

## Social Cohesion and Development

Vol 6, No 2 (2011)



Ana Marta Guillén and Margarita León (eds), *The Spanish Welfare State in European Context.*, Ashgate Pub Co Publisher Farnham G.B., 2011

Ángel Alonso Domínguez

doi: [10.12681/scad.8967](https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.8967)

Copyright © 2016, Ángel Alonso Domínguez



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Domínguez, Ángel A. (2016). Ana Marta Guillén and Margarita León (eds), *The Spanish Welfare State in European Context.*, Ashgate Pub Co Publisher Farnham G.B., 2011. *Social Cohesion and Development*, 6(2), 153–155. <https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.8967>

**Ana Marta Guillén and Margarita León (eds),  
*The Spanish Welfare State in European Context.*,  
Ashgate Pub Co Publisher Farnham G.B., 2011**

**T**he Spanish Welfare State (SWS) has been established following a similar path to that of most European countries but showing a different evolution, marked by a late transition to democracy and a hasty pace of modernization. This intense and spectacular transformation has constituted a very important phenomenon since the mid 70's, greatly emphasizing the expansion of some social rights as universal education and healthcare.

However, both the consolidation and effectiveness of the SWS have been constrained by an economic context marked by swings between expansion and contraction. The reforms adopted have neither been able to overcome the institutional inertia, nor to adopt a coherent and consistent view to respond to their different challenges over time. Two main challenges could be underscored: convergence with other European countries in a short period of time and the response to new and dramatic demographic changes which requires a revision of eligibility to different social protection programs.

These basic propositions are addressed in *The Spanish Welfare State in European Context*, edited by Ana Marta Guillén and Margarita León. Other fifteen renowned scholars, all members of the recently constituted ESPAnet-Spain (Spanish Network for Social Policy Analysis), have collaborated in the volume. Throughout the fourteen chapters that it comprises, it is highlighted how the SWS is not a model that shows pure Bismarckian features but also social-democratic and liberal ones. Such combination of features poses difficulties to respond to a wide range of demands, coping strategies and new developmental needs. The main thread of the volume is the evolution of the SWS and its differences or similarities in respect to other European welfare states. And to know that, it is vital to understand the process of Europeanization the SWS has experienced since the political transition to democracy until present. Moreover, this is an issue that is very present in all the chapters of the book, which is structured in three parts.

The first part is devoted to the evolution and consolidation of the SWS and underlines its achievements and shortcomings. A model close to the Bismarckian one, but streamlined and more moderate at the same time is presented. It is a complex welfare state due to constraints posed by the segmentation of the labour market, the combination of principles and the decentralization to the regions of several policies. The heterogeneity of social policies (especially in the social assistance and social care domains) and the advent of the international economic crisis have posed severe tensions to the harmonization of social policies and the adaptation to the global market.

The first part also emphasizes that the Spanish social protection model has changed considerably since 1980, strongly influenced by the economic growth and the processes of integration into the European Union. This has been achieved through a process of convergence of economic performance, though some social aspects are still in need of improvement. After all, Spain is among the European countries with a very optimistic vision about the future of the European Union. This part of the book also shows a country that has made considerable legal progress in gender equality although, in practice, despite the new and bold legal measures, it is still very far from reaching the ideal of equality.

The second part focuses on the architecture of the SWS, the relationship among levels of governance and the interaction between social dialogue and the transformation of a country in which many of the changes produced in the 80's and 90's have been preceded by tripartite negotiations and social pacts. The authors suggest that perhaps the corporatist structures in social bargaining have been eroded but the processes remain virtually intact.

This section further shows how Spain has been transformed from a unitary state to one of the most decentralized in Europe, assigning an important role to the Autonomous Communities (AC) in the development of the SWS and establishing the discussion between decentralization, equity and equality as one of the main challenges still facing Spain. Furthermore, a consensus has not emerged as yet on whether private intervention will be able to lessen the liability assumed by the state in the redistribution of resources. The section also discusses how changes in European societies and the economic crisis have prompted public debate about the sustainability of the welfare state. In this sense, Spain faces similar risks to those of the nations around it: ageing, viability of pension systems, and the increase of the number of immigrants becoming new consumers of resources. However, some peculiar Spanish features pose further difficulties.

Finally, the third part focuses on the present and future challenges facing the SWS in a country that accumulates a lot of problems in its labour market. The section also explores how the Spanish transition to a post-industrial society has developed along a model of low fertility. Moreover, it also highlights the essential role exercised by female workers in the processes of socio-demographic change in the country, which makes the work-family reconciliation a central goal. Reconciliation strategies continue to fall mainly on the family or non-formalized care provided by the immigrant population. So the transformation of the SWS is also difficult to explain without considering a recent, fast and very intense immigration process, which has played a decisive role in the support of the SWS.

The SWS has expanded significantly both in the number of recipients and spending, becoming more mature. Nonetheless, it has also incurred in heavy homogenization problems, regional inequalities and serious difficulties in funding and regional coordination, as underlined in several chapters of the book. Such deficiencies together with peaking unemployment, the singularities of social protection system and the institutional design of policies, have stabilized the Spanish poverty rates at levels higher than those of other European countries, after a continuous decline between 1973 and 1990. To conclude, the book addresses the financial imbalances caused by the Spanish pension system, responsible for the largest expense of the SWS - 9 percent of GDP - and which has been object of a recent amendment to postpone the retirement age and expand the period of calculation of the replacement rate, in a context of severe economic crisis and growing Spanish sovereign debt.

The literature on the SWS has already a large body of contributions, but The Spanish Welfare State in European Context has enriched it with the variety of subjects covered, the feeling of wholeness that the text provides and the added difficulty of analyzing such a long period of time. The last three decades have witnessed a lot of changes affecting the Spanish society as a whole and the SWS in particular, and rebuilding the entire evolutions over several decades involves using a longitudinal perspective that adds great complexity to the study.

The final result is certainly an excellent book, as it is not common for the publications to thoroughly analyze the institutional framework of the welfare state as a whole. In addition, the book provides an invaluable tool not only for researchers interested on the characteristics of the SWS, but also for policy-makers and other interested parties due to the thoroughness of the data, the quality of the textual references provided in each chapter and the timeliness of this topic, raised in the present situation of crisis and financial budgetary constraints.

In short, the volume is a strong X-ray of the SWS literature, offering an overview of its transformations, but also dealt with in a coherent and detailed way, which makes it a support manual for academics who want to include the Spanish case in comparative analyses. This was one of the objectives marked by the editors in the introduction of the book and amply fulfilled, because it fills a gap in the literature on the subject by the absence to date of a volume in English dealing with the Spanish case.

It is not clear, however, if the book persuades the readers to accept that the classification of the SWS within the Mediterranean model may be disputable, for the book itself is inconclusive in this respect. This is undoubtedly an important issue proposed, but the arguments presented in some chapters by the contributors on reminiscent familistic patterns in the SWS may address to a more intense debate on the subject in the future.

Ángel Alonso Domínguez  
University of Oviedo

**Marija Stambolieva, Stefan Dehnert (eds),**  
*Welfare States in Transition: 20 Years After the Yugoslav Welfare Model,*  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sofia 2011

**W**hen the countries of Eastern and East Central Europe abandoned socialism and introduced a market economy based on private enterprise they eliminated the fundament of the system of social protection prevailing until then. Neither was it possible any longer to maintain full employment so to speak “by decree”, overstaffing state enterprises and public institutions, nor was the state able any longer to allocate national resources and assign entitlements at will, according to politically set priorities, restricting the consumption level of the active population (by determining wages and setting prices) in order to “finance” pensioners’ consumption and public goods, such as high-quality universal health care, free university education, scientific research and well-equipped armed forces.

A capitalist market economy demands explicit transfers of incomes acquired by entrepreneurs, capital investors, free-lancers and employed workers in the products, capital and labor markets to the state and other agencies of redistribution. The state is able to afford entitlements (to income subsidies and to public goods and services) only to the extent it is able and willing to tax market incomes, market transactions and wealth. Contrary to the socialist control economy of the times before 1989, solidarity has a visible price tag in the capitalist market economy.

The post-communist states of Eastern and East Central Europe faced the task of reorganizing the solidarity their democratically emancipated citizens were expecting and demanding under highly unfavorable conditions, unfavorable in several respects:

- Citizens, socialized into an anonymous, uncontrollable and rather irresponsible system that had obscured relations between social benefits and costs, hesitated to endorse high taxes in order to finance effective social protection.
- Predatory elites, often from the technical nomenclatura of the previous regime, seized state power for the purpose of self-enrichment and put the development of a competent public administration at the service of its citizens on the back burner. As the enforcement of efficiency and integrity was neglected, the delivery of public services, including social services, deteriorated.