Acknowledgements

The idea for this volume originated during the second annual conference of ESPAnet (the European Social Policy Analysis network) in Oxford in 2004. Each ESPAnet conference involves at least one stream of papers which deal with comparative methods in cross-national social policy analysis. In this context the editors of this volume discussed the current international debate about welfare reform and welfare state change, and the notion that the strong interest in this topic within the scientific community has not been matched by considerable academic progress. There are plenty of leitmotifs aimed at capturing the nature of welfare state change (or the lack of it), as well as competing accounts of how to explain policy reform. At the same time, there has been a noticeable paucity of how to empirically and systematically conceptualize, operationalize and measure change within and across welfare states. It is this ‘dependent variable problem’ and its various aspects which led the editors to invite international experts to a ‘thematic seminar’ in May 2005 at the University of Stirling, and subsequently to organize a panel on this topic at the 2005 ESPAnet conference in Fribourg, Switzerland. This book provides the results of these and subsequent discussions on the subject. It aims to reflect on a number of dimensions of the ‘dependent variable problem’ within comparative welfare state analysis, and to provide suggestions as to how to address and tackle it empirically.

We are grateful to ESPAnet for providing the necessary fora for preliminary discussions, and to the Department of Applied Social Science, University of Stirling for hosting the above mentioned seminar in May 2005. We would like to thank Jacqueline Davidson for helping with its organization and all participants, and especially Frank Castles and Jane Lewis, for useful comments and advice. We owe thanks to our previous employers, i.e. the Universities of Stirling and Kent respectively, for enabling us to put the necessary time into editing this volume. We are indebted to all contributors for their efforts and patience with us and our repeated requests for revision and refinement. Finally we would like to thank Catherine Elgar for her interest in the original idea for this project and her continuous support throughout.

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