

Beyond Welfare State Models

Transnational Historical Perspectives on
Social Policy

Edited by

Pauli Kettunen and **Klaus Petersen**



Contributors

Christoph Conrad is Professor of Contemporary European History at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. In 2008–9 he was a senior fellow of the Freiburg Institute of Advanced Studies and a visiting scholar at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University. His current research interests concern the past and present of welfare states, as well as the comparative history of national historiographies and the writing of European history. Recent publications include: ‘Sozialpolitik transnational’ in the 2006 thematic issue of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32 (4), 437–44, which he edited; with Laura von Mandach editing *Auf der Kippe. Integration und Ausschluss in Sozialhilfe und Sozialpolitik* (Zurich: Seismo, 2008); and the essay ‘Was macht eigentlich der Wohlfahrtsstaat? Internationale Perspektiven auf das 20. Jahrhundert’ (Essen, in print).

Kees van Kersbergen is Professor of Comparative Politics at the Department of Political Science of Aarhus University, Århus, Denmark. He is co-editor of *Acta Politica* and has published widely on comparative welfare state issues and on religion and politics. His latest book, co-edited with Philip Manow, is *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). He is currently working, with Barbara Vis, on a study of the possibilities and constraints of welfare state reform.

Pauli Kettunen is Professor of Political History at the University of Helsinki, Finland and Director of the Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel: The Nordic Welfare State – Historical Foundations and Future Challenges. He has published widely on social movements and labour history, industrial relations and welfare state, nationalism and globalization as well as the conceptual history of politics. Recent publications include ‘The power of international comparison – a perspective on the making and challenging of the Nordic welfare state’, in *The Nordic Model of Welfare: A Historical Reappraisal*, edited by N. F. Christiansen et al. (Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), *The Cold War and the Politics of History*, co-edited with J. Aunesluoma (Edita, 2008); and ‘The Nordic model and the International Labour Organization’, in *Regional Cooperation and International Organizations*, edited by N. Götz and H. Haggrén (Routledge, 2009).

Stein Kuhnle is Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Bergen, Norway, and Professor of Comparative Social Policy at Hertie School of Governance, Berlin, Germany. He has published widely on comparative welfare state development, including in recent years: *Normative Foundations of the Welfare State: The Nordic Experience*, edited with Nanna Kildal (Routledge, 2005); *Survival of the European Welfare State*, editor (Routledge, 2000); and *The Nordic Welfare State*, in Chinese, edited with Chen Yinzhang, Klaus Petersen and Pauli Kettunen (Fudan University Press, 2010).

Christopher Lloyd is Professor of Economic History in the School of Business, Economics and Public Policy at University of New England, Armidale, Australia. His research interests include the methodology and theory of social science history, Australian historical political economy, the comparative history of settler economies, and Australian Indigenous economic history. Recent articles have appeared in, among other places, *Australian Economic History Review*, *History and Theory*, *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, *New Zealand Journal of History*, and *Australian Journal of Political Science*. A major edited book on *Settler Economies in World History* will be published by Brill in 2011 and an edited book on *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies* will be published by ANU Press, Canberra. During 2007 and 2009 he spent periods as a visiting professor in the NordWel Centre at the University of Helsinki working on the comparative global history of social democratic welfare capitalism.

Pirjo Markkola is Professor of Finnish History at the University of Jyväskylä. She has several publications on gender, religion and the history of welfare in Finland and the Nordic countries, for example the edited volume *Gender and Vocation. Women, Religion and Social Change in the Nordic Countries, 1830–1940* (Finnish Literature Society, 2000). She is a research team leader and a member of the management group of NordWel. Recent publications in English include 'Lutheranism, Women and the History of the Welfare States in the Nordic Countries', in *På kant med historien*, edited by Karin Lützen et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Forlag, 2008).

Kari Melby is Professor of History at Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture/Centre for Feminist and Gender Studies and Pro-rector for Research, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway. Her main area of research is gender and political participation/gendered policies. Her books include analyses of women's professional and voluntary organizations. With A. Pylkkänen, B. Rosenbeck and

C.C. Wetterberg she published *Inte ett ord om kärlek. Äktenskap och politik i Norden ca. 1850–1930* [Not a Word about Love: Marriage and Politics in the Nordic Countries, 1850–1930] in 2006, the main conclusions of which were published in ‘The Nordic model of marriage’, *Women’s History Review*, 15 (4). With A-B. Ravn and C.C. Wetterberg she edited the volume *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia. The Limits of Political Ambition?* (Policy Press, 2008).

Sonya Michel is Director of United States Studies at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. She is also Professor of History at the University of Maryland, College Park, USA, and a founding co-editor of the journal *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State, and Society*. Her research focuses on gender and the historical and contemporary analysis of social policy in the United States and in comparative and transnational perspective. She is currently engaged in a major collaborative project entitled ‘The EU, North America, and the Challenge of Global Policymaking for Social Care’. Among her recent publications is *Civil Society and Gender Justice: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, co-edited with Karen Hagemann and Gunilla Budde (Berghahn Books, 2008).

Jørn Henrik Petersen is Professor at the Centre for Welfare State Research, University of Southern Denmark. He has published numerous books and articles on Danish welfare state history and the challenges facing the current welfare state. He has served as chairman or member of several governmental commissions on reforming the Danish welfare system. He is currently with his colleague Klaus Petersen co-editor of and co-author of *Dansk Velfærdshistorie 1800–2000* [Danish Welfare History 1800–2000] – a six-volume history of Danish welfare policies (volume 1 published in 2010). He is working with Klaus Petersen on a comparative study of the history of the term ‘welfare state’ in Britain, the US, Germany and Denmark, 1840–1960. His most recent publication in English is *The Politics of Age. Basic Pensions in a Historical and Comparative Perspective*, co-edited with Klaus Petersen (Peter Lang, 2009).

Klaus Petersen is Professor at the Centre for Welfare State Research, University of Southern Denmark. He has published a number of books and articles on Danish and Nordic welfare state history and its present challenges. he is currently with his colleague Jørn Henrik Petersen co-editor of and co-author of *Dansk Velfærdshistorie 1800–2000* [Danish Welfare History 1800–2000] – a six-volume history of Danish social policy (volume 1 published in 2010). He is working with Jørn Henrik Petersen on a comparative study of the history of the term ‘welfare state’ in Britain, the US,

Germany and Denmark, 1840–1960. His most recent publication in English is *The Politics of Age. Basic Pensions in a Historical and Comparative Perspective*, co-edited with Jørn Henrik Petersen (Peter Lang, 2009).

Anna-Birte Ravn is Associate Professor in Gender Division of Work and Social Change at FREIA: Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg, Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University. She is a historian and has written on gender, women's movements, and the welfare state in Denmark in the twentieth century. Her most recent publications include *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia: The Limits of Political Ambition?*, co-edited with K. Melby and C.C. Wetterberg (Bristol: Policy Press, 2008) and, with B. Rosenbeck, 'Competing Meanings of Gender Equality: Family, Marriage and Tax Law in 20th Century Denmark', in Janet Fink and Åsa Lundqvist (eds), *Changing Relations of Welfare: Family, Gender and Migration in Britain and Scandinavia* (Ashgate, 2010).

Bente Rosenbeck is Professor at the Center for Gender Studies, Department of Scandinavian Studies and Linguistics, University of Copenhagen. She has published several books and articles in gender history, the history of science and the history of sexuality. With Anna G. Jonasdottir and Drude von der Fehr she has edited *Is there a Nordic Feminism? Nordic Feminist Thought and Culture in Society* from 1998. With K. Melby, A. Pylkkänen and C.C. Wetterberg she published *Inte ett ord om kärlek. Äktenskap och politik i Norden ca. 1850–1930* [*Not a Word about Love: Marriage and Politics in the Nordic Countries, 1850–1930*] in 2006, the main conclusions of which were published that year in 'The Nordic model of marriage', *Women's History Review*, 15 (4). Her latest publication in English, with A.B. Ravn is 'Competing Meanings of Gender Equality: Family, Marriage and Tax Law in 20th Century Denmark' in Janet Fink and Åsa Lundqvist (eds): *Changing Relations of Welfare: Family, Gender and Migration in Britain and Scandinavia* (Ashgate, 2010).

Christina Carlsson Wetterberg is Professor of History at Örebro University, Sweden. She has published several books and articles on the women's movement, social welfare and family law, is currently working on biographical research. With K. Melby, A. Pylkkänen, and B. Rosenbeck she published *Inte ett ord om kärlek. Äktenskap och politik i Norden ca. 1850–1930* [*Not a Word about Love: Marriage and Politics in the Nordic Countries, 1850–1930*] in 2006, the main conclusions of which were published that year in 'The Nordic model of marriage', *Women's History Review*, 15 (4). With K. Melby and A.-B. Ravn she edited the volume *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia. The Limits of*

Political Ambition? (Bristol: Policy Press, 2008). Among her publications in the biographical field is ‘... bara ett öfverskott af lif’. *En biografi om Frida Stéenhoff 1865–1945* [A Biography on Frida Stéenhoff 1865–1845] (2010).

Preface

The concept of model is very popular in welfare state research. It is also a very problematic concept, owing to the static and nation-state-bound meanings so often associated with it. On the other hand, identifying and comparing different models has played an important political role in the making of the welfare states. How should we account critically for the uses and limitations of models as analytical tools for comparing and understanding modern welfare states? How should we examine the role of models and comparisons in the formation and transformation of welfare states?

These questions are examined in this book. They have been a point of departure for the research cooperation and projects going on within the Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel since the beginning of its activities in 2007. The work on this book was started by the kick-off conference at the University of Helsinki in August 2007. The conference brought together Nordic and international welfare state researchers addressing the role of welfare state models from different perspectives and disciplines.

We would like to thank all the participants in the NordWel kick-off conference for contributing to and commenting on the first versions of what after several further discussions and rounds of editing became the chapters of this book. We would also like to extend special thanks to Melis Ari, who assisted us in the copy-editing, and to John Irons for language editing. It has been a pleasure to work with Catherine Elgar, Alexandra O'Connell and Bob Pickens of Edward Elgar Publishing in turning the manuscript into a book. We are also grateful for the comments from the anonymous reviewers as well as the suggestions and points from the editors of the series 'Globalization and Welfare': Jane Lewis, Denis Bouget, Giuliano Bonoli and Jochen Clasen. Last but not least, we wish to acknowledge the support provided by the Nordic research funding body NordForsk through its NCoE Programme Welfare, making possible the activities of the Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel.

Pauli Kettunen
Klaus Petersen
Helsinki and Odense, May 2010

Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	vii
<i>Contributors</i>	viii
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
1 Introduction: rethinking welfare state models <i>Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen</i>	1
2 The transnational construction of national challenges: the ambiguous Nordic model of welfare and competitiveness <i>Pauli Kettunen</i>	16
3 National, Nordic and trans-Nordic: transnational perspectives on the history of the Nordic welfare states <i>Klaus Petersen</i>	41
4 International modelling in the making of the Nordic social security systems <i>Stein Kuhnle</i>	65
5 From charity to social justice: religion and the European welfare state traditions <i>Kees van Kersbergen</i>	82
6 The Lutheran Nordic welfare states <i>Pirjo Markkola</i>	102
7 Moving targets: towards a framework for studying family policies and welfare states <i>Sonya Michel</i>	119
8 What is Nordic in the Nordic gender model? <i>Kari Melby, Anna-Birte Ravn, Bente Rosenbeck and Christina Carlsson Wetterberg</i>	147
9 Marketization and free choice in the provision of social services. Normative shifts 1982–2008. Social Democrat lip service as a response to problems of legitimacy <i>Jørn Henrik Petersen</i>	170
10 The history and future of social democratic welfare capitalism: from modernization to the spectres of ultramodernity <i>Christopher Lloyd</i>	199

11	Social policy history after the transnational turn <i>Christoph Conrad</i>	218
	<i>Index</i>	241

Tables

3.1	Formal Nordic agreements on social policy 1945–55	50
4.1	Introduction of the first national social security/insurance laws for the five major fields in the Nordic countries	72
4.2	Official statistics in the Nordic countries: some milestones	75
8.1	Early twentieth-century Nordic marriage reforms	149
8.2	Civil rights of unmarried and married women in the Nordic countries	150
8.3	Political rights of women in the Nordic countries	152
9.1	Danish and Swedish policies on public schools and unemployment insurance	171
9.2	Types of ideas and their effects on policymaking	172
9.3	Framing strategies	173
9.4	Main elements in framing the ‘new Danish model’	180
9.5	Factors to be balanced in deciding on free choice and extended competition	185
9.6	Catchwords describing the government’s programme of modernization, welfare and free choice, individual freedom and common responsibility	189

1. Introduction: rethinking welfare state models

Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen

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-definitions 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

'History matters', as Douglass C. North (1990: vii) famously puts it. But how does history matter? What kind of role may a historical perspective play in the welfare state research interested in present problems and future challenges? Three aspects of a cross-disciplinary historical approach appear crucial, all of them associated with the presence of history.

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 origines' 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.² 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