



SAL TSA

An alternative to the market
The social, political and economic role of public services in Europe

Organisers: ETUI-REHS, EPSU, SAL TSA

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Venue: ETUI-REHS; Blvd. du Roi Albert II, 5; B-1210 Brussels

Call for papers

The aim of this conference is to highlight the role played by public services in the European Union and the failure of the European Commission to acknowledge this. We hope that the debates in the workshops and plenary sessions will underline the vital economic and social contribution of public services, challenge assumptions underlying current EU policies and identify research questions which need to be covered in future EC research programmes.

An important aspect of the conference is the bringing together of the academic community and trade unions to debate the issues and to see how they might work together to tackle some of the main research questions in the future.

The first day of the conference will consist of a number of research workshops. The second day targets a wider audience and will consist of a plenary session that takes up the themes from the workshops and discusses them in a broader way.

The current EC approach to public services is to make them almost invisible. In EC-speak we have “services of general interest” rather than public services and their priorities are all about competition, the internal market, and the economic and financial policies of the stability and growth pact, not about delivering high quality public services. The contribution of public services to the economy and to employment creation, the social contribution of public services to the lives of Europeans, and the role of local, national and European political activity in shaping and controlling these services, have all been challenged by these developments. The historical development of these services under local, regional and national political conditions is obscured, and the policies of the EU and its member states in relation to developing and neighbourhood countries risk introducing the same tensions and problems beyond Europe itself. Considering the mounting evidence that the marketisation and privatisation of public services have not delivered the expected results there is a need to re-evaluate the role of public services in Europe, including a re-examination of the basic assumptions underlying current policies and taking into account political implications.

Researchers are invited to submit abstracts for papers focussing on one of the following topical workshops:

I Drivers of privatisation

This workshop will focus on the forces behind the waves of privatisation which can be observed in Europe since the beginning of the 1980s. It should – beyond analysing political and ideological factors – clarify and assess the emergence of new economic development patterns – led by financial investors as main actors – and a new economic policy paradigm where governments look to cutting tax rates and holding back public spending in the race for international competitiveness. It should also take into account the new concentration of income and wealth at the top of the society and the consequences of the accumulation of financial wealth for the growing pressure for privatisation of new areas of public services like health care, education and public administration. Finally the workshop will assess the chances for (increased) regulation of privatised services in an environment of intensified national and international competition.

II EU policies on public services: stock-taking and critical assessment

This workshop should concentrate on the clarification and critical assessment of the development of European policies with regard to public services. This will include their very limited and subordinated role in the different treaties, the development and limitations of the concept of universal service obligations, the discussion on services of general interest in the green and white papers and the recent communications on social services. The theoretical hypotheses which underpin current EU policies should be elaborated and submitted to thorough critique. The workshop should also take into account the differing approaches and positions of the Commission and the European Parliament, and within both institutions.

III The impact of privatisation of services on employment and industrial relations

This workshop will focus on the quantitative and qualitative impacts of privatisation and marketisation of services on employment and industrial relations. This can include issues around employment contracts, working hours, working time flexibility, earnings, training and occupational health and safety as well as the impact on collective bargaining processes and structures. The workshop may also examine quantitative issues such as changes in employment, productivity, prices, profits, and investment. Since the impact of privatisation and marketisation varies between different sectors and will be moderated to a large extent by national settings, comparative papers (either comparing sectors or countries) are strongly encouraged.

IV Public services as necessary alternative to dominance of marketisation

This workshop should focus on the role which public services could and should play in the European Union. It should explore how to counter the neo-liberal view of public services as a narrowly defined exception to the general principle of competition and how to re-instate them as an alternative form of provision of services in their own right. In the workshop the concept of “public good” and the way of defining, via public discussion and democratic decisions, its extent and content should be re-examined. The discussion will also consider possible modifications and/or extensions to the concept to make it applicable to a Union of states with different historical, political and cultural backgrounds.

Proposals of not more than 400 words should be submitted to services_conference@etui-rehs.org by 15th of July. A CV should be attached. The corresponding workshop should be clearly indicated. About 6 papers will be chosen for each workshop. Authors will be notified of the outcome by 1st September. Researchers selected will be asked to develop their proposals as a paper of between 4000 and 8000 words, and to prepare a presentation. Final papers should be submitted at the latest by 1st of November.

A number of papers will be selected for peer review and publication in “Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics” and “Transfer”.

Selection criteria: We will be looking for good quality research with a clear focus on the theme of a specific workshop and with a view to developing political conclusions. We do not want papers to develop any detailed mathematical or econometric investigations.