



European Welfare States

Comparitive Perspectives

Mel Cousins

EUROPEAN WELFARE STATES

EUROPEAN WELFARE STATES COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

MEL COUSINS

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ONE INTRODUCTION

The objective of this book is to provide an up-to-date and comparative analysis of European welfare states. It covers three main issues:

- 1 Key theories about welfare states (for example, political theory, globalisation and gender).
- 2 A description and analysis of the development of European welfare states and a comparative outline of a small number of states drawn from different welfare 'families'.
- 3 A discussion of current key challenges and possible options for future policy development.

The theoretical perspective is directly linked to empirical country examples providing a coherent and detailed picture of European welfare states.

This chapter defines the scope of the book. If we are to look at European welfare states, it is first necessary to ask what we mean by these terms, that is, 'Europe' and 'welfare state'. The chapter also provides an introduction to comparative welfare state analysis. Why should we study welfare states in a comparative context? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing so? It outlines the reasons for comparative studies and the potential disadvantages of this approach. It also discusses methods of comparative welfare state analysis. Finally, the chapter outlines the contents of this book.

EUROPE

Sykes has correctly stated that 'most studies of social policy in Europe focus either explicitly or implicitly on the Member States of the EU' (1998: 15). But it is clear that Europe and the European Union (EU) are not co-terminus. Even in the case of Western Europe, nations such as Norway and Switzerland have chosen to remain outside the EU. More fundamentally, the ongoing accession of a large number of Central and Eastern European countries has emphasised the shifting nature of the EU's boundaries. On the one hand, the accession of 10 countries (including eight Central and Eastern European countries) in 2004 has brought a significant section of

Europe within the EU. On the other hand, however, it has emphasised the fact that a large number of European countries remain outside the European Union.

Yet, as Therborn has argued, 'the territoriality of Europe is itself a historical construct' (1995: 34). Current Europe, he argues, is less than two hundred years old. There are fairly clear physical boundaries both to the North and West of Europe. However, culturally and in terms of policy influences it is often argued that the United Kingdom and Ireland are influenced in social policy terms at least as much by the United States as they are by mainland Europe. To the South, the Mediterranean now also forms a clear geographic and economic boundary between the wealthy countries of Europe and the under-developed countries of Northern Africa. As Therborn points out, there is a degree of irony in this in that 'the same sea once held a common civilization together' (1995: 35).

It is to the East that the fuzzy nature of Europe's boundaries is now most evident. The fall of Communism (and the Iron Curtain), the creation of a whole host of new nation states, and the enormous size of Russia and Turkey (both spanning two continents) all mean that it is very difficult to define exactly where Europe's eastern border lies. As Therborn argues, 'the Urals are a cartographer's demarcation, hardly a natural physical border' (1995: 35).

This study will look at Europe in broad terms rather than focussing narrowly on the European Union. Nonetheless, its main focus will be on those nations which are now members of the European Union. One reason for this is that 'the logic of the comparative research design ideally requires that the countries be maximally different on the dimensions of their study and maximally similar on all other dimensions' (Goodin et al., 1999: 14). Thus it is more difficult to engage in any real way in a comparative study of countries like Sweden with an average per capita income of US\$26,000 per annum and a country such as Albania with an average income equivalent to US\$400. There are, of course, also practical constraints in covering both an excessively large number of countries and countries for which very limited data is yet available. The study looks in detail at about twenty European countries. It is obviously impossible to make any detailed reference to such a large number of countries in one study. In Chapter 7, five specific countries from different welfare state approaches are discussed in more detail. These are not intended to be 'representative', but they are intended to be indicative of the different 'families' of welfare state which exist within Europe. The rationale for the selection of these particular countries is set out in Chapter 7.

EUROPEANISATION

Europe is not simply a geographic area but also a political, economic and cultural construct. Accordingly, in our study of European welfare states it is important to consider the impact that 'Europeanisation' is having in this area. Europeanisation 'can be taken as designating processes of economic, socio-cultural and political integration in Europe' (Kelstrup, 2001) and is mainly related to the recent process of integration specifically through the development of the European Union. Of course, this process is not confined to the current members of the EU but, due to the accession and related processes, extends far beyond the borders of the EU itself.

The term 'Europeanisation' is used in two different ways:

- First, the term has been used to describe the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal and social institutions associated with political problem-solving which formalise interactions among the actors and policy networks specialising in the creation of authoritative rules. (Börzel and Risse, 2000)
- Second, that term has been used to describe '[a] set of processes through which the EU political, social and economic dynamics become part of a logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies' (quoting Radaelli, 2000: 3).

Both these processes, the development of distinct structures of governance and the processes through which EU dynamics become part of the domestic discourse, are important in the development of European welfare states.

One of the difficulties in this area is to separate out the analysis of Europeanisation from the broader process of globalisation. The two processes are clearly related, but Europeanisation can be seen both as part of the broader globalisation process and as a reaction against it, 'which makes it possible to exercise political influence on the ways in which globalisation transforms societies' (Kelstrup, 2001). These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapters 7 and 10.

WELFARE STATE

The rationale for studying *European* welfare states is strengthened by the fact that, as Peter Flora has argued, 'the modern welfare state is a European invention' (1986: xii). But there is a perhaps surprising absence of any clear definition of the meaning of the term 'welfare state'. As Flora and Heidenheimer have stated, 'welfare and state are

among the most ambiguously employed terms in contemporary English political vocabulary' (1981: 5). They might have added that the combination of the two words in the term 'welfare state' has not diminished in any way the ambiguity involved.

ORIGINS OF THE TERM

The term 'welfare state' appears to have originated in its German form *Wohlfahrtsstaat* in the later nineteenth or early twentieth century. As early as 1922 it could be stated that 'today the state regards itself in principle as the bearer of primary responsibility for social welfare ... it does not aspire simply to be a state of order, police and law, but also wants to be a culture and welfare state as well' (quoted in Hong, 1998: 36). However, by the 1930s in Germany the term had become one of political abuse. In 1932 the German Chancellor, von Papen, accused the Weimar government of having 'attempted to make the state into a sort of welfare state and, in this way, weakened the moral forces of the nation' (quoted in Hong, 1998: 208).

In the United Kingdom, the term, in its English form, appears to have come into common use in the late 1930s and 1940s (Bruce, 1961). Ironically, the Beveridge Report, sometimes referred to as the blueprint for the welfare state, did not use the term. Indeed Beveridge himself, sometimes referred to as the father of the welfare state, disliked the term because of what he saw as its 'Santa Claus' and 'Brave New World' connotations and never used it (Harris, 1977: 448). As Harris points out he preferred the term 'social service state' which, he felt, implied that citizens had duties as well as rights (1977: 459).

Despite Beveridge's reservations, the term became widely used in English (see, for example, Asa Briggs' (1961) definition of the term 'welfare state' in Box 1.1).

WHAT IS A WELFARE STATE?

Today a typical example of the definition of a welfare state is:

A system in which the government undertakes the chief responsibility for providing for the social and economic security of its population, usually through unemployment insurance, old age pensions, and other social-security measures; A social system characterized by such policies. (Collins English Dictionary, 2000)

As can be seen, this definition brings together three different issues. First, there is the policy intention of the welfare state, in this case suggested to be government undertaking the responsibility for

providing for the social and economic security of its population. Second, there is the method by which this is achieved, in this case suggested to be unemployment insurance and other social security measures. Third, the definition recognises the fact that the term 'welfare state' has come to be used in respect of the overall social system characterised by such an approach.

A COMMITMENT TO 'WELFARE'?

Some approaches adopt a normative approach to the definition of the welfare state. In other words, they argue that, in order to be a welfare state, the cluster of state policies must have a specific objective whether this be emancipatory, de-commodification or the pursuit of equality. Marshall (1950), for example, argues that social citizenship constitutes the core idea of a welfare state. A recent German history of the welfare state argues that one should distinguish between two aspects of the welfare state: first, the welfare state as a range of social services or institutions, and second, as 'patterns of political action based on welfare-related normative orientations' (Leisering, 2003: 179). This approach identifies a welfare state only where social services are linked to normative orientations. Thus some countries, such as the United States of America and the former Soviet Union (and other former communist countries), cannot be identified as welfare states.

For the purposes of this study, however, it does not seem useful to delimit the scope of the term 'welfare state' by a preconception of what that state *should* aim to achieve. To do so would raise very difficult definitional issues about the precise degree of normative commitment required to qualify as a welfare state and the timing of transitions in and out of welfare statehood. (For example, would the United States of America qualify as a welfare state at the time of the New Deal in the 1930s, and if so when did it cease to be defined as such?) In addition, such an approach to the definition of welfare states does not perhaps correspond with the common use of the term. If, for example, we found that the social policies of a particular European country were neither de-commodifying nor emancipatory and, in fact, increased inequalities, one might criticise these policies but few would suggest that the term 'welfare state' could not still be applied to the country.

THE SCOPE OF THIS BOOK

A second issue arises in distinguishing between the bundle of policies normally referred to as the welfare state and the 'social system' characterised by such policies. This can be seen in Esping-Andersen's

definition of the welfare state (see Box 1.1). Esping-Andersen refers to a narrow and broad approach to the welfare state. The first sees it in terms of the traditional social policies of income transfers and social services. The broader view focuses on the state's larger role in managing and organising the economy. This broader view, which considers issues such as the state's role in the overall macro-economic steering of the economy, has produced many interesting studies. However, for present purposes, it would bring in a very wide range of policies including, for example, the role of the Central Banks and the role of corporatism in developing macro-economic policy.

Box 1.1: Definitions of 'welfare state'

[A] welfare state ... will be seen to have three immutable characteristics. The first is that the term refers not simply to a discrete range of social services but to a society in which government actively accepts responsibility for the welfare (broadly defined) of all its citizens. The second and third characteristics concern its chronology and core functions, both of which require further elaboration. Chronologically, welfare states were the unique creation of the 1940s. ... [In terms of its core functions] ... a welfare state is a society in which government is expected to ensure the provision for all its citizens of not only social security but also a range of other services – including health, education and housing – at a standard well above the barest minimum. In so doing it consumes resources (through expenditure on goods and the employment of manpower) on such a scale that it cannot but affect the working of the economy. For this reason, and in order both to finance its own expenditure and to minimise political dissatisfaction or unrest, it is concerned with the underlying health of the economy. (Lowe, 2004)

A 'Welfare State' is a state in which organized power is deliberately used (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three directions – first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain social contingencies (for example, sickness, old age and unemployment) which lead otherwise to individual and family crises; and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services. (Briggs, 1961)

The welfare state has been approached both narrowly and broadly. Those who take the narrower view see it in terms of the traditional terrain of social amelioration: income transfers and social services, with perhaps some token mention of the housing question. The broader view often frames its questions in terms of political economy, its interests focused on the state's larger role in managing and organizing the economy. In the broader view, therefore, issues of employment, wages, and overall macro-economic steering are considered integral components in the welfare-state complex. (Esping-Andersen, 1990)

Box 1.1: (Continued)

In a narrow sense, the welfare state may refer to state measures for the provision of key welfare services (often confined to health, housing, income maintenance and personal social services). Increasingly broadly, the welfare state is also taken to define (1) a particular form of state, (2) a distinctive form of polity or (3) a specific type of society [For the purposes of this study the author defines the welfare state under capitalism] as defining a society in which the state intervenes within the processes of economic reproduction and distribution to reallocate life chances between individual and/or classes. (Pierson, 1998)

I define the welfare state, or state social provision, as interventions by the state in civil society to alter social forces, including male dominance, but I do not judge a priori that all interventions are aimed at, or actually produce, greater equality among citizens. (Orloff, 1996: 53)

The welfare state is the institutional outcome of the assumption by a society of legal and therefore formal and explicit responsibility for the basic well-being of all its members. Such a state emerges when a society or its decision-making groups become convinced that the welfare of the individual ... is too important to be left to custom or to informal arrangements and private understandings and is therefore a concern of government. (Girvetz, 1968)

As Pierson has argued, the broad approach to the understanding of the welfare state has had 'salutary effects' and has illustrated 'the extent to which welfare states are nested in a set of broader institutional arrangements' (2001: 420–1). But as Pierson has pointed out, such a broad approach also has disadvantages. It inevitably brings together the discussion of quite different policies and issues under the umbrella of the term 'welfare state'. First, it leads to a situation where studies of the welfare state are 'talking past each other' because they are examining quite distinct aspects of the welfare state. Second, a study of a wide range of different policies and institutions makes comparative study more difficult both because of the difficulties involved in analysing a wide range of different policy measures and due to data limitations. A related reason for a focus on one particular area of the welfare state is that, as Castles has argued 'the causes and consequences of the policy actions of the state differ widely from one policy area to another and within particular areas over time' (1998: 300). An effort to analyse all the different sectors of welfare state policies can lead to so many answers that one has forgotten the question.

For the purposes of this study, we will take a somewhat pragmatic approach to understanding of the term 'welfare state'. We will look in particular at the policies which are included in the term 'social protection' by the European Union (that is, social security and, to a

lesser extent, health) and at closely related labour market policies (in particular active labour market policies).

Daly suggests that a focus on cash benefits can be justified on the basis of 'their power to reveal the nature and quality of social rights' (1997: 132). She argues that cash benefits are 'the most tangible expression of social rights' and thus 'are wonderfully revealing of the terms on which individuals can make claims on public resources and the types of solidarity which are fostered by systems of public support' (1997: 132). Tempting as this line of argument may be, it is not necessarily clear that cash benefits are any more revealing than labour market, health care or social services policies. I would prefer to defend a focus on cash and (to a lesser extent) health benefits on more pragmatic grounds. These benefits are undeniably important, constituting on average over half of total government spending in European countries. They impact on the lives and opportunities of the majority of the populations of European countries and are indeed revealing of key trends in public policy.

WELFARE STATE – AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TERM

A final point in relation to the term 'welfare state' is that despite its frequent use in international social policy discourse it is very much an English language term. Despite its German origins, the term 'welfare state' in German has negative connotations and such terms as 'social policy', 'social market economy' or 'social state' are more common (Alber, 1986). While the Latin languages have developed their own versions of the term such as the French *État Providence* or the Italian *Stato del Benessere*, these terms are not very commonly used.

COMPARATIVE WELFARE STATE ANALYSIS

WHY STUDY COMPARATIVELY?

In this section we look at why one might study welfare states in a comparative context and at the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. Then we look briefly at the approaches to comparative welfare state study.

Why should we study welfare states comparatively? In this, and most, studies of welfare states, the unit of analysis is the nation. The focus is on what is happening at the level of the individual country. Thus this book examines European welfare *states* rather than 'the European welfare state'. However, there are a number of international influences which are perhaps shaping the development of national welfare states, and it is arguable that these influences may be increasing over time. First, as we shall examine in Chapter 3, economic integration

and globalisation are argued to have an increasing impact on the national welfare states. Second, and this is particularly relevant in Europe, international agencies are increasingly having a role in the development of welfare state policies. In the European context, the work of the European Union is particularly relevant in this area. While social policy remains a national competence, the European Union has an increasing role to play in shaping the development of social policies, even if this is through 'soft' methods such as the open method of co-ordination rather than through the 'harder' methods of legislation. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also plays an important role in influencing policy and, in Central and Eastern Europe, organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have had an influential role. Finally, and this is a factor which can be seen over the lifetime of the welfare state, there is a high degree of policy diffusion, particularly in a European context. If, for example, we look at the introduction of old age pensions in any particular country, it may seem that national factors have been most influential in the timing and form of that introduction. However, when we look at this in a comparative context we see that old age pensions were introduced across Europe in a surprisingly narrow timeframe. The same applies to the introduction of sickness benefits, unemployment insurance and family allowances. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

The advantages of a successful comparative approach are obvious. We can hope to understand much more about the development of the national welfare state if we see how welfare states have developed in other, broadly similar, countries and if we can identify common trends or divergences across countries. A comparative approach can help us to question aspects of our own national welfare states which we may have taken for granted. Similarly, a comparative approach may help to explain particular developments which may otherwise appear anomalous. A comparative approach can also help us to generate general theories about the operation of welfare states and societies. While a study of one country (or even a group of countries) may suggest that, for example, government by left-wing parties is the factor most likely to lead to an extensive welfare state, broader comparative analysis can help us to ask whether, in fact, other types of government (such as Christian democratic parties) can lead to a similar destination by a different route. Similarly, comparative analysis can help us to examine whether globalisation has a different impact on a large and largely closed economy than it does on a small and more open economy. Finally, comparative analysis can help us to take into account the different stages of economic development

between core and peripheral countries in Europe and the impact this has on the development of welfare states.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF COMPARATIVE STUDY

Comparative study of welfare states is, however, difficult. First, there are the practical difficulties of language and data. In order to study comparatively, we have to be sure that we are studying the same thing. However, at least in a European context, this difficulty has been increasingly overcome by the development of more comparative data banks by organisations such as the EU and the OECD and by the (fortunate or unfortunate) increasing availability of English language studies of European welfare states.

There is also the perhaps more important danger of attempting to impose grand explanatory theories on diverse countries. Many welfare state studies can be criticised for their tendency to focus on a small number of rich, core countries and for assuming that more peripheral countries were simply 'backward' and that they would inevitably develop towards the same type of welfare state (Cousins, 1997). It has been argued that 'social scientists compare to escape cultural hegemony' (Janoski and Hicks, 1994: 6). However, rather than escaping from cultural hegemony, many social scientists can be accused of attempting – consciously or unconsciously – to impose cultural hegemony in their study of welfare states. While the study of other welfare states can help to inform both general theories of welfare and our knowledge of our own welfare state, it is important to ensure that our approach does not seek to turn the other into the same (Docherty, 1993).

HOW DO WE STUDY COMPARATIVELY?

The approach to the comparative study of welfare states varies on a continuum from the very detailed, *qualitative* study of a small number (perhaps two, three or four) of welfare states in great detail to the large-scale *quantitative* study of a large number of welfare states. In many cases, such studies involve about eighteen OECD countries, although some involve as many as sixty or more countries.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. The small-scale qualitative approach involves very detailed study of the development of welfare states over time. Inevitably, however, there is a limit to the number of countries which a researcher (or even a small team of researchers) can hope to study in detail. In contrast, the larger-scale quantitative studies can allow a wide range of factors to be taken into account over a considerable period of time in a much larger number of countries. Such quantitative studies

frequently use sophisticated econometric methods to analyse the relationship between factors such as the level of economic development or the strength of particular political parties and the development of welfare states. Unfortunately, however, the availability of data and the linking of the data to the theory rarely matches the reliability or sophistication of the econometric methods used and there have been a number of recent important criticisms of aspects of quantitative approaches (see Shalev, 2002; Hall, 2003; Ebbinghaus, 2003).

Korpi argues that while quantitative comparative studies 'cannot compete with the rigor of deductive theorizing nor with the richness of life in detailed case studies, they have a greater capacity for theoretical disillusionment via confrontation with specific aspects of reality' (1989: 324). This would, however, suggest that greater emphasis in quantitative comparative studies should be placed on rejecting theories due to lack of causal relationship rather than on attempting to 'prove' a causal relationship from a statistical one.

Hall argues that a substantial gap has opened up between ontology (in the sense of 'the fundamental assumptions that scholars make about the nature of the social and political world and especially about the nature of the causal relationships within that world') and methodology ('the means scholars use for ensuring that their inferences about the social and political world are valid') (Hall, 2003: 373–4). Most ontologies now assume that policy outcomes are the result of complex interaction effects and various forms of multiple causality, whereas many statistical methods are based on much more restrictive assumptions about causal relationships (for example, independence of variables, steady impact over time and space, absence of multiple causality). Increasingly there is a move towards more qualitative comparative approaches (QCA), which seek to combine the detailed study of the qualitative approach with the mathematical rigour of the more quantitative studies (Ragin, 1994 and see Box 1.2). However, as Hall points out, such approaches retain an essentially correlational approach to causal inference and, all too often, conflate causality with co-occurrence (2003).

Box 1.2: What is qualitative comparative analysis?

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a method of comparative analysis that uses Boolean algebra – an algebra based on binary numbers and a collection of binary logic operations – in the study of social phenomena. Qualitative studies generally examine only a relatively small number of cases, but these analyses are both detailed and look at how different factors interact together to produce specific

(Continued)

Box 1.2: (Continued)

outcomes. QCA formalises the logic of qualitative analysis in a mathematical model which allows researchers to apply the logic and empirical detail of qualitative approaches to studies that embrace a larger number of cases (which would normally require the use of statistically complex quantitative methods).

QCA involves the categorisation of each potential variable (identified on the basis of previous theoretical study) into either/or. A truth table is then prepared, setting out the categorisation of dependent variables and that of the independent variables. These combinations are compared with each other and logically simplified. The objective of the simplification is to represent the information in the truth table, regarding the different combinations of conditions that produce a specific outcome, in the most concise manner possible.

One of the disadvantages of QCA is the requirement that all variables be dichotomised. While this can be acceptable for some variables (for example, whether a person is or is not a Catholic), it may represent an unrealistic reduction of 'reality' in others (for example, strength of unionisation) where it may be more realistic to provide a continuum of values from very low levels of unionisation, through medium levels to very high levels.

A development of QCA, which takes account of this limitation, is 'fuzzy sets'. A fuzzy set allows measurement in the interval between 0 and 1. Thus the fuzzy set of trade union strength could include nations who are 'fully in' the set (membership = 1.0), some who are 'almost fully in' the set (membership = .90), some who are neither 'more in' nor 'more out' of the set (membership = .5), and so on down to those who are 'fully out' of the set (membership = 0). This gives considerably more flexibility. However, it may also lead to researchers attaching a spurious scientificity to apparent relationships between degrees of a particular 'cause' and an outcome such that this development of QCA can, in incautious hands, begin to resemble traditional quantitative methods.

This is not to deny the value of statistical methods. However, it is to insist on the importance of inspecting not only the correspondence between the data representing 'causes' and those representing 'outcomes', but also the process whereby those causal factors operate so as to lead to those outcomes (Hall, 2003). All too often, comparative researchers posit a possible relationship between cause and effect, then proceed to 'show' such a relationship (both through quantitative and qualitative methods) and then conclude that *quod erat demonstrandum*. As Hall (2003) argues, the essence of explanation does not simply lie in specifying a set of 'explanatory variables', particular levels of which can be said to correlate with an outcome, but in explaining the mechanisms whereby one factor leads to another.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book is divided into three sections. Part I looks at theoretical perspectives on the welfare state. Chapter 2 reviews the range of approaches developed to explain the development of welfare states. It is not confined to 'political' theory in the narrow sense, examining also factors such as economics, sociology, and religion. It outlines the recent theories about welfare state retrenchment and the 'new politics of welfare'.

Chapter 3 focuses on the wealth of recent writings on globalisation and outlines the (sometimes conflicting) approaches. In particular, it looks at what is meant by globalisation both generally and specifically in relation to welfare state theory. It outlines the different theses which have been put forward in relation to the impact of globalisation on welfare states and looks at the extent to which research indicates support for these theses in a European context.

Chapter 4 looks at criticisms of existing approaches from a gender perspective and at recent studies which apply a more gendered analysis of the welfare state. In particular it outlines the theoretical criticisms which have been made of existing theories and it draws on more recent work which has attempted to develop gendered criteria for analysing the impact of welfare states.

Part II looks at issues in comparing European welfare states. Chapter 5 gives a history of the development of welfare states in Europe, including the factors that have influenced those changes. It also gives some key data on the variations in welfare states that exist in Europe.

Chapter 6, which looks at typologies of welfare, examines the literature on these typologies and at how this applies in a European context. It looks at the general debates about 'typologising', at the criticisms that have been advanced of Esping-Andersen's approach and at the defences of that approach. It also looks at alternative approaches such as the 'families of nations' developed by Castles and his colleagues. It examines the extent to which typologies can inform our understanding of European welfare states and the extent to which 'actually existing' welfare states match the typologies.

Chapter 7 provides a concise overview of current welfare regimes in five contrasting European countries. Each country's system is outlined using a common analytical framework.

Chapter 8 looks at public opinion and the welfare state. It examines recent data on public opinion in Europe from surveys such as Eurobarometer, the International Social Survey Programme and the European Value Study. There is now a considerable body of international opinion poll evidence on support for the welfare state. This

evidence has, to some extent, called into question the 'legitimacy crisis' thesis, as opinion poll evidence does not generally show a decline in support for the welfare state. But if, internationally, there has not been a decline in the level of support for welfare spending, why has there been a tendency for governments – to varying degrees – to introduce policies of retrenchment or restructuring? This chapter looks at the theoretical issues relating to public opinion in the broad sense and at opinion polls and the extent to which public opinion can help to explain welfare state developments.

Part III looks at the future of European welfare. Chapter 9 looks at the challenges facing European welfare states including demographic issues (such as ageing and falling birth rates), international economic integration and globalisation, changes in the labour market, the expansion of the European Union, and their impact on the need for support in key policy areas such as caring and pensions. It refers, in particular, to issues arising in the countries featured in Chapter 7 and also links back to the theoretical discussion of the new politics of welfare in Chapter 2 to provide a comparative study of welfare reforms.

To conclude, Chapter 10 on policy options looks at current philosophies of welfare, and at possible policy directions for the future including privatisation and basic income and EU developments such as 'open co-ordination'. In particular, this chapter examines developments at an EU level and, in the light of EU expansion, assesses the extent to which a European welfare state may be developing.

Summary

This chapter has discussed:

- how Europe is a social, political and cultural as well as a geographical entity;
- the definition of the term 'welfare state' and whether a normative commitment to welfare is an essential part of that definition;
- the advantages and disadvantages of comparative study; and has
- provided an outline of the contents of this book.

Discussion points

- 1 Where does Europe's eastern (or southern) border lie? What implications does this have for the study of European welfare states/the development of European welfare policies?
- 2 We can only speak of a *welfare* state where there is a normative commitment by that state to the welfare of its people. Discuss.
- 3 '[S]ocial scientists compare to escape cultural hegemony (or ethnocentrism)' (Janoski and Hicks, 1994: 6). Is this true?

Supplementary reading

Despite its ubiquity, there is a surprising absence of discussion about the meaning of the term 'welfare state'. For an overview of the issues see Flora and Heidenheimer (1981). Therborn (1995) provides one of the most imaginative and comprehensive discussions of 'Europe' from a social policy perspective. There is a wide range of texts on comparative social policy analysis. Janoski and Hicks (1994) provide a detailed overview of more qualitative, comparative research methods. Said (1993) provides a useful caution to an excessively 'Eurocentric' approach to any area of study.

PART **ONE**

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
