The Rescaling Project and This Book

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This book is the result of the "*Rescaling Social Welfare Policies – A comparative study on the path towards multilevel governance in Europe*" project. It was a complex comparative project aimed at investigating the changes in both the territorial organisation and the new actors' organisation of selected social policies in several European countries. The project developed under the auspices of the *European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research* in 2005, following an initial *stimulus* by Matti Heikkilä to whom this book is dedicated. Matti, a good friend and a brilliant researcher felt that it was important to investigate these issues in a pioneering project. Indeed, when it started this was one of the very few projects on *rescaling* social policies. No consolidated knowledge base existed to be used as a reference and many methodological questions remained to be addressed even before starting.

   We approached the issue with quite high ambitions in terms of the policies to be considered, the countries to be involved and the methods to be used. We targeted four policies, twelve countries and multiple methods, but ended up with three policies, eight countries and fewer methods. Among the policies we were able to investigate: a) activation policies in the labour market; b) social assistance; and c) long-term care for the elderly. We unfortunately were obliged to drop migration policies. Having too many policies was not only costly, but also complex in terms of management. Among the countries that we were able to involve in the project are Finland, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Unfortunately Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom did not get funded by those countries' respective national agencies and were not able to participate in the study. This was a pity, because the territorial dimension of social policies was becoming particularly relevant in their

respective political debates. We had originally also planned the use of the EUROMOD tax benefit micro-simulation model for identifying the redistributive impact of territorial reforms. Unfortunately, however, the person assigned to this part of the project left the European Centre and it proved very difficult to replace him.

Despite the aforesaid resizing of the project, the countries we investigated, the policies we have considered and the methods used are relevant and interesting in relation to our understanding of the territorial dimension of social policies and of the new governance arrangements.

Some additional complications arose, however. The project partners did not know each other before starting the project and the funding was distributed unevenly among them. In fact, the funding mechanism of the project (see below) foresaw that each country had to finance its own part of research. This naturally led to different levels of funding for the different partners, who were first and foremost responsible towards their fund-givers. These challenges contributed to the complexity of the project and required several meetings not only to define the conceptual and methodological frame, but also to ease collaboration among the numerous partners.

During our meetings we developed several working hypotheses to frame our interpretation of the ongoing processes. A first hypothesis assumed that different institutional settings diversely frame the way in which rescaling and governance processes are deployed in different countries. This implies that there must be some degree of coherence between the ongoing processes, their direction of change and the organisation of the State and the welfare system / regime these countries belong to. This relation also holds consequences for the interpretation of possible trends of convergence and / or divergence. Almost all the chapters herein review these aspects against the specificities of the single policy fields. A second hypothesis assumed that the time frame during which specific processes take place influences the way they act. For instance decentralising regulative capacities in a period of economic expansion, when available resources are relatively high, has a completely different meaning than decentralising regulative capacities in times of economic penury and in the presence of neoliberalisation trends. The importance of contextualising trends emerges as a crucial aspect to be considered in interpreting the current changes. The need to adopt a variety of both quantitative and qualitative methods to disentangle the complexity of the processes at stake has also become evident.

The analysis of the results stemming from this project was also particularly complex, because we did not opt for country-specific chapters.

Rather, we went the more difficult path (but also the more interesting one) of issue-specific chapters, examining these comparatively. To strengthen this aspect, most of the chapters are written by colleagues from different countries and different fields of specialisation, allowing the cross-fertilisation of disciplinary knowledge. As the reader can easily imagine, this process has not been easy.

The structure of the book

The book is organised into an introduction and two main parts. The introductory chapter presents the main issues at stake and proposes a frame within which to understand the process of rescaling and the path towards multilevel governance arrangements. Some results are also alluded to ahead of time, in more general terms, and a typology of the territorial organisation of social policies in the different countries is presented; in particular this is carried out concerning the changes the different welfare systems are undergoing. One of the main points made is that the joint effect of the processes of territorial re-organisation and the multiplication of actors in policy design, management and implementation is an overall process of *subsidiarisation*. This process has an ambivalent nature given that it is – as we will see – legitimised by opposing ideologies (i.e. *neoliberalism* and *participatory democracy* and *grass-roots empowerment*). It is also a process characterised by converging rhetorical debates and diverging impacts. The chapter provides some contextual elements to address these differences in *social Europe,* paving the way for a more in-depth analysis of the policy-area-based chapters of the first part of this book.

In the first part of the book the three specific policy areas and – respectively – each individual policy area are addressed in three distinctive chapters. The first provides an overview of the literature in the specific policy fields, which theories are used to understand and interpret them and how they have changed. The second chapter addresses the territorial dimension and how it has changed over the last two-three decades, while the third chapter investigates how the policy-specific actors' configurations have changed over the same period of time. This structure is more or less replicated for all three policies.

Activation policies are addressed in Chapters Two, Three and Four. In the second chapter authored by Stefania Sabatinelli, the literature on activation policies is reviewed and the spatial dimension has been included

in the analysis. In particular, the chapter focuses on the implications of the activation paradigm in social assistance and labour market policies, aiming at highlighting some of the main driving forces. The chapter investigates the different meanings of the concept and the narratives developed to accompany its diffusion. From this point of view, activation is a policy area in which the ambivalence of the processes of change is particularly clear: it entails both neoliberal characteristics as well as innovative and empowering policy solutions.

The third chapter by Barberis and Baumann compares the effects of scalar configuration changes on labour market policies, providing contextual data and considering the implications of the aforesaid for users. What emerges is clearly that **multilevel governance and scale trends provide** coordination problems that weaken the effectiveness of active labour market policies. The equity of treatment during activation is also made an open question in all countries, but in particular in countries with complex patterns of multilevel governance and in those undergoing the process of changing their state configuration from a centralist typology to a more or less decentralised one.

The fourth chapter by Vappu Karjalainen completes the analysis of activation policies, more specifically taking into consideration the territorial dimension and the emerging governance arrangements. The working hypothesis of the chapter is that activation policies question the governance and distribution of responsibility between territorial levels, due to the contradiction between the macro-nature of the structural causes of unemployment and the local and individual nature of activation services. The governance of activation policy challenges the traditional sector-based administration and service structure of welfare society with bottom-up approaches. The aim is to catch the overall developmental state of activation policy governance in the countries considered in the present study.

Social assistance policies are addressed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In Chapter Five authors Barberis, Sabatinelli and Bieri provide a general view of the institutional settings within which social assistance policies and the respective welfare systems are embedded. They define the actors' degree of freedom, which also influences the way in which the interaction and coordination in the policy process takes place at the vertical and horizontal levels.

In Chapter Six Minas and Øverbye analyse how, over the last decades, the reorganisation of social assistance policies has entailed shifts of respon-

sibility between administrative levels. They address the consequences of the territorial dispersion of authority upwards, downwards or sideways in terms of the search for an optimal organisation of welfare policies. A major trend identified in the chapter is towards the decentralisation of authority. However, the authors show that – rather than representing a single rescaling strategy – decentralisation is a wide umbrella term for diverse and contextualised political, administrative and financial processes which are investigated in different sections of the chapter. The relevance of timing is also highlighted as a crucial perspective to understand current dynamics, i.e. the processes are more or less the same, but different contexts and different timing result in differentiated impacts. To this, the authors add the portrayal of the ambivalent character of the policies stemming out of the tension existing between empowering solutions and *new public management*-like solutions which permeate the way in which reforms are legitimised.

In Chapter Seven Bergmark and Minas provide an in-depth account of the wide array of actors involved in governing social assistance. They begin with a structured inventory of who is involved at what level and – in that respect – try to capture the relevant political-administrative span with respect to the vertical as well as horizontal division of authority and responsibilities therein. From that they proceed to describe how measures are coordinated between different actors and how that relates to the degree of targeting and fragmentation in the different countries involved in the project. The idea is to identify the extent and character of significant networks and their contextual settings. A particularly relevant section of the chapter addresses the fact that managerial structures and delivery systems are, to a considerable extent, related through the scope of actors and their relations. In order to capture this aspect in a more comprehensive manner the nature of assessments and professional discretion is analysed in-depth, with a special focus on different aspects of street-level decision-making.

The third and last policy we investigated is *long-term care for older people* (LTC), which is addressed in Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten. In Chapter Eight Rahel Strohmeier Navarro Smith provides an overview of trends, driving forces and differentiated impacts of the process of subsidiarisation on the delivery of LTC policies. First, she investigates the changing role of families in general and of women in particular in relation to the different welfare system configurations and the potential "re-familialisation" or "de-familialisation" of long-term care. Second, she analyses the regional variation in long-term care provision. The kind and amount of services and

benefits publicly given to dependent older people differ according to the institutionalised territorial frames designed for long-term care provision. The chapter investigates the extent and type of variation, providing an outlook on possible future developments.

In Chapters Nine and Ten Signy Vabo addresses, respectively, the territorial dimensions of long-term care policies for the elderly and the emergence of new governance arrangements. In Chapter Nine she clearly shows the complexity of the rescaling processes, which not only entail decentralisation, but also possible re-centralisation trends, according to the countries' specific conditions. Regulation, management and finances are addressed and analysed as relevant dimensions of these processes, highlighting some critical points: the importance of health policies for specific targets, and the blurring boundaries between formal and informal care. Both assume different meanings in the different institutional arrangements characterising the countries we investigated. Chapter Ten analyses the increasing number of actors from different sectors of society in the field of long-term care policies, combining it with scalar issues. The author also highlights how, in long-term care policies, hierarchy is decreasing in relevance. Meanwhile, market-based and self-organising modes of governance are increasing. The chapter analyses how this takes place considering three different perspectives: the mix of actors, institutional fragmentation and the role of the user.

The second part of the book addresses two transversal issues that are crucial in understanding the processes of subsidiarisation and their impacts: a) the convergence-divergence debate; b) the coordination issue. In Chapter Eleven Barberis, Bergmark and Minas address the first of these issues by disentangling the complexities of the convergence-divergence debate. The authors investigate the different phases of convergence studies and the fact that the issue has been approached by two intimately related research concerns: i) the reasons for which convergence has, or has not, occurred, and ii) *what* exactly has converged. Indeed convergence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and general convergence trends are not easy to establish. Our empirical findings tie in with a growing body of data which challenges the idea of increasing similarity among welfare states. Many welfare states have, in fact, proven to be comparatively resilient to external driving forces. The authors make a nuanced analysis of the ongoing processes of change and identify a converging trend in the increased relevance of sub-national authorities and diverging trends as far as the relevance of

the nation-state is concerned. In some countries its relevance has declined substantially, while in other countries it has remained stable. Finally, in others it has re-gained relevance.

In Chapter Twelve Øverbye, Strohmeier Navarro Smith, Karjalainen and Stremlow address the ways in which the coordination challenge is handled across countries and across policy areas. Indeed the subsidiarisation of social policies brought about a fragmentation of levels and actors involved in policy design, management and implementation. The chapter describes the whole range of possible options adopted to address this problem, highlighting how they are taken up in the different countries to counteract the negative effects of fragmentation. Are these different strategies tied to different welfare systems? Building on previous analyses, the authors look at the situation in the small Nordic countries, contrasted to selected examples from the more complex institutional structures found in Continental Europe. Their analysis confirms the fact that the implementation of converging trends – including coordination measures – has varied depending on the institutional structure of the country's welfare systems.

The last chapter of the book by Van Gestel and Herbillon can be considered a conclusion of the book as it examines the lessons we gained for further developing the theory and practices of the rescaling process of social welfare policies. What is the added value of this study in terms of exploration, evaluation and understanding of macro and micro policies and effects? And how can we describe its specific and original contributions? In answering these questions the chapter returns to the initial research hypotheses and perspectives presented in the first chapter, in order to identify and discuss the issues that lie at the heart of this study: the emergence of new modes of territorial governance in social welfare policies; their implementation and associated risks. Drawing upon the findings of the Rescaling project, the authors discuss the prospects for territorial governance in social welfare policies in two ways. First, they qualify the main trends in the territorial structures of governance at *multiple levels* as shaped by regulations from different (political) centres of command and as a process of co-production between various actors possessing different levels of status and authority. Second, they discuss the differences between the three policy areas related to their aims and background in the development of social welfare policies. They also reflect on the methodology that has been used for this pilot research project, developing several suggestions for further research and practice in social welfare policies.

A substantive appendix by Eduardo Barberis complements the book by providing a short overview on the triangulation method we used in the project. This is not only embedded in the current literature, but also discusses the implications of the use of these methodologies, and in particular of the vignettes, which provided an extremely interesting empirical basis.

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