Explaining attitudes towards the welfare state - Problems of a current research project


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1. Introduction

Everybody talks about the "crisis" of the welfare state: politicians, scientists, the media, and the people on the street. This subject is not new. Since the decline of economic growth of all Western industrialized countries with rising numbers of unemployed people, it has become more and more difficult to maintain the amount of welfare and social rights that has been provided during the golden sixties and seventies. Shrinking state revenues and increasing costs of welfare production together with enormous debts have initiated various kinds of retrenchment policies in basically all Western democracies; and in Germany this trend is accentuated in a special way because of the immense costs of the unification process. Besides these negative economic facts the demographic development challenges the social security systems: less and less economically active people have to support an increasing non-active part of the population.

But not only financial and demographic problems contribute to the present criticisms of the welfare state. Negative (side) effects are another part of the discussion: high wage costs, inefficient bureaucratization and overregulation, social control of beneficiaries, work disincentives, etc. It is argued that many government activities can be organized much more efficiently by private institutions, and instead of maximizing social security for everybody there should be more private provision supplemented by social security systems that ensure only basic life risks on a low level.

On the other hand, it is a widely accepted fact that the welfare state is a valuable institution. Besides providing social security and equality, it prevents society from excessive conflicts of distribution, and in doing so, it supplies the necessary social climate ("sozialer Frieden"), in which all members of society can pursue their own interests to the advantage of all. With respect to these positive functions of the welfare state, it is somehow startling that political scientists based on survey research and other information report declining support for the welfare state by the general public. The welfare state, at least partially, seems to lose its legitimization. Therefore, the question appears: What do citizens expect from the welfare state at the turn of the century, and how do they evaluate its present functioning? Answers to these questions are not only relevant for the traditional adherents of welfare policies, but also for those scholars that want to reform the current state of affairs to more efficient solutions with new policy mixes.

This paper reports some very preliminary ideas from a recently started research project on attitudes towards the German welfare state. More specifically, it presents a model for explaining attitude differences in the German public based on conceptions of self-interest on the one hand and of socialization on the other. The German case is particularly interesting in this respect, because it is concerned with attitudes towards the same (West German) welfare state that have been measured from individuals coming from different (East and West German) welfare cultures. The model is explained in section 2, followed by an empirical illustration in section 3. The paper closes with a summary of the basic conclusions from this illustration and raises some questions in section 4 that may form the basis of the discussion at the conference.
2. Explaining attitudes towards the welfare state

The empirical literature that tries to explain different attitudes towards the welfare state basically refers to four different determinants: a) self interest, b) values and norms, especially justice beliefs, c) different socialization patterns, and d) national welfare cultures (CNAAN et al. 1993, COUGHLIN 1980, GOUL ANDERSEN 1992, HASENFELD/RAFFERTY 1989, ROLLER 1997). All of them are more or less connected with each other, but never analyzed systematically together. Before illustrating these kinds of analyses with data from Germany, we want to define very shortly these four modes of explanation and their interrelationships.

2.1. Self interest

One mode of explanation focuses on the egoistic self interests of the citizens of the welfare state. Using rational choice arguments, it is hypothesized that individuals will evaluate those aspects of the welfare state positively from which they gain personally, and disapprove those aspects that do not appear advantageous for their own interests (COOK/BARRETT 1992, FORMA 1997, SANDERS 1988). For instance, low income groups will show a high degree of support for policies of income maintenance, because they are the possible beneficiaries, while high income groups have negative attitudes towards these programs, because they are the possible financiers of the welfare state. Similar cleavages are expected between the employed on the one side and the unemployed on the other (including people not participating in the labor market, like pensioners or housewives). There are also specific groups that are in one way or another dependent on the existence of the welfare state: e.g., older people receiving pensions from social insurance systems or state employees receiving their income from the government. All of them have a special interest in the survival of the welfare state and its institutions.

2.2. Values and norms: justice beliefs

Another type of explanation refers to the values and norms that people have acquired in their social milieu or within their national culture. Concerning attitudes towards the welfare state, those kinds of values and norms are of special interest that give answers to the following two questions: How should material and non-material goods be distributed between the members of a society, and who (or what kind of institution) should be responsible for this distribution: the family, the market, or the state? Since both questions revolve around the problem of a just society, we call these values and norms justice beliefs. The literature names different principles of distributive justice, among them DEUTSCH's (1975) well-known trias of equality, need, and equity. HOCHSCHILD (1981) argues that these (and other) justice principles can be ordered along a continuum of distributional rules ranging from perfect equality to perfect differentiation. Similarly, other researchers distinguish between egalitarian and anti-egalitarian justice beliefs (KLUEGEL/MATEJU 1995). A nice systematization of different justice beliefs can be found in SABBAGH et al. (1994).
Since the (welfare) state is usually conceived of as the main institution that corrects and complements the primary distribution of goods by market or kinship relations, it is plausible that beliefs about a just distribution and its main agents affect attitudes toward the welfare state itself. Therefore, the answer to the question, whether the welfare state should advise e.g. income maintenance programs, is connected with the opinion, whether the primary distribution of incomes is viewed as just and whether the state should be allowed to correct it, if necessary. Accordingly, WEGENER and LIEBIG distinguish between individualistic and etatistic justice beliefs (WEGENER 1992, WEGENER/LIEBIG 1995b). While the former are directly linked to the equity principle ("every individual should be remunerated according to its performance"), the later are not necessarily related to a specific principle, although government interventions are very often designed according to the principles of equality or need. Therefore, etatistic justice beliefs usually display a preference for measures that level social inequality, and it may be advisable to distinguish between anti-egalitarian individualism and egalitarian etatism (HEIEN 1997).

Interpreting attitudes towards the welfare state by values and norms, or more specifically: by justice beliefs, is nevertheless only a partial explanation, since the question remains: How do justice beliefs come about? On the one hand, they may be affected by the present interests of the individual: e.g., high income groups will show a preference for anti-egalitarian individualism. On the other hand, values and norms are usually taken as products of socialization processes. When talking about attitudes towards the (welfare) state, it is helpful to distinguish between socialization processes on the micro-(social milieu) and the macro-level (nation).

2.3. Cultural integration

A third type of explanation assumes certain "cultural constants" within a nation that crystallize into "dominant" justice or welfare ideologies. Such cultural constants are the religious and/or ideological background of a society. Some researchers distinguish e.g. between countries with catholic and protestant traditions (WEGENER/LIEBIG 1995a), others between countries with liberal, socialistic or communist traditions (HALLER et al. 1995). While Protestantism or liberalism stress the responsibilities of the individual, leaving only residual functions for the state, Catholicism, socialism, or communism focus much more on notions of equality - in the communist extreme: the "classless" society - allowing more or less extensive interventions of the welfare state.

Besides these historical differences of thought, structural features of each nation may explain differences in the dominant ideology. Socio-economic development, ethnic homogeneity, and class differences are examples of this sort (HALLER 1989, HONDRIICH 1984, PÖNTINEN/UUSITALO 1988). In wealthy nations it may be less necessary to level the distribution of goods, since even the worst off will have a sufficient standard of living. It has also been hypothesized that cultural heterogeneous societies (e.g. with respect to ethnicity) show less signs of solidarity on the national level. Help and interventions for the disadvantaged are organized by voluntary and non-profit organizations, but are no special task of the state. Finally, (extreme) class cleavages within a society will make inequalities visi-
ble for the members of society and correspondingly evoke egalitarian ideas of society, if these class structures are seen as unfair or illegitimate.

Similar influences have been attributed to institutional differences, e.g., to the (industrial) relations between employers and employees, to their organizational power (labor unions, political parties), to the political system in general, etc. (HALLER et al. 1995). If the country has a tradition of strong labor unions and working class parties, it is supposed that egalitarian ideas prevail. Such conceptions may be supported by a centralized political administration with a strong geo-political center (like in France), because there is a clearly visible agency that can be made responsible for all kinds of inequalities. In federal states, on the other hand, it is much more difficult to specify political responsibilities, and therefore egalitarian ideas do not find a clear opponent. Last but not least, egalitarian etatism used to be the official "state ideology" of the former socialistic countries, while anti-egalitarian individualism conforms much more with democratic market economies.

2.4. Differential socialization

While models of cultural integration assume a uniform socialization of all citizens into the dominant ideology of their (national) society, models of differential socialization deny such homogeneity. It is supposed that individual socialization processes will lead to different values and norms that explain inter-individual variation of justice beliefs and attitudes towards the welfare state. Several individual characteristics are used as indicators of different socialization processes: among them age (i.e., generation), gender, and education. WILENSKY (1975), for example, notes the contrast between the individualistic and meritocratic values of the younger generations on the hand and the ideals of solidarity and collective responsibilities of the older generations on the other hand. Another differentiation with respect to age can be found in INGLEHART's (1977) work on materialistic and post-materialistic values. Similarly, a rich literature can be found about different socialization patterns of men and women. A traditional view can be found in the following citation from KIDDER et al. (1981: 246): "Women's behaviors are maximally tailored to the world of love, men's to the world of work." Although it may be questioned, whether this traditional division of labor between men and women is still a good description of the living arrangements of both sexes today, there has never been any doubt that care for others forms a central part of women's socialization. Therefore, it is assumed that caring and need have much higher value for women than for men. Correspondingly, women will show a higher preference towards egalitarian justice beliefs and government intervention, while men will prefer individualistic justice conceptions based on personal performance.

The effects of education are not as clear as the two other variables. First of all, education is one of the ways in which the dominant ideology of a country is transferred to the individuals (HEIEN 1997). The longer a person spends in the educational system, the more s/he is assumed to adhere to the dominant ideology of his/her country. Secondly, education is supposed to enlighten people on general values of civilization. "With enlightenment [...] comes a greater commitment to the idea of equality as a positive value" (ROBINSON/BELL 1978: 129). If this is true, the better educated will show greater preferences
for egalitarian justice beliefs. On the other hand, the longer a person remains successful in the educational system, the more s/he will be convinced that individual achievement is rewarding and should be rewarded. Therefore, one could also hypothesize that individual "success" ideologies prevail among the better educated.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between these four determinants. Attitudes towards the welfare state are viewed as a result of different justice beliefs, which in turn are a product of rational choice considerations (self interest) and different values and norms acquired during socialization processes both on the macro- and the micro-level. Before discussing the problems of this conceptualization, it may be instructive to check the feasibility of the model with data from Germany.

3. An empirical illustration using data for East and West Germany

When studying attitudes towards the welfare state with respect to the cultural integration hypothesis, reunified Germany is a particularly interesting case. People from East and West Germany have lived until 1989 in two different political systems, and thus have been exposed to two different welfare cultures with distinct conceptions of a just society. However today, all of them are confronted with the same, West German welfare state. This allows a more powerful test of the integration hypothesis, because the object of the measured attitudes (the West German welfare state) is the same for the groups compared, while in the usual cross-national comparisons both the dominant ideology (the "independent" variable) and the object of measurement (the "dependent" variable) vary.

We use data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), which in 1992 launched its second survey on social inequality. On the one hand, this date is sufficiently near to the year of German reunification (formally 1990) to assure that socialization processes under different political systems have
not levelled off. On the other hand, in 1992 East Germans had enough practical experiences with the (West German) welfare state to evaluate its pros and cons. 3,391 interviews from East and West Germans of age 18 and above were gathered, but the amount of non-response was quite high (50.4%). Because of the unequal proportion of East and West in the sample and to accommodate with the unequal pattern of non-response, the following analysis uses weighted sample statistics.

Since this is an illustration, we have not attempted to give a full account of all aspects of the welfare state (but see the discussion below). Instead, the following analysis concentrates on three (interrelated) survey items which measure whether the state should be responsible for correcting income disparities. This can be achieved by labor market programs for the jobless or by income maintenance programs for the general public. More specifically, the respondent's opinion about the following three statements is the object of our analysis:

1. "It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes."
2. "The government should provide a job for everyone who wants one."
3. "The government should provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income."

(Dis)Agreement with these statements was measured on a five point scale. Since the items are highly correlated ($r > 0.5$), we combine the answers into one additive index measuring the respondent's attitude towards the responsibility of the state for supplying its citizens with sufficient (and not too unequal) incomes. The internal consistency of this index is satisfactory (Cronbach's Alpha equals 0.79), and not unexpectedly, East Germans score much higher (4.36 on average) than West Germans (3.56 on average). Thus, East Germans show on the average considerably higher preferences for egalitarian welfare policies.

Our independent variables include only a small subset of interest and socialization indicators. For reasons that will be explained below we have not attempted to include indicators of the respondent's justice beliefs. Household equivalent income, a dummy for gainful employment, and the respondent's (subjective) evaluation of his/her present and future socio-economic position identify the losers and winners of egalitarian income policies. A dummy for women, three dummies for different age categories, and a simple ranking of educational degrees are used as indicators of different socialization patterns. Finally, a dummy for citizens of the former GDR (residence = East Germany) determines the dominant ideology the respondent has lived with.

Our hypotheses are summarized in table 1. Most of them are self-explanatory, only the socialization indicators need some further comments: (a) because their methodological status is not quite clear and (b) because different effects can be expected for West and East Germans. The discussion in section 2.4 focussed on the West German experience and assumed higher preferences for egalitarian government intervention for women and younger age cohorts. A definite effect of education could not be specified, because of the opposite influences of "enlightenment" on the value of equality on the one side and "socialization" into the dominant West German ideology on the other. It can be questioned whether
these hypotheses make also sense for the East German case. First of all, the older age cohorts have built up the GDR, and because of selective migration processes to West Germany the older age cohorts remaining in the GDR can be assumed to be the ones that show the highest identification with the egalitarian socialistic model of society. On the other hand, the younger age cohorts born "into" the GDR took the socialistic achievements as granted, they realized their deficiencies, and were infected with Western capitalist ideologies by modern mass media. Therefore, if the hypothesized age effect for West Germany is true, it should work the other way round in East Germany. Similarly, it can be questioned whether the higher labor force participation of East German women eroded the traditional socialization model of men and women, with the effect that women in East Germany are as achievement-oriented as men. Finally, the effect of education, in contrast to the West German case, should be positive, since both "enlightenment" and "exposure" to the dominant ideology work in the same direction.

Table 1: Independent variables and their hypothesized effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Variable Value</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>Reference Group</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>Reference Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household equivalent income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective evaluation of present socio-economic position</td>
<td>(high value = positive)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective evaluation of future socio-economic position</td>
<td>(high value = positive)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence (East Germany = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>(18-27 years)</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>Reference group</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>Reference group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(28-43 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(44-60 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(61+ years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (women = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>West</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>East</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>West</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expected effects according to the following determinants: a) self interest, b) cultural integration, c) socialization

In order to test these different assumptions, two types of regression models are estimated. The first model assumes equal effects for all independent variables in West and East Germany, while the second model abandons this assumption by including the appropriate interaction effects. Before presenting the results, a short look at the last column in table 1 is necessary. As indicated, all socialization indicators also have meaning for the concept of self interest. And even more confusing: according to
this concept, they have partly opposite effects! This intersection of indicators has serious methodological consequences for a rigorous test of both concepts, as will be discussed later on in section 4.3.

Table 2: OLS estimates of effects on attitudes towards egalitarian welfare policies (t-values in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>model without interaction effects</th>
<th>model with interaction effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence (East Germany = 1)</td>
<td>0.34*** (16,78)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household equivalent income</td>
<td>-0.13*** (-6.00)</td>
<td>-0.11*** (-4.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.06</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status (employed = 1)</td>
<td>-0.01 (-0.26)</td>
<td>-0.04 (-1.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.08*</td>
<td>(2.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective evaluation of actual socio-economic position</td>
<td>-0.08*** (-3.85)</td>
<td>-0.10*** (-3.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual position × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.06</td>
<td>(0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective evaluation of future socio-economic position</td>
<td>-0.16*** (-8.35)</td>
<td>-0.18*** (-7.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future position × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.09</td>
<td>(1.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (reference group: 18 – 27 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 – 43 years</td>
<td>-0.05* (-2.08)</td>
<td>-0.06 (-1.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 - 43 years × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.01</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 - 60 years</td>
<td>-0.04 (-1.68)</td>
<td>-0.09** (-2.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 - 60 years × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.10*</td>
<td>(2.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 years and more</td>
<td>-0.07* (-2.55)</td>
<td>-0.15*** (-4.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 years and more × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.15***</td>
<td>(4.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (women = 1)</td>
<td>0.05** (2.71)</td>
<td>0.06** (2.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.04</td>
<td>(-1.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.09*** (-4.65)</td>
<td>-0.11*** (-4.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education × Residence</td>
<td>- -0.09</td>
<td>(1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2289</td>
<td>2289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance level: * ≤ 0.05; ** ≤ 0.01; *** ≤ 0.001
Source: ISSP 1992 (own calculations)

Table 2 shows the OLS estimates of all effects. We start with the overall effects (model without interaction effects) and then comment on the differences between East and West Germany (model with interaction effects). The fit of both models is satisfactory: they explain nearly one third of the variance of our attitude measurements (R²=0.27 and 0.29). As can be seen from the dummy for East Germany (β=0.34), the aforementioned attitude differences between East and West Germans are still in effect, even if indicators of different socialization and interest are controlled for. According to its t-value, this is by far the most important effect, and it seems as if the exposure to the dominant ideology of the GDR exerts the greatest influence on attitudes towards egalitarian welfare policies. Besides that, most indicators of self interest (except the effect for the employed) gain statistical significance with the appropriate signs. High income groups and individuals that estimate themselves in higher socio-
economic positions, both in the present and the future, are rather reluctant towards egalitarian welfare policies. The same is true for individuals with higher educational degrees and for the older age cohorts, although the differences between them and the youngest cohort (18-27 years), the reference group, are not as significant as the other effects and the estimates do not show a clear negative trend with increasing age. Since we expected different age effects in East and West Germany, this result is not surprising, and we have to wait for the model with interaction effects to make a clear statement. Finally, and as expected, women show a clear tendency towards egalitarian welfare policies.

We now turn to the second model that assumes different effects for West and East Germans. If such differences exist, the corresponding interaction effect should be significant. This is not true for most indicators of self interest, except the employment variable. According to the (non-significant) main effect (β=-0.04) and the (significant) interaction effect (β=0.08), employed persons in West Germany do not differ significantly in their attitudes from the rest, while the employed in East Germany, contrary to our expectations, show more preferences towards egalitarian welfare policies than the average respondent. Besides that, only the interaction effects for the various age cohorts achieve statistical significance. Looking at their signs, we see that the age effects of the first model are confounded by two opposite trends in East and West Germany. While the West Germans become more reluctant towards egalitarian welfare policies with increasing age, East Germans behave just the other way round. However, the most striking result of this second model is the fact that the dummy for East Germany looses its statistical significance. This confirms results reported by WEGENER and LIEBIG (1995a) on justice beliefs indicating that cultural differences between East and West Germans disappear, if one controls for structural differences between both parts of Germany.

4. Summary and discussion

According to our empirical illustration, egalitarian attitudes towards the West German welfare state can be explained by different indicators of self-interest and various socio-demographic variables. Not unexpectedly, people in low socio-economic positions have higher preferences towards egalitarian government interventions, while the better off more or less disagree. These indications of self-interest, i.e. the support for labor market or income maintenance programs by their possible beneficiaries, are clearly seen both in West and East Germany. However, the expectation that attitudes towards the welfare state are formed by socialization into one welfare culture or dominant ideology, cannot be confirmed on the societal level. If such effects exist, then they can be demonstrated only for certain socio-demographic groups, but not generally for East and West Germans as former citizens of two different political systems.

The effects of age, gender, and education, which we have interpreted as indicators of different socialization experiences, show some interesting results in this respect, but their interpretation is not always obvious. According to our hypotheses in table 1, we expected East-West-differences for each variable, but it turned out that gender and education have the same effect, although we suspected less gender differences and more identification with egalitarian welfare conceptions with increasing educational
degree in East Germany. The conclusion from this observation is: If different socialization patterns exist between East and West Germany, they cannot be described with the variables gender and education. Marked differences exist only with respect to age: While in East Germany the older age groups support egalitarian government interventions, in West Germany such attitudes prevail among the younger age groups. But can these differences be explained as effects of socialization? This question leads us to several critical remarks against the model and its results.

4.1. How to distinguish between indicators of self-interest and differential socialization?

As already noted, our three socio-demographic variables, age, gender, and education, can equally well be explained as indicators of self-interest. Women, the less educated and pensioners are in various ways much more dependent on welfare state regulations than other groups: income support, maternity protection, labor market policies, health insurance, education, etc. In other words: Much like people with low incomes these groups belong more or less to the possible beneficiaries of the welfare state and therefore we expect much more support from them than from the others (see table 1). Additionally, we have no a priori assumptions, why the interests of these groups should be different in West and East Germany.

Viewed from this theoretical perspective, the estimated effects of education and gender in table 2 can be explained consistently. There are no significant interaction effects (East-West differences) and both main effects point in the right direction: women show more support for egalitarian welfare policies and the better educated don't. But what about the effect of age? The expected support from the older people is only visible in East, but not in West Germany. Does the variable age measure predominantly socialization effects? Without direct measures of the results of socialization processes, i.e. relevant norms and values that individuals use in evaluating the welfare state, this question cannot be answered. As hypothesized in section 2.2, justice beliefs belong to these values and norms, which raises the question why they are not controlled for in our illustration (as suggested in figure 1).

4.2. How to distinguish between attitudes towards the welfare state and general justice beliefs?

A simple excuse is the answer that our analysis is very preliminary. However, a closer look at the ISSP 1992 questionnaire shows that indicators of different justice beliefs are rarely available. Since the 1992 version of the ISSP concerned social inequality, most of the survey items measure attitudes towards social inequality or perceptions of the actual inequalities in the society the respondent is living in. Of course, all of this has connections with the respondent's justice beliefs, but a clear operationalization that is distinct from measures of social inequality or from attitudes towards the welfare state has still to be worked out. Not surprisingly, other researchers of justice beliefs (e.g. WEGENER 1992) use the same items that we used as indicators of attitudes towards the welfare state as measures of etatistic and functionalistic (market oriented) justice beliefs. Apparently, the distinction of these and other constructs is not an easy task, especially when doing secondary research. (We are currently checking other
ISSP surveys concerning the role of the government and data from the International Social Justice Project.)

4.3. The welfare state is a complex entity and therefore support for the welfare state can have many different dimensions

Apart from these difficulties on the side of the independent variables, also the dependent variable needs some further considerations. As noted by SIHVO and UUSITALO, "the welfare state is a complex entity" and "we cannot assume that the support for the welfare state is the same regardless of the aspects studied" (1995: 215). In our preliminary analysis, we concentrated mainly on the government's responsibility for labor market and income maintenance programs. Given this specific aspect, it is not surprising that income and socio-economic position are among the main explaining factors. The relative importance of each our independent variables -- and accordingly, the relative importance of self interest and socialization explanations -- may well be totally different, if other aspects of the welfare state, e.g. its responsibility for social insurance systems, are studied. In order to do this more differentiated analysis, a proper model of attitudes towards the welfare state is needed. ROLLER's (1992) classification that distinguishes between attitudes towards the aims, means (institutions, programs), and (intended and unintended) effects of the welfare state may be a good starting point. Attitudes towards the financing of the welfare state are mentioned by several other authors.

References


