The thesis explores patterns of welfare state adjustment in Nordic welfare states in a Western European context, with a focus on changes in the 1990s. Its theoretical starting points are in the contemporary controversy between the power resource theory and the welfare regime approach that have underlined the role of ideology and politics as explanatory factors for the character of welfare states and their enduring divergence; and the new convergence thesis that sees 'external' factors, such as globalisation and EU, push for declining differences among welfare states. For both strands of thinking a crucial empirical question concerns how policy reforms affect diversity among welfare states, i.e. the patterning of differences and similarities that differentiate types of welfare states.

To consider this problematic two research questions are formulated: Are there systematic patterns of differences among welfare states? Do welfare states converge over time? Empirically the study addresses variation and trends in statutory fiscal and welfare policies with the help of statistics, especially with Eurostat's social protection expenditure data. The study outlines an ideal typical picture of the Nordic welfare model for gauging change, and employs basic statistical parameters, tables, graphical methods and clustering techniques that suit the case-oriented approach in general, but the aim of examining types in particular. Three studies are included in the thesis. Financing of welfare states and redistribution strategies are examined in two broader studies including fifteen Western European countries. The third study is a more focused case study on welfare state adjustment in Finland and Sweden between 1990-98.

The study concludes with four generalisations: Firstly, over the period examined the Nordic countries as a group had moved further away from the ideal typical picture of the Nordic welfare model. Secondly, in a relative comparison and in most of the areas examined the Nordic countries still clustered together and showed family resemblance. Thirdly, there were signs for convergence in several instances, although not to the extent to abolish diversity. Fourthly, these convergence processes meant that the distinctiveness of the Nordic countries by late-1990s was less evident than earlier.

Keywords:
- welfare states - comparative research - Nordic countries - 1990s
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