

Fault Lines and Silver Linings in the European Social Model(s)

This paper examines two ‘silver linings’ with respect to the daunting question of European welfare state futures in the wake of the global financial crisis. First, historically over the past two decades, the analysis reveals that the overall scope of social reform across the member states of the European Union, although varying widely, has been more proactive and reconstructive than is often argued in mainstream comparative studies. Alongside retrenchments, there have been deliberate attempts – often given impetus by intensified European (economic) integration – to rebuild social programs and institutions to accommodate the new economic and social realities of the 21st century. The more prospective, second sign of progressive reorientation is that in the aftermath of global financial crisis, *social investment is no longer dismissed as “fair weather” policy*, as epitomized by the launch of the *Social Investment Package for Growth and Social Cohesion* by the European Commission in 2013. In terms of social investment policy analysis, the paper distinguishes between three interdependent policy supports: (1) easing the ‘flow’ of contemporary labour market transitions; (2) raising the quality of human capital ‘stock’; and (3) up keeping strong minimum-income universal safety nets as social protection and economic stabilization ‘buffers’, viewed interactively through the lens of the life course contingencies of modern familiness. Social investment is a supply-side strategy, therefore it is imperative to embed social investment in a more inclusive growth strategy. In conclusion, the case is made for a “social investment pact” for Europe, allowing governments to pursue mid-term budgetary discipline *and* long-term social investment reforms in line with new EU economic governance procedures, allowing potentially for a viable balance between ‘economic’ and ‘social’ Europe after the crisis.

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Changing Welfare States is a major new examination of the wave of social reform that has swept across Europe over the past two decades. In a comparative fashion, it analyses reform trajectories and political destinations in an era of rapid socioeconomic restructuring, including the critical impact of the global financial crisis on welfare state futures. The book argues that the overall scope of social reform across the member states of the European Union varies widely. In some cases welfare state change has been accompanied by deep social conflicts, while in other instances unpopular social reforms received broad consent from opposition parties, trade unions and employer organizations. The analysis reveals trajectories of welfare reform in many countries that are more proactive and reconstructive than is often argued in academic research and the media. Alongside retrenchments, there have been deliberate attempts - often given impetus by intensified European (economic) integration - to rebuild social programs and institutions and thereby accommodate welfare policy repertoires to the new economic and social realities of the 21st century. Welfare state change is work in progress, leading to patchwork mixes of old and new policies and institutions, on the lookout, perhaps, for greater coherence. Unsurprisingly, that search process remains incomplete, resulting from the institutionally bounded and contingent adaptation to the challenges of economic globalization, fiscal austerity, family and gender change, adverse demography, and changing political cleavages.

Reviews

"This is a solid, priceworthy overview of recent welfare state developments in the European Union. In other words, it is a recommendable textbook for courses on European social policy ... you will benefit from learning professor Hemerijck's knowledge about European social policies in the 1990s-2000s." - **Göran Therborn, University of Cambridge**

"...this is an important book which will stimulate critical debate on a number of issues. The author's use of data is extensive and impressive and his thorough knowledge and documentation of European social policy will be a major resource for international social policy scholars who wish to understand the complexities of recent trends in the region" - **James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley**

"Hemerijck outlines a "Social Investment Pact" and Social Union wherein national welfare states are re-embedded at the European level and integrated with EU-markets. The European social space he describes is one that could accommodate large-scale trans-European investment of the sort needed to save major parts of Europe from becoming entrapped in a permanent economic depression. We can opt for a caring Europe or an unravelling Europe, and Hemerijck's well-researched book makes the choice clear." - **Stephan Leibfried, Professor of Political Science, University of Bremen and Jacobs University Bremen**

"Anton Hemerijck's *Changing Welfare States* is a tour de force. Ranging broadly across countries, time periods, and policy areas, the book provides an overview of where we have been and where we might fruitfully go in terms of welfare state policy. The theoretical framework he advances deftly combines the best of institutional accounts and policy learning models into a realistic view of the possibilities of politics within evolving institutional constraints. Essential reading for scholars and policy makers alike." - **Kathleen Thelen, Ford Professor of Political Science, MIT**