



# Redesigning Local Welfare between Social Innovation and Multi-stakeholder Governance: The Case of the Municipality of Parma in Pandemic Times

Franca Maino and Celestina Valeria De Tommaso

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/irpp/3749>

ISSN: 2706-6274

**Publisher**

International Public Policy Association

---

This text was automatically generated on April 2, 2024.

---

# Redesigning Local Welfare between Social Innovation and Multi-stakeholder Governance: The Case of the Municipality of Parma in Pandemic Times

Franca Maino and Celestina Valeria De Tommaso

---

## Introduction

- 1 In the last two decades, national and local policymakers in Italy have been faced with the challenge of responding to new demands created by an aging population, immigration, and globalization under severe budgetary constraints: the welfare state has been declared to be *under pressure* (Taylor-Gooby, 2001). This predicament was exacerbated by the emergency crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic exerted strong pressure on local welfare actors and policies to adopt socially innovative modes of action and governance. The unprecedented crisis triggered by Covid-19 has brought to light at least two points for reflection. First, developments and societal challenges have led to changes in social risks and needs; nonetheless, social developments and societal issues have occurred faster than public policy interventions. Second, the adoption of austerity programs – following the financial crash in 2008 and the economic recession – has questioned the capacity of welfare states to effectively tackle emerging social needs and risks. To cope with the increasing endogenous pressure (e.g., from an aging population to increasing poverty) and scarce resources, local welfare actors are realigning their economic, ideational, and human resources to deliver tailor-made responses to a wider range of beneficiaries through co-management. By co-management, we mean:

government that co-operates with private actors in service delivery, meaning that non-governmental actors have a say in the design of the service or put time or

other resources (e.g., money, skills, expertise) in the delivery of public services (Verschuere et al., 2012, p. 1086).

- 2 These are the contextual elements that drive this article for the Special Issue “Local Governments Response to the Impact of Covid-19: Mitigation and Adaptation.” They are also the objectives that have helped the concept of social innovation to gain ground at the local level. Social innovation involves the use of new products, processes, and procedures to re-balance resource flows toward greater resilience and sustainability of local welfare and societies. During ongoing policy changes, key local actors help to foster innovation. Against this backdrop, this article poses the following research question: *How have local public actors strengthened their capacity to foster policy change through innovative and collaborative processes?* We seek to answer this question through an in-depth analysis of the case of Parma. This municipality is a privileged case for observing social innovation processes, considering collaborative governance (actors, roles, and responsibilities) alongside the introduction of innovative and integrative local welfare initiatives. The latter are aimed at filling gaps in traditional public welfare schemes and coping with emerging risks and needs in contemporary local welfare systems. Moreover, Parma is part of the Welfare Innovation Local Lab project, whose aim is the renewal of local welfare governance, interventions, and provision<sup>1</sup>. The analysis considers measures implemented at the local level for the elderly (in relation to the frail elderly) and in-work poverty, and considers co-management processes between private and public actors.
- 3 The next section presents the current literature on local welfare and social innovation. The third section addresses the research questions, hypotheses, and methodology. The fourth section focuses on the case study. The fifth section presents the analysis of the empirical results, examining the main trends in public social spending in Parma, the policy measures related to the elderly and in-work poverty, and the role of “proximity welfare”<sup>2</sup> in innovating local services over the long term. The last section attempts to answer the research questions and hypotheses by summarizing the main findings in accordance with the mainstream literature in the field of social innovation.

## **(Local) welfare under pressure: the need for social innovation**

- 4 Local welfare is recognized as a powerful driver of social innovation and is known to be a “laboratory” for fostering and constructing values such as social citizenship, social inclusion, and active citizenship (Kazepov & Barberis, 2008). The crisis of the welfare state, the need to contain costs, and the greater social demands for public intervention have led national and local authorities – which are responsible for the bottom-up implementation of welfare programs – to recalibrate and innovate their interventions (Ferrera et al. 2000). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the role of regions and municipalities in shaping social policies and protection systems increased (Andreotti et al., 2012). New societal risks and fiscal constraints also emerged from deep demographic and socio-cultural changes. The crisis of the welfare state was thus the result of both endogenous and exogenous pressures. The exogenous pressures are mainly due to European integration, with a change in the economic paradigm and financial constraints, and to globalization, because of the extreme liberalization of markets and the rise of the gig economy (Ferrera, 2007). Endogenous pressures relate

to changes in socio-demographic structures (e.g., aging of the population), changes in family structures due to changes in the labor market (e.g., the increased participation of women and expansion of the service sector), and the increasing role of public-private partnerships in delivering social services. These pressures were also due to industrial transformations, i.e., the shift to post-industrialism, then a knowledge economy, in Western Europe (Ferrera, 2007; Ferrera & Maino, 2014). The argument for “recasting the welfare state” (Ferrera et al., 2009) is that the overriding need for welfare state reforms is to identify new value combinations and institutional arrangements in national systems that are both mixed – in terms of solidarity and growth objectives – and virtuous, i.e., capable of progress on all necessary fronts. Actors at the sub-national level become institutionally and politically crucial, as evidenced by their strong political mobilization and voice, as well as by their capacity to foster governance networks and innovation (Ferrera, 2008; Maino, 2015).

- 5 The social innovation framework thus becomes relevant to add greater value to public services by catering more effectively and holistically to the needs of the population. Concerning social innovation, the European Commission defines social innovation as “new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations. These innovations can be products, services or models addressing unmet needs more effectively” (European Commission, 2013). The definition involves the use (new or renewed) of products, processes, and policy designs (or a mix of these) with the aim of changing resource flows, filling gaps and inefficiencies in systems, and tipping entire systems towards greater resilience and sustainability (Westley et al., 2013).
- 6 At the local level, although social governance and social policies are usually affected by a progressive institutional crystallization (in terms of policies and practices) that hinders institutional changes and development (Fosti, 2013), the decentralization process promotes the strengthening of local capacities to tackle societal issues. For example, local welfare has developed a robust local capacity for community building at the inter- and intra-institutional levels to develop more efficient and equal welfare services, fostering interventions aimed at strengthening *ex-ante* risk prevention (Fosti, 2013). In recent years, many studies have been conducted to highlight local innovation across European cities, with the aim of fostering social inclusion and cohesion (Gerometta et al., 2015), smart communities (Greco & Bencardino, 2014), and more efficient public services (Manzini & Staszowski, 2013). In this field of analysis, the concept of “collaborative governance” defines a new strategy of governance that brings together multiple stakeholders in common *fora* with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision-making. In the spirit of multi-stakeholder and collaborative governance (Ansell & Hash, 2008; 2020), “second welfare” is defined as a mix of innovative social programs, mainly financed by non-public resources, that support investment in vulnerable individuals facing (new) social risks and are provided by a variety of different actors and stakeholders. Second welfare is mainly rooted in the local territory but is interlinked with other public and private actors at different levels of governance (Ferrera & Maino, 2012, 2014; Maino & Ferrera, 2013). The Covid-19 pandemic fostered social innovation and contributed to the catalysis of solutions by local hybrid organizations (“welfare mix” or “collaborative governance”) to address its disruptive socio-economic consequences (Maino, 2021b). Regarding policy trajectories, the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as a “focusing event” (Birkland, 1998), that is, a

sudden and attention-grabbing event whose power advances issues on the agenda and plays a role as a potential trigger for policy change.

## Research questions, hypotheses, and methodology

- 7 Social innovation does not occur simply by introducing technological devices (den Hertog & Bilderbeek, 1999). In contrast, the redesign of functions and processes requires strong coordination among those actors whose human and financial capital contribute to making actions systematic (*ibidem*). The common ground between the actors' ideas lies in their enhanced understanding of the old paradigm in local welfare (the so-called change in "value proposition", cf. den Hertog & Bilderbeek, 1999), which has proved incapable of providing solutions and responses to current social problems and demands. Policy frameworks and politics strongly influence the operational space of civil society initiatives and promote or hinder social innovation and the pathways leading from social innovation to institutional change (Lukesch et al., 2020). The research question therefore asks: *How have local public actors strengthened their capacity to promote policy change through innovative and collaborative processes?*
- 8 A number of authors have highlighted that we do not know much about the profiles of innovation creators and executives (Voorberg et al., 2015; Berloto & Fosti, 2019; Longo & Maino, 2021). Public actors are considered to play a privileged role in financing initiatives and reallocating resources. Actors and institutional contexts matter, and they act to facilitate the drivers of social innovation. As Voorberg et al. (2015) stated, social innovation processes imply a strong involvement of hybrid organizations that promote the co-management of innovative solutions.
- 9 As regards policy change, Gore et al. (2022) and Hogan et al. (2022) distinguish five main milestones:
  - *Path initiation* is generally the result of a focusing event and ensures that attention is paid to considering alternative policy tools for specific issues.
  - *Path reinforcement* tends to occur both automatically, through the actual implementation of a set of policies, and deliberately, through the search by proponents for positive feedback on the benefits and effects of the policy.
  - *Path deviation* is a juncture at which an existing approach loses legitimacy or rationale, when a choice has to be made regarding which set of new ideas or paradigms to adopt, and thus which direction to follow.
  - *Path clearing* refers to the removal of barriers to the introduction of policies (which would previously have been difficult to agree upon). This may involve several incremental steps or cumulative interventions over a long period of time, or it may happen quickly in response to the immediate needs of a crisis. Equally, of course, there is the possibility of situations that effectively constitute "path blocking", often the result of a negotiation stalemate between the different interests involved in a particular policy arena.
  - *Path termination* is self-explanatory, heralding the end of a policy stream; this can happen at a single point in time, but is more likely to be a gradual rundown. Path termination can result in either structural or incremental policy change, or no reform at all.
- 10 To carry out an in-depth analysis of policy adaptation dynamics, one that considers private-public partnerships and examines local responses to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, our research aims to analyze one main dimension: the evolution of policy change at the local level. The goal is to enhance understanding of the policy change

processes fostered by Covid-19 by examining two of the five major milestones in achieving policy change: path reinforcement and path clearing.

11 Two hypotheses guide the empirical analysis.

Hypothesis 1. During the Covid-19 emergency, public actors strengthened their capacity to co-design and co-produce innovative interventions and policies at the local level. This first hypothesis leads to the mapping and examination of local policies (both traditional and new) to tackle in-work poverty and old age, in order to understand the innovative mix for cooperation.

Hypothesis 2. The Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened the capacity of public actors to overcome barriers to social innovation through proximity welfare. This second hypothesis refers to the analysis of the evolution of the network of stakeholders and the policy mix at the local level, showing how their relationships were progressively enforced based on different logics.

12 The time span covered by the analysis is 2019-2021. The research was carried out using qualitative methods: in-depth desk analysis and focus groups with public and private actors at the local level. The data collection and desk analysis covered municipal financial reports (by welfare function), and final reports on local public-led activities with supporting documents on initiatives in the fields of old age and in-work poverty. To grasp innovative processes among local actors – public and private – and understand how they interact with innovative local processes, two focus groups were held in January and May 2022. These focus groups<sup>3</sup> involved public actors operating in the Municipality of Parma (the Welfare Counselor, the Public Social Service Manager, and public officials in the social area) and non-profit actors. The in-depth analysis and the focus groups were analyzed by means of classical content analysis.

## The case study: Parma, in the context of the Welfare Innovation Local Lab

13 The case of Parma is a typical case study for hypothesis testing (see *infra*). Parma has long been experimenting with the gradual involvement of the private sector (“the second welfare”) in co-management processes, introducing innovative services to cope with emerging social needs. The Covid-19 pandemic brought about inexorable changes that have contributed to rethinking the “traditional” policy path. The Municipality of Parma is a town in the northern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna. It has 198,292 inhabitants and is therefore the second most populous town in Emilia-Romagna. Parma is the case study for the current research. The Municipality of Parma is one of the nine municipalities involved in the Welfare Innovation Local Lab project (WILL).<sup>4</sup> The project aims to renew local welfare by formulating, adopting, and implementing new logics for welfare interventions that can overcome modern obstacles to the efficiency of local welfare services. The formulation of innovative policy strategies focuses on coping with existing social issues. The project’s main pillar is the recomposition of public financial resources through a stronger coordination between different levels of governance (e.g., National Health Insurance Agency, Regions, and local entities) so as to facilitate the professionalization of welfare services through value-added activities. In other words,

the main goal is to enable the matching of supply (the providers) and demand (the beneficiaries) for local welfare services. To fulfill the above-mentioned goals, the project guidelines include three factors for the success of potential innovative initiatives: (i) pooling the demand for welfare services (sharing the costs of services among several families with the same needs, for example by sharing babysitters); (ii) using technological tools (i.e., online platforms) to increase the efficiency of welfare services while lowering their costs; and (iii) expanding the coverage of services to allow access to the widest number of recipients. These three factors are accompanied by three tools of innovation: multi-channel platforms for social recomposition<sup>5</sup>, a marketplace system for aggregating demand and professionalizing supply<sup>6</sup>, and outcome-based public procurement.<sup>7</sup>

- 14 Finally, the social targets for intervention are listed as follows: for the elderly, the frail elderly (75-84 years old); for poverty, the working poor; and for children, teenagers enrolled in middle school (11-13 years old). The fourth target of innovation is a *cross-cutting* goal alongside the other three, i.e., community building (cf. Walter & Hyde, 2012) which is aimed at strengthening the proximity between interventions and facilitating more sustainable and resilient actions able to cope with future unexpected social and economic events (e.g., the Covid-19 epidemic).
- 15 The tailor-made path, one for each municipality, led sub-state public and private actors (those involved in experimental interventions) to customize their own trajectories toward social innovation. First, Parma chose the working poor and the frail elderly as its main social targets for innovation. Second, the framing of *how* to innovate required an in-depth analysis of local quantitative data and related trends in local initiatives, including public-private partnerships, and an examination of local responses to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The construction of a “knowledge-based system” (here the underlying logic is that an exhaustive data system will be composed of local quantitative data reporting trends over time and detailing social risks and needs) allowed for a better understanding of local trends in public social spending and territorial initiatives related to both the working poor<sup>8</sup> and the frail elderly.<sup>9</sup> The working poor and the frail elderly are the subject of the analysis.

## Analysis of results

- 16 The following three sections present the main empirical results. The first section analyzes trends in public social spending at the local level. The second section provides a better understanding of local initiatives and services to tackle in-work poverty and care for the frail elderly at the local level. The final section considers public-private partnerships through community building and proximity welfare initiatives.

### Public social expenditure in Parma: main trends

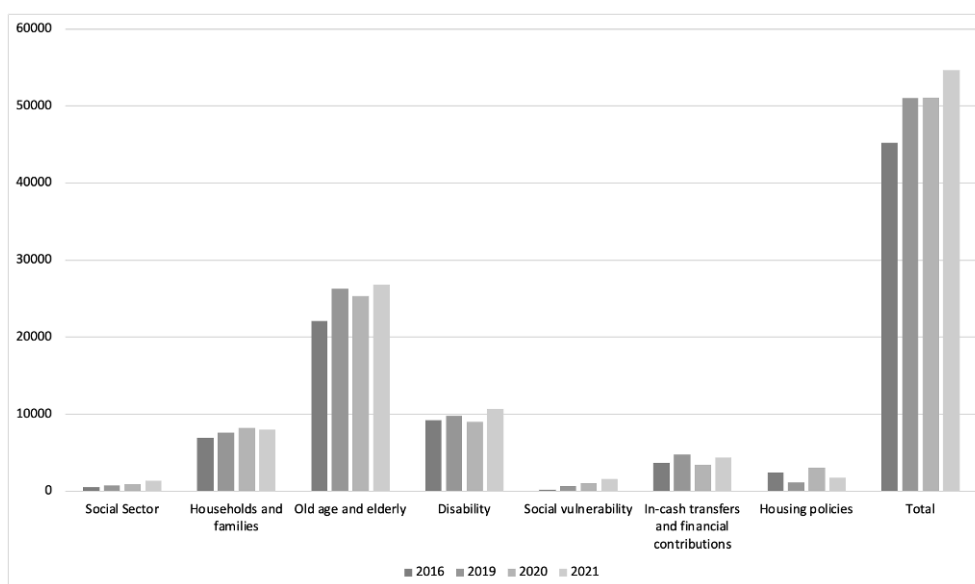
- 17 Public social expenditure in Parma addresses seven main functional areas, as follows:
- Social sector: this refers to those contributions directed to the *distretto sociosanitario*<sup>10</sup> and social hub points (social information hubs that aim to operate through proximity welfare logics).
  - Aging: social and care services for elderly people aged over 65.



- **Social vulnerability:** projects, interventions, and services for adults and single women and/or those with young children who are in need and under protection, foreigners, and people in prison or subject to criminal measures, as well as interventions to support employment.
- **Housing policies:** housing allocation, interventions for housing problems, and maintenance of the public real estate assets of the Municipality of Parma.
- **Families:** projects, interventions, and services in relation to children and families, children with disabilities, and those in need of legal protection interventions.
- **Dependent persons:** projects, interventions, and services for dependent persons.
- **Cash transfers:** cash measures provided to individuals or families residing in Parma who are unable to cope in a context of temporary or long-term poverty. This expenditure excludes national/public anti-poverty policies.

18 In the last five years (2016-2021), public social expenditure has progressively increased (54,635 euros in 2021, +21%), and represents 31% of total expenditure in Parma. In detail, the largest share of public social spending is for the elderly (26,484 euros in 2021, 21% more than in 2016). This is followed by spending on dependent persons (10,683 euros in 2021, +15%) and households and families (7,988 euros in 2021, +15%). The welfare areas receiving the least funding are the social sector (1,381 euros in 2021, +145%), economic vulnerability (1,589 euros, +606%), and housing policy (1,758 euros, -28%). Cash transfers (4,388 euros, +20%) and interventions for households (7,988 euros, +15%) have an average level of funding (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Public social spending in Parma, in euros (2016-2021)

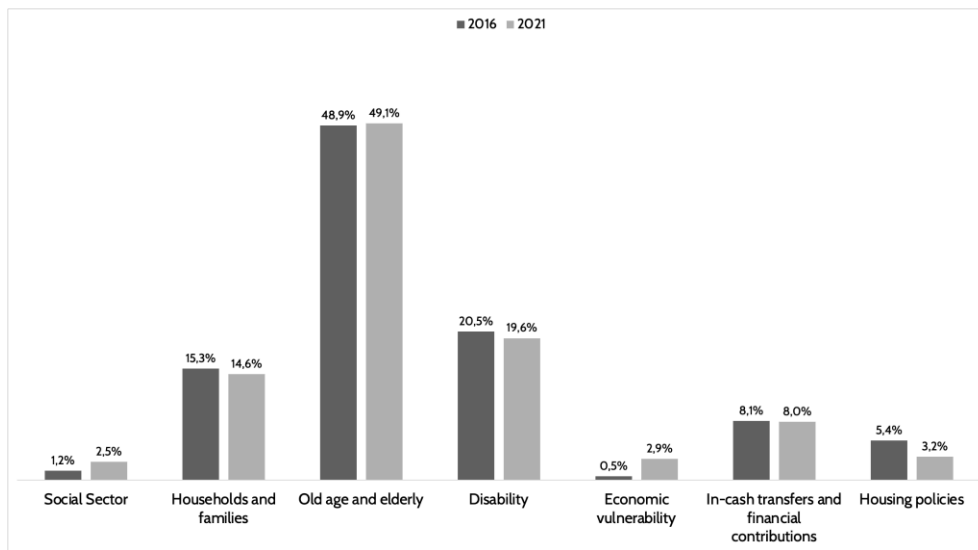


Source: Authors' elaboration from Parma municipal data

19 The welfare effort in the social sector (from 1,2% to 2,5% of total expenditure) and social vulnerability (from 0,5% to 2,9%) increased. The percentages for the other welfare areas – those related to aging, dependent people and cash transfers – remained unchanged. However, housing policy (3,2%) experienced a 2,2 percentage point decrease in the allocation of financial resources (Figure 2).



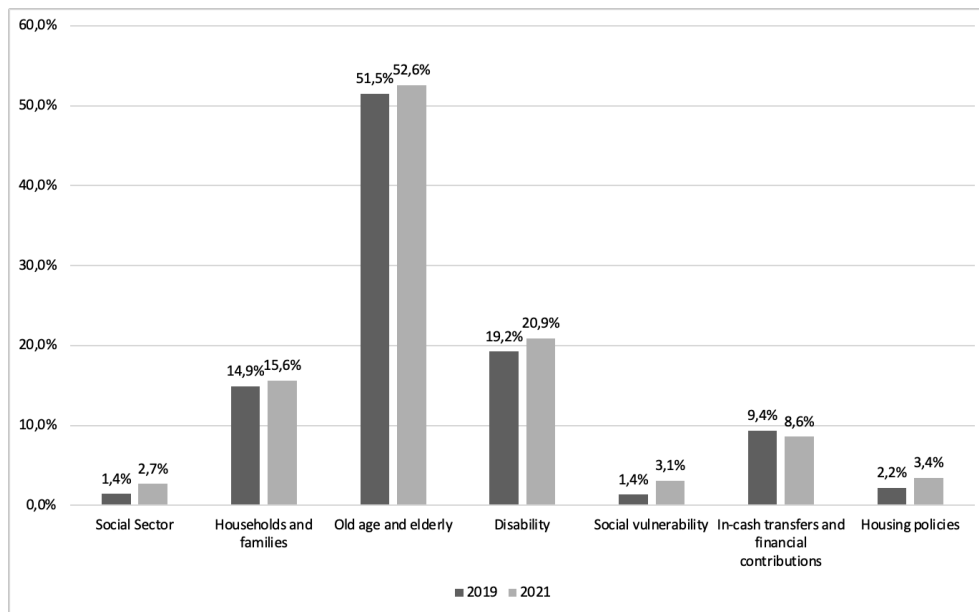
Figure 2: Public social spending in Parma, 2016 and 2021.



Source: Authors' elaboration from Parma municipal data

- 20 Despite the crystallization in the allocation of public social spending (most financial resources are on aging) in the last five years, the most prominent increase concerned the social sector (as mentioned above, proximity welfare and integration of socio-economic policies), as well as social vulnerability.
- 21 From 2019 to 2021, the resources allocated to the social vulnerability area (+130%), the social sector (+89%), and the housing policy area (55%) increased. The activities of public actors were mainly aimed at strengthening their capacity to deal with emerging needs – that is, temporary poverty conditions –, due to emergencies. In fact, in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public sector had to shift its public social expenditure toward social assistance. Moreover, they intervened in social areas that were traditionally residual in the Italian scenario: i.e., housing and poverty. From 2019 to 2021, welfare efforts increased in all social areas considered, except for cash transfers and financial contributions due to the introduction of the Citizenship Income (the Minimum Income Scheme, *Reddito di Cittadinanza*) in 2019 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Trends in public social spending in Parma, 2019-2021 (% variability).



Source: Authors' elaboration from Parma municipal data

- 22 Alongside the structural factors that contributed to welfare states being put “under pressure” (i.e., welfare cuts and retrenchments, the poor efficiency of welfare states in responding to evolving social needs, and institutional pressure from European institutions to transfer policy responsibilities to local administrations) (Moulaert et al., 2013; Ferrera, 2003), local welfare services have become more effective, participatory (democratic) and sustainable (Andreotti & Mingione, 2013). The interwoven nature of these three elements – effectiveness, participation, and sustainability – implies that there is a need for local welfare to meet individual needs with greater precision in their welfare policies (tailored more closely to individuals’ specific contexts). This would also allow for the participation of citizens and non-governmental actors to facilitate their action and participation in decision-making. It would also help to contain increases in national welfare state costs by giving local governments defined responsibilities in terms of financing and/or spending, or even by identifying new resources for welfare needs from local economic actors and social groups.
- 23 The previous considerations are thus central to understanding how – *ceteris paribus* – despite the crystallization of public social spending at the local level, the municipality attempted to increase its ability to achieve greater effectiveness, participation, and sustainability at the local level. In Parma, this was achieved through targeted interventions to tackle in-work poverty and the phenomenon of the frail elderly, as well as through proximity welfare, which promotes co-management processes. The aim of proximity welfare was to improve the municipality’s capacity to cope with emerging social needs at the local level.

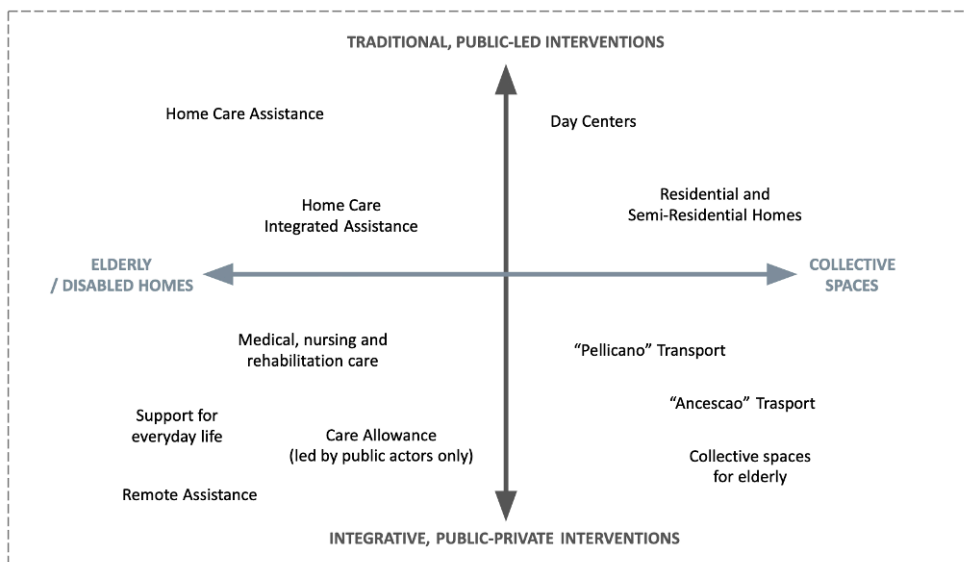
### Local welfare and policy measures: The frail elderly and in-work poverty

- 24 To test the first hypothesis, we considered local interventions and policy measures to tackle old age and in-work poverty at the local level. The analysis of local policy

programs, measures, and interventions provides a better understanding of co-design and co-management processes at the local level and of whether these processes were accelerated and/or consolidated during the Covid-19 emergency. In what follows, the local policies are exclusively those promoted by local public authorities in collaboration with private actors (in the 2019-2021 timeframe). We do not consider the set of initiatives led exclusively by local private actors. As specified in the hypothesis, the research focuses on the evolution of public actors in public-private partnerships and innovation. Therefore, we intentionally excluded private-led initiatives.

- 25 As far as public measures aimed at the elderly are concerned, the Municipality of Parma has intervened in two distinct directions in the past decade. First, it has strengthened public interventions – relative to their *take-up* capacity – for homecare and residential facilities. Second, it has promoted services to support mobility outside the home for those who are not self-sufficient and who are unable to use ordinary public transport (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Traditional and integrative public- and private-led interventions in Parma.



Source: The authors

- 26 The first stream of local services, in addition to the traditional ones (i.e., homecare assistance), shaped further local interventions to increase the independence and mobility of the elderly at home while monitoring their health conditions. Examples are the *servizio di assistenza tutelare* (homecare service for individual protection) and *sostegno alla quotidianità* (support for everyday life). Moreover, cash measures were added to in-kind measures. The *Assegno di Cura* (cash-for-care payment) is granted to elderly and disabled people in need of daily care and support to facilitate the recruitment and maintenance of personal caregivers. The use of this policy instrument keeps the elderly person in their usual environment and social context for as long as possible, thus avoiding (or postponing) their relocation to residential social and health facilities. Homecare assistance is juxtaposed with residential and semi-residential facilities, including day-care centers<sup>11</sup> (so-called *Centri diurni*). In addition, in 2020, the municipality financed a remote assistance system (*teleassistenza*), named *A casa mia*. The service – which operates 24 hours a day – is aimed mainly at the elderly or adults with

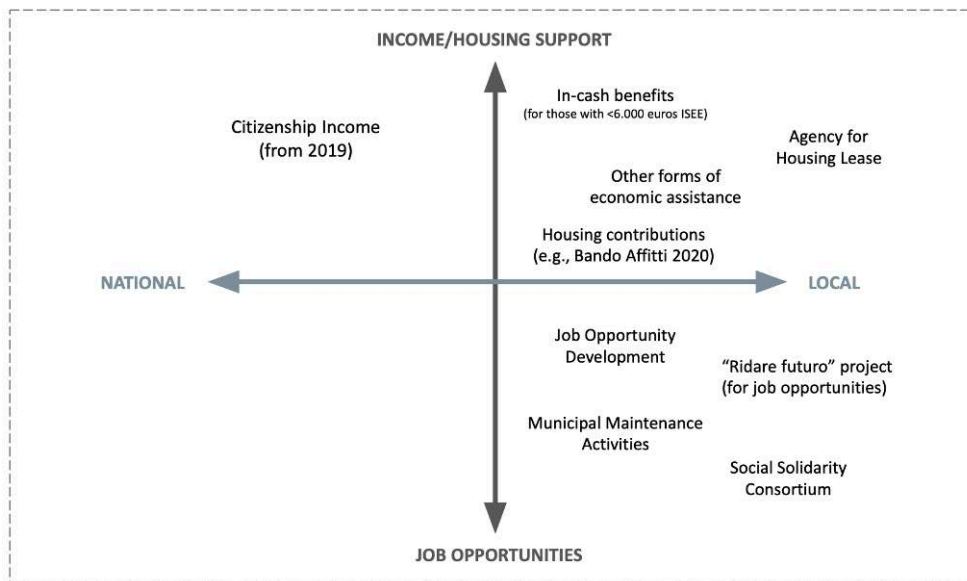
- disabilities, with the aim of allowing frail individuals to remain in their homes by guaranteeing the prompt intervention via a coded message which is sent to a specialist center that can immediately identify the user in the event of a health emergency.
- 27 The second stream of local intervention concerns *ad hoc* means of transport aimed at satisfying the mobility needs of citizens who cannot travel independently. *Trasporto Pellicano* (an on-call service) and *Trasporto Solidale* (coordinated by a third-sector association, Ancescao) are the two local interventions that have been set up to achieve these goals. Therefore, in the last ten years, the Municipality of Parma has promoted several policy initiatives to support active aging, mobility, and homecare assistance.
- 28 The analysis has also shown that the attempts to introduce innovative social investment initiatives – in the field of old age – focused on individuals with severe care needs, whereas policy measures for active aging and *less severe health frailty* (such as opportunities for socializing or cultural and intergenerational activities) are still lower priority. Three points of discussion must be raised to contextualize what has just been stated.
- 29 Despite the pervasive structural stratification in public social spending, public actors have managed to invest in integrative and supportive policy measures, reorienting the traditional configuration in the current policy mix design. Although public social spending (*per capita*) has not increased in the last five years (Istat, 2023), the Municipality of Parma has invested in strengthening the available policy tools in these areas, recognizing the urgency of dealing with the phenomenon of aging. There has been a gradual attempt to redirect current services and resources toward more sustainable and resilient local intervention.
- 30 In regard to policy interventions at both local and national levels to tackle in-work poverty, the traditional policy mix predominantly concerns severe and absolute poverty. At the same time, the policy tools aimed at tackling relative poverty, even where in-work poverty is concerned, remain scarce (or weaker) (Maino & De Tommaso, 2022). This phenomenon poses significant challenges to public administrations and social services: having a job does not prevent poverty risks and vulnerability. The multi-dimensionality of the phenomenon (e.g., housing, food, and educational poverty) requires municipalities to reorganize their financial resources in order to strengthen their capacity to tackle the phenomenon.
- 31 The introduction in 2019 of the Citizenship Income – a means-tested minimum income scheme in Italy – allowed municipalities to re-prioritize their local interventions to cope with relative and absolute poverty. In the last three years (2019-2021), public social expenditure on housing policies (+55%) and social vulnerability (+130%) increased, while cash transfers decreased (-8%). Although these results are strongly influenced by the detrimental effects of Covid-19 on socio-economic development at the local level, they highlight an obvious need for the urgent organization of resources to cope with more severe social needs and risks.
- 32 Before the introduction of the Citizenship Income, the Municipal Solidarity Income was approved in Parma for the 2015-2018 period. This was a means-tested minimum income aimed at combating severe poverty at the local level and was allocated to households and individuals with an Equivalent Financial Situation Index (ISEE) of less than 6,000 euros, real estate assets of less than 6,000 euros, and movable assets worth between 6,000 and 10,000 euros. From 2015 to 2018, the municipality experienced a surge in

applications for the Municipal Solidarity Income contribution (from 70 applications in 2015 to 366 in 2018). From 2019 onwards, after the implementation of the Citizenship Income, local cash transfers were allocated to households and individuals with an ISEE of less than 7,500 euros, real estate assets worth less than 10,000 euros and moveable assets worth no more than 20,000 euros-. Overall, the amount of cash transfers aimed at reducing poverty at the local level decreased sharply after the introduction of the Citizenship Income, falling from 2,667,064 euros in 2016 to 427,712 euros in 2019. This is because the financial resources previously allocated to the Municipality Solidarity Income – whose main function was replaced by the new anti-poverty policies – were allocated elsewhere in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Hence the promotion of social innovation.

- 33 In 2020, the largest share of cash transfer was allocated to families with children (300,796 euros against 45,006 for the elderly and 90,404 for adults). Income support in total amounted to 201,393 euros, with 163,541 euros for housing utilities and 71,272 euros for housing support. Despite the long-standing need for income support for families, a larger share of public resources was allocated to housing support and utilities, underlining the worsening of multidimensional poverty. During the Covid-19 period, the municipality promoted public contributions to alleviate housing poverty – even if this was temporary – due to the emergency. The attempt was to reach those in poverty conditions as a result of a temporary fall in income or increased spending on primary goods and housing utilities. Among other things, in 2020 – using regional funds<sup>12</sup> – the Municipality allowed the release of resources to support families struggling to pay their rent. A means-tested cash transfer was accessible to families with minors declaring an ISEE of between 3,000 and 17,154 euros. The Municipality of Parma opted for the maximum contribution allowed by the regional resolution, that is, up to six monthly payments of a maximum amount of 3,000 euros. In other words, the perceived urgency of responding to rising socio-economic inequality and poverty led local public actors to widen the criteria for access to contributions, reaching households with an ISEE of 17,154 euros. Moreover, in recent years Parma has invested in the *Agenzia per la locazione* (Agency for Housing Lease), whose objective is to provide a new local tool to enhance the private housing supply available to vulnerable households and individuals who are struggling to find housing alternatives on the free market.
- 34 It is worth mentioning that even before the Covid-19 crisis, the municipality promoted initiatives to create new job opportunities and improve workers' employability via *on-the-job* and *life-long learning* activities. To this end, Regional Law No. 14/2015 supported local interventions for active social inclusion in the labor market, defining a guiding framework to be implemented at the local level. Through the promotion of training courses – held online during Covid-19 – the municipality carried out a series of positive experiments for all those involved (users, public officials, and training institutions). Moreover, at least four projects led by public-private partnerships aimed to strengthen the local network for job placement and reintegration: Job Opportunity Development, Municipal Maintenance Activity, *Ridare Futuro* project, and Social Solidarity Consortium.
- 35 To sum up, alongside public national interventions to tackle poverty at the local level – notably the Citizenship Income –, the Municipality of Parma has been allocating its

available resources to cope with transient poverty and in-work poverty, which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Local and national policies to support income, housing, and employment in Parma.



Source: The authors

- 36 Public actors' capacity to tackle phenomena at the local level, even by taking an emergency/reactive approach (e.g., *Fondo Affitti* or *Pronto Cassa*) to alleviate local social risks, has been consolidated by their improved – and important – ability to reorganize their financial resources, such as regional, public, and private funds and related human capital. To increase the efficiency, equity, and sustainability of local interventions during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Municipality of Parma invested in interventions to strengthen proximity welfare. Local actors worked together to promote prompt assistance systems accessible to the whole community in any social situation.

### Proximity welfare as a long-term innovation in local welfare

- 37 In the proximity field, the Municipality of Parma invested in the development of a robust local network to reach the greatest number of those in need at the local level. The local community (civil society and third-sector organizations) became the pivotal reference actors for alleviating the effects of Covid-19 on welfare and society. The municipality promoted existing projects – *Parma Welfare* and *Sportello Clissa* – while adding new targeted interventions (the *Piattaforma Emergenza*) to achieve the above goals. We will briefly describe the cited projects – *Parma Welfare*, *Sportello Clissa*, and *Piattaforma Emergenza* – to highlight how multi-stakeholder networks have contributed to social innovation at the local level, and also to consider the specific and pivotal role of public actors in managing these processes.
- 38 First, the *Parma Welfare 2020* project, born as part of “Espr.it – The community generates new welfare”, is a path promoted and supported by the *Fondazione Cariparma*, in which multi-professional and inter-institutional working groups propose innovative projects in the area of community welfare. The Municipality of Parma, the

University Hospital and the AUSL of Parma, CSV Emilia OdV (Network of voluntary associations), the Consortium for Social Solidarity, and the trade union organizations CISL and UIL are some of the stakeholders involved.

- 39 The project has two goals: (i) facilitating access to, and use of, the opportunities already present in the area; and (ii) developing complementary methods particularly related to relationships, support, and proximity that ensure that people do not experience difficult moments of life in isolation. To reach these goals, the project expects that each person living in a difficult situation will be able to benefit from a proximity network that will be able to accompany, support, and strengthen them, and allow them to make their own resources available to the community, in a logic of circularity and capability. For these purposes, there are two main activities of the project: *Punti di Comunità* and *Non Più Soli*.
- 40 The *Punti di Comunità* (community hubs) are open and free spaces that support local communities online and virtually. They are coordinated by volunteers who provide information on local opportunities and services and organize collective or solidarity actions. The nine community hubs are connected to the central hub that is located at the city hospital. The hubs operate at two levels of governance: system governance and neighborhood governance (led by local, mainly volunteer, representatives). The activities of the community hubs are also supported by the trade unions and by an effective fundraising program aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the project.
- 41 *Non Più Soli* (“No Longer Alone”) is a strong solidarity network around the most vulnerable people and is composed of 23 associations and ten community hubs active in three districts of Parma. The project operates on two co-management dimensions:
1. Public and private. The project has created mixed-micro teams of “community agreements” and has started to experiment<sup>13</sup> the governance and management of *Punti di Comunità*.
  2. Social and healthcare. The project aims to activate and connect distant – but related – contexts (e.g., hospitals, neighborhoods, and communities).
- 42 Covid-19 catalyzed networks and volunteers after the pandemic: the emergency period facilitated the avoidance/elimination of the obstacles that had hindered voluntary action and strengthened the territorial networks in support of social vulnerabilities. The focus groups revealed how, during Covid-19, the community hubs tackled the digital divide problem and were equipped to provide remote support for activities such as enrolling in childcare services, filling out applications for food vouchers, and so on. The networks were spread throughout the community and were able to go beyond the physical locations of the community hubs. A significant contributor to this process and the communication was the *Piattaforma Emergenza* (see the following paragraphs).
- 43 The *Centro Servizi Volontariato* (the “CSV”, the volunteer service center) is the leading actor on the administrative side, with the support of the Parma Welfare structure for the organizational aspects. The role of the CSV is to recruit, train, and coordinate volunteer citizens willing to participate and engage in the activities promoted by the community hubs, in particular to support actions for vulnerable people through the creation of “light” community services (e.g., orientation to the opportunities and services in the area; assistance in dealing with bureaucratic procedures, etc.). The CSV also coordinates the local activities of the community hubs through the appointment of a community welfare manager, a liaison person, and territorial facilitators, who also



have the task of identifying and contacting vulnerable persons, alongside workers in the social centers.

- 44 The *Sportello Clissa* has similar goals at the local level. The Municipality of Parma has entrusted ASP Ad Personam,<sup>14</sup> in collaboration with local authorities and associations, with the Clissa helpdesk (the Sportello Clissa) for caregivers. This is a service point for families who need help in caring for elderly or disabled people at home.
- 45 The helpdesk provides information about opportunities for non-self-sufficient citizens to facilitate the matching of supply and demand in close collaboration with the employment center, as well as guidance, promotion, and organization of training courses for formal caregivers, contractual consultants, home tutoring, and monitoring of the assistance project shared with the family assistant, the dependent person, and his or her family. The Clissa helpdesk aims to facilitate meetings between families looking for professional care.
- 46 During the Covid-19 pandemic, the municipality also promoted the launch of a digital platform, called “*Piattaforma Emergenza*” (Emergency Platform), with the intention of facilitating the connection of requests for intervention sent by local social workers. In the first phase, a telephone network was activated to allow workers to organize themselves and work in the area. In the next phase, a platform – used by social workers – was launched to coordinate the requests and needs of people for support in their daily lives.
- 47 There was an interesting spillover effect of the platform on two sides: the targeted beneficiaries and the platform’s functions. Regarding the first, the platform was launched to identify the needs of the frail elderly and now covers a wider number of social targets (single-parent families, families with minors, etc.). Regarding the platform’s functions, its primary goal was to facilitate communication between the volunteers involved in the Parma Welfare project. The platform has become a reference point for a large number of local interventions whose objective is to overcome an emergency (or reactive) logic in distributing welfare in favor of an empowering logic. Table 1 sums up the local initiatives in the field of proximity welfare.

**Table 1: Local initiatives aimed at promoting proximity welfare through multi-stakeholder (collaborative) governance.**

| The project name   | Brief description   | Promoting actor           | Local actors involved   | Main development during Covid-19 pandemic  | Social need/function  |
|--|---|---------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Welfare Parma 2020, Esprit – La comunità genera nuovo welfare</b> | Launched in 2018, the project aims promoting an innovative responses to the new and old social risks through the setting of 9 Community Hubs and the Non più Soli network | Cariparma Bank Foundation | Parma Municipality, Azienda Ospedaliero-Universitaria & AUSL di Parma, CSV Emilia OdV, Consorzio Solidarietà Sociale, CISL & UIL Trade Unions | During Covid-19 pandemic, the project doubled their social workers and volunteers. The project moreover strengthened the proximity relationship at the local level                                   | The project caters to strengthen welfare proximity to reach the remotest target (those unknown by traditional social services) in the shortest time |
| <b>Sportello Clissa</b>  | Launched in 2016, the helpdesk aims at supporting families with caregiving needs  | Parma Municipality        | ASP Ad Personam   | Beyond its primary function (caregiving), the helpdesk contributed to catch and assist new social risks and needs at the local level (e.g. loneliness in older people)                               | The project is aimed to empower institutions’ tie to frail situations among elderly and their families (including informal/familial caregiving)     |
| <b>Piattaforma Emergenze</b>   | Launched in 2020, the digital platform is addressed to social workers and volunteers to coordinate requests and social needs for support in daily life                    | Parma Municipality        | Social Workers and Volunteers   | The platform became a reference point for a multitude of local interventions, with the aim of overcoming an “emergency” (reactive) logic in allocating welfare provisions to favor empowering logics | The project has been implemented to improve the public-private actors’ interactions, for enhanced understanding and cooperation                     |

Source: The authors

## Conclusion: The accelerating push of the Covid-19 pandemic, path-clearing and reinforcement of local adaptation policies

48 This research took the Municipality of Parma as a case for analysis, with the aim of answering the question of *how local public actors strengthened their capacity to foster policy change through innovative and collaborative processes*. This case study represents an interesting scenario for several reasons. Located in northern Italy, Parma is the second most populous city in the Emilia-Romagna region. Moreover, it has a privileged role in the analysis of local social innovation because of its involvement in the Welfare Innovation Local Lab project, whose aim is the renewal of local welfare by formulating, adopting, and implementing new logics of welfare interventions that could overcome obstacles to the improvement of local welfare efficiency. Considering the stated hypothesis, and drawing on Gore et al.'s (2022) analytical concepts for the analysis of policy change (see section three), Table 2 summarizes the Covid-19 impact and the main developments in social innovation processes at the local level.

**Table 2: Social innovation and multi-stakeholder governance in Parma: evidence of adaptation policies.**

|                            | <b>Hypothesis 1</b>   | <b>Hypothesis 2</b>   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
|                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening local actors' co-management</li> <li>• Spillover effect of local actors' coordination in implementing innovative actions</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening proximity welfare interventions</li> <li>• Increased awareness of local actors of emerging social risks and innovation of welfare responses</li> </ul>   |
| <b>The Covid-19 impact</b> | The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to strengthening the co-design and co-production of innovative interventions and services at the local level.   | The Covid-19 pandemic fostered proximity welfare interventions to reach the remotest social needs, while at the same time raising actors' awareness of the relevance of building interconnected roles and actions to achieve primary changes in local welfare structures in terms of actors' autonomy, discretion, and personality.   |
| <b>Policy change</b>       | <p><i>Path reinforcement</i></p> <p>The pandemic helped to identify and capitalize on the capacity of local actors to co-manage, with the aim of introducing integrative forms of welfare to fill existing gaps in public welfare.</p> <p>The health emergency highlighted the positive impact (in terms of the spillover effect) generated by the strengthening of public-private partnerships that filled gaps in</p> | <p><i>Path-clearing</i></p> <p>The pandemic contributed to the strengthening of local proximity networks to tackle the emerging needs.</p> <p>The health emergency also contributed to raising awareness of the need to accelerate social innovation at the local level and to overcome existing barriers to social innovation, while strengthening the resilience and sustainability of local welfare actions.</p> |

|   |
|---|
| traditional public welfare structures<br>(cf. siloed thinking). |
|---|

Source: The authors

- 49 The first hypothesis is confirmed. During the Covid-19 pandemic, public actors strengthened co-management processes in fostering innovative interventions and policies at the local level. The growing awareness of new social needs and risks pushed public and private actors to redirect actors, resources, and policy tools toward old age and in-work poverty. In the first case, the public sector aimed at introducing integrative (non-traditional) policies to prevent the physical and psychological deterioration of the elderly by encouraging the mobility of the elderly within (e.g., Remote Assistance) and outside their homes (e.g., Pellicano Transport). As for the case of the working poor, the municipality attempted to promote a coherent integration between local and national policies to tackle this phenomenon. In addition to the national public intervention to address poverty at the local level – notably through the Citizenship Income – the Municipality of Parma introduced targeted local policy tools to cope with transient poverty and in-work poverty, which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (the municipality boosted housing allowance support and job activation programs). If the increased involvement of the third sector cannot be attributed to the Covid-19 period, the pandemic highlighted a *spillover effect* generated by the strengthening of public-private partnerships. In terms of policy change, this represented a path reinforcement process.
- 50 Policy change is also observable in initiatives to strengthen proximity welfare. The second hypothesis is confirmed. The logic of proximity welfare is the main vector for reducing the existing barriers to fostering social innovation and is a path-clearing process. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this synergistic role among actors – which had already been experimented with before the pandemic – led to the launch of an emergency platform (*Piattaforma Emergenza*) aimed at weaving together the connections among local actors about their roles, resources, and functions. The Covid-19 pandemic enhanced actors' awareness of the relevance of building interconnected roles and actions to make primary changes in local welfare structures in terms of actors' autonomy, discretion, and personality. In terms of policy change, this implied a path-clearing process.
- 51 Finally, public actors demonstrated their ability to govern innovation processes. The institutional, political, and administrative context facilitates social innovation for at least two reasons. First, the horizontal (between actors in the same field) and vertical (between actors from the public sector, third sector, and civil society) dialogue for coordination and cooperation is enriched by co-management and plenary sessions. The public authorities – on both the political and the administrative sides – contribute to achieving cooperation, coordination, and sharing through a neutral and functionalist approach aimed at reducing inefficiencies at the local level while increasing the uptake of tailor-made welfare provisions.
- 52 The WILL project also played a central role in defining a common methodology for social innovation at the local level among the nine municipalities participating in the experimental initiative. The project also required a training session involving members of all the municipalities and thus favoring interaction between political actors and

public managers in a “neutral” context. The exchange of technical – rather than political – ideas between political actors, bureaucrats, and members of the third-sector facilitated the transition to a functionalist approach to social innovation, minimizing differences in approach and overcoming the factors that hinder social innovation. The Welfare Innovation Local Lab project thus proved to be a privileged fieldwork research site for examining local actors’ engagement in the social innovation process, revealing their orientation toward the logic of innovation even before the Covid-19 pandemic.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andreotti, A., Mingione, E., & Polizzi, E. (2012). Local Welfare Systems: A Challenge for Social Cohesion. *Urban Studies*, 49(9), 1925-1940.
- Andreotti, A., & Mingione, E. (2013). *The City as a Local Welfare System*. In N. Carmon & S.S. Fainstein (Eds.), *Planning, and People. Promoting Justice in Urban Development* (pp. 224-241). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ansell, C. (2008). Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543-571.
- Ansell, C., Doberstein, C., Henderson, H., Siddiki, S., & Hart, P. 't. (2020). Understanding inclusion in collaborative governance: a mixed methods approach. *Policy and Society*, 39(4), 570-591.
- Berloto, S., & Fosti, G. (2019). Paradigmi di innovazione per i servizi di welfare locale: servizi, service management e innovazione. In G. Fosti, E. Notarnicola, E. Ricciuti, S. Berloto & E. Perobelli (Eds.), *Il cambiamento nel welfare locale: Lezioni per il riposizionamento dei servizi pubblici* (pp. 45-62), OCAP 2.2019, Egea.
- Birkland, T. A. (1998). Focusing events, mobilization, and agenda setting. *Journal of Public Policy*, 12(1), 53-74.
- Den Hertog, P., & Bilderbeek, R. (1999). *Conceptualising Service Innovation and Service Innovation Patterns*. Thematic essay within the framework of the research Programme Strategic Information Provision on Innovation and Services. Directorate for General Technology Policy.
- Eurofound (2017). *In-work poverty in the EU*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission (2013). *Social innovation research in Europe: Approaches, trends, and future directions*. DG Research/WILCO Project.
- Ferrera, M. (2003). European Integration and national social citizenship: changing boundaries, new structuring?. *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(6), 611-652.
- Ferrera, M. (2007). Trent'anni dopo. Il welfare state europeo tra crisi e trasformazione. *Stato e Mercato*, 81(8), 341-375.
- Ferrera, M. (2008). Dal Welfare State alla welfare regions: la riconfigurazione spaziale della protezione sociale in Europa. *Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, 3, 17-49.
- Ferrera, M., Hemerijck, A., & Rhodes, M. (2009). *Recasting European Welfare States for the 21st Century*. *European Review*, 8(3), 427-446.

Ferrera, M., & Maino, F. (2012). Quali prospettive per il secondo welfare? La crisi del welfare state tra sfide e nuove soluzioni. In M. Bray & M. Granata (Eds.), *L'economia sociale: una risposta alla crisi* (pp. 125-134). Solaris.

Ferrera, M., & Maino, F. (2014). *Social innovation beyond the State. Italy's Secondo Welfare in a European perspective*. Working Paper 2WEL 2/2014.

[https://www.secondowelfare.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ferrera\\_maino\\_wp2\\_2014\\_2wel-3.pdf](https://www.secondowelfare.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ferrera_maino_wp2_2014_2wel-3.pdf).

Fosti, G. (2013). *Rilanciare il welfare locale. Ipotesi e strumenti: una prospettiva di management delle reti*. Egea.

Gerometta, J., Hässermann, H., & Longo, G. (2015). Social Innovation and Civil Society in Urban Governance: Strategies for an Inclusive City. *Urban Studies*, 42(11), 2008-2021.

Gore, T., Bimpson, E., Dobson, J., & Parkes, P. (2022). Path Clearing, Policy Punctuation or Trend Reinforcement: Local Government Responses to Covid-19 in the UK. *International Review of Public Policy*, 5(3).

Greco, I., & Bencardino, M. (2014). *The paradigm of the modern city: SMART and SENSEable Cities for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth*, Computational Science and Its Applications – ICCSA 2014, Springer.

Hogan J., Howlett, M., & Murphy, M. (2022). Re-thinking the coronavirus pandemic as a policy punctuation: Covid-19 as a path-clearing policy accelerator. *Policy and Society*, 41(1), 40-52.

Kazepov, Y., & Barberis, E. (2008). La dimensione territoriale delle politiche sociali in Europa: alcune riflessioni sui processi di rescaling e governance. *Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, 3, 51-78.

Longo, F., & Maino, F. (Eds.) (2021). *Platform Welfare. Nuove logiche per innovare i servizi locali*. Egea.

Lukesch, R., Ludvig, A., Slee, B., Weiss, G., & Živojinović, I. (2020). Social Innovation, Societal Change, and the Role of Policies. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 1-28.

Maino, F. (2015). Secondo welfare e territorio: risorse, prestazioni, attori, reti. In F. Maino & M. Ferrera (Eds.), *Secondo Rapporto sul secondo welfare in Italia 2015* (pp. 15-42), Centro di Ricerca e Documentazione Luigi Einaudi.

Maino, F. (2021a). Il secondo welfare e la crisi pandemica, tra pubblico-privato e nazionale-locale. In F. Maino (Ed.), *Il ritorno dello Stato sociale? Mercato, Terzo Settore e comunità oltre la pandemia*. *Quinto Rapporto sul secondo welfare in Italia 2021* (pp. 39-64). Giappichelli.

Maino, F. (Ed.) (2021b). *Il ritorno dello Stato sociale? Mercato, Terzo Settore e comunità oltre la pandemia*. *Quinto Rapporto sul secondo welfare*. Giappichelli.

Maino, F., & De Tommaso, C.V. (2022). Fostering Policy Change in Anti-Poverty Schemes in Italy: Still a Long Way to Go. *Social Sciences*, 11(8), 327.

Maino, F., & Ferrera, M. (Eds.) (2013). *Primo rapporto sul secondo welfare in Italia 2013*. Centro di Ricerca e Documentazione Luigi Einaudi.

Manzini, E., & Staszowski, E. (2013), *Public and Collaborative. Exploring the intersection of design, social innovation and public policy*. DESIS Network.

<https://www.desisnetwork.org/wp-content/up>.

Moulaert, F., Mac Callum D., & Hiller, J. (2013). *Social Innovation: intuition, percept, concept, theory and practice*. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood & A. Hamdouch (Eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation. Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research* (pp. 13-25). Edward Elgar.

Taylor-Gooby, P. (Ed.) (2004). *New Risks, New Welfare: The Transformation of the European Welfare State*. Oxford Academic.

Verschuere, T., Brandsen, T., & Pestoff, V. (2012). Co-production: The State of the Art in Research and the Future Agenda. *Voluntas*, 23, 1083-1101.

Voorberg, W. H., Bekkers, V. J. J. M., & Tummens, L. G. (2015). A systematic review of co-creation and co-management on the social innovation journey. *Public Management Review*, 17(9), 1333-1357.

Walter, C., & Hyde, C. (2012). Community building practice: An expanded conceptual framework. In M. Minkler (Ed.), *Community organizing and community building for health welfare* (pp. 78-90). Rutgers University Press.

Westley, F., Tjorno, O., Schultz, L., Olsson, P., Folke, C., Crona, B., & Bodin, O. (2013). A theory of transformative agency in linked social-ecological systems. *Ecology and Society*, 18(3), 27.

## NOTES

1. This article is part of the authors' ongoing research on local welfare and social innovation. Franca Maino is the Director of the Observatory "Percorsi di secondo welfare" which, – together with CERGAS SDA Bocconi – is the lead scientific coordinator of the Welfare Innovation Local Lab (WILL) project (see *infra*). Celestina Valeria De Tommaso is a junior researcher at the Observatory and is thus involved in the WILL project. The first draft of this paper was presented at the 3rd International Workshops on Public Policy in Budapest (June 2022). We would like to thank all the participants for their inspiring suggestions. The authors would also like to thank Tullia Galanti and Stefano Ronchi for valuable comments on the previous draft. Finally, we thank the anonymous reviewers for their time in reviewing our article.

2. According to Maino (2021a, pp. 50-51, authors' translation), proximity welfare is "a set of jointly defined public-private interventions and services aimed at welfare provision among people within the same community. It starts from a shared reading of needs and common goals fostering the protagonism of the local actors involved. [...] It involves the strengthening and promotion of formal and informal territorial networks (composed of public actors, private actors, associations and citizens) that seek to respond to local and shared social needs. "Proximity" refers to both the origin and the outcome of welfare initiatives. Proximity is the result of the identification of social needs, but it is also the welfare tool to address them. Proximity welfare actions reinforce a sense of closeness and sharing. As the pandemic has shown, proximity is not necessarily only "physical": it can use digitization (including other unconventional tools) to strengthen social bonds and foster joint mobilization to co-design and co-produce services and interventions. [...] Co-management transcends the traditional public-private relationship and involves private actors such as businesses. Proximity means contamination among actors, resulting in collaborative and cooperative practices, as well as the recomposition of social ties and the interweaving of formal and informal networks".

3. The first focus group was held on January 25, 2022, and involved public actors: the Welfare Counsellor, the Public Manager, seven civil servants of the Social Service Department with expertise in the field of in-work poverty and old age. The second focus group was held on May 19, 2022. The latter was extended to the most important Third Sector organizations operating in the field of social welfare and included *Fondazione Cariparma* (a Bank Foundation) and *Centro Servizi di Volontariato* (Volunteer Service Center).

4. The "Welfare Innovation Local Lab" (WILL) project is an Italian initiative coordinated by IFEL-Anci. Cergas SDA Bocconi and Percorsi di Secondo Welfare/University of Milan are the main scientific partners (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, On! and the Italian Forum of Third

Sector Organizations are part of the network). The main objective of the project is the renewal of local welfare in 8 municipalities (Bergamo, Como, Monza, Novara, Reggio nell'Emilia, Parma, Padova, and Rovigo) across four regions (Lombardia, Piemonte, Emilia Romagna, and Veneto), with the rationale of coping with ever-changing and pressing societal challenges for the welfare state. WILL was launched in 2019 with a 5-year time horizon (2019-2024) and 10 municipalities involved. The project has been marked by plenary sessions to share theoretical notions about innovative tools, operational strategies, and co-design activities that allow local welfare changes.

5. Multi-channel platforms for social recomposing support social networks via physical or virtual places to enable matchmaking within communities, thus fostering mutual and compassionate assistance. The main examples are social streets and the proactive use of sports and cultural associations to promote social inclusion and cultural integration.

6. The marketplace system for the pooling of demand and the professionalization of supply are aimed at the creation of a virtual marketplace that enables the aggregation of beneficiaries' needs while professionalizing the supply side in the delivery of social services. This would also include models for sharing service systems across families (e.g., shared caregivers for the frail elderly or babysitting services for children).

7. Outcome-based public procurement refers to the externalization of public procurement through the use of social impact measurement methods. In other words, outcome-based payment would incentivize the private sector to build robust and durable networks among actors whose ultimate goal is to enhance the quality and coverage of social services.

8. Regarding the first, according to the Eurostat definition "individuals are at risk of in-work poverty when they work for over half of the year and when their equivalized yearly disposable income is below 60% of the national household median income level (after social transfers)" (Eurofound, 2017). The national policies usually adopted to prevent (or alleviate) in-work poverty are direct measures (e.g., minimum wages, tax contributions, etc.). Municipalities can instead promote indirect measures to tackle in-work poverty. These policies have an impact on workers' well-being and employability (e.g., lifelong learning policies, long-term care, childcare, housing allowances, etc.).

9. Frail elderly people are those aged between 75 and 84. They are self-sufficient individuals living independently at home – or in sheltered accommodation – whose health condition, because of ageing, is progressively worsening. They have less independence outside their homes and are also more vulnerable to declines in health and daily functioning. They begin to experience the interconnection between health, social and relational decline.

10. The *distretto sociosanitario* is a strategic hub for health, social care and socio-health integration, and governance. The district is the territorial area that organizes the understanding, reading of needs and resources and the planning of interventions for a specific population target. The Social Service of the Municipality of Parma is divided into four territorial poles (hubs) that welcome, build projects, and accompany people; one central service that operates and coordinates the four poles and their programs and manages resources; and one "protection team" for alleviating critical situations relating to families with minors. The territorial extension of each pole includes several districts of the city. The territorial poles are divided into five main areas: reception (help desk) and social area, parenthood fragility, adult fragility, non-self-sufficiency, and disability.

11. A day care center is an intermediate, semi-residential service that complements home care interventions and ensures that elderly people who are not sufficiently independent to carry out daytime activities receive psycho-social support to maintain their potential and autonomy in an individual, relational network.

12. In 2019, the Emilia-Romagna Region approved the implementation criteria for a Social Fund for Rent, and specific guidelines for its operation and allocation.



13. The experimental initiative involved five city districts, five territorial teams with workers from the social pole and the third sector, 120 realities, and 230 active volunteers.

14. The ASP is a public company (a non-economic public body) with legal personality and statutory, managerial, asset, accounting, and financial autonomy, and is non-profit making. According to the needs indicated in the local plan defined in the *Piani di Zona* (local plans) for health and social welfare, its scope of services is aimed at: the elderly population, with particular reference to non-self-sufficient elderly people and adults with pathologies similar to geriatric ones; disabled people with psychophysical disorders; adults in conditions of social fragility; minors; and families in need.

---

## ABSTRACTS

To cope with increasing endogenous pressure (e.g., population aging and the emergence of new social risks) and scarce resources, Italian local welfare actors have had to reshuffle their economic, ideational, and human resources to deliver tailor-made responses to a wider range of beneficiaries through co-management. The Covid-19 pandemic further enabled the processes mentioned above. It contributed to a catalyzation of solutions from local hybrid organizations (a “welfare mix” or “collaborative governance”) to cope with the disruptive socio-economic consequences of the crisis and to foster social innovation processes. Considering these transformations, this article addresses the following research question: *How have public actors strengthened their capacity to foster policy change through innovative and collaborative processes?* This research aims to analyze the development of policy change at a local level with a view to carrying out an in-depth analysis of policy adaptation dynamics.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** local welfare, multi-stakeholder governance, second welfare, social innovation

## AUTHORS

### FRANCA MAINO

Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy  
franca.maino@unimi.it  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3275-8102>

### CELESTINA VALERIA DE TOMMASO

Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy  
celestina.detommaso@unimi.it  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1326-3742>