

Abstract

Title: Employment Service in Transition: Adaptation of a socialist employment agency to a market economy. A case study of Lodz, Poland 1989-1998

Written in English, 232 pages

Author: Iwona Sobis

Doctoral Dissertation at the Department of Sociology, Göteborg University

Box 720, SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden

ISBN: 91-974106-7-5

ISSN: 1650-4313

Göteborg 2002

This dissertation is a case study dealing with the adaptation of an employment agency to a market economy in the textile industry city of Lodz during the first eight years of the transition from socialism to a market economy in Poland.

Shortly after 1989, about 86,000 unemployed people were looking for work and assistance through the Employment Agency of Lodz. Unemployment, a new social phenomenon unknown under socialism, proved the major problem for the agency. The lack of means for counteracting unemployment, bad physical working conditions, and staff unprepared for working with the unemployed, were the starting point for following the new labour market and labour protection rules according to a market economy imposed by a political decision. Everything had to be changed.

Piotr Sztompka's theory of social becoming and the new institutional theory of organisational change are used here to support the interpretative work on the empirical data. The analysis is based on historical documents, domestic and international reports about the transition from socialism to market economy, legislation, official and internal statistics, and interviews conducted with the staff of the Employment Agency.

The study displays the macrostructural level influencing the adaptive process of the Employment Agency and the ways in which its staff was involved in the transition, collaborating with the Ministry of Labour and Social Politics and with Western consultants in order to adapt the agency's socialist organisational structure to the new tasks and duties of a "quasi"-market economy. However, a central role is given to the analysis of the interviews and the internal reports of the Employment Agency to shed light on the major problems the personnel faced after 1989, the pragmatic ideas and strategies they used to solve the problems and create a modern labour office in the Western meaning. Thus, the description of the adaptive process shows how the macrostructural level and the actors at the meso level of social reality meet in a "human agency" of everyday "praxis" when adapting the agency to a market economy.

The general conclusion is that the EU assistance to Poland in the framework of the PHARE programme proved a very influential force behind the adaptive strategies according to a market economy. The organisational changes within the Employment Agency were based on the current institutionalised standards of employment agencies of the highly developed Western countries, consistent with the EU norms of the labour market and labour protection policy. The EU and ILO consultants contributed to spreading the organisational similarities within the Polish labour market and labour protection field and shaping the model of the modern labour office in Lodz in 1997/98.

Keywords: Poland, transition from socialism to market economy, unemployment, remedial measures, employment agency, EU assistance, EU labour market and labour protection policy, institutionalised standards, organisational change and adaptation.