

Thirty years of the ‘Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism’: a review of reviews

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Abstract

In the thirty or so years since the publication of Gosta Esping-Andersen’s ‘Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism’ a number of rival welfare state typologies have emerged. This article has two broad aims. First, we review the reviews of welfare state typologies, pointing to issues of often unclear case selection, and a wide range of concepts, variables and methods, resulting in a variety of worlds of welfare and their constituent nations. We show that there is a great variety in the welfare modelling business at two different levels. Reviews vary significantly in terms of the number and composition of included studies, which has made it difficult to sum up the ‘state of the art’. Individual studies included in the reviews also vary significantly in terms of issues such as aims, concepts, variables and methods. Second, we produce a new review, which adds value as it is based on a clearer search strategy, and includes more recent material that was not available in earlier reviews. This finds that there is a great variety in terms of process (concepts, variables, methods, number of countries) and findings (the number and composition of ‘worlds’). We argue that the country classification seems to show less consensus than previous reviews, with fewer ‘pure’ nations (ie agreement between studies). We suggest that, in order to provide a clear point of engagement, future reviews need to pay more attention to a clear and explicit search strategy, including issues such as inclusion criteria.

Keywords

Welfare regimes; typologies; Esping-Andersen; review of reviews; review;

Introduction

Gosta Esping-Andersen’s ‘Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism’ (TWWC) (1990) typology of welfare states has been termed a ‘modern classic’ (Emmenegger et al 2015). This path-breaking work has become the basis for a whole academic industry described as the ‘Welfare Modelling Business’ (Abrahamson 1999; Powell and Barrientos 2011, 2015). Abrahamson (1999) noted that, since the publication of the book, every welfare state scholar has referred to Esping-Andersen’s tripolar scheme. According to Headey et al (1997: 332), it has become a canon in comparative social policy against which any subsequent work must situate itself. Scruggs and Allan (2006: 55) stated that it is difficult to find an article comparing welfare states in advanced democratic countries [or a syllabus on social policy] that does not refer to this seminal work. Danforth (2014) claimed that the ‘three worlds’ typology has become one of the principal heuristics for examining modern welfare states.

It still has great influence on the discipline nearly thirty years after its publication, as shown by two 25 year anniversary special editions of two journals. Powell and Barrientos (2015) noted that it has become one of the most cited works in social policy (over 20,600 Google

Scholar citations in 2014; now **33805 in 2019**). According to Emmenegger et al (2015), TWWC had an immediate impact on comparative welfare state research, and its status has only grown since. For example, it reached a 'breath-taking' 1600 citations in Google Scholar in 2013 alone. They continued that it was a standard reference in virtually all social science disciplines, while its influence on comparative welfare state research can hardly be overstated. For example, in recent years, almost 50 percent of all articles published in 'Journal of European Social Policy' have referred to the book.

However, in the nearly 30 years since publication it has been subject to extensive debate and critique (eg Arts and Gelissen 2002, 2010; Arcanjo 2006; Bambra 2007; Powell and Barrientos 2011). Bambra (2007b) argued that as a result of these criticisms a number of rival welfare state typologies have emerged, each based on different classification criteria, and each trying to capture in its own way what a welfare state actually does.

This article has two broad aims. First, we review the reviews of welfare state typologies based on Esping-Andersen (1990), pointing to issues of often unclear case selection, and a wide range of concepts, variables and methods, resulting in a variety of worlds of welfare and their constituent nations. Second, we produce a new review, which adds value as it is based on a clearer search strategy, and includes more recent material that was not available in earlier reviews. Turning to the structure of the article, after briefly outline the main issues of the welfare modelling business, we review the existing reviews. Then we move to producing an updated review, and discuss the results and implications.

Typologies

More typologies have emerged since Bambra (2007b) stated that rival typologies have resulted in the welfare state modelling literature being in a state of confusion. A number of scholars have reviewed these typologies (Arcanjo 2006; Arts and Gelissen 2002, 2010; Bambra 2007b; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011); Ebbinghaus 2012; Kim 2015) with two broad aims of examining the content of the classification (number and composition of worlds), and discussing the overall quality of typologies.

Arts and Gelissen (2002) reconstructed several typologies of welfare states in order to establish, first, whether real welfare states are quite similar to others or whether they are rather unique specimens, and, second, whether there are three ideal-typical worlds of welfare capitalism or more. They selected 'six classifications, which they 'think draw attention to interesting characteristics of welfare states not directly included in Esping-Andersen's classification' from the 'vast array of welfare state typologies': Esping-Andersen (1990), Leibfried (1992), Castles & Mitchell (1993), Siaroff (1994), Ferrera (1996), Bonoli (1997), and Korpi & Palme (1998) (their Table 1; We assume that this means six classifications in addition to Esping-Andersen (1990)). Later, they included a further five studies in a table titled 'Empirical robustness of the three-worlds typology': Kangas (1994), Ragin (1994), Shalev (1996) Obinger & Wagschal (1998) and Wildeboer Schut et al. (2001). They argued that even when different indicators are used to classify welfare states, some countries emerge as standard examples, approximating certain ideal-types: Liberal (USA); Continental/Conservative (Germany) and Social-Democratic (Sweden). However, consensus seemed to end here. For example, according to some, Italy can best be assigned to the second, corporatist/continental/conservative type, but belongs, according to others, along with Greece, Spain and Portugal to a distinctive Mediterranean type. The same holds for Australia

which may either be classified as liberal or is the proto- type of a separate, radical welfare state. Hybrid cases, such as the Netherlands and Switzerland are a bigger problem. They concluded that Esping-Andersen's typology 'neither passes the empirical tests with flying colours, not dismally fails them' (p.153).

Arcanjo (2006) reviewed thirteen empirical studies carried out between 1994 and 2005. Her selection is based on two criteria: the attempt to develop a constructive response to the three critiques of the "three worlds"; the diversity of conceptual and methodological options. This diversity (her Table 10) required great prudence when comparing the results obtained, due in particular to the use of data relating to a time-span of more than twenty years, during which period the European systems of social protection underwent many changes. She noted that the typologies analysed are based on different conceptual and methodological options. This justified the a priori comparison of the analytical focus, indicators, countries selected and the time period of observation (her Table 8). She stated that for the twelve countries selected by all of the authors, only six countries are given the same classification: Ireland and the UK; France and Germany; and Norway and Sweden. She continued that when a wider analytical criterion (ie all 22 countries) is adopted, fourteen countries have the same classification (Ireland, the UK, Canada, New Zealand and the USA; France, Germany, Luxembourg and Japan; Norway and Sweden; and Greece, Portugal and Spain. She made a number of concluding points. First, all of the studies confirmed the existence of at least three regimes, but in total six types were identified (the 'three worlds' of Esping-Andersen, together with Radical, Southern and Eastern European). Second, the existence of a specific regime for the four countries of Southern Europe was supported in three studies. Third, the classification of Eastern European countries was somewhat inconclusive. Finally, the USA, Germany and Sweden can be identified respectively as prototypes of the liberal, conservative and social-democratic regimes.

Bambra (2007b) aimed to compare classifications and determine which are currently of the most utility: to 'sift the wheat from the chaff' in terms of welfare state regime theory. She selected twelve studies based on income maintenance, not services such as health or education: six welfare state typologies (her Table 1) and six welfare state taxonomies (her Table 2). Bambra drew on Bonoli's (1997) argument that the welfare state typology literature can be divided into two halves: one of these examines 'how much' (i.e. the quantity of welfare provision), while the other examines 'how' (the Bismarck-Beveridge funding dichotomy). She argued that it is possible to determine which, if any, of the competing theories of welfare state regimes are the most useful in terms of accounting for welfare state variation in one-dimensional (how much or how) and/or a two-dimensional manner (how much and how). She used analysis of variance (ANOVA), multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and discriminant analysis (DA) to test the different welfare state typologies. She concluded that the four typologies of Leibfried (1992), Castles and Mitchell (1992), Ferrera (1996) and Bonoli (1997), and the two taxonomies of Kangas (1994) and Obinger and Wagschal (1998) emerge as the 'wheat' with Ferrera's (1996) typology accounts for the most variance and is therefore the most useful of the competing welfare state classifications

Arts and Gelissen (2010) presented 11 studies examining the 'empirical robustness of welfare state models'. These studies tested the goodness-of-fit of the welfare state models using statistically more sophisticated and robust methodologies, with some also generating new data sets to inquire into the robustness of the models over time. However, they did not present

any inclusion criteria. This is important, not least as some subsequent reviews such as Ebbinghaus (2012) and Kim (2015) take this selection to be the starting points for their reviews. Arts and Gelissen (2010) concluded that the empirical evidence pertaining to Esping-Andersen's original three-worlds typology is mixed. First, they argued that his typology has at least some heuristic and descriptive value, but a case can be made for extending the number of welfare state regimes perhaps to four or five, with a Mediterranean grouping being the most consistently suggested extension. Second, some cases came close to Esping-Andersen's three ideal type regimes, there are no pure cases, with some clear hybrids. Third, typologies based on social programmes beyond the original case of cash benefits did not conform so easily to Esping-Andersen's typology.

Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011) reviewed 23 quantitative studies analysing welfare regimes. They identified 'pure countries' (classified more than 80% of the time in the same regime type) of Sweden, Norway and Denmark (social-democratic); France, Germany and Austria (Christian-democratic) and the US (liberal). They found that only Switzerland and the Netherlands were not classified in the same regime type in more than 50% of the studies, with both countries being hybrids, classified in the literature in four distinct 'worlds'. Their aim was to bring all these studies together in order to verify whether Esping-Andersen's typologies constitute a good guidance for comparative social policy analysis. However, comparing these studies is fairly complicated for two reasons: first, typologies were based on different policy domains/indicators; and second, typologies were based on data collected at different points in time. Their final classification was based on all 23 studies because the 'purity' of Esping-Andersen's ideal types should be verified by considering all sorts of indicators and policy domains. However, when discussing the 'divergent typologies' from Esping-Andersen's measurement, they analysed only studies based on cash transfers and those that included a mix of indicators (including indicators for social transfers) because they relate closely to the concepts of 'decommodification', 'social stratification' and 'defamilialisation' (used by Esping-Andersen's to classify countries). They claimed that many deviations from Esping-Andersen's typology are simply explained by the inclusion of indicators related to the healthcare and education system.

Ebbinghaus (2012) reported a 'meta-analysis' of 13 studies (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999) and the 11 studies reported in Arts and Gelissen (2011). He pointed out that the number and coverage of cases varied considerably from a low of 11 countries to as many as 25 countries, although most range around Esping-Andersen's (1990, 1999) 16 to 18 countries. Moreover, there were clear differences in the methods and indicators of studies.

Kim (2015) reviewed studies that produced their own welfare regime typology by synthesising the lists compiled by Arts and Gelissen (2010) and Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011), followed by 'backward and forward reference list checking'. This resulted in a total of thirty-three studies which were divided into five groups: Esping-Andersen's (1990) original 18 nations; OECD members; non- OECD regions; non- OECD nations; and 'all' nations. For the purpose of his review, he focused on his first two groups of 24 studies.

Table 1: a comparison of studies included in review articles

Arts and Gelissen (2002)	Arcanjo (2006)	Bambra (2007b)	Arts and Gelissen (2010)	Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011)	Ebbinghaus (2012)	Kim (2015)	N
				Bambra (2004)		Bambra (2004)	2
	Bambra (2005a)						1
	Bambra (2005b)			Bambra (2005b)		Bambra (2005b)	3
			Bambra (2006)	Bambra (2006)	Bambra (2006)	Bambra (2006)	4
Bonoli (1997)		Bonoli (1997)		Bonoli (1997)		Bonoli (1997)	4
Castles and Mitchell (1992)		Castles and Mitchell (1992)	Castles and Mitchell (1992)			Castles and Mitchell (1992)	4
			Castles and Obinger (2008)	Castles and Obinger (2008)	Castles and Obinger (2008)	Castles and Obinger, (2008)	4
Esping-Andersen (1990)		Esping-Andersen (1990)		Esping-Andersen (1990)	Esping-Andersen (1990)	Esping-Andersen (1990)	5
					Esping-Andersen (1999)		1
						Ferragina et al (2012)	1
	Ferreira and Figueiredo (2005)						1
Ferrera (1996)		Ferrera (1996)				Ferrera (1996)	3
	Gal (2004)			Gal (2004)			2
				Gallie and Paugam, (2000)		Gallie and Paugam, (2000)	2
				Goodin (2001)		Goodin (2001)	1
						Hudson and Kuhner, (2009)	1

Kangas (1994)	Kangas (1994)	Kangas (1994)	Kangas (1994)		Kangas (1994)	Kangas (1994)	6
	Kautto (2002)						1
Korpi and Palme (1998)		Korpi and Palme (1998)		Korpi and Palme (1998)		Korpi and Palme (1998)	4
Leibfried (1992)		Leibfried (1992)				Leibfried (1992)	3
	MacMenamin (2003)						1
Obinger and Wagschal (1998)	Obinger and Wagschal (1998)	Obinger and Wagschal (1998)	Obinger and Wagschal (1998)	Obinger and Wagschal (1998)	Obinger and Wagschal (1998)	Obinger and Wagschal (1998)	7
				Obinger and Wagschal (2001)		Obinger and Wagschal (2001)	2
		Pitruzzello (1999)					1
	Powell and Barrientos (2004)		Powell and Barrientos (2004)	Powell and Barrientos (2004)	Powell and Barrientos (2004)	Powell and Barrientos (2004)	5
Ragin (1994)	Ragin (1994)	Ragin (1994)	Ragin (1994)	Ragin (1994)	Ragin (1994)	Ragin (1994)	7
	Saint-Arnaud and Bernard (2003)		Saint-Arnaud and Bernard (2003)	Saint-Arnaud and Bernard (2003)	Saint-Arnaud and Bernard (2003)		4
			Schroder (2009)	Schroder (2008)	Schroder (2009)	Schroder (2009)	4
			Scruggs and Allan (2006)	Scruggs and Allan (2006)	Scruggs and Allan (2006)	Scruggs and Allan (2006)	4
						Scruggs and Allan (2008)	1
Siaroff (1994)						Siaroff (1994)	2
Shalev (1996)		Shalev (1996)	Shalev (1996)	Shalev (1996)	Shalev (1996)	Shalev (1996)	6

	Soede et al (2004)			Soede et al (2004)			2
						Talme (2013)	1
Wildeboer Schut et al (2001)	Wildeboer Schut et al (2001)	Wildeboer Schut et al (2001)		Wildeboer Schut et al (2001)			4
			Vrooman (2009)	Vrooman (2009)	Vrooman (2009)		3
						Vrooman (2012)	1
12	13	12	11	23	13	24	

The broad conclusions from these reviews present a confusing picture (cf Bambra 2007b). A comparison of the reviews is given in Table 1. It shows that a total of 37 studies have been included in at least one review. The number of studies included in reviews varies from 11 to 24, and this is not explained simply by the pool of eligible studies increasing over time. Some studies were chosen by only one of the seven reviews (Esping-Andersen 1999; Pitruzzello 1999; MacMenamim 2003; Kautto 2002; Bambra 2005a; Ferreira and Figueiredo 2005; Hudson and Kuhner 2009; Scruggs and Allan 2008; Ferragina et al 2012; Talme 2013; Vrooman 2012), although clearly some of the later studies could not have been included in earlier reviews. On the other hand, only Ragin (2004) and Obinger and Wagschal (1998) [in German] were included in all reviews, while Kangas (1994) and Shalev (1996) were included in six of the seven reviews. Even Esping-Andersen (1990) was included only in five reviews.

Scholars such as Ebbinghaus (2012) and Kim (2015) pointed to a case selection problem in the study of welfare regimes, namely that few studies justify their choice of countries. As Kim (2015) put it, taking their lead from Esping-Andersen (1990), few studies have discussed and justified their case selection. It is possible that their conclusions are linked to the particular (and often unclearly justified) samples of studies. For example, some included studies appear to be more concerned with de-familization rather than de-commodification. Our review of reviews suggests a different case selection issue in that few reviews provided a clear search strategy with inclusion/ exclusion criteria (but see Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011) resulting in a large variety in the choice of studies. In our view, the large variety of studies covered in the reviews, the unclear search strategy of some of them, and the fact that some are now rather dated justifies a new review.

Search Strategy

Our starting point was to draw on the studies in the existing (above) reviews, resulting in 37 studies. We then carried out a search to capture any other earlier studies and to update the list. In order to include books and chapters, we used a Scopus search with the following search terms:

Social OR Welfare OR Esping OR World OR Regime AND Typology OR Taxonomy OR Cluster OR Class*

The Search resulted in 1044 hits. We then carried out forward and backward tracking on the studies. Our inclusion criteria (cf Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011) were that the study must include a classification; based on social/welfare criteria (rather than economic criteria

such as Varieties of Capitalism); cite Esping-Andersen, and refer to his at least one of his concepts; based on income maintenance or welfare as a whole rather than individual services such as health or education); be ‘mainstream’ (ie not based on gender or de-familization alone); and focuses on ‘advanced capitalist democracies’ (ie with the majority of cases being Esping-Andersen’s (1990) 18 nations of Esping-Andersen).

Two of these points may require more explanation. First, the term ‘mainstream’ follows Orloff (1993, 1996, 2009) in focusing on research such as Esping-Andersen (1990) that does not thematise gender. In other words, it focuses on ‘decommodification’ rather than ‘defamilization’. The large literature on the gendered analysis of welfare states, which arose partly as a reaction to Esping-Andersen’s neglect of gender, focuses on ‘defamilization’, but this term has produced different spellings, definitions, and operationalizations, as well as a number of cognate terms such as ‘dedomestication’ and ‘degenderization’ (eg Kröger 2011, Saxonberg 2013, Lohmann and Zigel 2016; Kurowska 2016).

Moreover, while Esping-Andersen (1999) discussed defamilization, he defined it in a very different way to feminist scholarship in terms of the freedom of the family rather than women’s freedom from the family (Bambra 2007a). As Orloff (2009) notes, Esping-Andersen (1999) blunted the radical edge of the concept. She adds that ‘every time I read an article in a nonfeminist journal citing Esping-Andersen and no feminists on questions to do with mothers’ employment and gender, I’m beyond vexed.’ This review examines the ‘decommodification’ (Esping-Andersen 1990) rather than ‘mainstream’ (Esping-Andersen 1999) or feminist concepts of ‘defamilization’. This is not because defamilization is unimportant, but because it is important, and requires separate and more extended analysis (eg Kröger 2011, Saxonberg 2013, Lohmann and Zigel 2016; Kurowska 2016).

Second, the selection of nations is restricted to studies that focus on Esping-Andersen’s (1990) original group of 18 ‘advanced capitalist democracies’. Similarly to gender, recent years have seen a significant literature that extends regime analysis into a much wider group of nations (eg Kim 2015). Esping-Andersen’s regime analysis has been termed ‘Eurocentric’ and ‘Swedocentric’, associated with ‘ethnocentric western social research’, a ‘Western lens’ and a ‘social democratic bias’ (Author Ref). There are a number of arguments that suggest that the worlds of welfare may be a historically and geographically bound typology based on particular notions of the welfare state (eg Estevez-Abe 2008; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011; Rice 2013; Powell and Kim 2014). It is still an open question whether Esping-Andersen’s (1990) approach extends to more recent OECD nations such as Korea and Turkey (Author Refs), let alone very different non OECD nations (eg Gough et al 2004).

This means that we excluded some studies included in the earlier reviews. Indeed, we excluded the most included studies such as Ragin (1994) and Kangas (2004) as they were based on one element of income maintenance, and Obinger and Wagschal (1998) as this is based on the wider ‘Family of Nations’ approach rather than Esping-Andersen (1990). This resulted in a final list of 21 studies.

Results

Table 2 focuses on the processes of the studies. The underlying concepts exhibit great variation. Indeed, it is noticeable how few studies clearly discussed the three concepts of

Esping-Andersen (1990) of de-commodification, stratification and the welfare mix. Perhaps – unsurprisingly- the closest is the updated replication study of Talme (2014). Some studies focused on de-commodification (eg Bambra 2004; Scruggs and Allan 2006). Others aimed to stress original concepts perhaps under-played by Esping-Andersen (1990) such as the welfare mix (Powell and Barrientos 2004) and stratification (Scruggs and Allan 2008). As suggested by the different terminology of their typologies, some studies such as Korpi and Palme (1998) and Hudson and Kühner (2009) had rather different aims. The variety of the underlying concepts was related to a variety in variables. The number of variables showed significant differences from a minimum of two (Bonoli 1997) to a maximum of 30 (Danforth 2014).

Some studies aimed to widen the original stress on transfer payments to include services (eg Bambra 2005b; Jensen 2008). We have included studies such as Bambra (2005b) and Jensen (2008) which examine both transfers and services, but exclude (eg) Stoy (2012) which focuses solely on services. However, we have not included the most ‘included’ studies of Ragin (1994) and Kangas (2004). As Vrooman (2013) noted, Ragin (1994) analysed pension benefits, while Kangas (1994) focused on health insurance. He continued that ‘such partial analyses can neither corroborate nor rebut Esping-Andersen’s classification, which refers to the entire configuration of social security and labour market institutions.’ Similarly, Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011) argued that many deviations from the typology reported in the literature are simply the result of including traits from other policy fields (education, health care) that should be discarded on theoretical grounds. Esping-Andersen (1999: 73-4) stressed some criticisms of the TWWC are irrelevant because they are not addressing welfare regimes but individual programmes. However, he admitted that his original typology focused rather one-sidedly on income maintenance, but income-transfer programmes capture but one side of the welfare state (pp. 87-8).

Finally, there is a significant variety of methods. Some studies aimed to replicate the original Esping-Andersen methodology of creating groups based on how nations cluster around the mean of de-commodification scores, which has been criticized (see eg Shalev 1996; Pitruzzello 1999; Barrientos 2015). Some studies used some type of Cluster Analysis, while others used Fuzzy set ideal type analysis, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). However, some appeared to use ‘eyeballing’ of a 2x2 matrix.

Table 3 shows that the variety in findings is related to the variety in process. The number of nations varies from a minimum of 11 (Vrooman 2012) to 23 (Hudson and Kühner 2008), although 11 of the studies focused on 18 nations. However, the description of those nations varied, including ‘European nations’, ‘capitalist democracies’, ‘advanced capitalist democracies’, ‘advanced OECD democracies’, ‘OECD countries’, ‘postindustrial countries’, and ‘original Esping-Andersen countries’. The number of clusters varied from three to five (or nine ‘overall types’) of Hudson and Kühner 2009), although Scruggs & Allan (2008) found no ‘mutually exclusive groups’. The cluster names closely followed Esping-Andersen’s terminology, with the addition of labels such as ‘Southern’, ‘Latin’ or ‘Peripheral’ regimes. However, Pöder and Kerem (2014) found a ‘post-Communist’ regime. A few studies used rather different terminologies such as Bismarckian/high-spending (eg Bonoli 1997); Productive/ Protective (Hudson and Kühner 2009) and Basic Security, Encompassing and Targeted (Korpi and Palme 1998).

The difference in terminology made classifying nations across studies difficult. We have assumed that terms such as 'Socialist' and 'Social Democratic' on the one hand and 'Corporatist', 'Continental' and 'Conservative' were similar enough to be part of the same grouping across the studies. The country classification seemed to show less consensus than the review of Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011; see above). However, our study suggests that most of the nations are placed in the same broad group by only around 50% of the studies (ie their 'medium internal consistency countries'). We found that no nation reached their 'pure' threshold, with the greatest level of agreement for Sweden (Social Democratic: 14/20 = 70%), Germany (Conservative: 13/19 = 68%), France (13/20 = 65%), and Australia (Liberal: 11/17 = 65%). The lowest level of agreement is for Switzerland (5/15 = 33%), Portugal (2/6 = 33%), Netherlands (6/19 = 32%), and Spain (2/7 = 29%). Our review includes a number of post 2011 studies which they could not have included, but it seems that different inclusion criteria seems to produce different results. It is difficult to state that one set of inclusion criteria is 'better' than another, but this does underline the point about the need to be clear about inclusion criteria.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article has reviewed the reviews of welfare state typologies, pointing to issues of often unclear case selection, and a wide range of concepts, variables and methods, resulting in a variety of worlds of welfare and their constituent nations. Second, we produced a new review, which adds value as it is based on a clearer search strategy, and includes more recent material that was not available in earlier reviews. This finds that there is a great variety in terms of process (concepts, variables, methods, number of countries) and findings (the number and composition of 'worlds'). We argue that the country classification seems to show less consensus than previous reviews, with fewer 'pure' nations (ie agreement between studies). We suggest that, in order to provide a clear point of engagement, future reviews need to pay more attention to a clear and explicit search strategy, including issues such as inclusion criteria.

In more detail, we have pointed to the great variety in the welfare modelling business at two different levels. It has been shown that reviews vary significantly in terms of the number and composition of included studies, which has made it difficult to sum up the 'state of the art'. This problem is compounded by often unclear search strategies, resulting in trying to draw conclusions from some studies with very contrasting aims, and based on different concepts, variables, and methods. In our view, more attention must be paid to the search strategy, including issues such as inclusion criteria. This means that subsequent critics have at least a clear point of engagement, allowing points of disagreement to be made explicit. Moreover, it has been shown that the individual studies included in the reviews also vary significantly in terms of issues such as aims, concepts, variables and methods. In our view, the production of further typologies may be near the point of diminishing returns. We suggest that further work in the field should consider a number of issues.

First, theoretical or conceptual issues should be clearly discussed (Powell 2015). Arts and Gelissen (2010) argue that it is the theory that creates the typology, not the typology the theory. Esping-Andersen drew on power resources theory, or as Arts and Gelissen (2010: 582) put it, the 'power resources' cum 'path dependency' paradigm. However, they continued

that most of the alternative typologies lacked a firm theoretical foundation. The original and modified conceptual position of Esping-Andersen (1990) was based on de-commodification, stratification, and the welfare mix, with social risk and de-familization added later (Esping-Andersen 1999). If authors wish to significantly depart from these concepts, then they need to justify their reasons for this decision. Second, the variables must be clearly linked with the concepts (see Yörük et al 2019 for variable selection problem that undermines validity and reliability in the welfare modelling business). Third, the range of nations should be carefully considered. Fourth, the range of sectors covered should include benefits and services rather than single areas. The aim should be towards holism, covering as much of the welfare state or regime as possible, allowing a view of the wood rather than the individual trees. Fifth, methods should be 'formal' and based on some notion of clustering rather than on informal or arbitrary methods. Finally, data should be recent (eg Talme 2013) or longitudinal (eg Danforth 2014). The original data of Esping-Andersen (1990) is now nearly 40 years old. Much has changed over this period, and examining a static or frozen landscape of almost ancient history can tell us little of today's social policy.

Clearly, some elements of Esping-Andersen's (1990) pioneering study would not match these suggestions, but he has later pointed to some of these issues (Esping-Andersen 1999). It is fitting to leave (almost) the last word to Esping-Andersen (1999: 94): his re-consideration of some points were 'certainly not the last word on the subject. The question of how to identify and classify welfare regimes will remain open because ... researchers differ in terms of what attributes they consider vital and of how to measure them.' However, future researchers need to be equally clear of their approach.

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