ABSTRACT

EUROPEAN OPEN COORDINATION VERSUS WELFARE/FAMILY REGIMES?

GENDER AND GENERATION CONTRACTS IN SWEDEN AND GERMANY

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Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference

August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

Recent developments in European welfare regimes have shown a certain convergence: as for pension systems, European trends in the individualization of entitlements as well as the compensation of care work or education allowances seem to standardize pension systems. There is evidence for this at least in so far as elements from the German system, for example the accounting for education times as well as a stronger equivalence according to contributions have been established in the reformed Swedish pension system, whereas reforms of the German pension system have been designed to strengthen women’s participation in the labour market even for mothers of younger children and to enhance the independence of women’s entitlements from their husbands’. Both have introduced programmes for promoting private pension schemes.

On the basis of reform discussions on recent pension reforms, my idea is to examine in how far the EU’s “open method of coordination”, a tool for policy coordination in the European context, has had an influence on these reforms. Has this new policy strategy of target-setting and controls through indicators, of benchmarking and best practice-examples intensified international policy diffusion, or is it merely the change in family structures, the impending demographical problems and the labour market development that has brought forth similar results? These factors have not developed equally in Sweden and Germany, but have been problematic at different periods of times. What is the impact of policies that have been transferred from a foreign system on the domestic welfare regime and how do reforms counter the impediments of path dependency? This will be examined with regard to gender aspects of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, Lewis/Ostner, Sainsbury etc.), and typologies of family policies (Gauthier).