

Reviews

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Agnes Blome, Wolfgang Keck and Jens Alber, *Family and the Welfare State in Europe: Intergenerational Relations in Ageing Societies*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK, 2009, 352 pp., hbk £79.95, ISBN 13: 978 1 84844 479 9.

What is the role of the welfare state and the family for social protection in childhood and in old age? Which is the more sustainable welfare model for an ageing population? Is intergenerational solidarity at family and societal levels at risk? These are just some of the grand questions from this comparative study. This book is a translated version of a German research report, and Germany is at the centre of interest with France, Sweden and Italy as comparative cases. The four countries represent different welfare regimes and family cultures. They are also facing quite different challenges as far as population ageing is concerned, and they are more radical in low-fertility states such as Germany and Italy. The countries are therefore well chosen, and as they are few in number, thick descriptions and rich comparisons can be made. However, lazy readers like myself may find parts of the presentation too dense, and I would have preferred more summaries to help separate the cream from the milk.

The book is a real *tour de force*, organised in ten chapters with close to 350 pages. The introductory chapter is a brief outline of why and what, and it is followed by a conceptual chapter on intergenerational solidarity and another on research design. The innovative approach is to link macro data about welfare programmes and micro-level data about how these programmes play out in the living conditions of individuals. The following chapters describe and evaluate how the welfare state and the family buffer against risk for older people and children, respectively, with two chapters for each of the groups. A fifth empirical chapter explores whether there is evidence of generational conflict in popular opinion about welfare policies. The final chapter tries to sum things up, though less successfully than each of the preceding chapters.

With reference to the findings concerning older people, as far as income protection is concerned, the welfare state is identified as the key source of income and security under all four regimes, although the extent of the support varies. It is also noted that access to pensions has made older people economically independent of their families, and vice versa, as monetary help now flows down generations and balances the instrumental support flowing upwards. Recent reforms do, however, indicate a trend towards the individualisation of risks, and of weaker social solidarity.

Care of older people is, however, still primarily a family responsibility, although supplemented by the welfare state. The authors of this report found that the two tend to be complementary rather than to substitute for each other. It is also interesting to learn how differently the four countries arrange and provide

long-term care, each in line with their cultural traditions. Thus, Germany counts on insurance and cash support to family carers, Sweden concentrates on service provision (with moderate co-payment), France has a comparatively generous but fragmented model, while Italy leaves the responsibility to the family, if recently supported by cash allowances that have stimulated a large industry of migrant carers. Comparative studies of long-term care are tricky, as the findings are very sensitive to definitions and measurements. Acknowledging this, the authors use data from different sources, but I am not totally convinced about the solidity of the findings. There is, however, no reason to doubt the general observation of a convergence between models. Germany in particular has become more statist, following the long-term care insurance measures of 1995 and since. Sweden has moved in the opposite direction, from de-familisation to re-familisation. Sweden still has the most generous services among the four countries, but France and Germany are closing up, and have more generous cash allowances. Population ageing may have made all countries more aware of weaknesses in their arrangements. For Sweden, the issue is how to finance an expensive welfare state; and for Germany, France and Italy, it is the tendency to place too much responsibility on families that may have few members or may not be able to manage.

It is comforting to learn that there are few if any signs of ‘a war’ between generations over the welfare state. On the contrary, the authors find correspondence between actual and ideal (preferred) policies, as with the majority preference in Germany and Italy for family care, and the majority preference for services in France and Sweden. The authors may, however, have overstated the support for family care, as other studies have reported a majority vote for more state responsibility, even in familist welfare states. Too much responsibility is now felt to be on family shoulders. Solidarity among age groups may be nourished by affection between family generations: but the risk of conflict may increase if family solidarity weakens. The authors observe that there is much research on generational solidarity in each context, but little about how family and societal solidarity are related to each other. Although the issues of generational solidarity are recognised, this topic could have been more fully explored. It would be totally unreasonable to end this review with negative points. That would be unreasonable: the book is an impressive effort, from which both students and academics will benefit, as this reader indeed has.

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Misa Izuhara, *Housing, Care and Inheritance*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK,
2009, 164 pp., hbk £75, ISBN 13: 978 0 415 41548 4.

This book provides a comprehensive review of a broad range of issues around housing, care and inheritance in the United Kingdom and Japan. Based on a thorough review of existing evidence and new empirical findings, the book draws on a mix of quantitative and qualitative research to explore and compare changing attitudes and practices in this field. Such a study is very welcome