

Exploring Theories of Social Policy Change in the Context of COVID-19: A Comparative Study

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The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to the capacity of developed welfare states to meet emerging needs. In its initial year, the pandemic prompted the introduction of a wave of new social policy programs and modifications to existing ones. This study empirically investigates the applicability of various theoretical frameworks in elucidating the dynamics of social policy change during this crisis.

Central to our inquiry is the examination of theories pertaining to persistence and change. Drawing on established frameworks including welfare regime theory, path dependence theory, and social change theories, as well as incorporating contemporary perspectives such as capability theory, our analysis employs Hegelian dialectics as a methodological framework. We aim to discern what these approaches explain and which of these theoretical paradigms best accounts for the observed shifts in social policy dynamics.

The paper builds upon previously our published studies that have focused on the dynamics of persistence and change, mitigation and prevention, divergence and convergence, continuity and irruption, inclusion, and marginalization in social policies implemented in response to the pandemic.

The synthesis of these sub-studies prompts a critical reevaluation of the challenges faced and the potential solutions required to establish a new equilibrium in social policy paradigms amidst the ongoing uncertainties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.