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Jochen Clasen and Nico A. Siegel (eds.), *Investigating Welfare State Change: The 'Dependent Variable Problem' in Comparative Analysis*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2007, ISBN 978 1 84542 739 9 (hardback), 352 pp, £75.00

Jochen Clasen and Nico A. Siegel's edited book "Investigating Welfare State Change: The 'Dependent Variable Problem' in Comparative Analysis" is an outstanding contribution to comparative social policy. The main aim of the volume is to foster reflection on how to conceptualize, operationalize and measure change within and across welfare states and this objective is, without doubt, achieved through its 12 chapters divided into four main parts.

After an introductory chapter (Chapter 1; Jochen Clasen and Nico A. Siegel) where the reader is introduced to the main structure, objectives and ambitions of the book, Chapter 2 (Christoffer Green-Pedersen) starts the debate with data questions and methodological issues arguing that the 'dependent variable problem' is as much as a question of theoretical conceptualization as it is a question of empirical indicators. As the author correctly calls attention, important for social policy analysts is to make a clear distinction between 'retrenchment' and 'restructuring': a country may, in fact, have retrenched its welfare state significantly without restructuring it and vice versa (p.23). Chapter 3 (Giuliano Bonoli) switches the focus on a conceptually coherent definition of the 'dependent variable' in social policy research. For Bonoli, this must take into account changes in the fundamental nature of social policy and, in particular, those which have occurred as a result of the transition towards post-industrial social and economic structures. The main argument here is that 'the welfare state' is both too narrow as a dependent variable, since countries use a whole range of instruments to tame markets, while, at the same time, it is also an extremely broad category, since it tends to put together old and new social policies in the same welfare mix.

The first Chapter of Part II (Chapter 4; Nico A. Siegel) assesses the strengths and limits of comparative inquiries based on social expenditure data. As the author shows, basic methodological problems continue to persist contributing to strikingly divergent conclusions. These basic methodological problems concern, for example, the neglect of complex causal chains and too narrow time perspectives, such as those occurring in the investigation of social rights and welfare efforts. Chapter 5 (Johan De Deken and Bernhard Kittel) complements Siegel's work highlighting the existence of a variety of other serious methodological problems in the use of aggregate spending data, most notably the OECD Social Expenditure Database and Eurostat ESSPROS database. These databases tend to be often conceptually ambivalent and inconsistent. Chapter 6 (Olli Kangas and Joakim Palme) continues the discussion on welfare expenditures addressing, this time, the issue of what has driven welfare state expenditures over the years. For Kangas and Palme, this is not simply the result of economic performance or welfare orientation, as it could be expected, but rather the result of a combined effect of social rights and structural needs.

Chapter 7 (the first chapter of Part III by Lyle Scruggs) analyzes welfare state generosity across 18 countries and over a period of 30 years. On the basis of the Comparative Welfare Entitlements Database (CWED), Scruggs convincingly shows how welfare states became more generous during the 1970s and 1980s, but experienced some considerable retrenchment in the 1980s and beyond. Interestingly, this retrenchment seem to have been greatest in the more generous countries. Chapter 8 (Jochen Clasen and Daniel Clegg) provides a further major contribution to comparative welfare state research advancing an alternative analytical framework in cross-national comparisons. This new analytical framework, complementary to those usually centered on welfare spending or efforts, is based on the degree of *conditionality* that is written in the design of all social programmes and sub-divided into, what the authors call, *levels* and *levers* of conditionality. Chapter 9 (Jon Kvist) provides a further alternative approach to the measurement of welfare change based, this time, on

fuzzy-set theory, which, according to the author, can help to assess diversity and change across a limited set of cases.

Chapter 10 (Julia S. O'Connor) opens the fourth part of the volume, brilliantly discussing the issue of 'convergence' in great detail. O'Connor's main argument is that convergence is an often under-understood concept which refers to an end result of processes of quantitative or qualitative change in similarity or difference across units over time. These units may include societies, policies, elements of policies, expenditures or outcomes (p.240). Chapter 11 (Sigrid Leitner and Stephan Lessenich) addresses the issue of de-familization from a novel perspective. According to the authors, not only women, but also women, children and even men have to be analyzed with regard to their needs, wants and interests if the process of "de-familization" wants to be understood in detail. Finally, Chapter 11 (Sven Jochem) concludes the volume investigating the most recent pension reforms in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, highlighting how European pension systems are, in effect, converging to the multi-pillar end of the spectrum. In this specific context, Jochem argues, the path dependence concept, too often criticized, becomes an extremely useful tool to understand the dynamic continuity and the robustness of crucial differences between several countries.

Rarely, an edited volume on such a broad issue can be addressed as so comprehensive as Clasen and Siegel's work. Even more rarely, are the single contributions of authors so innovative, informative and challenging. I beg the patience of the reader (and of the JESP book review editor) if I have used the space I had at disposal for a lengthy summary of each single chapter's main arguments and conclusions, instead of trying to highlight possible shortcomings. I am indeed extremely confident that due to its strong methodological and theoretical orientation, this book will generate, in each case, lively discussions (and critiques) among social policy researchers in the coming years.

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