

Fred Coccozzelli, PhD, New School for Social Research, 2007
Instructor, Department of Government and Politics, St. John's University, Queens, New York

Final Executive Summary:

Social Policy and Citizenship in Reconstruction: the Case of Kosovo

Research Topic:

My research addresses the issues surrounding the institutionalization of public social welfare programs in post-conflict Kosovo. The research is part of a larger recently completed dissertation project which takes the contested province, where social rights have been instituted in the wake of an highly divisive civil conflict, as its overarching frame while looking at individual municipalities as comparative cases. The core argument of the dissertation is that social policy and the programs that derive from these policies can become an important aspect for the reintegration of a divided society, but that these potentially positive results are highly dependent on variables within the political process. Through an analysis of the specifics of the social policy-making process, and program implementation in the province since 1999, the research examines the political impact of the reconstructed social welfare institutions.

I argue that social policy can make a significant contribution to the creation of democratic citizenship and the consolidation of peace in a post-conflict context such as Kosovo. By working on both a normative and functional level, social policy can help to consolidate peace in a post-conflict environment. Normatively, effective social policy has the potential to strengthen Kosovo as a multi-ethnic and democratic polity. Additionally, on a functional level, social policy comprises one of the key components the institutional foundation of a stable market economy.

Specifically, my project analyzes the Social Assistance Scheme and the Pension System that were built in post-conflict Kosovo. Building on an analysis that stresses the role of social welfare regimes and social rights in reconfiguring citizenship, the research looks closely at the establishment of these program and the institutions that supported them that were established since 1999 while the province has been under the authority of the United Nations. By looking both at the Kosovo-wide and the municipal levels, the work provides a comprehensive, but detailed account of social policy development and implementation. I contextualize the Kosovo regime into typologies developed by Richard Titmuss and Esping-Anderson, and determine that the system largely falls into the Liberal type. The research demonstrates that the Kosovo social welfare regime is dependent on means-testing, delivers meager benefits and has a low level of decommodification. The research ultimately presents evidence that the social welfare programs in post-conflict Kosovo fall squarely within current international preferences for economic liberalization. I argue that the post-conflict social welfare regime in Kosovo is a safety-net of last resort and will do little to foster social citizenship.

Methodology and Research Sites:

Methodologically, the larger research project followed a qualitative approach that incorporated interviews, participant observation, and analysis of documentary materials

generated by implementing agencies offices and NGOs, as well as the UN, OSCE and EU missions in Kosovo. The field research was organized around intensive, qualitative, open-ended interviews with policy-makers and implementers. In order to determine the political effects of the social welfare program, my analysis was focused on local implementation in four specific municipalities in Kosovo;

- Skënderaj / Srbica
- Malishevë / Mališevo

Both of which are very rural municipalities with very high proportions of Kosovo Albanians. Both municipalities were also saw high levels of fighting during the conflict.

- Prizren, and
- Kamenicë / Kamenica.

Both of which have more pronounced urban centers, and more diverse ethnic compositions. Neither Prizren nor Kamenicë were the sites of major violent combat during the conflict.

Research was conducted in these four municipalities, as well as in the Kosovo capital, Prishtinë / Prishtina, and Belgrade, Serbia. In addition some preliminary research was undertaken in the municipalities of Dragash / Dragas, Mitrovicë / Mitrovica, Strpce / Shtërpçë, Suharekë / Suva Reka and Zvečan / Zveçan. The final four municipalities were chosen because of they represented two paired cases where within each pair there were significant similarities in terms of ethnic composition, and rural-urban qualities, as well as significant differences in program implementation, conflict related demographic transformations, and political contestation.

A summary of research findings and preliminary policy conclusions:

The primary research findings concern social welfare policy-making, the institutions that support the policies once in place, and their role in the developing political dynamic of a post-conflict context.

In terms of social welfare policy-making the research found that the process was dominated by international actors and largely divorced from the local political dynamic. The reliance on external actors such as large, well-funded international NGOs or expert consultants financed by national donors such as the United States or the United Kingdom was as important for the process of policy-making as the for the outcome. Local Kosovar politicians, civil society groups and individual activists were largely absent from the process with the exception of those that were chosen for participation by the internationals. Because of this the larger political community in Kosovo did not gain vital experience in a particularly important area of policy-making. In other national contexts organized labor, private business interests, social movement activists and political representatives engage in complex implicit or explicit negotiations in order to make social policy. As part of the former socialist Yugoslavia, the local prior experience of policy formation was significantly different than the democratic practice. With external actors taking the lead in such things as determining the Social Assistance qualification criteria, and

drafting the relevant legislation, domestic actors gained almost no experience in the practice of social policy negotiation in a liberal democratic context. As such the policy that emerged did not reflect the preferences of the locals, nor did they express high levels of ownership over the policies or programs in most interviews.

The research did show that the international community to be largely successful in establishing the institutions for an effective social welfare program implementation. The efforts were most successful at the central level. The Ministry and Department of Labor and Social Welfare proved to be among the more effective components of the UN-sponsored Provisional Institutions for Self-Government. At the local level, public social welfare offices, built on the foundation of the old Yugoslav Centers for Social Work, were also re-established in all municipalities. There was significant variation in the effectiveness of these local offices. In places where one political party dominated local politics, the Center for Social Work could be captured by the leading party. This was most apparent in Skenderaj where the social welfare programs were quickly converted to patronage networks that functioned mostly to reward former militants in the Kosovo Albanian community. In Malishevë, the political contestation between the two main political parties resulted in the creation of political space for the local social welfare office to operate relatively autonomously from municipal politics. A similar conflictive arrangement existed based on demographic changes in Prizren, where an influx of conflict-related displaced Kosovars changed the local community composition. In this case the contestation was not yet resolved and a split between the municipal social welfare office and the Center for Social Work had developed. Kamenicë saw the negative version of this dynamic; conflict related demographic change was minimal and the social welfare office was able to navigate the local ethnic conflict to deliver assistance and services effectively.

A final aspect of the research that reflects directly on the external involvement of the international donor and NGO community involves the long-term impact of policy decisions made in the midst of an emergency humanitarian crisis. The research found that these high pressure policy decisions, involving such things as the distribution of food aid, and the choice of local distribution partners can have long-term impacts on future development. For example, the legislation that was developed in support of the Social Assistance Scheme in Kosovo was largely derived from the policy choices that were made as part of the emergency humanitarian response in summer 1999.

Suggestions for future research agendas in your field for the scholarly community:

The research combines a number of normative and pragmatic political aspects and therefore a variety of directions for future research present themselves. The question of externally lead social policy formation and implementation can be examined in other post-conflict situations, including the similar regional case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or the more dissimilar case of Iraq. On a normative level, the study represents a first effort at opening the discussion of post-conflict justice beyond the retributive examinations and directing it towards the issues of reconstructing a just society in the wake of a violent conflict. On a pragmatic level the issues of policy effectiveness, both in the medium and long-term of post-conflict institutional development can be further examined.

Any recommendations for the US policy community:

Perhaps the most important recommendations for the US policy community involves two aspects. The first is the greater attention that policy makers should place on the importance of promoting local political development, even if that runs a risk of increased contestation. Most post-conflict interventions have placed a high degree of stress on conflict prevention and reduction. This is, of course a reasonable strategy to pursue considering the context, however, US and other external actors should not completely shy away from allowing local actors to engage policy conflicts. As communities emerge from violence they will have to establish non-violent methods of resolving recurring political conflicts. By overriding local political debates in an effort to arrive at policy solutions that are nominally acceptable to all parties, international actors, including the US, may inadvertently be leaving local politicians without either the mechanisms or the experience to peacefully resolve policy disputes.

The second policy recommendation calls for increased attention to the long-term impact of programs that are meant for the immediate emergency relief and reconstruction. If the long-term policy effects of the transition from emergency food aid to social assistance in Kosovo are any indication, these programs have a much longer life-span than anyone in the field at the time of the original implementation would have anticipated. To a very large degree this recommendation is aimed less at policy-makers in the “official” community and more at those in the activist NGO sector. This part of the US, and international, policy community – the activist NGO community – should develop a greater capacity for political analysis of their programs, including emergency and relief operations.