

**Beyond mayors and great men:
effectiveness, policy leadership and accountability
in Italian local government**

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Abstract

In Italy institutional reforms have brought radical changes to local politics. Nonetheless, the effect of changes on policy performance has been less evident. This paper proposes an analysis of government effectiveness in four cases of social service provision in two Italian cities, using the most similar systems design. Starting from theories of organisational effectiveness, the paper discusses the influence of policy leadership and perceptions of transparency in overcoming resistance and avoiding institutional conflicts between the council and the executive. Through the collection of official documents and semi-structured interviews, policy-making in social assistance is reconstructed from the inside.

Keywords

Effectiveness, policy leadership, accountability, local government, bureaucracy, social assistance.

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1. Introduction

According to democratic theory, democracy involves a commitment not only to the achievement of results in terms of liberty and equality, but also to procedures that limit the power of the governors (Sartori 1987; Dahl 1989; Morlino 2010, p. 511). Indeed, the legitimacy of local institutions in a multi-level governance system may depend not only on the satisfaction of popular demands (input oriented legitimacy) but also on problem-solving capacity and government effectiveness in service delivery (output oriented legitimacy) (Le Galès 2000; Scharpf 1999).

The issue of problem solving and effectiveness is particularly relevant in the case of local government in Italy, as reform of local institutions in the 1990s was intended both to increase effectiveness in policy making (Bobbio 2005, p. 29; Lippi 2011, p. 499) and as a response to the crisis of legitimacy of the political system (Dente 1997, p. 178).

Notwithstanding the achievement of government stability (Fabbrini 2001), directly elected mayors have not always been able to improve local governments' performance, particularly in terms of service delivery (Catanzaro *et al.* 2002; Burroni *et al.* 2009; Bäck, Heinelt & Magnier 2006; Pasotti 2007). This paper focuses on the policy-making process and on the role of process variables to account for different levels of effectiveness in local government. In particular, the focus will be on two aspects relatively overlooked in the study of democratic policy-making: leadership and accountability. To do so, the analysis will consider a variety of policy actors: not only mayors, but also *assessori* – the Italian word identifying the members of the executive (in the singular: *assessore*) – top and front line bureaucrats, councillors and experts.

This comparative study of four cases of welfare-service provision is based on six months' fieldwork in the municipal authorities of Turin and Florence.¹ Each case deals with the achievements of a policy programme developed over two terms in each city: in Turin between 1997-2001 and 2001-2006; in Florence between 1999-2004 and 2004-2009.

By focusing on the policy process, the main research questions are how effective local government has been in the selected cases and what can be learned about performance. In order to develop the main argument, sections two and three define performance and effectiveness in local policy-making and examine the potential influence of policy leadership and accountability in shaping policy results. The selection of cases and the methodology is presented in section four. Section five evaluates effectiveness by identifying specific policy goals for each mandate and assessing their fulfilment. Finally, in section six I discuss the plausible influence of process variables such as policy leadership

and perceptions of transparency, and, in section seven I provide concluding remarks on the role of the policy-making process in determining performance in local democracies.

2. Theoretical and empirical relevance: Performance and effectiveness in Italian local government

This article proposes a study of performance looking at government effectiveness in an area of policy crucial for citizens' equality and satisfaction at the local level, namely welfare and social assistance. The concept of effectiveness can be semantically framed as "internal effectiveness", i.e. the ability to elaborate and achieve specific policy goals (Weaver & Rockman 1993, pp. 5-10). Nonetheless, the assessment of basic goal attainment needs to be completed by the evaluation of unanticipated effects (Vedung 1997, p. 52). Thus, the analysis of performance starts by identifying policy problems and solutions as formulated by policy-makers. Each solution corresponds to policy goals, instruments and practices. Assessing effectiveness thus means evaluating the extent to which institutions have achieved their objectives.

This definition explicitly leaves aside the evaluation of policy outcomes in terms of their impacts on target populations, but tries to unveil intended and unintended consequences of the policy process in policy subsystems at the local level. Government effectiveness is thus defined as the ability of the local government to achieve its policy goals and to cope with unintended consequences during the implementation phase.

To give an assessment of performance effectiveness, I recall Vedung's (1997) "side effects evaluation". In this approach, policies are considered as incremental processes. In their evaluation, it is possible to distinguish between intended and unintended effects of policy programmes. Main effects are the substantive impacts that the policy maker intends to achieve inside target areas. Side effects are impacts that fall outside the target area and can be beneficial or detrimental to the policy programme. Moreover, there can be perverse effects when the intervention produces outcomes that are the opposite of what was intended, or null effects, when the programme has no impact on target areas (Vedung 1997, pp. 49-57).

Each effect may be connected to a more specific list of expected outcomes. Evaluation of the distance between expected and observed outputs and of the sign of the effect in relation to the policy goal can give a rough idea of the effectiveness of governmental action. When main and side effects are positive and beneficial to the policy goal, aims are achieved and government

performance is defined as “effective”. When positive main effects are mixed with detrimental side effects or when beneficial side effects have perverse or null effects, performance can be defined as “partially effective”, since the government could not fulfil all its tasks. When the observed effects are both perverse, or null and detrimental, government is defined as “scarcely effective” .

Furthermore, in order to account for different levels of effectiveness and to understand the role of different actors in policy ~~provision~~, theories of government performance may be recalled here.

Since government can be seen as a complex organisation, theories of management and organisation can be used to highlight what factors may be relevant for the explanation. Environment, structures and management underlie all these theories (Lynn & Robichau 2013, pp. 221-222). Focusing on how the internal and external environment influence organisational performance, political authorities’ oversight and leadership emerge among the factors that provide motivation and enhance effectiveness in public agencies. In particular, other things being equal (such as resources, technology, mission valence, task design and organisational cultures), agency effectiveness is achieved through external supervision by political bodies and stakeholders, and by stable leadership involving a multiplicity of actors showing strong commitment to the agency’s mission and an ability to set goals as well as to cope with political and administrative constraints (Raney & Steinbauer 1999, pp. 3-18).

Thus, leadership and accountability emerge as two key factors affecting the ability of government to achieve its goals, according to specific mechanisms that explain effectiveness at the micro level. Especially when decision-making involves non-incremental changes, effectiveness is linked to the ability of policy-makers to overcome vetoes and to build support and consent (Dente 2011, p. 139). Therefore, in the implementation phase, the role of political and bureaucratic executives is crucial to the delivery of public services, as their actions may influence the translation of general objectives into concrete initiatives (Meny & Thoening 1991, p. 192).

In particular, in the case of Italian local government, political oversight and accountability may influence the relationships between the executive and the legislature, such relationships being strongly conflictual (Burroni *et al.* 2009).

In the next section, the definitions of policy leadership and accountability will be sketched out and hypotheses will be proposed to highlight the role of these two variables in local government performance in the four cases of social policy programmes.

3. Process variables determine performance? Policy leadership, accountability and perceptions of transparency

Effectiveness is linked to the ability to overcome resistance and to build support around government action, i.e. to overcome vetoes and to avoid conflicts. Local government develops policies under several constraints, such as limited financial resources, scarce knowledge of problems, and limited consent. These constraints draw attention to the relevance of the policy-making process and the role of individual actors in determining policy outputs. Policy leadership and perceptions of transparency in accountability forums can be considered as process variables that interact with other independent variables.

Political leadership and particularly mayors have proved to be influential not only at elections, but also in local policy-making (Gains, Greasley & Stoker 2009). What is less clear is the role of other actors and, in particular, the way leadership actually operates during the policy process.

Political scientists often identify leaders with the heads of political organisations and emphasise charismatic and relational attributes (Blondel 1987; Burns 2003; Nye 2008). Managerial and policy studies downgrade the role of single individuals, promoting the concept of leadership as social action carried out collectively, i.e. by a group of leaders, rather than by a single “great hero”. In other words, policy leadership is a specific form of action in which actors coordinate their action in a given way in order to achieve a shared policy goal (Capano 2009, p. 8).

Observation of the policy process reveals the necessity of guidance and steering in different phases of policy-making, from agenda setting to implementation, by a coalition of actors endowed with different strategic resources. In his seminal work, *Leadership and Administration*, Selznick (1957, pp. 22-28) emphasises the contextual nature of leadership and the importance of values and ideas setting activities.

In other phases of the policy-making process and in a multi-level system of governance, other types of resources, such as appointments, relations, finance and votes, may become strategic with regard to steering the policy-making process (Capano 2009, p. 10). Thus, the concept of “policy leadership” does not coincide with the idea of “policy entrepreneurship” (Kingdon 1984), which refers to an ideational activity rather than to the social action of coordinating multiple actors for the purposes of achieving a common policy goal.

Hence, another feature of policy leadership appears: though politicians are key actors in the achievement of policy effectiveness, especially in cities (Borraz & John 2004), their communicative

and relational resources are not sufficient to reach policy goals. Knowledge of the context and the technical expertise of street-level and top bureaucrats may prove fundamental for policy leadership. Whereas setting priorities and communicating a vision are pivotal activities, the selection of incoherent or inefficient policy instruments can strongly impinge on effectiveness. Furthermore through day-to-day administration, the local bureaucracy may contribute to clarifying the political vision, especially to associations and citizens.

Thus, policy leadership can be defined as the action of a plurality of actors who share a policy goal and activate strategic resources to overcome vetoes. Empirically, policy leadership corresponds to the action of more than one individual who uses his resources to overcome specific difficulties and can be revealed by the reconstruction of the policy process and specific questions in semi-structured interviews (e.g. “What were the main obstacles to fulfilment of the project? How did you try to overcome them?”).

A working hypothesis concerning the influence of policy leadership on effectiveness can be expressed thus:

Proposition 1 – If policy leadership emerges during the policy-making process, vetoes are overcome and ~~thus~~ more effectiveness is achieved.

Civil servants and politicians turn out to be fundamental actors also as far as transparency and accountability are concerned. In several European countries, local government reforms have attributed more power and visibility to executives in order to provide more effectiveness and accountability (Gains, Greasley & Stoker, p. 78). In the Italian case, the new institutional arrangementⁱⁱ soon created tensions between the executives and the municipal assemblies and among components of the governing coalition (Burroni *et al.* 2009). The initiative in policy making is in the hands of the executive, and the transparency of the policy process is not guaranteed by publicity: for example, executive meetings are not open to the public. Councils control executives through their activities in the thematic commissions or through their votes on budgets and regulations. Even harsher conflicts may rise when election time comes and incumbency is not taken for granted. As Italian legislation (see art. 2, law n. 81/1993) limits the number of consecutive mandates for mayors, the period before elections may indeed be even more difficult for the executive in charge.ⁱⁱⁱ Public scrutiny may also be enhanced by specialised administrative tribunals, which oversee the regularity of administrative acts. Hence, accountability has not been reinforced since the reforms (Lippi 2011, p. 514).

Theoretically, accountability affects perceptions of transparency, as accountability is a relationship between an actor and a forum in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify his or her

conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgments, and the actor may face consequences. Such a forum can also reinforce public governance legitimacy as executives undergo public scrutiny (Bovens 2010, p. 951).

In the accountability forum, members of the council may look for transparency in the behaviour of the executive and give their support to government action accordingly, while members of the executive may commit themselves to the fulfilment of policy goals. The consequences of accountability relations can also be seen at the individual level by investigating perceptions of transparency through semi-structured interviews and the analysis of public debate (*ibidem*, 954-956).

Municipal assemblies and thematic commissions are often the scene of these conflicts. My hypothesis is that perceptions of transparency and accountability of government action may attenuate conflict and thus be relevant in different phases of the policy-making process, and it can be expressed thus:

Proposition 2: If councillors perceive transparency in accountability relationships during the meetings of thematic commissions, conflict between the council and the municipal executive is absent and thus greater effectiveness is achieved.

4. Case selection

Italian cities offer an interesting point of observation for evaluating effectiveness, policy leadership and accountability in public-service provision. In a context of political fragmentation and “negotiated pluralism” (Dente 1991), implementation of Italian local government reforms has had different effects depending on the local context (Lippi 2011, pp. 509-510). Levels of effectiveness may thus vary not only between cities but also within the same city between different electoral terms.

The cases used for analysis are four municipal policy programmes that were developed, set up and implemented during two consecutive electoral terms in two Italian cities, Turin and Florence. These welfare programmes were chosen especially because of their similarities in policy goals, notwithstanding some contextual differences between the two cities.

All programmes focus on social services at the local level, but show different levels of effectiveness. This comparison is thus useful for unveiling different combinations of explanatory factors. Case selection was carried out based on the most similar systems design, whereby cases

display different outcomes in the dependent variable and are similar in several independent variables that contribute to the explanation according to existing theories (such as socio-economic conditions, institutional framework and policy design).

The first similarity lies in the socio-economic characteristics of the two cities and in the styles of their local governments. Both Florence and Turin are wealthy cities situated in the north of Italy and share a common style of government involving direct intervention in the local society and the economy. Members of executives in both cities enjoyed the trust and strong commitment of the mayors and thus had ample delegation on welfare issues. Moreover, both cities have been governed by centre-left coalitions since the beginning of the 1990s. Within the coalition, the role of the radical left has been relevant from an electoral perspective, and thus similar political vetoes were exercised in the area of municipal welfare. In both cases, third-sector actors and local associations are numerous and play an important role in delivering social services. These stakeholders are also active in regional policy-making (Agnoletto 2005; Madama 2010).

Another similarity lies in the institutional framework within which local government has to operate in the implementation of welfare programmes. In Italy, Regions can pass legislation on social services/policies, while the role of the State is less evident. Under regional legislation, local authorities are responsible for the operating level (Fargion 1996, pp. 137-138; Fargion 2012, p. 45). Social services reforms in the years 2000 and 2001 did not dramatically change this picture but introduced a certain number of uncertainties and territorial differences, also in terms of administrative capacity at different territorial levels (Gualmini 2012, p. 28).

In particular, both the regional governments of Tuscany and Piedmont tightly control the management of social services at the local level, especially through their political influence over the *Aziende Sanitarie Locali* (ASL) or local health boards. Two more issues have to be considered here: policy design and the distribution of resources.

As far as policy design is concerned, Piedmont and Tuscany have developed different strategies with regard to social services and social care, especially for elderly people and home care. While Piedmont has used regional legislation to define the criteria for access to services and accreditation of private actors and third-sector representatives in service provision^{iv}, Tuscany has attempted a more ambitious design with the creation of a new institutional body^v. In both Regions, local authorities have no freedom to change the regional policy design, but they enjoy some freedom in implementing it. Indeed, in Tuscany, the implementation of regional policy concerning [social services](#)/social care has differed from case to case, with varying degrees of success (Fargion 2012, p.

51-58). Implementation in Piedmont has also shown differences between local authorities (*ibidem*, pp. 59-60).

Second, the distribution of fiscal resources from the regional “centre” to the “peripheries” has always been the subject of conflict: local programming and the implementation of policies has been subject to the contingent relationship with the Region (Ferrera 2005; Madama 2010; Maretti 2009). As this analysis will show, the capacity of local politicians and bureaucrats to attract resources and to build multi-level coalitions of interests with the regional level is key to the implementation of policy programmes.

The last similarity pertains to the stability of the policy design and of key policy-making actors such as members of the executives with responsibility for welfare and social assistance. Despite the period of national and regional reforms, social needs and demand for services during the four terms considered has remained stable; at the same time, the responses of government in terms of policy goals and programmes have been similar in the four cases, as evidenced by the analysis of effectiveness in the next section. Moreover, the key individuals involved in the implementation of welfare programmes maintained a relationship of trust with the head of the executive, the mayor, especially in the case of Turin, where the mayor changed between the first and the second term.

Given the stability of policy goals and actors, Turin and Florence differ in terms of a potentially relevant contextual factor.^{vi} As a matter of fact, at the end of the second term in Florence (Florence B hereinafter), the local executive was heavily delegitimised by the legal problems of some of its components and by political pressure from internal opponents in the main party of the centre-left coalition (Galanti 2011). Nonetheless, interviews showed that this delegitimation of the Florence B executive, was perceived as a consequence, more than as a cause, of overall government effectiveness (Interviews FI9, FI11).

The analysis was carried out through description of the policy-making process, based on official documents and balance sheets, reports in local newspapers and semi-structured interviews^{vii} with mayors, members of the executive with responsibility for welfare and social services, general managers and other local government officers, councillors, experts.

5. Mission accomplished? Policy goals and effectiveness during four electoral terms

One of the main objectives of the local administrations was to adapt the municipal welfare system to a changed environment. In particular, population aging was a major problem. In order to respond

to the needs of this section of the population, a restructuring of social services was required, despite the lack of legal guidelines, national or regional, in this respect (Agnoletto 2005, p. 126; Kazepov 2009, p.13). Given this context, official documents, interviews and press releases^{viii} were analysed to highlight different policy goals, instruments and expectations in each case.

5.1 Setting policy goals

The policy goals in municipal social assistance are summarised in table 1. For each policy goal, the table also shows its development indicating expected outputs and indicators, observed outputs and type of effect.

In the first term considered, in Turin from 1997 to 2001 (hereinafter Turin A), government aimed at increasing the number of financial resources dedicated to social services and social care and at reorganising municipal services. Both these objectives implied competition over scarce resources among actors in government, and changes to the status quo in the organisational charts of the municipal administrative structure. The aim of the restructuring of municipal services remained also in the second case considered, that of social services in Turin from 2001 to 2006 (hereinafter Turin B). Moreover, joint planning of social interventions thorough a participatory process was set as a priority for the government.

In the third case, social services in Florence from 1999 to 2004 (hereinafter Florence A), the goal of increasing expenditure on municipal welfare and the restructuring of municipal social assistance was also present, but the aim of integrating health with social services emerged during the mandate as a key objective of both the municipal and the regional governments. In the last case considered, social policies in Florence 2004-2009 (herinafter Florence B), the involvement of private and non-profit actors was pursued but with different tools than in Turin B.

The approval of new rules and specific regulations by the Council was the main policy tool chosen to introduce changes in all the cases considered. In particular, resolutions and guidelines aimed at regulating tendering for outsourcing of individual services and at defining new access criteria.

Nonetheless, the priority in Florence B was bringing into being the new bodies for the governance of social policies, the *Società della Salute* (SDS), or health agencies.

A SDS is formally a consortium between the regional government of Tuscany, the local ASL and the local authority. It plans and manages health and social assistance in the locality.^{ix} The background idea is that a better coordination of proposals and resources between the ASL and the municipality will ensure more effective and efficient management of welfare services. To promote

this coordination, a formal agency was created: the SDS was intended to act independently in managing programmes and resources.

The SDS also has a regulatory function. It discusses and approves a number of formal agreements on outsourcing or delegation of service delivery to private actors. In other words, the SDS is the institution that formally establishes and controls the outsourcing and that should represent the public interest. Moreover, the SDS is also the agency that should foster participation in care planning (Morlino *et al.* 2010).

5.2 The effectiveness of policy initiatives: Spending is easier than restructuring

Effectiveness in reaching policy goals varied in the cases considered. Table 1 summarises the elements considered in the evaluation of the four cases. In the cases of Turin A and Florence A, policy goals were partially achieved. Strategies and instruments proved to be scarcely effective in Florence B, whereas in the case of Turin B the introduction of participatory planning helped complete the restructuring of social services, increasing effectiveness. The achievement of policy goals is discussed separately for each case.

In Turin A, expenditure on social services increased in comparison to other policy domains (see Table 2). Looking at current expenditure on welfare as a proportion of total expenditure allows for the assessment of the real priorities of government action at a time of financial constraints. Moreover, among welfare services, social services and subsidies were favoured.

The fulfilment of the second policy goal proved to be more difficult: the approval of the new regulation on homecare was postponed; revision of the regulations and criteria governing access to subsidies took more time than expected to be approved and led to conflict between the council and the executive as a side effect (Interviews, TO1 and TO2).

This conflict was resolved during the following term allowing for better achievement of policy goals in the case of Turin B. The council actively supported government action especially because of its involvement in the planning process associated with drawing up the *Piano dei servizi sociali 2003-2006 (Social Services Plan 2003-2006)*, which started in December 2001. Development of the Plan involved not only the *assessore* and social services officials, but also the council, the thematic commission on social services and, in particular, 197 organisations, out of the 364 associations – cooperatives and NGOs delivering social care – that were invited. According to interviews and expert opinions, governmental action was able actively to involve the relevant actors in social care, by creating trust among participants and reducing conflicts as a beneficial effect (TO2; TO5;

Bifulco 2010, p. 40; Ciarini 2008, p. 13). New procedures and a more collaborative attitude were useful for building support, especially for approval of the bill on homecare and changes to the former regulations on subsidies^x.

In Florence A, the increase in resources spent on assistance was moderate (see table 2) and the implementation of the reform of the organisation^{xi} of municipal social services ‘remained in a drawer’ (interview FI1), while the first step in the realisation of the SDS project was achieved. The municipal council was called upon to approve the experimentation of the SDS with a formal vote. Despite the strong resistance of the political opposition, involvement of the councillors in discussion of the project resulted in approval of the formal agreement and of the new local regulations on the integration between social and health services in 2002. Thus, a partial level of effectiveness was observed.

- TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE -

The support of the council started to fade during the last term considered, in the case of Florence B, which was evaluated as scarcely effective. The creation of the new SDS was not followed by its institutionalisation. The SDS could not achieve autonomy in management especially as far as budgetary and planning issues were concerned. At the same time, it was perceived as representing a ‘useless duplication of functions’ (FI2; FI9; FI12).

Fragmentation, vetoing of decisions and a lack of homogenous distribution of services between town districts were reported by most interviewees who were part of past and present administrations (FI5; FI6; FI8):

‘It was not only a matter of multiplying the number of decisions and formal steps needed for doing things. There was also the real problem of having different services according to the territory: each town hall acted totally freely, so in the end there was also a problem of territorial homogeneity in service provision’ (F5).

The SDS thus engendered bitter conflict among different bureaucratic structures and produced a duplication of procedures with detrimental effects especially for the creation of joint zone plans with private actors in the social service sector (i.e. the *Consulta del terzo settore*^{xii}). In the next section, policy leadership and transparency via accountability mechanisms will be discussed in relation to effectiveness in the four cases.

6. Policy leadership, transparency and mechanisms.

In sections 2 and 3, a proposition on effectiveness was derived from the theory of government performance and two main hypotheses were proposed on the influence of policy leadership and perceptions of transparency in accountability forums. To be effective, local government needs to overcome vetoes and to avoid conflicts, especially with councillors. In this section, I show evidence of how policy leadership and transparency have helped to overcome difficulties in the realisation of policy goals.

6.1 Leadership in action and the involvement of the Council: The Cases of Turin A and Turin B

In the case of Turin A, the obstacles were linked to the scarcity of financial resources and to changes in rules and in the organisation of municipal social services. In Turin B, resistance emerged from within the council, which felt marginalised in discussion of the criteria of access to services. Moreover, municipal branch offices, third-sector organisations and other associations delivering care for the elderly and disabled complained about their lack of involvement in the process. Indeed, different aspects of the policy programme became crucial for effectiveness and the resources of different actors were needed to overcome political, bureaucratic and social resistance. Moreover, since the restructuring of municipal social services implied a change of policy from public intervention to a mixed system of welfare based on public regulation, outsourcing and collaboration with the third sector and other associations, the sharing of a common vision of problems and solutions was necessary. Finally, the nature of social services implied the need for considerable technical expertise in social care and for collaboration with the regional level.

In both the above mentioned cases, policy leadership as defined in section 3 was present. A plurality of strategic actors from politics, administration and civil society shared the vision promoting welfare mix: the *assessore*, the mayor, the head of the social services' department, municipal staff and some private actors representing the non-profit sector (TO2; TO5).

Moreover, innovative policy instruments were activated to spread this vision and overcome resistance. For example, the *assessore* proved to be at the same time a policy entrepreneur and a leader in the policy-making process: he developed the idea of initiating a participatory process for developing the *Piano dei Servizi Sociali 2003-2006*, in collaboration with the director of the department of social services. This bureaucratic figure was a former employee in a local volunteer association and later a regional officer. These biographical notes are relevant insofar they represent strategic resources, because relationships of trust with street-level operators and the regional bureaucracy were crucial to overcoming resistance. In fact, the relationship with the regional

government was carried on at the bureaucratic level to bring financial resources and administrative capability to Turin's social services, since 'the real policy issues were not a matter for politicians, but for technicians' (TO2).

The *assessore* and the director shared technical and administrative knowledge about laws, rules and models in social care that proved to be fundamental with regard to proposing and drawing up the new regulations. Thus, the effectiveness of the process was also favoured by the coherence between policy goals and administrative initiatives. The policy instruments put forward were perceived as coherent with the overarching goals: such coherence facilitated the sharing of a common policy vision and its acceptance by the community at large (TO5; TO3). Collaboration between the political leader, the *assessore*, and the bureaucratic leader – the director – was decisive when it came to mobilising strategic ideational and material resources:

'In the end, I had the support of all the municipal officials and the politicians in the executive, the mayor in particular. (...) Finally, a leading group was created to work in a participatory way. Paths and formal resolutions were built together' (TO2).

Nonetheless, these strategic resources were not sufficient to avoid a detrimental effect in the first case considered (Turin A): conflicts between the executive and the council. The main problem experienced in that period was the substantial exclusiveness of the policy-making process and the weak role of the council (Interviews TO1 and TO3). The analysis of the activities of the thematic commissions showed that from 1997 to 2001, control of the executive was weakly exercised (interview TO1), despite the efforts of the President of the thematic commission, a former member of the local executive (interview TO4).

Moreover, the executive's commitment to the accountability forum was low, as the *assessore* was not available for council inquiries or public debate (Interview TO1). So, the conflict between the executive and the council delayed the approval of several regulatory acts and influenced the effectiveness of government action.

During the following term, the case of Turin B, both the *assessore* and the council members changed their perceptions and attitudes, according to interviewees. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of council enquiries presented by the thematic commission on social services gradually increased. Most of all, thanks to the initiative of the bureaucracy, council members were actively involved in the participatory planning. The meetings and practices of the participatory planning process gave transparency and influence to private actors in the planning process and this allowed for trust building (Interviews TO2, TO4; TO7; TO9).

From December 2001 to November 2003, when the Plan was officially approved, several coordinated meetings and different procedural steps, including audits, were carried out. The procedures implied different thematic meetings with associations, cooperatives and volunteers: these groups were called to put forward proposals to the local government. These proposals were presented by the *assessore* to the Council and then modified.

Thus, in the case of Turin B, policy leadership combined with perceptions of transparency (Interviews TO1; TO2; TO7); the networking capacity of the director, the political resources of the *assessore* supported by the executive, along with the close involvement of councillors in the auditing process, helped to overcome resistance to municipal initiatives and to transform conflict into active support:

‘My work was only to enhance these groups, to create a network and to make them talk to each other. It was a coordination role, with the close involvement of both public and private actors. (...) In the participatory meetings, I (the *assessore*) was often present. And this empowered the process a lot, also on the part of the council. (...) Our idea is that if we do things together, we also make mistakes together’ (TO2).

6.2 *One leader, but no leadership. From deadlock to conflict in the cases of Florence A and Florence B*

As discussed above, policy initiatives were less effective in the other two cases. Vetoes and conflicts came from bureaucratic structures, on the one hand, and from political conflict, on the other. The creation of a new organisation, the SDS, represented a dramatic change in policy and it proved difficult to establish the agency as an independent organisation.

Conflicts between the council and the executive were less evident in the case of Florence A, but emerged more clearly in the case of Florence B. Representatives of the political opposition in the council always contested the SDS design, but with time majority councillors too withdrew their support for the project. Press releases and interviews show that councillors and civil-society actors perceived a lack of transparency in government activities from 2004 to 2009. As a matter of fact, the Council could avoid implementing the SDS, since it was part of the regional legislative act on social care. Nevertheless, despite the presence of the *assessore* in the SDS, there were no mechanisms of formal accountability to the council (FI2; FI12). For example, the formal agreement for outsourcing welfare services – except for nurseries – was approved directly by the SDS, without formal intervention or supervision of either the executive or the council (FI2). Moreover, administrative courts took action against breaches of procedure: two SDS directors were sentenced

and fined for administrative irregularities in February 2011. All this strongly influenced perceptions of transparency, since the definition of roles and procedures inside the SDS was not institutionalised at that time.

Moreover, in both Florence A and Florence B, the fragmentation of strategic resources, scarce networking capacity, and incoherent policy visions among actors contributed to the absence of policy leadership. Actors were endowed with several strategic resources, but they lacked coordination, with a resulting misuse of several political, organisational, ideational and communicative skills.

As far as the sharing of policy goals was concerned, the policy views of the *assessore* and of the director of the social services department in Florence diverged, while the joint definition of goals and initiatives was evident in the two cases of social care in Turin. Moreover, the strict separation of roles and duties made it impossible to adapt policy instruments during the process and to activate strategic resources in order to overcome deadlocks.

In the SDS experiment, this lack of collaboration was particularly evident. The new agency was strongly promoted by the *assessore*, but his remarkable power resources were not sufficient to give new and stable rules to the organisation of social services. He was not able to overcome the opposition of the different administrative branches of the local institutions, including the director of social services and the director of the regional ASL. His political will was insufficient to overcome bureaucratic and organisational divisions:

‘A clear weakness was that the SDS does not yet exist as a management unit. At first, it was not clear inside the structure “who does what”. The definition of roles in the structure was unclear; meetings for consultation, formal rules and common procedures to actually integrate the ASL and municipalities were not activated: each subject inside the SDS continued with its own operations. The two worlds were still separate.’ (FI7).

In other words, the SDS project was not pursued through collective action, but only through the discrete use of political resources by a few actors worried about their personal careers and unwilling to collaborate in problem solving (FI2). This state of affairs also hampered any collaboration with the third sector and other associations. The difficulties involved in dealing with private actors were also due to a lack of reciprocal trust among actors (FI11).

Moreover, according to the interviews, the few private actors involved in the SDS were disappointed by it, since it was impossible to find a common vision for welfare provision (F6). This was also because the SDS was monopolised by the new *assessore*, who decided all relevant policy interventions with a close circle of people within the municipal executive, without any possibility

for scrutiny by the council (FI2, FI9). These features of the process are likely to have hindered support for the executive, and in particular for the *assessore* responsible for welfare policies.

Table 3 summarises the cases. A typology has been created to connect levels of effectiveness as a dependent variable with policy leadership and perception of transparency as independent variables, other things being equal.

The four cases showed varying degrees of influence of policy leadership and perception of transparency in overcoming resistance and avoiding conflicts with the council. In Turin B, policy leadership and accountability mechanisms helped overcome resistance and transform conflicts between the council and the executive into support. In contrast, the absence of policy leadership and the weak accountability of the SDS process produced deadlock and protests in Florence B: without policy leadership, notwithstanding its rapid creation, the new SDS organisation was not autonomous and was unable to promote the involvement of private actors; without accountability, the whole process produced widespread mistrust and protest among policy-making actors.

Turin A and Florence A correspond to cases of partial effectiveness. In both cases, policy goals were partially fulfilled, but the two cases showed different mechanisms of influence on effectiveness. On the one hand, in the case of Florence, the fragmentation of strategic resources and the absence of a clear and shared vision of policy problems produced a lack of coordination among actors. Without coordination, the organisation of social care remained unchanged, while the provision of services became fragmented. On the other hand, in Turin A, the lack of public debate and the lack of commitment of members of the executive produced internal dissent in the governing coalition and wariness.

-- TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE --

7. Conclusions

The analysis of four policy-making processes in social care showed the importance of individual behaviours and actors' perceptions in promoting government effectiveness at the local level. Not only results, but also practices mattered. Institutional constraints emphasise the role of individual skills and resources in local government: effectiveness of performance was influenced by the steering action of a plural policy leadership and by the relationships between the council and the executive. So, while policy leadership seems to reinforce output legitimacy, accountability could strengthen input legitimacy.

These findings are particularly relevant for Italian local government, but also for other European countries that enjoy some degree of discretion and autonomy at the local level and at the same time are facing a legitimacy crisis. Analysis of the process revealed the importance of actors other than the mayor for policy leadership. A variety of resources are needed for government to be effective (Dente 2011): the resources of the bureaucracy were decisive in shaping the relationship with the Region; at the same time, the ideational and political resources of members of the executive were necessary for the selection of core values, the creation of shared meanings and visions of policy. This meaning-making activity turned out to be fundamental, in an era of crisis for local Italian political parties in the elaboration of public policies (Dente 1997). Moreover, the analysis suggests that the introduction of practices aimed at transparency and the active involvement of the councils in the policy-making process may help to spread consent and limit protest. As the legitimacy of local governments depends not only on what services municipalities provide, but also on how they provide them (Pierre and Røiseland 2011), the policy-making process may thus serve as a means to increase effectiveness and legitimacy.

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List of interviews

- (TO1) council member, thematic commission for welfare, City of Turin
- (TO2) executive member with responsibility for welfare, City of Turin
- (TO3) executive member with responsibility for the peripheries and social exclusion, City of Turin
- (TO4) mayor, City of Turin
- (TO5) mayor, City of Turin
- (TO6) city manager, City of Turin
- (TO7) officer, social services division, section for old and disabled people, City of Turin
- (TO8) officer, social services division, section of the poor and immigrants, City of Turin
- (TO9) council member, City of Turin
- (TO10) council member, City of Turin
- (FI1) executive member with responsibility for welfare and personnel, City of Florence

- (FI2) executive member with responsibility for poverty and social exclusion, City of Florence
- (FI3) executive member with responsibility for welfare, City of Florence
- (FI4) mayor, city of Florence
- (FI5) manager, welfare and services section, City of Florence
- (FI6) director, social services division, City of Florence
- (FI7) director, SDS of Florence
- (FI8) director, social services division, City of Florence
- (FI9) officer, social services division, City of Florence
- (FI10) officer, social services division, section for old and disabled people, City of Turin
- (FI11) council member, city of Florence
- (FI12) council member, city of Florence
- (FI13) mayor, city of Florence

ⁱAs far as legislative and administrative functions are concerned, Italian regions have legislative competence in the areas of health, social assistance, disability, the elderly, parental leave and drug dependency. The planning and implementation of several services are the responsibility of the Municipalities. In this article, the services considered will be: social care/services and residential care (for the old, the disabled, the poor and immigrants), parental leave and social assistance. In this analysis, these services will be considered separately from other services often treated as local responsibilities, such as nurseries, cemeteries and social housing.

ⁱⁱ In Italy since 1993, mayors have been directly elected through a mixed electoral system. The electoral system gives the majority of the seats to the coalition supporting the winning mayor. This ensures governmental stability. The power of the mayor is increased also because he can appoint members of the executive and because he makes several appointments to municipal and other agencies. Moreover, the legal and economic resources as well as the visibility of local councillors have been much reduced.

ⁱⁱⁱ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this interpretation.

^{iv} See Piedmont regional law n. 1, approved January 8, 2004.

^v See Tuscan regional law, n. 40, approved February 24, 2005.

^{vi} I thank the anonymous reviewers for suggesting that I highlight this difference in the second term considered for the city of Florence.

^{vii} Interviews are listed after the references.

^{viii} See in particular official documents: *Linee programmatiche (executives programs) della Città di Torino 1997-2001; 2001-2006; Programma di governo del Comune di Firenze 1999-2004; 2004-2009*; interviews TO2, TO3, TO4, TO5, FI1, FI2, FI3, FI4, F5; archives of the local edition of La Repubblica (Torino and Firenze).

^{ix} See related regulations: acts of council n. 01058, November, 2001; n. 919, November, 19, 2003; n. 50, July, 17, 2006; n. 46, April, 20, 2009.

^x See regulations: council act n. 05700/19, February, 12, 2001; n. 11557/019, February, 28, 2005.

^{xi} A professional advisor was asked to suggest where and how services could be outsourced as part of a formal planning process called the “Services’ Plan”. The outsourcing strategy was intended to reduce the direct management of social services. As the *assessore* changed in 2002, the Plan was not implemented and substituted with the SDS project (Interview FI1).

^{xii} Literally “chamber of the third sector”. This body has a consultative function and is meant to facilitate the participation of NGOs, civil-society associations and third-sector actors involved in health and social care. It is involved in preparing the planning documents.