Sharing and Control: The Janus-Faced Governance of Social Services at Times of Social Innovation and Social Investment

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1   Introduction

The recent reorganization of European Welfare States has been closely associated with a shift in the approaches to governance (Beaumont & Nicholls 2008; Silver, Scott & Kazepov 2010; Geddes 2010). Indeed, the term "new governance," or "collaborative governance," emphasizes characteristics such as interdependence between institutions and society, joint steering, shared goals, and citizen participation, especially at the local level. Over time, the framework based on local governance, collaboration, and participation has become a strong convention in policy agendas, and a repertoire of tools and procedures - partly supported by European funding - has been consolidated, in theory, aiming at including marginal or weak local actors.

As we know, despite its successes, collaborative and participatory governance has long been the subject of heavy criticism. The point is that its democratic dimension is highly controversial. Inclusive decision-making processes should involve a redistribution of power through innovative forms of citizenship in local and urban contexts (Blakeley 2010). Yet practices of participatory governance can conceal different powers and unequal conditions of access to decision-making and may neutralize conflicting viewpoints on the issues at stake (Eizaguirre et al 2013).

Indeed, the relationship between governance and power is a critical issue. The logic and instruments of power may change without the power necessarily being relinquished or redistributed. Therefore, within the arena of governance, the reconfiguration of responsibilities between governments and citizens may take place "not as a transfer of power but as a transformation of power," (Blakeley 2010: 132). Concepts, such as soft governance, post-political governance, and technocratic governance (Garsten & Jacobsson 2013; Raco 2014), refer in different ways to a tangle of profound transformations in which technocratic mechanisms and consensual procedures tend to prevail in public action to the detriment of "the political understood as a space of contestation and agonistic engagement," (Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014: p.6). The neutralization of conflicts and the spread of "subtle forms of guidance and control," (Garsten & Jacobsson 2013: 422) are some of the key features of these forms of governance. In this way, governance can feed very powerful mechanisms of depoliticization that do not imply an absence of politics but a specific way of doing politics: "depoliticization is not about less politics, but about displaced and submerged politics," (Hay 2014: 302).

It must be added that the emphasis on collaboration and cooperation also influences production and the provision of services, in connection with the development of what is known as the sharing economy. The issue of co-production, even before the crisis, was put forward in the public and political debate on welfare reorganization - especially at the local

level - driven both by strategies for reducing expenditure and by requests for the involvement of citizens in policies and in the planning, provision, and evaluation of services. The notion of co-production was therefore ambivalent from its inception, poised between the possibility of enhancing individual and social resources and capacities, on the one hand, and the removal of public responsibility and subordination to budgetary constraints, on the other.

In this context, the paper deals with the Janus-faced governance, focusing in particular on social services and on the way they put into practice Social Investment and Social Innovation - two crucial policy strategies within the current reorganization of European Welfare State (Bifulco 2017). The aim is to illuminate the coexistence between the increasingly strict control mechanisms and the emphasis placed on the principles of sharing and cooperation, and to understand how that effects organizational/institutional practices, especially regarding social citizenship and rights.

The main findings of a research on two empirical fields will be presented, based on semi-structured interviews[1]: the implementation of an anti-poverty measure in an area of Lombardy, in the north of Italy; and a project underway in Milan, since 2015, aimed at reconfiguring the relationship between supply and demand of care services within the context of a more comprehensive reorganization of local welfare system.

The aim is to cast light on the ambivalent dynamics of change, adaptation, and resistance that Social Investment and Social Innovation - two crucial welfare policy strategies - trigger in the everyday governance of social services, specifically regarding social citizenship and rights.

2   Social Investment and Activation Strategies

Unlike the neoliberal perspective that views social spending only in terms of cost, the European strategy of Social Investment assumes that social policies can operate as productive factors and tools for economic growth (Palier 2013). This underpins the priority given to work as a means of inclusion - according to the well-known principle "work first" - and the importance assumed by policies aiming to develop human capital, training, and education, and to counter the inter-generational transmission of inequality (Jenson 2012).

The consensus over Social Investment is widespread and bipartisan. As Cantillon (2011) notes, its supporters tend to present it as a new paradigm capable of integrating the "enabling" Welfare State with the "old" Welfare State. In the eyes of many, "social expenditure is most justifiable when it leads to the accumulation of a range of individual and communal capital," (Daly 2011, p. 19).

Yet this perspective is not at all univocal. A central issue is exactly that of work. According to Morel et al. (2012), abandoning the idea that any work is good - an idea that tends to justify the increase in precarious, underpaid employment - would represent a significant discontinuity with neoliberalism; but the point is controversial. In any case, the assumption that (paid) work is the main driver of social inclusion implies the devaluation of unpaid work performed outside the market (Cantillon, Van Lancker 2013), obscuring both the need and the value of care work (Saraceno 2009).

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[1] As for the measure againt poverty, employment services officials and social workers were interviewed. The interviews were carried out by Clara Fumagalli. In the case of the project, the social workers of 7 of the 11 centers were interviewed personally by the author.

The relationship between protection and activation is another crucial issue. The objective of Social Investment is not to repair or compensate for the social damage caused by the market, as in the classic model of the Welfare State, but to equip citizens with the skills that will allow them to adapt to the market (Laruffa 2016). The redistributive mechanisms are, therefore, biased towards the young and active, and the problem of how to prevent the poor from being left behind remains unresolved. However, it must be said that these are rather blurred composite cognitive pictures: quasi-concepts, as Jenson (2010) defined them, open to multiple interpretations and diverse ways of implementation, depending on the contexts and welfare regimes onto which they are grafted (Esping- Andersen et al 2002).

It is in this framework that the two different aspects of activation policies must be placed, "both emancipating and restrictive, inclusive and exclusive," (Newman, Tonkens 2011: 230). In several European national and local programs, the core regulation of activation is the idea of a more proactive individual responsible for the results (Taylor-Gooby 2011; Lewis 2001; Daly 2012). Applied to the fight against poverty, although associated with the goals of empowerment and development of autonomy, this perspective can act as a punitive pedagogy based on a logic of reward (Morlicchio 2012). In the field of labor, it has ended up validating the argument that access to employment opportunities mainly depends on individual responsibility to be furnished with adequate skills (Bonvin, Farvaque 2003).

This ambivalence should be connected to the way in which the social dynamics of individualization are translated and impressed in policies. Despite the variety of formulas, the common element is the dominance of a figure of individuality whose autonomy is deprived of social foundations (Castel 2009). Where the grounding of the neoliberal project is more solid, society acts as a backdrop against which the active, responsible, and self-motivated individual stands out, with prerogatives and abilities that are largely taken for granted. If more complex social and contextual conditions evaporate or disappear from the scene, the responsibility of the individual tends to lead to its blaming, according to the typical "blaming the victim" mechanisms that imply the prevalence of a moralizing register of the interventions and of the categories underlying them (de Leonardis 2000, Cantillon 2011). The hypertrophy of responsibility is, therefore, the corollary of an individual whose value is measured on the ability to adapt to the labor market, rather than on the capacity for reflective planning of personal training/work paths.

In contexts of governance, the intrinsic ambivalence of this scenario is replete with paradoxical implications. These are particularly apparent in some contractual devices that have been in vogue for some time in the social assistance interventions aimed at activation, empowerment, and individual autonomy: inclusion projects based on contracts that oblige the beneficiaries to carry out activities laid down by social services aimed at recovering autonomy. These devices somehow oblige individuals to become autonomous, but the exhortation to "be autonomous" is a typical paradox.

3   The Vagueness of Social Innovation

The issue of Social Innovation finds its chief legitimacy in the European policy framework, specifically the Europe 2020 strategy. In this context, Social Innovation means "new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new relationships or social collaborations," (Murray et al. 2010). The range of sectors for intervention is remarkably wide - work, social policies, urban policies - and refers mainly to the inclusive dimension of growth, development, and new technologies, focusing in particular on boosting the social economy and collaborative forms of service provision.

In its widest sense, the concept incorporates new ways of defining and dealing with situations of social exclusion that open up to the experimentation of new forms of social organization (Moulaert, Vicari Haddock 2009). As Mingione and Vicari Haddock (2015: 103) argue:

> "social innovation includes the practices of social self-organization and self-production of goods and services, which build new social relations and alternative or complementary forms of social protection (...) a new phase of redefining relations between the State, the market and civil society."

Therefore, the potential of social innovation as the core and driving force of radical social transformation must be stressed. Yet it has to be added that discourse and rhetoric surrounding social innovation tend to celebrate the capacity of collective action while obscuring the role and importance of interventions by institutions. However, the concept remains imprecise, malleable, and adaptable to different points of view (Barbera, Parisi 2017). The very meaning of what is "new" or "innovative" is not at all clear. Indeed, social "innovation" is often associated with institutional devices that have long been used in public actions, such as public-private partnerships. The boundaries with other issues are also blurred, especially in Social Investment, and they often overlap.

As for empirical evidence, the picture that emerges is quite ambiguous in terms of the effects of social inclusion. Furthermore, it is almost unanimously acknowledged that, although the local scale is their main breeding ground, the local innovative experiences remain fragmentary and uncertain unless they are carried through on a wider scale with the appropriate resources and powers (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012). The need for an institutional infrastructure that supports this process of scaling up - through regulations, policies, rights, etc. – is, therefore, one of the main findings of research (Vicari Haddock, Moulaert, ed. 2009; Brandsen et al. 2016).

4 Activation practices: Support for Active Inclusion (SAI)

Support for Active Inclusion (SAI) is a national measure that provides economic support to families in economic difficulty, disbursed by means of an electronic payment card. This was introduced in Italy in 2015, and quickly shelved. The approach is conditional in that the benefit depends on the beneficiaries signing up for social and work inclusion projects proposed by the local social services, in collaboration with job centers, health services and schools, and private and non-profit organizations. A project may focus on the active search for a job, participation in training courses, school attendance and commitment, and taking measures to protect health. This implies that, if the project commitments are not met, the economic benefit will be suspended.

As confirmed by the empirical cases examined, this mechanism is undoubtedly the main source of the tension and ambiguity inherent in such practices. While, in theory, access to benefits is conditional on the beneficiary's participation in the project, the reality can be quite different. According to one official:

> "The approach presupposes a change of mentality but many people retain the mentality of welfare dependency. The critical point is conditionality. The measures only work if we apply the sanctions," (RSI).

The interviewee is a strong supporter of the measure and its logic of opposition to welfare dependency. His arguments make us understand how the principle of conditionality is very demanding and for this can materialize in a wide range of practices inconsistent with the

stated objectives. Actually, there are more disenchanted or instrumental positions as we glimpse at the following interview excerpt:

> "Social services did not believe in the project and saw it as a resource to be used to boost income. The problem was there was no desire to get involved in the project," (E).

In practice, this gave rise to strategies of adaptation rather than outright opposition. The negotiation of objectives is the prevailing strategy, a combination of realism and exploiting the opportunities offered by the measure.

> "It is better to work on limited but achievable goals, which at least make sense. Major projects are pointless if the tools to carry them out are lacking. For 90% of people, the priority is work. The goal might then be the production of a CV, a demonstration of how to find a job, create an e-mail address, explain how to contact agencies offering temporary employment. You want work, fine, but what can you do?" (E).

Realism does not necessarily mean giving up, but instead, relying on the secondary aspects of the measure.

> "I get angry when I hear that the measure is useless. Yes, it has come out of the blue and some situations offer little room for maneuvers. However, in some cases it produces good results. I am not saying that it is decisive in finding work but it opens up new things, different realities, and points of reference. Talking to someone else, even for the social workers and professionals, breaking the routine and engaging with someone from outside, can be really useful, especially for situations in which there is the will to act," (E).

The downsizing of the project and the weakening of the conditional nature of the measure go hand-in-hand. Usually, this does not entail explicit, agreed strategies, but tacit changes to everyday routines. Because of this, the difference between the objectives that the measure should pursue and those actually pursued is a source of great tension in organizational interactions.

> "If our assessment is that this person cannot work, we may still be able help them, but there must be honesty of purpose. At some point, we must stop and not send them to sign a Personalized Service Pact involving tasks and duties that we know very well that they cannot abide by," (RSI).

Organizational cultures and practices face their greatest challenge when beneficiaries default. Of course, different actors react differently to the obligation to impose penalties, depending on their approach, their values, their professional codes, and work experience, but for everybody this is certainly one of the main areas of friction and open conflict.

> "In no case was the support suspended even if it would have been right to suspend it. In 70% of cases, the onus was put back on me, so I alone fought for it," (E).

The variety of negotiations that arises around the conditional nature of the measure underlines the importance of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1980), with discretion and powers of action even in quite restricted contexts. Moreover, in this specific case, it highlights some paradoxical aspects of the obligation of autonomy as the basis for a project for activation. The possibilities for beneficiaries to access autonomy, seen through the eyes of those who seek to increase them, vary widely:

"We have seen all kinds of situations. There are people who have discovered possibilities of inclusion that they did not know. In other cases, people told me 'I have to come here otherwise they will take away my benefits'. If they did not come before, why should they come now? In some cases, people say: 'I thought I had lost hope, but now I have found opportunities'. There are also those who admit to working illegally," (AS).

Paradoxically, the obligation for activation also applies to situations where the search for autonomy through work has long been undermined by the lack of opportunities and institutional resources.

"The answer that better conveys this idea is: 'You did not call me before, why now when I am asking for help from the Municipality?' The tragedy is that they are right. It is true that we never called them. We do not have the time or the staff to do the work of adequate intermediation with local companies. When people do come here, we must give them answers and apply the conditionality," (RSI).

5 Social Innovation Practices: The WeMi-Welfare Milan Project

The WeMi-Welfare Milan Project is certainly among the most interesting cases - and narratives - regarding Social Innovation in the Italian context of local welfare.

Launched in 2015 with funding from a banking foundation, the project is managed by the Milan Municipality, which created a network of subjects - university and third-sector organizations – with the aim of, "offering everyone the opportunity to easily access the new system of home care services of the City of Milan," (http://wemi.milano.it/). It concerns all citizens who need care and can pay for accredited home care services as part of the municipal provision.

There are many potentially innovative aspects that are interconnected: the importance of the space in terms of both the physical setting - the aesthetic quality of design and furnishings - and the relationship with the neighborhood - the conditions of accessibility and physical proximity; the centrality of information technologies in order to facilitate the use of services; and the coordination of supply and demand through joint planning and practices of shared services. The latter is a key issue in the project, as stated on the website:

"In the WeMi areas, the provision of shared services will be encouraged: one or more baby-sitters shared among several children from the same neighborhood/school, family care-givers shared among the inhabitants of the same condominium, welfare services shared among the workers of a company. Sharing solutions among several families or between employees of the same company, between parents of the same school or tenants of the same condominium, means creating new bonds or strengthening existing ones and helps to optimize the resources of everyone, the public and the private," (http://wemi.milano.it/).

The project is currently based in eleven centers in different areas of the city - plus a central coordination center - in which social workers from third-sector organizations give counselling on paid care services. The centers are designed to intermediate between citizens and the system of provision (private but regulated by the Municipality), but also foster innovation processes to bring out new needs and new solutions.

"WeMI is not a service, the image comes to mind of elastic, something that stretches and then returns to its original shape, not an amorphous mass that encompasses everything but something that seeks to work together with you with the goal of making citizens as autonomous as possible," (O).

The intention to build a framework based on accessibility and openness is very clear from the location. Being physically on the street, "within everyone's reach," "out in the open," (V) is the main feature. In two centers, the social workers are literally "on display." In others, access is more mediated. One of the first centers built is located in a bar - normally crowded with young people - and the social workers work in the back of the premises, only partly sheltered from the noise and gaze of the patrons. Listening and openness are continually cited as underpinning the skills, roles, and working models:

"We don't have a predetermined pattern when we do interviews with people ... We let them tell us everything they feel inside and then our job is just to pick out the relevant issues and act on them," (T).

Furthermore, locating the centers in the neighborhoods entails a combination of strategies to facilitate citizens' access, on one hand, with strategies to open up to the outside, on the other. WeMi, in fact, draws on a range of abilities quite different from those traditionally brought into play by social workers in contexts focused on individualized performance or on an established repertoire of responses: "capacity for settling, negotiation and proactive listening with citizens and the community they belong to," (CN).

Therefore innovation is rolled out at the neighborhood level in its twin pillars: relation-based joint planning and the cognitive reconfiguration of problems and solutions. It is not just a question of being an access point but of generating "new ways of responding to needs" which means thinking and acting "as builders of solutions in the territory," (CL).

From this point of view, the rethinking of conventional working methods is obligatory, since it is crucial to create the conditions under which needs can emerge and resources can be activated.

"We have to go where the people are. Any social worker who waits for people to come to him or her is not welcome here. You have to go and seek people out. It's not 'come to me' but 'where are you, are you interested?'" (V).

The development of new ways of working raises questions about the relationship between the individual and collective dimensions aiming to boost the centrality, in the social sphere, of the links between people and contexts.

"We need to get away from the individualized view that it must be about charity. It is about taking care of the collective and community well-being as well. So I also see this dimension of connectivity, WeMi as a service that brings connectivity," (CN).

However, the typical problems of innovation were also brought to the forefront. Firstly, the risk of failure: the case of the center based in the bar is highly symbolic in terms, but rather modest in practice. The location does not meet the interests of inhabitants and it attracts very low numbers.

Secondly, there is the subjective burden of innovation. On one hand, there is the tendency to focus on opportunities that innovation imply regarding professional development and quality of work. On the other, there is the difficulty of coping with the lack of established routines. The plurality of viewpoints that co-planning requires is considered a resource, but it is not easy to pull them together in a shared perspective: "the beauty of this work is that there are no obvious answers. But this produces a sense of disorientation," (V).

Moreover, the classic problem of social service systems must be emphasized: the scarce availability of resources. The financial support that made it possible to launch the project has come to an end and the key issue now is economic sustainability. Innovation is likely to remain confined to the gaps in local welfare, if not disappear altogether. The intrinsically ephemeral and contingent nature of the project – due to its temporary nature - is combined with the fragility of social innovation, amplifying the risk of being lost. Besides, in order to evolve, thought must be given to how WeMi can connect and coordinate with the system of welfare services as a whole, therefore, also with standard, conventional social services. In any case, there is a risk of a separation between those who can afford to innovate and those who cannot – due to different mandates, resources, and constraints.

6   Conclusions

In focusing on Social Investment and Social Innovation, this paper has tried to shed light on the two opposite but complementary faces of the governance of social services, looking in particular at the organizational/institutional practices with which services deal with changing social citizenship. The empirical evidence highlights the areas of action and discretion long identified in the literature as an intrinsic attribute of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1980), those who implement policies - translating them, shaping them, and orienting them to specific circumstances, people, and contexts.

In the case of services involved in the SAI, this area is used strategically, and often tacitly, to mitigate or neutralize aspects of the measure considered too restrictive and constricting. In the case of WeMi, this is fully highlighted and enhanced as a resource to implement skills and ways of working that draw on the ability to redefine problems and solutions together with other people.

With regard to intervention tools, both cases mainly refer to the instrument of the project. Yet in one case it incorporates the individualized and obligatory logics of the contract and feeds the confrontation and the friction between divergent positions; in the other case, it turns towards the collective and interactive dimension of co-planning, and acts as a source of innovation, but puts a burden on people engaged in highly uncertain work contexts.

The two scenarios also differ in the type of user: so-called social cases, that is, poverty or the risk of poverty on one hand, and the need for care mostly from well-resourced subjects and families, on the other. This scenario reveals the risk of establishing a two-speed system of social services. In other words, we are faced with two distinct social worlds that are only intelligible when interconnected: the world of assistance to the needy and to the poor, where the priority of overcoming the logic of the welfare dependence stressing autonomy involves social workers and users in a role based on mutual obligations that are often mutually disregarded; and the world of the proactive and generative world of sharing which, starting from the need to identify new solutions to care needs, enhances the role of citizens as partners while reserving the investment in change for "light" demand and "normality."

This twin track refers to the different tools and degrees of treatability that services officials and social workers assign to social questions due to the greater or lesser correspondence with the institutional mandate, the repertoires of answers and resources, and the parameters of autonomy and well-being. In other words, not only the services for activation, but also, those for innovation tend to identify their own users by implementing explicit or implicit selection strategies.

Indeed, what the two worlds share is just as important as where they differ. In fact, common selectivity allows us a glimpse of the common way inclusive and universal rights are bracketed. Both the activation in its conditional/restrictive version, with the associated adjustments in practice, and the innovation that focuses on the generative power of social aggregation, are integral parts of a broader framework that tends to obscure or neglect the vocabulary and devices of social rights conceived in the terms of the Marshall's perspective of social citizenship.

As a consequence, the future is fraught with uncertainty, due to the scarce availability of resources. Innovation is inherently susceptible to being ephemeral. Measures to combat poverty such as Support for Active Inclusion, and the others that have followed, are influenced by budget choices and spending priorities.

It is certainly true that the analysis should be extended to the two specific welfare contexts as a whole to more effectively take account of differences and their implications, but the point is that both lead to the same stratified accumulation of processes that, across different levels - not only local - have gradually formed and strengthened in the discourses and practices the conditions for putting social rights in brackets.

To close, it must be said that the narrow field of observation presented here can give indications regarding the direction for further research. Two areas concern the following questions: whether and how knowledge and skills regarding activation and innovation effect processes of building individual and collective capabilities based, à la Sen, on the development of substantial freedoms; whether and how using critical issues as resources to define roles, powers, and models of action can support dynamics for learning. A close look on the practices is clearly fundamental in order to answer both these questions. At the same time, situations have to be analyzed in the wider – meso and macro - context of the current evolution and involution of welfare.

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