

Soziologie – Sociology in the German-Speaking World

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Social Policy

Birgit Pfau-Effinger and Christopher Grages

Abstract: During the last two decades, comparative social-policy research has improved our understanding of the causes, processes, dynamics, and consequences of change in social policies. It has also broadened the horizon of sociological theory and research. It has shown that understanding the nature and generosity of welfare-state policies is crucial for explaining the cross-national differences in social structures as well as the effects of social-policy reforms on social inequality, poverty risks, social cleavages, and social cohesion. This review of the development of social-policy research focuses on theory and research in the field, with its primary emphasis being on sociological social-policy research in German-speaking countries.

Keywords: Welfare-state reforms, social policy, social inequality, social cohesion, welfare culture

1 Introduction

The main aim of this review is to show how sociology in German-speaking countries has contributed to theory and research in the international study of social policy. The concept of *social policy* refers to the areas of public policy that are directed towards the provision of social security and social services to citizens. According to Franz-Xaver Kaufmann (1997), governments take an explicitly “social” responsibility for the welfare of their citizens on the basis of distinct national social objectives and the aims and principles of social provision. The concept of *welfare-state policies* is also used to characterize these aspects of state policies (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Social policies are various kinds of state intervention in market conditions with the aim of influencing the societal distribution of resources and the resulting social stratification. It has been argued that these policies are a fundamental component of democracy and the functioning of market economies (Esping-Andersen, 1990). On the basis of the work of T.H. Marshall (2000 [1950]), it is common to conceptualize the institutionalized relationship between the state and the citizen as “social citizenship.”

Since social policies are part of the macro level of society, the primary focus of social-policy research is on cross-national or cross-regional differences and on historical change in social policies (Obinger et al., 2013). Sociologists mainly contribute to this by theories and research on the trends and social consequences of social policies. They also analyze the cultural, socio-structural, and demographic factors that can explain these changes. Sociological theory and research have shown that the degree of redistribution of financial resources by welfare states and their generosity towards those who are temporarily not employed (sick, disabled, unemployed, and retired persons as well as those who care for family members) are crucial for explaining the

degree of inequality, poverty, and social cohesion in a society. It seems that generous welfare states that take an inclusive approach to social citizenship create the most favorable conditions for a more egalitarian social structure along with greater social inclusion and social cohesion (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Particularly important to research on the relationship between welfare-state policies and social structures was Gösta Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990). According to his "welfare regime" approach, it is possible to distinguish between different ideal types of welfare regimes: the liberal, conservative, and social-democratic (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The main criteria for the construction of this typology are (a) the degree of generosity in granting social rights related to social security, which is indicated by the extent of "de-commodification"; (b) the ways in which welfare-state policies affect the structures of social inequality; and (c) the relative weight of the state, the market, and the family in the provision of social services. According to this approach (Esping-Andersen, 1990), the social-democratic welfare regime is ideal-typically based on a high degree of de-commodification, supports egalitarian social structures, and assigns the state the role of the main welfare provider. The liberal type has a low degree of de-commodification, encourages social polarization, and positions the market as the main provider of welfare. The conservative welfare regime, by contrast, has a medium degree of de-commodification by linking social security to paid employment, fosters hierarchically segmented stratification, and renders the family the main provider of welfare. Some authors have suggested extending this typology to include a Mediterranean (Ferrera, 1996) and Central-Eastern European (Fenger, 2007) type of welfare regime.

In recent years, mainly driven by German-language sociology, attempts have been made to link Esping-Andersen's welfare-regime typology (1990, 1999) to Hall and Soskice's (2001) "varieties of capitalism" approach (Ebbinghaus and Manow, 2001; Iversen, 2005; Korpi, 2006; Fleckenstein and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011; Paster, 2019) or to integrate both typologies (Schröder, 2009; 2013). The basic postulate of the connected approaches is that different institutional areas of market economies and welfare states can complement, reinforce, and support one another if they follow a common logic (Etzerodt and Eriksen, 2017; Hall and Gingerich, 2009; Schröder, 2019). In addition to functional complementarity, common political origins have also been discussed as explanatory factors for institutional interrelations, especially in the welfare-state discourse (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011). More recently, a new classification model for differentiating "welfare democracies" was introduced that classifies welfare states on the basis of their political orders and explains differences in the context of longer economic and political trajectories (Manow, Palier, and Schwandner, 2018).

Feminist theory and research on the welfare state have contributed to this debate by broadening the theoretical framework for the analysis and classification of social policies to account for the integration of welfare-state policies towards childcare and long-term care for the elderly (LTC policies for short), with concepts like the "care regimes" approach (Daly and Lewis, 2000; Ostner and Lewis, 1995; Villa/Hark, GENDER, this volume).

Herbert Obinger and Manfred G. Schmidt have recently published a German-language *Handbuch Sozialpolitik (Social-Policy Handbook)* that includes contributions from many welfare-state researchers in German-speaking countries (Obinger and Schmidt, 2019). Some of the salient focal points of these contributions are theories of social policies, challenges related to social policies, and research on the different fields of social policies. A comprehensive overview and discussion of social-policy research in Germany and its perspectives is provided by the book *Wohlfahrtspolitik im 21. Jahrhundert (Welfare Politics in the 21st Century)*, edited by an interdisciplinary team of welfare-state researchers. This volume discusses a wide variety of topics that pertain to theory and research in social-policy studies and includes a section that reviews the role of sociology in welfare-state research in Germany (Busemeyer et al., 2013). According to the main conclusions of their review, the field of social-policy research in Germany had long been largely composed of small research units and rather fragmented. There was also a lack of state support for scientific research and teaching in the field. In view of the great significance of this field in social science and to society at large, the authors recommended that public policies should strengthen social-policy research in Germany.

In recent years, public support for welfare-state research in Germany has been strengthened as part of a program of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*; BMAS) that supported the establishment of several new professorships in social-policy research. Also, two new publicly funded research centers with an emphasis on social-policy analysis were recently established. These are the Collaborative Research Centre “Global Dynamics of Social Policy” at the University of Bremen, funded by the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*; DFG), and the Cluster of Excellence on “The Politics of Inequality” at the University of Konstanz under the framework of the Excellence Initiative of the German Government and the Federal States. Sociologists are included in the interdisciplinary collaboration in all of these activities.

The present article first gives an overview of general trends in comparative social-policy research on welfare-state reforms within the last two decades (section 2). In section 3, the article highlights three selected strands of theory and research on social policies of the last two decades to which sociologists in German-speaking countries have made substantial contributions. The article’s fourth section closes with some reflections on the perspectives of sociological research on social policies. All of the sections examine how German-language sociology has contributed to the wider debate.

2 Overview of General Trends in Comparative Welfare-State Research

At the close of the 20th century, the welfare states of the affluent Western societies were confronted with new challenges that were caused in part by exogenous processes, including globalization, EU integration, and the transformation of the Central and Eastern European societies from Socialism to Capitalism, as well as endogenous processes that involved cultural, social, demographic, and economic change within European societies (Alber and Standing, 2000; Kaufmann, 2003; Offe, 1996; 2019; Pierson, 2001). There has been much theorizing and research on the direction and nature of these reforms and their causes.

The directions of changes in social policies in the last two decades have not been without their controversy. Whereas some scholars identified a competitive “race to the bottom” associated with retrenchments in expensive welfare protection (Alber and Standing, 2000; Castles, 2004; Korpi, 2003; Scharpf, 1999), others argued that exogenous pressures had been met with an expansion of welfare that would function as a social buffer (Rieger and Leibfried, 2003).

This debate has resulted in a broad consensus that the development of social policy has been contradictory. Many researchers now argue that welfare-state reforms in many countries have weakened the role of the state in the provision of social security on account of marketization and privatization as well as cuts in social benefits and the curtailment of social rights. This rollback has primarily related to unemployment policies and pension policies, and particularly so in Germany (Barbier and Knuth, 2011; Betzelt, 2011; Bridgen and Meyer, 2014; Ebbinghaus, 2015; Frericks, 2010), whereas reform in the areas of family and long-term care (LTC) policy has been characterized by an expansion of social rights and public infrastructure and a strengthening of the role of the state (Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011). Sociologists in German-speaking countries have tended to focus on the “conservative” type of welfare regime in Esping-Andersen’s typology, which is the dominant form of welfare provision in Germany. This welfare-state model typically comes with a considerable degree of poverty and social inequality, the reason being that this type of social-security system is closely tied to the employment system in that people’s eligibility for social benefits and the amount that they can expect to receive depends on the length of their paid employment and their previous income (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Offe, 1996).

German-speaking sociologists have also made substantial contributions to the debate about different “care regimes.” Here Germany has been seen as a typical example of a “familialistic” care regime, whereby the state places the primary responsibility for childcare and LTC on the family (Leitner, 2003; Ostner and Lewis, 1995). With regard to specific trends in welfare-state policies, German-speaking social-policy researchers have shown that a weakening of social rights related to social security and the extension of social rights and infrastructure in childcare and LTC policies reflect

the general ambiguity of welfare-state development (Bridgen and Meyer, 2014; Eggers; Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2020; Fleckenstein, 2011; Nullmeier, 2004; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011).

As for the causes of this development, many scholars have emphasized the impact of exogenous pressure on the welfare state as a result of the global expansion of trade, an increase in the flow of investments and new technologies, as well as the internationalization of labor markets. These scholars often assume that such pressure creates convergence among nation states because their experiencing similar pressures brings about corresponding developments (Castles, 2004; Huber and Stephens, 2001). An opposing argument contests the influence of external pressure and focuses more closely on endogenous dynamics in welfare-state development. This perspective emphasizes more the path dependence of welfare reforms on the basis of institutional, structural, and cultural differences, which lead to a persistence of differences despite exogenous pressure (Brady, Beckfield, and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2005; Pierson, 2001). However, researchers have made an argument that welfare-state reforms based on endogenous factors can also lead to fundamental social-policy change. A good example is the German family-policy reform of the mid-2000s, which was a path-breaking shift from a conservative male-breadwinner-oriented policy towards a policy with a more gender-egalitarian orientation. With these policies, the German welfare state reacted to demographic change, the increase in female employment, and the broader cultural change towards a more gender-egalitarian family model (Fleckenstein, 2011; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011).

In the theoretical discussion about factors that influence social-policy change, the role of cultural ideas has also been examined (Fleckenstein, 2011; Kaufmann, 2003; Pfau-Effinger, 2005a; b). Kaufmann (1991) introduced the term *welfare culture* to describe cultural ideas that are related to social policies. Such cultural ideas include, for example, cultural values related to social solidarity, to the criteria of people's "deservingness" of receiving social benefits, to the role of the state and the market in the provision of welfare, and to the role of the state and the family in the provision of childcare and care for the elderly (Pfau-Effinger, 2005a).

For a long time, the main focus of welfare-state research was on the national welfare state, and theory and research were characterized by "methodological nationalism" (Busemeyer et al., 2013). Within the last two decades, social-policy analyses have started to include a global dimension (Deacon, Hulse, and Stubbs, 1997; Deacon, 2010; Kaasch and Stubbs, 2014). The chief issues of examination include the role of international and supranational actors such as NGOs, the EU, and social movements, as well as the global diffusion of social policies. The ideational foundation of global social policy can be traced back to the early 1940s; it has been shown that such policies were closely linked to the development of international organizations like the UN, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Kaufmann, 2003).

3 The Contribution of Sociology to the Main Strands of Social-Policy Research

The following section discusses the contribution of sociological theory and research to the analysis of some defining trends in the development of social policies that have played a particularly important role in the evolution of social inequality, poverty, and social cohesion, with its main focus being on sociology in German-speaking countries.

These strands of research include sociological research on social-policy trends and the social consequences of

- retrenchment, privatization, and marketization;
- familialization and de-familialization in care-related policies; and
- the globalization of social policies.

3.1 Retrenchment, privatization, and marketization

It has been shown that retrenchment and support for the privatization and marketization of social security and social services have been major trends in welfare-state reforms since the 1990s. The term *retrenchment* refers to cuts in social benefits and services, which have been especially strong in Germany with regard to unemployment benefits and pensions. The term *marketization* concerns the construction of social security and social services as goods that are traded in (quasi)-markets that are shaped by welfare-state policies, whereas the term *privatization* concerns the outsourcing of public tasks and a strengthening of the role of for-profit providers (Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Bode, 2012; Nullmeier, 2004; Schimank and Volkmann, 2017; Starke, 2008). German authors (Ebbinghaus, 2015; Frericks, 2010) have emphasized that privatization and marketization are two different trends that should be analyzed separately, although both trends have been politically promoted simultaneously. Privatization, and principally the strengthening of for-profit providers, played an important role in pension reforms (for example, private pensions schemes such as *Riester-Rente*). Unemployment policies were restructured on the basis of “activation policies” that sought to strengthen the connection between the willingness of the unemployed to return to the labor market and their eligibility for unemployment benefits, while the effectiveness of these policies was reinforced by additionally cutting unemployment benefits. Privatization and marketization were also strongly promoted in policies towards long-term care (Bode, 2012; Theobald et al., 2017). The concept of the social citizen was reinterpreted in this context as the “self-responsible” social citizen who acts like a “consumer” in welfare markets (Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2019; Frericks and Höppner, 2019; Gilbert, 2002; Rostgaard, 2011; Vabø, 2006).

German social-policy researchers have shown that the retrenchments in the social-security system, chiefly with regard to pensions and unemployment benefits, was particularly strong in the conservative German welfare state (Barbier and Knuth, 2011;

Betzelt, 2011; Bridgen and Meyer, 2014; Ebbinghaus, 2018). In addition, the principle of “self-reliance” of social citizens on the basis of weakening state support was considerably strengthened in pension policy and unemployment policy (Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2019; Frericks and Höppner, 2019). An argument has been made that this trend has resulted in a transformation of the German welfare state into a mix of the “conservative” and “liberal” types of welfare regime (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2014; Nullmeier, 2004).

Many researchers agree that welfare states have reacted to financial problems and demographic aging through the processes of retrenchment, privatization, and marketization. However, such cost-cutting and free-market approaches were not the only possible strategy to welfare reforms. Researchers pointed out that alternative options were available, and these generally involved an increase in social contributions or taxes and in public debt. Many European welfare states have chosen such a path (Bonoli and Palier, 2007; Ebbinghaus, 2015) and have implemented changes that have affected the life-course norms governing social citizenship (Frericks, Harvey, and Maier, 2010). It has also been argued that neoliberal ideas, which were largely introduced into the discourse by the OECD and the World Bank, contribute substantially to the explanation of why the governments of many welfare states, including several Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, preferred a strategy of privatization and marketization, even if this entailed a paradigm shift in their political aims (Ebbinghaus, 2015; Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Butterwegge, Lösch, and Ptak, 2017). Furthermore, social-investment ideas also played an important role in the implementation of labor-market activation policies that aimed to prevent educational dropout, (long-term) unemployment, and early labor-market exit (Dingeldey, 2011; Esping-Andersen et al., 2002).

Sociological research found that welfare-state reforms based on the retrenchment, privatization, and marketization of social security and social services have been a driving force behind the weakening of social cohesion and the increase in social inequality, poverty, and economic uncertainty in most affluent countries over the last two decades (Palier and Martin, 2010; Butterwegge, 2012; Hinrichs and Jessoula, 2012; Koos and Sachweh, 2017). As a consequence of such reforms, social cleavages were also exacerbated (Clasen, 2011; Emmenegger, Häusermann, Palier, and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2012; Groh-Samberg, Hurch, and Waitkus, 2018; Lessenich, 2008), albeit to different degrees in various types of welfare regimes (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2014). Social-policy researchers in German-speaking countries have shown that the conservative German welfare state is a good example of a policy that has contributed to the widening of various kinds of social cleavages. Among such cleavages are the one between the majority of employed people and several kinds of socially excluded or marginalized social groups, including new social groups of immigrants without legal status (Böhnke, 2008, 2010; Dingeldey, 2015; Lessenich, 2008), and socio-structural polarization as a consequence of the shrinking of the middle classes (Burzan and Berger, 2010; Frericks, Harvey, and Maier, 2010). Another argument has been made that, besides social policies, labor-market policies have further contributed to growing

inequality on the basis of processes of “dualization”—that is, a widening and deepening of insider–outsider divides in labor markets or the creation of new ones (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Eichhorst and Marx, 2012; Eichhorst, Marx, and Tobsch, 2015; Palier, 2010).

According to the findings of empirical research, retrenchment and policies that encourage the privatization and marketization of social services often lead to social inequality in the availability of these services and in the quality of the services themselves (Bode, 2012; Vabø, 2006). Other studies have demonstrated that the privatization and marketization of social services have problematic consequences for the working conditions of professional care workers and their job satisfaction (Kröger, 2011; Theobald, 2011) as well as for the use of informal family care (Da Roit and Le Bihan, 2011). Altogether, the results of these studies have shown that working conditions and job satisfaction have generally suffered from the trend toward “marketization” and that market principles are only compatible to a limited extent with the underlying logics of the provision of public and familial care.

3.2 Extension of family policies and long-term care policies

With the introduction of new childcare and long-term care policies since the 1990s, many welfare states have supplanted their old conservative care policies that still supported the male breadwinner model of the family (Ostner and Lewis, 1995) with new care policies that support a dual-breadwinner family model, mainly through extra-familial care services. As part of these reforms, many welfare states have introduced new social rights related to care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997) and extended their infrastructure of publicly funded provision for childcare (Daly and Ferragina, 2017; Kreimer et al., 2011) as well as LTC (Ranci and Pavolini, 2013). This trend was partially connected to a conceptual shift from the citizen as family member to the citizen as an individual, even if the concept of the citizen as family member is still relevant in many welfare states (Frericks and Höppner, 2019). However, European welfare states still differ substantially in terms of the degree to which they support extra-familial LTC and public daycare for children under the age of three (Bahle, 2017; Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2018).

German sociologists have made substantial contributions to the theoretical debate about theoretical concepts for the analysis of family policies and care policies, such as the concept of *de-familialization/familialization* that is very common in the classification of family policies and long-term care policies according to their influence on gender inequality. Some of their contributions have involved suggestions on how to develop the concept further (Eggers, Grages, and Pfau-Effinger, 2018) or addressed changes in the life-course norms of social citizenship (Frericks, Harvey, and Maier, 2010; Gottschall, 2019; Leitner, 2003; Lohmann and Zagel, 2016). They have also shown that Germany is a good example of a paradigm shift from a “familializing”

towards a “de-familializing” childcare policy (Fleckenstein, 2011; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011).

More recently, the correlation between welfare-state policies towards childcare and long-term care and the employment of migrants in private households has become a major issue in the debate (Lutz and Pallenga-Möllenbeck, 2011; Theobald, 2011). Some sociologists have emphasized that the LTC policies of the German welfare state offer a good example of a policy field in which gaps in the public provision and financing of LTC are filled in part by migrant carers who serve as low-wage workers in private households.

The reform of welfare-state policies toward childcare and long-term care since the 1990s has been to some degree a reaction to the increase in female employment and demographic changes. The principal aims of these reforms were to support women’s integration into the labor market and to reduce the risk of care-related poverty for the elderly and parents engaged in care-taking (Leitner, Ostner, and Schratzenstaller, 2004; Leitner, 2013; Ostner and Mätzke, 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011). German sociologists and social scientists have shown that a shift towards a more egalitarian “gender culture” (Pfau-Effinger, 1998) has also contributed to this paradigm change in family policies (Fleckenstein, 2011; Ferragini and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2015; Pfau-Effinger, 2005a, b). Comparative research has further found evidence that the reforms were partly associated with a shift in the concept of the welfare state from its role in financing social security towards its role in preventing social risks by investing in human capital as part of the concept of the *social investment state*. The European Union adopted this concept in the context of the Lisbon Strategy (Allmendinger and Nikolai, 2010; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2015; Morel, Palier, and Palme, 2013; Naumann, 2014).

The consequences of the reforms of family and long-term care policies from the perspective of women’s labor-market integration and gender equality has been another important topic to which German sociologists have made a substantial contribution (Gottschall, 2019; Gottschall and Dingeldey, 2016; Grunow and Evertsson, 2019; Konietzka/Feldhaus/Kreyenfeld/Trappe, FAMILY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, this volume). Many authors have argued that family policies that support public daycare for children have a positive effect on women’s and men’s ability to reconcile family and employment. This argument has been contested. A comprehensive study of the relationship between work–family policies and labor-market outcomes by Brady, Blome, and Kmec (2019) found that work–family policies are not associated with labor-market outcomes for women or mothers. Jensen et al. (2017) concluded on the basis of a comparative study of Europe and Asia that cultural differences rather than differences in family policies are what explain cross-national differences in the rate of part-time employment among mothers of small children. Other recent research has also analyzed the caring behavior of fathers in the context of parental-leave policies (Aunkofer et al., 2019; Reimer, 2019).

Eggers et al. (2019) conducted a cross-national comparative study in which they have argued that a combination of very generous familial and extra-familial care

policies has considerable potential to promote gender equality and that this approach is particularly common in LTC policies in Nordic welfare states.

3.3 Research on global social-policy trends

For a long time, traditional welfare-state research was mainly focused on the nation state. However, social-policy analysis has always included a global dimension (Barr, 2001; Deacon, Hulse, and Stubbs, 1997), and German sociologists have contributed heavily to this debate as well (Kaasch and Stubbs, 2014; Leisering, 2019). With the establishment of the new DFG Collaborative Research Centre on “Global Dynamics of Social Policy” at the University of Bremen in 2017, in which a large team of social scientists collaborate, this strand of social-policy research has recently gained further importance in Germany. Core research fields that have arisen from this perspective encompass the emergence of social policy and welfare programs in non-Western countries that follow or adopt international or global models. It has been shown that distinct social policies have increasingly also been developed and implemented in the developing and emerging countries of the Global South (Gerharz/Rescher, *GLOBAL SOUTH*, this volume). There they often take different forms than in the affluent societies of traditional welfare states. The welfare states of developing countries are rather limited because of low governmental tax revenues and weak state authority (Hort and Kuhnle, 2000; Kaasch, Sumarto, and Wilmsen, 2018; Kim, 2008; Kwon, 2014; Leisering and Liu, 2010).

Research has found regional associations of governments to be the leading actors in the development of social policies in the Global South; these include entities like MERCOSUR in South America, ASEAN in Southeast Asia, or ECOWAS in West Africa (Deacon et al., 2009; Yeates, 2009). One of sociology’s more important contributions to research on global social policy, and an area of research in which German-speaking sociologists have also participated, lies in the emphasis on global cultural models and ideas that spread and diffuse through international organizations and shape the emergence and development of social policy (Hasse, 2003; Berten and Leisering, 2017; Davy, Davy, and Leisering, 2013; Gliszczynski and Leisering, 2016; Leisering, 2019). This perspective is closely connected to the world-polity approach of John W. Meyer (2009).

However, since a responsible global welfare state—in the traditional sense of the co-presence and combination of the social as a state objective with an institutional social sector (Kaufmann, 1997)—does not exist, the scope of reinforcing and implementing global social policy is limited. Deacon, Hulse, and Stubbs (1997) delineated three types of interventions or measures of social policy: provision, redistribution, and regulation. At the global level, the instruments and measures for provision and redistribution are lacking; the focus of global social policy therefore lies in regulation and soft coordination. The most prominent forms of regulation are the proceedings before international courts or the dispute settlement procedures of the WTO. Soft

coordination is reflected in the human-rights cases of the United Nations and the Council of Europe (or the EU's method of open coordination). The ILO also uses such methods as these for monitoring and enforcing its conventions and plays an equally important role in providing actors with the tools to meet international standards. Even softer coordination takes place in the form of international conferences and international target declarations. These procedures can be effective if they are able to create public awareness and define mandatory objectives (Strang and Chang, 1993).

Unlike the ambivalent developments in social policy and the wider trend towards retrenchment in social security in the traditional welfare states, countries in the Global South have generally experienced a large expansion of social policy within the last two decades (Barrientos, 2013). With regard to the outcome of such policies in these countries and regions, sociologists are mainly interested in the role of social policy in the mitigation of poverty, which is often predicated on the steady expansion of the beneficiaries (traditionally often limited to members of the military and public administration) of labor rights, social security, and healthcare, as well as more recently social cash transfers (Leisering, 2019). Some researchers have emphasized the importance of inclusive growth in reducing poverty by fostering redistribution and minimizing inequality in developing countries of the Global South along with social investment as a plausible alternative to neoliberal retrenchment in global social-policy dynamics (Busemeyer and Garritzmann, 2019; Deeming and Smyth, 2018; Schmid, 2018).

4 Conclusion

Over the last twenty years, sociological research on the causes and consequences of changes in the welfare state and the development of theoretical approaches and concepts have improved our understanding of the complex interrelationships between the development of welfare-state policies and the development of social structures and cultures, and sociologists in German-speaking countries have made fundamental contributions to this field of study. This is mainly with respect to the following issues:

- Theory and research have shown that welfare-state policies play an important role in explaining cross-national differences in social inequality, poverty, and social cohesion. They have also made a case that strong and generous welfare states that take a comprehensive approach to social citizenship create the most favorable conditions for more egalitarian social structures, social inclusion, and social cohesion. Sociological theory and research have led to a better and more nuanced understanding of this relationship.
- The theories and research on the role of welfare-state policies in the work–family relationship and gender inequality, and about the effects of welfare-state change on this relationship, have led to an improvement of theoretical concepts and research in the field.

- New research on the globalization of social policies offers important insight into the effect of transnational diffusion of social policies and migration on social outcomes.

Sociologists in German-speaking countries have contributed to the development of theory and research in the sociology of social policy in manifold ways. A particular merit of their contribution is that they have evaluated theoretical assumptions related to the causes, consequences, and directions of welfare-state change with a specific focus on Germany, which has generally represented the conservative type of welfare regime in Esping-Andersen's typology (1990) and the familialistic care regime in the classical typology of care regimes (Lewis, 1992). It has been shown that the German welfare state has changed in an equivocal way as result of the welfare-state reforms, with a weakening of social rights in the social security systems and an extension of social rights and infrastructure in terms of policies towards childcare and LTC. With regard to the classification of welfare states, the German welfare state still exhibits substantial features of the conservative welfare regime, but these are combined with features of the liberal and social democratic types. Also, it has been partly transformed from a predominantly familializing care regime towards a care regime with de-familializing features, mainly in its childcare policies.

However, we argue that sociological theory and research on social policies too often treat the institutional settings of social policy as coherent units. We suggest that both in theory building and empirical research, researchers should take into account the complex interrelations between different policies and political institutions and consider that their impact on social inequality and social cohesion might result from policies and institutions interacting in incoherent or even contradictory ways. There is also a need for extended theory building and research on the relationship between the design and generosity of welfare states and the social groups that are primarily affected by social marginalization and exclusion. Additionally, more research is called for on the ways in which vulnerable groups deal with current welfare-state policies and how it is possible to explain cross-national differences in this regard.

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