Multidimensional Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe: a cross-national Perspective

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Abstract

The main scope of this dissertation is the analysis of multidimensional poverty and social exclusion in Europe from a cross-national perspective. The multidimensional approach means that in addition to income, other more direct indicators of living-standard deprivation are taken into account. Using empirical data from the European Community Household Panel and European Social Survey, the thesis explores cross-country differences in the patterns of poverty and social exclusion and explains them in terms of the characteristics of societies and welfare systems. The research also explores the interrelations between various aspects of disadvantage and identifies its most severe forms.

A number of more specific research questions are also addressed in three empirical chapters of the dissertation. The first of these chapters investigates the cross-national differences in the risk of multidimensional poverty among low skilled workers and the unemployed, as well as the level of protection against poverty offered by different patterns of labour participation within households (dual earner, single earner, and so-called one-and-a half-earner models). It finds that more redistributive countries, and those spending more on social protection, perform better in terms of lowering the risk of poverty among people with relatively vulnerable positions in the labour market, even when controlling for the size of economy.

The second investigates the cross-national differences in the circumstances of certain groups particularly at risk of poverty: older people, single parents, large families and people with poor health. The evidence suggests that welfare regimes differ in their ability to protect these risk groups from multidimensional poverty, and that their performance depends on the type of risk represented by specific category. Countries of social-democratic and conservative regime types are found to offer good protection for those affected by labour market-related risks, but they perform relatively poorly in the case of more individualized, biography-related risks.

The last empirical chapter shifts the focus from poverty to social exclusion by investigating the relationships between lack of resources, poor social participation and dissatisfaction with life, the focus again being on cross-national differences in the revealed patterns. The results demonstrate that the poor are relatively more likely to be socially detached and dissatisfied with life in more affluent societies. Also, lack of social participation is found to have an effect on dissatisfaction with life independent from poverty, and the effect is found to be stronger in more prosperous countries.
Overall, the research demonstrates a substantial variation in the prevalence and the patterns of multidimensional poverty across Europe, with Southern-European countries having the highest rates and the Nordic countries and The Netherlands performing best. However, the research also provides evidence for a greater polarization between the poor and the non-poor in the countries where the incidence of poverty is less frequent. It is suggested that these greater contrasts may stem from different patterns of selection into the category of poor operating in those more affluent countries.

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Bio: Before commencing his doctoral studies at the EUI, Wojtek Tomaszewski received a Master’s degrees in Mathematics and in Sociology, both from Warsaw University. He also worked as a Researcher/Analyst at TNS Poland in Warsaw. Wojtek’s research interests include the issues of poverty, social exclusion, and the relationships between living conditions and social participation and also – more recently – the social aspects of participation in crime and risky behaviours. He is also interested in the methods for quantitative data analysis and the applications of mathematical and statistical models in the social sciences. As a part of his doctoral programme, Wojtek completed two research visits: as a Graduate Research Fellow at the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and as an ECASS Visiting Researcher at the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) of the University of Essex. He has been a member of the Research Committee 28 on the Social Stratification and Mobility of the International Sociological Association and a member of an advisory panel on the “Analysis of Life Chances in Europe” programme run by ISER. Currently, Wojtek works as a Senior Researcher (Analyst) at the National Centre for Social Research in London.