

# **IT, Big Data and algorithms in social service organizations: Opportunities and restraints for street-level workers**

## **Call for proposal for a Special Issue of Sozialer Fortschritt**

**Guest editors:** Martin Brussig (Duisburg, Germany), Ida Bring Løberg (Oslo, Norway)

Over the last 30 years a series of social policy reforms took place in Western welfare states. These reforms include substantial changes to the governance of social policy delivery. The implementation of social policy was subjected to new modes of organizational governance, such as, for example, New Public Management and Management by Objectives. Moreover, the idea of tailoring policy outputs to individual needs took ground. In order to transform policy input into an adequate policy output, a number of decisions has to be made and a pool of information needs to be evaluated. At the same time, social policy administration constantly produces large amounts of data, which in turn could help shaping future decisions as well as evaluating the performance of social service workers. Professional experience of case managers and social workers could thus be complemented by evidence-based practice stemming from information about what works best. For example, in regard to labour market policy, algorithms can be formed about the future probability of a client to integrate successfully into employment. With the COVID-19 pandemic, non-personal technologies seem to gain in importance, which might be a strong driver for the development and implementation of Big data and algorithms in social service organisations.

Until now, the consequences of the use of IT, big data and algorithms for work and organization of street-level workers in social service organizations have not been analyzed in a systematic and/or comparative manner. This stream therefore aims at taking stock of new studies. We focus on the public employment service, but consider other areas of social policy administrations as well. We invite papers addressing the following questions:

- What are the drivers for the development and implementation of algorithms from a managerial point of view?
- How do big data technologies change street-level workers' conception of their own work? And how do these technologies change their conception of clients?
- How do street-level workers and managers use computer-based profiling technologies? How flexible are these technologies with respect to individual cases? Are there gender-related differences towards clients?
- Under which conditions we will see more or less work control and more or less professionalization in social service organizations?
- How affected the COVID-19 pandemic the implementation of big data and other non-personal technologies?

We have a focus on work place studies, ethnographic approaches and qualitative research paradigms and prefer comparative papers, but single case studies are also of interest.

*Sozialer Fortschritt* («German Review of Social Policy»), founded in 1951, is a peer-reviewed academic journal which provides information, analysis, and reform proposals across the complete spectrum of social policy. It is not only the »major« topics of current debates that are critically assessed. An important objective is to address areas of social policy that would otherwise either frequently be overlooked or only be dealt with in highly specialized journals. In contributions on current issues, *Sozialer Fortschritt* provides a forum for academic analyses and reform proposals that deal with the fundamental concerns of social policy and social security. See here for full information:

[https://www.duncker-humboldt.de/zeitschrift/sozialer-fortschritt-sf-14/?page\\_id=1](https://www.duncker-humboldt.de/zeitschrift/sozialer-fortschritt-sf-14/?page_id=1)

Proposals of 300-500 words should contain a title, the research question, a short description of the empirical material, the methodological approach and, if possible, a brief outlook to the results. All proposals will be reviewed by the guest editors. Selected proposals will be invited for full papers (March 2021), which will then be reviewed by external reviewers (August / September 2021). The special issue is planned for December 2021. We encourage papers in English and German language.

Please send your proposals to: [martin.brussig@uni-due.de](mailto:martin.brussig@uni-due.de) and / or [loib@oslomet.no](mailto:loib@oslomet.no).

**Deadline for proposals is February 28, 2021.**

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