

Call for Papers

From Welfare Capitalism to
Welfare State: Transformation
of Welfare Institutions in
Central and Eastern Europe,
1780-1948

Prague, 20-22 October 2022



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From Welfare Capitalism to Welfare State:

Transformation of Welfare Institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, 1780-1948

Welfare capitalism refers to a complex of social, housing, health, safety, and leisure policies and institutions which were connected to the workplace and established by the private companies. In contrast to individual policies, welfare capitalism is considered to be a system-forming phenomenon. It points to a socio-economic order that existed at a certain place and time. Welfare capitalism emerged along with the boom of industrial enterprises, construction of factories and influx of labor forces. It could be a corporate strategy for heading off the demands of organized working-class movements. Through it, entrepreneurs sought to eliminate strike actions, subdue the power of trade unions, ensure social reconciliation, and effectively manage the working population. Welfare capitalism is also interpreted as an attempt to assume the responsibility for employees' well-being before the welfare state massively took over these obligations.

While American and West European historians have been studying welfare capitalism and welfare institutions for many years, they have not been systematically researched in the Central and Eastern Europe. Yet the development of welfare institutions was not only the result of moral, religious and pragmatic decisions by entrepreneurs, but was often backed by state support and pressure - an aspect that has not been not been discussed so far. Welfare institutions not only transformed society, but also contributed to a fundamental change in spatial and place relations. Early-modern cities changed, many villages became industrial centers, and on the flat countryside, where once there were only fields, meadows and forests, factories sprang up around which housing, schools, hospitals, churches and an entire infrastructure developed.

Nevertheless, the mentioned institutions were very particular and targeted at selected groups. They did not contain the principle of equality and did not include a number of characteristics usually associated with the welfare state, such as unemployment compensation, pension and disability insurance, free education etc. Local municipalities could provide minimal welfare provision, but it was determined for persons with legal or long-term residence status. In many cases, social care was limited to the establishment of communal kitchens, workhouses, and labor exchanges. Its minimal nature and scope exacerbated permanent tensions. Thus, the term "welfare states" should be used very carefully. A certain differentiation between welfare capitalism and the welfare state, vis-à-vis to the fact that both terms are sometimes understood as synonymous, could be fruitful for historical research.

The intersection of private, state and public interest in the establishment and operation of welfare institutions is the starting point of the conference. It seeks to answer the question under what historical conditions company welfare institutions were constructed and operated? What role did state and public authorities play in the changes of welfare institutions? Were they merely a catalyst, as the classical definitions suggest that welfare capitalism emerged when authorities began to intervene in labor and social issues? How have the authorities tried to regulate the company welfare institutions and interfere in places of everyday life? How did they have been transformed into state-sponsored services?

Papers that exploring welfare institutions and focusing on (micro)history of kitchens, houses, schools, hospitals, churches, health and pension cash offices in the long-term span of time are encouraged.

Please send your abstract of no more than 350 words and a short biographical note by 15 September 2022 to both Zdeněk Nebřenský (nebrensky@dhi-prag.cz) and Jakub Štofáník (stofanik@mua.cas.cz).

The conference will take place 20-22 October 2022, in Prague, Czech Republic. In case of travel restrictions due to the pandemic, the conference will be held in a hybrid or online format. Conference languages are English and German. Travel and accommodation costs are covered by the organizers.