Welfare State Citizens – Objects of Control or Reflexive Actors in the Context of Market, Family and Social Policy?

Dr. Annette Henninger, Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung/ Institut für Soziologie der FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, Nürnberg

Abstract

The current discourse on re-commodification or the enforcement of labour market participation in the context of welfare state reforms points to profound changes in the relationship between the welfare state and its citizens. However, the discussion focuses too much on the presumed intentions of the reforms on the part of the welfare state, while welfare state citizens are conceived mainly as objects of social policy reform. In academic analyses of the so-called ‘Hartz Reforms’ in Germany, for example, welfare state citizens are mainly seen as the objects of control and education by a workfare-oriented welfare state with emerging authoritarian traits. This view points to an important change in the conception of social rights. However, social action on the part of welfare state citizens remains under-conceptualized in this perspective. Social policy is important, but it is only one of several contexts for individual action, and individual’s choices and preferences can not be a direct outcome of government strategies.

Such a non-deterministic conception of the impact of social policy calls for a theoretical reflection of the relationship between political regulation and individual action. In my paper, I discuss the analytical advantages and limitations of two theoretical concepts – Foucault’s conception of governmentality and Beck’s hypothesis that the diverse and sometimes contradictory requirements of institutions such as the market, the family and social policy require reflexive action on the part of the individual. While both authors differ in the conception of the impact of political regulation, they conceive individuals as actors in their own right, pursuing their own objectives and interests that might be in conflict with the objectives of the welfare state. In my conclusion, I discuss whether and how these theoretical concepts might be useful for the analysis of welfare state reforms.
Welfare State Citizens - Objects of Control or Reflexive Actors in the Context of Market, Family and Social Policy?

Dr. Annette Henninger, Institut für Soziologie der FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg/Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, Nürnberg

1. The implicit determinism of social policy research

*Political institutions educate the people,* states German political scientist Gerhard Göhler (1997). For him, political institutions are systems of rules to conceive and implement binding decisions that are relevant for society at large. The core conceptions (“Leitbilder”) of political institutions provide orientation for individual and collective actors. Göhler wants to establish a theory of political institutions. However, he is not interested in the impact of the educational efforts of political institutions on the citizens, which is the main focus of my paper. One can go even one step further in applying the analogy of education: As parents know very well, education does not always produce the intended effects. Moreover, parents often give contradictory incentives as they do not agree on the education of their children.

In my paper I discuss the question how to conceive the impact of the educational efforts of the changing welfare state theoretically. I am making the point that welfare state policies – similar to the parents in my example – often give contradictory incentives, and children might not even follow these incentives. What kind of strategies do individuals develop in the face of this complex and often contradictory framework of regulation? Until today, social policy research often operates with quite simple assumptions that conceive the impact of political regulation according to a behaviouristic stimulus-response model, assuming that welfare states provide incentives and sanctions with a more or less deterministic impact on individual interpretations and decisions. I argue that this assumption was never very realistic. Indeed, it fails completely in the face of new strategies of welfare state reform that combine sanctions with activation and empowerment.

In the debate created by Esping-Andersen and his critics, one strand of the argument focused on the impact of different welfare regimes on individual and household decisions, especially on women’s labour market participation and the organization of care work. While some authors assume that cross-national differences result from national policies (Sainsbury 1994, Lewis 1992, Lewis/Ostner 1994), others argue that patterns of paid work and care work vary due to culturally different conceptions of gender and the family (Pfau-Effinger 1998 a, b). Both positions, however, presume that a certain policy or cultural conception on the macro-level of the welfare state predicts a certain pattern of action on the micro-level of individuals or households (for a critical discussion, see Ludwig-Mayerhofer/Allmendinger 2004, Newman 2005b). As empirical evidence the authors draw on macro-level statistical data (Esping-Andersen 1998) or public-opinion polls (Pfau-Effinger 1998a). However, why individuals or households opt for a certain pattern of paid work and care work is not part of the analysis. Here, qualitative research on women’s choice of occupation and on their life courses provides additional information, arguing that women have to deal individually with contradictions between the institutions of the labour market and the family (Geissler/Oechsle 1994, Born et al. 1996). However, the results from this type of studies mostly are not linked with welfare state research.

The assumption that political regulation on the macro-level of the welfare state determines individuals’ perceptions and actions also can be found in the scientific debate on the welfare
state reform in Germany. While labour market policy is conceived as the core of the new activation strategy (Dingeldey 2006, Trube/Wohlfahrt 2001), activation also plays a role in other fields, e.g. activating citizens to buy (additional) private pensions and health care insurance. One strand of the debate analyses changing models of governance. While first analyses assumed a retrenchment of the welfare state (e.g. Pierson 1996), nowadays the debate tends towards a diagnosis of qualitative change, arguing that in the process of restructuring, the welfare state is not vanishing but assuming a new role. For Germany, there is no empirical evidence for welfare state retrenchment according to neo-liberal concepts of a minimal state. However, the mode of governance changes from a direct, hierarchical modus of control and responsibility towards a new conception that sees the welfare state as moderator and initiator who might delegate certain tasks to other actors, without giving up its steering function (Dingeldey 2005 and 2006, Trube/Wohlfahrt 2001, Brütt 2003).

Research on the impact of welfare state reform focuses on the changing relationship between the state and the market, stating a privatisation or marketization of former tasks of the welfare state (Dingeldey 2006, Nullmeier 2004). However, this is not an evidence for a retrenchment of the state, as Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Wroblenski (2004, 501) state: „More market and thus more choice is introduced, which is often backed up by considerable state subsidies, and also frequently an element of state supervision“. The growing importance of subsidiarity, e.g. the call on households and families to provide for the needs of their members, is discussed as a privatization of collective risks (Ludwig-Mayerhofer/Allmendinger 2004) or as re-familialisation (Leitner et al. 2004). Newer publications also discuss a changing relationship between the welfare state and its citizens. Critics mark that social rights are no longer conceived as universal rights, but are connected to pre-conditions and duties on the part of welfare state citizens. Moreover, the German variant of activation policy, following the motto ‘demanding and promoting’, puts much more emphasis on sanctions and coercion than on promotion and counselling and has negative consequences especially for under-privileged groups (Ullrich 2002, Brütt 2003, Dingeldey 2005).

While this work is important as it warns about negative consequences of welfare state reform with regard to social rights and social inequality, critics often do not distinguish between laws and policies on the one hand and their interpretation and implementation on the other hand, assuming implicitly that changing incentives and sanctions will lead quasi automatically to changes in individuals’ actions. However, this is theoretically as well as empirically an open question. Studies on welfare reforms in the U.K. (Rose 1999, Newman 2001 and 2005a, b, c) rather point to contradictory and conflictive processes of implementation, where old and new discourses overlap and actors pursue their own objectives and interests that might be in conflict with the objectives of the welfare state. In Germany, research on the impact of welfare state reform on individual citizens still is at the beginning. First results point to sizeable differences in the local implementation of the new law on social security benefits (SGB II), thus justifying doubts on a deterministic impact of political regulation (Bartelheimer 2006, Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al. 2006). Moreover, Bartelheimer (2006) argues that the new policy does not promote activation; rather, the recipients of benefits have to fight against the logic of the system in order to pursue their own job search activities.

Thus, social policy research is lacking a non-deterministic conception of the impact of social policy on individual agency. In my paper I present some analysis in this direction, discussing the work of two authors who develop a more complex understanding of the interplay of political regulation and individual agency: first, the hypothesis that the diverse and sometimes
contradictory requirements of different institutions require reflexive action on the part of the individual, which can be found in the early work of Ulrich Beck ([1986] 1992), but also in life course research; and second, Foucault’s’ reflections on governmentality and technologies of the self (Foucault 1979, 1982 and 1993) that inspired the so-called governmentality studies. While both authors differ in the conception of the impact of political regulation, they conceive individuals as actors in their own right, pursuing their own objectives and interests that might be in conflict with the objectives of the welfare state. In my conclusion, I discuss whether and how these theoretical concepts might be useful for the analysis of welfare state reforms.

2. ‘Reflexive Action’ versus ‘Self-Governance’

As Newman (2001) points out, much of the literature on governance argues that modes of governance are undergoing a shift from governance through state hierarchies towards governance through markets and networks. She identifies a normative strand in the governance debate, as self-government is often viewed as superior to government by the state. When asking for forms of ‘self-governance’ aiming at individuals, one can draw on Foucault’s reflections on governmentality and technologies of the self. While Foucault analyzes technologies of power aiming at a ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault 1991), Beck (1986) argues that the diverse and sometimes contradictory requirements of institutions as the market, the family and social policy require reflexive action on the part of the individual.

The work of both authors is compared according to the following questions: 1. How does the author conceive the state? 2. What conception of institutions can be identified in the text? 3. A further question of special interest for the analysis of welfare state reform is the implicit or explicit understanding of change. Further, I am asking for: 4. the author’s concept of regulation respectively governance and 5. their understanding of individual agency. Following a short presentation of both authors, I present some empirical work drawing on their theoretical reflections.

2.1 Ulrich Beck: Reflexive action in the face of institutional standardization

The early work of Ulrich Beck ([1986] 1992) provides one possibility to theorize the impact of political regulation on individual agency. Beck develops his hypothesis of institutionally structured life courses drawing on theoretical reflections from life course research (e.g. Kohli 1985). He assumes that individuals are socialized through their integration into social institutions such as labour and product markets, the family and social policy regulations. These institutions establish diverse and sometimes contradictory requirements that have to be managed reflexively by the individual.

2.1.1 Regulation of individual action in the work of Ulrich Beck

Beck (1986) develops his reflections on institutional structuration of the life course and situations in life in the context of his analysis of individualization. He is interested in the impact of modernization on individuals’ lives; thus, he does not formulate a conception of the state. For him, a mature welfare state just provides a necessary pre-condition for the process of individualization. Beck conceives change as a long-term process of modernization and individualization that results in a disembedding of individuals from traditional bonds and securities, e.g. class and the traditional male breadwinner model. For Beck, the driving force of individualization in a mature (labour-)market society is the need for a market income to make one’s living.
Overview on Beck (1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the state</th>
<th>No conception of the state; the welfare state is regarded as a pre-condition for individualization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>institutions</td>
<td>Sets of rules and norms that regulate the life course, as Labour and Product Markets, the educational system, social policy regulations, the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td>The process of modernization and individualization leads to an &quot;institutional lag&quot; between changing social practices and assumptions of normality that are preserved in institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>governing</td>
<td>(Welfare state) institutions structure the life course and situations in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual agency</td>
<td>Potentially self-willed individuals are submitted under the imperatives of the market and institutionally produced constraints through labour market individualization; the diverse and sometimes contradictory requirements of these institutions have to be managed reflexively by the individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beck (1986) conceives institutions as sets of rules and norms that regulate the life course, e.g. labour and product markets and social policy regulations that either provide qualification for the labour market (e.g. the educational system) or securities for labour-market related risks (pensions, health care, social security benefits). For Beck, the institutions of the market and the welfare state structure an individuals’ life course and his or her situation in life. He assumes that institutions play a major role in modern market societies, as they re-integrate the solitary individuals into society. Institutions interfere in the personal life course and make it an object of political regulation. This institutional structuration of the life course is accompanied by a growing external control, standardization and vulnerability of the individual, as the uncertainties of the market now influence directly the possibility to make one’s own living.

Beck sees individuals as potentially self-willed, but submitted under the imperatives of the market and the institutional setting by labour market individualization. In the process of individualization, biographies become self-reflexive: socially pre-structured biographies are transformed into biographies that have to be actively constructed by the individual. However, in constructing their own lives, individuals are not completely free, but they make use of pre-existing institutional and biographical ‘self-construction kits’. Necessary pre-conditions for this active construction of individual biographies are a concept of individual agency and an ego-centred perspective, which make it possible to develop individual strategies to moderate or to thwart societal determinants. The downside of such a self-constructed biography is that risks and contradictions that were created by the society and its institutions have to be processed by the individuals, who get the blame if they fail. As an example, Beck takes the contradictions which arise for women in their simultaneous involvement in the institutions of the labour market and the family, as well as the contradictions that arise for the individuals in the process of social change, as changing social practices conflict with assumptions of normality that are preserved in the institutions.

---

1 Becks’ understanding of reflexivity differs from Giddens (1994) whose conception of reflexivity describes the growing importance of expert knowledge for everyday life and for the construction of identities. For Beck, however, reflexivity means that the (unintended) consequences of former decisions have an impact on future actions.
Beck’s theoretical reflections, however, do not answer the question how individuals process the contradictory requirements of different institutions. Empirical studies from life course research that partly draw explicitly on the work of Beck can give some answers on this question (Weymann 1989, Geissler/Oechsle 1994, Leisering 2003). As an example of this type of research, in the following I discuss the work of Born et al. (1996) and Krüger (2003).

2.1.2 Life course research
Born, Krüger and Lorenz-Mayer (1996) and Krüger (2003) ask how the dominant norm to live for the family was reflected in the individual life courses of women in post-war Germany. Using interviews with older married women with children who completed a professional training after the Second World War, the authors show that already the life courses of this older generation of women are obviously structured by their profession. Thus, what has changed in the process of modernization is not women’s integration into the labour market, but the political articulation of their claims on participation. Theoretically, the authors draw on the hypothesis formulated by Kohli (1985), Beck (1986) and others, that individual life courses are pre-structured by institutions such as the educational system, the labour market, the family, as well as the pensions and health care system and social welfare. For individuals, institutions provide orientation as well as templates of action, at the same time putting an emphasis on subjectivity, self-responsibility and self-management. The norms preserved in the institutions retroact onto the lives of the individuals.

The authors argue that the female as well as the male life course is structured by the institutions of the family and the labour market. However, both institutions have different effects for men and women, leading to the differentiation of a female and a male standard biography: Usually, men can add work and family without any problems, while the norm to live for the family implies assumptions of availability for women. For them, already the assumption of motherhood leads to discrimination on the labour market. Public institutions that supply mostly part-time care services in Germany, e.g. kindergartens, and half-day schooling, put further pressure on women to be available for their families. Moreover, they argue that due to the gendered pay gap, for a couple it seems an economically rational decision if it is the women who reduces or interrupts her paid work when a child is born. On the long run, the gendered implications of the institutional setting will lead to the accumulation of inequalities in the life courses of working mothers. At the same time, the authors see women as agents of change, as they have to cope in their personal lives with the contradictions between changing social practice and gendered norms that are preserved in the institutions (Born et al. 1996: 301).

2.2 Discussion
Beck as well as life course researchers are mainly interested in individual life courses and situations in life that are conceived as structured by institutions. The welfare state is considered as a given framework for individual action. The authors’ focus is on the impact of societal subsystems such the market, the family and selected effects of the welfare state, that have to be linked by the individuals in their every day lives as well as in their biographies. They are not interested in the (political) production of and changes in the institutions of the welfare state and have no conception of the state.

The authors point to a retarding effect of institutions on the process of social change, as they preserve out-dated norms that continue to retroact onto the lives of the individuals. However,
especially in periods of political reforms, it is also possible that institutions may change faster than social practice, which also can lead to tensions and contradictions. This phenomenon, which is called ‘cultural lag’ by Pfau-Effinger (1997), remains out of sight in the work of Beck and the quoted authors from life course research, due to their focus is on social change and their neglect of the state.

Beck’s concept shows similarities with functionalist explanations of the origin of the welfare state (e.g. Kaufmann 2002,), who argue that in the process of industrialization a market income became the only way to make one’s own living. As families could no longer provide security for the risks of the market, the welfare state was founded as a collective arrangement to provide for social risks and to pacify the arising social conflicts. However, Beck goes one step further, pointing to the contradictions that result from the socialization of individuals by institutions that structure their life courses. Beck’s assumption that labour market individualization forces the individuals to react upon institutional demands seems plausible. Moreover, he points to institutionally produced conflicts and contradictions the individuals have to cope with. However, he does not answer the question what motives and interpretations are underlying this coping process on the part of the individual, and which patterns of individual actions can be expected as an outcome of this process. Moreover, his concept lacks a consideration of the structures of dominance and power that are inscribed into the institutions, which make certain forms of individual action more obvious and impede others, or at least make them more difficult.

2.2 Foucault: Self-Governance by Technologies of the Self

In the next part, I present a contrasting concept of the impact of (political) regulation on individual agency: the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault conceives governing as an ensemble of technologies of power aiming at a ‘conduct of conduct’, including political regulation as well as technologies of the self (Foucault 1991).

2.2.1 Regulation of individual action in the work of Michel Foucault

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview on Foucault</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>the state</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>institutions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>change</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>governing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual agency</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foucault (1982) conceives the modern state not primarily as an institutional-administrative structure, but as a combination of technologies of individualization and totalization. To analyse power relations, Foucault explores selected institutions. For him, institutions have explicit or implicit systems of rules and an apparatus. Thus, Foucault focuses on institutions that are also organisations. In the work of Foucault, change is conceived as the rise and change of modern governmentality, starting from the late middle ages unto the rise of neoliberal forms of governmentality at the beginning of the 20th century that are characterized by
the dominant role of the market as regulating and organizing principle of the state (Lemke et al. 2000: 15).

In his analysis of the development of the art of government, Foucault draws on the original meaning of government, including the conduct of the state as well as the conduct of other entities, e.g. the conduct of the self and the conduct of the family. According to Foucault, the primacy of political government by the state arose in the 18th century: not until the population became an analytical entity, new technologies of government could come into being that had the intention to act upon this population. Foucault uses the concept of governmentality – consisting of ‘governing’ and ‘mentality’ (Lemke et al. 2000) – to analyse the complex of institutions, procedures, analyses and tactics which make it possible to influence the population. Governmentality constitutes a new type of power that became predominant in the Western world, leading to the origin of the modern state. For Foucault, the development of new forms of expert knowledge, e.g. the development of statistics, plays a key role for the development of new technologies of power. Due to the key role that Foucault ascribes to expert knowledge, he focuses on the analysis of discourses to reveal the ascent of new forms of knowledge. These discourses are reconstructed using historical documents.

Concerning the impact of government on individual agency, Foucault distinguishes technologies of domination designed to subdue and determine individual agency, and technologies of the self that enable the subjects to transform themselves with their own means. Lemke et al. (2000: 29) argue that this distinction allows an improvement of the analysis of power: according to Foucault, government is not based primarily on the suppression of subjectivity, but on the invention and promotion of technologies of the self that can be combined with government objectives and induce potentially recalcitrant subjects to behave according to government strategies. Thus, subjectivity is seen as historically constructed and embedded in power relations.

2.2.2 The Governmentality Studies

Foucault’s theoretical reflections as well as his considerations on neo-liberalism inspired an intensive scientific discussion in the Anglo-Saxon countries since the beginning of the 1990ies (Lemke et al. 2000: 17). In the context of the so-called Governmentality Studies, empirical studies were conducted, among other fields, on the reform of the British welfare state (Rose/Miller 1992, Rose 1999, Newman 2001 und 2005b). Researchers in Germany, however, up to now were reluctant to incorporate Foucault’s work (Lemke et al. 2000). Just some empirical studies on social policy with a background from political science analyse public-private-partnerships (Sack 2005); in addition, some pedagogical studies analyse social and educational work drawing explicitly on the work of Foucault (Kessl 2006, Weber/Maurer 2006). However, to discuss the question of the impact of social policy on individual agency, here I draw on research on the reform of the British welfare state.

Rose and Miller (1992) argue that liberal forms of governance depend on techniques for ‘governing at a distance’. For them, modern forms of government rely upon alliances between entities that are conceived as ‘political’ with a large number of experts that try to govern individuals through manifold and often contradictory techniques of education, persuasion, seducement, management, instigation and motivation. As Rose and Miller show using the example of the British national health system, such experts follow their own objectives and interests that in turn may be detrimental to the interests of government. This leads to manifold alliances, conflicts and competition. The authors argue that at the beginning of the 20th
century, Great Britain experienced the rise of a new form of governance, coined ‘welfarism’. ‘Welfarism’ embodies a specific conception of the relationship between the state and its citizens in the form of a mutual contract to promote national welfare: the welfare state accepts its responsibility to attack social problems, and in return, the citizens respect their obligations to be industrious and socially responsible. In his newer work, Rose (1999) states ‘welfarism’ has been replaced by a new technology of governance which he terms ‘government through community’.² At the core of this ‘advanced liberalism’, Rose identifies a new conception of mutual duties, which draws on bonds of personal loyalty and responsibility in manifold and fragmented communities.

Newman (2001) asks whether the ‘Third Way’ of the British Labour Government designates a policy change to a new type of governance. Newman argues that questions of change as well as power and agency are underconceptualized in the literature on governance. Thus, she draws additionally on institutional theory and discourse analyses. Newman distinguishes analytically four models of governance: the hierarchy model, the rational goal model, the open systems model and the self-governance model. However, she argues that the implementation of a new model rarely will lead to the complete removal of an old one, but rather it leads to an instable arrangement which is characterized by tensions between different modes of governance. This hypothesis is confirmed by the empirical part of her research. Following Newman, the concept of the Third Way was conceived as an alternative to the neo-liberalism of the Thatcher years. At the interface between intention and realization of Labours’ political project, Newman identifies a struggle for ideas, aiming at a reconfiguration of the understanding of core concepts, such as ‘partnership’ and ‘community’.

In this process, old discourses were coupled with new ones, leading to tensions that were partly resolved through strategies of co-option, displacement, and subordination. At the same time, some actors such as managers, professionals and user groups appropriated the new discourse to pursue their own interests and agendas (Newman 2001: 167). Rather than a reduction of government, Newman shows a dispersal of state power in the process of reform. Strategies for ‘governing at a distance’, e.g. audits, the proliferation of (quality)standards and incentive-based funding, were combined with coercive regulations, e.g. the capacity of government to take over ‘failing’ organizations. In her newer work, Newman (2005c: 3) focuses not only on public service workers, but also on the people who are the object of new technologies of government. She points to the different and sometimes contradictory conceptions of citizenship which are called into being in the process of welfare state reform, for example the active citizen, the responsible citizen, and the worker-citizen. Moreover, she points to the extension of coercive regulatory strategies of the state into households and individuals’ lives, as decisions that were once regarded ‘private’ become an area of public policy, e.g. if a parent of young children should go out to work (Newman 2005b: 203).

2.2.3 Discussion

The analytical nexus of technologies of government and technologies of the self in the work of Foucault is very inspiring, as it offers a non-deterministic conception of the impact of political regulation on individual agency. Following Foucault, technologies of government suggest a certain behaviour to subjects that are situated in a network of power relations.

² Rose (2000) argues that the discourse on community had its origin in a critique of a centralized state bureaucracy; however, it soon turned into an expert discourse and became a field of professional work, e.g. for social workers.
However, subjects also can pursue their own objectives and interests and have the potential to offer resistance. Following Foucault, modern governance is characterized by the effort of the state to influence the population using expert knowledge. Most of the empirical research discussed above focuses on the role of these experts. For Rose and Miller, public service workers such as different professional groups in the NHS or social workers are experts who translate political discourse into technologies of government that address the subject. Besides the role of these experts, Newman also explores the role of the citizens who are the objects of government strategies.

The governmentality studies argue that new political discourses offer new interpretations, identities and legitimations to the subjects. Drawing mainly on discourse analysis, this strand of research can give interesting answers to the question how political regulation influences subjective interpretations. However, discourse analysis does not provide analytic tools to discern between discourse and action. Thus, it remains an open question how the subjects react to these confinements. Newman (2005b, 211) states: “the subjects ... may not hear the messages, or they may refuse to listen“. Or, even if they choose to listen, does this really lead to changing patterns of action?

Foucault focuses primarily on the analyses of power relations. He is interested in institutions only insofar they provide empirical evidence for this research interest. However, his concept can be combined with institutional theory, as the work of Newman shows. Following this line of thought, one can get more insight into processes of institutional change that are inspired by new technologies of government, as well as into the overlap of old and new discourses and the resulting tensions and contradictions. Moreover, when combining discourse analysis with institutional theory, individual actors come into the picture, either as agents of change or as potential sources of resistance.

3. Insights for social policy research

Social policy research is often based on the assumption that welfare states provide incentives and sanctions with a more or less deterministic impact on individual interpretations and decisions. While this assumption was never very realistic, it fails completely in the face of new strategies of welfare state reform that combine sanctions with strategies of activation, counselling, and empowerment that can be characterized as new technologies of the self. The question how individuals react upon these new strategies as well as upon the often contradictory conceptions („Leitbilder“) of political institutions, is of enormous interest for social policy research. However, to answer these questions, one needs a non-deterministic theoretical conception of the impact of political regulation that sees individuals as self-willed and potentially recalcitrant actors.

Some suggestions for such a theoretical conception can be found in the early work of Ulrich Beck and in the writings of Michel Foucault. Beck argues that individuals are integrated by different social institutions that establish diverse and sometimes contradictory requirements. Following Foucault, technologies of government suggest a certain behaviour to subjects that are situated in a network of power relations. While both authors differ in the conception of the impact of political regulation, they conceive individuals as actors in their own right: For Beck, individuals have to manage the diverse and sometimes contradictory institutional requirements reflexively; for Foucault, the subjects have a potential for resistance in the face
of technologies of power. Thus, the work of both authors indicates that the objectives and strategies of the welfare state do influence, but do not determine individual action.

Beck as well as Born et al. point to a retarding effect of institutions on the process of social change, as they preserve out-dated norms that continue to retroact onto the lives of individuals. Such a retarding element is missing in the work of Foucault; the question of a possible time lag between changes in the technologies of government and the implementation of new technologies of the self remains unanswered in his work and in governmentality studies. Moreover, Beck as well as Foucault miss the point that institutions may change faster than social practice, which also can lead to tensions and contradictions. However, for social policy research it is a most interesting question what kind of strategies individuals develop in the face of this ‘cultural lag’ in periods of political reforms.

The theoretical and empirical work that was presented in this paper indicates that it is necessary to analyse individual interpretations and actions in the face of political regulation empirically, as the impact of social policy is not deterministic. For an empirical reconstruction of individuals’ reflexive coping with contradictory institutional requirements suggested by Beck as well as for an analysis of the technologies of the self suggested by Foucault, qualitative research is needed. This kind of research calls for an ‘interpretative turn’ in social policy research, with a subject-oriented approach that considers the situation of individuals in structures of power and domination as well as their different access to material and cultural resources.
Bibliography


Krüger, Helga, 2003; The Life-Course Regime. Ambiguities Between Interrelatedness and Individualization, in: Walter R. Heinz and Victor W. Marshall (Eds.), Social Dynamics of


Leitner, Sigrid; Ostner, Ilona; Schratzenstaller, Margit (Hg.), 2004: Was kommt nach dem Ernährermodell? (Jahrbuch für Europa- und Nordamerika-Studien, Band 7). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.


Sack, Detlef, 2005: Gouvernementalität in der Sozialpolitik zwischen Wettbewerbsinstrumenten und Partnerschaft. Vortrag auf der Jahrestagung der Sektion


