

Preface

The Changing Welfare State in Europe: The Implications for Democracy is a collaborative effort centred on the University of Auckland Europe Institute. It was made possible through the inclusion of the institute in the RECON (Reconstituting Democracy) project funded by the European Union's sixth framework programme.

The work on this book took place over a period of years when national economies and welfare systems were put under severe strain caused by the impact of the financial and economic crisis. Before the crisis welfare systems were set to undergo profound change due to a number of identifiable challenges that were, however, not always fully understood. The process of change advanced in a slow and path-dependent manner influenced by national specificities deciding the extent and sequence of reform. On the whole, despite distinct national trajectories, these transformations appeared to proceed according to the same template. Intensified European policy coordination from the late 1990s onwards goes a long way towards explaining this development. The economic and financial crisis made it clear however that even though the prescriptions for welfare reform were similar the underlying economic conditions of individual European states and their ability to compete internationally differed greatly. At the time of writing it is too early to predict the impact of the crisis on individual European states with any certainty but one aspect of the crisis is that it struck with very different outcomes in different EU member states. On a more general level, it is also certain that the devastating effects of the crisis in the countries most beset by sovereign or private debt will result in greater economic and social heterogeneity in the EU with strong implications for its ability to devise, fund and implement common policies.

In a context of a deepening economic interdependence among the member states of the EU coupled with an increasing heterogeneous post-crisis fall-out, it seems all the more important that we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the different dimensions of the changes in the welfare state. The immediate management of the crisis has led to a reappraisal of economic and social governance in the EU that is bound to

have implications on democratic governance at both national and European level. This book contributes to the body of research-based knowledge that is necessary to conduct informed debate the implications for democracy in Europe of the system of multi-level governance that has already emerged in the area of social and economic policy.

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