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Moving from "Defined Benefit" to "Undefined": The interests in the enhancement of supplementary provision for old age in Germany

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With the pension reform of 2001, the main objectives of pension politics in Germany have changed, because of the necessity for additional – occupational and/or individual – saving arrangements. In result, the German pension system has shifted from a “defined benefits” system to an “undefined” status. The paper analyses the process of policy formation because such a “system shift” cannot be solely explained by the internal problems of the pension system and the external macro-economic environment. The thesis is that there is a restructuring process of the German pension system taking place in which different actors pursue different interests but rely on the same means. In 2001 the collective actors employers, employees, and the political-administrative system all could agree on the expansion of the so called second and third pillars of the pension system – nevertheless there was no mutual intension. Pension politics cannot be reduced to “technical” answers to commonly shared questions, but have to be understood as the result of political conflict. Therefore, the interests of the actors shape “corridors of reforms”, restraining the amount of possibilities.

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