

Framing Croatian Social Policy

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This important and impressive text by a group of authors headed by Professor Vlado Puljiz is another big step in the development of the discipline of social policy in Croatia. This book coincides with Vlado Puljiz's retirement after 20 years in the Law Faculty of the University of Zagreb. The last issue of the *Revija za socijalnu politiku* was published in his honour, allowing colleagues and friends to mark his achievements of which the *Revija* is, of course, one of the most important. In my essay in the journal I noted the rather anti-social meta-political environment in contemporary Croatia, suggesting that:

„The processes and content of reform of Croatian social policy are radically unfinished. ... However, and thanks largely to the legacy left to us by Professor Vlado Puljiz, whose formal retirement from his post is unlikely to limit unduly his engagement in the public sphere, the possibilities of mapping the terrain, discussing policy and political alternatives, advocating for change, and identifying social ills wherever they occur, has been expanded considerably and irrevocably in Croatia.“ (Stubbs, 2008: 375)

This book is one part of that expanded possibility, containing essays on key aspects of the social policy system written by Puljiz and four colleagues: Gojko Bežovan; Teo Matković; Zoran Šućur; and Siniša Zrinščak. Following a brilliant introductory essay from Puljiz, containing a detailed historical overview of social policy in Croatia, from the first world war and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy to the present, we are then presented with 7 essays on sub-systems or sectors of social policy: the pen-

sions system; health; labour market; social assistance and social welfare; family policy; housing; and the role of civil society. These essays all demonstrate the importance of the linkage between theories, concepts, and current practice. They provide an up to date overview of key measures, as well as confronting debates about the future direction of policies in their field of interest.

The book is strong analytically and descriptively. Whilst parts of it will date quickly, this is not a problem providing those who wish to be informed about the latest developments continue to subscribe to the *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, the rigorous approach and strong conceptual base will have a longer lifespan. The book is primarily designed as a text book for students of social policy. However, I would suggest that it is the kind of text which policy makers, policy advisors, practitioners and, above all, politicians, would do well to read. This is not, of course, a manifesto for a new social policy but, read carefully, it is, I think, a clear statement of the importance of social policy in any modern society; of the importance of historical legacies in creating modern social policies; of the need to assess carefully the evidence rather than the ideological rhetoric associated with social policy reform; and, above all, I read it as a plea, in the context of European integration, to take the Europeanization of social policy more seriously. The approach reminds me of the Fabian-inspired study of Social Administration in the United Kingdom, with the need to school a new generation of policy makers and practitioners in the skills needed for a new welfare state, but this is very usefully combined with more

German political economy traditions and, indeed, with recent work on the nature of the transition in Central and Eastern Europe. In a sense, it reflects the combination of Bismarck, Beveridge (and Titmuss), Esping-Anderson and others as influences on Croatian social policy. I was surprised to find very little study of institutions in the book, not least because of the grip which historical institutionalism has over much of the study of social policy in Europe these days, but I am not particularly disappointed by this absence, not least because I think that historical institutionalism can lead to an over deterministic picture of social policy futures. I also think the book is, probably, easier to read as a result.

For its purposes, the book is hard to find fault with. However, for the purposes of discussion I do want to address four issues which are, perhaps, not so well addressed in the book. The four are of particular interest to me (so could be labelled my obsessions) but I do believe each has a literature associated with it which is of more general interest and, crucially, the themes could become even more important in the future. In broad brush stroke terms the four are: the nature and limits of 'social policy' and ways of studying it; the problems of studying social policy within a nation state frame; the relationship between structures of oppression and social policy including the gender, class, ethnicity and disability aspects of social control and disciplinarity; and the relationship between economic, social and environmental policies in the context of the current economic crisis.

One of the problems with much of the literature of social policy, reflected in teaching, is what I term its 'sectoral shopping list'. After a broad introduction to types of welfare regimes, students then study sector by sector: health, pensions, employment; social welfare; education; housing, being the usual sectors. The book, to an extent, follows this approach, adding family policy

and the role of civil society in a new welfare mix. I am not clear in my own mind what is it which is 'social' about the policies which the book studies and what is not 'social', or not social enough, about those which are not studied. There is a very useful definition at the start of the book of social policy in terms of „the organised activities of the state and other social actors whose goal is to reduce social risks ... and ... to improve the social well-being of citizens“ (my translation). Why then no discussion of education policy?, not least since both 'early childhood education' and 'lifelong learning' have become critical policy discourses in recent years. What of the criminal justice system? What about migration policy? Also, what about the link between social policy and development policy, including rural development or development in areas of special state concern? The obvious answer, of course, is that the book cannot include everything. The other problem is, however, that social policy is not only a shopping list of sectors but is a rather complex discursive terrain in which different social issues become constructed and reframed over time, especially – and this links to my second point – as social policy defining (as well as social policy making) is no longer the sole preserve of the nation state but is affected by all manner of international organizations. Quoting my colleague and often co-author Noémi Lendvai, the task of social policy research is more and more to „unfold the subtle processes of the transformation of social policy meanings, discourses, ideas, policy tools and objectives“ (Lendvai, 2007: 32).

Since Siniša Zrinščak and I have written on the question of the Europeanization of Croatian social policy and on the role of diverse international actors (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2007, 2009), and because the question of globalization, Europeanization and Croatian social policy is noted in the introductory chapter, I will not say too

much about it here. I also entirely understand the importance of an approach to social policy in one country, especially when that country has only recently secured its independence. But to focus only on social policy in one country risks a downplaying of the importance of the various 'scales' at which welfare is defined and produced; it risks understating the nature of various de- and re-territorializations of welfare; and the importance of cross-border claims and entitlements. This is important politically since many progressive social policy scholars are arguing that citizenship based welfare entitlements tied to a nation state are becoming less effective and indeed less relevant in the current context of globalization. Whilst these arguments can overstate the case, most of what constitutes social policy is still settled at the nation state level, the need to think below and, crucially, above the nation state level is clearly important and, indeed, is recognised by scholars of social policy in Croatia.

Twenty years ago in the United Kingdom, Fiona Williams' book *Social Policy* (Williams, 1988) changed the way that social policy was studied there. She argued from an explicit 'critical social policy' position which starts from the assumption that social policy is underpinned by and itself contributes to, fundamental social inequalities. The class based nature of this can be found, to an extent, in the work of both Titmuss and Esping-Anderson. Williams' great achievement was to add inequalities of gender and ethnicity (later others added disability) to this framework. She argued that the dominant power relations in a society create the conditions for social policies which address the critical triangle of family, work and nation, with social policy discourses and practices continually dividing welfare subjects into 'normal' and 'deviant'; 'deserving' and 'undeserving' and, indeed 'citizens' and 'others'.

There is some discussion in the book, particularly in the chapter on 'family policy', of the gendered nature of social policy although this tends to focus on the gendered dimensions of employment and women's dual role rather more than the gendered dimensions of old age, health and social services. The chapter is also extremely useful in terms of discussing narratives of demographic renewal as a driving force for contemporary Croatian social policy. I am not going to comment on a gendered division of labour in which all five authors are male but I would suggest that there is a rather significant arena concerning the gendered dimensions of Croatian social policy which has not yet been addressed in any detail.

In terms of social class questions, I do think that there has been a general lack of focus on social stratification within Croatian sociology in recent years of which the study of social policy also suffers. In part, of course, this is an understandable response to some of the more rigid marxist orthodoxies on this question which maybe dominated in a previous era. However, the inter-relationship between social policy and social stratification, albeit in a rather different form, does need posing anew, not least in a situation when what might be termed the professional middle class working in the public services also feels that their material and social situation is endangered. Regarding ethnicity, there is interest in this theme but, again, my concern is that ethnicised stratifications have been seen more in terms of vulnerable groups than in terms of the working of systems.

And, so, finally, to the big question of social policy and the crisis. I will not spend too long on this issue but would, rather, open up a number of questions for discussion. How is it possible that the crisis has been defined as a financial or, at best, an economic crisis when it clearly has social dimensions to it? Why has the voice

of 'experts' been primarily the voice of economists whose solutions have tended to treat social policy as residual and marginal or, indeed, as part of the problem? What new modes of governance are being suggested by the creation of an Economic Council whose advice is, firstly, ignored or rejected by Government and then, step by step, brought back into the public domain? What social policy measures are needed to minimise the social impacts of the crisis? Why is the linkage not made between economic, environmental and social justice? I suspect that in ten years time, we will be discussing the relationship between climate change and social policy in ways which we can barely imagine now. Perhaps, then, the greatest challenge for the next generation of social policy scholars, researchers and practitioners will be to explore the new risks which Beck and others have been writing about and to propose new ways of reshaping economic policy in the interests of social justice and environmental sustainability. This will require, at the very least, new

tools, new concepts and new social energy if it is to break the current position where social policy is still, despite all our best efforts, treated as of marginal importance.

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