

Call for Papers

Food Charity, Welfare State Transformations, and Affective Economies: Critical Engagements

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WU Vienna

How to explain the rapid expansion of food charity institutions such as food banks, social supermarkets, and soup kitchens in Western welfare states in the last decades? To what extent have they gained importance in the context of the COVID-19 crisis or the cost-of-living crisis? What is the relationship between the rise of food charity and welfare state transformations? And what role do the dynamics of affective economies play in food charity's consolidation and proliferation? The conference critically explores these questions, taking food charity as a contested political site.

The idea of food banks originated in the U.S. in the 1960s before spreading across the globe. With the beginning of the welfare state restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s, food charity institutions gained importance (Poppendieck 1998), and they have further expanded in the wake of austerity policies and the rising costs of living in recent decades (Lambie-Mumford/Silvasti 2021). Although food charity institutions have not become “secondary extensions of weakened social safety nets” (Riches 2002) everywhere, as they have in the U.S. and Canada, in most countries, food charity has, nevertheless, come to stay, thus exhibiting a precarious entanglement between the expansion of food charity institutions and welfare state transformation. In order to capture this shift from social rights to charitable donations, scholars speak of a “new charity economy” (Kessl 2009; Roets/Kessl/Lorenz 2023), “affective statehood” (Bargetz/Griesser 2024), or the “double-bind of austerity” (Strong 2020).

While researchers largely agree that food charity does not offer structural solutions to fighting poverty in the long run, some simultaneously point to its potential in terms of everyday resistance. Volunteering in food charity, for instance, may then be both an example of “community capitalism” (van Dyk/Haubner 2021), that is, the exploitation of community-based civil engagement, as well as a laboratory for new practices of solidarity and hope and thus for political “counter responses” in the ‘meantime’ (Clove/May/Williams 2017). For volunteers, food charity may include the idea of “giving back something to society” (Garthwaite 2017) and echo a longing for agency in the momentum of post-democracy (Crouch 2000).

Yet, food charity is not only a highly ambivalent but also a highly affective task. Affects circulate in

(volunteering for) food charity (Denning 2019; van der Horst/Pascucci/Bol 2014), displaying “affective economies” (Ahmed 2004) between political depression and hope, between anger and new forms of belonging. Food charity is also a site of contested emotions such as humiliation or stigmatization (Schoneville 2020). Waiting in line at a food bank can bring about guilt and shame as well as “the inconvenience of other people” (Berlant 2022). At the same time, recipients of food charity are affectively addressed, as they are expected to display gratitude as proof of their neediness (Tarasuk/Eakin 2003). Feelings of unease and discomfort may also be an issue for volunteers, who are caught between filling the gaps left by the decline of the welfare state and making a difference for those in need of food charity.

Against the background of this complex entanglement of welfare state transformations, poverty, food charity, and affective economies, **the conference in particular welcomes the following:**

- **Examples from different countries**, including comparative perspectives, that allow for critical insights into the **political economy of food charity**. What influence does the capitalist food system, i.e., the entire process of production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food, have on the dominant national forms of food charity? What are the **ecological implications** of food charity for new forms of waste management and a more sustainable food system in general? And what effects do **different welfare regimes**, in particular the specific arrangement of social assistance and minimum income policies, have on the way the “new charity economy” operates?
- Critical engagements with the **political visions** within food charity and their **underlying promises**. What kind of (new) politics do they imagine? Which struggles do they address, and what are the material and affective investments?
- Presentations that critically engage with the **symbolic and material struggles over food and food charity**. What is the **role of food** in food charity, and how do ascriptions to food and social positionings relate? How are

some people affectively attached to food that others do not consider buying? What affects stick to food charity, and how do they relate, for instance, to the shaming and stigmatizing of food bank visitors?

- Submissions exploring the **intersectional gendered dynamics of volunteering**. In which ways do women's presumed virtues such as empathy and care (still) operate as resources of the (restructured) welfare state? How does food charity mirror a gendered, racialized, and class-related division of labor? And what role do affects and emotions play within these dynamics?
- Contributions that engage, more generally, with **affect and how affects circulate within food charity**. What affective states emerge in food charity, and what methodologies and epistemologies can help in grasping them?

- Critical engagements with the structural failures of the welfare state in view of preventing poverty for everyone. What **kind of practices of collective care and solidarity** related to food sovereignty have been invented by those who have historically been excluded from or marginalized by the welfare state, both in and beyond the Global North? In which ways can these inventions contribute to thinking about new ways for fighting poverty and enhancing food sovereignty?
- Contributions that **conceptualize** the contemporary political and affective economy of food charity and its struggles. What **kind of critique** is necessary within this constellation between a politics of survival and the need for structural transformation?

We welcome contributions from disciplines such as Political Science, Critical Political Economy, Sociology, Social Work, Education, Critical Geography, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Affect Studies, and Religious Studies. Please send your **abstract of 300 – max. 350 words** (excl. references) and a **short bio-note** to contact.foodcharity@wu.ac.at by **15 November 2024**. Contributors will be notified by **13 December 2024**.

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