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Call for Papers

Coping with Instability in Market Societies Max Planck–Sciences Po Conference

December 15–16, 2011 | Paris

In 2012 the Max Planck Society and Sciences Po Paris will jointly establish the *Max Planck Sciences Po Center on Coping with Instability in Market Societies*, a German-French center in the social sciences. To launch this project and gain insight into the topic the center addresses, the two partners are organizing a conference in Paris on December 15–16, 2011, entitled “Coping with Instability in Market Societies.” They invite researchers working on aspects of this phenomenon to submit proposals by June 15, 2011.

The Conference Subject

The last thirty years have seen profound shifts in the social organization of Western societies. Today individuals are increasingly exposed to market forces in a growing number of life spheres. Cultural shifts that accompanied this “marketization” have led to a more individualized culture and the destabilization of traditional social structures, for instance in the family. Creating a growing sense of uncertainty, these developments have led to pressures on individuals, organizations, and politics to cope with increasingly unstable economic, social, and political environments.

In the economy amplified instability can be observed for instance in labor markets, where unstable labor relations have increased, or in public services such as health care and education, which are increasingly organized as quasi-markets today. *In society*, detraditionalization is reflected in the family in rising divorce rates and a greater variety of family types, and in contemporary society at large in a growing ethnic and religious heteroge-

neity due to increased immigration. *The political system* of Western democracies has witnessed the erosion of stable party systems, the decline of formal participation, and the multiplication of governance structures and levels of authority. From the changes in the economy and social life, new political instabilities arise and lead to conflicts and protest.

While these transformation processes are already well studied in the social sciences, the *consequences* of these multiple forms of instability have yet to be examined systematically. What strategies do individuals, organizations, and the political system employ to cope with uncertainty and instability? How do the economy, social life, and politics adapt in response to the uncertainty actors and institutions are facing?

The effects of these developments are clearly multifaceted. The literature argues, for instance, that although market forces may destroy traditional social structures (Polanyi), markets may also create new relations and social groups (Hirschman). On the societal level the detraditionalization of family relations and greater flexibility in life-course choices have opened tremendous opportunities for individuals; at the same time these developments have often caused insecurity and new needs to adapt rapidly to changing life situations. The coping strategies through which the individuals adjust to less stable life-worlds can themselves trigger new unforeseen risks and uncertainties in other societal spheres. For example: (1) If increasing demands for flexibility on the labor market, the economic need for employment of both partners, and the attraction of women to the labor market lead to decreasing fertility rates in middle-class families, the state needs to react by introducing expensive policies to provide institutional support to middle-class families – with uncertain success. (2) In Great Britain and the United States reductions in welfare state provisions went along with an increase in the availability of consumer credit and the expansion of home mortgages, exposing not only individuals to the risks of not being able to pay back these loans but also contributing to the real estate bubble that triggered the financial crisis in 2007.

Coping with instability does not necessarily have to be limited to the adaptation of individual decisions but can also be manifested in collective action, which is an attempt to reduce uncertainty for specific social groups and shift risks to others. Political conflicts about access for underprivileged social groups to (elite) institutions of higher education, migration policies, or estate taxation are political controversies about the distribution of uncertainty within society.

Submissions

This conference brings together researchers working on the ways the economy, social life, and the political system adapt to and cope with increasing instability. Papers can

focus on individuals, the family, organizations, the political system, or the economic system and concentrate on any domain relevant for discussing the consequences of marketization and individualization, including but not restricted to the following themes:

Conflict over the extension of competition to sectors such as health, education, or the environment

Adjustment in labor markets and training

Transformation of family structures

Effects of immigration

Gender relations

New forms of public intervention

Risk governance

Transformation of political participation

400-word abstracts should be submitted by **June 15, 2011**. If an abstract is accepted for the conference, a full paper is expected by November 15, 2011. Please send the abstract containing information about the author, affiliation, e-mail address, and the title of the contribution in a Word or PDF format to Christine Claus, claus@mpifg.de. Notifications will be sent out in mid-July.