***36th Conference of the AÉS***

**(Association d’économie sociale/Association for Socio-Economics)**

**Organised by Clersé – University of Lille 1**

**Thursday 8 and Friday 9 September 2016**

***Social policies undergoing change: what opportunities and what risks for the social state?***

**Call for papers**

Social policies, broadly defined, are rooted in time and space. The fundamental principles that underpin them and the forms they take are dependent on the way in which the ‘social question’ is articulated. From this point of view, social policies are constantly changing, since what a society recognises as an object of social policy varies depending on context and time period. Nevertheless, the social policies that are adopted are linked to analytical concepts and questions that remain to some extent unchanged (How can social cohesion be ensured? What relationship to work should individuals have?). In some ways, social policies could be said to be permanently changing. Nevertheless, there are different levels of change and not all of them have the same consequences for the reconfigurations of the social state. Some changes may arise out of developments in the mobilisation of labour in capitalist societies or from changes in certain socio-economic parameters (changes in demographics, employment, living conditions and so on) while the institutions themselves remain unchanged. Conversely, the institutions themselves (funding, formal rules, organisation, etc.) may change or there may be changes in actors’ perceptions and practices (identification of ‘new risks’, reorganisation of public action, disparity between prescribed work and actual work, etc.).

While the social state undergoes constant change, efforts to describe these changes, to analyse their causes and to debate the foreseeable consequences require that attention be directed successively (or simultaneously) to institutional configurations, the formulation of public policies (and in particular their reference framework) and the actors in policy-making (professionals and those eligible to contribute), as well as to the socio-economic context in which they are situated. While these research questions are not new, one of the ways of shedding fresh light on them is undoubtedly to make a distinction between the discourse of change and change itself. In reality, after all, social policies do not necessarily follow the path marked out for them in advance. They may evolve less than planned, they may follow a different trajectory or the most profound changes may not necessarily be those that receive the greatest publicity.

The main theme of the papers to be given at the 36th AES Conference will be the question of change in social policies. The proposals submitted should be relevant to one of the following thematic streams:

* A/ Evolution of the context in which social policies are implemented, particularly viewed in conjunction with the evolution of the forms of labour mobilisation;
* B/ Evolution of the content of those policies (new approaches?) ;
* C/ Evolution of the object of social policies (new policy areas?).

These questions may be addressed at both the most highly aggregated level (macroeconomic or comparative approach) and the most microeconomic or microsociological level, with due care being taken to examine the actors’ animating principles in all their complexity. The call for papers is traditionally open to a range of different disciplines (economics, sociology, political science) as well as to combinations of two or more disciplines (interdisciplinary approach).

**THEMATIC STREAMS**

**A/ The evolution of social policies viewed in conjunction with changes in working and employment conditions**

Participation in paid work still constitutes the basis of the French social model and social state as it has developed since the end of the 19th century. Changes in the forms of labour mobilisation are calling into question the foundations of social policies and the forms they take.

# *Social rights and fragmented careers*

Many of the questions relating to social policies are linked to the changes currently taking place in working and employment conditions, in the factors determining the profitability of the productive system and in the modes of labour mobilisation among the various generations of workers. Conversely, the proliferation of non-standard employment forms is raising questions about the social rights associated with them. It is also raising questions about the transferability of these rights between the various situations of which an increasing number of working lives are now made up: range of different working times and schedules, diversity of employment statuses (salary/wage earner, ‘self-employed’, voluntary, etc.) etc.

The objective here is to investigate the nature and evolution of the links between social policies and changes in work and employment. Papers may adopt an historical perspective, explore a single employment situation or labour market institution, compare situations (e.g. by providing an overview of the social rights associated with the jobs or sectors under consideration and examining possible inequalities in that regard between different age groups, employment statuses, occupations, etc.) or focus on the actors involved in the management of social rights. The new need for rights to be transferable in the case of fragmented employment histories could also be examined.

* ***Social policies and industrial relations***

The changes in work and employment are echoed in changes in the industrial relations system, at the inter-occupational, industry and firm levels. This industrial relations system is the basis for the construction of the collective rights enjoyed by workers and the actors in the system (employers’ organisations and trade unions, employee representative bodies) are operating within an overall framework that has undergone significant change in recent years.

At the inter-occupational level, for example, the act of 31 January 2007 on the modernisation of social dialogue has tended to increase the level of negotiation between the social partners, with a social agenda determined in part by the government. What results has it produced? To what extent is the establishment of a mode of bargaining leading to legislation effective and is it reflected in the joint construction of social norms?

In recent decades, the ‘firm’ has been designated the favoured location for establishing ‘effective social dialogue’. On the one hand, it has become the location at which the obligations and/or incentives to negotiate have become particularly firmly established, to the point where the hierarchy of norms principle has been reformed. On the other hand, however, it is within the firm that new actors in the industrial relations systems have been defined in institutional terms. What are the actual consequences of these changes? How have the actors appropriated these new rules (if indeed they have) and how effective is ‘social dialogue’ at firm level? Another possibility would be to investigate the consequences of strengthening the ‘firm’ as a location for social dialogue in a context in which the wage relationship is crumbling and the boundaries of the firm and of the actors managing it are shifting (between the individual establishment and the parent company, for example). These questions could be addressed through the prism of the economic crisis which, above and beyond the cyclical adjustments it has produced, has also revealed a number of deeper structural changes.

**B/ The evolution of the content of these policies: towards new ways of policy making?**

The content of social policies is given tangible form through the three-stage process of design, implementation and evaluation, through which its nature is indeed shaped. The evolution of their content could, therefore, be investigated from the perspective of the modes of implementation, financing and evaluation.

* ***Modes of implementation***

Social policy implementation seems to be structured to some extent by two enduring factors: firstly, the relationship between an individual’s right to benefit from a social policy and his or her involvement in productive activity and, secondly, the question of the appropriate level at which to implement social policies.

The link between social policy and productive activity has re-emerged since the beginning of the 1990s in the form of the activation measures that have led to a strengthening of incentives to participate in the labour market (tax credits, the ‘active solidarity income’ or RSA, a form of income support, making unemployment benefits dependent on participation in active labour market programmes, pension reform, etc.), despite recurrent and still pertinent questions about the effectiveness of this development. Contributors could examine the periodic revivals of the debate on activation in the history of social policies, while at the same time highlighting the breakpoints: the establishment of a European framework for convergence and the redefinition of this priority in times of crisis. To what extent is the current change one such breakpoint? What specific form has this return to activation been taking since the 1990s? Has the focus of policy changed? Are the mechanisms put in place different? And above and beyond the institutional context, contributors might investigate the changes in the behaviour and experience of the clients and providers of these active labour market policies: what is their relationship with the institution? Are non-usage behaviours a new phenomenon? How do providers, particularly counsellors, go about implementing these policies? How do they reinterpret the prescribed work?

In the case of social transfers aimed at the poorest groups in society, the so-called ‘social minima’, trends towards territorialisation/de-territorialisation can be observed in the design and implementation of social policies. How are these different levels of design and implementation justified? Are the actors’ practices changed by these shifts? What consequences does this have for beneficiaries of these policies?

* ***The financing of social policies***

The change in the nature of the social state and its public actions is embodied in its financing, which has undergone radical change. Above and beyond the standard modes of financing for public policies, innovations, e.g. in the form of exemptions from compulsory contributions and the concomitant funding from taxation, have been introduced. What do these innovations tell us about the change in the state and in social solidarity?  More generally, is the financing not becoming increasingly diverse, with an expanding range of revenue sources, both public and private? To what extent is this mix of revenue sources, which sometimes involves appeals to actors in the financial markets to invest in the social state, changing the nature of social policies, and more generally that of the social state? Has austerity affected social policies in different ways depending on their mode of funding? These questions could be tackled from a macroeconomic perspective, by taking individual policy areas (policies on employment, on the provision of private social protection by companies, on the family etc.) as points of entry or by adopting a sectoral approach (policy on the development of personal services, the French Fifth Risk Plan aimed at curbing the risk of dependency for the elderly etc.).

* ***The evaluation of social policies***

Evaluation is now firmly established as an imperative in social policy. Some explain this as a consequence of the erosion of the legitimacy of public action, while for others it reflects a drive to rationalise policy choices. Some authors see this expansion of evaluation as expressing a dream of a society characterised by ‘harmony through calculation’, of which randomised experiments are one paradigmatic illustration, although they coexist with many other forms of evaluation.

In fact, however, some studies tend to show that the evaluation of public policies, whether ex-ante or ex-post, is not as widespread as is claimed. This being so, a number of questions might be asked. To what extent are social policies actually evaluated? What are the main forms of evaluation? What do they tell us about the evaluation market (particularly when the evaluation is carried out by experts regarded as ‘independent’)? To what extent do certain forms and dynamics of evaluation in turn redefine public policies, particularly by changing the actors’ guiding principles? Obviously, targeted social policies or experiments could be used by way of illustration, together with critical analyses of evaluation systems.

**C/ Evolution of the object of social policies: towards new policy areas?**

Is it possible that the changes in social policies are being driven by the object of those policies? This will be the crosscutting question in this thematic stream. Reference is frequently made to new social risks, new target groups and new territories. What do these new objects tell us about the social state and in what respect do they contain the seeds of structural changes? What is the nature of these changes?

* ***New social risks***

The ‘new social risks’ acts as markers for the changes in the system of social protection (ageing population, disintegration of family solidarity, etc.) by highlighting the current failings of the social state. Nevertheless, the construction of these new risks often depends on analytical and justificatory categories that struggle to free themselves completely from the categories traditionally used to conceptualise social problems (as the use of the notion of risk, for example, indicates). Thus contributions might investigate whether these new risks have been constructed in a specific way (justificatory category, modes of legitimation and financing, institutional architecture, etc.). Do these new risks provide an opportunity to introduce new areas of action for public policies? Or are they rather new areas of economic opportunity? What is their impact on our system of social protection? And, finally, what does this tell us about the changes in that system?

* ***New target groups***

The emergence of these new risks has also led to the emergence of ‘new target groups’ (the dependent elderly, single women, question of gender, immigrants, etc.) who until now have been little represented, if at all, in the established bodies responsible for managing social protection. This in turn has led to the emergence of new actors (voluntary/charitable associations, private insurers, etc.) with often divergent interests. What are the strategies and power relations that are emerging as a result? And how are these new target groups being taken into account?

* ***New countries, new locations***

What are known as ‘social policies’ in wealthy countries take on a completely different meaning in developing countries. The differences concern policy objectives, the types of actors involved, their respective positions within the overall system (if it exists) and the modes of financing. The balance between state intervention (structured and legitimate to varying degrees), private, not-for-profit organisations (of the NGO type), international institutions and capitalist (often multinational) companies varies considerably from country to country, or even from region to region within the same country. Furthermore, the financing of these policies is heavily dependent on the degree to which the economy is organised or ‘formal’. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the new millennium, social protection has become a priority for developing countries. In the eyes of the international financial organisations, social policies are also regarded as instruments for fighting poverty, in particular because they enable everyone to have the capacity to take part in the formal money economy, which in turn helps to achieve the broader goal of improving the countries’ economic growth.

Contributors might investigate the changes taking place in developing countries, both from the institutional point of view and in terms of the mobilisation of the actors concerned.

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While the AÉS programme committee awaits with interest papers focused primarily on the conference’s central theme, the AÉS Conference is also open, as it is every year, to papers concerned with any area of socio-economics, such as health, education, social protection, housing, the economics of the non-market sector, poverty and exclusion and the economics of culture. Thus proposals not directly linked to the central theme of the conference may also be submitted to the AÉS programme committee.

**How to respond to the call for papers**

Proposals must be presented in accordance with the following standard layout (2 to 3 pages maximum):

*The first page* must contain the title of the paper, together with the names(s), postal and e-mail addresses and institutional affiliation(s) of the author or authors [in the case of co-authors, please underline the corresponding author].

*The proposal must include the following points*:

* brief outline of the research question and the issues it raises;
* in the case of papers addressing the central theme of the conference, please state the number of the thematic stream and its connection with the proposed presentation;
* a statement of the paper’s originality vis-à-vis the existing literature;
* the nature of the paper: theoretical, empirical etc.;
* the methodological approach: sources and tools;
* the paper’s state of progress;
* a selective bibliography (5 to 10 references).

**These proposals are to be submitted by e-mail only on or before:**

**23 November 2015**

**to the following address:** **aes2016@univ-lille.fr**

All the necessary information, together with a link through which to contact the organisers directly, can be found on the Conference website at: <http://aes2016.sciencesconf.org/> and <http://association-economie-sociale.fr>

**Timetable**

Deadline for submission of proposals for presentations: 23 November 2015

Responses to authors from the programme committee: 18 December 2015.

Deadline for receipt of final versions of presentations for publication in the Conference Proceedings: 29 March 2016.

**Publication of Conference Proceedings**

The papers that are accepted by the programme committee, whether or not they address the conference’s central theme, may be included in the Conference Proceedings, to be published by *Presses universitaires de Louvain* (Louvain University Press). The programme committee will select the best papers in April 2016. All papers that are received at the latest by 29 March 2016 and that comply with the standards for presentations (which will be circulated when the selection procedure is finished) will be eligible for publication in the Conference Proceedings. Those papers not selected for publication in the Conference Proceedings and papers received after the deadline of 29 March 2016 will, however, be available for downloading from the following website: <http://aes2016.sciencesconf.org/>

The published papers may be further disseminated in special issues of peer-reviewed journals.

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