

9° Panel

Besides the local welfare: circuits of “informal” welfare, between self-organization and trust networks

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Keynote:

Keynote speaker: Emanuela Mora, University of Sacred Heart of Milan

In the recent decades, the national welfare system has been affected by a reduction of benefits, which, in part, has been balanced by the emergence of different forms of welfare mix on local base. The reduction of the role of the state in the management and in the services delivery has been accompanied by spending review and liberalization policies, which were often characterized by the absence of a unified planning and perspective on care and social protection.

Especially in the Southern areas, the phenomenon of welfare territorialisation was not always able to meet adequate levels of service. On one hand, the local public action faced up to a mismatch between the new demands of participatory governance of services and a structural lack of economic resources. On the other hand, the third sector and the cooperative system demonstrated difficulties in driving new spaces of action alternative to South-European welfare state models, in which the management privileged transfers to households and was therefore often conditioned by particularistic-patronage networks.

In such a framework of weakness of public and social territorial services, the persisting economic crisis has exposed to risks of marginalization and impoverishment the most fragile and vulnerable local areas. However, those marginal contexts demonstrated an unexpected social resilience, being able to activate safety nets, which became alternative to institutional channels. Nevertheless those nets born in an informal, spontaneous and self-organized manner, they are often equipped with high structuring levels.

This is the case of various phenomena of production of assistance forms, solidarity and mutual-help “out-of-the-market” (i.e. not included in a circuit whose purpose is the monetary enhance) and at the same time beyond the institutional circuit, or outside the traditional ways of service delivery represented by the public and the third sector. Consider for example the resumption of informal work (free or “borrowed” within mutual trade systems), increasing in specific contexts, such as enterprises in rural areas or urban neighbourhoods or even marginal families in specific social circles.

Also, consider the increasing of new forms of community management of lands, spaces and resources, which mark a return to the commons and the civic uses. Finally, consider the emergence of trust networks or circuits of delayed reciprocity, as the phenomenon of suspended goods and shared economy, such as crowdfunding, carpooling or car sharing, peer-to-peer sharing of houses or clothes, etc.

We could unify these hybrid forms, under the label of “informal welfare”. In other words, it is a welfare born beyond the institutionalized system of goods and services delivery, using informal networks of trust, based on mechanisms of delayed reciprocity. In such forms, the “de-commodification” of social relations within networks of services allows not only the playback of local communities, but also the creation of value.

The objective of this panel is investigating these circuits and the various forms of informal welfare as well in urban and in rural contexts, by collecting case-study contributions, highlighting the following elements: the operation dynamics of these circuits; the networks in which are engaged actors, practices and cultures that animate them; the way they are in relation to institutional channels (market, public, third sector).

Preference is accorded to contributions, which will be able to combine the sociological perspective with multidisciplinary approaches, coming from anthropology, history, urban sciences, geography, economics and demography, etc.

Info

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