

Considerations on the efficacy and collective legitimacy of the welfare system in the South of Italy

Fiorella Vinci*

Key-words: public action, efficacy, collective legitimation

Abstract

The sociological consideration investigates the ways through which public action may build economic efficacy and competitiveness of the welfare systems in the South of Italy. Efficacy and collective legitimation of public action are two elements of the same social process by which the search for efficacy modifies the collective mechanism of instrumental legitimation of the welfare system. An efficient public action is a sort of permanent education of the community.

Introduction

In these notes, being sociologists of public action, we suggest a reflection that rises from the observations of common sense.

In the areas of Southern Italy the inefficiency of the public action represents a recurring theme both in people's opinion and politicians and scholars judgments, at the same time, the negative effects of the welfare system, that first were conceived as economic aids with the aim of obtaining political consent, are very well-known.

* Sociologia politica, Università degli Studi di Palermo, fiorella.vinci@tiscali.it

Having as a starting point such common judgments our sociological reflection inquires the courses of public action that can – mining the welfare traps (Ferrara 1998) - build also in Southern Italy the economic efficacy and competitiveness of the welfare systems.

The exposition is divided into two parts:

In the first part are exposed some courses of public action capable of triggering governance processes and innovative economic competitiveness of the welfare systems.

In the second part are analyzed processes of collective legitimation of the welfare in the areas of Southern Italy.

Processes of the innovative governance

Scholars of the European policies and in particular of the multilevels governance, for example like Pierson and Liebfried (Pierson e Liebfried 1995) have identified two constituent dimensions of the efficacy of public action which are the following:

- The interdependence of social policies and economic policies.
- The coordination between public actions located at different government levels.

According to P.Duran, an effective public action is an action capable of giving the best possible answer to a stated definition of collective problems: in other words to resolve in short time and in a good way a definite common problem (Duran 1999).

Optimality and timeliness assume an economic conception that uses at the best the available sources limiting loss and excess and guaranteeing for an average long time the achievements.

The interdependence between social policies and economic policies and the coordination between the various government levels sends directly back to a similar economic conception of public action.

In Italy but also at European level, social policies often have different sources, aims and administration policies. Their differences more than a substantial fact seems a

“political construction” linked to precise justifications of the interference by the state in economy.

Actually, social policies and economic policies are absolute complementary to the point that they seem only different segments of public programs (Ferrera 2006; La Spina 2003). Both cannot withdraw from the economic justifications of their existence.

Recent studies on social policies have showed their economic effects in terms of growth of GDP and rate of employment (Paci 2008; Pierson 2001), at the same time, the economic policies, for example the ones regarding working activity, have considerable social effects, indicated by the creation of capital stock, individual professional self-fulfillment and by the decrease of criminal rates.

Fundamental in the comparative analysis of the social and economic policies is the consideration of their economic logic, the analysis of the coordination between public actions located at different government levels allows to explore innovative formations of public action.

In a global society and above all interconnected, the inter-government coordination seems technically aided, it is not based on the existence of an exclusive and original strategic project, nor by unambiguous public projects but by the formation and clarification of political shared guidance that can involve, in different ways, people belonging to different state offices.

Processes of collective legitimation of welfare in the areas of Southern Italy

The collective legitimation of the welfare systems in the regions of Southern Italy seem to be instrumental. Justified by an average level of the GDP, inferior compared to the European regions and by poor individual knowledge of the physical and cultural resources available, it seems to be supplied by various types of aids: individual social security, unemployment benefits; temporary work or for a fixed time, paid out by state offices.

Analyzing the welfare system that comes out from this article what is comparatively noticed is the unbalancing of its setting, it has an only marginal set in collective

services (Ferrera 1984), and what more towards the processes of social building of the right to social benefits.

This is a process that involves various individuals (citizens, state employers, professionals, trade unions, politicians) and it is collectively accepted.

It is founded not on the purpose to supply collective service but on the claim of an individual economic position that has the features of certainty, continuity and in which the individual sees himself as a passive object. The profession and above all Weber's features (Weber 2003) such as vocation, competence and responsibility towards the community are absent in this kind of claim, also absent are both the assumption of typical risk in business working world and the perception of the limits of one's own claims of public rights. The separation between the individual earned income claim and the effective participation in the production of the collective wealth is supplied both by lack of attention on the efficacy of public action and by a deformed conception. In such a cognitive process public policy is efficient if it gives an answer to an individual need by resolving it; the collective dimension of needs, at the same level of the evaluation of the costs of public presence seem unrelated to this logic.

The perverse effects of the economic enhancement of the public presence

The processes of governance suggested (the interdependence between economic policies and social policies and their intergovernmental coordination) threaten the instrumental legitimation of the welfare because they enhance the economic dimension of public presence: good timing research of the best use of the resources, research of the best possible result. According to the economic meaning of the involvements, the collective purposes interfere both at the beginning and at the end of the process of political formation and collective legitimation of the welfare. At the beginning in the attempt to give an answer to the needs of a great number of individuals, at the end in the research of a reduction of the various policies. From this point of view, the transformation from an exploitable collective process of legitimation to a type of major axiological legitimation does not appear as a radical change but as

gradual and slow, comparable to an evolution of “virtuous clientelism” . In the virtuous clientelism, the distinctive element is that the benefit from public presence is not individual but collective. Even in this change the main key is represented by the collective utility. The change of the perception of the utility from individual to collective introduces two kinds of deformed effects. From the governors point of view it introduces forms of collective responsibility, from the citizen’s point of view a non knowledge of the social right in the use of benefits. Both of these effects destroy the collective legitimation of instrumental type introducing mechanism of collective diffusion of political responsibility, that is to say a responsibility not only directed towards the whole community but also towards the future generations.

References

- DURAN P. (1999), *Penser l’action publique*, Paris, L.G.D.J.
- FERRERA M. (1984), *Il Welfare State in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- FERRERA M. (1998), *Le trappole del welfare*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- FERRERA M. (2006), *Le politiche sociali: l’Italia in prospettiva comparata*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- LA SPINA A. (2003), *La politica per il Mezzogiorno*, Bologna, Il Mulino, “Studi e Ricerche”.
- LIEBFRIED S., PIERSON P. (1995), *European Social policy, between integration and fragmentation* tr. fr. (1998), *Politiques sociales européennes entre intégration et fragmentation*, Paris, Editions l’Harmattan.
- PACI M. (2008), “Welfare, solidarietà sociale e coesione della società nazionale”, in *Stato e Mercato*, n. 82, aprile 2008, pp. 3-29.
- PIERSON P. (2001), *The New Politics of the Welfare State*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- WEBER M. (2003), *Le savant et le politique: une nouvelle traduction*, Paris, Ed. La Découverte.