Abstract

This paper (prepared within the context of the NORFACE HEALTHDOX Project on the “Paradox of Health State Futures”) analyzes policies of austerity in the Portuguese healthcare system in the historical context of the country’s healthcare system development since the 1980s. In the context of the financial crisis, the system witnessed series of reforms imposed by the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, or the so-called "Troika", through the Memorandum of Understanding (2011). The fact that beside Greece, Portugal was the only other South European country that introduced a set of externally conditioned austerity policies specifically aimed on healthcare makes it an excellent case for the analysis. The paper will draw some preliminary conclusions about the main trends of the healthcare reforms introduced the context of austerity and will situate these reforms in the context of a broader historical development of the Portuguese healthcare system since 1980s.

Furthermore, the paper makes a two-fold argument. First, we use the Portuguese example to show that states can respond to financial crises in more than one way: they can respond to external pressures, but they can also use crisis as window of opportunity for large-scale policy reform. Second, we argue that the austerity policies continuously followed by the Portuguese government during the crisis should be explained not only by economic pressures, but also by conscious political choices enabled by a set of specific social and political circumstances. Analyzing the Portuguese case, the paper emphasizes that the policies of austerity must be analyzed in a more fine-grained way that pays equal attention to differences in the economic pressures of the affected countries, but also to the role of political choice in responding to these pressures.

Obs.: 2016 Annual ESPAnet Conference, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 1-3