

PRACE NAUKOWE

Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu

RESEARCH PAPERS

of Wrocław University of Economics

Social Policy: Controversies and Paradoxes

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Preface

Social policy is often defined as practical activity of public sector and other actors, including market entities and non-profit organisations, but it is also fascinating, interdisciplinary academic field, where various theories are confronted. Some of these theories are even contrary to each other. Sometimes the reason is that they refer to different research findings, using alternative methods or concerning varied populations. Nevertheless, the most convincing argument for such variety of social policy theories is that they were constructed on the basis of different viewpoints, attitudes and values.

Every social action is taken in order to change social reality, but many questions still have no clear and unambiguous answer. For example, how to divide responsibility for social policy tasks performance among public, market, non-profit and informal sectors? What goals shall social policy actors aim at? What tools should they choose while performing plans of action?

Disparate political and research strategies and outlooks provide numerous answers that are often contradictory or controversial. Despite the process of welfare state retrenchment some authors emphasise the role of public sector in accomplishing social policy goals, while others suggest necessity of increasing involvement of market mechanisms. Fighting poverty and excessive economic inequalities is often regarded as a priority, but there are also numerous arguments for focusing on social investment, including education and active labour market policies. Even if priorities are agreed, it is not clear what actions should be performed – for example, is basic income appropriate mechanism to eradicate poverty?

What is more, actions undertaken frequently cause unexpected or even paradoxical results. Introducing social benefits may improve some people's living conditions, while demotivating others. Commissioning of public tasks performance to market entities may cause decrease in public spending, but also increase some risks, as it is stated in contract failure theory.

We are pleased to present in this volume a set of articles that refer to issues mentioned above. Their authors worked out academic texts that specify controversies and paradoxes in different social policy fields. The articles included are based on numerous theoretical and empirical arguments, which reflect diversity of social science.

We hope that this volume will contribute to rising awareness of complexity of social policy, as well as finding answers to some of important questions present in contemporary social policy debates.

Lukasz Jurek, Stanisław Kamiński, Joanna Szczepaniak-Sienniak