

Introduction

**Flavia Martinelli, Anneli Anttonen and
Margitta Mätzke**

Publicly provided in-kind social services are a key component of the welfare state in most of Europe, albeit their development trajectories, coverage and legal status still vary considerably among countries. The way such services are provided and made available to people bears significantly on social and territorial cohesion, on the gender balance and, ultimately, on the wealth of any society. On the other hand, while much is discussed and written about social policy and welfare systems, social services are somewhat neglected. Although they have progressively gained a stronger foothold in national legislations and social policy agendas, their status remains weaker compared to health or education services. Moreover, because of the austerity measures brought about by the 2008 financial crisis, they have been the primary object of cuts and reorganisation.

And yet, from a social capital and social investment perspective social services should earn much more attention. Cuts in the social service systems have, in fact, very severe consequences on older people and people with disabilities, as well as on households – women – with small children or living in poverty, i.e. on people whose labour market position is weak. The public provision of in-kind services, more than monetary transfers and benefits, represents a social investment that not only generates welfare, social inclusion and jobs, but also reduces future social risks. The theoretical debate on social policy and welfare states needs thus to be enriched by comparatively informed research on the restructuring of social services. This is also a field where national, regional and local variations are large and greater empirical evidence is needed.

The aim of this book is to revive the discussion on publicly funded social services and their changes, with a focus on care services (for small children, older persons and other people that are not self-sufficient) and services that enhance the social inclusion of vulnerable groups (immigrants, minorities, recipients of social assistance, homeless people). It addresses the changes that have affected the organisation and supply of publicly supported social services in Europe over the last thirty years. The restructuring of welfare

states that started in the late 1980s throughout Europe has profoundly affected the governance of social services, possibly more than other welfare provisions. There have been changes in the ‘vertical’ division of responsibility among different government levels, as well as in the ‘horizontal’ division of responsibility among service providers – the state, the family, the market and the community. There have been changes in the way social services are financed, organised and produced, with the introduction of ‘market mechanisms’ in the management of services and in the selection of providers, as well as in access parameters (e.g. with the introduction of user fees). All such changes were aimed at reducing public expenditures, while at the same time democratising governance, improving the quality of services and increasing the satisfaction of users. In the last few years, the intensification of old and new social risks, together with the financial crisis of 2008, have added further stress on the capability and/or willingness of welfare states to support social services, albeit with different intensities and outcomes, depending on countries and their welfare state traditions and trajectories.

The book conveys the main findings of the COST Action IS1102 *SO.S. COHESION – Social services, welfare states and places: the restructuring of social services in Europe and its impact on social and territorial cohesion and governance*, which was operational from 21 November 2011 to 30 April 2016. The Action involved 24 countries, over 40 research and university institutions and close to 90 among researchers and scholars, about half of whom were early stage researchers (for more information see the Action website at <http://www.cost-is1102-cohesion.unirc.it> and the COST website at http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/IS1102). The aim of the Action was to share and critically compare research on the restructuring of social services in Europe over the last thirty years – but with a focus on the period after the financial crisis of 2008 – and on the social impacts of these changes, from five key perspectives:

1. *Cost/quality effectiveness*. Did changes in the organisation of social services bring about the expected reduction in public expenditures, increase in users’ choice and satisfaction, as well as improved quality of services?
2. *Democratic governance*. Did the vertical re-scaling of authority among different government levels and the horizontal re-mix of responsibility among different suppliers bring about increased citizen participation and empowerment, greater democracy in decision-making processes, improved subsidiarity and optimised cooperation among actors?
3. *Social and territorial cohesion*. Did the restructuring maintain or improve universal access, i.e. access to social services for all, regardless

of origin, income, gender and place, while ensuring diversified and customised services?

4. *Labour market of care and social work.* What are the consequences of the restructuring of social services on the training, skills and/or contractual conditions of social service workers?
5. *Gender.* How has the restructuring of social services affected the social position of women, in terms of access to the labour market, quality of employment, gender divisions of labour in the household?

As already mentioned, our COST Action focused especially on care services (for early childhood, older people, people with disabilities) and services for the inclusion of other vulnerable groups (immigrants, recipients of social assistance, minorities such as Roma, as well as homeless people). Among these services, however, care for older people has moved centre stage. This is partly because, while early childhood education and care is generally on the rise in most European countries, also as a consequence of the Barcelona targets, services for older people – and many other vulnerable groups – are bearing the brunt of the recent restructuring.

The book is based primarily on the information and empirical evidence gathered in the course of the COST Action on the restructuring of these services in different places. The core of the Action was the comparison of national and regional trajectories, as well as of ‘case studies’ on changes in the provision of services in specific places (cities and regions), mostly of a qualitative and evaluative nature (review of research and documents, interviews of privileged witnesses, field work, etc.), but often backed by statistical data. These country and regional reports and these case studies were drafted and discussed in the course of the Action and some of them were later published in different forms. Throughout the book they are referred to as CAPs (COST Action Papers or Presentations) and their full references are spelled out in the bibliography of each chapter.

They confirm that in Europe there is a great variety in social service and care provision models. However, this diversity, while a challenge for comparative purposes, also proves to be an asset. A major strength of the book is that no ‘single’ case study is presented, whereas all chapters engage in some form of ‘transversal reading’ across places, service fields and/or policy tools, from a given perspective or focusing on a particular theme, while sharing a common conceptual and analytical framework. Although it cannot be considered a strict ‘comparative’ methodology, this ‘transversal reading’ approach contributes to highlight differences and similarities in restructuring trends across places. It also contributes to identify the main issues and implications of the restructuring of social services and the key challenges for an inclusive Europe.

The book includes 19 chapters, grouped in five parts. Part I includes three chapters which contribute to set the general context and conceptual framework. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the debates on social services as a key, but very specific, component of both the service sector and the welfare state, stressing the need for a time- and space-sensitive approach to understand the great variety of national and regional restructuring trajectories. The author then proceeds to 'unpack' the main trends involved in the restructuring of social services and identifies a number of key analytical dimensions. Chapter 2 addresses EU policy discourses, strategies and regulations concerning the organisation of social services in Europe, stressing the ambiguous position of social services within the EU regulatory and strategic framework and highlighting the unsolved tension between competition policy and social policy. The authors also draw attention to some inadequacies of the EU Cohesion policy to redress imbalances in this domain, despite its ambitious inclusive goals. Chapter 3 addresses the policy 'conceptions' underlying the designs of social service systems, by examining their core commitments (priorities) and target orientations. Priorities vary between emancipatory and disciplining commitments, whereas targets can concern individuals, communities or polities. The approach, illustrated through three case studies, contributes to a clearer understanding of institutional designs, beyond political rhetoric.

Part II addresses the transformations of the governance of social services and includes five chapters. Chapter 4 retraces the overall evolution of social service systems in post-industrial Europe, highlighting its 'success' aspects (expansion, institutionalisation, professionalisation), but also its 'tragic' loopholes and limitations (incompleteness, selectivity, inequality of access, residualism). It also emphasises how recent changes in the governance of social services, such as re-privatisation, competition among providers, and the growing role of for-profit providers, are bringing about a 'disorganisation' in social service systems. Chapter 5 addresses the 'vertical' division of authority concerning social services within the state, stressing the re-scaling processes that have occurred in the last decades, both upward (towards the EU) and downward (towards the local scale). Based on a number of COST Action case studies from several European countries, the authors highlight the dangers of the devolution rhetoric, especially when social services are concerned, since in many instances the decentralisation of responsibility has involved a devolution of austerity and has led to growing territorial differences, reduced accountability and an unsustainable burden for local authorities and communities. Chapter 6 is somewhat complementary to the previous chapter, as it addresses changes in the 'horizontal' division of responsibility among the state, the market, the third sector and the family. Drawing on case studies from

the Action in several European countries, the authors identify the main 'directions' of this 're-mix' – marketisation, re-familialisation and re-communitarisation – stressing how such trends can be formal or informal, passive or active. Chapter 7 explores how the 'activation turn' in social policy has affected the horizontal division of responsibility at the local level in the case of social assistance services in four European countries. Drawing on evidence from the Action, the authors highlight how the new forms of collaboration now encouraged among different providers at the local level are highly discretionary and hence depend not so much on the national institutional framework, but rather on the initiative of local actors, allowing for enhanced territorial differences. There is also a 'creaming of the crop' effect that leads to prioritising the less needy recipients. Chapter 8, the last chapter in this part of the book, explores the gender implications of recent changes in care provisions for early childhood and older people in two quite different European countries: Spain and the UK. The chapter highlights how in both countries the financial crisis has negatively affected the relative progress towards gender equality and is reinforcing the traditional gendered division of labour. It also shows how different policy tools – parental leave, in-kind services and cash benefits – have differentiated impacts.

Part III of the book focuses on recent trajectories in the public provision of services for older people. It includes four chapters. Chapter 9 offers an overview of the evolution of these services, as observed in the course of the Action in several European countries, according to five 'dimensions' or dichotomies: centralisation/decentralisation; direct provision/outsourcing; health/care; home-based care/institutional care; formal/informal care. The authors identify striking similarities in a number of trends, although they also highlight that impacts are conditioned by the specific national regulatory traditions. Chapter 10 focuses on the Nordic countries and the process of 'marketisation' they are experiencing, especially Finland and Sweden. The authors stress how the introduction of market logics in the public provision of services for older people and the opening up to for-profit providers is significantly changing, 'from within', the Nordic model, especially in what concerns the role of the state and the position of users (now 'customers'), although social impacts are still tempered by the long tradition of universalism characteristic of these countries. Chapter 11 addresses the de-institutionalisation strategy implemented in two Transition countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In presenting two very different local case studies, the authors highlight how despite very similar national strategies – based on decentralisation and 'ageing in place' – the actual implementation of de-institutionalisation beyond discourses and legislation is contingent on regional and local capabilities,

both financial and institutional. They also underscore that, despite more or less successful de-institutionalisation processes, users' preferences for institutional care remain high. Chapter 12 also addresses de-institutionalisation processes, but in three Mediterranean countries. Here too, the authors stress the gap between de-institutionalisation strategies and actual implementation, showing how the ineffectual implementation of home-based care for older people, while institutional care does not follow the growth in demand, ends up favouring a 're-familisation' of care.

Part IV of the book groups four chapters that address the socially innovative potential of local initiatives in the domain of social services. Chapter 13 focuses on the ambivalence – the 'Janus face' – of the concept of social innovation. The authors stress the different meanings given to this notion in the literature – ranging from a more radical view that emphasises the societal transformative potential of local initiatives to a more mainstream view that stresses the potential of such initiatives to fill the gaps left by the retrenchment of the welfare state – and test this ambivalence in four case studies in Europe. Chapter 14 compares two socially innovative local initiatives for the inclusion of Roma, in Austria and Hungary. In this case both initiatives exhibit empowering and transformative potential, but the authors stress the importance of multilevel governance for the sustainability of such innovative experiences. Chapter 15 addresses the role of local initiatives for the social inclusion of immigrants in two originally very different systems: Italy and the UK. The authors show that a convergence is occurring in the way both national governments are addressing the growing immigration flows, as both national governments are maintaining a firm grip over 'immigration' policies (entry), whereas 'immigrant' policies (services for their social inclusion) are decentralised at the local level. Here, third sector initiatives are increasingly filling the void of retrenching public services. Chapter 16 addresses the impact of market-oriented reforms, the financial crisis of 2008 and the ensuing austerity measures on housing and neighbourhood services. By examining a number of case studies, the authors highlight how socially innovative local initiatives are attempting to contrast the growing social exclusion generated by these trends, filling the void left by the state. They also stress the differentiated social innovation potential of such initiatives and the need for multilevel responsibility.

The last section of the book includes three chapters, where the editors present their shared interpretation of the restructuring of social services in the last thirty years, drawing on the wealth of empirical evidence gathered and compared in the course of the Action and in the book. They point out key trends and impacts, challenges and dilemmas, especially focusing on the policy implications of such findings.

Before concluding this brief presentation, we wish to stress that the book

is intended for both the academic and the policy-making, practitioners' and also users' circles. On the one hand, it will be a very useful reading for students and scholars in the fields of comparative social policy and welfare systems, urban and regional studies, sustainable development and cohesion policy; on the other, it will be a key tool for policy-makers, civil servants, civil society and users' organisers, as well as service providers at local, national and EU levels, since there is an urgent need for new comparative knowledge on European care, services and welfare systems. In fact, although theoretically and scientifically informed, the book contents and policy outlooks have a very pragmatic nature and are written in a language accessible to all, including non-academic operators, who in everyday practice aim at providing better services for their target groups, struggling with complex management and coordination problems. The open access formula, thanks to the COST Association, will maximise dissemination to this non-academic audience, which does not always have access to university libraries and cannot afford the price of academic books.

