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On the cultural analysis of social policy

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Abstract

This paper takes the increased interest in the relation between culture and social policy as a starting point, and discusses how this increasing attention can be understood as the result of economic, social and academic trends. It discusses these matters and at the same time reviews briefly some of the main findings of the cultural analysis of social policy. A second issue regards the character of the cultural perspective in social policy analysis. Thus far, most studies in the field have been guided by a notion of culture as consisting of the values, norms and beliefs of welfare state actors. Recently, this notion has been questioned by advocates of the so-called 'cultural turn', who suggest that a radical change in the cultural analysis of social policy is required. The article concludes with a discussion of their claims.

Introduction

Some colleagues deny that paying attention to cultural factors is contributive to our understanding of social policy. The idea that moral ideas and debates would have a significant influence on the design of social policies has been equated with the idea that the party and gossip on deck would determine the course of the ship (Schoor (1984) in: Deacon, 2002). Baldock (1999) has argued that culture, as a set of common values, norms and attitudes shared by the majority of a national population, is not a missing variable in understanding social policy.¹

However, those who deny any significant relation between culture and social policy take in a lonely position. Much more often than not one can read opposite views expressed in the literature. It is, for instance, a broadly accepted view that the early development of Western welfare states cannot only be partially understood as resulting from industrial and economic growth (Wilensky, 1975), or from a power struggle between the interests of classes and risk categories (Baldwin, 1990), but also from a struggle between various ideologies as conservatism, liberalism and socialism (George & Page, 1995; Chatterjee, 1996; Fitzpatrick, 2001). In addition, it is acknowledged that Catholic and Protestant religious cultures have had their influence on the formation and design of European welfare states (Van Kersbergen, 1995; Hornsby-Smith, 1999), and that a political culture of neo-liberalism has been steering the restructuring of Western welfare states during the last two decennia (Bonoli et al., 2000; Deacon, 2002; Powell & Hewitt, 2002). Recently, it has even been posited that the process of globalization, which urges many welfare states all over the world to adapt, is essentially a cultural process of rationalization (Rieger & Leibfried, 2003).

Many more examples could be given to illustrate that relations between culture and social policy do exist. Not only at the macro level, but also, for instance, at the level of the interaction between administrators and their clients. And not only of culture influencing social policy, but also the other way round, as is claimed, for instance, by studies of the effects of welfare benefits on work ethic and civic morality.

This all does not mean that the relation between culture and social policy at present has developed into an adequately theorized, coherent field of study. On the contrary, as it seems, since in recent years quite a few complaints have been expressed about the underdeveloped state of the cultural analysis of social policy and about the fact that it lags behind the economic and political analyses (see e.g., Aaron et al., 1994; Chamberlayne et al., 1999; Schmidt, 2000; Lockhart, 2001; Clarke, 2002; Pfau-Effinger, 2002). Although pessimistic in tone, these recent complaints do indicate, however, that the interest in culture and social policy is growing. Why would one otherwise be bothered? But what is more, in most cases the complaints expressed function as preludes to theoretical and/or empirical studies into the various relationships between culture and social policy.

In this paper I take the increased interest in the relation between culture and social policy as a starting point. What interests me, firstly, is how it can be understood that this relationship has attracted increasing attention. In my view this has to do with

¹ Strong positions on the irrelevance of the cultural factor are most often based on a strict and limited conception of culture. Like in Baldock's case, where culture is seen as a common set of values, norms and attitudes, shared by the majority of a national population. This, combined with his opinion that a small intellectual elite always designs social policy, is the basis for his views on the role of cultural factors. Other and less restricted conceptions of culture exist that leave room for the cultural analysis of social policy. Although they are not strictly necessary to refute Baldock's thesis when it is realized that also intellectual elites are (partly) driven by values and norms.

economic and social trends, as well as with specific academic developments. I will discuss these matters and at the same time try and review very briefly some of the main findings of the cultural analysis of social policy. A second issue regards the character of the cultural perspective in social policy analysis. Thus far, most studies in the field have been guided by a notion of culture as consisting of the values, norms and beliefs of welfare state actors, like policy makers, administrators, interest groups, clients, taxpayers etc. Recently, this notion has been questioned by advocates of the so-called 'cultural turn', who suggest that a radical change in the cultural analysis of social policy is required. I will conclude the article with a discussion of their claims.

2. Backgrounds of an increased interest in the cultural analysis of social policy

Economic crisis and moral debates

In the Western world the oil price related crisis that hit the international economy at the end of the 1970s ignited a process of welfare state restructuring which has not come to an end yet, although at present the pressures that welfare states experience are of a different and more diverse character (Sainsbury, 2001). Given the new scarcity created by the initial fiscal crisis the basic moral welfare question of 'who should get what, and why?' came to the fore again. Particularly, there was a rise of debates on the moral aspects of poverty and welfare dependency, as well as on the moral effects of welfare.

(New) poverty and morals

One of the direct consequences of the economic crisis was the rise of the number of households living under the poverty line. The so-called 'new' poverty attracted many scholars to study its extent, social distribution, determinants and dynamics in a large number of quantitative and qualitative studies. But it also put the relation between social policy on the one hand, and normative images of the poor and perceptions of the causes of poverty on the other hand, back on the research agenda.

That such relations exist is acknowledged for long. Already in 1908, George Simmel argued in his essay on 'Der Arme', that the generosity of poor relief generally depends on the degree to which the poor are blamed for their own misery (Simmel, 1908). And the American saying that 'programs for the poor, tend to be poor programs' is based on the experience that the quality of services and benefits tends to be worse if their target groups have a negative image in society (Dale Tussing, 1974; Rainwater, 1982).² A historical perspective shows more broadly how social policies and images of the poor are related. The alms and charity based poor relief of the middle ages was based on a positive image of the poor as followers of the life style of Jesus (Geremek,

² Different mechanism may account for this relationship. It may be due to the fact that social policies are reflections of dominant moral systems and thus try to control, discipline and even punish the deviant poor (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1991). According to Schneider and Ingram (1993) it may also stem from the fact that social policy is designed by politicians who want to be re-elected. As a result, in their decisions on the allocation of resources, they would take the political power and the societal image of target groups into account, and be less generous to the 'deviants' in society, i.e. the groups with least power and a strong negative public image, like the poor are.

1997)³. But from the 16th century onwards, related to the economic crises of that time, which generated ever-larger numbers of poor, and related to the rise of Protestantism, with its strong work ethic and its aversion against the practice of alms and indulgence, the image of the poor turned negative. They were no longer seen as children of God, but increasingly as idle and immoral beings, who had to be disciplined and put under control. The unable, deserving poor were minimally supported on a 'less eligibility' basis, but for the able-bodied, undeserving poor the workhouse was the only option. With the rise of capitalism, its first periodic crises and the deep misery that resulted from it, the understanding arose that poverty was not only a matter of individual blame. Economic and social processes came to be seen as playing a role too (Piven & Cloward, 1971).

However, this does not mean that today negative stereotyping of the poor has vanished completely. Nor is it the case that they are no longer individually blamed. Especially in America the moral aspects of the poor and of anti-poverty policy continue to be the issue of sharp debates. One of the leading themes has been the question whether poverty is the result of a 'culture of poverty' among the poor (as it is e.g. claimed by: Auletta, 1982; Mead, 1986; J. Wilson, 1994; Niskanen, 1997), or that it finds its base in the, in many ways, backward structural position of the poor (W. J. Wilson, 1987; Katz, 1989). The individual-blaming culture of poverty theory has influenced the welfare policies under several US presidencies importantly (Rein, 2001; Handler, 2002), and it has entered the European debate with Clinton's and Blair's communitarian ideas on the moral responsibility of dependent citizens (Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992; Deacon, 2002).

Despite the latter, opinion surveys show that still in Europe the social blame perspective is most dominant among the public, while the victim blaming view is most popular among Americans (Van Oorschot & Halman, 2000).⁴ Some claim that the relative underdevelopment of the American welfare state and its lesser generosity, compared to that Western-European welfare states, finds its ultimate cause in this culturally based difference in public beliefs (see e.g: Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lockhart, 2001). However, this is not to say that Europeans do not differentiate between groups of needy people. On the contrary, as is shown by public opinion data on deservingness criteria. People tend to support welfare more strongly if it is targeted at needy people who cannot be blamed for their neediness, who culturally 'belong to us', and who can reciprocate in future or have contributed to society in the past (Van Oorschot, 2000). It is on the basis of these popular deservingness criteria of blame, identity and reciprocity, that it is easy to understand why people in all Western welfare states support welfare for elderly and sick and disabled people more strongly, than welfare for unemployed people, let alone for needy immigrants. This 'deservingness rank order' (Van Oorschot, 2005) or 'universal dimension of support' (Coughlin, 1980) and its underlying criteria are so fundamental a cultural pattern that in most European welfare states it has led to

³ Geremek (1997) stipulates that the 'moral value' of the poor was attributed most to the 'pauperes cum Petro', the voluntary poor who deliberately renounced worldly goods, but that the 'pauperes cum Lazaro', the involuntary 'ordinary' poor, benefited from the positive image too.

⁴ It has been claimed that the victim blaming view of Americans is based on their ethic of individualism (Kluegel et al., 1995; Gilens, 1996), and on their work and success ethic (Rainwater, 1982), which makes them believe generally that poor people are to blame and do not deserve support. Opinion survey based studies into the question 'why Americans hate welfare' has shown that there is an important racial component: a majority of the Americans believe that it is mainly blacks that benefit from welfare, while at the same time a majority believes that blacks are more lazy than whites (Quadagno, 1994; Gilens, 1996).

clearly distinguishable differences in the rights and obligations of various groups of beneficiaries: it is usually the case that elderly people and disabled people can rely more strongly on less stigmatizing benefits, than, for instance, unemployed people; in many European countries widows are usually better protected by national benefit schemes, than divorced women; mostly, core workers can rely on more generous and comprehensive social insurance schemes, than peripheral workers; and job seek obligations attached to benefit receipt are usually more relaxed for older people and single parents. This common European deservingness culture may have a long history, because the deservingness dimension coincides strongly with the chronological order in which different types of schemes have been introduced in these welfare states from the end of the 19th century onwards: first the schemes for the most deserving categories of old, sick and disabled people, than family benefits and unemployment compensation, and lastly (if at all) social assistance for the least deserving (Kangas, 2000).

It should be noted that in Europe studies on the relation between social images of target groups and social policies directed at them have more been focused on unemployed people, instead of on the poor as such as in the USA.⁵ In European societies less favorable images of unemployed people do exist (De Goede & Maassen, 1980; Golding & Middleton, 1982; Fridberg & Ploug, 2000; Furaker & Blomsterberg, 2002; Larsen, 2002). There are doubts about their willingness to work, but they are also seen on average as less intelligent, responsible, perseverant, and reliable. The social image of young unemployed is more negative than that of older unemployed, but this might be due to the fact that generally older people have a more positive social image than younger people (Dekker & Ester, 1993). Studies have shown that differences in the degree of negative imaging of unemployed people depend on personal characteristics: more negative, for instance, are rightist people, authoritarian people, conservatives (Ester & Dekker, 1986; Fridberg & Ploug, 2000; Cozzarelli et al., 2001). But economic and social conditions also play a role, since negative imaging is less in times of high unemployment. Presumably because under such conditions the public has a clearer eye for the structural causes of poverty (Eardley & Matheson, 1999; Gallie & Paugam, 2002), and there is a higher probability that one is personally confronted with unemployment, either directly, or indirectly through unemployment of relatives and friends (Bryson, 1997). Remarkably, negative images of unemployed people are not less among people from lower income and professional categories, whose risk of unemployment is usually higher than average. On the contrary even, which may be due to their internalization of prevalent stereotypes (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), to a psychological coping strategy of distinguishing themselves from the stereotyped group (Golding & Middleton, 1982), or to feelings of resentment towards those groups one is most directly competing with for status, jobs and benefits (Eardley & Matheson, 1999).

The moral effects of social policy

The moral questions that came to the fore in the last two decades were not confined to the behavior and character of poor and unemployed people. More generally, a critique of the welfare state arose that it created social problems, instead of helping to solve them, by undermining its own constituting virtues of solidarity and community spirit. In the literature quite a few (alleged) moral effects of social policies have been discussed

⁵ Which seems to reflect that poverty is seen as the more or less inevitable outcome of the residual American welfare model, while unemployment tends to be seen as a result of the more generous and institutionalized European social model (see e.g.: OECD, 1994).

and listed (see e.g.: Engbersen, 1986; Yankelovich, 1994; Deacon, 2002). Citizens would have developed a calculative attitude towards benefits, leading to abuse, misuse and permanent welfare dependency (Murray, 1984; Engbersen et al., 1993). In the framework of the encompassing welfare state citizens would have developed an 'immoralistic ethic' (Zijderveld, 1999) characterized by a hedonistic and consumerist attitude in private and public relations, as a result of which the solidarity necessary for the survival of the welfare state would be undermined, and the demand for welfare would grow beyond control (see also: Spieker, 1986). Citizens would have lost their sense of self-responsibility and social commitment, leading to an erosion of civil society and neighborhood or family based social support systems (Wolfe, 1989; Etzioni, 1995). And citizens would mainly be pre-occupied with their social rights, and systematically neglect the (work) obligations that go with them (Mead, 1986).

Most of this critique, however, is highly normative, and based on theoretical conjectures, anecdotal evidence and ad hoc interpretations. Rarely it is systematically and at full tested against reality. This is not to say that empirical studies on the moral and behavioral effects of social policy do not exist. On the contrary, there have been quite a few since the early 1980s. What they mostly show is quite another, less pessimistic picture. Review studies for example show that (higher) unemployment benefits do not corrupt the work ethic (Jehoel-Gijsbers et al., 1995; Bryson, 1997; Gallie & Alm, 2000), nor do they inhibit unemployed people to look for a job and to accept one if offered (Atkinson, 1989; Barr, 1992); social expenditures targeted at elderly people do not undermine intra-family and inter-generational solidaristic feelings and behavior (Kohli, 1999; Attias-Donfut & Arber, 2000); voluntary work is not less in well-developed welfare states than in others, on the contrary (Kuhnle & Selle, 1990; Rothstein, 2001) and a 23 country European comparative analysis of the relationship between people's trust in welfare state institutions, civic morality and social networks has learned that these aspects of social capital are positively, not negatively, related to welfare state comprehensiveness and social spending (Van Oorschot & Arts, 2005). In addition, in a well-developed welfare state as, for instance, the Netherlands repeated surveys show that over a time-period from 1960 onwards no consumerist ethic has developed (Ester & Halman, 1994), nor have citizens become more 'calculating' and selfish, or have pro-social attitudes, trust in other people and supportive behavior in families and neighborhoods declined (Dekker & De Hart, 2000). It is true that data of the European Values Survey have shown that the public's concern about the living conditions of needy groups as elderly, sick and disabled, unemployed and immigrants tends to be less in the more encompassing Northern European welfare states, than in, for instance, the UK and the Mediterranean countries. However, this substitution of informal by formal solidarity seems not to be related to a worsened moral, but is probably the result of a crowding-out effect: where formal solidarity seriously takes over social protection responsibilities towards needy groups, there is no longer a need for individual citizens to be concerned with it (Arts et al., 2003).

The negative perspective on the relation between moral and social policy mainly dates back to the 1980s, but it has not disappeared fully. At present, it is manifest in communitarianism, the 'third way' between a too liberal and a too collectivistic welfare state, with its emphasis on social cohesion, community spirit and family and marriage moral. Civil society and the family should take over part of the welfare responsibilities from the state, for which a moral revival among citizens is necessary, but social policy can also help to achieve such a revival. Communitarians readily acknowledge that social policy (also) has the aim of moral change (Deacon, 2002). Influenced by communitarian ideas there is now an international trend towards greater emphasis on the family, and the

children in it, as target groups of social policy (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Goldson et al., 2002; Kaufmann et al., 2002), and there is also (the beginning) of a trend to use social policy as an instrument for strengthening family and marriage morals (Barlow & Duncan, 2000; Rein, 2001; Duerr-Berrick, 2002; Head, 2002).

International comparison

The economic crisis and resulting unemployment was only one of the developments that European welfare states were commonly faced with. The ageing of the population, an increasing female labor market participation, the need for a more active approach in providing work and welfare, and more recently the influx of immigrants, are other common processes which induced governments, international NGOs like ILO and OECD, and not in the least, the European Commission to commission international comparative research on problems, policy practices and outcomes. The increase in such comparative research has contributed significantly to the awareness that cultural factors may be significant for explaining differences between countries. Such factors operate at the level of policy elites, manifested e.g. in the fact that UK policymakers see the eradication of poverty as the ultimate goal of social policy, while the actions of their French colleagues are focused on fighting and preventing social exclusion. The difference in these perspectives can historically be traced back to different conceptions of society (market versus moral community), of the individual (atomistic versus socially embedded), and of the relations between them (see e.g., Room, 1997). But cultural factors also play a role at the level of citizens. It is, for instance, found that European differences in the degree to which children (mostly daughters) care for elderly people is not only related to labour market participation and the presence of leave schemes, but also to differences in family culture (Dallinger, 2001). It is also known now that differences in the take up of parental leave schemes is less determined by variations in types of schemes, than by differences in motherhood culture, which is strong in the Netherlands and Germany, compared to the Nordic countries (Den Dulk et al., 1999; Pfau-Effinger, 2000). In other words, increased international comparison has thrown light on culture as a missing variable.

International comparison and an eye for cultural factors not only increased in consequence of certain policy demand. The methodological possibilities for comparing cultures in Europe extended strongly with several comparative surveys entering the scene from the 1980s onwards, while Esping-Andersen's comparative regime approach stimulated the search for cultural factors as explanations for differences in welfare state design and functioning.

Public opinion surveys

Since the 1980s, in several European countries national surveys or parts of it, are focusing on welfare and social issues (for instance, the British Social Attitudes survey, or the annual surveys by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office), and a number of European comparative public opinion surveys entered the scene. There are the European Values Survey EVS, the International Social Survey Project ISSP, the International Social Justice Project ISJP, the Eurobarometer surveys, and most recently, the European Social Survey ESS. In main lines, these opinion surveys have learned several things.

First of all, contrary to what theories on the legitimacy crisis of the welfare state predicted, there is widespread support for welfare all over Europe (Ringen, 1987;

Ferrera, 1993; Pettersen, 1995; Ploug, 1996). More relevant here, however, is that such crisis theories assumed that welfare support basically is class related, reflecting considerations of perceived personal interests. The assumption was that the middle and higher classes would oppose welfare, because they were the ones who had to pay for it and they would perceive to get little in return. Rose and Peters (1978), for instance, claimed that the 'abused taxpayer' would ultimately refuse to contribute, but see also Crozier et al. (1975), Wilensky (1975). Even in the 1990s Galbraith (1992) argued that the middle class based 'comfortable majority' would be reluctant to extend the welfare gained for itself to the minority of the poor. Putting these theories to the test, however, national and European wide surveys showed that people's support for welfare is based on a mixture of personal and group interests on the one hand, and on value and ideology related considerations regarding social equality, social justice, solidarity, mutual obligation, state responsibility, etc. on the other hand (for instance, Pettersen, 1995; Bowles & Gintis, 2000; Kohli & Kuenemund, 2001; Van Oorschot, 2002; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003). In some studies, however, class related variables were found to have no influence on welfare attitudes. For instance, Ploug (1996) found in his data on a variety of Danish opinions on the welfare state that '...there was very little variation in the answers given by different age and socioeconomic groups' (p.6); Taylor-Gooby (1983) found that social division variables did not influence opinions on welfare spending in Britain; Aguilar and Gustafsson (1988) did not find a relationship between socioeconomic background variables and Swedish opinions about social assistance levels; and van Oorschot (2000) found little or no relation between class variables and Dutch people's conditionality regarding support for needy people. Not rarely, it is found that the effects of values and ideologies, or cultural factors, is larger than that of measures of interest and class. It is especially people's political stance that has a strong effect on welfare attitudes: leftist people are more positive towards welfare programs, endorse social spending more, and have more pro-social attitudes to benefit recipients and unemployed people, than more rightist people (Coughlin, 1980; Whiteley, 1981; Taylor-Gooby, 1983; Papadakis & Bean, 1993; Pettersen, 1995).

Although there is widespread, class and culture based, support for welfare, the European public makes a difference when it comes to the deservingness of various groups of needy people. As we have seen, all over Europe the public is most in favour of social protection for old people, closely followed by protection for the sick and disabled, while the public supports schemes for needy families with children less, schemes for unemployed people even more less, and support is least for social assistance schemes. This deservingness rank order is found in cross-sectional opinion data from different European countries (Pettersen, 1995; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Van Oorschot et al., 2005), as well as in data from single countries, as for instance, the UK (Taylor-Gooby, 1985; Hills, 2002), Finland (Forma, 1997), Denmark (Larsen, 2002), The Netherlands (Van Oorschot, 1998), Belgium (Debusscher & Elchardus, 2003) and the Czech Republic (Rabusic & Sirovatka, 1999). In some recent studies support for social protection of immigrants is also analyzed, and found to be at the bottom end of the support dimension (Appelbaum, 2002; Van Oorschot, 2005).

In addition to contributing to a deeper insight in welfare support and its structural and cultural determinants, the European comparative surveys have also shown differences in national cultures, with regard to issues relevant for social policy. As yet, there are still a few studies only, like Lueck and Hofaecker's (2003), which shows how European women's orientations on jobs, but especially those on family obligations, differ quite strongly among European countries and depend on social structure, institutional design, but also on cultural tradition. And there is the study by van

Oorschot and Halman (2000), which shows that in the UK and in Eastern European countries the public blames the poor more strongly than in other European countries, where poverty is seen predominantly as being produced by social factors.

Although welfare opinions are studied in more detail thanks to the increased availability of data, it should be mentioned that the relation between public values and attitudes on the one hand and social policy on the other is a controversial matter. The basic question here is whether public opinion has any policy relevance, either ex-ante as a causal factor in the process of policy-making, or ex-post as a legitimacy base for policies. That public opinion can have an influence on government policies generally, and on social policy in particular, has been demonstrated with American examples quite frequently (see for reviews: Childs, 1964; Page & Shapiro, 1983), but the debate keeps on going. This is because the conditions under which effects occur are rather complex and depend strongly on issue, time and place, which makes it difficult to proof direct causal links between opinions and policy decisions. It is clear that the argument of democratic theory, positing that democratic leaders will listen to the public's opinions and act accordingly, is too simple: policy-makers not only act with a view on opinions of citizens, but they also reckon with their own preferences and interests; their decisions are bounded by legal rules and guidelines; they might be more sensitive to opinions of small lobby groups, than to public opinion at large; with regard to many issues there is no clear and stable public opinion that could guide them; and, one of the major arguments, policy-makers influence public opinion, in stead of the other way round (Taylor-Gooby, 1983; Kuran, 1995; Burstein, 1998). However, in cases where effects are found, generally, these are stronger to the degree that an issue has a high salience for the public, if there is time for societal debate and when policy options are not too complicated (Burstein, 1998). The way in which public opinion exerts its influence can be different, though. It can put issues on the political agenda and it can limit the policy options available, but it can also express lack of societal support and function as an ex-post control. Public opinion's influence is mostly indirect, operating through, for instance, a median voter mechanism, media debates, demonstrations and lobby group activities (Childs, 1964; Coughlin, 1980; Whiteley, 1981; Jacobs, 1995; Burstein, 1998).

Welfare regimes

Perhaps one of the most significant academic developments in the field of social policy has been the increased attention for the ideal-typical welfare regime approach, as advocated by Esping-Andersen (1990), who distinguishes between liberal, conservative-corporatist and social-democratic welfare states. This typology basically assumes that each type has a different ideological, or cultural base. Liberal views on personal responsibility and freedom, with the related reluctance to accept state intervention and to value market led social organization, underlie the liberal welfare state; conservatism, with its emphasis on society as an organic whole of hierarchical inter- and intra-group relations, cherishing professional, communal and family bonds in particular, underlies the type of the conservative-corporatist welfare state, and the social-democratic values of social equality and mutual responsibility underlies the social-democratic welfare state. This explicit linking of broader ideological perspectives to welfare state types by Esping-Andersen (for another example see Lockhart (2001)) has introduced a line of debate and research, which further emphasized the role of the cultural factor in welfare state development. Scholars got engaged in the question what effects religion and confessional parties have had on the development of European welfare states, and more

recently, the question is raised what the cultural particularities are of non-Western welfare states.

As for the first, it has been shown that in countries like Italy, Portugal, France, Belgium and Austria, Catholicism and its emphasis on social harmony and traditional social ties, has led to a relatively better social protection of families with children, to a more pronounced role of social partners in the design and implementation of social security, and to a wider application of the instrument of social insurances as a means of maintaining status and class hierarchies in society (Van Kersbergen, 1995; Hornsby-Smith, 1999). As for the influence of Protestantism, a recent study suggests that a distinction has to be made between countries with a Lutheran state-church, like the Scandinavian countries and Germany, and countries with a Calvinist Protestant culture, like the UK, Switzerland and the USA (Manow, 2002). Calvinism has inhibited welfare state development, because of its emphasis on 'sovereignty in one's own circles' and the related anti-statism, while Lutheranism has had a positive effect on the introduction of state welfare. This latter is stressed by Soerensen (1998), who argues that the universalistic and generous character of the Scandinavian welfare states is not the result of a 20th century social-democratic solution of the conflict between labor and capital (as Esping-Andersen suggests), but of the typical Lutheran perspective on the relation between central authority and citizens. In this perspective, communal and state authority have the duty to take well care of citizens, who in turn subject themselves willfully to the authority and its demand for contributions to the common good. In the generous 18th century Copenhagen Poor Law, Soerensen recognizes the cradle of the modern universalistic welfare states of Scandinavia.

More recently, the question has been raised whether there exists something like a non-Western type of welfare state, more particularly, is there a typical Asian welfare state? Countries like Japan, South-Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have a high level of wealth and productivity, but a residual degree of state welfare. This fact is at odds with the 'logic of industrialisation' and it cannot be easily explained as the result of class struggle (Esping-Andersen, 1997; Lin, 1999). Instead, some point to the influence of Confucianism and talk of a Confucian model or regime type (Jones, 1993; Goodman & Peng, 1996; Esping-Andersen, 1997). Generally, what is regarded to be characteristic of the Confucian worldview is that individuals are seen primarily as subordinated members of groups. Related to this, authority and paternalism are easily accepted, there is a strong work ethic aimed at contributing to the group's welfare, and a strong meritocratism ensures rewards for those who contribute most. Typical also is a degree of fatalism, which makes people accept facts of life, and prevents them to claim help from others. In such a culture, as Lin (1999) claims, a residual degree of state regulated social protection is easily legitimated.

The question whether culture matters for welfare state design is recently extended to Islamic and African cultures. Dean and Kahn (1997), for instance, discuss whether the traditional Islamic duty to pay 'zakat' (to give a proportion of one's disposable wealth for distribution to members of the community who are in need) could function as a basis for poor relief in a wider welfare state context. Olivier and Mpedi (2002) point to the fact that the South-African constitution has incorporated the traditional 'ubuntu principle' as the guiding principle for the future of the welfare state. This principle of group solidarity recognizes that people can only be human beings through others. People are seen as being socially indebted to their fellow group members, and are asked on this ground to contribute to the common good.

3. Discussion: 'old' versus 'new'?

Most of the studies discussed here have been guided by a notion of culture as consisting of the values, norms and beliefs of welfare state actors, like policy makers, administrators, interest groups, churches, clients, taxpayers etc. What they were interested in were either the effects of values, norms and beliefs on the design of welfare systems, benefit schemes and services, or on the reverse effects, those that social policies and institutions have on people's moral attitudes and behavior. Clearly, there are no studies which confine the notion of culture to artistic and intellectual aspects only, nor are there studies which widen the concept as to encompass the total of values, practices, institutions and relationships, like it is advocated in anthropology, for instance, by Geertz (1977). The first, 'high culture' approach, would maybe result in very interesting, but certainly in very narrow scoped studies, the latter 'thick description' approach would not lead to meaningful studies at all, since it would not distinguish between explanandum and explanans (if everything is culture, culture can explain nothing) (see also Harrison & Huntington, 2000).

However, the notion of culture most studies departed from has been questioned lately and an alternative has been suggested. What is this critique, and does it make a different type of cultural analysis necessary? The critique has been formulated most clearly by John Clarke (2002; 2004), who distinguishes between 'culture as property' and 'culture as practice' to characterize the issue. In what he sees as the old approach culture is seen as a property, that is, as a feature of people related to their membership of a certain group. In this perspective, people's behaviour and thinking is steered by the relatively coherent, static and coercing cultural patterns of their group. The reproach is that this a deterministic concept of culture, which sees individuals more or less as robots who act on internalized cultural programs (see also Eagleton, 2000). A cultural analysis of social policy from this perspective treats culture as an objective variable exerting its influence along side political, economic and institutional factors. An example of this 'old' approach is to see whether the presence of a Catholic or a Protestant culture leads to a different development in welfare institutions. But also, to see whether neo-liberal values of policymakers shape social policies, or whether different justice and solidarity values among populations from different countries is related to welfare regime type.

The new 'culture as practice' approach recognizes explicitly that culture is not homogenous, but differentiated into various subcultures. More importantly, the new approach denies that culture is a supra individual, closed and static system of values and norms. In stead, culture is manipulated, produced and reproduced actively by people in their daily lives. This social construction of reality is subjected to relations of power: some people or groups are more powerful in manifesting and enforcing their reality, than others. A cultural analysis of social policy from this perspective more than anything else is interested in the effects of social policy on cultures and daily practices. Typical questions being: what type of images and normative categories do policies and policymakers produce; how do such images legitimize inequalities and differential welfare treatment; how do social policies influence people's life world; to what degree do the cultural ideas and practices of policymakers, administrators and clients match; what possibilities do clients have to get their worldviews and practices accepted, etc? In the new approach there is a strong tendency to see social policy as an instrument for the production of meaning in the hands of a policy elite, while the function of the cultural analysis of social policy primarily is to deconstruct and unmask the thus created reality.

Clarke's use of the terms old and new approach is not coincidental. Also other authors have pointed at a shift towards a 'cultural turn' in the analysis of social policy

(e.g. Chamberlayne et al., 1999). In its weakest interpretation the cultural turns means a shift towards the view that any analysis and explanation of the developments in social policy and its outcomes falls short, if it does not pay attention to the values of actors involved, the meaning they give to the situation they are in, and to the symbolic codes they use and exchange (Freeman & Rustin, 1999). In its strongest interpretation, however, the 'cultural turn' is seen as a new, critical approach, aiming at the emancipation and empowerment of vulnerable groups in society, by deconstructing the reality created by elites.⁶

In my view the difference between the old and new approaches to the cultural analysis of social policy should not be exaggerated. Firstly, because the weak interpretation of the cultural turn is fully compatible with the essence of the old approach, which is to analyze the relationships between (outcomes of) policies and the values, norms and beliefs of the various actors involved. Secondly, in real life, culture is external and enforcing to a degree, it is not a totalitarian force; it is as well open for manipulation, negotiation, variety and change. Thus seen, both approaches are not in competition, but complementary to each other. Thirdly, the new approach is not that new, as it is sometimes claimed. This certainly is true for its weaker interpretation, but there are examples of earlier studies (like Golding & Middleton, 1982) that had a deconstruction approach too. What I think is the unique character of the strong interpretation of the cultural turn, is that it rejects scientific analysis as a politically indifferent undertaking. Doing research, and particularly the results of it, should foster and improve the wellbeing and power of vulnerable groups in society. Or, like Freeman et al. (1999) describe the starting point of the cultural turn approach: '...subjects and citizens must have a voice'(p.....). All in all, however, there is little need to completely denounce the old style cultural analysis of social policy. Old and new are largely compatible and complementary.

⁶ Advocates of the cultural turn in the analysis of social policy refer to a cultural turn that took place in the social sciences earlier. That is, the renewed attention paid to the agency of individuals within and against the structures and dominant cultures they are part of, as well as to the related idea that reality is a social construction (Archer, 1988; Chaney, 1994; Lewis et al., 2000). The strong interpretation of the cultural turn builds upon Habermas' critique on the welfare state as colonizing people's life worlds, as well as upon Foucault's critique on the policing and oppressive character of modern, bureaucratic administrations (Rustin, 1999).

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