1. Introduction: healing the divisions – restoring the foundations for a ‘Social Europe’

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For the 113 million people living and working in European societies who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including 43 million people living in severe material deprivation, the concept of a European Social Model, however defined, is no more than an elusive dream (Eurostat, 2019). The everyday struggles and long-term scars caused by income poverty, low pay, poor-quality work and social exclusion have been evidenced as contributing to growing levels of mental and physical illness across European societies (Elliot, 2016; Marmot, 2020; OECD, 2019). In 2018, mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety disorders and alcohol and drug use disorders, affected more than one in six people across the European Union (EU) in any given year (OECD, 2019). Inequalities within social, economic and physical environments underly the complex and multi-dimensional factors contributing to mental and physical health problems (Marmot, 2020; Stafford, 2020; Urali and Oyeboode, 2004; World Health Organization, 2020).

This has been made more profound by the health emergency that European societies and societies across the world now face as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a crisis that jeopardizes the social, cultural and economic fabric of all of our lives. As recent epidemiological evidence reveals, the impact of Covid-19 is directly related to levels of poverty and related health inequalities within each society (Bedford et al., 2020; Marmot, 2020; ONS, 2020; PSE, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). Moreover, inadequate public health infrastructures and public pharmaceutical capabilities have also been revealed by the differential impact of the pandemic and concomitant strategic response in different European countries (EAPN, 2020; Marmot, 2020; Mavragani, 2020). Infodemiology has emerged as a critical tool merging new approaches to disease surveillance to facilitate the preparedness of public health care and pharmaceutical systems at a regional level in Europe (Emiliani, 2020; Mavragani, 2020; Saglietto et al., 2020).

It may be argued that recent evidence relating to the differential impact of the Covid-19 virus in Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) underlines the importance of an adequate public health infrastructure, particularly with regard to testing capacity at local level (Stafford, 2020). It may be strongly contended that the unprecedented challenges we now face across Europe demand a dual approach encouraging significant investment in public health infrastructures, and a strong drive towards more equitable economic and social conditions within European societies (Cheng and Khan, 2020; Emiliani, 2020; Marmot, 2020; Saglietto et al. 2020). This, it may be argued, forms the fundamental basis of the European Social Model.

The complex contours of inequality across European societies have given rise to socio-economic and health inequalities across and within European societies. These health inequalities have contributed to the differential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on European societies. Widening divisions between the top and bottom of the income distribution are clearly evident within European countries (Blanchet, 2019; Eurostat, 2019; Marmot, 2020; OECD, 2019). Equally, evidence relating to widening trends in inequality, poverty and social exclusion between different countries is so capacious that the notion of a single European Social Model is difficult to conceptualize or justify, particularly in the light of the current health crisis (Emiliani, 2020; European Commission, 2019b; Vlachos and Bitzenis, 2019).

Definitions of the European Social Model are located within a highly contested terrain (Ellison, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2016; Grewal, 2018; Grimmell and Giang, 2017; Jaroszynski and Rolstone, 2019; Kauppi, 2018; Wiener et al., 2019). More broadly, the notion of a ‘Social Europe’ is usually counter-poised against the concept of free-market, neo-liberal models of Europe. The uncertainty relating to the specific meaning and contribution to European integration of the European Social Model relates to both its proposed intent and effect across Europe.

Historically, the EU was established as an economic organization with the central aim of fostering integration through frictionless trade whilst retaining trade barriers against countries outside the EU (Amato et al., 2019; Antonioli et al., 2019; Ellison, 2011; Olsen, 2020). Growing awareness of the way in which economic conditions within the 1970s gave rise to widespread economic and social insecurity among EU citizens led to the establishment of the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, which provided a minimum set of social rights for all EU citizens (Council of the EU, 2008). The Charter constituted a non-binding political declaration. Critically, in 1992 the Charter was annexed as a social protocol within the Treaty on European Union. The Charter could not be established within the main body of the text due to opposition from the UK Conservative Government. As a result, the UK opted out from provisions within the Treaty leading to the adoption of a body

of European directives concerning social and employment policies. These directives related to areas such as maternity rights, working time and the regulation of collective redundancies (Council of the EU, 2008). These social and employment rights were fortified by the incorporation of the provisions within the main body of the Amsterdam Treaty. Article 11 provided a range of competencies directed at the reduction of social exclusion and maintaining stable industrial relations (European Union, 1997). Thus, whilst there is ambivalence relating to the definition of the European Social Model it is undoubtedly the case that employment and social rights have been established as a core intent of European solidarity. Reinforcing this, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), established in 2000, recognizes the intrinsic relationship between social and economic rights (Vanhercke, 2020).

Whilst employment and social rights across Europe remain subject to a range of policy interpretations and inconsistent implementation, it is nevertheless the case that most European nations have expressed a unified approach to values relating to the promotion of social protection and social dialogue (Amato et al., 2019; Bauböck, 2019; Ellison, 2014; Moro and Pacelli, 2012). Critically, however, whilst there is a clear consensus regarding the intent of the European Social Model, the establishment of a 'Social Europe' has faced many challenges. The pervasive move towards a neo-liberal Europe in recent years has led to increasing unease within and across European societies (Bauböck, 2019; Chiochetti and Allemand, 2019). In particular, reductions in public expenditure as a ratio of gross domestic product (GDP) in key areas such as education, social protection, health care and social services, together with the decreasing role of collective bargaining within industrial relations and perceptions of declining national political influence in EU decision making, have led to the rise of populism within a number of European countries (Ellison, 2017; Theodore, 2020; Wöhl et al., 2020). Indeed, this is perhaps most clearly evidenced by the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, as the UK is identified as having one of the most neo-liberal policy agendas in Europe (Cafruny and Ryner, 2003; Clarke and Newman, 2017; Taylor-Gooby and Leruth, 2018; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). The acceleration and deepening of austerity measures and deregulation of labour markets has characterized policy approaches across a number of European countries since the financial crisis of 2007–2008 exacerbating social and employment conditions (Avram et al., 2012; Bargain et al., 2017; Bauböck, 2019; Farnsworth and Irving, 2017; Gaisbauer et al., 2019). The tension between a 'Social Europe' and a 'Competitive Market Economy Europe' is clearly evident today. As Farnsworth and Irving (2017) argue, austerity is

not simply about expenditure cuts, it more accurately describes an intention towards and reconfiguration of economics and welfare states that cannot be measured or

assessed simply by reference to social spending as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP). While the intension is to dissolve the bonds of solidarity that characterized the post-war period of the welfare state building, because for neo-liberalism they have always represented constraints on freedom. It is the reconfiguration of the welfare state that is expected to achieve this outcome. (p. 103)

Underlying this, as the devastating impact of the Covid-19 virus itself reveals, the interaction between public health, work, capital, poverty, formal care and informal social care lies at the axiom of the relationship between economy and society in Europe. Calls for a new focus on a well-being economy which recognizes the centrality of the economy of care have arisen (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2018; Chertkovskaya et al., 2019; Addati et al., 2018; Marmot, 2020). This focus on a well-being economy was at the forefront of the Finnish Presidency of the Council for the EU between 1 July 2019 and 31 December 2019. The central focus of the Presidency was upon building a European ‘Economy of Wellbeing’ which fully supports the development of the welfare economy contributing to a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable Europe (Finnish Government, 2019). Fundamental to this approach was the view that the formulation of macro-economic policy requires the comprehensive analysis of its implications upon the well-being of citizens, particularly with regard to the quality of social and health care services and the prevalence of social exclusion among vulnerable groups (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2018; Chertkovskaya et al., 2019; Addati et al., 2018; Marmot, 2020).

The financial crisis of 2007–2008 led to deepening levels of income inequality across many European countries (Bargain et al., 2017; Callan et al., 2018; Whyman et al., 2014). The adoption of fiscal austerity policies designed to increase economic competitiveness across a wide range of European countries exacerbated levels of inequality within and between European nations, with a devastating impact on the well-being of citizens, particularly in countries such as Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Cyprus, Spain and the UK (Castells, 2018; Eurostat, 2019; Morlino and Sotttilotta, 2020). The intensity of the austerity measures has also undermined economic growth in both the medium and long term, particularly in those countries benefitting from support from formal ‘bail out’ measures such as Greece, Ireland, Spain, Cyprus and Portugal, which were forced to adopt stringent macro-fiscal austerity policies (Castells, 2018; de la Porte and Heins, 2016; Morlino and Sotttilotta, 2020).

Whilst there is clear evidence of the differentiated nature of austerity and welfare reform across European nation states, it is undoubtedly the case that austerity and welfare reforms have weakened the capacity of public health social protection systems to respond to the current Covid-19 crisis, especially in national settings with pre-existing high levels of economic, social and health inequalities, such as the UK (Chapman, 2017; Marmot, 2020; Viens, 2019).

Here it may be argued that austerity policies and welfare reforms legitimated as a response to the financial crisis of 2007–2008 have exacerbated social and health inequalities for vulnerable groups across Europe in recent years. It is critical that the response to the current Covid-19 crisis does not follow the same pattern. Recent epidemiological evidence has revealed that inequities in health have exacerbated the impact of the Covid-19 virus pandemic (Ahmed et al., 2020; Chapman, 2017; Krouse, 2020; Marmot, 2020; Viens, 2019). This underlines the critical need to invest in social and fiscal policies directed at reducing levels of social and health inequalities across European welfare settings.

There is also clear evidence of welfare retrenchment across European settings in recent decades. At the same time, several European countries have instituted tax and transfer policies since the crisis which have reduced levels of income inequality and relative poverty (Bargain, 2017; Callan et al., 2018; Funke et al., 2016; Whyman et al., 2014). Critically, analysis of fiscal and policy outcomes also reveals that some welfare systems are more effective than others at reducing income inequality through redistributive instruments. The Nordic countries are revealed as being the most equal European countries, but Central Eastern European countries (Slovenia and the Czech and Slovak republics) also exhibit lower levels of income inequality (Eurostat, 2019). Western European countries, such as France, Germany and the Netherlands, are close to the European average. Income inequality is above average in all Southern European countries. The highest levels of income inequality in Europe are evident in the UK and the Baltic States (Eurostat, 2019).

The value of effective fiscal and welfare systems in reducing socio-economic inequalities is also evidenced by the most recent European Quality of Life Survey, which found that in some European countries, the quality of public services had improved since the financial crisis, leading to perceived improvements in areas such as healthcare and childcare since 2011. Critically, however, the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey also revealed substantial differences between European countries (Eurofound, 2017). Demonstrating this, the UK was identified as the worst place to live in Europe for quality of life. Significant indicators underlying this were the third lowest spend on health as a percentage of GDP, below-average government spending on education, and the fourth highest retirement age in Europe. At the same time UK households face a high cost of living, with food and fuel prices being the highest in Europe. Given these variations, the influence of differential welfare regimes on outcomes for people living and working in Europe is significant.

Despite these differences the commitment of the EU Commission to a unified European Social Model is evidenced by the overarching aim of the Lisbon Treaty (2007), which was to create a more equal society, ending poverty and low pay and guaranteeing fundamental human rights (EU, 2007). These

fundamental social rights, legally enshrined within the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, included social protection delivered through highly developed universal systems and wealth distribution measures such as progressive taxation and minimum income (European Parliament, 2000). These rights also included fair working conditions, equality and non-discrimination and the right to conclude collective agreements. All legislation enacted by the EU must comply with the Charter. The Court of Justice for the EU¹ has the power to remove legislation that does not comply with the Charter (Hoevenaars, 2018; Horsley, 2018; Krenn, 2018; Schmidt, 2018; Shaw, 2018).

Reinforcing this judicial capacity, the European Court of Human Rights has jurisdiction to make decisions with regard to complaints submitted by individuals and states related to violations of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.² This convention focuses on civil and political rights of individuals living and working in Europe. Recent studies have revealed a strong correlation between the degree of compliance with judgements made by the court and the quality of democratic governance in member states (Lang and Bell, 2018; Von Staden, 2018). Changes to laws, policies and practices required by judgements made by the European Court of Human Rights are very much reliant on the quality of democracy within each member state. In particular, diverse liberal democracies may exploit all available options to minimize the domestic impact of court judgements on their own framework of law, policies and practices (Lang and Bell, 2018; Von Staden, 2018). This diversity is illustrative of the limits of Europe-wide effective judicial governance over human rights across the EU. Nevertheless, it remains the case that when taken together the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights do represent the judicial institutionalization of principles of social, economic, civil and political rights for people living and working in Europe. As such they provide legal protections and legal redress for people who live and work in Europe. At this critical juncture in the history of the EU itself, reinvestment in and reinvigoration of the European Social Model is reliant on the judicial effectiveness of both of these institutions.

More broadly, the advancement of a Social Europe has also been facilitated by the soft instruments of governance of the Open Social Method of Coordination (OMC). Founded on the concept of social solidarity within and between nations, the OMC has been designed to encourage the coordination of policies directed at social protection, pensions, health, social care and social inclusion of people who live and work in Europe. At the same time social policy in the EU is built on the notion of subsidiarity, rendering the effective implementation of the European Social Model reliant upon adequate levels of social solidarity within and across European nation states (Barcevičius et al., 2014; Ellison, 2011; Sirovátka and Mareš, 2011).

More broadly, the effectiveness of the OMC has been significantly weakened by the tensions between the concepts and principles underpinning notions of a 'Social Europe' and free-market, neo-liberal models of Europe. Critically, however, recent contributions have evidenced the significant role that the OMC has played in encouraging flexible kinds of policy-making and cooperation between EU-level, national and sub-national governments across European welfare systems (Vanderbroucke, 2017). Indeed, the OMC has strengthened the influence of the European Social Model by enabling monitoring and benchmarking of welfare policies across different welfare systems. In addition, the OMC facilitates the coordinated use of EU funding instruments aimed at rebalancing economic and social inequalities between wealthier and poorer regions and groups within the EU.

Superseding the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, the EPSR provides the legal framework for the operationalization of EU funding instruments designed to address these imbalances. Established in 2017, the EPSR addresses 20 central principles and rights designed to support fair and well-functioning labour markets. These principles and rights are embedded within three chapters: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; and social protection and inclusion. Despite these principles, recent evidence has pointed to a growing liberalization of the European Social Model, particularly with regard to increased emphasis on flexible labour markets; wage moderation; a reduction in relative pension levels and social security entitlements; reductions in expenditure on public health care services, social services and education; and the privatization of social and health care services over the last three decades (Amato, 2019; Callan et al., 2018). These tendencies have been accentuated since the financial crisis of 2007–2008. In particular, the adoption of social measures and programmes imposed upon countries in Southern Europe as a result of bailouts provided by the Troika³ has led to a significant rolling back of welfare provisions and the privatization of public services in countries such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland (Balbona and Begega, 2015; Heins and de la Porte, 2015; Karger, 2014; Morlino and Sottillotta, 2020).

Critically, however, there is also clear evidence of attempts to respond to economic crises and financial constraints through the hybridization of welfare arrangements with an emphasis upon social innovation within the context of meta-governance of social policies across European states (Bassi and Moro, 2015; Bertin and Ellison, 2019). This is demonstrated by the adoption of distinct policy and governance approaches directed at improving the level and quality of social protection, pensions, health, social care and social inclusion of people who live and work in Europe. Exemplifying this, the EU Youth on the Move initiative advocates that each European member state implement a Youth Guarantee which ensures that all young people between the age of

16 and 25 are guaranteed a place on either a training, educational or employment programme. Whilst the UK opted out of this measure, all of the other 28 EU nations have developed a range of measures, often highly innovative and funded partly by European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding within distinct governance and welfare arrangements. In many cases hybrid arrangements are adopted at local level to ensure relevance to local priorities (Ellison et al., 2017). In Scotland, for example, a sophisticated place-based community planning and partnership approach is a statutory requirement of all 32 local authorities. A critical component of this is that local communities are given the power to select local priorities under the Community Empowerment Act (2015). A range of national and local public and third-sector organizations are then required by law to work in partnership with local communities and local authorities and businesses to respond to these priorities in partnership (Bertin and Ellison, 2019; Ellison, 2020).

This book adopts a network governance theoretical lens. This is centrally based upon the notion that there is emerging evidence across European welfare states of communities and organizations at local level initiating processes which have contributed to the construction of a shared idea of social rights and welfare policies from the bottom up. Thus, the relationship between the European Social Model at EU level and welfare measures developed at national and local level is informed by the analysis of distinct processes which have arisen within specific national contexts.

Emerging from this, the book focuses on organizational processes which are pursued in attempts to achieve these shared welfare policies. Here we argue for a move away from standardizing logic systems that claim to build a single welfare model from the top down towards an investigation of the processes experienced by people at community level with distinct regulatory forms and integrative dynamics which are embedded into local cultures. Developing this, we utilize international comparative methods to interrogate the construction of learning opportunities which are based upon concrete experiences. Within this it is clear that the EU continues to play a central role in enabling the growth of network governance by facilitating the sharing of effective forms of partnership and hybrid welfare arrangements within well-established forms of dialogue and community initiation of projects.

These specific forms of network governance are currently facilitated by key instruments of European funding such as the ESF and ERDF enabling the development of new forms of local community-initiated welfare arrangements by redistributing investment to less developed⁴ and transition regions.⁵ It is nevertheless clear that the scale of regional inequalities and inequalities at individual and household level across European settings reveals the immense social and economic challenges that lie ahead. As recent research reveals,

whilst austerity measures and welfare reforms have exacerbated these inequalities it is the fundamental reconfiguration of the relationship between economics and society which is driven by neo-liberal economics that has undermined the social and political fabric of Europe in recent years (Bailey, 2017; Caterino and Hansen, 2019; Della Porta et al., 2017; Farnsworth and Irving, 2017; Kamali and Jönsson, 2019; Palley, 2018; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017; Tett and Hamilton, 2019). As has been argued, the current Covid-19 health pandemic has exposed the depth and extent of health inequalities in Europe (Marmot, 2020). The relationship between economy and society in Europe has stimulated a growing literature in the field in recent years (Büllesbach et al., 2017; Burroni et al., 2012; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017).

We argue that investment strategies should support the effective governance of welfare measures developed as part of bottom-up, place-based, collaborative strategies. This requires the transition from a logic of hierarchical regulation to a process of network governance. These processes require a focus on the concept of community and the construction of its capacity to be resilient. The logic of social investment, and the need for measures and arrangements that facilitate the mobilization of individual and collective resources within distinctive welfare cultures and systems, are central to this process. In arguing for a cross-sectoral, horizontal approach to governance we also underline the central importance of the effective judicial implementation of the EPSR. The EU itself is strongly committed to this in principle:

To strengthen its economic and social performance, the EU must fully deliver on the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. While the economic recovery helped to improve employment and social outcomes across Europe, action is needed to ensure the enjoyment of social rights and to counter the risks posed by a growing social divide. (European Commission, 2019a, p. 10: Section 5, Fairness)

Critically, however, a growing number of commentators argue that the fundamental source of the growing social divide in Europe is neo-liberalism itself (Farnsworth and Irving, 2017; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). There is growing literature relating to alternative, economic models offering a progressive, just and environmentally sustainable way forward (Dubb, 2016; Kristensen, 2016; Stiglitz, 2020). A unifying characteristic of these models is the promotion of cross-sectoral, horizontal approaches to the governance and mobilization of social investment measures that facilitate the realization of individual and collective resources within distinctive welfare cultures and systems. New organizational forms, such as social enterprise ownership at the urban community level, community development corporations and community development financial institutions and employee stock ownership plans (ESOP), provide the basis for a more comprehensive strategy for shared well-being at local level.

The actualization of individual and collective resources at community level also relies on social investment measures which recognize the critical importance of progressive government policies such as accessible and equitable lifelong worker training and education, and investment in social care and child care for the well-being of citizens (Bonoli et al., 2017; Cantillon et al., 2017; Ellison, 2014; Hemerijck, 2018; Kristensen, 2016).

A unifying theme across these economic proposals is the importance of balanced, democratic and sustainable social economies. Illustrating this, Joseph Stiglitz (2020) argues for the construction of a balanced social economy that advances the well-being of people who live and work in distinct societies. A fundamental pre-requisite of this is the conceptualization and operationalization of prosperity as a symbiotic relationship between social, economic, political and environmental activity, requiring equilibrium among social, public and private sectors of society. Crucially, Stiglitz (p. 8) argues that

the economy is not an end in itself but a means to an end to improving living standards and well-being of the people within the country in ways that do not impose harm on people outside the country.

Ecological economic approaches endorse this view by promoting alternative economic models which centre on human development and ecological regeneration (Hanaček et al., 2020; Milani, 2000; Muradian and Pascual, 2020; Spash, 2020). Milani (2000) articulates a fundamental premise of ecological economic models in his re-definition of the concept of wealth itself. In essence, he says, wealth is conceptualized in qualitative terms as individual and community well-being and ecological regeneration rather than the quantitative accumulation of money and material objects.

In summary, the central premise of this book is that an effective and sustainable relationship between public health, work, capital, formal care and informal social care is the central generating mechanism of a well-functioning well-being economy. In light of this, we argue that to repair the social fabric of Europe we need to invest substantially in locally driven welfare strategies which address inter-regional inequalities as well as inequalities faced at individual level by people who live and work in Europe. Here we argue for the development of place-based approaches involving collaborative networks and partnerships between different sectors and organizations in society which are designed to respond to priorities identified by people within local communities in distinct European societies.

At the same time, the book clearly evidences the scale and depth of economic, social and health inequities and the intersectional vulnerabilities suffered by a substantial number of people who live and work in Europe. We also recognize the need to address issues of economic democracy and the

effectiveness of the judicial processes in supporting economic and social rights of people living and working across Europe. In particular, the book argues that the effectiveness of place-based network governance strategies is dependent upon the recalibration of work and well-being in knowledge-driven, environmentally sustainable economies of well-being. Equally, the effectiveness of network governance is contingent upon substantial investment in coherent, locally relevant and cross-sectoral, interorganizational services and labour market measures. More broadly, the book evidences the symbiotic relationship between the architecture of the European Social Model, characterized by redistributive, place-based network governance and innovative alternative economic infrastructures such as the 'foundational economy'. Here it is argued that the relevance and effectiveness of the European Social Model within post-Covid-19 European societies is contingent upon the equitable and sustainable delivery of universal public services and measures vital to the health and well-being of all who live and work in Europe.

NOTES

1. The Court of Justice for the EU operates as the supreme court of the EU in all matters of EU law. It is considered by many to be 'the most powerful and influential international court that is realistically possible'.
2. The European Court of Human Rights is an international court which was established by the European Convention on Human Rights.
3. The Troika was the decision-making group comprising the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The use of the term came to the fore during the financial 'bailouts' of Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Ireland, which were made necessary by potential economic insolvency within these states caused by the financial crisis of 2007–2008.
4. That is, where GDP per inhabitant is less than 75 per cent of the EU average.
5. That is, where GDP per inhabitant is between 75 per cent and 90 per cent of the EU average.

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