

Applicant's Name : Prof Lorenzo Bordogna

Workshop name: EMERGING FROM THE CRISIS? PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS? PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS IN EUROPE

Chair : Stephen Bach
Lorenzo Bordogna

Presenter/s : Germany: Berndt Keller, University of Konstanz, Germany
Greece: Christos Ioannou, OMED and the Greek Ombudsman, Athens Italy: Lorenzo Bordogna, University of Milano, Italy UK: Stephen Bach, King's College London, UK

Discussant : Ian Kessler, King's College London

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PROPOSAL

This special workshop examines the consequences for public service employment relations of the economic and financial crisis and the legacy of austerity measures for patterns of employment relations in the public sector. Has the 'shock' of austerity measures transformed public sector employment relations in high-profile European countries, and, in case, to what extent? Or have public sector employment relations institutions and practices remained more resilient than many commentators anticipated? To address this research agenda requires placing post-2008 developments in a wider framework that incorporates the legacy of more than thirty years of public sector and workforce reform. Each paper addresses the interplay between an emerging post-crisis public service sector and the consequences for the state, employers, trade unions and new actors (e.g. social movements) in core public services.

This special workshop is distinctive, extending and redirecting the themes of track 5, taking account of the specific political economy of Europe. In contrast to the important themes flagged in track 5, the experience of many European countries indicates that strike action remains muted, collective bargaining in abeyance, public sector trade union influence is being eroded and employer and state responses are centre stage. Within public management and comparative employment relations there has been a recognition of diversity in national political, economic and institutional structures, with variation in the patterns and outcomes of public sector reform (Bach and Bordogna 2011; 2013; European Commission, 2013, chapters 3 and 4). Recently, there has been a tendency to argue that the magnitude of the sovereign debt crisis and the ideology of austerity has led to a 'European fixation on austerity as the only possible way forward' (Blyth, 2013: 16), implying that all countries are pursuing the same policies with similar outcomes.

This special workshop takes up the challenge to explore and contest this influential interpretation of the impact of austerity on public service management and employment relations, drawing on critical cases. These cases include papers that focus on four distinct country experiences. Germany has been much less affected by policies of fiscal consolidation, with indeed a lean state emerging about two decades ago. Greece has been subject to severe cuts in public sector employment and wages, but there is less certainty about the consequences in terms of public sector reform. Italy, under the pressures of the crisis and of the new EU economic governance, is experiencing both the fourth public sector reform in the last twenty years and an overall loss of autonomy of social dialogue practices in the sector. The UK has also experienced severe austerity measures, from a rather different starting point, but there are signs of emerging problems in the public sector as the economy returns to growth. These four country studies indicate variations, but also some common trends, in response to the financial and economic crisis. Each paper follows a common framework that places crisis responses in a longer timeframe, incorporating analysis and legacy of public service reform and institutional changes in employment relations.

The planned workshop draws on a long-standing network of public sector employment specialists that have co-operated effectively on several journal special issues arising from symposia at previous world congresses (International Journal of Human Resource Management, No. 11/2011; European Journal of Industrial Relations, No. 4/2013). The symposium provides an opportunity to share the findings of a comparative European public sector research project, covering a large number of European countries, leading to a forthcoming comparative volume.