



soziologische vorträge

„ Migration and social security in the EU:
Theoretical approaches and empirical findings“

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What is the European Union anyway? How the governance of social security and free movement can illuminate our understanding of the European Union

This paper argues that a close examination of how the nexus of mobility and welfare is governed in the EU can illuminate key characteristics of the Union and its limits. The paper starts from the premise that ‘the EU’ is constituted through discursive and governance practices, that shape its meaning, role and purposes (Walters and Haahr 2005, Shore 2006, Zimmermann and Favell 2011). These practices also selectively structure social, political and economic relations within across and beyond the EU (Favell 2008, Hansen and Hager 2010). The paper applies this perspective to explore how social security portability and transnational social protection are governed, and with what implications, for mobile EU citizens. It treats relevant Directives, case law, member state regulations and implementation guidelines as a single corpus of discursive and governance practices. It interrogates them to reveal how mobility and welfare are articulated together as a) explicitly universal – generating ‘the mobile EU citizen’ and their ‘free movement’ as an abstract identity, where the EU is imagined as a limitless site of both mobility and welfare b) implicitly ‘European’ – setting common limits to what the Union does and marking out what characterizes the ideal ‘mobile citizen’, c) implicitly national – setting specific limits to the meaning and the authority of ‘the EU’, negotiated in the otherwise hidden crevices of EU legal and policy discretion. These practices governing mobility and welfare thus jointly produce ‘the EU’ as an implicitly and inevitably inequitable social space where the status of EU citizen is ambiguous, and where citizenship ‘rights’ are contingent rather than protected.

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