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Title

Social economy in the productivist welfare state: Policy changes in self-sufficiency programmes in Korea

Abstract

The distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor has long been debated in the history of social welfare. Work integration is one of the major fields of social economy, especially in the productivist welfare state. However, when it comes to the work-integration policy of the ‘undeserving poor’, who live under poverty line and yet are officially categorized as having work capacity, third sector activists, especially those who are critical to market capitalism, will be in dilemma. On the one hand, the promotion of a self-help community among those in poverty can be a goal of social economy movements. The government’s regulatory and financial support can be helpful for them to maintain their organizations and activities. On the other hand, however, the participation in the policy for re-commodifying people in poverty may be in conflict with their idea of voluntarism and their critical stance towards neoliberal capitalism.

My paper will explore how third sector activists face this dilemma situation, by examining the processes of policy-making and change in the self-sufficiency programmes in South Korea (hereafter, Korea). The Korean basic livelihood security system regulates that the benefit claimant should take the work capacity assessment, and if he/she is diagnosed to be able to work, he/she receives the benefit in the condition that he/she participates in work or job-searching activities. The self-sufficiency programme is there to help their self-help. The voluntary sector, especially progressive solidarity movement activists have been involved in the initiation and management of the self-sufficiency programme. However, on the other hand, many of those activists have participated in movements for the promotion of welfare policies and economic democracy. I will examine how progressive third sector activists initiated the self-sufficiency programme in the beginning in the form of the public-private partnership, and how, in subsequent policy changes,
they have coped up with conflicts of norms between solidaristic self-help in community and the social citizenship in the welfare state.

Keyword