Beyond Welfare Regimes: From Empirical Typology to Conceptual Ideal types

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Abstract

The welfare regime concept introduced by Gøsta Esping-Andersen in 1990 is still widely used in comparative political research, although it has been challenged extensively both on empirical and analytical grounds. Besides the fact that many empirical welfare states seem to be hybrid cases of the established welfare regime categories, the argument that welfare regimes exist not only at the country level but also at the local level and at the level of particular welfare programmes has recently gained momentum in the academic literature. In this article, it is argued that the welfare regime concept should be stripped of its historical-geographical connotations and turned into an ideal-typical approach. To this end, a three-dimensional model is proposed here that allows for analyzing the attributes of welfare states, welfare regions and welfare programmes on three analytical dimensions: welfare culture, welfare institutions and socio-structural effects.

Keywords

Welfare regimes; Welfare culture; Welfare institutions; Effects of welfare policy; Social policy; Political theory

Introduction

Few concepts in the social sciences are both as loved and debated as the welfare regime concept introduced by Gosta Esping-Andersen in his seminal 1990 work, The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism. Although the concept is still widely applied in comparative political research and although few scholars would disagree that a welfare state like Sweden or Denmark has more in common with another Scandinavian peer than with a Mediterranean welfare state such as Italy or Spain, for example, the concept of welfare regimes has been criticized not only on empirical grounds but also in analytical terms (Aspalter 2011; Bambra 2007; Bolderson and Mabbett 1995; Kasza 2002; Scruggs and Allan 2006). Thus, Kasza (2002) and Bannink and Hoogenboom
(2007) have argued for the existence of programmatic rather than country-
level welfare regimes (such as pension regimes, healthcare regimes or labour
market regimes; cf. also Castles 2008; Clasen and Siegel 2007: 6). Also, more
and more authors are beginning to apply the welfare regime concept at the
regional and local level, arguing that different types of local welfare regimes
exist alongside each other within one and the same welfare state (cf. Hudson
2012; Künzel 2012; Pierson 1995; Schridde 2002).

The emergence of a body of literature on programmatic and local welfare
regimes illustrates that the welfare regime concept, in spite of its empirical
weaknesses, remains highly useful as an analytical tool. For this reason, this
article joins Powell and Barrientos (2011), Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011)
and others in proposing to dissect the empirical and analytical elements
inherent in Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime typology, transforming his
typology into a set of purely conceptual, i.e. neither historically nor geographi-
cally rooted, ideal types (Weber 1922).

From Empirical Typology to Conceptual Ideal types

Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) based his welfare regime typology on the
groundbreaking insight that clusters of welfare states ‘decommodify’ social
risks to different degrees and in different ways. Very crudely put, (predomi-
nantly Anglo-Saxon) liberal welfare states tend to provide only a small safety
net of universal, means-tested benefits while outsourcing more sophisticated
forms of welfare to the private sector. This stands in stark contrast to the
(Scandinavian) social-democratic welfare states whose public welfare systems
are both generous and rather universally accessible, and the conservative-
corporatist welfare states of Continental Europe where networks of public and
private actors administer reasonably generous but selective benefits and
services.

Following the publication of Esping-Andersen’s 1990 book, legions of
authors set out to both rationalize and criticize the methodological integrity,
empirical correctness and analytical implications of Esping-Andersen’s
work. In a nutshell, an academic consensus has been reached in the past two
decades that:

1. the welfare regime typology is here to stay as an analytical tool because
   there is clearly ‘something in it,’ although the empirical applicability of
   the concept remains problematic;
2. a minimum of three but possibly more welfare regime prototypes can be
   identified (Abrahamson 1999; Arts and Gelissen 2002; Ferragina and
   Seeleib-Kaiser 2011);
3. the historical origins of welfare regimes lie in the religious and state-
   building history of Western Europe (Grimm 1986; Kahl 2005; Kaufmann
   1986; Manow 2002; Van Kersbergen 1995); and
4. welfare regimes differ not only in the structures of inequality and social
   stratification they (re-)produce, but also in the way in which they seek to
   achieve this goal as well as in their normative justifications thereof (Aspal-
   ter 2006).
The goal of this article is to provide a theoretical foundation for the above-sketched pragmatic consensus. This will be done in two steps. First, a stylized historical recount of the emergence of welfare regimes in Western Europe will be offered. Second, this stylized historical tale will be stripped of its empirical foundations, leading to an ideal-typical welfare regime framework that operates on the three dimensions of welfare culture (referring to fundamental ideas about the individual and the state; cf. Arts and Gelissen 2001; Pfau-Effinger 2005; Van Oorschot et al. 2008; Wilensky and Lebeaux 1965), welfare institutions (referring to laws, regulations and actor networks preoccupied with the provision of welfare) and socio-structural effects (cf. Calloni 2005; Machado and Vlrokx 2001), and that is applicable not only to welfare states but also to welfare regions, welfare localities and welfare programmes.

A Short Stylized History of Welfare Regimes

Building on the early work of Stein Rokkan (1975), Flora and Alber (1981), Van Kersbergen (1995), Manow (2002) and others, a consensus has been reached in the academic literature that welfare regimes have their origins in the religious and state-building history of Western Europe. In a brevity that would be unworthy of the true historian but that hopefully suffices for our purposes, this section recounts in a stylized manner how four major political cultures emerged in Europe in the centuries after the Reformation, providing the backdrop against which modern welfare institutions were modelled in the late 19th and the 20th centuries. The main argument of this section is that the prototypical welfare cultures of Nordic, Southern, Continental Europe and England were fundamentally shaped by two historical developments, the rise of Protestantism against the dominant Catholic tradition and the relationship between political rulers and organized religion in the early days of state formation. This stylized historiography of welfare regimes will provide the empirical basis for developing a purely ideal-typical welfare regime framework in the remainder of the article.

Catholic and Protestant legacies

To begin with, empirical differences among modern-day welfare states are in part a result of the Catholicism-Protestantism divide in the religious history of Europe because the two faiths espouse different images of the human being and different ideas about the role of the state in society. In the Catholic tradition that was unrivalled in Europe until the 16th century and whose influence has been most enduring in Southern Europe, society is depicted as a body (or family) consisting of many different parts. In consequence, the Catholic tradition endorses a societal order that morally differentiates not only between the sexes, but also between societal sectors and classes. Moreover and building upon the principle of moral differentiation, Catholic doctrine embraces the principle of subsidiarity by which societal welfare is made the responsibility of the lowest possible societal level: Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and . . . [a]
disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do’ (Pope Pius XI 1931: para. 79). The Catholic principles of moral differentiation and subsidiarity have visibly shaped modern-day welfare states especially in the Southern European region. First, the family has remained the primary producer and addressee of societal welfare in welfare states like Italy, Spain or Greece (Ferrera 1996) and, second, corporatism instead of etatism was promoted by the Catholic church as the best way to resolve the ‘conflict between the hostile classes’ of capital and labour in the wake of the Industrial Revolution (Esping-Andersen 1990: 61; Korpi 2006: 175).

In contrast to the Catholic welfare tradition, Protestantism brought secularizing and individualizing tendencies in its wake, albeit with heterogeneous political outcomes (Grimm 1986; Kahl 2005; Kaufmann 1986; Manow 2002). In Great Britain, the cradle of the Anglo-Saxon welfare culture, the Reformation strengthened parliamentarianism and conditioned the king’s execution of power discursively on the establishment of peace and justice as well as on the provision of the ‘common welfare’ (Thomas and Lauderdale 1987: 201; cf. also Luhmann 1990: 138). Hence, a series of poor laws were issued in 16th-century England that culminated in the ‘Old’ Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 (later amended by the ‘New’ Poor Law of 1834). In line with the Reformed (i.e. Calvinist) strand of Protestantism that became dominant in Great Britain and that put a strong emphasis on the individual’s inherent worth, individual responsibility and communal self-help, however, these poor laws were both universalistic in that they ‘provided coverage [for] (potentially) . . . the whole population’ (Bonoli 1997: 366) and made a very strong distinction between deserving poor such as old or ill people, and undeserving poor who were to be punished or forced to work (cf. Bonoli 2003: 1024; Flora and Alber 1981: 48). This curious blend between an individualistic image of ‘man’ that regards all persons as equal and autarkic on the one hand, and a paternalistic political culture that calls for the state to intervene in the private lives of un-autonomous citizens in order to restore autarky and civil order on the other hand has remained a central element of Anglo-Saxon welfare culture to this day.

In summary, Catholic and Protestant theology planted the seeds for two distinctive empirical political cultures in Europe. Whereas welfare states with a Catholic heritage lean more towards familialism and moral partisanship, welfare states with primarily Protestant roots tend to be more individualistic and morally indifferent in outlook, at least as long as the civil order is not threatened.

Religion and state-building

In spite of their differences, both the Catholic and the Protestant political tradition are weary of a strong state. While Catholicism propagates a weak partisan state whose welfare policies are geared towards maintaining the familialistic social order, Protestantism tends to favour a weak neutral state that confines itself to setting a legal framework for the peaceful and industrious exchange among otherwise autonomous individual citizens. In Southern
Europe and England where frictions between the church and political elites constrained processes of state expansion in the early days of state formation, a private charity-oriented conception of welfare has therefore tended to prevail. Where alliances between church and state evolved as in Nordic and Continental Europe, however, more solidaristic political cultures emerged.

More specifically, in Nordic Europe, the Reformation entered a scene where elected kings in Sweden (including Finland) and Denmark (including Norway and Iceland) based their rule on coalitions of trust with peasants and burghers and where important welfare functions were carried out by local parishes (Lin 2005). With the establishment of Lutheran state-churches headed by the kings, these parishes’ welfare functions were incorporated into the framework of the state – state and church became ‘different parts of the same body’ (Lin 2005: 727, quoting Stenius). This explains how in the Nordic countries, Protestant ideas about individual responsibility and autarky merged with a societal heritage of co-operative etatism and relative social equality to form a specific type of welfare-cultural and welfare-institutional tradition that is characterized not only by a trustful relationship between state and citizens but also by a strong state-centrism on the one hand and a strong focus on the universal promotion of individual life chances on the other hand.

On the European Continent, contrariwise, solidaristic etatism emerged more out of cultural and political heterogeneity than out of relative cultural and political homogeneity as in Nordic Europe. Here, the Reformation led to more than a century of calamitous religious conflict in the 16th and 17th centuries, after which both Catholicism and the (Reformed as well as Lutheran) Protestant faith became firmly rooted in different Continental European regions. As a result of this cultural split, the importance of the absolutist or republican state as a unifier of the fragmented nation increased, although matters ‘strongly related with religion such as family law or education’ remained ‘under the supervision of the church’ (Grimm 1986: 95; cf. also Luhmann 1990). This cultural and political mix has significantly shaped Continental European welfare culture and consequently also the institutional setup of the modern Continental European welfare states. First, the Catholic heritage of a strong family-orientation, a male-dominated labour force (Goode 1963: 60) and political corporatism continues to play an important role in Continental Europe; second, the cultural and political fragmentation of these states has precluded the emergence of universalistic welfare arrangements and brought forward occupational and status-based social protection systems (Bonoli 2003); third, however, the necessity to unite internally riven nations has led the Continental European welfare states to adopt a much more economically redistributive course than their Catholic brothers and sisters in the Southern European region, thereby giving rise to the unique brand of ‘social capitalism’ that has become characteristic of the Continental European welfare states (Van Kersbergen 1995; Van Kersbergen and Manow 2009).

Summing up, when contrasting the political history of Nordic and Continental European with that of Southern Europe and England, it appears that prevailing notions about public responsibility for welfare have much to do with the relationship between the church and the state in the era of state
formation. Where the church retained an autonomous sphere of influence, charity organizations and family networks *ceteris paribus* continue to play a much stronger role in the provision of welfare than in regions where the state co-opted not only the religious authority of the church but thereby also inherited the latter’s religious duties.

Although the stylized historical argumentation presented in this section is largely in line with Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime conceptualization, figure 1 illustrates that juxtaposing Catholic vs. Protestant cultural legacies on the one hand with etatist vs. non-etatist political traditions on the other hand yields a matrix of four welfare regime prototypes in which Esping-Andersen’s ‘conservative-corporatist’ regime type is split up into a Continental and a Southern European variant. In this regard, the current model is more in line with the propositions of Leibfried (1992), Ferrera (1996), Castles (1998) and others who have suggested that the ‘Latin rim’, ‘Southern model’ or ‘Periphery’ is unduly neglected as a fourth ‘world of welfare capitalism’ in Esping-Andersen’s work (see also Arts and Gelissen 2002; Ferrera and Hemerijck 2003; Mayer 2001; Obinger and Wagschal 2001; Taylor-Gooby 2005; Trifiletti 1999). However, it is essential to keep in mind that although the stylized picture presented in figure 1 provides a historical rationalization and to some degree even a refinement of Esping-Andersen’s framework, it is infested with the same problems as the original typology. Upon closer inspection, it will always appear that empirical welfare states fall out of their supposed regional clusters or that welfare states are internally diverse in terms of regime logics. For that reason, it seems promising to abandon a historically rooted welfare regime conceptualization in favour of a purely ideal-typical one. A proposal for an ideal-typical welfare regime framework is developed in the following three sections.

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1**

A revised empirical typology of welfare regimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGIOUS HERITAGE</th>
<th>Alliance of church and state (religion fosters state expansion)</th>
<th>Friction between church and state (religion constrains state expansion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestantism strong</td>
<td><strong>Nordic Europe</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anglo-Saxon world</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholicism strong</td>
<td><strong>Continental Europe</strong></td>
<td><strong>Southern Europe</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The citizen as individual
  - The neutral state
- The citizen as family member
  - The partisan state

State as active, transformative societal force
Welfare as solidarity

State as passive, reactionary societal force
Welfare as charity

POLITICAL CULTURE
Welfare Culture (Ideal-typical Dimension 1)

Although secular versions of the four prototypical welfare traditions outlined above are *grosso modo* identifiable in today’s empirical worlds of welfare (cf. Koster and Kaminska 2012; Obinger and Wagschal 2001; Svallfors 1997), any attempt to trace a specific welfare culture or institutional arrangement back to the above-sketched historical mechanisms is bound to run into problems due to countless national and sub-national idiosyncrasies. For this reason, it is proposed here to strip the stylized historical account of the former section of its empirical content, turning it into a purely ideal-typical framework that operates on three dimensions: welfare culture, welfare institutions and the socio-structural effects of welfare policies. Moreover, each of these three dimensions can be organized into two juxtaposed axes: conservatism vs. liberalism or socially conservative vs. socially transformative effects on the one hand, and solidarism vs. residualism or economically conservative vs. economically transformative effects on the other hand. Let us begin by reviewing the four ideal types of welfare culture that form the conceptual backbone of the welfare-institutional ideal types presented in the next section.

*Liberal vs. conservative welfare cultures*

The ideal-typical cultural conservatism vs. liberalism-axis is derived from the distinction between Catholic and Protestant political culture sketched above. Mirroring the ontological premises of Protestant individualism and rationalism, liberal political culture depicts the citizen as an autonomous individual and the state as the administrator and arbitrator of a ‘society of individuals’ (Elias 1991). Apart from setting the legal framework for a peaceful and productive societal life, the liberal state is thus supposed to ‘assume a neutral posture . . . vis-à-vis individuals’ choice of life project’ (Rothstein 1998: 31; cf. also Elias 1991: 181; Grimm 1986). In contrast and in close resemblance with the Catholic principles of moral differentiation and subsidiarity, conservative political culture depicts citizens first and foremost as family members rather than individuals (Mayer 2001). In order to secure familial welfare, the conservative state places primary emphasis on the bread-winning function and ability of the (male) family head (Siaroff 1994). For this reason, the welfare policies of the paternalistic conservative state are generally sector and gender-specific (Gelissen 2001: 85; Van Kersbergen 1995; Van Kersbergen and Kremer 2008), thereby reproducing rather than levelling out gender and status differentials among the members of society (Lewis 1992; O’Connor 1993).

*Solidaristic vs. residualistic welfare culture*

Just as the conservative and liberal welfare-cultural ideal types are modelled on existing religious cultures, the solidaristic and residualistic cultural ideal types are derived from the historical relationship between political rulers and religious actors in the era of state formation. Moreover, the rise of socialism and, in its wake, social and Christian democracy in the late 18th and 19th
centuries provides an additional historical template for the construction of an ideal-typical solidarism vs. residualism-axis on the dimension of welfare culture (cf. Baldwin 1990; Donzelot 1991; Stephens 1979; Stjernø 2008: 57, 62). Ideal-typically speaking, residualistic welfare culture subscribes to the liberal and conservative mandate that a small bureaucratic state function only as the guardian of a moral or civil societal order, leaving all other matters in the hands of private communities, families and individuals, including – for a large part – the provision of charity to citizens in need. In contrast, solidaristic welfare culture ideal-typically maintains that ‘harmonious relations between the social classes’ (Esping-Andersen 1990: 61) can only be upheld if individuals are free to pursue their innate abilities and aspirations, which presupposes a strong (welfare) state that equalizes life chances and status differentials through the partial redistribution of wealth among the members of society.

Having discussed the main ideal-typical features of conservative vs. liberal and solidaristic vs. residualistic welfare cultures, the next section describes what the respective cultural principles imply for the laws, regulations and actor networks (i.e. institutions) that govern the provision of social benefits and services in the corresponding ideal-typical welfare regimes.

Welfare Institutions (Ideal-typical Dimension 2)

Esping-Andersen’s work on welfare regimes is often cited as following a historical-institutionalist mode of analysis due to its focus on the impact of institutional and ideational legacies on the design of present-day welfare institutions (cf. Thelen 1999). The ideal-typical welfare regime framework proposed in this article stays in line with the historical-institutionalist premises of Esping-Andersen’s typology, arguing that the generosity, distribution and administration of welfare benefits and services follows certain regime-specific logics in the four ideal-typical worlds of welfare. In what follows, the ideal-typical characteristics of liberal, conservative, solidaristic and residualistic welfare institutions are described in more detail.

Liberal vs. conservative welfare institutions

Welfare-institutional ideal types in liberal and conservative welfare cultures differ in four major respects. First, corresponding with the individualistic and egalitarian values of liberal welfare culture, liberal welfare systems tend to universalistically endow ‘all citizens . . . with similar rights, irrespective of [social] class or market position’ (Esping-Andersen 1990: 25). In contrast, the selective ‘preservation of status differentials’ is central to conservative-paternalistic welfare systems – here, social rights are ‘attached to class and status’ (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27). Second, and in close relation to the first point, conservative welfare systems are ideal-typically characterized by contribution-based social insurance systems that redistribute resources along occupational lines whereas social protection in liberal welfare systems tend to take the form of means-tested or flat-rate social assistance available to everyone in need (Bonoli 1997; Esping-Andersen 1990: 43). Third, and again in relation to that, the rationale behind welfare provision leans primarily towards
the prevention of poverty in liberal welfare systems (because of poverty’s potential for disturbing social peace and thereby also the smooth functioning of the market), whereas conservative welfare systems are more concerned with securing the income-level of employed (male) family-heads (Bonoli 1997: 357). Lastly, an important difference in the organization of welfare provision among liberal and conservative welfare systems pertains to the role of non-state actors. Due to the imperative of state neutrality, liberal welfare systems will tend to keep a strong dividing-line between the public and private provision of welfare whereas in conservative welfare systems, the concertation of welfare functions among public and private actors is much in line with the conservative image of society as a family or body in which many different parts together perform a common task (cf. Esping-Andersen 1990: 61; Ringe-ling 2002).

In summary, conservative (‘Bismarckian’) welfare systems are characterized by strongly selective welfare institutions (i.e. generous social insurance benefits for wage-earners and low tax-financed benefits for others) with the goal of social-status maintenance (Esping-Andersen 1996: 18) as well as by the concertation of welfare functions among public and private actors. Liberal (‘Beveridgean’) welfare systems, in contrast, are typically characterized by universalistic social assistance schemes and a strong dividing-line between the public and private provision of welfare (Palier and Bonoli 1995).

**Solidaristic vs. residualistic welfare institutions**

Also solidaristic and residualistic welfare institutions differ in three fundamental ways due to different underlying cultural logics. Most importantly, whereas solidaristic welfare systems tend to be highly institutionalized and strong, residualistic welfare systems are generally more rudimentary and night watchman-like (cf. Goodin 1988). In addition, because solidaristic welfare culture regards the life chances of citizens as fundamentally dependent on the latter’s economic pole position in life (Luhmann 1990: 26), solidaristic welfare policies tend to be structure-oriented and redistributive (Bonoli 1997; Rothstein 1998: 150) whereas residualistic welfare systems lack the political legitimacy for intervening into the daily lives and income of citizens unless such an intrusion can be justified in terms of the maintenance of the (civil or moral) societal order (in liberal and conservative societies, respectively). As a last point, public providers of welfare play a prominent role in solidaristic welfare systems whereas residualistic welfare systems are characterized by a welfare ‘dualism’ – due to the weakness of residualistic welfare institutions, more affluent citizens have their welfare needs served by the market whereas the poorer strata of society have no choice but to rely on private charity or the rudimentary welfare state (Castles and Obinger 2007; Esping-Andersen 1990: 25–6; Ferrera 1996; Gelissen 2001: 87).

To conclude, this article proposes an ideal-typical welfare regime framework of which welfare culture and welfare institutions form the two basic dimensions. Combined, the two dimensions yield a 2×2 matrix in which a conservatism vs. liberalism-axis and a solidarism vs. residualism-axis delineate four welfare regime ideal types, a conservative and a liberal ‘pure’ type.
alongside a socio-liberal and a socio-conservative etatist/solidaristic variation on the essentially residualistic and charity-oriented conservatism/liberalism theme (figure 2).

Having introduced welfare culture and welfare institutions as the two basic dimensions of an ideal-typical welfare regime framework, the next section adds a third and last dimension to this model: the socio-structural effects of social policies.

**Socio-structural Effects (Ideal-typical Dimension 3)**

A core insight underlying Esping-Andersen’s decommodification measure is that welfare institutions not only yield to societal pressures and problems but also actively ‘intervene [. . .] in, and possibly correct [. . .], the structure of inequality [of a society]; the welfare state ‘is, in its own right, a system of stratification’ (Esping-Andersen 1990: 23; cf. also Kaufmann 1986: 129). Furthermore, the above discussion has shown that the way in which welfare institutions do or do not intervene in structures of economic and/or social inequality differs markedly among welfare systems due to different underlying notions about the roles and responsibilities of the state and individual citizens (Bulpett 2002). This section discusses how the welfare culture – welfare institutions nexus produces distinct kinds of socio-structural effects in the four ideal-typical worlds of welfare outlined above.

**Socially conservative and socially transformative effects**

The stratification effects of liberal vs. conservative welfare systems come to bear primarily on the social terrain. The term ‘social’ is here taken as refer-
ring to the equal or unequal distribution of full citizenship status among a
given population on the basis of underlying cultural notions about who IS
(norm-al, e.g. men, Caucasians, able-bodied persons, etc.) and who IS NOT
(norm-al, e.g. women, coloured persons, disabled persons, etc.) and therefore
does not deserve full access to life’s bounty in the form of education, earn-
ings, career choices, welfare benefits and so forth (Baldwin 1990: 33; Berger
and Luckmann 1967; Calloni 2005; Deutsch 1975). 1 As was shown above,
social differences are seen as natural and even desirable in conservative
welfare cultures because the conservative nation is conceptualized as an
organic body with many different (i.e. unequal) parts coordinated by the
head, i.e. the state. Conversely, socio-cultural barriers that inhibit individuals
from reaching their full potential are regarded as unjust and detrimental to
societal prosperity in liberal welfare cultures that place a strong emphasis on
the equal worth of every person and therefore on the equal treatment of all
citizens by the state. These ideological differences between liberalism and
conservatism have severe implications for social stratification effects in liberal
vs. conservative welfare systems. As aforementioned, the conservative
welfare system tends to reproduce social differences through its legal and
redistributive structures because it protects primarily the (typically male and
majority-ethnic) breadwinner from lifecourse risks whereas it tends to neglect
married women, single parents, young people, immigrants, and others. Such
welfare systems may therefore be termed socially conservative (the Latin
conservare means ‘to preserve’) because they sustain and even reproduce status
gaps among their populations that are rooted in cultural notions of différence.
Liberal welfare systems, in contrast, tend to treat citizens equally, i.e. irre-
spective of their personal attributes or particular roles in family and society.
Therefore, liberal welfare systems tend to be more universalistic in outlook
than their conservative counterparts and will treat a single immigrant
mother in much the same way as a native male worker, for example. By
thereby balancing out pre-existing social differences, liberal welfare systems
produce socially transformative societal effects.

**Economically conservative and economically transformative effects**

As distinguished from the liberalism vs. conservatism dichotomy, the institu-
tional ideal types of solidarism and residualism play out primarily on the
economic terrain, in terms of the redistribution of resources (Korpi 1983). As
was discussed above, solidaristic welfare cultures perceive the life chances of
citizens as fundamentally dependent on the respective individuals’ economic
pole position at the beginning of their lives. Hence, solidaristic welfare systems
strive to redistribute economic resources at least to such a degree that every
member of society has the chance to fully develop her or his potential. In
effect, the solidaristic welfare system may therefore be termed economically or
class-transformative since it seeks to level out economic differences so as to
create sufficiently equal opportunities for all. In contrast, residualistic welfare
culture frames economic (class) differences among individuals as naturally
given or even desirable and hence leaves the individual citizen’s welfare
mainly to his or her own, to her or his family’s, or to the market’s lot. By
implication, the socio-structural effects of residualistic welfare systems are therefore economically or class-conservative because no redistribution of wealth is deemed desirable beyond an absolute minimum. Figure 3 draws the welfare culture – welfare institutions nexus described above and the inferred socio-structural effects of four ideal-typical welfare regimes described in this section together in a unified framework.

Why Ideal types? Advantages of an Ideal-typical Welfare Regime Framework

An ideal-typical welfare regime framework like the one developed above has at least four advantages over a historically and geographically bound empirical typology. In the first instance, an ideal-typical conceptualization is not limited to Western welfare states but can also be used to analyze social policy developments in Eastern Europe, East Asia or Israel, for example (cf. Aspalter 2006, 2011). Second, a major advantage of an ideal-typical framework vis-à-vis Esping-Andersen’s original typology is that it can be applied not only to welfare states as seemingly monolithic entities, but also to welfare regions/localities and welfare programmes. For example, scholars could use the framework at hand to devise an empirical typology of local welfare regimes within a given welfare state, or of policy regimes across different policy areas such as unemployment policy and educational policy (cf. Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2004; Clasen and Clegg 2006; Künzel 2012;
Schridde 2002; Schwarz-Hahn and Rehburg 2004; Serrano Pascual and Magnusson 2007).

A third advantage of the ideal-typical model proposed above is that welfare states, sub-states and programmes need not by definition be regarded as congruent across all three ideal-typical dimensions. Rather, an ideal-typical regime framework can sensitize researchers to interesting asynchronicities and dynamic cross-fertilizations between cultural and institutional processes on the one hand and socio-structural policy effects on the other hand. For instance, it is easily conceivable that an institutional shift towards activation may effectuate long-term cultural changes especially in conservative and residualistic societies, or that the rise of new ideas about the responsibility for welfare may lead to the adoption of path-breaking institutional reforms, with all the intended and unintended socio-economic consequences that this might entail (cf. Cox 1998; Goodin 2001; Taylor-Gooby 2005). An ideal-typical welfare regime framework can help researchers to map interesting differences and changes in social policy across space as well as over time, facilitating the search for theoretical puzzles and explanations.

Lastly, a major advantage of the present framework over the original typology is that the conservatism-liberalism and solidarism-residualism axes are explicitly understood as spectra or ‘continua rather than . . . boxes’ (Bolderson and Mabbett 1995: 120), which provides an elegant solution to the problem that in empirical reality, welfare states or systems often appear as hybrid cases of the originally fixated welfare regime categories.

**Conclusion**

This article has taken up recent arguments by Powell and Barrientos (2011), Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011), Bambra (2007) and others that in order to solve the analytical problems inherent in Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime typology and to make his conception applicable to empirically diverse national, local and programmatic welfare landscapes, the welfare regime approach should be transformed from an empirical typology into an ideal-typical framework. Such a framework was proposed in this article, taking the historical emergence of different welfare cultures and welfare institutions in Europe as a starting point but distilling from these religiously and geographically rooted traditions three ideal-typical dimensions: welfare culture, welfare institutions and the socio-structural effects of welfare policies. The first two dimensions, welfare culture and welfare institutions, can be subdivided into a liberalism vs. conservatism-spectrum and a solidarism vs. residualism-spectrum that together generate a 2x2 matrix of a conservative and a liberal ‘pure’ regime type alongside a socio-conservative and a socio-liberal variant. Together with the related third dimension of economically and socially conservative or transformative societal effects, such an ideal-typical welfare regime framework may prove a useful tool in researching not only the *de facto* variation of social policies and their outcomes across welfare states, welfare regions/localities and welfare programmes, but also the path-dependent versus path-breaking effects of new policy trajectories (Clasen and Van
Oorschot 2002; Cox 1998; Pierson 1996; Vis 2008) or the societal effects of welfare reforms (cf. Machado and Vilrokx 2001).

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Notes

1. The most deep-rooted cultural markers of sameness and difference are gender and ethnicity/race, but countless others could be enumerated such as age, physical health, mental health, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or ideological viewpoints, for example (cf. O’Connor and Robinson 2008: 39).

2. Empirically, economic and social (in-)equality do of course intersect because economic status is partly mediated by social status. In analytical terms, however, economic and social (in-)equality are separate concepts and are therefore treated accordingly here (cf. Calloni 2005: 95).

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