

# **The future of the welfare state: paths of social policy innovation between constraints and opportunities**

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## **The cultural dimension of welfare state change**

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## Abstract

It has often been argued that welfare state change is the result of economic, political, social or demographic change in a society or at the supra-national level, or of a shift in power relations between actors with differing interests. So far, less attention has been paid to the influence of cultural change on welfare state change, although the cultural foundations of welfare state policies are gaining increasing attention in comparative welfare state research. This paper examines the question of how and under which conditions cultural change can contribute to change in welfare state policies.

“Culture” is conceptualised here as potentially contradictory and subject to negotiations and change. I argue that it is useful to distinguish between three different levels with regard to the relationship of welfare culture and welfare state policies, the cultural values on which welfare state policies are based, welfare attitudes in the population, and discourses between actors which mediate between both levels. Cultural change can start at different levels and can influence welfare state change through different types of processes.

Change can emanate from changes in the cultural orientations on the level of the political elites. On the basis of public discourse, these attempt to legitimise the policy change “from above”. It will be shown under which conditions they can be successful, by using the findings of empirical studies with regard to the strengthening of neoliberal values in the policies of the European welfare state. Change can also emanate from changes in the cultural value orientation among part of the citizens, and then be carried into politics through public discourses which are initiated by social actors such as political parties or social movements. I will demonstrate under which conditions such processes can lead to policy change, by the example of change of the attitudes regarding the family and gainful employment of women in Western European societies since the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I will show that it is important to distinguish short-term and long-term effects, and therefore to consider the chronological course of the change in welfare state policies for the analysis of change processes.

In the first part it will be discussed what sociological concept of “culture” is suitable for such an approach. In the second part, the different levels of the welfare culture will be introduced. In part three I distinguish different types of processes through which cultural change can contribute to policy change and analyse under which conditions the chances increase that such processes lead to change in welfare state policies.

Keywords: Actors, discourses, values, welfare culture, welfare state change

## Introduction

The analysis of the development of welfare states and international differences between them has been a flourishing branch of research in the social sciences for some time. Explanations for changes and international differences in policy have often been sought in the specific structure of institutions and the relevant constellations of actors (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999; Manow 2002; Rhodes 2001). The importance of the cultural foundations of welfare states for their development has only recently also been discussed (e.g. Bal-

dock 1999; Campbell 2002; Oorschot et al. 2007; Orloff 2005; Steensland 2006). For example, the role of religion and Christian democratic parties in the development of European welfare states has been analysed (Daly 1999; Kaufmann 1989; van Kersbergen 1995; Opielka 2007), the influence of Confucianism on the development of social policy in East Asian welfare states has been elucidated (Rieger/Leibfried 1999; Peng 2007), and analyses of the role of cultural values in the structure of social services have been carried out (Chamberlayne et al. 1999). A precursor to such approaches was that of Harold Wilensky, who in his 1975 book "The Welfare State and Equality" undertook a comparative international investigation of both structural and cultural foundations for the size of social spending (Wilensky 1975). However, the newer approaches can be distinguished from this in that they emphasise that culture cannot be regarded as static and is potentially changeable (e.g. Chamberlayne et al. 1999; Clarke 2004; Ullrich 2003; Pfau-Effinger 2004; van Oorschot et al. 2007).

In these works, however, consideration of how the complex interplay between cultural change and welfare state change policies functions is sometimes still too brief. The article introduces reflections on how the impact of cultural factors on the development of welfare state policies can be analysed. The welfare state is considered in its societal context, and the cultural foundations of welfare state policies are viewed as changeable and as the subject of conflicts and negotiation processes between social actors.

In the first part of the article it will be discussed what sociological concept of "culture" is suitable for such an approach. In the second part, a multi-level approach to the influence of cultural factors on the development of welfare state policies is proposed. On this basis, in the third part, various types of processes are distinguished through which cultural change can contribute to policy change.

## **1. How can "culture" be conceptually and theoretically understood for the explanation of welfare state policies?**

"Culture" is a term for which many and varied definitions exist in the social sciences, as the sociologists Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn pointed out in the early 1960s (Kroeber/Kluckhohn 1963). In the early anthropology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was used to characterise the societal and symbolic organisation of traditional "tribal societies". There it was used to denote the whole complex of customs, language and artefacts of a society in the sense of "tradition" (e.g. Smelser 1992). Such a comprehensive definition of the term, in which culture was equated with "tradition" or "traditional society", proved however to be of little use for empirical research and was therefore replaced by a conception of culture that was restricted to societal systems of ideas (Wimmer 2005). In sociology, too, there was a tendency to accept

a conception of culture that was concerned with “ideas” and that essentially consisted of cultural values, models and states of knowledge (e.g. Wimmer 2005; Alexander 1998, 1990; Archer 1995; Lepsius 1990).

The relationship between culture and social systems has been theoretically conceptualised in different ways. Classicists of sociology with more connection to a “materialistic” tradition, such as Karl Marx and Émil Durkheim, treat culture more as a social area whose existence and form is derived from the social system. On the other hand, those theorists with a more “idealistic” orientation, such as Talcott Parsons and Lévi-Strauss, assume that culture determines behaviour and social structures through symbolic orientations and on the basis of socialisation (cf. also Archer 1995).

Both types of approach are controversial. Depending on the scientific standpoint of the critic, it has been argued that the societal role of culture has been overestimated or that it has been underestimated. The tendency to treat culture as a homogeneous and statically established entity has also been criticised. Margaret Archer (1995) writes in this context of the “myth of cultural integration”. The application of both approaches in empirical social research proved to be problematic, since they allowed little room to investigate dynamics and contradictions in the relationship between cultural systems and actors’ behaviour (Pfau-Effinger 2004; Wimmer 2005).

Another tradition of theoretical understanding of culture was essentially founded by Max Weber (1973, 1989, 1991) and is represented by authors such as Shmuel Eisenstadt (2000), Jeffrey Alexander (1988, 1990), Margaret Archer (1996, 2000) and Rainer Lepsius (1990, 1995). In this type of approach, culture is seen as contested and changeable. Also, the level of culture and the level of social system tend to be viewed as equally influential. The interaction between the two levels is emphasised, but the two are still assigned relative autonomy in their relationship with each other. These theoretical approaches offer a suitable basis for the analysis of the two-way influences and dynamics of change in the relationship between culture and institutions.

This kind of theoretical conception of culture also underlies the approach presented here. I define culture as collective constructions of sense on the basis of which people define reality. These constructions of sense include values, models and states of knowledge: in brief, ideas. Cultural systems can be stable over long periods of time. Nevertheless, collective sense constructions are produced and reproduced by the social practice of actors; they can be the subject of conflicts and negotiation processes and can change.

The cultural values and models that are relevant in the context of the welfare state are generally referred to as “welfare culture” (Baldock 1999; Chamberlayne et al. 1999; Manow

2002; Ullrich 2003; Pfau-Effinger 2005a). The expression has become established in social policy research, and is sometimes understood in a broader sense and sometimes in a narrower sense (Dallinger 2001; Ullrich 2000). The broader approach incorporates the whole complex of values, institutional traditions and institutional practices of the welfare state. In the narrower approach, which is also used as the basis for the current article, the expression refers to the complex of ideas relating to the welfare state and its societal functions (Hinrichs 1997; Kaufmann 1991; Offe 1987, 1990). Welfare culture in this sense includes cultural values, value complexes and models relating to the welfare state. It defines the ideational environment to which the relevant social actors, the institutions of the welfare state and concrete policies relate.

The cultural values and models that are dominant in welfare culture limit the spectrum of possible policies of welfare states. International comparative analysis of the cultural foundations of welfare states can therefore also contribute to explaining differences in policies between countries. Not only the foundational values and models can vary, but also the degree of coherence of welfare culture, depending on the spatiotemporal context. Differing welfare cultures can also exist at regional level, below the level of national welfare states. They are generally linked to the national welfare culture on the basis of certain base values, but do not necessarily form a coherent unit with it.

The cultural base values of welfare states are essentially related to the following dimensions of welfare state policy:

- The general societal role of the welfare state
- The redistribution function of the welfare state
- The influence of the welfare state on the division of labour

Values relating to the *general societal role of the welfare state*: Cultural values with relation to the appropriate degree of intervention of social policy in the free working of the market form an important foundation of welfare state policies.

In this regard, differences exist which are crucial for different types of welfare states. In his 'welfare regime' approach, Esping-Andersen has argued that in the welfare cultures on which each of his three welfare regime types are based, different societal spheres are treated as mainly responsible for the provision of welfare: in the "social-democratic welfare regime", it is the state, in the "conservative" regime type it is the family, and the "liberal" regime type particularly appreciates the market as main provider of welfare (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999), even if empirical studies show that this is in fact more a mixture of these principles in Euro-

pean welfare states. In the Central and Eastern European societies, often the market is given higher priority than in many Western European welfare states (Ferge 2007).

Values relating to the *redistribution function of the welfare state*: Cultural values regarding the extent of redistribution, the social groups who should be included in redistribution, and the forms of social integration on the basis of which entitlement to benefits form another main cultural basis for welfare state policies. They also have an impact on the ways in which social security systems are organised - if they are based, for example, on flat rate benefits or social insurance systems, on the degree to which they are targeted, and on the level of benefits.

For example, the value system described by Esping-Andersen as the “social-democratic welfare regime” aims at a universal right of all state citizens to a basic financial assurance of existence. In the more liberal value system of the “liberal welfare regime” in Great Britain and the USA, the principle of self-responsibility of the individual is accorded central importance; the receipt of welfare state payments is seen as desirable only for specific social groups, of whom it is assumed that they are undeservingly threatened with poverty (Chelf 1992; George/Taylor-Gooby 1996; Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Kluegel/Myiano 1995; Ploug/Kvist 1996; Robertson 1998; Steensland 2006).

Furthermore, there is a set of cultural values related to which social groups should count as citizens of a given welfare state and should participate in the distribution at all. This is particularly relevant with regard to the status of migrants. According to Hilary Silver (1995), definitions of social state citizenship and of affiliations differ depending on whether social policy is based more on a republican, a liberal or a social-democratic value system.

Values relating to the *influence of the welfare state on the division of labour*: Social policy is determined by specific values regarding which social groups should be involved in gainful employment, what the “correct” and “normal” form of employment and of employment biography is, and in what relationship to each other gainful employment and social security should stand (Frericks et al. 2008). For example, international differences exist with regard to the extent to which mothers of small children are entitled to leave from gainful employment, and the extent to which migrants have a right to gainful employment (Calloni/Lutz 2000; Knijn et al. 2008). Further important values are those which relate to the question of how much the welfare state should support the family in its caring function, and how childcare and elderly care should be organised. In this respect, too, the welfare cultures of European societies can vary markedly (Ellingsaeter 1999; Pfau-Effinger 2004b; Saxonberg/Szelewa 2007).

## **2. The different levels in the relationship between culture and the welfare state**

The influence of cultural values on the development of welfare states has been receiving increasing amounts of attention for some time now. Often, however, the analysis is limited to the level of welfare state policies themselves and the cultural values and models that enter into the political programme.

The contribution of cultural values and models that are widespread among the population to the stability or to the change of welfare state policies has so far received less attention. Especially in political science, a causal relationship has been construed primarily only in the opposite direction, e.g. in “policy feedback” approaches. According to this approach, welfare states engender certain cultural values and models among the population (cf. Pierson 1993). In this regard, for example, political science has long debated whether a generous social policy creates a “welfare culture” that undermines work ethics and family values (Dean 1992; Engbersen u.a. 1993; Jordan 1992). In the other direction, however, welfare state policies can also reflect cultural values and models that are dominant among the population.

In this regard, the question of the extent to which these are in accord with the cultural foundations of welfare state policies and the extent to which they might diverge from them is of considerable importance for the stability or change of the cultural foundations of welfare state policies. The cultural foundations of welfare state policies form an essential basis for legitimisation of policies that are conditional on acceptance among the majority of the population. In actuality, cultural values and models among the population can also change relatively independently of the welfare state, with the consequence that the change in values causes pressure for change in the cultural foundations of welfare state policies. In order to understand the change, it is therefore important to analyse from which level the change emanates in each case, to what extent a pressure to change then emerges on the respective other level, and to which degree an adjustment to the change ensues there.

The influence of cultural factors on the development of welfare state policies can therefore only be appropriately captured, I argue, if one differentiates between the various levels on which the values and models of welfare culture exert an effect, and if the complex interrelationships between the levels are understood. I consider these levels to be

- The level of the cultural values and models that underlie welfare state policies,
- The level of the cultural values and models relating to the welfare state among the population, and

- The level of the discourses of social actors that have the aim of mediating between the two levels.

It must be stressed that the manner in which the various levels interrelate with one another is modified by further factors in the context of society, such as social structures, central societal institutions outside the welfare state and the specific constellations of actors in a given instance. In what follows, the three levels are described in more detail.

#### *Level 1 - Cultural values and models that underlie welfare state policies*

Welfare state policies are based on cultural values and models and are legitimised by these. For recent developments in European welfare states, several authors have shown that the importance of neo-liberal ideas as a foundation for the shaping of welfare state policies has clearly increased. At all times, however, considerable differences exist and have existed in this regard in the international comparison of welfare states (Bonoli et al. 2000; Martin/Palier 2008; Sinfield 2005).<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between policies and their cultural foundations is thus, because of its embedding in its societal context, changeable. Policies can lose their link to their original cultural basis and have unclear links or even receive a new cultural basis for legitimisation without necessarily changing in the process. In Germany since the late 1990s, for example, the cultural basis for public child care has successively changed. Behind the expansion of public child care in the late 1980s was at first the idea of securing the care of children in light of the increasing employment activity of women, and thus promoting the equality of women. Since then this expansion has continued on the basis of the idea that it is desirable for a society to invest in the education of young children in order for it to keep its footing in the global competition of “knowledge societies” (Olk 2006).

When pursuing the interest of being re-elected, political elites are advised to relate to popular values and models.

#### *Level 2 - Cultural values and models among the population*

Among the population, particular cultural values and models regarding the welfare state are dominant. Contrary to the widespread view that welfare state policies are currently in a crisis of legitimisation, which is often found in the literature, social security receives a broad level of support from the populations of European societies, as van Oorschot (2007) and Dallinger (2008) have shown on the basis of data from European Surveys.

When comparing national societies, the welfare values that are dominant in the population may vary. For example, several studies have shown for the USA and Europe that attitudes among the population towards social inequality and the welfare state, independently of social class membership, clearly differ (Wegner 1992; Walker 2007): in European societies, the dominant model among the majority of the population tends to be that of an intervening social state that reduces social inequality, while the majority of the population of the United States believe that equality is best guaranteed by the free functioning of the market, which is also why social inequality is to a large extent accepted there. In this respect, however, differences also exist when comparing European societies (van Oorschot 2007).

The degree of coherence of values and models relating to the welfare state existing in the population can also be a differentiator within a spatiotemporal context, depending on the extent to which the dominant values and models differentiate between different social groups. In this respect, the population within a country can be fragmented with regard to the welfare culture on a relatively long-lasting basis. For instance, Elisabeth Bühler (2001) demonstrated for Switzerland that the cultural values regarding the extent to which small children should be cared for in public establishments differs clearly between French- and German-speaking Switzerland. In Germany, there are clear differences in this regard between East and West Germany (Pfau-Effinger 2002). In Great Britain, these values differ considerably between social groups with different ethnic backgrounds (Dale/Holdsworth 1997).

### *Level 3 – Actors and discourses*

The cultural values that enter into the welfare state policies form a fundamental basis for the legitimisation of the policies and presuppose the approval of broad parts of the population. Therefore, for the enforcement of changed welfare state policies, it is necessary that the cultural foundations of the policies do not deviate too strongly from the values prevalent in the population with regard to the welfare state. Political and public discourses mediate between cultural values and models on the one hand and the cultural foundations of social policy on the other hand. Such discourses about welfare state values, which should serve to stabilise or change the welfare culture, can emanate from actors on different levels, from the political elites or from social groups in the population. Due to such adaptation processes, differences in the cultural values and models of the respective population are also reflected in the international differences between welfare cultures.

However, it must also be noted that actors act not only on the basis of ideas and that their discourses are not always aimed at the stabilisation or change of dominant ideas; their interests also play an important role. This connection has been shown particularly by Rainer Lep-

sius (1990, 1996) following Max Weber. Social groups may have different interests regarding the welfare state, e.g. because of their position in the structures of social inequality on the basis of social class, gender, ethnicity, region or age. For example, Gösta Esping-Andersen (1990) in his “power resources theory” takes differences in interests between social classes as the basis for an explanation of why different types of welfare states have emerged historically. Position within structures of societal division of labour can also generate different interests, as Gösta Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) has shown through the example of employment in the private and public sectors.

Ideas may co-vary with the material interests of social groups. However, specific values can also be shared by the populations of national societies independently of their respective interests (Opielka 2007). Following the theoretical work of Rainer Lepsius (1990, 1996) and Margaret Archer (1995, 1996) it can be argued that ideas and interests may mutually influence one another but may also develop relatively independently of one another. This is one reason for the empirical untenability of the assumption that the welfare state finds less support in higher social classes than in lower social classes because these pay the most taxes and profit comparatively less from social security (Pettersen 1995; Bowles and Gintis 2000; Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003). This also explains why in countries such as Germany, particularly in the lower social classes, a conservative model of the family in the sense of the “housewife marriage” is widespread, even though the realisation thereof is strongly against the families’ interests regarding income in these groups (Pfau-Effinger 2004).

### **3. The influence of cultural change on change in welfare state policies**

In the following section I examine the question of the conditions under which changes in the cultural foundations of welfare state policies can arise. The multi-level approach presented above can contribute to explaining this.

The development of welfare states may initially rest on a stable value base in the long term, as long as its cultural and social foundations are to some extent coherent and cultural values are stably anchored as norms in the welfare state institutions where they provide the relevant foundation for the behaviour of actors. However, the value base of welfare state policies can change through processes which start at different levels of the welfare culture. Accordingly, two broad patterns of change dynamic can be distinguished:

- (a) Value change starting among the political elites
- (b) Value change starting among the population.

Cultural change can thus contribute to changes in welfare state policies in various ways.<sup>1</sup> The degree of coherence of a welfare culture gives indications of the potential for change it contains. It can be assumed that with decreasing coherence and increasing inconsistency the probability increases that particular groups of actors will try to bring about a change. Discourses about welfare state values can be initiated by actors on various levels, by political elites or by social groups among the population. Political elites can establish discourses with the aim of influencing the values and models of welfare culture among the population such that inherently unpopular policies become accepted (cf. Schmidt 2001). On the other hand, it can happen that groups of social actors among the population outside the welfare state initiate discourses about the cultural values and models of welfare culture with the aim of contributing to stabilising or changing them. The power relationships between the actors play an important role in determining the extent to which the discourses lead to the stabilisation or change of the existing welfare culture. In addition, it can be assumed that governance structures and established forms of cooperation are also important in determining the extent to which particular groups of actors can achieve their goals. In this sense, cultural change can lead to changes in the welfare state policies in different ways.<sup>2</sup> The degree of coherence or incoherence of a welfare culture is therefore an indicator of what potential for change it comprises. It can be assumed that with increasing inconsistency of the values, the likelihood increases that the welfare state policy will remain contentious and unstable.

#### *Value change starting among the political elites*

The change in values may arise among the political elites or parts of those elites and lead to change in the value base of the welfare state. This is primarily conceivable when shifts of power within the political elites have taken place in the direction of those groups who are the social bearers of new or previously marginalised cultural values and models with regard to the welfare state.

The attempt by parts of the political elites to bring about a policy change that will fundamentally call the value base of the previous policy into question may however fail when the defenders of the old policy successfully stick up for the underlying “old” values and fortify these rhetorically and programmatically. Brian Steensland (2006) uses this sort of mechanism to

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<sup>1</sup> The question of the processes and mechanisms that can lead to cultural change is not the object of this paper. It is addressed by a variety of theoretical and empirical contributions from sociology: cf. e.g. Archer; Wimmer 2005; Somers/Block 2005; Pfau-Effinger 2005b.

<sup>2</sup> The question of the processes and mechanisms that the cultural change itself can bring about is not the object of this article. A multitude of theoretical and empirical contributions in sociology are devoted to this (cf. for instance Wimmer 2005; Somers/Block 2005; Pfau-Effinger 2005b).

explain the failure of the American government's drive in the 1960s and 1970s to introduce a guaranteed annual minimum income (GAI), which was also supported by some influential business leaders. The new programme called into question an essential cultural foundation of the US-American welfare state, which was based on a differentiation between two categories of "poor" and according to which poor people whose poverty was classed as being their own fault - and who were therefore stigmatised - were distinguished from poor people of whom it was assumed that they had involuntarily fallen into poverty. Key to the failure of the plans was, according to Steensland, the fact that their implementation would invalidate the cultural differentiation between the two categories, and the fear that the poor who were classed as involuntarily poor (particularly the "working poor") would be stigmatised as "welfare recipients". The conclusion that Brian Steensland draws from his policy analyses is that the world view of those in powerful positions is often the crucial factor in preventing innovation in welfare state policies (Steensland 2006: 1317).

The successful implementation of socio-political innovations, however, requires not only that the changed value base become accepted among the political elites. It is also important for relevant parts of the population to support the new welfare values where these clearly diverge from the previously dominant welfare culture. In this case a process is often initiated in which the political elites establish public discourses "from above" with the aim of influencing the values and models of the population such that policies with changed cultural foundations become accepted (cf. Schmidt 2001). Generally one can assume that the establishment of discourses "from above" with the aim of changing the dominant welfare values of the population is particularly likely to be successful when the relevant political elites are in a position to mobilise a variety of resources and when they succeed in relating to the cultural orientations of large groups of voters (Burstein 1998; Steensland 2006).

But even when a policy change has been implemented, the correspondence with the dominant welfare values in the population is important for the question of how sustainable the change is. This is demonstrated, for example, by the results of a comparative study conducted by Vivian Schmidt (2001), in which she investigated the pushing through of cost-cutting policies in liberal welfare states. In all cases the market was strengthened, and neo-liberal elements were accorded greater importance. In order to implement those policies, governments established discourses that were aimed at according neo-liberal values greater acceptance. Schmidt demonstrates that they were successful in the UK, where the arguments already encountered a generally liberal basic attitude. In New Zealand, by contrast, these discourses were less successful. The government there carried out a relatively surprising short-term deviation from a policy based on social-democratic values at the end of the 1980s, replacing it with a policy more oriented towards neo-liberal basic principles. On the

basis of discourses they then attempted to find acceptance for it among the population. Since liberal values had not previously been prevalent among the population, however, the government experienced increasing dissatisfaction with the policy change among the electorate, with the eventual result that a referendum carried out in the early 1990s restricted the possibility for further reforms (Schmidt 2001; Fellmeth/Rohde 1999). The relatively short-term and unexpected change in the value base of welfare state policy thus proved not to be sustainable in the long term, as this change did not accord with the dominant values among the population at the outset.

#### *Value change starting among the population*

It is also possible, however, for value change to occur initially among parts of the population. In this way, tensions or conflicts between the cultural foundations of current policy on the one hand and the welfare values of the population on the other hand may arise. Under certain conditions this can cause the cultural foundations of welfare state policies and policies themselves to change.

For example, the change of dominant cultural family model from the traditional model of housewife marriage in the direction of a model of moderate equality in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, described by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) as conservative welfare states, was an important factor in causing the changes that have taken place in family policies in these countries since the 1990s as public options for child care have been expanded. In this case, however, family policy reacted to the cultural change, which had already begun much earlier, only after a considerable delay (Kreimer/Schiffbänker 2005; Pfau-Effinger 2005a). The family policies of the conservative welfare states thus tended to approximate more closely to the welfare states of the “social-democratic” type, whose family policies had already been oriented at a model of equality on the basis of the full integration of men and women into employment for considerably longer (Pfau-Effinger et al. 2009).

The emergence of new dominant values and models among the population obviously does not automatically lead to change in welfare state policies. Important for their implementation is the behaviour of social actors. There are various types of actors who can be important in the “translation” of cultural change among the population onto the level of welfare state policies. These mainly include actor types such as primary actors, collective actors and social movements.

The term “primary actors”, as defined by Archer (1995: 259), refers to large groups of the population who find themselves in a similar social situation but who follow no common strat-

egy to change welfare state policies and who do not organise themselves collectively to do so. They pursue no strategies through which they wish to change welfare state policies. Since their behaviour may possibly also change as a consequence of serious changes in cultural values, however, the aggregate effects of their change in behaviour, e.g. in their role as voters, employees or consumers, may exert a pressure for change on the cultural foundations of welfare state policies. For example, the change in cultural models for families and gender relationships that took place in the 1960s and 1970s in many Western European societies contributed considerably to a massive increase in the participation of women in gainful employment. This change initiated a massive pressure for a change in the welfare states to establish a public infrastructure for child care. Changes in the structure of the economy, which have often been cited as causal, played only a secondary role, behind cultural change; they were far more a consequence of the cultural change and the resulting changes in the behaviour of women than their cause (Pfau-Effinger 2004).

A further type of actor that has the potential to be important in this context, whose influence, including on a cultural level, has been much investigated in political science, are the “collective” actors such as parties, syndicates and unions. These not only follow the interests of their respective members or clientele but generally also integrate their member base on the basis of particular cultural value orientations that they introduce into public and political discourses. An example of the influence of collective actors on change in welfare state policies is presented by Jill Quadagno’s study of the development of the American health system. She argues that a central cause of the expansion of the US-American health system through the establishment of “Medicare” in the 1960s was the success of collective actors in altering the categorisation between “guilty” and “innocent” social groups suffering from poverty such that the elderly were basically counted as part of the group of “involuntarily poor” (Quadagno 2005). A further example is provided by Steinar Stjernö’s analyses of the development of social-democratic parties in Western Europe. He comes to the conclusion that since the 1990s a change in values based on a strengthening of neo-liberal ideas has taken place in a range of Western European social-democratic parties. According to Stjernö, this has significantly contributed to the increase in influence of this sort of principle in the welfare cultures of Western European welfare states (Stjernö 2007).

In the context of cultural change, social movements may also attain importance. For example, the second wave of the feminist movement in Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s

pursued the goal of a change in the cultural value base of European societies with regard to the family and gender relationships with relative success (Gerhard 1996).<sup>3</sup>

Collective actors and social movements generally initiate public or political discourses in order to convince the political elites to make changes in the cultural foundations of welfare state policies (Kaufmann 1991; Schmidt 2001). The extent to which the actors who aim for change are also in the position to mobilise a sufficient range of resources is important in determining whether such actions lead to a change in the cultural foundations of welfare state policies. When such attempts fail and the discourses do not lead to the desired change in welfare culture, tensions and conflicts may continue to exist, which contribute to the process being re-launched at a later date.

The chronological course of the change in welfare state policies is therefore also important for the analysis of change processes. It is possible for a change in the cultural values and models that are dominant among the population to lead to a change in policy only after a considerable delay. For instance, most welfare state policies reacted only hesitantly, with a strong time lag, and incompletely to the change in the cultural foundations of the family and of gender relations in the population (Pfau-Effinger 2004).

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the current article, considerations were presented regarding how the influence of cultural factors on the development of welfare state policies can be analysed. "Culture" is conceived as potentially contradictory, as an object of conflicts and negotiation processes, and as changeable. Three different levels of the relationship between welfare culture and welfare state development can be distinguished. These encompass the level of cultural values and models which underlie the policies and which serve purposes of their legitimisation, the level of cultural values and models with regard to the welfare state in the population, and the level of discourses of social actors. The influence of the welfare culture on the change in welfare state policies can be analysed in the context of the interrelations between these levels.

In this way, different types of processes can be distinguished on whose basis cultural change can contribute to the change in welfare state policies. In the one case, the change emanates from changes in the cultural orientations on the level of the political elites. On the basis of

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<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, in some circumstances a change in the cultural foundations of policies can influence cultural orientations among the population. Eydal (2005) shows, for example, that the provisions for parental leave for fathers first introduced in several Scandinavian countries and recently introduced in Germany have contributed to an increase in cultural estimation of the care of children by their father.

public discourse, these attempt to legitimise the policy change “from above”. This was shown using the example of the strengthening of neoliberal values in the policies of the European welfare state. In the other case, the change emanates from changes in the cultural orientations of the population, and is carried into politics through public discourses which are initiated by social actors such as political parties or social movements. An example of this was demonstrated in the cultural values and models regarding the family and gainful employment of mothers in Western European societies. In both types of process, however, it can occur that the change is blocked or proceeds in a contradictory manner, and that the cultural foundations of welfare states remain contentious in the longer term.

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<sup>i</sup> In part, the content of central welfare values was itself subject to certain changes, as illustrated, for instance, by Steinar Stjernö (2007) using the example of the cultural value of "solidarity".