

Old challenges, recent changes: elderly care as a political struggle in Europe

A generous body of research on care for dependent family members has been developed over the past decades. More precisely, different research axes focusing on (in)formal work, gender (in)equalities or ethical issues have helped us reach a better understanding of specific forms of care, such as childcare, care work, current ‘care crisis’, etc. However, when it comes to *paid elderly care*, some research strands have mainly developed social-policy oriented approaches (Meagher & Szebehely 2013; Ranci & Pavolini 2013; Theobald & Luppi 2018) while others have elucidated only certain aspects thus far, and these mainly through medical, aging or social exclusion lenses (Bodogai & Cutler 2013; Filipovic Hrast et. al. 2013).

There are two key aspects which need particular attention today. First, in the context of the recent social and political processes, traversing the globe to a greater or lesser extent – late-modern globalization of care, its neo-liberalisation and commodification, (de)gendering, bureaucratizing, (de)familializing, etc. (Dahl 2017) – elder care has become the object of intense transformations. Those are related to both the conditions of care and to the expectations about how it should be provided. Second, elder care has ceased to be conceived simply as a ‘private’ or a ‘family’ problem. On the contrary, it is now “paid, managed, regulated and professionalised” (Dahl 2017). Care for the elderly finds itself at the intersections of the state, market, civil society and family, becoming part of political struggles (Hoppania 2015).

It is highly significant that these political struggles differ: not all political problems are being treated with the same political attention. How does elder care (i.e. a social fact) become a political problem? And to what extent is it prioritised (or not) within political agendas? Although paid elder care has become a political concern all over Europe, different parts of the Old Continent have their own specificities in relation to elder care politics and policies. Hanne Marlene Dahl has developed a model approach to the struggles in the field of elder care (Dahl 2017), focusing on the Scandinavian countries, which has not yet been used for analysing elder care in other European regions. Our aim is to elaborate on Dahl’s approach in order to understand how *paid elderly care became a scene of political struggle* in different regions of the Old Continent.

How has elder care become a part of the political agenda? What are the main stakes underpinning the process of gaining (political) visibility and other public responsibilities toward the elderly? Rights and responsibilities are organized through legal regulations; however, these regulations often remain limited in relation to human realities and social institutions which, by definition, have unpredictable dynamics. Therefore, what are the consequences that derive from the ambivalent aspects of the choice to regulate elderly care? These preliminary questions invite us to reflect upon the diverse forms of elder care as a political concern, such as the institutional arrangements or national policies and their implementation at different levels of governance, including political-administrative regulations at different levels (local, national and transnational). At the same time, both top-down and bottom-up perspectives are necessary in order to understand the impact of public policies as well as the ways in which these policies are being perceived, used and maybe also questioned with the purpose of demanding necessary or possible changes.

The contributions may include the following research axes and related preliminary questions:

- *the regulation of elder care*: how is care for the elderly perceived, understood and politically delimited, considering the current hybrid forms of regulation (political and also dictated by

financial and economic rationalities)? How have the different degrees to which processes of bureaucratisation, commodification (including the use of ‘innovative welfare technologies’) and the promotion of self-responsibility come to prevail in each context? In what ways does elder care become a political issue? Who are the most relevant social and political actors involved in this process and what role do they play?

- *the multilevel governance of elder care (subnational, national, transnational) through the lens of the Europeanization process*: how is elder care regulated and conceived as a political problem at all these levels, what are the effects of ‘travelling’ from one level to another and what kind of struggles does this traveling reveal? What are the main differences and similarities between different European regions regarding elder care as a political concern?

- *the gendered forms of regulation*: what are the main gendered effects in relation to the process of conceiving elder care as a political concern? what is the significance of the silencing of gender, through the lens of both perspectives of care givers and care receivers, and what are the possible ways in which this could be overcome? and what kind of hierarchies and obstacles related to the recognition of paid care work does gendered regulation reveal?

The aim of this special issue to be published in a high impact journal is to identify and analyse the struggles in elderly care as a political concern, and thus to map the current elderly care landscape at a national, transnational and also European Union level. Contributions that focus on the influence of the current global pandemic on elder care as a political concern are also welcome, as well as articles that shed light on the various ways in which the pandemic has brought care closer to the center of our attention (as silenced work). More precisely, contributions on different regions of Europe would allow us not only to identify similarities and differences between different parts of the continent (whether integrated or not into the EU), but also to reach a better understanding of the current political struggles and societal stakes that are at the heart of the current transformations of elder care as a universal human activity.

Top-down as well as bottom-up perspectives are welcome. This edited collection is also conceived for multi and transdisciplinary approaches (i.e. stemming from sociology, political science, gender studies, etc.) including socio-historical analyses that can shed light on the historical processes that have influenced the emergence and the development of political frictions and debates on elder care since the end of the 20th century.

Submission guidelines:

Contributors are kindly invited to submit an abstract (max 300 words), as well as a short bio/institutional affiliation/contact details, no later than **April 28th**, to:

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The organizers consider several possibilities for the publication of the accepted papers into a special issue of an international, peer-reviewed journal.