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*Regimes and Reform of Welfare State: the Classification of
ten European Countries in 1990 and 2006*

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Regimes and reform of welfare state: the classification of ten European countries in 1990 and 2006.

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Summary This article seeks to contribute to the discussion on the current state of knowledge with regard to the clustering of European welfare states, especially the Mediterranean countries. We want to demonstrate that the reforms be carried out well, to varying degrees, over the period 1990-2006 may have contributed to a reclassification of some countries. To this end, we analyze the positioning of ten Western European countries in 1990 and 2006 based on the two bi-dimensional classifications of Bonoli (1997) and Kautto (2002). Our results show some interesting changes in the positioning of some countries that seem to confirm a trend of convergence.

Key words: welfare regimes, social policy, welfare reforms, longitudinal analysis

Introduction

In the extensive literature that has been dedicated during the past nineteen years to the comparative analysis of the welfare states, a significant number of studies have focused on the identification of the ideal regimes, in addition to their empirical validation. The celebrated work, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, by Esping-Andersen (hereafter EA) constituted the point of departure for a vigorous academic debate which has continued right up to the present day. In spite of the work's acknowledged merits, various criticisms have been raised. One of the most intensely debated of these have been the classification of certain countries (namely, the Mediterranean countries). The divergence in relation to the number of regimes gave rise to several typologies according to which

can be identified three (EA, 1990), four (Leibfried, 1992; Castles and Mitchell, 1993; Ferrera, 1996; and Bonoli, 1997) or five (Korpi and Palme, 1998) types of welfare regimes which show significant differences in the classification of countries (for a survey see Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Arcanjo, 2006; and Bamba, 2007).

Besides the theoretical debate, an extensive number of empirical studies have been published with the objective of identifying the number and composition of real regimes (e.g. Alber, 1995; Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996; Gough, 1996, 2001; Gough *et al.*, 1997; Obinger and Wagschal, 1998; Wildboer Schut *et al.*, 2001; Kautto, 2002; Powell and Barrientos, 2004; MacMenamim, 2003; Saint Arnaud and Bernard, 2003; Bettio and Plantenga, 2004; Gal, 2004; Soede *et al.*, 2004; Bamba, 2005a, 2005b; Ferreira and Figueiredo, 2005; Guo and Gilbert, 2007; Jensen, 2008). Again we observe a great diversity as regards the number of clusters (from three to seven) and their composition. Indeed, the results show that a large number of countries (including the countries of southern Europe) are positioned in different types of regimes. This means that remains open the issue of classification of Mediterranean countries as a specific regime.

So, despite this huge scientific production, it is unclear which of the various proposals for classification is the most appropriate and useful (Bamba, 2007). This conclusion appears justified given the variety of conceptual and methodological options of different studies such as the various dimensions of the state of welfare, the diversity of indicators and statistical methods.

However, there is an issue that we consider of utmost importance though little discussed in the literature i.e. the time horizon of each analysis. More concretely, the above mentioned studies were based on data relating to a time-span of more than twenty years. Thus, they are ignored the potential effects of reforms carried out, particularly in Europe, on the classification of the welfare states.

This article seeks to contribute to the discussion on the current state of knowledge with regard to the clustering of European countries, particularly the South of Europe. Specifically, we want to demonstrate, through a very simple exercise, that the reforms be carried out well, to varying degrees, over the period 1990-2006 may have contributed to a reclassification of some countries.

The structure of the article is as follows. The next section comprises a critical analysis of three of the ideal typologies - the EA's 'three worlds' and the proposals of Ferrera and Bonoli, with their identification of a fourth regime encompassing the Southern European countries – as well as a summary of four empirical studies, all carried out between 2001 and 2008, which can illustrate the diversity of positioning of the Mediterranean countries. In order to evaluate the reclassification of ten Western European countries (Denmark, Sweden, the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece), as representative of different welfare regimes, we will apply the two bi-dimensional classifications of Bonoli (1997) and Kautto (2002) to data from 1990 to 2006. The methodological options and results are presented in section 2. Finally, section 3 concludes.

Ideal and real types of welfare state

The 'three worlds' of Esping-Andersen and their criticism

Introducing the concept of welfare regime and based on two major dimensions (the level of decommodification and the type of stratification), EA identifies the well known three regimes – *liberal*, *conservative* and *social-democratic* – each differing with respect to the historical and political development in various societies.

In order to evaluate the degree of decommodification, EA selected the three most important cash benefits programmes (pensions, sickness, and unemployment) and a set of indicators illustrative of the “ease with which an average person can opt out of the market” (1990:49). A two-stage process of qualitative grouping, followed by multiple regressions (p.44-50 and Appendix), was applied on data from 1980 in 18 OECD countries.

Taking only the thirteen European countries, the total decommodification score showed that the welfare states cluster into three distinct groups, each of them showed the expected countries according to his theory of regimes: Ireland and the UK (*Liberal*); Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland (*Conservative*); Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (*Social-democratic*). However, the ranking order of the countries based on the results that had previously been obtained for each of

the three social programmes would not lead to consistent clusters: only seven countries were part of the same regime for all social programmes and only five of them were in correspondence with the combined score (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 50, Table 2-1). This finding seems to indicate a certain weakness with regard to EA's methodology (for a detailed analysis, see Van Voorhis, 2003).

The EA's typology has generated an intense debate which themes have focused on several areas of criticism (e.g. Cnaan, 1992; Gough, 2000; Wildboer Schut *et al.*, 2001). Here we will only explore three of them: i) the range of countries; ii) the analytical focus on cash benefits; and iii) the concept of welfare regime.¹

The first area of criticism refers to the incorrect classification of certain countries, namely, Australia and New Zealand, Japan and Italy. The assertion of a fourth or even a fifth regime resulted in the presentation of new typologies (Leibfried, 1992; Castles and Mitchell, 1993; Siaroff 1994; Ferrera, 1996; Bonoli, 1997; Korpi and Palme, 1998).

The second area of criticism is concerned with the identification of the three regimes on the basis of the exclusive analysis of cash benefits. The omission of other domains of State intervention, in which more significant differences might be expected among the welfare states (e.g. health care, education and social services), constituted a motive for questioning the validity of the typology. As a result, numerous empirical studies were conducted with the aim of confirming the EA's three-fold division.

The third, and most radical, criticism was put forward by Kasza (2002) and Bannink and Hoogenboom (2007), in which the very concept of the welfare regime came under question. So, it is precisely the concept of the welfare regime as a coherent package of public policies that conforms to a defined set of principles that Kasza rejects, arguing that, with few exceptions, governments implement unconnected or even contradictory social policies. Similarly, Bannink and Hoogenboom argue that the welfare state can be composed of various types of arrangements (coordination and allocation mechanisms) and that this 'mix' of different regimes can explain the residual and hybrid cases of empirical studies.

¹ A further criticism, not considered in this article, was also prominent in the debate, namely, the neglect of gender-dimension (Lewis, 1992, 2002; O'Connor, 1993, 1996; Orloff, 1993, 1996; Siaroff, 1994; Sainsbury, 1994, 1999; Bambra, 2004).

Some specific criticisms have drawn the attention of EA (1999). With regard the existence of three or more regimes, two important issues had been identified: i) “if alternative attributes were considered, the classification might break down or, at least, require additional regimes”; ii) “since [they] refer to one time-point, we shall miss out on possibly decisive transmutations” (p.86). The omission of these questions would justify the conclusions of many empirical studies that stressed the erroneous classification of various countries.

Acknowledging that the Southern European countries (as well as Australia and Japan) presented characteristics which were not entirely compatible with this ‘three worlds’, EA presented a new classification based on two dimensions: the model of welfare state and the dominance of the family in the welfare mix. Relating the classification of the European countries (1999: 84-5), there are two noteworthy observations: the existence of a Scandinavian group and the classification of Spain and Italy in the same cluster of the Continental Europe.

‘New’ typologies: a southern regime?

According to Bamba (2007: 25), the proposals of Ferrera (1996) and Bonoli (1997) are currently of the most utility – or, “the wheat” – in terms of welfare state regime theory.

Based on four dimensions (eligibility rules, structure of benefits, financing, and organisational arrangements), Ferrera (1996) proposed the grouping of seventeen Western European systems into four distinct ‘families’: *Anglo-Saxon* (Ireland and the UK); *Bismarckian* (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg Netherlands and Switzerland); *Scandinavian* (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden); *Southern* (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain). The fourth ‘family’ comprised the Mediterranean countries, the social protection systems of which presented “ peaks of generosity accompanied by vast gaps in protection” and by the “establishment of national health services, based on universalistic principles” (p.29).

The fact that the health care and the social security are governed by different principles suggests that Kasza is correct and might effectively represent an important element of differentiation. However, the polarisation of material cover can only be

explained by the lower level of development of the systems, as acknowledged by the EC (1993), Katrougalos (1996), Ferrera *et al.* (2000), and Vogel (2003).

Based on two additional characteristics - the low degree of state penetration of the welfare sphere and the formation of fairly elaborate 'patronage systems' for the selective distribution of cash benefits – Ferrera stated that Southern European welfare state is characterised by a peculiar mode of political functioning (p.29). This conclusion gives rise to two different questions. Firstly, the comparison seems to be based on different dimensions: the political functioning of the Mediterranean countries and the principles of organisation for the other countries.

Secondly, Ferrera's reflection on political clientelism appears to be a forced generalisation on the domain of social security, at least with regard to Portugal. So, it seems reasonable to argue that these features are not structural in nature but only behavioral patterns (Sotiropoulos, 2004:406) and that can not define a welfare regime (EA, 1990:90).

According to Bonoli (1997: 352-7), the classifications of EA and Ferrera were found to be excessively limited by their uni-dimensional approach: the first author focused on the quantity of welfare provided by individual welfare states while the qualitative dimension was not taken into consideration by Ferrera. Bonoli's response was to develop a bi-dimensional classification (p.357), based on the Bismarckian and Beveridgean models, which were differentiated by five dimensions (objective, benefits, eligibility, coverage and financing).

In order to test empirically the typology, Bonoli selected two indicators: social expenditure as a GDP-share and the percentage of social expenditure financed through contributions. The data used was related to 1989-92. The classification of the sixteen European countries (Austria excluded) was similar of that of Ferrera. In view of the number of exceptions and mixed cases (for example, Portugal) observed, Bonoli concludes that "it seems appropriate not to consider the four [groups] as sealed clusters of totally different welfare states" (p.362).

Relating the composition of the clusters, and taking only the twelve countries which were selected in common by the three authors, it is verified that only seven countries are given the same classification (Ireland, the UK, France, Germany, Denmark, Norway and

Sweden). Of the countries for which a divergent classification is observed, the case of Italy can be taken to represent the crucial question as to whether a specific regime for the Latin countries exists or not.

The Mediterranean countries in some empirical studies

Among the abundant production of empirical studies that aimed to test the 'three worlds', we have selected a sample of four studies: Gough (2001), Kautto (2002), Powell and Barrientos (2004), and Jensen (2008).² This small number is explained by the restrictions imposed: the inclusion of at least two Mediterranean countries and the option of specific dimensions of social policy.

Gough (2001) analysed the social assistance in the OEDE countries applying another statistical technique to the same data (extent, programme structure and generosity in 1992) used in an earlier study (Gough *et al.*, 1997). Regarding the European countries, we should highlight the large heterogeneity (five clusters) and the division within the Mediterranean group: Spain and Italy shown more extensive and higher spending programmes (and clustered together with France and Germany, for example) while only the programmes of Portugal and Greece earned the title of 'rudimentary assistance' (p. 168-9).

Kautto (2002) analysed the benefits in cash and benefits in kind (education excluded) in the EU-15. Based on data for the years 1990 and 1997, two indicators were constructed: i) service effort (expenditure on benefits in kind in % of GDP); and ii) transfer effort (expenditure on cash benefits in % of GDP). Three clusters were identified: a service group (namely, France, Germany and the Nordic countries); a transfer group (Italy, Belgium, Austria and the Netherlands); and a third group (Ireland and the other three Mediterranean countries). Once again, a division in the southern group was observed.

Collecting data from 1990 to 96 in 21 countries, Powell and Barrientos (2004) examined three variables characterising the welfare mix and the active labour market policies (p. 92). The results validate the three regimes of EA (1990) although with some

² Facing the criticism of EA's methodology (e.g. Shalev, 1996; Pitruzzello, 1999; and Pierson, 2000), all the studies used the cluster analysis of what has been considered as a more appropriate statistical techniques to identify welfare regimes.

differences in their composition. The four Mediterranean countries appear in the conservative regime, together with German, Belgium and Austria.

Jensen (2008) analyzed the transfers and social care in 18 OECD countries. The data used (public expenditure as percentage of GDP) was related to 2001. The thirteen European countries were classified in three clusters. The Nordic countries (third cluster) were distinguished by the level of social care while the remaining countries “primarily stand out by the level of transfers” (p. 157). Italy and Spain appear classified in two different clusters.

The results of the four studies give rises to three conclusions. First, none of them confirm the existence of a specific regime for Mediterranean countries. Second, a liberal regime is only supported by Gough (2001) while a Nordic cluster is only clearly identified by Jensen (2008). Finally, none of the three typologies were totally validated. Facing the different analytical focus, the selected studies may confirm the internal inconsistency of the welfare states as argued by Kasza.

Welfare regimes over time

The classification of some countries in different regimes/ clusters can be explained by different methodological options relating to the welfare dimension well as by different statistical techniques. However, a third explanatory factor may be admitted this is the different periods of time used in the empirical analysis.

As stated above, the very Esping-Andersen (1999:86) recognized a possible reclassification of welfare states caused by the social changes they made over time. Later, following an innovative perspective, some authors tested the effect of long term in the welfare regime patterns (Saint-Arnaud and Bernard, 2003; Guo and Gilbert, 2007).³ While the first study revealed an interesting alteration, namely, that Italy and Spain moved into the conservative regime (p.84), the results of the second empirical work show an apparent movement of convergence - already detected by Kautto (2002) - which may

³ Using data from 1986-1990 and 1993-1998, Saint-Arnaud and Bernard (2003) analyzed 36 indicators of public policy, social situation and civic participation. Guo and Gilbert (2007) examined social expenditure on family policy over three different points of time (1980, 1990 and 2001).

be explained by the demographic pressures of ageing population and the competitive discipline of well-integrated markets (Guo and Gilbert, 2007: p. 312).

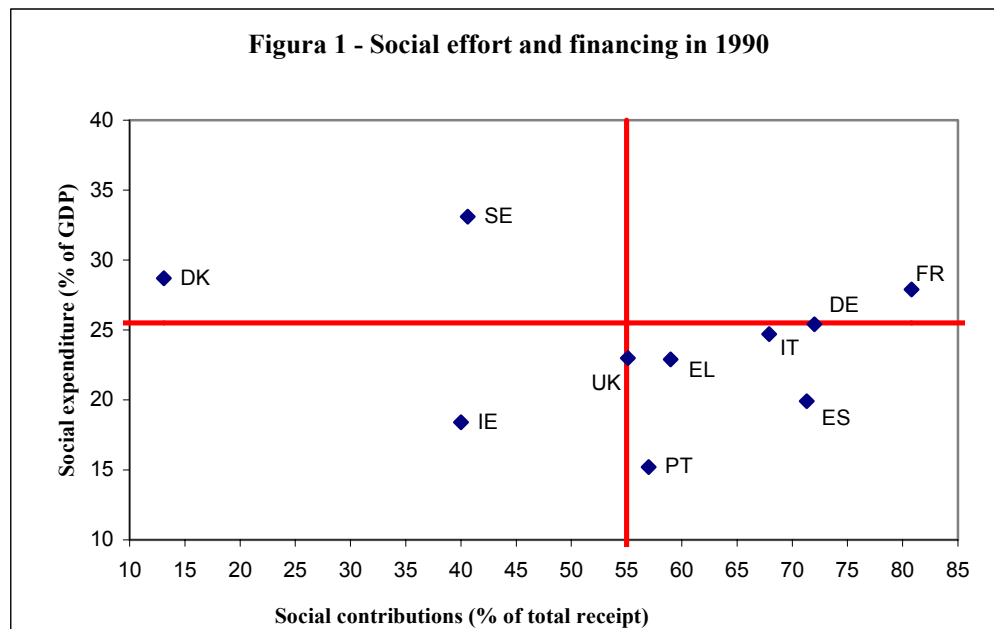
Since the mid-1990s, a large body of literature has been devoted to the analysis of welfare state reform, particularly in Western Europe, by virtue of the important challenges shared, to different extents, by all countries. The external pressures (globalisation) and/or internal pressures (ageing population, slower economic growth, high and persistent unemployment, transformation of the household structure and the EMU-related constraints on public spending) have been identified as the major drivers of social change (e.g. Buti *et al.* 2000; Iversen 2001; Pierson 2001; Powell and Hewitt 2002; Korpi 2003; Castles 2004).

Despite the absence of consensus on the nature of the reform there is empirical evidence on many social changes introduced in the last fifteen years. Indeed, many countries have introduced social changes in the eligibility (e.g. protection against unemployment), in the structure of benefits (increasing the benefits means tested or the insurance component), and in the sources of funding (tax or social contributions), among others.

Our argument is that these changes may have had as a consequence a repositioning of some countries in the welfare clusters (three or four), empirically identified. To test this hypothesis, we adopt the two bi-dimensional approaches of Bonoli (1997) and Kautto (2002) in a longitudinal perspective. The first classification is based on social effort and contribution-dominance while the second one is based on transfer effort and service effort. The four indicators are calculated for 1990 and 2006, for ten European countries (Denmark, Sweden, the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece), as representative of different regimes. The data on social protection expenditures and receipts are from Eurostat. All the concepts used here are conformed to the European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics (Eurostat, 2008b). This analysis should be understood as merely illustrative already has all the limitations related to the nature of the indicators (only quantitative) and non-adoption of more sophisticated statistical techniques.

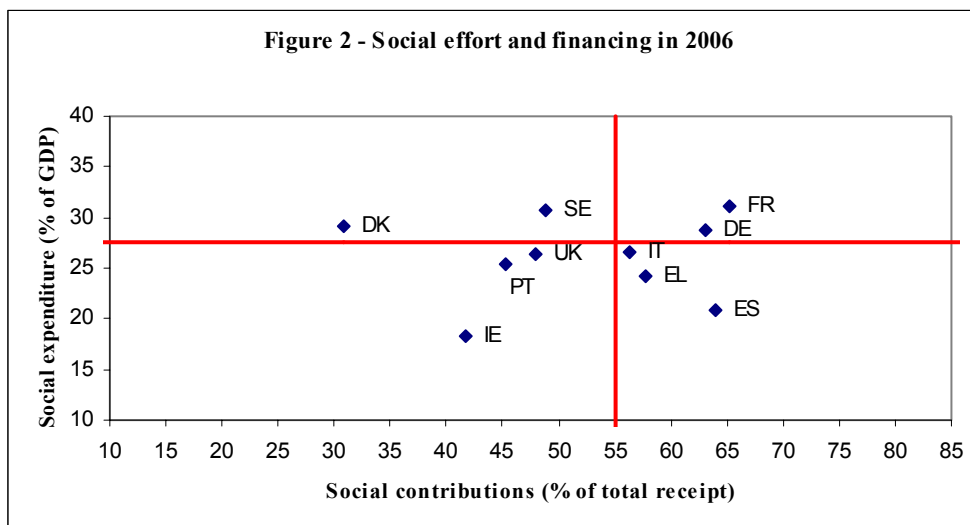
Social effort and financing

A first longitudinal analysis relates the positioning of the ten countries in 1990 (Figure 1) and 2006 (Figure 2) according to the social protection expenditure as a percentage of the GDP (social effort) and the social contributions as a percentage of the total of receipt (contribution-dominance). The reference values were set at 27.5% (EU-15 average) and 55% (dominance of social contributions), respectively.



Source: Eurostat (2001, 2008a, 2008c)

In 1990, three countries were situated in the left-hand quadrants (Beveridgean model): Denmark, Sweden (high spenders), and Ireland (low spender). Other five countries were located in the right-hand quadrants (Bismarckian model): France (high spender); Germany and Italy (average spenders); Greece, Spain and Portugal (low spenders). The UK could be defined as a mixed case: a low spender, with equal emphasis on contributions and taxation. Due to the Italian case, The Mediterranean countries did not cluster together.



Source: Eurostat (2001, 2008a, 2008c)

Over the period 1990-2006, two general trends were observed in EU-15: the average expenditure on social protection had been increased (from 25.5% to 27.5% of GDP), and social contributions have been reinforced as the main source of funding of social expenditure. However, these general trends masks major national differences which are illustrate here by the ten countries under analysis.

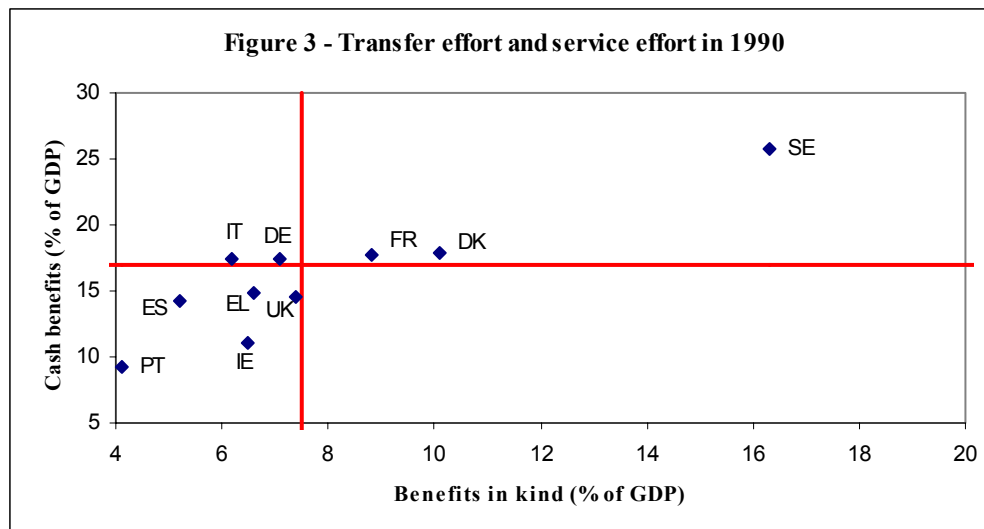
A contraction in the social effort was observed just in Sweden while in Ireland the ratio remained constant. In the other countries, by contrast, the increase in social effort falls within a range of 0.4 (Denmark) to 10.2 points (Portugal). Regarding the structure of financing, only three countries (Denmark, Sweden, and Ireland) reinforced the dominance of contributions while the seven remaining increased their share of government funding. The most pronounced changes took place in Portugal, Italy, Spain and France (from – 12 to – 15 points) and Sweden (+17 points).

These double effects explain the repositioning of the countries in 2006. Indeed, the composition of the three groups identified in 1990 made three changes: Portugal moved to the Beveridge group showing a social effort close-to-average; the UK moved clearly to the same group; and, finally, Italy became a mixed case in terms of funding. Particularly interesting are the movements inside quadrants in the cases of Denmark (an outlier in 1990), Sweden, Germany and France. The dispersion observed in 1990 resulted in a

higher concentration of countries around the values of reference which suggests a trend of convergence already detected in other empirical studies.

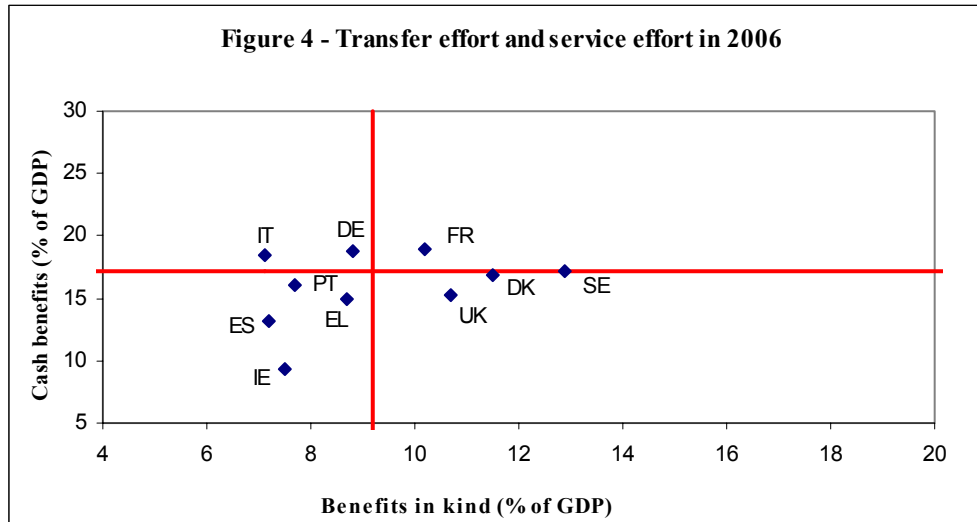
Transfer effort and service effort

We will proceed now to the second longitudinal analysis: the positioning of the ten countries in 1990 (Figure 3) and 2006 (Figure 4) according to the transfer effort (social expenditure on cash benefits as a % of GDP) and to the service effort (social expenditure on benefits in kind as a % of GDP).



Source: Eurostat (2001, 2008a, 2008c)

In 1990, the transfer effort ranged from 4.1% (Portugal) to 16.3% (Sweden) while the service effort ranged from 9.3% (Portugal) to 25.7% (Sweden). Setting the reference values at 7.7 and 16.9% (EU-15 averages), and using the terminology of Kautto (2002), the following groups can be identified: a service group, characterized by a high service effort and an high/average transfer effort (Sweden, Denmark, France); a transfer group, characterized by a high transfer effort and an average/low service effort (Italy, Germany); and a third group characterized by a low service effort and a low transfer effort (Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Spain, the UK).



Source: Eurostat (2001, 2008a, 2008c)

Over the period 1990-2006, there was another general trend in Europe: the increase in the service effort (1.7 points) and a nearly maintenance of transfer effort (0.3 points). The reference values are set now at 9.2 and 17.2%. Again, the European averages hide significant differences in the behavior of different countries. Relating our ten countries, the service effort ranged from 7.1 (Italy) to 12.9% (Sweden) of GDP while the transfer effort ranged from 9.4 (Ireland) to 18.8% (Germany) of GDP.

Compared with 1990, all countries except Sweden (-3.5 points) increased its service effort with the most significant changes in Portugal (+3.6 p) and in the UK (+3.3 p). The majority of countries (Germany, France, the UK, Spain, Italy, Portugal) recorded a higher transfer effort while other three (the two Nordic countries and Ireland) shown a lower ratio. The most pronounced changes were observed in Sweden (-8.6 p), Portugal (+6.8 p) and the UK (+4.5 p).

Once again, these combined effects explain the repositioning of several countries. Two countries changed their previous reference group: the UK moved to the service group while Portugal (an outlier in 1990) became more like Italy. Once again, some movements inside quadrants – Sweden, another outlier in 1990, shown the most pronounced change - toward the reference values seem illustrate a convergence trend.

Conclusions

This article intended to contribute to the discussion on the current state of knowledge with regard to the clustering of European welfare states, especially the Mediterranean countries.

Despite the extensive scientific production during the past nineteen years, we may conclude that the number of clusters as well as their composition remains an open issue. The diversity found in the extensive number of empirical studies appears justified given the variety of their conceptual and methodological options. However, we argued that another explanatory factor must be taken in consideration i.e. the potential effects of reforms carried out, particularly in Europe, on the classification of the welfare states. As mentioned above, the very Esping-Andersen (1999) has recognized a possible reclassification of welfare states caused by the social changes they made over time. Later, several authors (Saint-Arnaud and Bernard, 2003; Guo and Gilbert, 2007; Kautto, 2002) have identified some interesting changes in the composition of the clusters.

To test the hypothesis, we applied the bi-dimensional approaches of Bonoli (1997) and Kautto (2002) in a longitudinal perspective – from 1990 to 2006 – to ten European countries (Denmark, Sweden, the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece), as representative of different regimes.

Despite the limitations of the quantitative indicators, some results may be identified. As regards the social effort and the structure of financing, we observed some interesting repositioning of countries in 2006 (Portugal, Italy, and the UK) as well as a possible movement toward convergence among welfare regimes. Besides the border case of Italy, the other three Mediterranean countries appeared classified in two different clusters.

Concerning the transfer effort and the service effort, two countries (the UK and Portugal) changes their previous reference cluster. The possible trend of convergence was also detected which seems confirm the conclusions of other empirical studies. Once again, a specific Mediterranean cluster has not been identified.

It seems reasonable to conclude that all the changes identified over the period 1990-2006 may be explained by the reforms carried out by the ten selected countries, mainly in the areas of old-age, unemployment, health care and long term care. Additionally, the change reported in the structure of financing seems consistent with the measures to

combat unemployment as well as the significant increase in the health expenditure (Eurostat, 2000, 2005), two areas that have put pressure on government funding.

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