

*The politics of welfare – from  
rights to obligations  
The case of Slovenia*

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# Rights and obligations

- Rights and obligations play a key role in any society.
- Rights refer to what we gain, obligations refer to what we should do.
- They strengthen the society, giving it more stability as they lead to developing the social consciousness of people as social beings.
- Rights must be viewed as individual entitlements.
- Obligations are our responsibilities as citizens or individuals of the society.
- Rights are what we gain from the society - Obligations are what we do for the society.

# Rights

- Rights allow people to be aware of what they are entitled to and what they are not entitled to do.
- In different societies and cultural groups, there are various rights.
- These may be backed up by social, ethical or legal boundaries.
- When speaking of rights, a universal set of values applies to all human beings (Human rights) irrespective of nationality, sex, culture, religion or ethnic group.
- It is the obligation of all states to implement these and create an ambiance where human rights can be enjoyed by all people.
- It is believed that rights lay the foundation for the effective functioning and stabilization of any society.

# Obligations

- An obligation can be defined as something that one must do because of a law, necessity or because it is their duty.
- There are various forms of obligations such as legal obligation, moral obligation, etc.
- Just as rights, obligations play a vital role in society.
- If individuals are more focused on obtaining their rights but are indifferent to their obligations, it creates a negative ambiance. Hence, people should realize that just as they enjoy their rights, they have to fulfill their obligations towards others.
- Source: <https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-rights-and-vs-obligation/>

# Social rights

- Social rights are human rights and have all their characteristics.
- Social rights are moral, legal or societal rules and an understanding of what is necessary to fulfil people's social needs and to promote social inclusion and social solidarity.
- Social rights concern how people live and work together and the basic necessities of life.
- They are based on the ideas of equality and guaranteed access to essential social and economic goods, services, and opportunities.

• Source: Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/enter/social-rights>

# Revised European Social charter

- Social rights are the rights of people to achieve their basic human needs:
  - Access to quality public services
  - Access to education
  - Access to health services
  - Access to social protection
  - Access to housing
  - Access to employment
  - Access to social rights for minority social groups

# Social Citizenship and the welfare state (Buckmaster, Thomas, 2009)

- Social citizenship refers to the social rights, obligations and institutions that play a role in developing and supporting equality of status in the community.
- According to T.H. Marshall (*Citizenship and social class*, 1959), social citizenship encompassed a range of rights from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society.
- The main way in which social citizenship contributes to equality of status is through helping to develop a common culture in which the differences between social classes and other groupings are less sharp. This occurs as a result of the redistribution of economic resources (through benefits and services) in such a way as to reduce the extent of social inequality.

• Source: [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp0910/10rp08#\\_Toc244315391](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp0910/10rp08#_Toc244315391)

# Active citizenship

- The change in the cultural model of citizenship was determined by the rise of neoliberal ideology and favored by the transition to a post-industrial service society. In this environment a new version of the citizen, that of the active citizen, came to prominence.
- At the heart of the active citizen approach is the notion that the sharing of common values of “belonging” to a political community and the consequent pride in shared local or national values, are to be seen as obligations. Active citizenship advocates that every citizen must be emancipated, autonomous, and flexible.
- An active citizen is one who can shape his or her own career path by adapting to changes in the external environment. In this context, they must organize their life plan on the basis of their individual interests. Claiming responsibility for one’s life and well-being is an individual responsibility.

# And welfare state

- On the basis of active citizenship, the right to welfare is transformed into an “obligation” to work to ensure one’s individual well-being.
- Consequently, access to social rights is increasingly intertwined with the aspect of employment while, in social policy terms, active citizenship is associated with a concept of “detachment” from state social benefits.
- Active citizens have a duty to take responsibility for their ability to be employable, to cover their health care, and secure a decent standard of living and their financial viability.
- The external (neoliberal) effects shaping active citizenship suggest that state responsibility must be strictly defined and residual, with the aim of managing extreme poverty. Inequality is seen as an accepted and vital condition of human nature. Efforts to deliberately reduce it are seen as an unacceptable situation that generates social distortions and negative side-effects.

# Active welfare state

- This version is dominated by the post-Fordist type of work organization with its dominant characteristics of flexibility and the transition to the service sector in an internationalized economy environment dominated by the national policy framework.
- Social policy features are shaped by the needs of the labor market and the economy. They are provided in a mixed economy scheme with the basic requirement of fulfilling obligations to access social benefits, including workfare. Third way - the enjoyment of every right should be framed by the fulfilment of obligations.
- Ways should be sought to find social policy measures that benefit business. This argument is reinforced by the conviction that the economy is the state's main source of funding through the tax system. Therefore, if the economy deteriorates, then the state will suffer a fall in its revenues.

# Responsible citizenship and residualised welfare state

- Lister examines the ways in which social policy has been used to encourage or enforce responsibilities and obligations. She develops a key critique that the responsabilisation agenda has been directed overwhelmingly at the poorest and least powerful in society through the increasing conditionality, exclusivity and selectivity of social citizenship. This spirit is reflected in James Cameron's phrase, "if you fail to take responsibility, then the free ride is over." The concept of equality in the new welfare contract is replaced by the wording of the need for individuals to be competitive in the labor market. Responsible citizens should have ambitions such as improving their position through their own efforts and not with the help of the state.
- Every citizen can exercise his or her rights, as long as they are able to comply with market rules. The ideal citizen is the one who can provide for their own social security, health protection and, in general, the promotion their well-being.
- The active citizenship relates to responsibilities for individual choices and responsibilities towards others. These responsibilities are more about making the right decisions for citizens, being more actively involved in the public sphere, and developing self-organizing or voluntary social support initiatives for those in need. In this sense, the dominant rationale primarily focuses on how to activate the citizen to make social contributions.
- Lister Ruth (2011)

# Welfare changes in Slovenia

- Welfare mix – reduced state services – public services extend to NGO and private sector (the debate on what is „public“)
- Especially services for the elderly and the family are extensively marketised (discourse on the needs, the right to choose, the role of the family)
- Activation policy is the only social policy – state social services should adopt the activation paradigm. The role of the state is to nudge „benefits recipients“ towards the labour market
- Increased conditionality – moral obligation of poor not to claim social benefits, in case they do, they have to bear consequences.

# Conclusions

- The redistributive nature of the welfare state is the primary cause of the welfare change – the effort is how to assure social rights without of the power of the state to redistribute income generated by taxes.
- Subordination and incorporation of social policy to economic policy
- Segmentation of social policy – not systemic (food poverty, energy poverty, educational poverty – managed by different ministries: agricultural, infrastructural, educational...)
- Complex social problems/issues address by targeted programmes (residualisation)
- Disappearing welfare state – no debates, no reflexivity, absent scientific discourse

# references

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