

Tra l'incudine e il martello. Regioni e nuovi rischi sociali in tempi di crisi, edited by Valeria Fargion and Elisabetta Gualmini, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013, 280 pp., €22.00, ISBN 978-88-15-24115-3

This book – edited by Valeria Fargion and Elisabetta Gualmini – lies at the intersection between literature on the Italian welfare state on one side and the institutional performances of the Italian regions on the other. According to the editors these two themes are inextricably linked. This is essentially so for two reasons: firstly, because in Italy there are many differences in terms of employment, income levels and thus protection depending on one's geographic location; secondly, because the reform of the Italian Constitution which was approved in 2001, greatly expanded the discretionary power(s) of the regions regarding a growing number of policy areas, including the so-called “new social risks”.

In this respect, we can easily understand why the editors decided to carry out a territorial comparison among five Italian regions: Piemonte, Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, and Puglia. These regions were chosen very appropriately with the aim of highlighting various social policy governance models. In more detail, Lombardia (and to a lesser extent, Piemonte) appear to be characterised by a strong “market-oriented” model, Emilia-Romagna and Toscana by an opposing strong “social-planning” model, and finally Puglia by a weaker model in which the instruments of regulation are poorly formalised due to the absence of an efficient and effective bureaucracy.

The book highlights the transition, now completed, from the welfare state to the welfare regions. In doing so, it focuses on three analytical dimensions which are common to almost all the sectional chapters (with the exception of the chapter concerning income support for the working poor by Granaglia, Castaldo and Carrieri): *i*) the reconstruction of regional lawmaking and the analysis of the policy paradigms that inspired it; *ii*) the governance models, namely the horizontal and vertical relationships among public institutions and between public and private actors; *iii*) the arenas of implementation, namely the regional bureaucratic and administrative capacity of producing legislative measures which have a real impact on citizens.

In my opinion, this methodological aspect represents one of the added values of this research: by extending the empirical analysis to the implementation stage, it is possible to examine certain details and dynamics which would have been impossible to evaluate if we only take into consideration the lawmaking stage. In other words, this book goes beyond the classical research design of literature regarding institutional performance, thus proving that both the political variables and policy paradigms exert an important operant conditioning, but the administrative abilities of the different regional bureaucracies count even more. This is even more the case in the context which was consolidated following the 2007 financial crisis, with increasing social needs and decreasing economic resources.

As already mentioned, the empirical body of the book is composed of six chapters dealing with six distinct policy sectors included in the new social risks area: *a*) long-term care programmes for people who are not self sufficient (Fargion: 37-72); *b*) health care policies (Toth and Carboni: 73-102); *c*) policies for reconciling work and family (Confalonieri and Canale: 103-132); *d*) initiatives for the integration of immigrants and

their families (Campomori and Caponio: 133-162); *e*) social security cushions in derogation (Mulè and Di Stefano: 163-192); *f*) tax credit policies in favour of the working poor (Granaglia, Castaldo and Carrieri: 193-228).

In the analysis of the policies concerning long-term care, Valeria Fargion shows very clearly how, in the face of quite precise national guidelines, the implementation of those guidelines was carried out quite differently at local level, with Lombardia being very distinct from the other regions.

The high level of variability among territories is also clear in the study of health care policies carried out by Federico Toth and Nadia Carboni in the second chapter: if it is true that the logic of 'de-hospitalisation' is under investigation in all five regions, it is equally true that regional organisational structures tend to be divided between models favouring integration (Emilia-Romagna and Toscana) and models characterised by a clear separation between the public sector and private players (Lombardia and Piemonte); while Puglia seems to work pragmatically, seizing insights from both the above-mentioned models.

In the third chapter, Maria Antonietta Confalonieri and Laura Canale focus on the analysis of policies for reconciling work and family. This chapter shows how important the impact of the political colour of the regional majority can be. In other words, in this case a high level of conditioning is exercised by two opposed policy paradigms; the former involving the dominance of the market and considering the family as the central actor, and the latter which is based on the State and private associations in a combined manner, and where the target of policies is the individual rather than the family.

The same sensitivity to changing policy paradigms underpinning the different governmental majorities can be found in the fourth chapter, where Francesca Campomori and Tiziana Caponio deal with the analysis of immigration policies: since this policy sector is highly salient and politicised, the kind of policy paradigm inspiring regional governments is very influential, both in the decision-making arena as well as in the implementation stage.

In the fifth chapter, focusing on social security cushions in derogation, Rosa Mulè and Livia Di Stefano show very clearly how, in a different way compared to other policy areas under investigation, the variable which best explains the implementation of the approved measures is the degree of unionisation: this benefits regions with collective bargaining traditions at the expense of regions such as Puglia, where consultation between policy makers on one side and social actors on the other has only recently entered into the management culture.

The sixth chapter, written by Elena Granaglia, Angelo Castaldo and Vincenzo Carrieri, differs from all the other chapters in the book, as it does not address a public policy already in effect in Italy: the protection of and income support for the so-called working poor. By making a comparison with similar measures adopted in Great Britain, France and Sweden, the authors list all the different reasons concerning efficiency and equity which can be put forward in favour of the measure; however, they also conveniently put us on guard against some possible risks.

This sixth chapter – albeit very interesting and well discussed – looks quite detached from the rest of the book, both theoretically and methodologically. Although it is difficult to disagree with the statement that 'if the crisis represents an opportunity to reconsider the type of society and the welfare state, then the issue of the policies in

support of the working poor does not appear to be easy to circumvent' (p.195), there is a trade-off between the relevance of the theme and the overall coherence of the book.

Finally, in the concluding chapter Valeria Fargion expertly reconstructs the overall profile of the actions carried out by each region: Lombardia is clearly market- and family-oriented; Toscana appears to be the complete opposite of Lombardia; Emilia-Romagna is similar to Toscana, but less ideological and more pragmatic; Piemonte is strongly dependent on the political colour of the regional majority; Puglia is the region where the characteristics of bureaucracy have the greatest impact. Moreover, the author is very persuasive in stating that the empirical evidence collected in the book confirms the importance of the territorial dimension in the analysis of the Italian welfare state. Overall, the insufficient funding accredited to regions for addressing the growing social needs is clear proof of how the regions actually came face to face with a very difficult situation: with varying degrees of effectiveness and efficiency, nevertheless they have succeeded in developing original responses to a growing number of social challenges.

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