly. However, scholars familiar with non-Western contexts, including the post-socialist space, have found that this is not always the case (Deacon, 2000; Mares & Carnes, 2009; Pop, 2013; Sotiropoulos & Pop, 2007; Szikra and Tomka, 2009). This approach fails to consider the role of disruptive elements or informal mechanisms in what has been defined as Lawless Economics (Dixit, 2007). In addition, policy adopted at the national, or even regional level, may be 'boycotted' or even 'sabotaged' by street-level bureaucrats or other interest groups, even ingrained cultural norms (Cook, 2007; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008). Scholars have explored the

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1127229>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1127229>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)