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Path-Dependence Reconsidered: Towards a New Comparative Historical Approach to the Study of Continuity and Change in Central European Welfare States and Beyond

by Tomasz Inglot

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For several decades comparative social policy literature has wrestled with the challenge of explaining and theorizing about continuity vs. change in welfare state development. Drawing on country examples from Central and Eastern Europe, I propose a new comparative-historical framework of analysis that re-examines conventional path-dependence arguments. This framework consists of three dimensions: structures, institutions, and actors; the temporal aspects; and the comparative (small-n) approach. Combining all these elements in a systematic, empirically grounded, and interdisciplinary fashion makes it possible to account for simultaneous continuity and change while opening up new exciting opportunities for future collaborative research across all of Europe.

Tomasz Inglot is Professor of Political Science in the Department of Government, Minnesota State University, Minnesota, USA and an alumnus Policy Fellow at the Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs in Minneapolis. He emigrated to the United States from Wroclaw, Poland, as a political refugee and a student activist in 1983. He earned his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1994. He specializes in comparative social policy with a concentration in Central and Eastern Europe. His publications include the award winning book – “Welfare States in East-Central Europe, 1919-2004” (Cambridge University Press, 2008), a co-winner of the 2009 Orbis Book Prize from the American Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, and many journal articles and book chapters in the United States and Europe. He currently serves on the Program Committee of the journal Problems of Social Policy (Problemy polityki społecznej) published by the Institute of Social Policy, University of Warsaw. This year he is finishing a new book project, co-authored with Drs. Dorottya Szikra and Cristina Rat, entitled: “Welfare States and Families in a Transforming Europe since 1945: a Comparison of Hungary, Poland, and Romania.”

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