Welfare state regimes and family policy: a longitudinal analysis

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The primary aim of the article is to access the extent to which welfare state regimes support distinct family policies across OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries and over time. Focusing in particular on the work of Esping-Andersen we address the following questions: (i) What is the relation between de-commodification and defamilialisation? (ii) Are there distinct welfare state regimes that support different levels of family policy? (iii) To what extent have levels of support for family policy differed over the last decades toward divergence or convergence among OECD welfare states? Using data from the OECD Social Expenditure database (1980-2001), we find that the degree of defamilialisation through welfare state regimes parallels the de-commodification scores. However, the findings indicate a degree of instability in the relationship between levels of support for family policy and welfare state regimes over the last decades. We conclude by discussing how the findings speak to the changing character of welfare regimes and the implications of a longitudinal perspective.

Among comparative studies of modern welfare states, Gosta Esping-Andersen's (1990) path-breaking analysis of the Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism has framed the field of inquiry over the last decade.1 Using de-commodification of labour as one of the central characteristics to classify social welfare policy in 18 advanced industrial countries, he identified three ideal-type welfare states: liberal, conservative and social democratic regimes. De-commodification represents the extent to which social welfare policies allow individuals and families to uphold a normal and socially acceptable standard of living regardless of their performance in the labour market. Esping-Andersen operationally defined this concept by developing an index based on data from 1980 that measure such factors as the stringency of eligibility rules and the rate of income replacement for pension, unemployment and sickness benefits. Liberal regimes are typically marked by social policies that engender the lowest levels of de-commodification; conservative regimes (sometimes identified as continental European or Christian democratic regimes) score in the middle; and social democratic regimes rank highest on the de-commodification index.

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Although Arts and Gelissen (2002) show that researchers have found the three-welfare-regime typology to be a convincing tool for describing and explaining cross-national differences, this typology has also been criticised on several levels. For example, some find that welfare capitalism changed dramatically in the 1990s and that the three regimes identified by Esping-Andersen's analysis of data from 1980 have begun to converge (Ferge, 1996; Gilbert 2002; Rojas, 2005). Others argue that the three regimes ignore the distinctive characteristics of welfare systems in Mediterranean countries (Ferrera, 1996; Leibfried, 1993).² Van Voorhis (2003) reveals methodological flaws in the design and calculation of the decommodification index. And various scholars argue that the three-welfare-regimes typology is too narrowly based on income transfer programmes (such as pension, unemployment and sickness programmes) for male breadwinner workers and lacks a gender lens for examining how different welfare regimes affect women, mothers and family life (O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994, 2001).

Indeed, the feminist critique of mainstream welfare state theories and the significant change in family

For example, see Arts and Gelissen's (2002) review of empirical studies using Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology as an organising principle for comparisons.

For instance, The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism classification did not include countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece, while Italy was grouped among the conservative welfare regimes.

structure and gender roles over the last several decades have opened new perspectives on comparative analyses of welfare state policy. Dissatisfied with the prevailing three-welfare-regimes typology, Orloff (1993) and other feminists argue that de-commodification pays little attention to women's relationships with the welfare state. They have conducted analyses of gender-related welfare state issues that attempt to combine mainstream welfare state studies and feminist studies (Sainsbury, 1994, 2001). In particular, feminist studies have contributed to welfare state research by documenting the inequalities between men and women embedded in work and social welfare policies; they have pointed out the underlying ideologies of familial and gender roles and expanded the analytic focus of welfare state analyses on policies designed to harmonise work and care (Gustafsson, 1994; Sainsbury, 1994; Siaroff, 1994). Social measures to reconcile work and care have varied enormously among countries (Daly & Lewis, 1998). For example, in Scandinavian countries, the extensive provision of childcare was a part of explicit social policy designed to create a dual-breadwinner model and full employment. In contrast, public childcare provision in the UK has been primarily for children who are in poverty or at risk, and in the USA childcare has remained essentially in the private sphere with limited public support (although this has been increasing in recent years). Knijn and Kremer's (1997) comparative analysis of the UK, Denmark and The Netherlands reveals different patterns of organising care in welfare states. Examining maternity leave policies and institutional childcare, they found that, due to the focus on care as a right of citizenship, the Danish welfare state came closest to creating a system of gender equality.

With gender concerns at the core of their research, feminist scholars have created alternative typologies of welfare states based on the extent to which they allow women to form autonomous households. Lewis (1992) analyses the 'male-breadwinner/female-caregiver' and 'dual-breadwinner' models, which reflect the degree to which social policies enhance women's independence and minimise the tension between work and family responsibilities. In a similar vein, Sainsbury (1994) differentiates the male-breadwinner model from the individual model under which women qualify for pensions and other benefits based on their own status rather than as their husbands' dependents. From a broader perspective, Kamerman (1995) distinguishes alternative approaches that guide the development of family policies, which include a targeted focus on poor families, a categorical emphasis on lone-mothers, universal support for young children and a combination of labour market and family supports.

Welfare regimes revisited

The movement of gender-related issues to the forefront of comparative welfare state research gives rise to the question: How well does the prevailing model of welfare state regimes, based on the degree of de-commodification, help to account for alternative approaches to family policy? Addressing this question, Esping-Andersen (1999) re-examined the welfare regimes through the analytical lens of family-related policy. In doing this he introduced the concept of de-familialisation, which is defined as 'the degree to which households' welfare and caring responsibilities are relaxed either via welfare state provision or via market provision' (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 51). This concept is operationally defined with several empirical measures of social policies that promote defamilialisation of family care and responsibility, such as public expenditure on family services and the percentage of children under 3 in public childcare.³ In comparison with policies that de-commodify labour by reducing workers' dependence on the market, policies that promote de-familialisation reduce the individual's dependence on kinship.

Employing these measures in a cross-sectional analysis of data on family policy, Esping-Andersen finds a general consistency among the three standard welfare regimes and the degree of de-familialisation. That is, in social democratic welfare state regimes, family policies emphasise a strong government role, stressing the goal of gender equity and child wellbeing. Due to these generous family policies, social democratic regimes exhibit the highest degree of de-familialisation. In continental European countries, family policies stress the role of traditional family and discourage female labour force participation. Continental family policies parallel the conservative welfare regimes that emphasise status and class with underlying male breadwinner model assumptions. These countries show a modest level of defamilialisation. The liberal model marked by the Anglo-American approach to family policy has the lowest level of de-familialisation through public welfare intervention among the standard welfare state regimes originally delineated in Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism. In addition to these three regimes identified in the 1990 study, Esping-Andersen (1999) introduced a fourth regime - Southern Europe - in his analysis of the relationship between family policy and welfare regimes. On the measure of public spending on family services as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), the

In addition to social policies that support de-familialisation of welfare and caring responsibilities, Esping-Andersen (1990) also presents measures of activities that reflect the degree to which families and the market may assume more or less welfare and care responsibility, such as the percentage of unemployed youth living with parents, the average hours of women's unpaid work and the cost of private day care. Since our concern in this article is the extent to which family policy efforts parallel the three-welfare-regime model, the analytical focus here will be on the degree of de-familialisation through social welfare programmes rather than family or market provisions.

southern European regime falls at the very bottom of the list, with a level of de-familialisation below that of the liberal regimes. Beyond the general parallel between welfare state regimes and family policy efforts, Esping-Andersen suggests that the level of de-familialisation based on public provision showed such a huge gap between the social democratic regimes and all the others, as to form a bimodal distribution.

A caveat on comparative data

It has long been recognised that, in addition to the cheques written directly by government, comprehensive measures of generosity and welfare effort should include other sources of social expenditure that promote individual wellbeing. As early as the 1930s, special tax deductions and exemptions were identified as a form of government transfer in Arthur Pigou's classic text, Economics of Welfare. However, it was not until the mid-1970s that data on tax expenditures became available and were introduced as a regular component of the president's budget in the USA, which was among the first countries to collect this information [for a discussion of this development in the USA, see Stanley Surrey (1974)]. As Gilbert and Moon (1988) pointed out, in the 1980s the conventional categories of gross social expenditure are at best a crude metric for comparisons among different countries, which does not account for the true cost and value of all social welfare benefits. Developing an alternative index of welfare effort, they demonstrated the significant shifts in the rankings among countries that occurred when the analysis controlled for tax burden, tax expenditures and need.

More recently, as additional data have become available, Adema and his colleagues (1996) have developed a new ledger for social accounting that controls for the effects of costs and benefits from various sources – introducing the most rigorous and comprehensive measures of social spending to date. Their net total expenditure index represents the cumulative value of benefits distributed through direct public expenditures, tax expenditures and publicly mandated private expenditures, reduced by direct and indirect taxes on these benefits, and adds in the value of voluntary private expenditures, reduced by direct and indirect taxes.

Even this highly sophisticated measure, however, does not take account of the effects of government deficit spending, which can finance current benefits through the creation of debt that must be discharged at some point in the future. Moreover, measures of both gross and net social expenditure, which compare spending among countries as a per cent of their GDP, yield a different set of results than when this spending is calculated according to a per capita basis. All this is to say that, whether focused on the total spending or spending directed mainly on family policies, at their best, comparative data on social

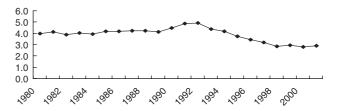


Figure 1. Public expenditure on family as percentage of GDP in Sweden (1980–2001).

expenditures offer only rough estimates of the welfare efforts being studied.

In this article we are seeking to analyse the degree to which Esping-Andereson's findings concerning the relationship between welfare regimes and de-familialisation hold stable over time. While not immune to criticism about the comparative measures of social expenditure employed, his work is widely regarded as authoritative. To examine the pattern of de-familialisation among welfare regimes from a longitudinal perspective, we employ measures of direct public social expenditure that closely replicate Esping-Anderson's operational definition of de-familialisation, recognising that this direct public social expenditure approach is not without deficiencies.

Refocusing the analytic frame: a longitudinal perspective

While cross-sectional analysis reveals a relationship among levels of de-familialisation and the welfare state regimes, the snapshot in time afforded by this type of analysis captures a restricted picture, which can sometimes be misleading and offers no indication of any temporal trend that might influence an interpretation of the pattern shown in the data. Taking the typical social democratic country of Sweden as an example, Figure 1 shows the trend of total public expenditure on family from 1980 to 2001.

Noticeably, public spending on family provisions reached its peak in 1992 and has gradually decreased since then. Based on cross-sectional analysis using data from the year 1992, Esping-Andersen (1999) concludes that the social democratic regimes have considerably higher public spending on family services than other welfare regimes. It is possible that the disparity in public spending on family benefits among welfare regimes varies considerably over time and what appears as a bi-modal distribution in 1992 is significantly different from the relationship among welfare regimes and family policy in 1980 and 2000. In that case, the extent to which regime types can be used to explain levels of de-familialisation is seriously open to question.

How well does the relationship between welfare regimes and de-familialisation hold over time? Does it continue

Table 1. Classification of 17 OECD countries (de-commodification score).

Social-democratic regimes	Continental Europe	Liberal regimes	Southern Europe
Denmark (38.1) Finland (29.2) Norway (38.3) Sweden (39.1)	Austria (31.1) Belgium (32.4) France (27.5) Germany (27.7) Netherlands (32.4)	Australia (13) Canada (22) Ireland (23.3) UK (23.4) US (13.8)	Italy (24.1) Portugal* Spain*

Note: De-commodification scores are from Esping-Andersen (1990). * Portugal and Spain were not included in the original de-commodification analysis (1990), but they are included in the examination of de-familialisation (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

to form a bi-modal distribution with the Scandinavian welfare states on the high end of the scale of defamilialisation as Esping-Andersen's (1999) previous analysis suggests? If the pattern over time is not stable, do the fluctuations suggest a trend toward divergence or convergence? In addressing these questions we analyse the levels of family policy among different welfare regimes over three time periods – 1980, 1990 and 2001. Table 1 shows the updated classification of welfare regimes and the de-commodification score for each country.

Along with Esping-Andersen's (1999) regime classification, our analysis employs measures of family policy that closely replicate his operational definition of defamilialisation through welfare state provisions, which focused on three key indicators – family service expenditure, public childcare coverage of children under 3 years of age and home-help service coverage for seniors.⁴ He also suggests that cash transfers are important. Following in this vein, we define defamilialisation through public provision by calculating the overall welfare spending on family benefits for each country. Table 2 illustrates the main domains and subcategories that form the operational definition of total social expenditure on family policy, which encompasses measures of both cash benefits and family services.

Family cash benefits include family allowances for children, and maternity and parental leave, which are widely considered to be two essential components of family policy. In addition, the measures of family services, which include day care, personal and home-help services, capture the main indicators suggested by Esping-Andersen (1999) – public childcare coverage of young children and home-help service coverage for seniors. Since the data on total public expenditure on family policy go beyond measures of family service expenditure, we analysed the relationship between levels of defamilialisation represented by these two indices and the

Table 2. Social expenditure on family policy.

Family cash benefits Family allowances	Family cash benefits Family allowances for children
Maternity and parental leave Other cash benefits	Family support benefits Maternity and parental leave Lone parent cash benefits Family other cash benefits
Benefits in kind	Family services
Day care/home-help services	Family day care Personal services Household services
Other benefits in kind	Household other benefits in kind

Source: The OECD Social Expenditure database (1980–2001).

Table 3. Correlation between de-commodification and de-familialisation (1992).

	Public expenditure on family service (1992)	Total public expenditure on family (1992)
De-commodification score (1980)	0.691* (p = 0.004, n = 15)	0.710* (p = 0.003, n = 15)

de-commodification scores. In order to compare the results with those of Esping-Andersen's (1999) study, we used data on de-familialisation for the same year, 1992, as reported in his analysis. (The de-commodification index was constructed by Esping-Andersen in an earlier study and based on data from 1980.)

As shown in Table 3, both the total public spending on family (both cash and in-kind) and public spending on family services in 1992 have statistically significant relationships to the de-commodification scores. The total public expenditure on family had a slightly higher correlation (0.710) with the de-commodification scores than the measures of spending only on family services (0.691). This finding demonstrates a clear-cut parallel between countries with different degrees of decommodification and their total levels of expenditure on family policies in 1992. Countries with higher decommodification scores, which imply more generous spending on key work-related welfare programmes such as pensions and unemployment benefits, are more likely

The data used in our analyses are from the OECD Social Expenditure database (1980–2001), which was released in 2004. This is one of the latest, most reliable and internationally comparable datasets. It provides an opportunity for exploring the trends in aggregate social expenditure and analysing the changes in any specific programme, such as family programmes.

Table 4. Total family expenditure as percentage of GDP (mean and standard deviation).

	1980	1990	1992	2001
Social democratic regimes	2.62 (0.64)	3.46 (0.74)	4.00 (0.70)	3.23 (0.39)
Continental Europe	2.70 (0.37)	2.22 (0.52)	2.32 (0.56)	2.22 (0.73)
Liberal regimes	1.19 (0.64)	1.23 (0.66)	1.43 (0.81)	1.59 (1.00)
Southern Europe	0.79 (0.31)	0.76 (0.38)	0.74 (0.30)	0.88 (0.34)

Table 5. Comparison of public expenditure on family between welfare regimes, 1992.

(I) Regime	(J) Regime	Total family expenditure difference (I–J)
Social democratic	Continental Europe	*
	Liberal	*
	Southern Europe	*
Continental Europe	Liberal	
	Southern Europe	*
Liberal	Southern Europe	

Total family expenditure is calculated as a percentage of GDP.

to spend a higher percentage of their GDP supporting families with children as well.

The correlation based on 1992 measures of defamilialisation suggests, but does not confirm, that there is a pattern of distinct welfare state regimes that support different levels of family policy; it tells us nothing about the extent to which these regimes form a stable pattern of relationship with public expenditure on family policy over time. To address this question we use analysis of variance (ANOVA) to statistically test for significant variations in public expenditure on family among welfare regimes over time. Table 4 shows the average public expenditure on family as a per cent of GDP for each welfare regime. We include the year 1992 to examine the results in comparison with those of Esping-Andersen's study. Indeed, as shown in Table 5, the average rate of total family expenditure in the social democratic regime was significantly higher than that of the other three regimes. However, these data also show that, in addition to spending a significantly lower percentage of GDP on family policies than social democratic regimes do, the southern European countries also spent significantly less than the continental European countries. Hence, beyond the large divide that existed between the social democratic regimes and the others in 1992, the southern European countries were the laggards even within the other regimes that had lower levels of de-familialisation.

But how stable is this pattern of relationship over time? Do social democratic regimes always show higher public spending on family policies? Are the differences among all the regimes large enough to be statistically significant? Do the differences vary over time and, if

Table 6. Comparison of total public expenditure on family between welfare regimes (1980, 1990 and 2001).

(I) Regime	(J) Regime		Total family expenditure difference (I–J)		
		1980	1990	2001	
Social democratic	Continental Europe Liberal	Ns **	*	ns **	
Continental	Southern Europe Liberal	**	** ns	* * ns	
Europe Liberal	Southern Europe Southern Europe	** Ns	** ns	ns ns	

Total family expenditure is calculated as a percentage of GDP. The mean difference is significant ** at the 0.05 level; * at the 0.10 level. ns, non-significant differences.

so, in what direction? In response to these questions, Table 6 shows the ANOVA results regarding the variance in total public expenditure on family benefits among welfare regimes for the periods of 1980, 1990 and 2001.

The findings for 1980 show a bi-modal distribution in which total family expenditure in social democratic regimes and continental European countries is significantly higher than in liberal regimes and southern European countries. However, there is no significant difference between total public spending on family benefits in social democratic regimes and continental countries. Indeed, at that time, family expenditure in continental European countries was slightly higher than in social democratic regimes. Overall, there are statistically significant differences in the average levels of family expenditure among regimes in four of the six possible comparisons – which suggests that the regime classification is useful in distinguishing the degree to which social policies of different regimes promote de-familialisation in 1980.

The results of the 1990 comparison are similar to the analysis for 1992. However, in this period the bi-modal distribution shifts with a sharp division between the social democratic countries on the high side and the other three regimes with significantly lower average levels of spending on family benefits. Again, the results show statistically significant differences in family expenditure among the regimes in four of the six possible comparisons. But in 1990 these differences are not among all the same regimes as in 1980, which indicates some instability over time.

^{*} The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

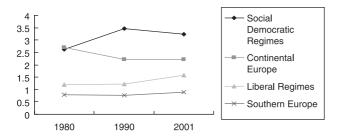


Figure 2. Public expenditure on family as percentage of GDP (1980, 1990 and 2001).

A heightened pattern of instability appears in the analysis of differences in total public family expenditures among welfare state regimes in 2001; here the differences between social democratic regimes and continental European countries, as well as those between the continental and southern European regimes, no longer show up as significant. In 2001, the variations in family expenditure are statistically significant in only two of the six possible comparisons — with the social democratic regimes showing a significantly higher percentage of spending than the liberal and southern European countries. The shifting pattern of public expenditure on family benefits from 1980 to 2001 is graphically illustrated in Figure 2.

Conclusion: welfare regimes over time

These findings from a longitudinal perspective on the extent to which welfare state regimes incorporate distinct levels of de-familialisation (operationally defined by public family expenditures) lend themselves to several interpretations.

First, while the social democratic countries generally have higher levels of public family spending than the other regimes, our results only partially confirm Esping-Andersen's conclusion about a bi-modal distribution, based on his cross-sectional analysis of spending in 1992. We found that, although such a distribution did exist with statistically significant differences between the social democratic and the other countries in 1990, it was not present in 1980 or 2001, suggesting apparent changes in levels of de-familialisation among welfare regimes over time. In 1980, social democratic regimes and continental European countries spent almost the same percentage of GDP on family benefits. And in 2001, again the difference in average spending between social democratic countries and continental European countries was not significant.

Second, over the decades from 1980 to 2001 there was a fair amount of fluctuation in the extent to which average public expenditure on family benefits was statistically differentiated among all four welfare state regimes. Although in both 1980 and 1990 comparisons

of average public expenditures on family among the four clusters of countries revealed significant difference in two thirds of the cases, the significant differences did not appear among all of the same regimes during these two periods of time. Moreover, by 2001 the findings show significant differences in average spending among the four regimes in only one-third of the possible comparisons.

Lastly, examining the patterns of public expenditure on family benefits over time reveals that the differentiations among the four regimes increased to its maximum level between 1980 and 1990 and then narrowed between 1990 and 2001 – as the average public spending on family benefits in social democratic regimes declined while expenditure increased or remained constant in the other regimes. Between 1980 and 1990 the average spending diverged as different levels of de-familialisation among the four regimes became more distinct. After 1990 this trend was reversed and the average levels of spending began to converge.

Various reasons have been posited for the apparent movement toward convergence among welfare regimes, including the combined impact of demographic and market forces. In recent times, social welfare systems throughout the advanced industrialised nations have experienced increasing social and fiscal demands from the demographic pressures of rapidly ageing populations. And during the same period policy makers have come under the competitive discipline of well-integrated global markets, which has intensified pressures to scale back social benefits which are seen as hindering a country's capacity to keep production costs low and attract foreign investment (Standing, 1999). In response to these and other social forces, some analysts find a growing convergence among policy reforms in welfare regimes toward emphasis on privatisation, targeting of benefits, promotion of work and individual responsibility (Ferge, 1996; Gilbert, 2002; Rojas, 2005). From another perspective, the welfare regimes of western Europe have been seen as increasingly influenced by developments at the supranational level of the European Union. In this regard, there appears to be a growing interest in the question of European convergence, particularly in terms of social policies, such as childcare (e.g. Mahon, 2002; Randall, 2000).

It is always difficult to clearly identify a change process as it unfolds. Although our findings point towards a convergence in public spending on family benefits in recent years, we would like to close with a word of caution about the limitations of this analysis. The study concentrates on direct expenditures to capture the 'how much' dimension of social transfers to families. This approach does not take into account transfers through tax expenditure, mandated benefits and voluntary contributions, which vary in significance among different countries (Adema, 1999; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1989; Hacker, 2002; Howard, 1997). Moreover, studies of welfare state

classifications have argued that the use of aggregate public expenditure data provides only a partial picture, which excludes the substance of social provisions and the ways these benefits, especially service benefits, are delivered, i.e. to measure and understand the 'how much' dimension does not tell us precisely how the funds are being spent (Bonoli, 1997). Hence, these findings should be seen as suggestive of a trend in family policy that awaits further verification through more detailed analyses.

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