



WHO CARES IN EUROPE?

Call for Papers: “Unpolitical Politics”

Who Cares in Europe? Cost Action 18119

<https://whocaresineurope.eu/>

Who Cares in Europe? Cost Action 18119

<https://whocaresineurope.eu/>

CALL FOR PAPERS

Unpolitical Politics? Public action for social protection in Europe from the late 19th through the early 21st centuries

With this call for papers, we seek contributors to an innovative document reader organized around the paradoxical notion of “unpolitical politics” as a form of individual or collective public action undertaken by many actors working in the field of social protection, broadly conceived. “Unpolitical politics” is, for our purposes, more of an analytic concept than an emic/native formulation, as these actors did not necessarily express themselves in precisely this language. We believe that this concept constitutes a broad *problématique* that is transversal to our entire Action. It therefore holds potential for pulling together a wide range of findings, themes, and approaches that have emerged across members’ individual studies and transversal projects. The reader will consist of contextualized presentations and critical readings of a short document or set of documents regarding a public action in the field of social protection, interpreted (analyzed) in light of the concept of “unpolitical politics.”

The notion of “unpolitical politics” presents a paradox inasmuch as it seeks to challenge the idea, dominant throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, that “the political” and “the social” constitute separate realms of human action and experience. This idea had emerged by the second half of the 18th century as a clear categorical distinction. Intertwined with other dichotomies on which 19th century philosophy, literature, social and political thought were based, including public versus private, or male versus female, the conviction that “the social” and “the political” frame distinct, even opposing realms of human experience stood for a long time as a point of overarching consensus. Since the late twentieth century, however, social scientists have come to agree that the frontier separating the political and the social was never a fixed one, but has always been mobile and porous, shifting easily in different contexts, as any socially constructed concept will do.

Social protection is an emblematic field for unpacking “unpolitical politics” as a concept and a practice. Over the second half of the 19th century, the notion of being “un-”, or even “non-” political came to resonate with an ever-broadening range of actors and organizations in the field of social care and social protection, although the precise uses and significance of the idea varied widely and evolved, depending on the political context and the historical period. To compress a long history involving a blend of ideas about charity, salvation and transcendent concern for suffering humanity, we might say that actors for social protection have long understood their work to be anchored in the non-instrumental values of care and empathy for the most vulnerable, as opposed to the more instrumental logics that govern the political. Analysing the diverse forms, practices, and discourses of this work through the concept of “unpolitical politics” thus allows us to explore how the political has been disputed, constructed, reclaimed or refuted through action that was often not publicly recognized as political either by those who acted or by those who observed them.

Finally, “unpolitical politics” is always culturally, geographically and historically situated. It may therefore vary considerably as both concept/discourse and practice. For example, public action may

imply a critique of how politics, narrowly conceived, is done; or it may deploy a more neutral sense vis-à-vis politics as something distinct with respect to the social; alternatively, it may seek to abolish altogether any distinction between politics and the social. Individuals engaged in actions that can be construed as “unpolitical” may well have had political affiliations on the right or the left. On the contrary, they may have studiously avoided politics, acting in the name of alleviating human suffering or promoting social justice. Hence, they may have complied with, contributed to or dissented from central politics, depending on the political regime and the historical period in which they acted. They also may have invoked religious conviction or scientific expertise as guarantees of their politically neutral social work.

We are convinced that the notion of unpolitical politics offers a novel analytic lens through which we may present a wide range of documents produced from the late 19th through the early 21st centuries across the full geographic space of that very large Europe that our Action covers. Read through the particular kind of bottom-up perspective that our triadic approach affords (families, associations and states as co-constructors of social welfare), the documents presented in this reader will, when taken together, constitute a kind of “blueprint” for the entire COST Action “Who Cares in Europe?” As such, “Unpolitical Politics?” will stand as a signature publication for our Action.

We invite you all to contribute to this source reader with a short document (or set of documents) which you then introduce and contextualize in a brief entry of no more than 4000 words (document and commentary/contextualization combined). Translation and editing costs will be covered.

Please fill in the attached template and send your proposals to Ellianna Farazi ellianna.farazi@parisdescartes.fr by April 15, 2022.

For more information, please, contact

Efi Avdela avdela@uoc.gr

Clarisse Berthezene clarisse.berthezene@u-paris.fr

Laura Lee Downs Laura.Downs@eui.eu

Dominika Gruziel dominika.gruziel@eui.eu

Dimitra Lampropoulou dlamprop@arch.uoa.gr

Template for your proposed entry to the volume “Unpolitical Politics”?

Author's name	
Email address	
Institutional affiliation	
Brief description of your source(s)¹	

¹ These can include associational statutes, laws, letters, newspaper articles, extracts from case files or applications for assistance, drawings, photos, blueprints or designs, publications or extracts from the above – in other words, the material that you are using in your own research.

Original language of your source(s)	
Publishing rights of your source(s)	
Creators of your documents/artifacts²	

² Individuals, association, network, movement, community, ad-hoc mobilization, etc.

**Contextualization of
your source(s) (max
500 words)³**

³ What did you choose this source? What is its relevance to the concept of “unpolitical politics” and how does this concept illuminate aspects of the social action in question? Who are the action’s intended beneficiaries? How do the categories of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, race or age feature in the social action?