

PATCHWORK CAPITALISM AND MANAGING THE INTERLINKED CRISES IN ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES IN POLAND

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OVERVIEW

- Introduction
- The concept of patchwork capitalism
- Methodological note
- Collective workers' responses to the interlinked crises: the results of empirical analysis
- Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

Overlapping crises affecting all levels of social reality:

- Permanent/irreversible (e.g. climate change)
- Temporary/reversible (recurrent economic crises)

The idea of polycrisis (Tooze 2021) or interlinked crises (UN GCRG).

The focus of our research is on:

- Pandemic crisis
- War in Ukraine
- Economic troubles (increasing cost of life)

We explore ways of coping with crisis consequences by essential workers

(Mezzadri 2022) in the public sector (healthcare, social care, education).

We refer to the debate on the diversity of capitalism (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Amable, 2003; Bohle & Greskovits, 2012; Nölke & Vliegenthart, 2009)

Research gap to fill: the application of patchwork capitalism concept to interlinked crisis affecting essential services

PECULIAR FEATURES OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ORDER OF THE CEE COUNTRIES - PREMISES OF THE CONCEPT OF PATCHWORK CAPITALISM (GARDAWSKI, RAPACKI 2021)

Methodological perspective: ideal-typical approach.

Specific type of institutional heterogeneity, i.e., the incoherence and lack of complementarity of the institutional architecture.

The fundamental weakness of the institutional fabric - the basic institutions defining rules of the game within the existing socio-economic order.

Social inclination to create informal institutions from below and launch ad hoc resourcefulness in solving non-routine problems.

Open access socio-economic order, due to low transaction costs of entry, which facilitates attachment of new organizations and institutions (especially MNC) representing different, often divergent inner logics.

Inclination to falling into a development drift.

The socio-economic orders of ECC countries as an area of increased import of entropy from more advanced economies of the core.

The concept of "patchwork capitalism" as an adequate interpretation of the peculiarities of the socio-economic order in CEE countries.

DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC ORIGINS OF THE PATCHWORK ORDER

The historical roots of the weakness of formal institutions (including proto-capitalist institutional legacy, the legacy of authoritarian socialism, and imports of institutions from the West).

Mechanism of building capitalism without capitalists.

Reformist elites of the political breakthrough: idealization of free market principles and attempts to introduce a pure neoliberal economy, which triggered a social "counter-movement" and, as a result, institutional incoherence.

The role of foreign capital and the requirements of the Washington Consensus in pluralizing the institutional architecture of the socio-economic order, and on the other

hand in inhibiting the development of the stratum of domestic "oligarchs".

Impact of the EU membership on the pluralization of institutional architecture.

Distant social origins (long duration) of the propensity to create informal institutions and resourcefulness. The reasons for their current persistence.

Structural consequences of the "axiological patchwork".

Growing authoritarian orientation in some CEE countries close to the ideal type of patchwork capitalism.

PATCHWORK CAPITALISM AND THE RESPONSE OF PUBLIC SECTOR IN THE FACE OF INTERLINKED CRISES

The protracted and interlinked crisis of public services in most capitalist countries (Greer & Umney, 2022; Kozek, 2011; Peters, 2012; Popic, 2023).

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that the quality of the provision of essential public services differed across countries

Specific areas of interests regarding impact of patchwork on institutional response toward pandemic, war and inflation crises in 2020-2022:

- A time-lagged, incomplete, selective and inadequate response of the public health care system to the pandemic.
- A very high number of excess deaths brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Fairly low level of state involvement and delays in the face of the refugee crisis.
- The role of social resourcefulness in the first period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Research questions:

1. The level of public sector preparation for interlinked crises?
2. The conditions and organisation of work after pandemic outbreak.
3. The polycrisis influence on the organisation of the public services?

Hypotheses:

1. The preparation of public sector for interlinked crises was limited and based on ad-hoc solutions.
2. The system was reliant upon bottom-up collective workers' efforts
3. The patchwork organisation of public services is likely to be reproduced rather than changed: limited transformative effects

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

| Method | Interviews | Categories | Branches |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Biographical narrative interviews | 42 | Frontline workers | Healthcare, Social Care, Education |
| Focus group interviews | 13 | Frontline workers | Healthcare, Social Care, Education |
| Expert interviews | 23 | Trade unions' representatives, employers' organisations, local and supralocal authorities supervising the public services | Healthcare, Social Care, Education |

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: COLLECTIVE WORKERS' RESPONSES TO THE INTERLINKED CRISES

3 key dimensions of the interlinked crises:

Organisational chaos affecting labour process - the main feature of the turmoil was **the “freezing effect”** on power relations in the workplace, which translated into a lack of effective crisis management.

The increased **importance of self-organisation** in the context of the partial paralysis of top-down management (importance of the innovative, individual and collective actions of the workers themselves)

Workers' mobilisation potential balanced by the tendency to normalise overlapping crises - **“building up” collective resilience** under the conditions of uncertainty and weak institutional fabric of patchwork capitalism

ORGANISATIONAL CHAOS AFFECTING LABOUR PROCESS

Negative assessment of the preparedness of the organisations where respondents worked

Healthcare: chaos regarding work pace, labour process reorganisation, personnel management, health risk, tensions in relations with co-workers, supervisors and patients;

Social care: potentially high risk of virus contraction and spreading caused significant reorganisation, labour process limitations and stress increase

Education: a shift to remote teaching without prior legal, organisational and technical (equipment) preparation

“Marta: The first month was one big chaos. There was nothing, no gloves, no goggles, no... I mean, there was, but it was all... it was of multiple use. So, you went in, you should come out, take it off, disinfect it, throw it away, put another one on. We didn't have that. In our case, when I was put into the overalls, I walked around in them for 6-7 hours, that's how it was. I was just drenched in sweat. (...) After a month it started to improve, I mean, there were already protective measures. There was full hygiene.” (FGI_Nurses)

SELF-ORGANISATION AND MANAGING THE PANDEMIC AND REFUGEE CRISIS

Temporary suspension and reconfiguration of existing workplace hierarchies and relations

Healthcare: (self-)organization of covid wards

Social care: limitations in everyday work in some cases triggered labour process reorganisation; risk of lockdown of nursing homes (with patients and staff inside)

Education: teachers benefited from pre-pandemic and pre-war networks between colleagues and organised small mutual support groups

“Antoni: It was total chaos (...). The employees practically managed everything. We organised ourselves, we knew what was being done (...). So all this chaos, it was really prevented thanks to ... internal organisation among the caregivers, because there was even a moment when we were not allowed to do things, when the orderly helped us while we were changing or bathing.” [caregiver, nursing home, Workers’ Initiative]

PROTESTS AND “PATCHWORK NORMALISATION” IN THE FACE OF INTERLINKED CRISES

Tension between normalisation mechanism (including the privatisation of coping strategies) and community-oriented actions

Healthcare: In the case of doctors, we can observe the privatisation of life strategies

Social care: The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for setting up trade unions in some of the nursing homes

Education: a bitter lesson of pre-pandemic strikes

“Basia: I think the situation changed a lot after the strike, when, let's not kid ourselves, but our rulers made such a big deal about our profession.

Researcher: After which strike?

Basia: The teachers' strike, it was April 2019. I noticed that our profession lost a lot of respect. We started to be treated, maybe not all of us, but a very large part of society as non-workers, freeloaders. (FGI_Teachers)”

CONCLUSIONS

The features of the patchwork capitalism that significantly determine the response of the public service sector workers:

- Role of informal institutions:
- Resourcefulness and axiological patchwork

Verification of hypotheses:

- The preparation for interlinked crises was limited and based on ad-hoc solutions CONFIRMED
- The system was reliant upon bottom-up collective workers' efforts CONFIRMED
- The patchwork organisation of public services is likely to be reproduced rather than changed: limited transformative effects CONFIRMED

Coping Strategies and Resilience:

- Patchwork order requires reliance on individual and collective workers' resilience
- Coping strategies reflect and reproduce a patchwork logic
- Importance of individual resources and support from primary groups (family)
- Relationships with colleagues and resourcefulness crucial for managing crises
- Discourages change-oriented attitudes and collective action

Future Research:

- Explore collective responses in other CEE countries and other aspects of interlinked crises

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