

New challenges for the welfare state: The emergence of ‘youth unemployment regimes’ in Europe?¹

Abstract

We discuss the emergence of ‘youth unemployment regimes’ in Europe, that is, a set of coherent measures and policies aimed at providing state responses to the problem of unemployment and, more specifically, youth unemployment. We classify these measures and policies along two main dimensions: unemployment regulations and labour market regulations. Using original data, we show how seven European countries locate on these two dimensions as well as within the conceptual space resulting from the combination of the two dimensions. Our findings show cross-national variations that do not fit the traditional typologies of comparative welfare studies. At the same time, however, they allow for reflecting upon possible patterns of convergence across European countries. In particular, we show some important similarities in terms of flexible labour market regulations. In this regard, the recent years have witnessed a trend towards a flexibilisation of the labour market, regardless of the prevailing welfare regime.

Key words: unemployment, welfare regimes, political opportunity structures, labour market, youth

Introduction

The main argument of this article is that the politics of unemployment, as it has been developing in recent years, has given shape to deep national differences in Europe which fit only partially the main teaching and the consolidated models of the welfare state that are

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discussed in the scholarly literature. Existing characterisations of the welfare state (e.g., Bonoli & Palier, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1993) follow a broad and comprehensive approach, including various aspects of welfare (health, unemployment, social aid, pensions, invalidity, maternity etc.). Other scholars have provided more specific typologies that are focused on state intervention in the field of unemployment (e.g. Bamba & Eikemo, 2009; Gallie & Paugam 2000). These latter works, however, still rely on the assumption that policies and measures to fight unemployment follow the prevailing institutional approaches to welfare in general. Furthermore, they focus on unemployment benefits, neglecting other aspects —such as the characteristics of the labour market— which can play a major role in determining the opportunities and constraints offered to those who are excluded (fully or partly, temporarily or permanently) from the labour market.

By focusing on two dimensions of main institutional intervention and policy-making in the field of unemployment, here we discuss the shape of what we call ‘youth unemployment regimes’ in Europe. By that we mean a set of coherent measures and policies aimed at providing state responses to the problem of unemployment and, more specifically, youth unemployment. The two dimensions along which these state responses can be classified relate to the role of ‘unemployment regulations’ and ‘labour market regulations’. The first dimension refers to specific conditions of access to rights for the unemployed as well as to the obligations attached to full enjoyment of these rights, which may be either inclusive or exclusive. The second dimension refers to state intervention in the labour market, which as a result may be characterised as either flexible or rigid. In line with the theoretical framework that the authors of this article have developed in previous work (Cinalli & Giugni, 2010; Giugni et al., 2009), the combination of these two dimensions yields a conceptual space with four main ideal-typical configurations of youth unemployment regimes. By allocating seven European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland) across this conceptual space, we test its heuristic potential.

In particular, we place our findings in the context of existing typologies of the welfare state, emphasising most counter-intuitive aspects. For example, we will see that policies and institutional provisions in the unemployment field in Switzerland fit only partially the traditional characterisation of social security in this country, given their strong ‘flexicurity’ orientation. Similarly, we argue that ‘precariousness’ may well be the distinct element of policies directed specifically at the unemployed youth in Germany, fitting only partially with the idea of an inclusive welfare state. Ultimately, we show that the way in which unemployment is institutionally thought and regulated deserves the highest attention, since it might be at the core of broader dynamics that question the nature of the welfare state as we think of it today.

The next section provides a discussion of the comparative literature on the welfare state as well as more specific studies focusing on unemployment. This discussion will serve as a basis for presenting our typology of youth unemployment regimes. Then we show the methodological approach that we have followed so as to retrieve systematic information on the two dimensions of our framework. Finally, we show how the seven countries of our study locate on each of the two dimensions of youth unemployment regimes as well as within the space resulting from the combination of the two dimensions.

Welfare state and unemployment regimes

Our approach of youth unemployment regimes in Europe is directly inspired from the comparative literature on the welfare state (see Arts & Gelissen, 2002, Green-Pedersen & Haverland, 2002, and Pierson, 2000 for reviews). A great deal of this literature has followed two main lines of inquiry. A first line of inquiry has looked at the development of the welfare state. In this perspective, scholars have focused on the expansion of the welfare state, most notably by looking at the broader societal forces and processes leading to such an expansion, in particular in the post-war period (van Kersbergen, 2002). Starting from the 1990s,

however, the focus has shifted from welfare state expansion to its retrenchment. Scholars have therefore started to examine the political and institutional factors explaining the welfare state's retrenchment from a neo-institutionalist perspective (Pierson, 1994, 1996; Skocpol, 1992).

The second, more often explored, line of inquiry is more relevant for our present purpose. Here scholars of social policy and the welfare state have focused on cross-national variations (e.g. Bonoli, 1997; Cochrane, 1993; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1993; Gallie & Paugam, 2000; Merrien, 1996; Taylor-Gooby, 1991). Much of this literature 'has been concerned with the classification of welfare states and the identification of ideal-types of welfare provisions' (Bonoli 1997, p. 351). Perhaps the most prominent one is Esping-Andersen's (1990) well-known distinction of 'three worlds of welfare capitalism.' Aiming at broadening the perspective with regard to traditional classifications based only on the level of expenditure (Cutright, 1965; Wilensky, 1975), this author has focused on the level of decommodification as a basis for classifying the welfare state according not only to the amount of social provisions, but also to the ways in which they are delivered. Based on that, he distinguished between three types: the liberal or residual regime typical of the Anglo-Saxon countries, the Bismarckian or insurance-based regime typical of the continental European countries, and the universalist or social-democratic regime typical of the Nordic countries.

Similar typologies have been proposed by other authors as well. All of them, in the end, rely on the basic distinction between the Bismarckian and the Beveridgean models of social policy (Castel, 1995; Rosanvallon, 1995); then they add further distinctions to provide a more accurate picture. For example, Ferrera (1993) distinguished between occupational and universalist welfare states based on the criterion of coverage of social protection schemes.² Similarly, Bonoli (1997) distinguished between four ideal-typical welfare states based on the quantity of welfare they provide and where they stand on the Beveridgean/Bismarckian

² Ferrera (1996), among others, also stresses the existence and peculiarities of the 'southern model' or welfare.

dimension: Beveridgean/high-spending welfare states, Beveridgean/low-spending welfare states, Bismarckian/high-spending welfare states, and Bismarckian/low-spending welfare states. More recently, scholars have discussed the transformation of welfare states with reference to globalisation and its consequences, in particular concerning trends towards liberalisation (Ellison, 2006) and the new risks relating to postindustrial society (Bonoli, 2007; Clasen & Clegg, forthcoming; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). While these new risks are associated to many components of public welfare (health, pension systems, unemployment, etc.), today they are especially the object of debates concerning the labour market and employment policies.

Most if not all of the works reviewed above deal with the welfare state or social policy. As a result, they are only of limited help for studying cross-national differences in state intervention and policy-making relating especially to unemployment. A more specific focus is thus required. This is, for example, what Gallie and Paugam (2000) have done in their study of unemployment-providence regimes and their impact on the experience of unemployment. According to them, the latter may be influenced by the degree of coverage, the level of financial compensation, and the importance of active measures for employment. Based on these factors, they define four such regimes: the sub-protecting regime, providing the unemployed with a protection below the subsistence level; the liberal/minimal regime, offering a higher level of protection, but not covering all the unemployed and in which the level of compensation is weak; the employment-centred regime, offering a much higher level of protection, but in which the coverage remains incomplete because of the eligibility principles for compensation; and the universalist regime, characterised by the breadth of the coverage, a much higher compensation level, and more developed active measures.

Despite this and similar efforts, however, most often than not comparative analyses of state responses to unemployment still refer to welfare provisions in general. Even when dealing directly with indicators of unemployment regulations (Bambra & Eikemo, 2009),

comparative research may overlook findings that do not fit the teaching of traditional welfare state scholarship (see also Baglioni in this special issue). As a consequence, more systematic research is needed to consider specific measures aimed at creating a safety net for those who are or become excluded from the labour market (the so-called passive measures) and at giving them more chances to become 'employable' (the so-called active measures). As Clasen and Clegg (forthcoming) stress,

[i]n the large comparative literature on welfare state development in recent decades, there are few comprehensive studies of unemployment protection systems as a whole, and fewer still that focus explicitly on the relationship between the regulation of the risk of unemployment and labour market change.

Therefore, although they certainly are highly correlated to the general features of the welfare state, we need to take into account more specific approaches to unemployment. Yet, unemployment regulations are only one side of the coin. The other side is formed by state intervention on the labour market, that is, labour market regulations. As Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) pointed out, labour market regulations are central to an understanding of the modern welfare state. Similarly, Sapir (2005) maintained that different types of welfare state tend to have a different labour market organisation. Thus, in order to get a more comprehensive picture of how the state intervenes with respect to unemployment, one needs to take into account not only how the state responds to the challenge of unemployment (both through passive and active measures), but also how it regulates the labour market.

Most crucially, unemployment regulations and labour market regulations can be combined so as to construct a bi-dimensional space within which each country has a specific position. Conceptually, this space was initially meant to work as a typology that is useful to identify specific opportunities for collective action in the field of unemployment politics relating to welfare state regimes (Cinalli and Giugni, 2010; Giugni et al., 2009). Yet, we can

also use it to highlight cross-national variations in the institutional approaches to unemployment or different unemployment regimes.

Figure 1 shows the potential organisation of this space into four main ideal-types. The first type couples inclusion of the unemployed with flexibility of the labour market, representing the so-called *flexicurity* or *social protection* model. The second, opposite type, the traditional *corporatist* or *economic protection* model, couples exclusion of the unemployed with high protection of insiders. Thirdly, the combination of rigidity on the labour market dimension and inclusion on the unemployment regulations dimensions represents the *full protection* model where inclusion of the outsiders is not negotiated against the loss of rights for protected insiders. Finally, the *precariousness* model couples a low level of rights for traditional workers together with the exclusion of the unemployed.

Figure 1 about here

This conceptual space is also useful to go beyond the rigid kind of typologies that one usually finds in the literature, and that tend to assign countries to fixed models. In other words, countries do not necessarily fit rigidly a given type, but they may be placed in different positions within a same type and may travel across space if the analysis were conducted diachronically.

In the remainder of this article, however, we use this conceptual space to show the synchronic cross-national variation of youth unemployment regimes in Europe and, more specifically, how institutional approaches to unemployment vary across countries along our two dimensions. Before doing so, we need to say more about the empirical basis of our study and the specific way in which we have operationalised the two dimensions.

Data retrieval

Our mapping of youth unemployment regimes in Europe is based on systematic information on existing policies and measures in the field of unemployment politics retrieved as part of

the EU-funded project “Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A Multidimensional Approach to Understanding the Conditions and Prospects for Social and Political Integration of Young Unemployed” (YOUNEX). The two dimensions that form our definition of youth unemployment regimes have been operationalised by means of a set of indicators of policies and measures concerning unemployment regulations and labour market regulations that target the unemployed youth, including individuals aged 18–34. We are aware that official statistics on youth unemployment – for example, those that are produced by the central governments of our countries, as well as Eurostat, the International Labour Organisation, and so forth – refer specifically to the cohort of young people aged less than 25. However, we have decided to be more inclusive in terms of age (18–34) so as to take into account on-going social processes that have substantially augmented the time-span that individuals have to wait for before entering a full adult life (Billari, 2004). This decision also follows from the fact that our study includes countries where this lengthening of youth is remarkable owing to changes in terms of family situation, living conditions, health, and education (Eurostat, 2009).

We have thus formulated our lists of indicators so as to include relevant information for unemployed young people who are aged 18–34. Yet, for the same indicators, we have also distinguished information referring specifically to the cohort of younger unemployed people who are under 25. This information is not always relevant as often there is hardly any difference between regulations targeting the very young unemployed and those targeting our broader population of unemployed youth aged 18–34. Nevertheless, we thought that it was crucial to assess more systematically the extent to which unemployment regulations and labour market regulations take into account the specific needs and situation of the younger, or are otherwise shaped according to a more comprehensive understanding of unemployed youth.

Indicators were appraised following a simplified scoring procedure allowing for cross-national comparative analyses. More specifically, for each indicator we attributed a score of +1, 0, or –1: +1 indicates a strong degree of inclusiveness of unemployment regulations along the

first dimension or otherwise a strong degree of flexibility of labour market regulations along the second dimension; -1 indicates a low degree of inclusiveness of unemployment regulations or otherwise a low degree of flexibility of labour market regulations; and 0 indicates an intermediate situation. The average scores on the whole set of indicators for each dimension then give us the position of countries with respect to the two dimensions of the typology. Overall, 16 indicators were used to grasp the two dimensions of youth unemployment regimes. The dimension of unemployment regulations refers to the conditions of access to rights and welfare provisions for the unemployed, but also to the obligations attached to full enjoyment of rights and provisions. In particular, the average score for this first dimension is based on eight indicators: the formal pre-requisites for obtaining social provision, the level of coverage, the extension of coverage, the shifting to social aid, the role played by private and public employment agencies, the sanctions for abusing the unemployment system, and (as output indicators) the number of people receiving unemployment benefits as well as the number of people receiving sanctions for abusing the benefit system. The dimension of labour market regulations acknowledges that rights and obligations deriving from unemployment legislation and, more generally, from state welfare, can go hand in hand with labour market arrangements, as the example of active measures shows. It is also important to assess the existence of a clear distinction between protected workers and unemployed, or otherwise the insiders and the outsiders, as a consequence of the types of labour market regulations (Berger & Piore, 1980; Lindbeck & Snower, 1988; Rueda, 2005). The average score for this second dimension is also based on eight indicators: protection of the insiders against dismissals, regulation on temporary forms of work, requirements for collective dismissals, role of unions in the benefits system, role of unions for protection of workers, and (as output indicators) number of temporary workers, flexible workers, as well as participants in activation measures.

In particular, the two main steps of our research have consisted in the collection of information so as to describe each case across the selected indicators and in the standardisation of information along the continuum –1 to +1 for comparative purposes. The first qualitative step has thus provided the basis on which the second quantitative step has been accomplished, allowing for translation of each indicator into an interval measure along the 3-point scale. We have already indicated that our information refers to legislation and policy-making, but also includes output indicators so as to understand softer informal aspects for each dimension. In so doing, we aim to find out the effect of constraints that may be operating behind formal regulations. For example, we consider the number of people who are engaged in flexible forms of contract to be very useful to indicate the true flexibilisation of access to the labour market for the unemployed youth. All scores refer to 2008–2010 period. The scoring rules for each indicator are shown in the Appendix.³

Youth unemployment regimes in Europe: An empirical assessment

The 2000s have been characterised by the implementation of an increasing number of policies tackling unemployment, and young unemployment in particular. Even the most progressive forms of leftist liberalism, such as the Red–Green coalition in Germany, have engaged with crucial policies to loosen up the labour market while fostering rights and interests of the unemployed such as the Hartz reform (e.g. Fleckenstein, 2008). Most recently, in the aftermath of the economic recession of the late 2000s, the political future of a large number of national governments has been linked to their interventions in the unemployment field. Beyond the trajectories of specific national executives, the European Union adopted the European Youth Pact in 2005 and put the Employment Guidelines at the centre of its European Employment Strategy (see Schultz et al. in this special issue). Both the Commission

³ The specific sources used for retrieving the information are indicated in the integrated report on the part of the research dealing with the institutional indicators (YOUNEX 2008). However, it should be noted that, after the report was written and delivered, we updated and slightly modified some of the indicators, so that our findings do not fully reflect the content of that report. Additional information was provided by the members of the YOUNEX research team, which we warmly thank.

and the Council have felt the need to intensify their strategy for fostering inclusion of the unemployed and, more broadly, of young disadvantaged people. Interventions such as the EU Strategy for Youth, the Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018), and the Agenda 2020 provide substantial evidence of a comprehensive policy effort that is cross-sectoral and highly articulated.

This mixture of common efforts at the European level and specific national interventions in terms of labour market and unemployment regulations targeting the unemployed youth can be appreciated through the analysis of our findings in Figure 2. Each of the seven countries is given an average score for unemployment regulations and labour market regulations across the indicators that have been mentioned earlier. Considering each dimension separately, the data show that cross-national variations are especially wide-ranging in terms of unemployment regulations. Some countries implement highly inclusive policies vis-à-vis the young unemployed, while others stand out for their much more exclusive stance. The difference is particularly large, for example, when one compares France with Poland. More generally, one can argue that countries tend to choose clearly between a more inclusive and a less inclusive approach. By contrast, cross-national variations are not that strong when focusing on the dimension of labour market regulations. In this case, the range between the most flexible approach of Sweden and the most rigid cases of Italy and Portugal is overall contained. More generally, one can argue that between the two poles of rigidity and flexibility, this latter is the most likely option across the European countries. Overall, then, the analysis of unemployment regulations shows that a large gulf exists between countries that exclude the unemployed youth on the one hand and countries that are highly inclusive on the other. Variations along the second dimension of labour market regulations are relevant, but much smaller. Italy and Portugal stand out as the only cases that have not made a clear break into flexibility.⁴

⁴ In addition, and beyond the synchronic dimension of our research, one may consider relevant diachronic movements of Italy and Portugal towards flexibility (Jessoula et al., 2010; see also Baglioni in this special issue).

Figure 2 about here

Our findings also suggest that flexibility in the labour market does not involve necessarily more inclusion of the unemployed youth on the dimension of unemployment regulations, as the cases of Poland and Germany. In other words, the position of a country can be very similar but also very dissimilar across the two dimensions of unemployment and labour market regulations. This means that no relevant correlation exists between the policy choices that countries implement along the two dimensions.

Looking now at the place of our seven countries within the conceptual space discussed earlier, it is first noticeable that no case fits with the full protection model. France stands out as the national case that is somewhat closer to this ideal-type since it has focused its own policies relatively more on the inclusion of the unemployed youth than on the flexibilisation of the labour market. Sweden and Switzerland show their flexibility in terms of labour market while at the same time targeting the unemployed youth with inclusive measures, hence standing out as the best cases fitting the social protection model. By contrast, institutional provisions and policies in Italy and Portugal do not fit the flexicurity model. Traditional corporatist arrangements (that grant extensive rights to the insiders of labour market) are still at work in Italy and Portugal, while at the same time both countries have few inclusive policies vis-à-vis the outsiders (and the ‘mid-siders;’ see Jessoula et al., 2010). Overall, then, Italy and Portugal are the two cases that come closest to the economic protection model. Finally, the position of Germany is somewhat surprising given the same embodiment of the country with the Bismarckian model. Our findings show that Germany has policies that are in line with flexibility in the labour market, but it has poor unemployed regulations for the inclusion of the unemployed youth. Germany thus fits with the precariousness model, which does little for the insiders while giving nothing to the outsiders.

Having focused on distinct approaches targeting unemployed youth across Europe, it is important to come back to our distinction between young and younger unemployed people

so as to assess the extent to which policies and institutional provisions target specifically the youngest cohort.⁵ Our findings are quite conclusive owing to the overall lack of specific policies for the younger across our countries. It should be said, however, that most flexible labour market regulations are sometimes especially relevant for the younger even in the absence of *de jure* distinctions. Thus, Sweden and Switzerland – that is, the most flexible countries in our study – stand out as the places where people aged 18–24 are especially present in fixed and part-time forms of working conditions. In Sweden 47 per cent of employed young people under 25 were recruited in part-time contracts in 2010, while at the same time there were just over 26 per cent of people working part-time out of the total national workforce (Labour Force Survey, 2010). In Switzerland 27 per cent per cent of active population under 25 was employed in 2008 under various forms of fixed-term contracts, 41 per cent of which consisted of precarious youth on call work (ESPA 2008). One should also notice that the further *de facto* flexibilisation of young people aged 15–24 in Sweden and Switzerland does not imply further *de jure* inclusiveness alongside the dimension of unemployment regulations. Thus, the younger face overall the same provisions existing for the older unemployed. In fact, minor differences exist so as to restrict, rather than foster, inclusion of young unemployed people under 25. In Sweden the younger lose the right to unemployment benefits as soon as refusing an offer of activation measure (the same refusal is sanctioned ‘only’ with a reduction of benefits in the case of young unemployed aged 25–34), whereas in Switzerland students and apprentices, as well as young people under 25 who have no training (completed or underway), cannot receive regular benefits. Overall, then, Sweden and Switzerland confirm their flexicurity approach to youth unemployment across the 18–34 range, though with an extra bite of flexibility for the younger owing to the demographic characteristics in the labour market.

⁵ Much of the information we use for this assessment of recent political reforms was provided by members of the YOUNEX consortium. We thank them for their help.

France also confirms its position within the flexicurity camp when focusing on policies targeting specifically the younger unemployed. An extra bite of *de facto* inclusiveness, however, can be observed. Thus, 44 per cent of unemployed people under 25 receive benefits from the unemployment insurance, that is, a large percentage when one compares them to the 55 per cent of unemployed people who obtain benefits from all age categories (Pôle Emploi, 2011). One could also mention that, since 2010, the shift from unemployment to social aid has become more inclusive also for the younger through the extension of the RSA (*Revenu de Solidarité Active*) for the unemployed youth aged 25 or less. That is, findings for the youngest cohort of the unemployed opens up space for further research on the potential distinction within the flexicurity camp between countries that may put extra efforts on flexibility (such as Sweden and Switzerland) on the one hand, and countries that focus on further inclusion (such as France) on the other.

Germany and Poland confirm their position within the precariousness camp when focusing on policies for the young unemployed under 25. In fact, findings for the Polish case show that no relevant distinction is made, at least along the two dimensions of unemployment regulations and labour market regulations, in terms of specific provisions for the younger vis-à-vis the older unemployed. As regards Germany, its policies of exclusion in terms of unemployment regulations are also common for the younger. The latter, when not eligible for insurance-based benefits and not married, are supposed to live with their parents. Benefits can thus be granted only if family support is not possible (while the option to live alone is possible only if the labour agency agrees that there are good reasons to move out). At the same time, restrictive policies are confirmed in terms of labour market regulations owing to the high percentage of flexible employees amongst the younger as well as the high number of young people under 25 in active labour market policies.

Finally, we have found that policies for the younger fit broader patterns of youth unemployment regimes also in Italy and Portugal. The Italian fit is remarkable owing to the

very restrictive approach of Italy in terms of unemployment benefits (regardless of different age categories) and to the fact that flexibilisation of the labour market is particularly intense with regard to the '*collaborazione a progetto*' contract in the 25–34 cohort. As regards Portugal, one finds that the young unemployed under 25 are not more likely to benefit from the unemployment insurance, with flexible forms of work such as part-timing being quite balanced across different age cohorts of workers.

Conclusion

This article has inquired into a number of indicators along the two dimensions of unemployment regulations and labour market regulations so as to discuss variable configurations of youth unemployment regimes. We have considered not only formal laws and policy-making, but also output indicators so as to identify constraints and facilitation that may be hiding behind formal regulations. Our main thrust was the construction of a conceptual space allowing for identifying cross-national variations in Europe and the empirical assessment of the position of seven European countries within this space. Our findings enable us to enter the scholarly discussion of results from other typologies in the comparative literature on the welfare state (e.g., Bonoli, 1997; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1993; Gallie & Paugam, 2000). In this regard, we have observed consistencies as well as unexpected findings. The two southern European countries as well as Poland reflect the characterisation of their unemployment regimes as being 'sub-protective' (Gallie & Paugam 2000). France and Sweden stand out as being very generous in terms of unemployment regulations, but they have quite flexible labour market regulations pushing them towards the flexicurity model. As regards Switzerland, it fits only partially the liberal/minimal regime (Bertozzi et al., 2005). Its high flexibility in terms of labour market is not coupled with restrictive conditions for the unemployed, but rather with high unemployment compensations and relatively favourable conditions for the low-skill precarious (Bonoli & Mach, 2001).

Most crucially, our conceptualisation is also valuable to identify variations that are hardly discussed in the extant literature, discussing cross-national differences that do not fully fit the traditional teaching of comparative welfare studies. The case of Germany, in particular, has been singled out. Our findings go against the idea of a Bismarckian state *par excellence* since Germany is characterised by high flexibility in terms of labour market regulations. Indeed, there have been considerable changes going on in Germany owing to the Hartz Reform, which was passed as a series of laws between 2003 and 2005 (Kemmerling & Bruttel, 2006). While there is much dispute about whether this is a break with the past or rather a gradual and incremental change of policy orientations following development of government policies since the early 1980s, the main point of our findings is that the Bismarckian model is hardly a model for the descendants of Bismarck themselves. In fact, precariousness is the distinct element of Germany in its approach to the unemployed youth. At the same time, the Bismarckian model is not working for other European countries. Our findings show that France – that is, the best buddy of Germany in traditional accounts of comparative welfare studies – is actually far from Germany in our bi-dimensional space, as well as from the ideal-type of the corporatist model.

In addition, our findings allow for reflecting upon similar patterns across European countries, at least the ones considered here. We have shown some important similarities in terms of flexible labour market regulations. In particular, our data display that a common preference for flexibilisation of the labour market exists regardless of cross-national distinctions. Thus, flexibility has been placed high on the political agenda in traditionally insurance-based welfare regimes such as France, Germany as well as in traditionally universalist or social democratic regimes such as Sweden. More generally, we have observed a sort of alignment of all the countries of our study along the dimension of labour market regulations (towards a relatively high level of flexibility). At least in the view of a certain political part, the counterpart of this strong flexibilisation of the labour market is an increased

precariousness of workers and in some case what some have called flex-insecurity (Berton et al., 2009). Yet, we have also emphasised that cross-national variations are still most likely in terms of unemployment regulations.

Finally, we have shown the need to extend the age borders of too strict a definition of youth unemployment so as to include young unemployed people up to their early thirties. Not only have social processes increased the time-span that individuals have to wait before entering a full adult life, but they have also impacted upon specific provisions dealing with unemployment. Accordingly, we have analysed systematically not only information referring to our broad definition of unemployed youth (18–34), but also information specifically relevant for the cohort of younger unemployed under 25. In so doing, we wanted to evaluate whether our youth unemployment regimes work across the age cleavage that is often suggested by official statistics. The answer has been overall positive. Young people over 25 are the target of crucial provisions at least as much as the unemployed youth aged less than 25. Even when the latter is taken at the core of the analysis of unemployment and labour market regulations, one finds that institutional arrangements and policy-making have not a distinct shape according to the specific situation of the youngest cohort, but usually reinforce youth unemployment regimes. Yet, we have found that the distinction between young and younger is still useful to open space for further research into differences within a same corner of our bi-dimensional space. In particular, we have shown that the flexicurity type can put more emphasis on the flexible side of labour market regulations (e.g., in Sweden and even more in Switzerland) or alternatively on the inclusive side of unemployment regulations (e.g. in France).

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