

Welfare States in Transition: 20 Years after the Yugoslav Welfare Model

Marija Stambolieva and Stefan Dehnert, eds.

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This volume of essays traces the development of social policy in the post-Yugoslav space, including two essays on each of the successor states, as well as an introductory and concluding essay by Marija Stambolieva. The work derives from a project funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung so that the text as a whole reflects a significant degree of collaboration between the authors. For each post-Yugoslav country, there are two essays. The first essay provides a detailed overview of four spheres of social policy: pensions, health care, unemployment and labour market policies, and social protection (variously termed social inclusion, social welfare, social assistance, and social services in different chapters). The second essay presents an overview of the political system, a guide to the social policy programmes of the main political parties, and a broad picture of the main actors and values shaping social welfare and its reform. The book is extremely valuable because it includes essays on Slovenia and Montenegro. Slovenia, because of its relatively smooth transition and early membership of the European Union, is rarely considered in the context of post-Yugoslav welfare assemblages. At the

same time, Montenegro is rarely addressed in its own right, in part because for much of the period under consideration, it shared a social policy framework with the much bigger Serbia. It is symptomatic of the problem that the same authors (Drenka Vuković and Natalija Perišić) are responsible for the chapters on social policy in both Serbia and Montenegro. The absence of discussion of Kosovo is disappointing. Whilst Kosovo's historical development can be construed as "specific", influenced heavily by international organisations in the post-war period, the fact that Centres for Social Work have been redeveloped in recent reforms and the exceptionalism of the development of the pension system are worthy of discussion, well developed in the extent literature, and would have made the book more complete.

The argument that there was, prior to 1990, a distinct "Yugoslav welfare model" is more of a starting point for the study than a subject of in-depth analysis. The recognition that social problems would not simply "wither away" under socialism, institutionalised in professional social work training at university and the establishment of Centres for Social Work in the early 1960s, is a clear expression of the "Yugoslav exception". At the same time, the nature of decentralisation after the 1974 constitution, the persistence of massive inter-republic inequalities, and the uneven impacts of the economic and political crises in the 1980s can be said to have created rather different legacies in different republics which are not addressed adequately in the book. Instead, we are presented with a picture of an out-of-date and unsustainable model in decline on the one hand, and diverse hybrid and unstable new models not yet institutionalised fully, on the other hand, with the relative exception of Slovenia. The causes of this, in terms of the consequences of war, the uneven impact of international organisations, the existence of clientelistic elites, and the lack of a new social contract, are clearly demonstrated. The timing of the book means that, unfortunately, the extent of the impact of the economic and financial crisis is not explored as fully as it might be.

In part because of the lack of literature describing social policy in Montenegro, the chapters on Montenegro are of particular value, not least in showing that, in effect, economic and social policies in Montenegro have diverged from those of Serbia since, at least, 1999. The undoubted folly of a continued commitment to a kind of “cut and paste” three-pillar pension reform in what is a very small country, with limited financial markets, in the midst of a global fiscal crisis, is not remarked upon in the texts. The political overview (Jelena Dzankić) is notable for the elaboration of a raft of concepts enabling a more thorough understanding not just of the political economy of Montenegro but of many of the post-Yugoslav successor states, in which political elites, controlling a shadow economy, “integrate the legacies of the socialist system into a new model of welfare capitalism” (p. 202) which is hybrid and which is in need of recalibration to adjust to endogenous and exogenous forces.

The chapters on Serbia explore the delayed transition but fail largely to note the progress made under an innovative and determined Minister of Social Affairs, Gordana Matković, in the first democratic Government under Zoran Đinđić between 2000 and 2004. The overview of social policy (Drenka Vuković and Natalija Perišić) does address the impacts of the economic and financial crisis on labour market policies. However, by addressing only social assistance and other cash benefits, and not addressing at all the issues of social services, the text ignores the impetus for reform provided by the Social Innovation Fund which is mentioned only in passing in the text on political actors (Slaviša Orlović). The clash between those embracing a kind of liberalising modernism and those still adhering to authoritarian populist ideas, in a framework in which democratic reforms still compete with patronage and partocracy, is still unresolved. Those who obtained large fortunes in the first wave of reforms are, in fact, the ones who most resist reforms today. The complexities of Serbian realities are also shown by a comment, not followed up, that the influence of the International Monetary Fund is mitigated by support from the EU, from Russia, and from China.

The chapter on social policy in Slovenia (Zinka Kolarič, Ana Kopač Mrak and Tatjana Rakar) includes an extensive and nuanced analysis of the pre-independence legacy of socialist social policy. The chapter addresses the apparently smooth transition to a corporatist Central European insurance-based social policy, underpinned by a degree of social consensus and, until recently, sustained high levels of GDP and moderate growth. At the same time, it notes that radical reforms occurred in housing policy which, since it is not one of the four social policy sectors which the book addresses, is largely ignored in other chapters in the book. The fact that Slovenia undertook a rather more piecemeal pension reform which has secured replacement rates of over 60 percent is, perhaps, salutary, although the sustainability of the scheme in the context of an ageing population and a global financial crisis may be in question. In the political essay, Igor Guardiancich suggests that the particular type of Slovenian neo-corporatist pluralism contains within it certain negative tendencies towards exhausting policy debates and a degree of policy inertia. Whilst the chapter explores the limits of “new right” impacts on policies, and the importance of social dialogue, it does not address perhaps the most important feature of the Slovenian post-independence settlement, namely its construction of a peculiar mono-culturalism based on an intolerance towards ethnicised diversity and, indeed, the denial of citizenship to the *izbrisani* (erased) new minorities.

The lack of attention to the ethnicisation of welfare provision, not only in terms of the treatment of national minorities, but also in relation to the region's Roma population is present throughout the book and is, perhaps, a product of the narrow focus of the remit given to the authors. The rise of “new actors” in social policy, notably non-governmental organisations and the private sector, is also not addressed to any great extent. The lack of voice of users of services, increasingly stigmatized as “undeserving”, and the lack of accountability mechanisms, is also not addressed adequately.

Stambolieva, in her concluding chapter, suggests, rightly, that the book provides a starting point for future research. Her chapter is extremely useful in providing

an overview of theories of welfare regimes and, in particular, the pitfalls of their uncritical application in a post-communist context. The argument that there has been too great an emphasis on the “formal” rather than the “essential” – by which I deduce she means “practical” or *de facto* aspects of welfare – is well made. Her initial attempts to address the realities of welfare assemblages in practice, over and above their formal character, to stress the importance of different kinds of agency, as well as the continued relevance of political economic structures, and what has been termed “discursive institutional” practices, offer a useful starting point for future research. Finally, a taken-for-granted assumption that social policy is confined, *a priori*, to specific sectors, and primarily the province of sovereign nation states, is in danger of failing to grasp many of the key realities of the transformations of welfare assemblages, regionally, and across borders, as well as nationally and locally. The book falls short in terms of its ambition to trace the complex reconfigurations of economic, political, social and cultural practices in terms of welfare in the post-Yugoslav space. It is, however, an important staging post for anyone who dares to take up elements of the challenge in the future.

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