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# Social politics and the welfare state

An international and a local perspective\*

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The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that our view on the history of the welfare state has both been clarified and blurred by an internationalist approach, in which social legislation and the welfare state are seen as common for Western democracies, with at best only minor attention to national, let alone sub-national, diversity. In general, however, these internationalist approaches to the history of the welfare state, dominated by social and political scientists, lack an empirical base. Recent research indicates that it is necessary to focus on the local level of welfare state policies, especially in the inter-war period, to fully understand the complexity of the history of the welfare state. Historians have recognized this situation, which has given rise to additional historical research into all aspects of the history of the welfare state. In my own research project, conducted at the University of Groningen, we reassessed the local level of social politics in a context of the international exchange of knowledge and administrative experiences. Elsewhere, attention has been focused on local experiments with welfare policies prior to World War II, and on similarities and differences among countries in the conception and implementation of social politics.

## *The international comparative approach*

One of the central themes in present-day politics is the reorganization of the welfare state. For over 25 years it has become an adage in politics that we

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simply cannot afford the combination of a minimum level of welfare guaranteed by the state and assurances of a high level of health care and no loss of income. The economic crises of 1973 and 1979 put too much strain on the welfare arrangements, which were seen as impediments to economic recovery. Although the pace at which social security has been cut back and reorganized differs from country to country, it is clear that the ideals of the designers of the welfare state have become illusions, as French historian Pierre Rosanvallon has stated in a challenging and much-reviewed analysis. He asserts that present-day society is unable to realize the goals of social solidarity and civic equality on which the welfare state was founded, and recommends a less general, more individualized approach to social needs.<sup>1</sup>

As the tide of social welfare changed, historians came to the fore to analyze the history of the welfare state. This is only natural: an era had ended and therefore a comprehensive view on the past became possible. As might have been expected, researching the history of the welfare state did not simply lead to new insights in post-World War II history; rather it resulted in an analysis of social politics and welfare arrangements dating back to the nineteenth century. Despite present-day academic pressure to publish in peer-reviewed journals, the monograph has proven to be the medium *par excellence* for conveying the new history of the welfare state, often presented in the form of extensive description based on the exhaustive exploration of primary sources, as well as in a more essayistic form, with the welfare state as part and parcel of the history of Western nations taken into account.

Roughly two approaches can be distinguished in the wide-ranging literature on the welfare state. One concentrates on the state: welfare politics are explicitly related to the formation of the nation and democracy. The other concentrates on social relations as a decisive factor in the development of the welfare state. State-oriented approaches to the history of the welfare state are dominant among continental European historians and social scientists. Historians who concentrate on industrial relations or class conflict can be found everywhere. In their works, some distant neo-Marxist rumor as inspiration reverberates, though most historians are non-Marxist in their approach to history.

Both the state-oriented and social relations-oriented approaches to the welfare state delivered impressive comparative studies at the end of the

1. See Pierre Rosanvallon, *La nouvelle question sociale: repenser l'Etat providence*, Paris 1995, also published in English translation: *The new social question: rethinking the welfare state*, Princeton 2000.

1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Peter Baldwin, exponent of the social relations approach, published his book, *The politics of social solidarity: class bases of the European welfare state 1875–1975*, in 1993. Baldwin defined the essence of the welfare state as "applying the instruments of social insurance on behalf of increasing numbers of citizens to ever greater varieties of risk and ill fortune" to guarantee each citizen a minimum standard of wealth.<sup>2</sup> He analyzes the history of the welfare state as a continuous struggle among interest groups over the desirability of social insurance. His book is an account of ever changing coalitions, with different motives for implementing social politics. He aims at explaining differences among countries and differences in the pace and the volume of social insurance, but succeeds only partially due to his restricted definition of welfare as organized solidarity (which, for example, appears to exclude unemployment benefits) and the fragmented treatment of his European examples.

With Baldwin's book, an era of comparative, international studies on the welfare state came to an end.<sup>3</sup> Baldwin seems to have anticipated this by publishing a review article on a number of international comparative studies in 1992 in *Comparative studies in society and history*.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the book Baldwin seems to appreciate the most was Gerhard A. Ritter's *Der Sozialstaat*, which is indeed an impressive essay on social arrangements, but which is not primarily concerned with the welfare state itself. Ritter, a former professor of history in Berlin and Munich, uses a long-term approach to explain the relationship between the state and social arrangements, beginning with the Middle Ages. His international, comparative approach clearly inspired Baldwin who, in *The politics of social solidarity*, uses the same kind of reasoning as Ritter. Baldwin also found inspiration in François Ewald's *L'Etat providence*, which was published in 1986.<sup>5</sup> Ewald, a disciple of Michel Foucault, concentrates on social legislation. To be more precise: his book is an unbridled analysis of all possible approaches to the French Industrial Accidents Act of 1898, laying bare the establishment of social rights as the glue of

2. Peter Baldwin, *The politics of social solidarity: class bases of the European welfare state 1875–1975*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 1–2.

3. Franz-Xavier Kaufmann has published a concise study, *Varianten des Wohlfahrtsstaats: der deutsche Sozialstaat im internationalen Vergleich*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, which summarizes the histories of the welfare state in a number of countries (including the Soviet Union), but without offering new insights.

4. Peter Baldwin, 'The welfare state for historians: a review article', *Comparative studies in society and history* 34, 1992, pp. 695–707.

5. François Ewald, *L'Etat providence*, Paris 1986.

modern society. Like much of French historiography on the welfare state (a major exception being Pierre Rosanvallon's aforementioned essay *La nouvelle question sociale*), Ewald's book is not comparative; it approaches the French case in a universal context. Another, though different claim to universality was made by the Danish social scientist Gøsta Esping-Andersen, today one of the ideologists of a new welfare model for Europe. In *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, published in 1990, he distinguishes between the liberal, the corporatist and the social democratic welfare states, typologies that are inspired by the history of social welfare and by the function of the present-day welfare state in mitigating social tensions, redistributing income and guaranteeing social rights. This leads to a somewhat confusing combination of a long-term historical analysis and a post-modern reassessment of the welfare state.<sup>6</sup> In *In care of the state*, by the Dutch social scientist Abram De Swaan, is a broad but rather finalistic account of the intertwining of educational and welfare arrangements in the history of Western society. He explains the welfare state as a universal phenomenon comprising education and all sorts of social politics, albeit with accents varying from nation to nation, but with similar characteristics. In his view, the welfare state is simply the post-war culmination of centuries of state intervention.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in a limited time span, 1986 to 1993, a number of international comparative and theoretical studies on social politics and the welfare state have been published. It appears that what can be said has been said. With these studies, a framework for further research was available. And indeed, these studies were followed by, and clearly inspired numerous books on the history of social politics and the welfare state. In particular, excellent monographs on Germany, which refine our understanding of German social politics under Bismarck and Weimar, have been published.<sup>8</sup>

And yet, the last word has not been uttered about the history of the welfare state. Let us follow it in greater detail. There is a high degree of consensus in historiography about the development of social legislation in Europe from 1850 to 1970. It started with compulsory insurance acts and ran, via the temporary state intervention in socio-economics during World War I,

6. Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, Cambridge 1990.

7. Abram de Swaan, *In care of the state: health care, education and welfare in Europe and the USA in the modern era*, Cambridge 1988.

8. Wolther von Kieseritzky, *Liberalismus und Sozialstaat: liberale Politik in Deutschland zwischen Machtstaat und Arbeiterbewegung (1878–1893)*, Köln 2002; Young-Sun Hong, *Welfare, modernity, and the Weimar state, 1919–1933*, Princeton 1998.

from the economic crisis with mass unemployment of the 1930s, the devastations of totalitarianism and World War II and the post-war threat of Communist take-overs, to the all-comprising welfare politics of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Social politics and the welfare state can be seen as the product of the struggle between capital and labor, the inevitable by-product of industrialization.<sup>9</sup> Some authors emphasize continuity throughout the 19th and 20th centuries; others see the welfare state as an essentially post-war phenomenon. In this last view, the welfare state is the product of institutional, political and bureaucratic solutions to the political challenges of totalitarianism and societal problems.<sup>10</sup> However, there are some important dissenting views on the fate of the welfare state. In his *Age of extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm emphasizes the modernization of capitalist economy, neglects the role of the state and politics in the class struggle, appears to ignore the post-war rise of the welfare state altogether and sees 1970 as its starting point,<sup>11</sup> as does Robert Castel in *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale*.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Castel signals the destabilizing effects of all-encompassing social politics on society: social cohesion is threatened by affluence.

### *Social legislation*

To clarify the history of social politics and the welfare state, we can concentrate on state interference in society and establish that it came in two waves, beginning in the mid 19th century. The first wave had as its starting point the protection of the individual worker and the need for his integration into modern society. Liberal, classical economics were at the core of this type of legislation. It aimed at protecting the male worker against a loss of income caused by the inability to work due to an accident at the workplace, illness, or old age. At the same time, the position of the female worker was reassessed. The breadwinner wage and safety legislation that reduced women's working hours expanded the gendered division of labor and domestic life in industrial society.<sup>13</sup>

9. Alexander Davidson, *Two models of welfare: the origins and development of the welfare state in Sweden and New Zealand, 1888–1988*, Uppsala 1989.

10. Mark Mazower, *Dark continent: Europe's twentieth century*, London 1998, p. 191; Kaufmann 2003, pp. 27–29.

11. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of extremes: the short twentieth century, 1914–1991*, London 1994, p. 284.

12. Robert Castel, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale*, Paris 1995, pp. 621–645.

13. Katrina Honeyman, *Women, gender and industrialisation in England, 1700–1870*, Houndmills 2000, p. 101. For an overview of protective legislation aimed at women, see Ulla Wikander, Alice Kessler-Harris & Jane Lewis (eds.), *Protecting women: labor legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880–1920*, Chicago 1995.

The first wave of social politics did not interfere with poor relief or with the workings of the labor market. It was initiated by a limited, but active core group of socially committed liberals, physicians, social engineers and civil servants.<sup>14</sup> They initiated a public debate and supplied the legislative tools with which government, in which they sometimes participated, could create social legislation. The principle of state responsibility for social issues was almost generally recognized before 1914, at least in Europe. The impact of legislation differed however, from large-scale compulsory social laws, with a large role of the state in the execution of the laws in Germany, to a minimalist program of compulsory accident insurance with limited additional insurance laws in countries with a low rate of industrialization, such as the Netherlands and Sweden. The bottom line of this first wave of legislation was the protection of workers against the loss of income due to a physical incapacity. The voluntary character of the legislation in countries with a high level of industrialization, like Belgium and Great Britain, reveals both the persistence of *laissez-faire* thinking in politics and the relative strength of labor unions. Compulsory insurance was seen as undesirable and unnecessary. In France, the compulsory character of social legislation, "l'obligation", was debated fiercely and rejected as being "German" in nature, even by the most powerful trade union.<sup>15</sup> The French "pension-law" of 1910 provided a very small pension and only applied to a small segment of the population. *Laissez-faire* was challenged by socialists and moderately revised by left-wing liberals and conservatives, but still dominated economic thought on a national level. The belief that some invisible hand steered economy and that state interference would only impede the development of economy was the foundation of economics and of social politics. More often than not, social legislation was defended as a means to retain and restore the workings of the free market. The abolition of child labor, for instance, was seen as a means of protecting the position of the adult worker on the labor market.<sup>16</sup> The first wave generally came to an end around World War I, when in the most advanced industrial countries, social insurance legislation, albeit more often voluntary than compulsory, was enacted. Immediately after World War I, the state withdrew from intervention in economics, only to reconsider it during the economic crisis of the 1930s.

14. Dirk Jan Wolffram, *Vrij van wat neerdrukt en beklemt: staat, gemeenschap en sociale politiek, 1870-1918*, Amsterdam 2003.

15. Castel 1995, pp. 456-466.

16. Wolffram 2003, p. 67.

The first wave of social reform is connected with the process of nation-building in modern Western states. Social politics became inclusive: its aim was to tie the worker to the state and the nation. In this way, workers were integrated into politics as well: social legislation coincided with the expansion of the franchise, which sooner or later led to universal male suffrage.

*The urban social question*

Social legislation was only part of the story. The social question first and foremost affected urban life from the mid-19th century onward. No longer was poverty solely seen as a lack of income; it also comprised the devastating effects of working in the factories and living in the overcrowded slums of the big cities on the health of workers and their families. Local politicians and administrators were the first to be confronted with the needs of the new urban proletariat. From the beginning, their efforts concentrated on public health, epidemic diseases like cholera and typhus, and the disturbingly high infant mortality rate. In a process of trial and error and the international exchange of information on medical and hygienist congresses, solutions were found. The medico-microbiological discoveries of Koch and Pasteur contributed greatly to the effectiveness of measures like sewage and the drinking water supply. The success of local public health policies led to the recognition of the permanent responsibility for public health of local, and later, national governments as well. Legislation compelled local governments to administer sewage, supply the population with drinking water and supervise the quality of housing. It gave cause to a moral imperative of health policies: something can be done, so it has to be done. This is, of course, what Michel Foucault has labeled *biopolitique*, "the imperative of health: at once the duty of each and the objective of all",<sup>17</sup> population politics as a rational intervention into society to improve the productivity of the workers and the quality of living conditions.<sup>18</sup> This public responsibility for the health of the population was institutionalized in the first half of the 20th century in local public health boards and public health bureaus, which began to monitor the quality of housing and the health status of babies and school children and took measures against alcohol abuse and the spread of tuberculosis. Living condi-

17. Michel Foucault, "The politics of health in the eighteenth century", in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*, Colin Gordon (ed.), Brighton 1980 (originally published in 1976) p. 170.

18. Michel Foucault, *"Society must be defended": lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, Mauro Bertani & Alessandro Fontana (eds.), transl. by David Macey, London 2003, pp. 243–245.



tions were recognized as being part of the social question because of the devastating effects of living in the big city slums. Cynically, one might argue that this concern for health and housing was aimed at improving labor productivity, but the aforementioned group of social reformers showed a genuine concern for the poor living conditions of a large segment of the population. Surveys brought these poor living conditions to the attention of politics. Famous are the surveys of Charles Booth and Beatrice Webb-Potter in London, but they were by no means the only ones. A "reform" of the individual worker or housewife started in the last quarter of the 19th century, with private initiatives, such as Toynbee Hall which spread through Europe, or as part of local poor relief in the continental Elberfelder system.<sup>19</sup>

This versatility of the social question has not yet been analyzed very thoroughly. British historiography, such as the study *Private lives, public spirits* by Jose Harris, the biographer of William Beveridge, the founding father of the welfare state, offers the best examples.<sup>20</sup> The living conditions of the working class and municipal measures to improve them have been the topic of urban historians, especially in Great Britain and the United States. The importance of sanitary measures has only been acknowledged explicitly in British historiography and has concentrated on the pioneering work of Sir Edwin Chadwick. In particular, Christopher Hamlin's *Public health and social justice in the age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800–1854*, published in 1998, offers a challenging view on the early days of social politics, as Hamlin makes a strong point in defending the thesis that social politics (in his case, public health politics) were not simply a reaction to industrialization and urbanization, but were political choices, expressions of ideology, "an achievement of public persuasion".<sup>21</sup> Hamlin took public health out of the realm of medicine and civil engineering and put it in the heart of politics. He showed how public health care was institutionalized in Great Britain around 1850, laying a foundation for state intervention on behalf of the health of the working class, to be executed at the local level.

The preoccupation in historiography and social and political sciences with national histories and internationalism has led to a neglect of the importance

19. Seth Koven, "Borderlands: women, voluntary action, and child welfare in Britain, 1840 to 1914", in Seth Koven & Sonya Michel (eds.), *Mothers of a new world: maternalist politics and the origins of welfare states*, New York 1993, pp. 94–135.

20. Jose Harris, *Private lives, public spirit: Britain 1870–1914*, London 1993.

21. Christopher Hamlin, *Public health and social justice in the age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800–1854*, Cambridge 1998, p. 337.

of the local level, especially in the 20th century. This is more than just a gap in literature; through our exclusive focus on the national level, we miss the crucial developments that took place at the local level in the inter-war years, and that, in large part, account for essential properties of the welfare state post-World War II: state intervention in housing and planning, social work, national health regulations.

In Great Britain there has always been an interest in the works of the great urban reformers, such as Chadwick and Joseph Chamberlain. Their activities have been analyzed from the viewpoint of a desirability of state intervention in society, first at a practical level (sanitary measures) and, in the last quarter of the century, as an integrating part of the ideology of the more advanced liberals, and indeed of liberalism and conservatism in general. Add to this the persistent local autonomy in Germany, as acknowledged by Ritter and underlined by Wilfred Rudloff in his monumental study on Munich, and the emphasis of the local in French social politics, as envisaged in the works of Pierre-Yves Saunier and Timothy B. Smith on Lyon and in the works of Christian Topalov<sup>22</sup> and many others, and it becomes clear that the full complexity of the welfare state can only be understood if we analyze it at all levels of society.

This becomes all the more urgent if we take into consideration the second wave of state intervention, which constitutes the formation of the welfare state after World War II. At first sight, the welfare state was a national project, based on a Keynesian framework of economic thought. It was an expression of the highly ambitious desire to create a post-war society with a high level of welfare, which had to be distributed more evenly. The welfare state was contested; it had to be negotiated, in politics as well as in society. It required compromises on the side of the trade unions and from the employers' organizations. The welfare state was created by Christian democratic and social democratic governments, sometimes in cooperation with liberals. It comprised the completion of the legislation of the first wave, but at the same time took social politics to a new level in formulating a social right to a minimum income on a basic welfare level.

22. Wilfred Rudloff, *Die Wohlfahrtsstadt: kommunale Ernährungs-, Fürsorge und Wohnungspolitik am Beispiel Münchens 1910–1933*, Göttingen 1995; Pierre-Yves Saunier, "La toile municipale aux XIX et XX siècles : un panorama transnational vu d'Europe", *Urban history review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 34, 2006, pp. 163–176; *idem*, "Taking up the bet on connections: a municipal contribution", *Contemporary European history* 11, 2002, pp. 507–528; Timothy B. Smith, *Creating the welfare state in France, 1880–1940*, Montreal 2003; Christian Topalov (ed.), *Laboratoires du nouveau siècle: la nébuleuse réformatrice et ses réseaux en France, 1880–1914*, Paris 1999.

However, that is only one side of the welfare state. It also encompassed huge programs in housing and town planning, health care, social care and welfare work. European governments initiated extensive programs of investments in industry. The welfare state comprised the regulation of the labor market and of industrial relations. In short, the welfare state deliberately intervened in almost all aspects of socio-economic life in an all-encompassing effort to create a superior capitalistic alternative to economic crisis, totalitarianism and communism. It appeared to have very little in common with social politics around 1900.

There appears to be a missing link, somewhere between World War I and the end of World War II. In the inter-war political arena, the most important factors were the general feeling of uncertainty, the waning of the position of liberalism and the rise of conservatism, socialism and Christian democracy, especially in smaller countries like Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria. Politics also continuously had to face the threat and challenges of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, which gradually took control in the central, south and east of Europe from 1921 onward. This all brought with it a renewed emphasis on the state as the central institution in politics, but the continuous atmosphere of economic emergency inhibited large-scale investments by the state. The example of New Deal politics to stimulate the economy in the United States was imitated to only a limited extent in the United Kingdom, and hardly anywhere else in Europe. In the United Kingdom, as elsewhere, the Treasury dictated politics – budget cuts were the principal answer to deteriorating economic circumstances. If anything, social policies aimed at preventing social unrest. So there it is: a picture of stagnation, of the forces of politics and economy reinforcing each other, right into the cataclysm of World War II.

Nevertheless, the inter-war years also witnessed the implementation of social insurance legislation in countries all over Europe and the beginning of unemployment insurance. The latter was considered complicated because unlike illness, old age and industrial accidents, the risk of becoming unemployed could not be calculated statistically. Unemployment caused a change in attitude toward the social question. Whereas all the other forms of social legislation concerned themselves with physical inhibitions against earning a living and thus fit into a *biopolitique*-esque discourse à la Foucault, unemployment was a problem of able-bodied workers. Until the end of the 19th century, it was believed that granting the able-bodied worker an unemploy-

ment benefit would disturb the workings of the labor market. After 1900 and before World War I, systems of government-sponsored unemployment insurance were introduced in several cities in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. When it became clear that local unemployment support was insufficient, national measures, generally executed at the local level, were introduced in France, Norway, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands (at the outbreak of the war).<sup>23</sup>

### *Planning*

Continuity between both waves can be found by concentrating on the concept of planning, in the broad sense of organizing both public space and social relations. The organization of public space comprises public housing, town planning, traffic regulation and environmental management. The organization of social relations comprises both the regulation of industrial relations and taking care of the individual in society. Both social politics and the welfare state are based on the idea that society, social relations, living conditions and economic development can, and must, somehow be controlled by government. Basic to this concept is the growing awareness, somewhere in the second half of the 19th century, that the state had the capacity, in a theoretical, material and mental sense, to intervene in social processes. The technical and medical solutions given to local problems by social engineers and hygienist medicine were accompanied by a new approach to people. Social reformers, soon followed by officials, not only believed they could engineer the city and control public health; they also tried to reform the individual, especially the new citizen – the worker and his family, who had to be adapted to the exigencies of modern life. Around the turn of the 19th century, stimulated by the social sciences, this welfare work became institutionalized and professionalized. During the inter-war period, welfare work spread throughout the Western world, aiming to fit the new citizen into the new city, which was to be the result of town planning. In my opinion, we have to look more closely at this continuity in planning and controlling society to be able to fully comprehend the nature of the welfare state. We also have to take into consideration the fact that planning and social politics were generated in an international context of the exchange of ideas and transfer of techniques. The

23. John A. Garraty, *Unemployment in history: economic thought and public policy*, New York 1978, pp. 131–132.

welfare state may have been a national project, but one of its characteristics was the similarity of ideas and arrangements throughout the Western world.

The essence lies in the transformation in the inter-war period, when the concept of planning became generally accepted and started to find its way into government policies. Of course, planning was distrusted, especially by liberals, as an outrageous expression of state interference in individual freedom. The five year-plans of the Soviet Union served as an effective argument against interference in the economy. However, at the same time organized industrial relations, sanctioned by legislation on collective bargaining, became generally accepted. Social democrats, shaking off their revolutionary feathers, began to develop plans for reforming capitalism, a tendency that was greatly stimulated by the crisis of the 1930s.

What has largely been ignored in welfare state studies is the fact that the state itself was transforming into what Rosanvallon has aptly called *l'état rationnel*, the rational state.<sup>24</sup> Public bureaucracy grew, giving rise to Max Weber's famous analysis of modern government; however, administration did not simply expand as a by-product of the growth of administrative duties caused by the modernization of society. It was greatly stimulated by the growing efficiency of private organizations and developed into a complex of semi-autonomous, knowledge-based departments and services, led by scientifically trained experts seeking recognition of their position in society.<sup>25</sup> They were the ones who redefined government policies in terms of efficiency, control and planning. They developed their own administrative science and turned planning into an academic discipline. John Maynard Keynes may have been the most famous of these experts, but there were others. The Nobel Prize-winning Dutch economist Jan Tinbergen started out as a social democratic civil servant and laid the foundations for the Dutch welfare state, based on collective bargaining, governmental wage control, state pensions, the restructuring of agriculture and careful planning of industrialization.<sup>26</sup> These scientists provided the tools for state intervention.

24. Rosanvallon 1995, p. 232.

25. Rolf Torstendahl, *Bureaucratisation in northwestern Europe 1880–1985: domination and governance*, London 1991, esp ch. 4; idem, "Introduction: promotion and strategies of knowledge-based groups" in Rolf Torstendahl & Michael Burrage, *The formation of professions: knowledge, state and strategy*, London 1990, pp. 1–10.

26. M. J. Boumans, *A case of limited physics transfer: Jan Tinbergen's resources for re-shaping economics*, Amsterdam 1992; A. Jolink, *Jan Tinbergen: the statistical turn in economics, 1903–1955*, Rotterdam 2003.

However, this is not the only reason to re-evaluate the inter-war years. The shift from social-insurance legislation to all-encompassing welfare arrangements had already taken shape in the inter-war years in many European cities. For France, the creation of the local welfare state before 1940 has been analyzed by Timothy B. Smith.<sup>27</sup> In her analysis of the welfare state in the Weimar Republic, Young-Sun Hong has brought to the fore the emergence of social work, which appears to be crucial in our understanding of the implications of the inter-war period. Hong points at the growing importance of professional social support by professionally trained women for families in their struggle to cope with modern life. Building a community of responsible, self-regulated, self-controlled citizens – that is what social work (which concentrated on general social assistance to families, social hygiene and/or youth welfare) was about. Hong emphasizes the predominantly private, church-organized nature of social work, but also shows how state and municipal administration became entangled in social work arrangements.<sup>28</sup> Pat Thane has underscored both the importance and the complexity of this theme: "In Britain, the dominant theme among those women and men who were concerned with social and political questions, from the 1870s to the Second World War, was the nature of the social, political and legal rights and obligations, which bound citizen, state and society together".<sup>29</sup> It is generally accepted that World War I was the watershed, with the development of state and municipal support for child and maternity care programs as an expression of an all-encompassing view on controlling society.<sup>30</sup> However, the economic crisis of the 1930s put these programs under severe pressure, especially in countries like France, where these kinds of programs were based on mutual aid.<sup>31</sup> In short, the idea of comprehensive welfare arrangements was the product of World War I; the necessity of implementation by the state was underlined by economic crisis, the totalitarian challenge and World War II.

Moreover, the local level was also vitally important as a breeding ground, an experimental garden for the organization of state intervention. The turn toward the welfare state was preceded by a reorientation in local administra-

27. Smith 2003.

28. Hong 1998, see also Rudloff 1995, esp. part II, chs. 8–9.

29. Pat Thane, "Visions of gender in the making of the British welfare state: the case of women in the British Labour Party and social policy, 1906–1945", in Gisela Bock & Pat Thane (eds.), *Maternity and gender policies: women and the rise of the European welfare states, 1880s–1950s*, London 1991, pp. 93–118.

30. Thane 1991, pp. 104–106; Smith 2003, pp. 54, 56.

31. Paul V. Dutton, *Origins of the French welfare state: the struggle for social reform in France, 1914–1947*, Cambridge 2002, p. 137.

tion toward specialization, efficiency and professionalism. Driven by the expansion of governmental duties as a result of urbanization, scientifically trained civil servants began to occupy crucial positions within the polity. They deliberately sought and found inspiration in an international environment and organized themselves, for example, in the International Union of Local Authorities (1913) and in a number of categorical organizations on aspects of municipal administration. Local governments became very well-equipped to survey social, economic and spatial developments upon which local policies were based. After World War II, these techniques and models were simply elevated to the national level, more often than not by civil servants and politicians who had started their careers in local administration.

Of growing influence within local government were planners, in particular town planners, who were hired to regulate the complexity of public space in modern cities. Beginning in the 20th century, they cooperated in international conferences and organizations, exchanging techniques like "survey before plan," a method of basing town planning on statistics regarding living, working, recreation and transportation. They also shared a hygienistic view on the quality of life, designing living quarters in such a way that sunlight and fresh air could enter all dwellings, and nature would always be close at hand.<sup>32</sup> Town planning was a direct heir to 19th century hygienism and workers housing initiatives. It therefore was infused with a strong sense of urgency for social change.<sup>33</sup> There was a strong utopian element in the concepts laid out by architects and planners such as Gropius and Le Corbusier, but their ideals were anchored in science, in the theory of scientific management of F. W. Taylor and the survey before plan method of Patrick Geddes and Thomas Abercrombie. Most modern town planners organized themselves in international organizations, founded town planning as an academic discipline or entered city administrations. Leading American urban historian Sam Bass Warner, author of the classic study *Streetcar suburbs*, has pointed to the 20th century "atrophy" of city planning in the United States. Governmental traditions and the legal protection of property inhibited the application of integrated forms of town planning, lapsing planning into mere map-making.<sup>34</sup>

32. Dirk Jan Wolffram, "Town planning in the Netherlands and its administrative framework, 1900–1950", *Jahrbuch für europäische Verwaltungsgeschichte* 15, 2003, pp. 199–217

33. David Pinder, *Visions of the city: utopianism, power and politics in twentieth-Century urbanism*, Edinburgh 2005, p. 62.

34. Sam Bass Warner, *The urban wilderness: a history of the American city*, New York 1972, pp. 36–37.

Europe, however, saw the birth of regional and national planning.<sup>35</sup> Politics and policy-making had difficulty keeping pace with modernistic architecture.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, however, in 1917 even the British government appeared to be riddled with utopian zeal, committing itself to "moulding a better world out of the social and economic conditions which have come into being during the war".<sup>37</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The internationalist and comparative approaches to the history of the welfare state by social and political scientists have yielded a rather one-sided vision on the welfare state as a comprehensive effort to create a society based on social rights and freedom from want and on state-regulated social relations. The omissions in the historiography of social politics and the welfare state add up to an under-evaluation of the meaning of the inter-war period, usually seen as a period of transition and economic crisis, which itself did not contribute in a positive way to the development of the welfare state.

I have tried to show that the inter-war period cannot simply be dismissed as an intermediary time of stagnation in a continuous development of the welfare state. Negatively, the almost persistent climate of economic and political crisis in the democratic societies, as well as the challenges of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, called for drastic measures. Positively, a new administrative framework for social politics, consisting of organized health care, unemployment benefits, planning and social engineering was constructed at sub-national levels. At the local level, it became clear that welfare was something more than simply insurance against the loss of income. Social politics also came to comprise state concern for living conditions, for social relations, for planning the physical environment and for the social and mental well being of the family. At the municipal level a new attitude toward the social question paved the way for the post-war "ideology" of the welfare state.

35. John Sheail, *Rural conservation in inter-war Britain*, Oxford 1981, p. 127.

36. Pinder 2005, p. 83.

37. As quoted in Dennis Hardy, *From garden cities to new towns: campaigning for town and country planning, 1899–1946*, London 1991, p. 120.



## Socialpolitik och välfärdsstat: internationella och lokala perspektiv

Den internationella och jämförande ansats som präglat den samhällsvetenskapliga välfärdsstatsforskningen har medfört en ganska ensidig syn på välfärdsstaten som en central kraftsamling för att skapa ett samhälle baserat på sociala rättigheter, avsaknad av nöd och statligt reglerade sociala relationer. Historiska och lokala studier fördjupar och nyanserar denna syn. Avsikten med denna uppsats är att visa att bilden av mellankrigsperioden i de övergripande internationella studierna, där den ofta framställts som en period av stagnation i välfärdsstatens utveckling, blir en helt annan om vi anlägger ett lokalt och empiriskt grundat perspektiv. Författaren utgår därvid från det forskningsprojekt vid universitet i Groningen där han ingår och som har studerat olika städers och kommuners socialpolitik. Denna politik har präglats av internationellt utbyte av idéer och kunskap kombinerat med lokalt administrativa erfarenheter.

Uppsatsen ger också en översikt över flera av de senaste historiska och samhällsvetenskapliga studierna av välfärdsstaten på ett generellt plan. Dessa kan delas in i två kategorier: de som tar staten som sin utgångspunkt och menar att välfärdsstaten är direkt sammankopplad med nationen och demokratis framväxt, och de som ser de sociala relationerna som den centrala faktorn i välfärdens utveckling. Den lokala nivåns betydelse har dock inte beaktats i någon större utsträckning i dessa övergripande studier. Det övergripande, internationella perspektivet behöver kompletteras med en historia grundad på empiriska analyser på olika nivåer.

På lokal nivå är välfärdsstatens historia från 1800-talet och framåt minst lika mycket en historia om bostadspolitik som om socialpolitik. Lokalpolitiker och ämbetsmän var de första som konfronterades med det urbana proletariats nöd. Deras första aktioner gällde folkhälsan, de återkommande epidemierna och den höga barnadödligheten. Framgångar på detta område, bland annat gällande tillgången på rent vatten, närde tanken på det offentliga ansvar för invånarnas välbefinnande. Det fick under 1900-talets första hälft sitt uttryck i lokala hälsovårdsnämnder, övervakning av bostädernas kvalitet och åtgärder mot alkoholmissbruk. Det som skedde på lokalt plan under mellankrigstiden lade grunden för den politik som efter andra världskriget skulle utvecklas till en statlig välfärdsstat: sjukvård, bostäder och socialhjälp. Mellankrigstidens lokala välfärdsstat är den länk som saknats mellan 1800-talets sätt att lösa den sociala frågan och den sena efterkrigstidens allmänt ingripande välfärdsstat.

Kontinuiteten blir tydlig om vi koncentrerar oss på idén om planering, i betydelsen både planering av det offentliga rummet och planering av de sociala relationernas organisering. Rummet organiserades genom allmännyttiga bostäder,

stadsplanering och trafiklösningar; de sociala relationerna genom lagar eller avtal på arbetsmarknaden och omsorg om individerna. Sociala ingenjörer, och företrädare för det offentliga, ansåg att det inte bara var möjligt att reformera staden och folkhälsan, de försökte också skapa en ny medborgare – arbetaren och hans familj – som skulle anpassas till det moderna livets krav. Tankarna kring planering förvetenskapligades och offentliga tjänstemän utbildades i planering.

Vissa europeiska städer hade redan gått ifrån ett socialförsäkringssystem till ett allomfattande välfärdssystem under mellankrigstiden. De svåra ekonomiska kriserna kom att begränsa ambitionernas omfattning, men dessa försök kunde tjäna som experiment för senare statlig politik. Försöken leddes av en kår av offentliga tjänstemän och experter som tog del av varandras idéer och utbytte erfarenheter i olika internationella sammanhang. Stadsplanerare träffades till exempel vid internationella konferenser och inspirerades av varandras sätt att hantera frågor med hjälp av tekniskt administrativa förfaranden såsom översiktsplaner. Stadsplaneringen kan ses som en direkt efterföljare till 1800-talets folkhälsopolitik och experimenterande med olika typer av arbetarbostäder på lokal nivå.

*Keywords:* local history, welfare state history 19th century, welfare state history 20th century