

Stream #28

Political Representation of the Poor in Social Policy

Conveners:

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This stream examines the representation of socioeconomically marginalised interests in social policy. Political responsiveness research shows that decision-making processes in welfare states are marked by unequal influence favouring the well-organized and well-off, often resulting in weak political representation for people experiencing poverty. For instance, basic income and other benefit schemes directed at those in poverty are designed without directly considering their perspectives. Public discourse on poverty is furthermore largely driven by party ideologies, from relatively generous benefits to restrictive conditionality, frequently portraying poverty as a statistical abstraction and obscuring lived experience. Consequently, beneficiaries' interests are often sidelined, as decisions are made 'about them, without them', despite persistent efforts by social work-based advocacy organisations, such as welfare associations, and self-representation organisations, such as national poverty conferences and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN). This neglect endures in social policy as poverty rises, eroding democratic processes and deepening the crisis of representation amid major challenges such as the socio-ecological transformation. Ultimately, perceived disenfranchisement contributes to political apathy and an increasing turn to radical right-wing parties and anti-democratic ideologies.

Against this background, we call for papers that address the following questions:

- What do we know about advocacy and self-representation organisations for the poor throughout Europe (and beyond)?
- What role do they play in social policy? When are they successful, and why do their efforts go unheard?
- How can self-representation of the poor be organised sustainably?
- Which storytelling practices do advocacy and self-representation groups use to intervene in public discourse? How do they differ from other lobbying groups?

- How can advocacy and self-representation organisations meaningfully work together and increase their influence by power sharing?

We welcome papers/presentations that address single-country cases or adopt a comparative perspective across countries, using qualitative or quantitative methods or a mixed methods design. Contributions can focus on different groups of people experiencing poverty, such as the homeless, the long-term unemployed, single parents, children in need, and people with disabilities.