

*Marginalised People, the State and the Mixed Economy of Welfare:
Entangling European Experiences, 1918-1939*

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Proposal

The proposal aims to shed light on the interrelation between socially marginalised people (vagrants, beggars, poor and/or sick people, migrants, mentally ill, war invalids, orphans, prostitutes, etc.), and the actors in charge of their assistance: the State, local authorities and the constellation of the voluntary and informal sector. The main framework of the investigation is therefore the so called “mixed economy of welfare” and its impact on some of its recipients. While not all the recipients of social assistance were ascribable to the category of “socially marginalised people”, the project is concerned with those who, at that time, bore this stigma. By so doing, we aim to narrow our target to the field of “marginality” during the interwar period. The proposal focuses on these composite social groups as targets of social assistance, benefits, healthcare, and on the wide-range of public and private actors as provider of social aid. On the other hand, the analysis equally takes due account of the effects in terms of social control and social disciplining. The proposal draws from different experiences of various European countries between 1918 and 1939, and opens up to transnational/comparative analyses, as well as the interplay between centre and peripheries.

It explores marginality and intersectionality in the face of policies, actions, ideas, discourses carried on by the States and the variegated world that composed the “mixed economic of welfare”. By so doing, the proposal dwells on the dynamic processes that entailed the interaction between social groups, non-State actors, public authorities on a local, national, and transnational level. It emphasises synergy and competition between private and public sector, perceptions and discourses concerning marginalised people, political uses of social assistance, the combination of assistance and coercion underpinning social actions, self-aid, and resistances to social control.

The proposal is concerned with the ways in which socio-political actors conceived “assistance” to social marginals. Relevant questions stemming from this topic may include:

- What policies did governments implement to cope with “marginalities”?
- How was the idea of “social marginality” conceived and reformulated during the interwar period?
- How did voluntary sector acted to tackle this social issue?
- To what extent was public/voluntary action conditional to social and moral considerations (the needy, the right to assistance, the individual fault)?
- How did marginalised groups organise themselves?
- How did social groups, lobbies, voluntary sector interact with the State?
- How and to what extent were the experiences across the European continent entangled?

To address this question, our proposal welcomes contributions on:

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- “New” marginalised and the post-war recovery (war invalids; the return of PoWs and the entitlement to social assistance; care and social disease after the Great War; post-war epidemics and the Spanish flu)
- Old and new “marginalities” during the Great Depression (entitlement to social aid in times of crisis: the promotion of public discourses and ideas on the “good citizen” , e.g. the “respectable worker” VS the “lazy”, “undeserving poor”, etc.; State policies and voluntary sector facing mass unemployment)
- The interaction and/or tension between governmental policies and the other actors in charge of social aid, including local authorities.
- The synergy/competition between public and non-State actors from an inter-/transnational perspective (the rise of international humanitarianism; international agencies for social policies)
- Comparisons and transfers across the European continent (western Europe; newly formed post-Habsburg and post-Ottoman States; the Soviet Socialist Republics and the “mixed economy of welfare”)

Workshop and outputs

After having fine-tuned goals, topics, and scope of our proposals with the other members of WG2, we would like to operationalise it as follow:

- 1) The organisation of a one-day workshop that gathers scholars who are dealing with these issues, to be discussed within the framework of our COST-action, and particularly of the WG2 about the “mixed economy of welfare”;
- 2) A special issue, which will collect some of the papers presented at the workshop. Depending on the topics of the papers presented at the workshop, we will discuss with the contributors (and with the leaders of the COST-Action) which journal may act as most suitable outlet;
- 3) A collaborative reader with the contributors of the workshop. It will offer a selection of the most representative and inspiring texts derived by the international scholarship about the topics under examination. The reader will be conceived for university students, teachers, and activists in the social sector. In compliance with copyright, it could be put on the website of the project as a product with open access.