



INSTITUTIONALISING MARKET SOCIETY IN TIMES OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE. THE CONSTRUCTION AND REFORM OF SOCIAL AND LABOUR MARKET POLICIES IN POLAND IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE (1989-2004)

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Abstract

In the face of an exogenous economic crisis or systemic political and economic transformations leading to multiple pressures for adaptation, social and labour market policies are the cornerstone of employment adjustment. Because they can pool and redistribute individual risks, these policies are likely to embody or facilitate a change of paradigm or economic system. However, the orientation of policies is also a matter of negotiation between the government and various interest groups. This is well illustrated in Poland, where post-1989 transformations involved a redefinition of the relationship between the state and the community of citizens and provide an opportunity to observe the dynamics of large-scale change over a relatively condensed period.

The thesis investigates three issues in this context: the nature of the emerging welfare system; the factors accounting for policy change, and the existence of a new socio-political compromise underlying the emerging work and welfare nexus. The analysis builds on a conceptual framework drawing on two streams of literature: the comparative studies of the welfare state in Western Europe and theories of public policy making. The first leads to a set of hypothesis that seek to explain change in the perspective of 'regime politics' while the second suggests on the contrary that conflicts and compromises are arising in different arenas defined by a configurations of actors and power relationships that are specific to each policy domain (employment regulation, labour market policies and pensions). The thesis uses original and secondary empirical material to assesses, on one hand, the validity of theories of the welfare state based on power resources, class cleavages and institutional path-dependence to explain the orientation of social policies in the post-communist context, and on the other, the idea that the representation of interests and the actors involved in the decision-making process are being shaped by the nature of the policy at stake. The analysis considers especially the role of pre-existing institutions, trade unions, employers associations and government, as well as specific categories of beneficiaries.

The methodology of the research combines process-tracing and in-depth case analysis with a comparative study of the trajectories of policy emergence and reform in three areas closely linked to labour market adjustment: employment regulation, unemployment policy and the pension system. In each domain, I map successive policy turns and the evolving configuration of actors, before assessing resulting policy outcomes. The cross-time, cross-sectional variation is then used to draw more general findings. This approach allows the thesis to contribute not only to improving the understanding of the politics of social and labour market policy in Poland specifically, but also to the conceptualisation of policy change by showing that there are different possible paths leading to a fundamental redefinition of the responsibilities of the state towards citizens.

The first contribution of the thesis is a detailed account of the nature of welfare regime in post-1989 Poland, and how it emerged and consolidated. The main empirical finding is that, contrary to the common argument of the passive retreat of the state, social and labour market policies have led to a third, more subtle transformation accompanying the change of economic and political systems: the institutionalisation of 'market society' emphasizing individualism. This relies on a broad compromise – sometimes implicit – between government and collective actors (trade unions and employers associations) in favour of an individualised management of social risks rather than solidarity across risk communities. These findings highlight trends that are at play in various other European countries in a more subtle way and allow for identifying new conditions of emergence of the minimalist or residual welfare state.

Furthermore, the thesis contributes to the study of welfare policies and politics more generally as it demonstrates that the nature of conflicts and compromises arising in the face of increasing labour market risks vary across sub-sectors of the welfare state, according to the issues and institutions that are at stake and pre-existing entitlements. The configuration of actors and the relationships between them, and thus the representation of interests in the making of employment regulation, policies addressing unemployment and the pension system substantially differ in a given country. Interestingly, in Poland, the conditions of employment tend to be negotiated in class terms (according to the model of redistributive politics) while this is neither the case for pension reform nor unemployment insurance. This suggests a new orientation for the study of the politics of labour market adjustment and welfare reform, departing from idea of a coherent welfare regime, with a prospect of shedding new light on developments in various other European countries.



Jury: Colin Crouch (Supervisor), Virginie Guiraudon (CERAPS-CNRS), Francois Bafail (CERI-Sciences-Po, external co-supervisor), Maurizio Ferrera (University of Milan, *in absentia*)

Bio

Since September 2009, Catherine Spieser is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Centre d'études de l'emploi (Centre for employment studies) in Paris. Her primary research interests are in the politics of labour market adjustment and socio-economic change, the political sociology of the welfare state and the relationship between domestic and EU economic and social policies. During her doctoral studies, she contributed to a collaborative research project on policies addressing socio-economic issues connected with enterprise restructuring. She is now participating in the GUSTO EU-funded project, directed by Prof Colin Crouch. Her work has so far appeared in several edited volumes and the French journal *Politique Européenne*.

Catherine Spieser graduated from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (IEP) in Strasbourg (2000) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (MSc European Political Economy, 2002). Before engaging in doctoral studies at the EUI, she worked as an economic policy analyst with the European Commission in Brussels and the French Ministry of Economy and Finance, posted in Warsaw and Kiev. The research for the PhD involved several periods of fieldwork in Poland, during which she was hosted by the College of Europe in Natolin and the French-Polish Centre Michel Foucault at the University of Warsaw. She was also a visiting research student at the LSE and CERI-Sciences Po. Between 2007 and 2009, she held lectureships at the University of Montpellier and Strasbourg, teaching European and comparative politics, public policy and social science research methodology at BA and MA level.