1. Introduction: rethinking welfare state models

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Welfare state research has for decades been dominated by models. The comparative welfare state research industry has produced, recycled and restructured an impressive number of categorizations or models of national social security systems. Historians, when turning their attention to the history of welfare states, have often underlined the national specificities of their own countries as unique national models. By doing so they may have criticized generalizations associated with comparative research, but at the same time they have contributed to ever more sophisticated model categorizations that welfare state researchers have constructed with an almost Linnaean ambition.

Much has been learned from the systematic comparisons as well as from the in-depth national studies. Yet, while the comparative and historical ambitions associated with research on models are praiseworthy, they are also limited by the very same concept. Comparisons of models often indicate that nation-states and national societies are taken for granted as the units of research. The importance of history is pointed out, associated with a stress on institutional continuities and path-dependencies, yet in this way ‘history’ tends to become synonymous with national characteristics. The limits of approach remain, regardless of whether just one or several countries are seen to share the characteristics of a model or a regime.

In this book models are questioned as an analytical framework for welfare state research. At the same time, we argue for recognizing cross-national comparative political, cultural and economic practices – which often utilize the concept of model – as an important subject for historical welfare state research.

It has been very much through various comparative practices that transnational interdependencies and transfers have been effective in the making and changing of national welfare states. Social reformers, experts and welfare state politicians have been thinking, working and arguing comparatively since the first pieces of modern social political legislation in the late nineteenth century. It is crucial to explore the role of international institutions, religions, movements and crises, transnational learning and diffusion of ideas, problem-definations and
solutions that have transcended national borders, as well as comparisons of welfare state models, which themselves are often associated with comparative concerns about economic competitiveness. From this general perspective, it is possible to highlight blind spots of comparative and historical welfare state research. The aim in this volume is not to develop a new theory of the development of welfare states, not to dismiss existing analyses of them, but to open up, on the basis of critical discussions, new perspectives for cross-disciplinary research and new historical questions on welfare states. In this introductory chapter we briefly outline the broader framework for this endeavour.

THE WORLD OF COMPARATIVE WELFARE STATE MODELS

Over the last three or four decades, comparative welfare state research has developed into a veritable industry. It began in the 1970s with quantitative studies focusing mainly on social spending, then from the 1980s onwards the scope of the studies broadened to include more qualitative aspects such as basic principles and the level of social rights. The latter was heavily inspired by the classic welfare state typology developed by Richard Titmuss, one of the founding figures of British social policy discipline. Titmuss’s (1974) distinction between residual, handmaiden and institutional-redistributive models was later developed by the Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen, who in his seminal study *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) established his work as the gold standard of comparative welfare state studies. Esping-Andersen divided all Western welfare states into three ideal-type regimes: the liberal welfare state (for example in the US and Anglo-Saxon world), with an emphasis on market solutions and selective public policies; the conservative central European model, with its heavy reliance on labour market performance and status protection; and finally the social democratic or Scandinavian model, with its comprehensive, state-centred and tax-financed universal welfare states.

Esping-Andersen’s categorization has been criticized from several perspectives. Feminist scholars have claimed the three welfare state types do not take sufficient account of different family ideologies and the role played by women in providing informal care within families (Lewis 1992; Sainsbury 1996). Others have had difficulties recognizing how their specific country of interest fits into Esping-Andersen’s three worlds of welfare (Baldwin 1996; Arts and Gelissen 2002). It has been argued that there is a huge difference between the southern and central European countries placed in the conservative welfare regime, and countries such as Spain and Italy may form a special ‘southern rim’ model of their own (Katrougalos 1996). There has also been a strong
desire to differentiate within the liberal group, not least when it comes to the Australian welfare state (Castles 1998), or to post-WWII Britain before Margaret Thatcher (Thane 2007). Other scholars have tried to develop alternative typologies that may even create division within the more homogeneous group of Scandinavian welfare states (Korpi and Palme 1998; Kosonen 1993). Furthermore, a very high number of historians have pinpointed the specifics of national historical developments vis-à-vis social scientists’ more ahistorical snapshots (Baldwin 1996; Christiansen et al. 2006).

There seems to be a growing awareness that regime or model typologies cannot be more than analytical ideal types or crude generalizations, but at the same time they still tend to dominate welfare state scholarship. Comparative research needs ‘models’ or ideal types as an analytical tool. However, we should also recognize that they are just tools of the research process, not its results.

Two recent and current ‘turns’ in social political research appear important for our attempt to reach beyond welfare models: ‘the historical turn’ and ‘the transnational turn’. It appears especially important to relate and interlink these turns.

THE HISTORICITY AND TRANSNATIONALITY OF THE NATIONAL WELFARE STATE


First, a historical approach means acknowledging that the researcher is operating in the field where images of change, and thus of the past, the present and the future, are constructed not only by researchers but also by many different actors such as politicians, business leaders, consultants and journalists. Second, it recognizes the presence of history in the multilayered historicity of institutions and discourses. Third, it is an approach sensitive to agents and agency, especially from the point of view that human agency is inherently historical in the sense that the actors, in their institutionally and discursively preconditioned and structured situations of action, handle and interpret their experiences and expectations and relate these to each other. These three points of view can be concretized by means of the critique of three conventional understandings of the role of history in welfare state debates and studies: (1) history as national specificities, (2) history as origins and (3) history as path dependencies.
History as National Specificities

Any research on social transformation is inevitably related to wider public discussion on current transformation and to the images of the past, the present and the future that are constructed in that discussion. Such constructions are and have been an important part of political and ideological argumentation. This is clearly the case in discussing the new challenges of the welfare state associated with globalization, immigration, European integration, or ageing. The controversial definitions of the challenges and responses include more or less influential historical images that the welfare state researcher should approach critically as her or his point of departure. ‘History’ tends to become almost synonymous with national specificities.

The nation-centred view of the actual role of history appears not only in public debates but also in much of the welfare state research. This concerns not only the historical background overviews that are conventionally included in the studies of national social political systems but also more sophisticated views on how history matters. The social political research applying to or inspired by neo-institutionalist approaches¹ may be praiseworthy for its emphasis on history and comparison. Pointing out ‘varieties of capitalism’ (Hall and Soskice 2001) in general and ‘varieties of welfare capitalism’ (Esping-Andersen 1999) in particular includes a welcome critique of abstract generalizations about the functioning and changing of modern capitalism, which used to be characteristic of many Marxian and neo-liberal approaches. However, this comparative research interest too often reduces history to a dimension – albeit a highly important one – of national performance capacity inherent in national institutions such as the welfare state. Thus neo-institutionalist research tasks tend to stick to the political agenda settings associated with national attempts to succeed in global competition (Strange 1997) and, consequently, cannot include these agenda settings in their topic of research.

In comparative analyses of national performance capacities, as well as in public debates on globalization as a challenge of ‘our’ welfare state, the distinction between the actor and the external environment of action is taken as a point of departure. Globalization and often even European integration are conceived as phenomena of the external environment of national societies and welfare states. The actors, in turn, the nation-states like the Nordic countries, appear as carriers of internal historical properties, achievements, resources and burdens that they have to defend, utilize or get rid of when responding and adapting to external challenges. The transition of the welfare states is analysed as ‘national adaptations in global economies’ (Esping-Andersen 1996).

Indeed, national responses to inter- and transnational constraints and opportunities play a significant part in research on the persistence and change of national institutions and policies. In the development of territorial nation-
states and the international relations based on nation-states, such a mode of thought has played a crucial role. Yet, not least so as to be able to explore this influential mode of thought, one should keep a critical distance from it. Inter- and transnational processes have been constitutive of the making of national welfare states (Kettunen 2006; Petersen 2006), and globalization is taking place not just in the ‘environment’ of a nation-state society but also within and through nation-centred modes of thought and action.

History as Origins

The notion of history as national specificities may be easily associated with another problematic view: the notion of history as origins. During the last couple of decades, many researchers – sociologists, political scientists and somewhat later even historians – have been interested in the origin of welfare states. They have tried, for example, to trace back the origins of the Nordic welfare state to the nineteenth-century processes of modernization or the structures of pre-industrial rural community, to socialism or to nationalism, to the rise of social democracy in the 1930s or to the Reformation and the making of the Lutheran state church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Interesting and even convincing historical interpretations have been elaborated in this discussion. However, the very idea of tracing the origins is questionable.

In his last texts from the early 1940s, Marc Bloch, a founding father of the Annales School, criticized historians for having ‘la hantise des origins’ as their idol. He pointed out that it is unsustainable to suppose that the origin or the beginning of a phenomenon includes its explanation. Such an attempt at explanation also bypasses the questions as to what extent the phenomenon is to be explained – Bloch used Christianity as his example – is still the same as it was during its ‘original’ phase (Bloch 1949: 19–23). The search for origins can also be criticized as a particular form of the unreflective teleological presentism that is far from unusual in historical research.

Instead of the search for origins, we will argue for an approach interested in the multilayered historicity of the welfare state. The aim should be not simply to explain what we already see in our present, but also to add something into the picture of the very phenomenon that we are explaining. A crucial research interest would be the presence of different institutional and discursive layers in the welfare states, developed in different periods of time. How are they mediated through mentalities, traditions, values, epistemic practices, conceptualizations, and social movements? How are they present in the formal and informal rules and norms of the welfare states and in the different modes of agency both shaping and shaped by the welfare state? The interest in the multilayered historicity of the welfare state represents ‘a history of the
present’, to use a famous phrase of Michel Foucault (1977). As Mitchell Dean (1994: 35) puts it, a history of the present ‘is concerned with that which is taken-for-granted, assumed to be given, or natural within contemporary social existence, a givenness or naturalness questioned in the course of contemporary struggles.’

Conceptual history can be understood as a history of the present in this sense, often interested in different layers of meaning and inspired by Reinhart Koselleck’s analysis on the multilayeredness of time, the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous (Koselleck 2003). For example, the concept of society has formed a taken-for-granted premise and centre for social research and political discourse. Since the 1980s, however, this has been questioned in debates on postmodernity and globalization. It has been argued that the modern concept of society is somehow too strong and too limited to sustain. It is too strong while referring to ‘an integrated holistic entity’ (Featherstone 1995: 134) with progress and rationalization as its inherent dynamics, and too limited owing to its ties with the nation-state and national borders. The concept of society is, indeed, ‘a givenness or naturalness questioned in the course of contemporary struggles’ in a way that makes it a timely target for a history of the present (Kettunen 2000; 2008, ch. vi). In similar way all important concepts, including ‘welfare state’ (Petersen and Petersen 2010), can be analysed from critical historical perspectives.

The notion of layering does not here refer only to a particular mode of institutional change as it does in the distinction drawn by Kathleen Thelen (2003) between institutional layering (wherein new arrangements are built on the basis of existing structures) and institutional conversion (in which existing institutions are used in new ways for new goals), nor does it refer to gradual changes in contrast to radical ones. The metaphor of historical layers may be understood in many different ways. It can be associated with a distinction of different levels of transformation with their different rhythms of change. The most influential elaboration of this idea is the French historian Fernand Braudel’s (1985 [1949]) distinction between the ‘longue durée’ of the human–nature relationship and the levels of more rapid socio-economic and political changes. The figure of layers can also be associated with historical periodization by noting that in our present, or in any present, many different-length periods of time coincide. Thus, the different ‘origins’ of the welfare state(s) can be reinterpreted this way, that is as different temporal layers in the sense of simultaneously lived periods of time of different lengths. For example, in the case of Nordic welfare states, such different periods and layers could be associated with the Lutheran traditions, with the strong state and local self-government, with the role of the work ethic, with the particular characteristics of nationalism, with popular movements and voluntary association, with citizenship and gender, or with the modes of interest organization and corporatist compromising.
It is important to understand the multilayered historicity of the welfare state as an analytical imagery that according to the specific concrete research tasks leads the researcher to different historical reconstructions of relevant layers and their different mixes and relationships. In any case, as an analytical imagery, the emphasis on the multilayered historicity of the present helps to deconstruct the linear images of change that too often appear in research on social policies.

History as Path Dependencies

The imagery of historical layers is not enough, however, to bring the dynamics of change into the historical analysis of the welfare state and social policies. For one thing, the changing mixtures of different layers are a crucial question, including also changes in which old, layered modes of thought, speech and action are provided with new meanings and functions – the changes Thelen and other institutionalists call ‘conversion’ (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Furthermore, the imagery of historical layers needs to be completed with the recognition of agency and contingency in a way that is critical of any simplistic notion of history as ‘path dependency’.

In concrete situations of action, historicity means institutional and discursive preconditions that enable and limit the agency on the one hand, and an insecurity and openness of the horizon of expectation on the other. Consequently, an appropriate understanding of path dependency should include the recognition that path dependency and contingency are intertwined. This intertwining appears in institutional continuities and breaks and in the relationships between institutions and innovations, not least between institutional preconditions or constraints of social innovations. The intertwining of path dependency and contingency also appears in how social problems and solutions are conceptualized and how the defining of problems and solutions – that is, agenda-setting – becomes a subject for struggles. National pension systems have with good reason been seen as very path-dependent ‘elephants on the move’ (Hinrichs 2009), yet even pension systems may sometimes change dramatically, as the Swedish historian Urban Lundberg (2003) has shown in his study of the contingent political processes resulting in the Swedish pension reform of the 1990s.

In comparative research on different models of capitalism or different welfare regimes a major question has been the relationship between path dependency and convergence. Arguably, such comparison greatly benefits from a historical approach that places emphasis on the dualism of path dependency and contingency. In the crossing of these two dimensions – path dependency and contingency on the one hand, and path dependency and convergence on the other – we can find histories and comparisons as forms of
reflexivity in social practices. Relating the past, the present and the future, or experience and expectation, as well as recognizing and interpreting differences and similarities, are inherent aspects of human agency. Social practices are in this reflexive sense historical and comparative. This seems especially important for research on social policies.

The tension between experience and expectation is constitutive of modern historical and political consciousness, as Reinhart Koselleck (1979) has taught us, and the attempts to master this tension have been at the core of the development of social policies. One need only to refer to the concepts of risk and insurance that have played a central role in the formation of the welfare state (Ewald 1991) – concepts for handling dangers and uncertainties by means of knowledge that relates the closed space of past experience with the open horizon of future expectation. In varying ways, this historicity is associated with agency at different levels of social policies. In political decision-making on social policies, the tension between experience and expectation is dealt with by means of political planning, yet the decisions on long-term issues often have the nature of a short-term compromise between conflicting interests. In the functioning of social service and social security systems, the actors implementing the political decisions and producing services and security are supposed to cope with the tension of experience and expectation by the constant calculation of risks, resources, efficiency, and the intended and unintended consequences of alternative measures.

Too often in comparative welfare state research, national chronologies of social policy legislation are compared, and quantitative comparisons are made by means of variables describing characteristics of national welfare policies and institutions. One should take into account that these policies and institutions have been shaped and changed through processes and conflicts in which practical inter- and cross-national comparisons have played an important role in political agenda-setting, in political arguments and in the production and transmission of social knowledge (Rodgers 1998; Kettunen 2006; Petersen 2006). Recognizing the significant role of comparisons as political practice is important for overcoming the methodological nationalism of comparative research in a way that helps to take seriously the continuous roles of the nation-states and to examine how transnational processes have taken place through and within national and nationalist modes of thought and action.

In efforts to get beyond the comparative research settings that focus on separate isolated nation-state units, research into political and cultural transfers has been a step in the right direction. However, it is not enough to examine transfers between pre-given (nation-state) units. One should be able to analyse transfers, translations, interactions and crossings as constitutive practices in the formation of the (nation-state) parties of these relationships. This is one of the promising aspects in ‘histoire croisée’ advocated by Michael
Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann (2003, 2006) and in many approaches developed under the umbrella of ‘transnational history’ (see Iriye and Saunier 2009) applied to social policies, for example by Christoph Conrad (2006).

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The authors of this book, coming from different research milieus and representing different disciplines and research interests, share the emphasis on historical and transnational dimensions in the welfare state and contribute to history as a cross-disciplinary principle. Reflecting the fact that this book has been written within the framework of the Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel (The Nordic Welfare State – Historical Foundations and Future Challenges), many chapters focus on the Nordic welfare state. However, not only do we find it crucial to put the particular welfare states concerned into historical, comparative and transnational contexts – we also find ‘the Nordic model’ a good case for discussing the analytical limits and political meanings of model comparisons as well as for examining the ways in which transnational processes shape national policies and institutions and take place within and through nation-states.

From this point of view, Pauli Kettunen examines in Chapter 2 the national welfare states in the Nordic countries as transnational historical constructions. Starting from the modernizing nation-state society as the framework for addressing ‘the social question’ from periphery–centre perspectives in the late nineteenth century, the discussion proceeds to the phase of globalized capitalism with increased economic and social asymmetries vis-à-vis the role of spatial ties. These asymmetries have questioned the trust in virtuous circles between social equality, economic growth and widening democracy within a national society, but also have created preconditions for new comparative constructions of a national ‘us’, concerned about the competitiveness of the national community. Kettunen argues that in the Nordic countries old welfare state institutions have been modified to serve new competition-state functions. In this incremental change, new post-welfare-state and old pre-welfare-state modes of understanding the social seem to be intertwined, notably in matters concerning the role of work.

Klaus Petersen analyses in Chapter 3 the shaping of the Nordic welfare states as processes at, and interactions between, three levels: the national, the Nordic and the international. As one should recognize that welfare states in general and the Nordic welfare states in particular are historically embedded in the nation-state, it is also essential to explore the role played by the Nordic region as a special geographical–political–cultural arena and an epistemic community with a strong tradition for cooperation, internal rivalry, interdependence and mutual imitation. Nordic communication and cooperation have
influenced ‘the Nordic model’ both as a transnational concept and as an important factor in the shaping of the national welfare systems. However, the development and the role of Nordic region have always been preconditioned by wider inter- and transnational transformations, transfers and interdependencies which at the same time influenced both the positions and roles of different Nordic countries in Nordic cooperation and their national developments. Thus transnational ideas on welfare issues, social political practices as well as global economies, and supranational institutions and networks, are an integral part of national and regional welfare state histories.

As Stein Kuhnle demonstrates in Chapter 4, solutions to ‘the social question’ in the Nordic countries in the late nineteenth century were formed in an international context characterized by varying (trans)formations of nation-states and the production and diffusion of knowledge, ideas and models. In these learning processes ideas were transferred and modified, adapted and rejected. In order to understand the present institutional and normative characteristics of the Nordic welfare states, a long historical perspective is needed, one that includes sensitivity to how historical agents conceived domestic social and political challenges and how they learnt about and were influenced by external events, actors and ideas for new public policies and policy solutions. It becomes clear that the launch of national social security systems cannot simply be explained by the stage of industrial modernization. Nordic and wider international comparisons between the timings of these reforms indicate that such an explanation would be untenably reductionist. Instead, Kuhnle points out the significance of state administrative capacities, not least the role of statistical institutions, for the early developments of social security systems and, consequently, for the later making of the Nordic welfare states into an international ‘model’.

The role of religion for European welfare state traditions is examined by Kees van Kersbergen in Chapter 4. In his view, ‘the Social Democratic model of explanation’ is actually still prominent in welfare state research, and it severely limits the perspectives of comparative analysis, marginalizing the impact of religion on the welfare state. This impact can be recognized and investigated at different levels; these include the contents of faith and the role of theological doctrines, the organized practices of churches and parishes, the impact of religion as a cultural force, the influence of religiously inspired political movements – especially Christian democracy – and the level of macrosociological processes such as modernization, social cleavage formation and secularization. As van Kersbergen argues, the impacts of religion on the welfare state, and the different impacts of Catholicism and Protestantism, and Lutheranism and Reformed Protestantism, have been mediated through political movements and processes in which elements of respective religious social doctrines have been given up or redefined. This concerns, not least, the rela-
tionship between the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and the formation of the Christian democratic welfare state.

In Chapter 6, Pirjo Markkola focuses on the role of Lutheranism in the history of the Nordic welfare states. It has become popular in the Lutheran church to draw long linear continuities from the Reformation to the present ‘Nordic model’ as an argument for defending the welfare state or welfare society. In recent welfare state research the Lutheran heritage has been associated with such characteristics of the Nordic welfare states as egalitarianism, the combination of the strong state and strong individualism, and the emphasis on full employment. The Nordic welfare states have been described as secularized Lutheranism, but as Markkola maintains, the religious dimensions of welfare policies are still poorly investigated and the assumptions of linear continuities, so typical of the general overviews on this issue, need critical historical testing. Presenting and assessing discussions on the relationship between Lutheranism and the Nordic model of welfare provision, the chapter addresses questions regarding the changing and varying relationships between the state and the church in the Nordic countries, the impact of the Reformation, the formation of poor relief and the diaconal work of the churches, and later political-theological disputes on welfare and religion. These are also significant topics for further research.

Developing a framework for comparative research in family policies and welfare states, Sonya Michel points out in Chapter 7 that ‘family’ is a contingent historical term. One should ask who or what is defining it, and for what purpose. Moreover, the contents of family policies are not always intended, and the intentional policies may have unintended consequences. And these policies with their intended and unintended consequences do not develop in isolated national contexts. Historical comparisons of ‘family policy regimes’ should involve transnational interdependencies as a pivotal aspect of analysis. It appears especially important to explore the different ways in which large transnational transformations – gradual changes and rapid crises and ruptures – have occurred in different regional and national contexts. Thus periodization plays a crucial role in comparative historical research in general and in the analysis of family policies in particular. Focusing on the advanced industrial democracies of North America, Europe and the Antipodes, Michel discusses the intercourse between transnational transformations and national family policies by distinguishing between five different periods, starting from the ‘long nineteenth century’, which established the family as the bulwark of emerging nations, and ending with the period of neo-liberalism and globalized family.

The decisive role of cross-national and notably intra-Nordic comparisons in policy processes clearly appears in Chapter 8, in the analysis of the Nordic marriage reforms of the early twentieth century by Kari Melby, Anna-Birte
Ravn, Bente Rosenbeck and Christina Carlsson Wetterberg. The authors argue that these reforms represented a specifically Nordic – as opposed to English or German – regulation of relations between women and the nation-state. Even though there were differences between the Nordic countries, a specifically Nordic ‘marriage model’ came to be characterized by a scientific understanding of the formation of marriage, the liberalization of divorce and economic equality between men and women. In very concrete ways, the national marriage reforms resulted from intra-Nordic communication and cooperation. This model of regulation combined individualism with state intervention in such a way that marriage was regulated as a modern, secular institution. At the same time, this regulation of marriage and family was closely associated with national concerns for the quality of population and with new ideas of ‘prophylactic social policies’, aiming at preventing social problems instead of compensating for them and providing ingredients for a universalistic notion of national welfare state.

Since the 1980s, the transnational ideological turn towards more market and individual free choice has challenged major elements of this notion. In light of the developments in Denmark and Sweden, Jørn Henrik Petersen explores in Chapter 9 social democratic responses to this turn and challenge. As his ‘test case’ he examines personal care and practical assistance in the home for elderly and handicapped. These have been central elements in the social democratic understanding of the ‘classic welfare state’, and they clearly belong to those policy areas in which the legitimacy of universalistic welfare state institutions and principles has been challenged by market- and free-choice-oriented solutions and arrangements. Petersen concludes that at the level of principles, Danish and Swedish social democrats have paid lip service to free choice and competition, yet only as instruments within the public-sector framework. They have taken no market-accommodating initiatives with regard to home help services. In his view, however, it is rather more remarkable that the social democrats have not been active in developing convincing arguments against the basic idea of market-accommodating reforms. This leads to two big critical questions: ‘Who are, indeed, the consumers in cases financed from tax money? Are the social services equal to private goods?’

Christopher Lloyd argues in Chapter 10 for an evolutionary approach to the research of the history and future of ‘social democratic welfare capitalism’. For him, this concept refers to a particular combination of liberalism, social fairness ideology, extensive state welfare and the collective regulation of labour, with capitalist economic imperatives. In the post-WWII decades, most mainstream political parties within the states of social democratic welfare capitalism ‘more or less converged’ on the essential aspects of this form of capitalism. Today social democratic welfare capitalism is haunted by spectres arising from globalized markets, fiscal crisis and new forms of popular move-
ments. These spectres can be analysed, as Lloyd does, as the evolution of ‘ultramodernity’ – that is, the evolving of many aspects of modernity to an extreme. In his comparative discussion, Lloyd especially focuses on two zones of welfare capitalism that were once quite similar but diverged in the 1980s: the Nordic countries on the one hand, and Australia and New Zealand on the other. Hard questions emerge: ‘Can the Nordic solidaristic and competitive state model survive at all in a globalizing and multicultural world? … Can the divergent, neo-liberal Australasian societies retain anything of their social democratic legacy or will they produce a new kind of social model for the twenty-first century?’

The book concludes with a general account by Christoph Conrad in Chapter 11 on the consequences of ‘the transnational turn’ in social sciences and historical research for social policy research. As he maintains, a point of departure for this turn has been dissatisfaction with cross-national comparisons that tend ‘to stabilize and even to essentialize each national case instead of accounting for the numerous relationships, interactions and communications between two and more units of comparison’. Conrad distinguishes between different ‘vectors of transnationality’ that should be recognized in different topics of social political research. They include the circulation of models, organizations and forums of transnationalization, communities and networks of experts, translations, mobile actors, transnational law and norms, financial transfers and human assistance, and global social policy. As he points out, research in transnational dimensions and processes should not overlook the nation-state as the decisive actor of social policies. A crucial question is the inherent relationship between transnational dimensions and the continuous but reshaped role of the nation-state.

NOTES

1. ‘Neo-institutionalism’ refers here to a vast range of approaches in social sciences, emerging especially in the 1990s in connection with vitalized cross-national comparative research interests and pointing out the role of institutions that were conceived of not only as formal (as did the ‘initial institutionalism’, see Hall 2003, 375–6) but also as informal rules of game.
2. Within the neo-institutionalist tradition, for example, Ira Katznelson (2003, 290–93), Paul Pierson (2004, 44–53), Kathleen Thelen (2003) and James Mahoney (Mahoney and Thelen 2010) have actually developed arguments in this direction.

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