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Generating Legitimacy for Labor Market and Welfare State Reform--The Role of Policy Advice in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden

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Policy advice can help political actors design and implement institutional reforms through the generation of political and substantial legitimacy. This article clarifies the institutional preconditions of effective supply and transfer of policy advice with particular respect to the field of labor market and social policy reform and to corporatist arrangements where academic think tanks and social partner bodies for policy advice exist side by side. It shows how policy advice is structured and to what extent it could influence actual policy-making in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden over the last decade. Our main argument is that the structure of policy advice is essential for its effectiveness. Highly reputable and less contested expert committees and research institutes that provide balanced policy-oriented advice to political actors and the public are most influential and conducive to furthering labor market and welfare state reforms in corporatist settings. If government provides a shadow of hierarchy they can also facilitate social partner consensus. Hence, an appropriate supply of policy advice can help ensure sufficient legitimacy for institutional reforms and increase societal problem-solving capacities. If government is weak for institutional reasons and policy advice rather fragmented, challenged and less policy-oriented, as in the German case, policy advice cannot realize its full potential.

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