

Tomasz Inglot: *Welfare States in East Central Europe, 1919–2004*

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There are not many books that present a detailed historical and cross-national comparative analysis of welfare state development spanning almost the entire 20th century. *Welfare States in East Central Europe* is one of these rare books. The fact that Tomasz Inglot has been able to gather and organise all the necessary data for such an analysis in one volume is in itself a major achievement. Inglot here embarks on an ambitious project aimed at a better understanding of the origins, development and reforms of the modern social policies in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic and Slovakia from 1993 onwards). His analysis is mainly guided by a historical-institutionalist framework that focuses on both institutional and policy legacies. These legacies of past events and choices largely impact on the possibilities of present and future policy making, which in turn result in continuities and recurrent patterns in the development of the East Central European welfare states and politics of social policy. Inglot limits his analysis to five branches of the social security system (pensions, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, family allowances and child-care benefits), and draws on numerous secondary sources, original (mainly Polish) official documents and interviews with about 40 key social policy experts.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter elaborates an original theoretical framework for the analysis of welfare state development in Eastern Europe. Inglot convincingly argues that the standard theoretical framework for Western welfare states should be adapted to take the specificities of post-communist welfare states into account. On the one hand he conceptualises East European welfare states as a 'layered' structure of various social (insurance) programmes that

have been added throughout history. On the other, he further refines the causal mechanisms that operate in the development of such a layered structure. Additionally he formulates some interesting hypotheses, although he could have done more to embed these explicitly in his broader explanatory framework. The empirical discussion of the evolution of welfare states and social policy in East Central Europe is subdivided into the period before 1989 (Chapters 2–3) and after (Chapter 4). Each of these chapters consists of a section devoted to common characteristics, a section devoted to in-depth country studies and a summary section with a theoretical discussion with regard to the hypotheses. The second chapter focuses on institutional legacies and analyses the institutional development of the welfare state from 1919 until 1989. 'Institutional legacies represent structures and norms that are firmly embedded in the processes of state building and rebuilding during different historical periods.' (p. 41) Interestingly, Inglot also pays attention to broader issues of economic development and state building, crucial for the understanding of the interwar and immediate post-war period. In the third chapter, the focus shifts to legacies of policy making from 1945 until 1989. Policy legacies are defined as 'recurring patterns of government action in the sphere of welfare state (and more specifically social insurance policies) that produce lasting effects over time' (p. 119). The fact that the second and the third chapter largely cover the same period from two different angles offers an enlightening perspective on the communist welfare state. In the fourth chapter, Inglot turns to the post-communist period and discusses both institutional and policy legacies.

Some important conclusions can be drawn. First, Inglot effectively shows the importance and richness of long-term historical cross-national comparative research which enables the researcher to put present (recent) reforms into a broader historical

perspective, facilitating the evaluation of the 'uniqueness' of reforms. Important social policy patterns recurred several times during the 20th century and certain 'core' institutions survived different regime types and severe crises. Second, Inglot convincingly argues that a linear model of welfare state development consisting of a long period of welfare state expansion and consequent attempts of retrenchment from the 1970s/1980s onwards – as is often applied to West-European welfare states – is inadequate as a general picture of East Central European welfare state development. These countries experienced regular economic crises but also severe 'regime crises' as a result of which social policies were adapted. Furthermore, during these crises social policy acquired particular salience. Inglot uses the term 'emergency politics of social policy' to denote the recurrent patterns of social policy that emerged to manage these deep crises, resulting in alternating cycles of at least partial social policy expansion and retrenchment. However, the exact timing and extent of expansion and retrenchment as assumed by Inglot's interpretation of his main indicator can be questioned (see below). Nonetheless, sufficient evidence for the existence of a non-linear pattern of welfare state development is presented by Inglot's discussion of other, qualitative variables such as eligibility rules and the development or suspension of certain types of benefits. Inglot has not (yet) evaluated whether and to what extent periods of emergency politics of social policy conform to Vanhuysse's [2006] divide and pacify thesis for the early 1990s – a promising ground for further research. Third, Inglot gathers considerable evidence of important differences in the development of the Polish, Hungarian and Czechoslovak welfare states. In spite of regular emphasis in the literature on the common characteristics of the 'communist' and 'post-communist welfare states', these countries cannot simply be characterised as conforming to a certain 'regime type'. '[E]ven during

the Stalinist period of Soviet-imposed uniformity the three countries diverged considerably in terms of the timing, scope, and intensity of reconstruction, recombination, and reform of their inherited pension schemes and other major social insurance programs.' (p. 199) Nonetheless, they seem to share a history of emergency social policy making. A definite conclusion as to whether these countries do (not) form a separate 'regime type' would need a joint analysis of many more welfare states based on a common methodological and theoretical framework.

Although Inglot offers an interesting, detailed historical account of the development of East Central European welfare states and the politics of social policy during the 20th century, in my view this work should be considered a starting point for the hypotheses put forward, rather than a definite conclusion. Inglot points to striking parallels between types of social policies at different moments in time (i.e. policy legacies). Nevertheless, the fact that such correlations exist does not prove a causal relationship. Although Inglot points to some causal mechanisms and assesses their accuracy in some instances (e.g. the continuing influence of Shoenbaum in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War, the continued role of social policy experts and welfare bureaucrats after the demise of communism), these remain under-researched. As a result, real path dependency as a causal factor for 'bounded change' has not been proven sufficiently. More in-depth research of particular causal mechanisms are therefore necessary as well as a more thorough confrontation of Inglot's interpretation with existing alternative explanations in chapter three [e.g. Müller 1999; Cook 2007].

Second, Inglot reveals convincingly that a linear model of welfare state development and change is inadequate. However, he limits the empirical delineation of periods of social *policy* expansion and retrenchment largely to one single quantitative indicator: social expenditures as a per-

centage of GDP (or Net Material Product for the communist period). This is problematic as the share of social expenditures in GDP may be driven by many other factors than *policy* changes, among which changes in economic growth in first place: strong economic growth (decline) may hide real increases (decreases) in social expenditures. Although Inglot discusses important qualitative information that indicates periods of (partial) expansion and retrenchment, this is not guided by a proper evaluative framework in which benefit levels, eligibility criteria, number of beneficiaries, development/suspension of alternative/additional (privatised) programmes, etc., are integrated [cf. Seeleib-Kaiser 2008]. This may result in a flawed interpretation of expansion and retrenchment, especially since for the communist period no *yearly* figures of real economic growth are presented and in most cases figures of real growth in social spending are lacking altogether. A last critique does not pertain to Inglot's main argument: inaccuracies in tables and text, the lack of a clear grid for the organisation of text in some parts of the book, an unclear interpretation of the real evolution of benefits, and the lack of reference to the literature in the case of a discussion of the evolution of poverty [e.g. Atkinson and Micklewright 1992; Szulc 2006] gave the book a sometimes rather sloppy impression. Nonetheless, Inglot's book is a valuable contribution to the literature both at the theoretical and empirical level as one of the most comprehensive, detailed analyses of welfare state development in East Central Europe available today. As such it is recommended to those working on a theoretical framework of welfare state change as well as to everyone interested in the evolution of the welfare state in this fascinating region of Europe.

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Tomila V. Lankina and Anneke Hudalla, with Hellman Wollmann: *Local Governance in Central and Eastern Europe: Comparing Performance in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Russia*

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With a few exceptions, most comparative studies of local governance in Central and Eastern Europe have emphasised the cross-country comparison of national systems of sub-national governance. While such approaches are informative, argue the authors of this volume, they fail to adequately take into account the diversity of local governance that can exist in localities *within* a single country and the complex configuration(s) of factors that may explain such variations. To remedy this, their book presents an ambitious and detailed comparative study of local governance across eight medium-sized provincial cities in four post-communist Europe states: Sopron and Szolnok in Hungary; Karviná and Ústí nad Labem in the Czech Republic; Jelenia Góra