

*Call for papers
Workshop*

***Social policy by other means: Alternatives to state welfare for redistribution
and insurance – historical and comparative perspectives***

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Abstract

Life can be “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 2010 [1651]: 129). To insure their citizens against the hardships of life, Western European governments have since the 1880s introduced social policies such as health insurance or pensions that constitute the core of what we now understand as the modern welfare state. The strong focus on these particular policies has served comparative welfare state research well in analyzing the reduction of life-risks in advanced democracies over the last century. Yet, increasingly, this focus is too narrow. Especially outside the OECD, the old approach falls short. Often, the nation state is not even the main provider of social security. What is more, the political cleavages and mechanisms shaping welfare policies in non-OECD countries are very distinct. Urban-rural and ethnic conflicts tend to play a much larger role for instance than the traditional capital-labor cleavage, which has shaped (party) politics in the West (Ulriksen, 2012). Depending on the economic and political structure, basic health care or agricultural policies matter more in developing countries than, say, pension reform. In a similar way, new ways of ensuring equity and risk protection are gaining ground in industrialized countries as well. Policies like consumer protection and the integration of immigrants have at first sight little to do with classic welfare state instruments. What are the political dynamics of such policies and how do they relate to more traditional redistributive and safety net measures? We invite papers that analyze ‘social policies by other means’ in both OECD and non-OECD countries. We thereby aim at a dialogue between traditional comparative welfare state research and other sub-disciplines, theories, historical and geographical lenses.

Themes of the workshop and their relation to existing research

Historical and comparative social policy research in the social sciences has provided us with an enormous amount of knowledge on the ways in which governments have enacted a certain set of formal policies to ensure the basic well-being of their citizens since the beginning of what is considered the modern welfare state in the 19th century. In Western Europe and other core parts of the OECD-world, these typically include statutory old-age pensions, sickness benefits, work accident and unemployment insurance, health services and various forms of family benefits (Castles et al., 2010; Flora and Alber, 1981; Huber and Stephens, 2001). Today, about 50 per cent of public expenditure are devoted to these policies in an average OECD country.

The strong focus on this particular set of policies has served comparative welfare state research well in analyzing the reduction of life-risks in advanced democracies over the last century (Amenta, 2003). Yet, when trying to grasp the wide variety of ways in which people and their governments protect themselves against the vicissitudes of life and provide for their human needs, this focus is too narrow. Especially outside advanced democracies, i.e. the world in which the majority of people live, the old approach falls short on at least three dimensions: *First*, in many countries around the world - as in Europe before the 1880s –the state is not necessarily the main provider of ‘welfare’. This task is taken over by the wider family (including through remittances from migrants), faith-based organizations, firms, charities or transnational actors such as foreign governments and international organizations (Franzoni, 2008; Gough and Wood, 2004; MacLean, 2010). Recent research has shown that the often assumed association between ‘stateness’ and the provision of collective goods does not exist (Lee et al., forthcoming). In other words, it is not necessarily the classic (European) nation state that prevents human life from resembling Hobbes’s natural state. Although the topic of ‘social policy by other means’ has been addressed by some scholars with relation to some exceptional countries and historical periods, where ‘social protection by other means’ mattered (Bonoli, 2007; Castles, 1985; 1989), more systematic approaches to such functional equivalents are still lacking.

Second, the political cleavages shaping welfare policies in non-OECD countries are often very different from those that initiated the welfare state in industrializing European countries (Rudra, 2007). Hence, policies needed to ensure citizens' well-being in the former countries are often very different or come at least with very different priorities than those in the West. So are unemployment policies in countries with large informal sectors as for instance in Latin America rather a regressive scheme to secure the upper middle classes than

to provide a safety net for the population at large. Depending on the economic and political structure, basic health care (e.g. vaccinations) or agricultural policies (e.g. land redistribution) (Deininger, 2003) might matter much more for people's well-being than, say, old age pensions.

Third, the need to include other policies into the analysis if we care about the protection of citizens' welfare is not restricted to the global South. Also governments in advanced democracies enact more and more policies that are not traditionally counted as social or welfare policy, which nevertheless aim at ensuring very similar goals of equity, individual security and protection from hardship. Examples include: education and fiscal policy, consumer protection, integration of immigrants, fair trade and efforts to bridge the 'digital divide'. Historical research also revisits some of the functional equivalents of state welfare, such as philanthropy, land reform, marriage laws and alcohol policy. While these policies certainly differ from classical social policies, it is time to assess what the old theories of the welfare state may have to contribute to the study of new policies and, conversely, in what ways the study of new policies may force us to reconsider the old stories about the OECD welfare state.

In sum, welfare state research as we know it is increasingly losing focus and some of its basic theoretical premises and empirical emphases need to be reconsidered and reformulated. By bringing together scholars from different fields and with different analytical foci this workshop provides a starting point for a new unifying theory of the welfare state.

Type of Papers

We invite contributions from scholars that look beyond the usual welfare policies, outside advanced democracies, or besides the government as provider of well-being. This may include historical papers explaining the development of such policies in one or several countries, papers explaining a particular policy mix or welfare state configuration, comparative research mapping the terrain and explaining differences, papers which try to quantify the extent to which non-classical welfare policies matter, research on international influences as well as (empirically grounded) theoretical and methodological papers. We welcome a wide variety of empirical methods (large-N, experiments, comparative case studies, process-tracing case studies, other qualitative methods, and micro as well as macro-level research).

Participants

We encourage a broad range of participants to submit papers, ranging from development and international relations scholars through historians to comparative welfare state researchers, from country, policy or area experts to broad comparativists, and from Ph.D. candidates to established scholars. We especially strive to secure some funding to support the participation of scholars from non-OECD countries.

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