

Book Review

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Social Policy in the European Union by **Karen M Anderson**. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 252pp., £29.99 (p/b), ISBN 9780230223509

This book is part of a series on European Union (EU) studies directed at a broad audience of scholars, students and well-informed readers. Its goal is to analyse the development of EU social policy over time and to highlight its causes and consequences. Two puzzles are the starting points: (1) the EU – despite treaty, financial and institutional constraints – is able to affect significantly national welfare provision and (2) there are substantial variations between policy fields in this respect. The author’s main argument is that the EU’s institutional configuration, the varieties of welfare provision and the central role of social policies in national electoral politics all shape both EU social policy integration and member states’ responses.

The research relies on the historical institutionalist theoretical approach. Compared to intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism, it has the advantage of stressing temporality, unintended consequences and path dependence as explaining factors. The EU, in its turn, is seen as a system of multi-level governance, resulting from the interaction of members’ intentional decisions and unintended outcomes. Following the introduction, Karen Andersen first reviews the literature on social policy in 28 member states and then sets out the conceptual and theoretical foundations. Chapter 3 deals with the EU social policy process since the 1950s in historical

perspective. Chapters 4–8 focus, respectively, on the EU’s role in social security and pensions policies, employment, vocational training and higher education, health, and poverty and social inclusion. The conclusion summarises and presents possible future developments.

The language of the analysis is highly accessible and even scholars whose expertise is not in EU and policy studies can definitely enjoy reading this book. On one hand, the author presents a valuable compendium of the most thought-provoking debates on the research topic and a wealth of relevant information. On the other hand, she proposes a sound use of the existing conceptual and theoretical tools, finally providing convincing arguments and fresh insights for further research. The historical perspective helps strengthen the general argument.

Overall, the goals stated in the introduction are met and the theoretical and empirical facets of the study are well balanced and mixed. To sum up, *Social Policy in the European Union* would be a good work of reference both for people who are simply interested in a systematic and theoretically informed study of EU social policy-making and for specialised scholars who want to inquire further into the topic.

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