

Renegotiating Social Citizenship – Democracy in Welfare Service States

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1 Introduction

Welfare arrangements are subject to constant change. These changes take place against the background of demographic, social, and economic developments that have generated new social needs and risks (Taylor-Gooby 2013). Accordingly, welfare states in Europe and around the world are implementing new modes of welfare production, with significant consequences for the lives of those who need to rely on public help and support to adapt to new challenges (Potůček 2014; Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, & Chung 2017; Wulfgramm 2017). The scopes and scales of these welfare reforms, as well as their societal implications, may vary by institutional pathway and general political and economic constellation throughout different countries. Nevertheless, a fundamental change in welfare production is widely observable and it is leading to a distinctly new phase of welfare states with quantitative increases and qualitatively redefined functions of social services in welfare provisions. In numerous welfare states, personalized social services stepped out of their residual roles and now fulfill central bridging functions of welfare production to enhance beneficiaries' capacities to live a life on their own. This new kind of welfare architecture – may it be called *Welfare Service State*– is not without consequences for what is reflected in *Social Citizenship*.

2 Welfare Service States

Against this political and societal background, traditional welfare programs – based on compensation for market failures, existential threats and standard biographical problems by income-replacing – are no longer considered capable of addressing the unequal diffusion of new social risks (van Aerschot 2011). The European Union not only, but especially, promotes new forms of welfare production by drawing attention to ‘human development’ – emphasizing equal opportunities, social protection and inclusion, high levels of education, and health for all (European Parliament et al. 2017). While growing inequalities within several states as well as the international inequalities between rich and poor states are acknowledged to be significant policy issues, social conflicts and personal hardships have been redefined along more individualized terms. Accordingly, current welfare approaches attempt to strengthen the citizens' capacities to handle social opportunities – but also to overcome individual hardships – on their own as a personal responsibility. In particular, service-based approaches to welfare production are forming the core of comprehensive and far-reaching reforms. The extensive implementation of such welfare approaches seems to amount into a distinctively new phase of welfare architecture: the emergence of *Welfare Service States* (Bonvin et. al 2018)

The restructuring of welfare states is based on two main pillars. On the one hand, these reforms are following social investment ideas which are aiming to capacitate citizens. On the other hand, the implementation and realization of social investment rationales are fundamentally based on Social Services.

2.1 Social Investment

The rising of Welfare Service States seems to be linked to what has been proposed as a sophisticated answer to (neoliberal) critiques of traditional welfare settlements: The *Social Investment Turn* (Morel, Palier, & Palme, 2012). Social investment rationalities mark a particular framework of reasoning and justification of welfare measures, which will be presented shortly and only in fragments here. Roughly put, the focus lies in preventive policies, personalized interventions, and an effort to strengthen citizens' capacity to handle social opportunities and also to overcome personal hardships on their own as an individual responsibility.

Proponents of social investment are convinced that the former approaches of welfare states and their providing institutions are either fundamentally ineffective – perhaps because the new (social) problems could not be solved by just improving the available resources of those in need anymore, as the traditional welfare regimes did – or because traditional ways of welfare are seen, for example in the case of traditional social services, as too rigid, too patronizing and too paternalistic (Tonkens, Hoijsink, & Gulikers, 2013, p. 161).

Certainly one of the essential renewals in welfare politic is the emphasis on capacitating citizens. This focus implies a significant recalibration of the cognitive and normative orientations on what welfare should achieve. Empowerment of individuals to achieving active social participation as well as self-reliance and flourishing personal life conducts have become the new 'currency of justice' in welfare production. Instead of passive transfers to improve life-conditions, people should be capacitated to tackle their challenges on their own. This marks a substantial "reorientation in social citizenship, away from *freedom from want towards freedom to act*" (Hemerijck 2017: 12).

In contrast to neoliberal critics, SI proponents highlight the productive aspects of the welfare state. Spendings in the welfare sector are regarded as investments in education and human capital – promising a pay-off for the competitiveness and quality of society as a whole as well as for the individual well-being. The SI perspective,

“promotes the notion that investments in individuals enrich our common future and ensuring success in the present is beneficial for the community as a whole, both now and into the future” (Jenson 2012: 29).

However, the transformation in realpolitik sets other priorities. Jean-Michel Bonvin and others identify four normative bases of the understanding of SI by the European Commission which is intended to serve as an illustration for various political SI approaches in different countries (Bonvin & Laruffa 2017: 6ff.):

1. Social policy is offensively defined as an economic factor, which can and should increase the competitiveness of the European economy. In general, all social policies should refer to this objective.
2. In contrast to neoliberal work-first approaches, the Commission's understanding of SI highlights the need to invest in human capital through education and training. The welfare recipients have to adapt to the requirements of the (changing) labor market (European Commission 2013b, p. 13). Furthermore, behavior such as refusing a job or refusing to participate in ALMP is punished by sanctions.

3. The SI logic and the consideration of the entire lifespan of welfare citizens lead to the search for the "highest return on investment" (Bonvin & Laruffa 2017: 7). Notably, early childhood education and family assistance have become more attractive than other forms of social policy measures, not because young people are seen as more vulnerable than other groups, but because the cost-benefit calculation seems to be more attractive.
4. The involvement of private financiers and the reorganization of social policy under market logic could be seen as possibly the most radical change. Hence, the definition of social enterprises has been expanded so that now primarily profit-oriented actors are involved as well. Accordingly, new ways of financing the welfare sector were sought – such as *Social Investment Bonds* which are supposed to make the welfare-sector accessible for private investors and their profits.

2.2 Social Services

Personalized welfare services are basically means of providing opportunities in *terms of care and support supplies as well as pedagogically, 'people changing' actions*. They aim at enhancing, sustaining or restoring competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and other dispositions of people (Hasenfeld 1972). These are precisely those approaches to problem-solving that are emphasized in the social investment perspective. Services may well be reactive on prevalent problems, but they are also expected to be suitable for strategies aiming at "preparing rather than repairing," and "prevention rather than cure" (Hemerijck 2017: 10). Significant EU policies like the *Lisbon Strategy*, *Europe 2020*, the *Social Investment Package* and the *European Pillar of Social Rights* highlight enabling, activating, and targeting welfare measures. They emphasize the importance of policy fields – like education, training, and active labor market policies, but also care, counseling, health and rehabilitation, and numerous family policies – within which welfare is primarily provided through personal services.

Accordingly, personal welfare services have become an over-proportionally growing economic sector and play an altered, strategically significant and growing role within the different welfare settlements in Europe (Jensen 2008). Despite the lasting power of long term welfare pathways and variations according to given inequalities, governance capacities, consolidation efforts, and other fiscal constraints, the spending for social services has increased as a proportion of GDP as well as a proportion of total expenditure on social benefits in the vast majority of European countries. Daniel Oesch (2013) has demonstrated this growth in numerous countries in statistical workforce studies. The so called socio-cultural experts are the parts of the workforce that have most dynamically expanded. Put differently, 'welfare service state jobs' – whether in public administration, health, education, or social work – have been growing much faster than any other occupation. Brenke, Schlaak, & Ringwald (2018) are coming to the same conclusion of increasing employment, but also report an increased caseload. Further, this growth might also be reflected in the growing number of students studying related subjects (i.e. Meyer und Karsten 2019).

However, to suggest a subtle morphogenesis towards a WSS does not presuppose a consistent, explicitly service-based welfare regime without various public help measures, but indicates that personal welfare services are a disproportionately increasing economic sector that plays an altered, strategically significant, and growing role within the different welfare settlements in Europe. Nevertheless, there are strong indications of a social and political constellation in which it is not so much a question of social work taking place in welfare state

contexts, but instead that in Welfare Service States, welfare itself – to put it very bluntly – turns more and more into that what interactive social welfare practice does – and this does not remain without consequences for the citizenry of welfare states.

Given the apparent relevance of services for understanding and analyzing welfare, it is remarkable that classical welfare research tended to merely focus on the transfer component of welfare states while losing sight of the service component. Only recently has this changed. Leading scholars such as Anton Hemerijck (2013) do not only suggest discriminating “service-oriented capacitating” and “benefit-transfer compensating” social spending. He even suggests a new edifice of service-based welfare states (Hemerijck 2013: 263ff.). However, it is not enough to acknowledge the architectonic relevance of social services, but the shifting of features and conditions of welfare production have to be taken further into account in order to understand what current welfare actually *is*.

3 Social Citizenship and the Role of Social Services

As welfare states are actively regulating societal relations, changes in the architecture, objectives, and control mechanisms of welfare are deeply connected with the make-up of societies themselves. The suggested service-based modes of welfare – which are performed by persons on persons in direct social interactions and highlight individual empowerment rather than protective rights – imply features that may renegotiate the relationship between the state and its citizens. Given that *citizenship* is a crucial legitimation of welfare states, this remains is a significant desideratum in analyzing welfare architectures as the nature and meaning of welfare citizenship, being the elephant in the room of an incipient welfare edifice emphasizing the role of services. What is needed is scrutiny of welfare service actions with reference to what kind of welfare citizenship is constructed and realized for whom and in what ways. Beyond the practices of welfare service production, this perspective includes the reconstruction of how different types of beneficiaries construct, seek to realize or dismiss their mundane accounts of (welfare) citizenship.

3.1 Services and Rights-Based Citizenship

In the context of personal social services, criteria for eligibility and entitlements are more individualized and depend on personal behavior. Social service treatment is not – and should not be – universal and uniform for all beneficiaries. It instead is established in negotiated casework processes of situated assessments to find tailor-made solutions for individual hardships in which (moral) attitudes of front-line workers, that may override the individual preferences of beneficiaries and are known to affect implementation (Hill & Hupe 2014; Kallio & Kouvo 2015).

These features of individualized service production may sit uneasily with the emphasis on formal entitlements and assumptions of universality inherent in conceptions of citizenship associated with democratic liberalism. Liberal thinkers make the same point with respect to freedoms. They argue that those welfare schemes which are tackling economic injustices through social services are more oriented towards issues of practical life conduct rather than issues of structural life conditions and thus – promoting valuable activities rather than straightforwardly redistributing wealth – express the paternalist rational, that citizens are unable and/or unwilling to decide and to use their resources appropriately (Ziegler 2014).

Formal conceptions of citizenship tend to argue that citizens’ personal rights and entitlements imply a public obligation to provide benefits so that citizens do not need to claim access to them. Financial, redistributive welfare interventions can be considered desirable for all kinds

of welfare beneficiaries. Personalized, pedagogical service interventions, however, entail interference in patterns of habits, ‘mental infrastructures,’ and behaviors. In several personal welfare services – like mental health, social work, youth welfare, family and child protection, active labor market services etc. – beneficiaries might not want to claim help, and instead, they might well be compelled to seek work, training, or advice. Thus, welfare services may intervene with the lives of beneficiaries (and their families) in ways that are – or may be by beneficiaries as – inappropriate, unrequested, and overbearing.

3.2 Citizenship as Practice

The notion of welfare citizenship asserts that aspects of citizenship are settled within specific frameworks of welfare production and highlights the social constructions of citizenship that are squarely placed in issues concerning inequality and power differences including metrics of valuating entitlements, claims, and demands. Inequalities, needs, and (new) social risks may be expressed in terms of citizenship in cases where they lead to entitlements. In acknowledging that exercising citizenship rights is far from neutral (*vis-a-vis* gender, class, race, and other prescriptive attributes and life situations of citizens), a conception of social citizenship is needed that includes and extends legal and political dimensions by *highlighting* citizenship as social practices. The perspective on social citizenship as social practices moves the primary focus from policies as written towards policies as performed. It allows analyzing the meaning and content of practical citizenship, doing justice to the renewed forms and conditions of service-based welfare production. The fulcrum of these practices of welfare citizenship negotiates the realm of public and private responsibilities, the public role in providing for members’ needs, expectations and well-being as well as the demands of how citizens govern their own behaviors and to what extent, content, conditionality, and meanings and aims of benefits and entitlements as well as the formal eligibility and life-world dimensions of their effective access.

The instituted social practices of citizenship denote ideational and discursive aspects but also habitual practices. They frame how status, (social) rights, responsibilities, and obligations are negotiated and constructed. It depends on how citizens are addressed, how they can participate, and on the negotiating(power) of claims, demands, and entitlements. Degrees of paternalism, discipline and sanctioning, which tend to make the material and symbolic benefits of welfare citizenship more conditional, exclusive, and selective seem to be associated with attitudes and ideas about what is appropriate, acceptable, and tolerable as well as about the deservingness, neediness, responsibility, and rationality of different groups of beneficiaries (Wilde & Marchal 2018). In order to analyze the real-life constitution of social citizenship in service practices, it is mandatory to not only highlight its capacitating and empowering features but also elements of discipline and control (Kananen 2016; Watts & Fitzpatrick 2018; Whitworth 2016).

More personalized service-based measures may be more appropriate in order to responsively tackle citizens’ needs, though not necessarily (Munro 2011). It depends on how citizens are addressed, and it must be noted that the extension of pedagogical interventions is undoubtedly something different than the strengthening of socio-pedagogical professionalism (Otto, Wohlfarth & Ziegler 2020). Aspects such as the non-take-up of services, the role of front-line workers, or the arduous problem of paternalism within personal service-based welfare production are exemplary features that have not yet been taken sufficiently into account in current welfare analyses. These, however, moderate the actual and practical realization of social rights. The constructive enactment of social citizenship may therefore only be

investigated meaningfully when the situated, interpretative, and evaluative practices of service workers *and* beneficiaries are taken into account – while keeping in mind that these practices are often highly scripted, framed, and enabled by complex legislative and administrative processes that set the boundaries within which welfare production takes place.

3.3 Service Practices, Frontline Workers, and Beneficiaries

Direct, interactive, face-to-face relationships between service providers and beneficiaries are well-known features. Personalized social services are ‘co-productive’ processes. It is frontline workers who implement service-based welfare strategies and who process welfare clients. It is the welfare beneficiaries who have to be able and willing to react to the service arrangements, to comply and cope with the demands and obligations, as well as to take up offered opportunities. The mere membership of a (political) collective is no longer sufficient to benefit from the safeguards even if this was not a guarantee and accompanied by exclusions and access hurdles of different nature. What is needed is the willingness, but also the capacity, to be active and/or to become activated, so that social services can unfold their potential. The production of welfare in personalized services depends on the active participation of those supposedly receiving the services, and the beneficiaries’ confidence in the services as well as the service providers. The etiquette in these (personal) interactions between service users and SLB are also becoming vital aspects of welfare production.

Frontline workers, on the other hand, do not only implement policies designed elsewhere but act as ‘ultimate policymakers’ and gatekeepers, who translate institutional policy into situated ground level practices. In doing so, they enjoy a substantial discretionary space of maneuver and autonomy, which may effectively determine who gets what and how. This may include the interpretation of needs, demands, their eligibility or beneficiaries’ qualifications for types of services and support, appropriate aims of particular measures, and also the selection of clients themselves.

In principle, this applies to all personalized social services. However, it becomes essential in welfare architectures mainly based on services. At best, this can allow individual needs to be made visible and interests to be brought into the institutional and political framework. This could adapt or create new benefits and help to expand individuals’ opportunities, enabling them to shape their lives in such a way they can reasonably value.

Nevertheless, it may also involve prescribing SLBs as benevolent guardians with a largely uncontrolled asymmetry of paternalistic power *vis-à-vis* the clients. SLBs as guardians who are making ‘good choices’ on a client’s behalf, who are getting them to change their behavior, act more prudently and responsibly by offering advice, support, motivation, and, if necessary, admonition and sanctions. Taking this into account, the organizational cultures, practices, interpretations, and attitudes of street-level bureaucrats have considerable control and impact on the lives of clients and the real-life meaning of their status as citizens (Evans & Hupe 2019).

Thus, micro-practices of street-level bureaucracy can no longer be ignored by solely focusing on macro-level understandings of welfare systems. They are, in fact, of cardinal importance concerning the practical meaning of citizenship. It may well be that services are benign in many aspects, yet they may also be arbitrary, patronizing, and disciplinary. However, this concept of robust and secure rights may be at odds with broad discretionary powers on behalf of social service practitioners. This may point to the problem of the cultural and social selectiveness of access and appropriateness of the supplies. WSS may, therefore, aggravate

the universal realization of social rights (Warin 2016) and the secured and enforceable *entitlements* and *freedoms* associated with social citizenship. Adequate social security, therefore, depends more on organizational practices and interpretations, varying according to values, social identities, cultural schemes, entitlement perceptions, and frames of trust (Dubois 2014; Hasenfeld 2000; Hupe 2015).

3.4 Governance of Services

Personal welfare services have not only gained significance but have also been a major field of social reform and the modernization of welfare governance themselves. Ideas of new public management seek to constrain the limited accountability and discretionary powers of service workers by channeling it through stronger incentives, rules, and controls. Performance-based management rationales focus on outcomes and impacts. They tend to employ tools which are promising to enhance transparency, effectiveness, and quality. In particular, accountability should be secured, which can be understood as the primary link between bureaucracy and the democratic demands of citizens. At the same time, it is suggested that by borrowing instruments from private companies, the state may shift from an upholder of republican values (Jany-Catrice 2016) towards a mere service provider (Burmester, Dowling, & Wohlfahrt 2017; Mohr 2017). Tools attempting to standardize and constrain the discretion of frontline workers and SLBs may contribute to weakening the power of protecting the interests of the clients (see van Aerschot 2011), and to promoting a shift "from a culture of providing social rights towards a culture of supervising and controlling welfare recipients' behavior" (Malmberg-Heimonen & Tøge 2016: 28). However, how bureaucracy, professionalism, and managerialism shape the interactive practices of service provision, or how tensions between evaluation methods, bureaucratic standardization, managerial regulation, professional autonomy, practical responsiveness, and client participation impact the actual realization of citizenship remains unclear.

As social services increasingly face the challenge of proving their effectiveness, a reference to independent (social pedagogic) professionalism is no longer sufficient for political legitimation. This favors situations in which the socio-pedagogical and social-work rationalities are framed by external demands such as references to market economy principles. The debates on social investment bonds and attempts to document professional quality through the financial disclosure of a social return on investment may often have an odd or amusing character in particular individual cases. However, they bear evidence of a considerably changed (cognitive) embedding of personalized social services and determination of their performance (Ziegler & Wohlfarth 2019). This is reinforced by the fact that personal social services are easily commodified compared to other welfare measures.

Other critics add that the notion of *empowerment* might be dovetailed with more utilitarian functionalist approaches to public action (Otto 2010). This manifests itself in political attempts and strategies to improve and measure service performance in a way that may create not only *new treatments*, but also a *changed view on* unemployment, poverty, homelessness, disability, and other phenomena of social distress (Burmester & Wohlfahrt 2018). Issues of representation of service beneficiaries is thus not only relevant *vis-à-vis* the likelihood of arbitrary treatment given the discretionary power of front line welfare workers, but is also crucial *vis-à-vis* aims, objectives, and desired results translated into and reflected in targets and performance indicators.

4 Democracy in Welfare Service States

Roughly summarized, *Welfare Service States* are formations of welfare architectures that are based on social investment policies and personalized social services. The historical achievement of democratic welfare states consists of anchoring social claims in an institutionalized form as the rights of citizens. As seen, the incipient new welfare edifices of *Welfare Service States* are associated with new understandings, substances, and creations of citizenship. Despite all their diversity, social investment policies – as they are accentuating the *capacitating* of citizens, activation policies, *Human Capital Approaches* but also utilitarian rationales as valuation frameworks or emphasizes on economic aspects of welfare policies – are influencing the specific welfare formation just as well as sui generis characteristics of social services like discretion, problems of paternalism or specific conditions of access and exclusion. Additionally, the resulting interactions and tensions between these demands and systems of knowledge production and governance also affect the conditions and modes of welfare production and the actual realization of (social) citizenship rights.

Within the manifestations of these aspects – on whichever level they may be based and interact – a renegotiation of what citizenship is takes place. Moreover, this renegotiating is not only contained in a factual shifting of welfare architectures but also within the unique production conditions of service-based welfare. As of yet, what concepts of citizenship may effectively secure equity, autonomy, and social entitlements for citizens is still up for debate.

What is needed is a renewed devotion to democratic qualities and citizenship in modern welfare states. Welfare Service States – if they are attempting to enable democratic participation, to secure political freedoms and to enhance capabilities of citizens to live lives they have reason to value – have to find answers concerning inevitable challenges to citizenship associated with paternalism, the fuzziness of eligibility criteria, the discretionary powers of service providers, changed forms of governance as well as renewed request for accountability and legitimation, and more. Hoping for benign guidelines, professionals, and/or policymakers is not enough. Contemporary social investment policies, managerial claims for control, social return-on-investment rationalities, implementations of profit-oriented market logic, and proletarian working arrangements and conditions mark political crossroads. Societies facing an emerging WSS, instead, have to find new ways to found and resettle resilient conceptions of social justice, democracy, entitlements, and safeguarding of the dignity of their citizens.

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