

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: A NEW TYPE OF WELFARE SYSTEM ?

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This article develops a policy-oriented, explanatory, meso-analysis of the configurative aspects of the Social Dimension of the European Union. It comprises six sections which fall into two wider parts. In the first part (sections one to three), the central elements of the analytical framework are outlined. Social policy is conceptualized in terms of its substantive boundaries and normative foundations. And the distinct structures, contents and policy types of the welfare systems -at the national and the EU levels- are drawn up against the background of their respective contextual determinant factors. In the second part (sections four to six) the analytical framework is further developed. First, the article assesses the impact of cross-national welfare heterogeneity upon the levels and nature of European social policy integration (the territorial cleavage). Secondly, the content of the EU welfare system (the substantive cleavage) is analysed on the basis of the degree of translation of a limited set of partly conflicting goals into actual policy initiatives. Finally, the extent to which an intergovernmental logic prevails over a neo-federal state-building perspective, within the social decision framework of the EU, is considered as the key variable which help to explain both the external boundaries of the social dimension (its policy structure) and its internal balance of policy types and instruments.

1. A CONCEPT OF SOCIAL POLICY: MANAGING THE LABOUR MARKET AND THE DISTRIBUTIONAL CONFLICT

The concept of social policy has been used to identify realities of diverse scope and nature. It does not refer to a field of public intervention which could be defined in clear-cut sectoral terms. However, a number of well-defined policy areas (health, housing, income support...) have been widely examined under the heading of social policy. Therefore, a first key question emerges whether social policy is an analytically relevant concept, beyond its mere function of conceptual umbrella. In this article, a definition is proposed taking into account the two basic configurative aspects of social policy: its substantive boundaries and its normative foundations. Firstly, social policy will embrace the set of collective decisions which are intended to regulate and manage both the labour market -the real conditions under which the individuals are excluded/included in the process of production- and the distributional conflict -the struggles over the allocation of resources among class and other social groups- in western European capitalist societies¹. Secondly, governments may legitimize their intervention (or inaction) in employment and distributional issues on competitive normative grounds (Kleinman and Piachaud, 1993 p.3-5). According to a liberal point of view, the free play of market forces will maximize social welfare. Nevertheless, given the specific nature of social commodities (imperfect information, supply inelasticities...), market mechanisms will lead to sub-optimal outputs. Thus, public decision-making is justified to reach an optimal level of supply in relation to societal preferences and to avoid the negative impacts that such sub-optimal allocations will have on the general level of economic competitiveness. From a critical perspective, it is assumed that the uneven distribution of resources renders the marketplace a mechanism of social domination, where the outcomes will never express the preferences of the powerless groups. Thus, social policy is advocated on the grounds of both redistribution -the achievement of an egalitarian final income structure- and equal universal access to basic goods and chances (Majone, 1993 p.156-159. Spicker, 1993). In short, efficiency criteria in the face of market failures and, on the other hand, public-promoted equality and welfare become alternative rationales which reflect the right/left cleavage in the sphere of social policy². Having advanced a concept of social policy with a broad substantive scope and a pluralist value-basis a second key question arises whether this concept is not only analytically relevant but also empirically identifiable. The next sections will be devoted to this task.

2. THE WEST EUROPEAN NATIONAL WELFARE SYSTEMS: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND POLICY STRUCTURES

At the national level, the emergence of the post-war European welfare states engendered a large scale change in state-market relations. The public provision of services and the collective allocation of income became embedded in the new model of "intensive capitalist accumulation"³. The welfare state involved massive public spending and it was a central factor in the process of post-war nation state rebuilding on new solidaristic grounds (Janosky and Hicks, 1994)⁴. This national form of welfare could be successfully forged, over more than three decades (1950-1980), under three key contextual variables. First, the development of fordism, characterized by mass production and mass consumption processes in a framework of centralized and highly unionized industrial relations. Secondly, the social-democratic consensus, forged within stable party systems, embodying a class-based homogeneous social structure (Giddens, 1973). And finally, the practice of Keynesianism, which made viable the sustained growth of wage spending powers, preventing, at the same time, crises of over-production and political legitimation (Habermas, 1976).

These three structural factors -none of which will be found in the wider context of the EU social dimension in the late 1980s and 1990s- not only provided a stable basis, but they also determined the common features which could be found in the social policy structures, contents and policy types of the main west European welfare states. In each of these national contexts, social policy crystallized, in practice, in a structured, multi-dimensional welfare system. Each dimension of social intervention can be conceived as a sectoral regime, taking shape in a set of policies tied by a number of shared values and assumptions and by a web of dense and reasonably enduring institutional links (Francis, 1993 p.43-48). In addition, these sectoral regimes are interconnected by specific logics of relationship - shaped by the interplay of political and cultural factors- to conform the global welfare system. The common policy structure of these national systems comprised three main dimensions of intervention: (a) an employment regime, comprising labour-market legislation and the industrial relations system, (b) a social protection regime, embracing health and personal services, social security and income support programmes and (c) an urban regime, made up of a wide range of housing and planning policies⁵. Within this structure, the contents of the welfare system were broadly informed by a limited set of policy goals: the institutional support to a model of stable full employment of working-age males, a strong commitment to the social reproduction of the labour force and the public (relative) maintenance of the income of those groups excluded from work (Mishra, 1990. Bryson, 1992). Finally, an asymmetrical balance of policy types gave top priority to tax-financed service provision and transfer mechanisms of cash benefits. By contrast, the regulatory type of action played minor roles, as uncontested public monopolies did not allow scope for the emergence of state-regulated, private welfare markets (Le Grand, Bartlett p.13-34).

3. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: A DISTINCT WELFARE SYSTEM UNDER NEW STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Along with technological change and the segmentation of consumption patterns, the transnational production of goods and services lies at the heart of the new flexible model adopted by post-fordist capitalist economies (Kotz et.al. 1994). Such a break-up of the old national protected markets is likely to involve massive employment and distributional effects. In western Europe, the progressive transformation of the European Community into a new form of political domination -with increasing scope for qualified majority decision rules and a progressively expanded and deepened policy agenda- provides the institutional grounds to make authoritative societal allocations across a wide range of economic and social policy areas (Richardson, 1994. Nugent, 1994). The type and nature of the EU intervention in the process of market integration differs radically from its involvement in employment and distributional issues.

-On the production side, the EU has showed a strong commitment to a model of economic integration based on market, neo-liberal values. The policies formulated to steering the global process have included a threefold dimension: (a) the deconstruction of all type of tariff barriers to free trade, (b) the alignment of the member states' economies around four monetary convergence criteria⁶ and (c) the

creation of a new single economic regulatory framework. The two last dimensions entail the convergence of national policies around deflationary and supply-side strategies, with redistribution of the national income towards capital profits at the expense of wages and social transfers (Tsoulakis, 1993).

-On the welfare side, the Social Dimension can be defined as a set of policy regimes, developed alongside the single market initiative, aimed at managing employment and distributional issues at the EU level. From a chronological perspective, the social dimension can be seen as a historical form of welfare politics at the EU level, at a particular period of time (late 80s and 90s), given a particular balance of policy actors along two semi-autonomous lines of conflict: the substantive cleavage, polarizing collective regulation versus market distributions, crossed by the territorial conflict, over the allocation of decision powers between the Union and its member states. (Rhodes, 1991 p.254. Lange, 1992 p.230-231).

An initial overview to the social dimension provides a threefold picture. First, while inter-country differences have not hindered a strategy of economic convergence, the heterogeneity of the national welfare systems has been increasingly alleged as an obstacle to pursue a centrally-driven model of social convergence⁷. Secondly, a sort of neoliberal spillover has involved a global adjustment of the social dimension to the predominant market orthodoxy. And finally, the type of the EU decision rules related to the social dimension -which embedded the weakness of the neofederal state-building components- has delivered a half-hearted structure of social regulation. Brought together, these aspects must be considered as the direct expression of the three sources of structural pressure under which the social dimension is being shaped: (a) the broad and deeply-rooted differences across the welfare systems of the member states, (b) the unchallenged market imperatives of the economic integration process and (c) the intergovernmental dynamics prevailing in the social decision-making frameworks of the EU. These key features differs radically from the historical and political context which gave birth and sustained the welfare states of western Europe. This article argues that these structural differences of context account for the specific nature of the social dimension with respect to any national system of welfare.

In the following sections, each of these factors will be taken into account. First, the growing and complex inter-country heterogeneity will explain the degree and nature of social policy integration at the EU level. Second, within this framework, the dependency relation of the social dimension with respect to the single market will provide the basis to understand the substance of the EU welfare system. Finally, this article will argue that intergovernmentalism has a direct influence over the structure and policy types of the social dimension.

4. CROSS-NATIONAL WELFARE HETEROGENEITY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LEVEL AND NATURE OF EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY INTEGRATION

4.1. Patterns of cross-national social policy variation and restructuring

According to two recurrent fallacies, the European model of welfare is in crisis. However, when the national welfare systems of western Europe are analysed in detail, the existence of a single European model promptly appears as a myth. In addition, the collapse of the strategy of "social-keynesianism in a single nation" has not implied the crisis, but the restructuring of the welfare systems following new and divergent ideological trajectories. Both aspects -heterogeneity and increasingly complex patterns of policy variation- conform the first contextual and determinant variable of the EU social dimension. Nevertheless, inter-country shifting disparities do not confine necessarily social policy analysis within the epistemic boundaries of national case studies, without any wider relationship. Otherwise, it is completely meaningful to build up comparative knowledge by setting out transnational frameworks in order to study the dimensions, determinants and shifts of welfare variation in western Europe.

A. A Multi-Dimensional typology of Welfare Systems in the European Union

The task of model-building in (European) comparative social policy analysis faces two key dilemmas. First, the task of establishing and making operational the dimensions of policy variation. Namely, those variables which will explicit how the contents -modes of financing, purposes and functions-

and/or the outcomes -impacts on social structures and relations- of welfare policies differ across western European states (Ginsburg, 1992 p.2-13). And secondly, deciding on whether or not transforming these dimensions into dependent variables and, in the affirmative case, to set up and test hypotheses about the explanatory variables and processes of policy determination⁸.

With regard to the first point, a proper understanding of the different models which attempt to discern the nature and extent of welfare variation needs to trace a distinction among the types of variables used to express this variation⁹. Two criteria help to classify these variables. On the one hand, their inherent relation to policy contents or, alternatively, to policy outcomes. On the other, their policy-specific or trans-sectoral nature. There are, at least, three types of trans-sectoral variables which apply to policy contents: (a) the level of social expenditure as a percentage of the total public spending and of the gross national product (Hicks et.al. 1989. Hicks and Swan, 1992), (b) the level of decommmodification as a combined measure of the extent of coverage and the degree of protection of any service or transfer programme (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and (c) the mix of policy types between regulation, service provision and cash benefits¹⁰. Two further indicators, which are policy-specific, also refer to the substance of social policy: (a) the bases of welfare entitlement -rights, contributions or needs- within the social protection regime¹¹ and (b) the public policy versus collective bargaining balance and the combined measure of flexibility and regulation within the employment regime. Yet, the welfare system is also a key factor on shaping the social structure by impinging on the several logics of stratification that conform the advanced societies of western Europe. Thus, four dimensions of variation apply to the field of policy outcomes: (a) the net redistributive effect of the welfare system, (b) the final structure of income inequality, (c) the level of relative poverty in society and (d) the impact of the welfare system on those cleavages which are not structured in class lines, such as the social relations of gender, race and age. (Muller, 1989. Hills, 1994 p.32-62)¹².

Different authors have constructed different models of comparative analysis through specific combinations of these variables. They vary in many respects: primarily, in the analytical focus and in the nature of the variables adopted. But also in the type of knowledge they produce (descriptive or explanatory), in whether they make explicit the pattern of relationship between sectoral regimes and in the form of knowledge-building (ideal-types or on inductive processes). However, a common conclusion arises out of these many differences: close similarities prevail among groups of countries (worlds of welfare), which share, to a relevant extent, policy contents, outcomes and a same structure of determinants; by contrast, sharp ruptures and "divisions of welfare" are the norm across the worlds. And crucially, the basic agreement on transnational clusters also expands to the key defining features and the boundaries of these clusters. The widely influential work of Esping-Andersen (1990) does not depart, fundamentally, from the typological structure of the classical work of Titmuss (1974). While the most recent research of Leibfried (1993) incorporates a new typological category, as a result of the southward enlargement of the national cases studied, although maintaining uncontested the previous three-polar structure.

Drawing on two key aspects of this background -the fundamental agreement on the typological structure and the cumulative nature of many of their partial findings- and making use of our reshaped framework of variables, it becomes viable, first, to outline a comprehensive view of the different welfare types around which the existing national social policy models cluster (Table 1), and secondly, to assess the actual pattern of relationship between the social protection and the employment regime within each of these types.

TABLE 1. A multi-dimensional typology of Welfare Systems in the European Union
Table 1 not available

First, the world of Corporative welfare systems would include those national models where earning-related social security and transfer mechanisms prevail over universal rights and service provision, rendering contributions the main source of entitlement for state cash benefits. High levels of social expenditure are matched by medium decommmodification rates. A framework of centralized and coordinated industrial relations interacts with high levels of labour regulation but only moderate union membership. The welfare system works as a powerful agent of stratification as it tends to reinforce status divisions, while the redistributive dimension is weak. However, income inequality and poverty

tend to be medium/low, due to low rates of wage dualization and high levels of economic development (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1991. Castles, 1993).

Second, the type of Market welfare systems would comprise those countries characterized by means-tested social transfer policies, with low levels of both expenditure and decommmodification. Social needs provide the bases of entitlement and benefits are more relevant than services in kind, while the role of policy is mainly reactive and social programmes tend to be simply palliative. The employment regime presents low levels of unionization in a context of decentralised, fragmented collective bargaining and only a residual regulation of the labour-market. The impact of market welfare supports the dual society engendered by the interplay of market forces, thus high levels of income inequality remain without being decisively affected by low redistributive effects (Savage, Atkinson and Robins, 1994).

Third, the world of Universal welfare systems would embrace those national policy structures which rely on universal income transfer programmes, with high levels of both expenditure and decommmodification. The provision of services prevails over cash benefits, far-reaching social rights provide the basis of entitlement and the welfare system plays a strategic role in facing needs, with promotional programmes as the main type of policy response. Highly unionized, centralized and coordinated industrial relations combined with moderate levels of labour-market regulations. The universal mode of social governance can be considered as a building-force of egalitarian social relations, achieving high net redistributive effects and successfully removing poverty (Clement and Mahon, 1994).

Finally, the type of Traditional welfare systems presents a particular mix of the corporative and the market models. On the one hand, earning-related schemes of social security combine with the lowest levels of expenditure and decommmodification. On the other hand, welfare entitlements draw on both contributions and clientelistic relations, and the service/benefit package tends to be balanced within low levels of coverage and protection. Industrial relations exhibit low rates of union membership, but they also show a more centralized/coordinated structure and a higher labour law density than in the liberal model. Finally, the welfare system acts as a status-maintenance factor, though with a lower societal impact than in the corporative world, the redistributive dimension is weak and the remaining levels of inequality and poverty are aggravated by structural economic underdevelopment (Lessenich, 1994. Adelantado, 1994).

Although there is no any national case which can be considered as a pure type, Table 2 maps the location of each member state of the European Union within the comparative framework. Two aspects must be pointed out. First, the Universal and Corporative types have a solid empirical projection in the EU, while the Market and Traditional worlds exhibit empirical weaknesses related to the processes of strategic social policy change that all national systems have undergone over the past ten to fifteen years¹³. Secondly, all the founding members of the Community (within

Table 2. The Member-States of the European Union in the Transnational Divisions of Welfare

Table 2 not available

the box in Table 2) cluster around the Corporative model. Since the inception of that highly homogeneous scenario, every enlargement of the EC involved an impact of increasing internal complexity and policy pluralism in the field of welfare. Both aspects, as will be analysed later, will have a determinant influence over the recent development of the EU social dimension.

A final defining feature of these worlds is expressed by the specific pattern of internal relationship between the social protection and the employment regime. In the Universal model a rights-based regime of universal social protection is linked to an overall employment orientation of the welfare system, where this acts as an "employer of first resort" (Leibfried, 1993 p.140). In the Corporative type, the earning-related, contributions-based regime lies at the heart of an overall social protection-oriented system, where, nevertheless, full employment policies are pursued. In the Traditional model the same logic of relation is found, but the market-oriented labour regime excludes any relevant state involvement in the field of employment promotion (Alós et.al.1994). Finally, the means-tested social

protection regime of the liberal world is linked to a employment-oriented welfare system, where benefits act as work-enforcing factors in the private and deregulated labour-market (Hill, 1994 p.241-258).

B. Strategic social policy change:
different paths of welfare restructuring in the European Union

This model-based strategy used to outline the heterogeneous scenario of welfare in the EU countries is likely to stress the more permanent features of these models (Chamberlain, 1992 p.308-316). Therefore, it would fail to capture one major point: the restructuring that all western European welfare systems have undergone recently. A set of new transnational economic and social processes -the transition from fordism to flexible accumulation and the shift from class-based to fragmented social structures- have unfolded across advanced capitalist countries over the past decade (Boyer, 1987. Esping-Andersen, 1993). Insofar as these processes have impinged dramatically upon the labour-market and the distributional conflict, the welfare systems of western Europe have been placed under strong pressures for change¹⁴. Due to the structural nature and the societal scope of the underlying sources, social policy change have adopted the form of major restructuring, going beyond the incremental/decremental logic towards a strategic shift. Fundamentally, this implies two things: (a) the redefinition of the external boundaries and the internal inter-regime relations within every national welfare policy structure, and (b) the enhanced role of both knowledge-based resources¹⁵ and political values and ideas as the steering factors of change (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993 p.211-234). Bureaucratic interests and mutual adjustments, within stable value systems, may act as self-sufficient forces for incremental/decremental policy change, but they cannot lead to policy restructuring when structural and societal forces are in motion.

The west European welfare systems have traced their own trajectories of restructuring along five main dimensions: (1) The old fordist employment regimes have given way to conflicting flexible models, with highly diverse levels of regulation (Teague and Grahl, 1992 p.58-69). (2) Long-term unemployment and the new types of poverty arising from non-class-based processes of segregation account for the emergence of alternative regimes to deal with social exclusion. (3) The crisis of the traditional patriarchally structured society explains the new competing policy paradigms regarding gender equality in wage and care work (Sainsbury, 1994. Lewis, 1992). (4) The collapse of the techno-bureaucratic monopolism embodied in post-war social keynesianism has involved new distinct patterns of welfare mix affecting public, private and community roles (Evers and Winsberger, 1990). (5) Finally, new logics of relation between employment, protection and exclusion emerge, as a result of direct fiscal stress, within every national welfare system. Provided the irresistible nature of the strategic shifts in social policy, the key point now is to answer the question of whether similar national welfare systems have followed common paths of change and, in this case, the transnational types and divisions of welfare have been consolidated. Or, by contrast, routes of restructuring have been divergent within and across worlds of welfare and, then, the pattern of transnational clustering has been eroded or has simply dissolved.

A first wave of empirical data shows that trajectories of social policy change have been complex and multi-directional. Complexity arises from the fact that a distinction must be made between two interconnected logics of change: national and sectoral. When the national welfare system becomes the analytical unit, it appears that three parallel types of welfare transition evolve in different state contexts. First, a case of strategic shift consistent with the policy principles underlying the former model: since 1982, the German Christian-Democrat governments have flexibilized the policy design of their Corporative system, in order to deal with emerging socio-economic trends, without any fundamental break-up (Leibfried, 1993). Secondly, a case of global restructuring towards a new welfare type, showing internal inter-policy coherence: since 1979, the Conservative governments have strongly undermined the Beveridge-type aspects of the British welfare system, by pursuing a global realignment of social policy according to the values of the Market model of welfare (Pierson, 1994 p.131-163). And finally, a case of systemic collapse leading to a new fragmented social policy structure: the reshaping of Traditional welfare in Spain since the Socialist Party came into government (1982) has

followed contradictory paths: a massive deregulation of the labour-market coexists with a corporative-based social protection regime and with a traditional, family-based model of dealing with social exclusion (Garcia Roca, 1992).

On the other hand, when the analytical focus moves to a sectoral basis, it appears that classical patterns of co-occurrence and rupture may persist within a core of policy-specific or trans-sectoral variables. However, in many emerging aspects national systems are likely to change in diversified ways and to highly unequal extent. More concretely, new labour regimes and the new inter-sectoral relations between employment, social protection and exclusion display transnational commonalities consistent with classical types. By contrast, policy change in both the emergent gender regimes and welfare mix show contents and directions which cut-across welfare worlds. An explanation of these trends is to be found in the specific relation of each new aspect with the class logic which underpin classical social policy. Thus, insofar as employment policy and the links of the labour-market with the system of social services and benefits, though restructured, continue lying at the heart of the distributional conflict, the old welfare alignments survive. On the other hand, as far as the gender and exclusion dimensions, and the nature of the welfare mix are barely related to class cleavages, the dealignment of national welfare is more likely to occur.

In summary, not only cross-national heterogeneity remains but the patterns of policy variation are now more complex. Therefore, this first structural determinant of the social dimension of the European Union, far of vanishing, will continue playing strongly influential roles.

B. The degree and nature of social policy integration: uneven Europeanisation within competing notions of subsidiarity

Growing and complex cross-country welfare variation will exert strong and direct influence upon the degree and nature of social policy integration at the EU level. This influence will be mediated, among a constellation of variables, by the conceptual conflict around the principle of subsidiarity (Blichner and Sangolt, 1994 p.293-296). According to Gold, it states that "the EU should legislate only on those issues which cannot otherwise best be dealt with at national or regional level" (1993 p.26). Such a broad principle is likely to be interpreted in many ways, but all of them draw upon one of its two conflicting underlying assumptions. If subsidiarity leads to a sectoral allocation of decision powers and responsibilities between the Union and the member states, then, entire policy regimes may become excluded from the EU agenda. Alternatively, if subsidiarity leads to a goal-driven, intra-sectoral allocation, then, the EU role would span on an extensive cross-regime basis, focusing, within each policy area, on strategic regulation functions¹⁶. Although there is no clear "constitutional" option, article 2 of the Social Agreement appears more in line with the second assumption¹⁷. In addition, this seems to be the predominant view among the senior officials of the DG V of the Commission¹⁸. All of them agree that the only condition for EU social policy initiative should be to demonstrate the "value added" of the European action, without excluding any specific policy area.

Within the shifting boundaries linked to the epistemic struggle on subsidiarity -where knowledge resources and policy learning capacities become central elements- and under the pressures arising from cross-national pluralism, two interconnected questions emerge: to what extent is social policy inserted in a dynamics of europeanisation ?. Is the national space of decision-making over the labour-market and the distributional conflict being substantially undermined, correlatively to a process of EU welfare empowerment ?. Coping with these questions is a complex task for a number of reasons. First, it will be argued that the concept of policy integration is a complex one, embodying a bi-dimensional nature. Second, the empirical object of europeanisation -the welfare system- comprises several sectoral regimes and a broader number of specific policy areas.

A matrix can be constructed in order to analyse the level and nature of EU social policy integration (Table 3). The "level of integration" axis, which will measure the degree of European involvement on every policy area, presents a high/low scale structured around two alternative poles. In the high europeanisation space a distinction must be made between policy alignment, centrally-driven homogenization, and coordination, rendering distinct national regimes compatible. In the other extreme, policy exchange would account for bi or multi-lateral contacts and insulation would mean a pattern of state-driven policymaking. The "nature of integration" axis makes explicit a qualitative distinction: the

functional focus of EU action can be restricted to the sphere of policy principles or, alternatively, expanded to determine the institutional arrangements within which policy will be implemented at the national or sub-national level. Crossing this functional rupture with the high/low integration scale, four concepts arise as an integrated expression of the level and nature of europeanisation in every particular policy area.

Table 3. A Bi-Dimensional Model of Social Policy Integration

Table 3 not available

If a sectoral interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity prevails, the model of integration tends to include institutional and technical arrangements, thus, favouring non-strategic forms of regulation. Few policy areas become subject to a dynamics of full harmonization, while most of them are likely to remain in the national context. Under specific conditions, insulation may give way to policy transfers as a result of intergovernmental exchange (Hogwood, 1994 p.72-73)¹⁹. Instead, when subsidiarity moves to a goal-driven perspective, the pattern of EU policy involvement tends to focus on policy principles, thus enhancing strategic modes of regulation. In this case, most social policy areas are potentially subject to convergence of objectives. Otherwise, when the EU action does not add real value it may turn to create or consolidate mechanisms towards the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

The EU welfare system, in its current configuration, cannot be placed, monolithically, within one of these options. While the Single European Act constrained the European Community welfare role to a function of cross-fertilisation of ideas, the Social Agreement of the Maastricht Treaty has strongly deepened the scope for social europeanisation²⁰. In fact, there would not be "constitutional" limit to bring the whole social policy structure under high integration levels. However, reality differs heavily from this legal potential. Social europeanisation, though uneven, presents two basic regularities: (a) an overall shift from institutional to goals-based perspectives of policy integration and (b) strong resistences to cross-sectoral, high levels of Europeanisation. It is argued that the two main comparative features of the welfare systems of the member states

-complex patterns of variation and persisting heterogeneity- become the key explanatory factors of such regularities. On the one hand, the increasingly diversified structure of the transnational divisions of welfare is a powerful variable explaining the historical departure from harmonization, at the EU level, as a viable integrationist path (Brewster and Teague, 1989). Social policy institutions, in order to expand their responsiveness to rapid contextual change, have been restructured in many ways at the national and sub-national levels. Any attempt to harmonize them on a supra-national basis is likely to face mounting obstacles. By contrast, the very trans-national nature of the emerging social problems (new forms of social exclusion, structural unemployment, homelessness and so on) provides a range of additional opportunities for alternative routes of integration: those based on the central allocation of strategic regulatory functions, leading to flexible convergences of policy principles at the EU level. On the other hand, cross-national welfare heterogeneity becomes a real constraint, in most policy areas, to high levels of integration, even in its goals-oriented version. Nevertheless, it appears that a number of selective policy sectors cluster around the high europeanisation pole (as Table number 4 shows).

An explanation to this fact is to be found in a twofold correlation: those social policy areas, which are necessarily linked to the process of market integration, are more likely to be europeanised. By contrast, in those sectors which are not directly supporting such a process the role of the EU is much weaker. In addition, this pattern is reinforced by a cumulative rupture between work-based and citizen-based social policies.

Table 4. Social policy integration and its relations with the single market process and with the distinction between work and citizen-based social policy

Table 4 not available

A part from these logic of explanation, the weak level of europeanisation in areas such as social security standards and anti-exclusion strategies may be overlapping a substantive position against redistributive politics at the European Union level. In addition, when social harmonization (occupational health) or convergence (some labour-market provisions) occur they usually adopt the lowest common denominator strategy, setting up minimum regulations or a floor of social rights (EC, 1994). Only within the gender regime, in its workplace dimension, the EU-driven upward alignment of policies is predominant (Cox, 1993 p.41-56). But this will be the concern of the next section.

5. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION BETWEEN THE SINGLE MARKET AND REDISTRIBUTIONAL POLITICS

5.1. The several and partly conflicting goals of the social dimension

The EU welfare system is a complex, neo-pluralist policymaking arena, with an emerging corporatist dimension (Carley, 1993 p.106-133. Falkner, 1995). There is no a hegemonic coalition capable of translating its own preferences into policy outcomes without real political bargaining (Lange, 1992 and 1993 p.21-27). Instead, a network of actors interact combining cooperative and conflictual models, within unstable decision rules and shifting distributions of several types of power resources (Springer, 1992. Mazey and Richardson, 1994 p.21-34). In addition, this social arena is essentially related to the wider process of economic restructuring and integration. And, crucially, in line with the balance of power and interests which underpins the recent development of the EU welfare system, this essential relation tends to adopt a pattern of dependency, where social policies usually play secondary and subordinated roles with respect to the predominant market-based economic integration policies. Thus, a logic emerges which places the policies of the social dimension under the pressure to support the process of economic integration, accommodating rather than challenging its market imperatives. However, the neo-pluralist nature of the social dimension's policymaking model provides some scope for the configuration of alternative coalitions and uncontrolled institutional dynamics, which explain the simultaneous evolution of several social policy initiatives on the basis of conflicting goals and values. Three multi-directional goals have been mainly advocated by the several coalitions built around the welfare-making process at the EU level.

(a) Providing a functional support to the process of market-led economic integration.

A narrow but powerful neoliberal value-based coalition, led by UNICE and the conservative British government, has actively endorsed the idea that the transnational unleashing of competitive forces will have complex consequences: the expected net economic gains may be restricted by both key negative externalities and non-tariff barriers preventing trade or workforce mobility. A number of them, as far as they impact upon or are located within employment and distributional processes, should be managed from social policy initiatives, which, in all the cases, would be normatively constrained to efficiency-improving criteria. The main social externalities limiting the full potential of market integration would be a threefold trend to underinvestment in training (Marsden, 1994 ch 1 and 4), welfare dumping and regime shopping²¹. On the other hand, social barriers would mainly refer to distinct national labour regulations and distinct social security systems. According to this perspective, the functional social policies to be framed at the EU level should lead to prevent the three former trends and to remove the two latter barriers.

(b) Providing assistance to those social groups and peripheral spaces affected by the regressive distributional impacts of the single market.

A broader but more unstable coalition, led by the Commission, the governments of the poorest member states and the socialist-christian democrat majority of the EP, has underpinned this second goal, which draws upon social-liberal values. According to this view, the market orthodoxy on which economic integration is founded must not be challenged. However, the nature of this model involves not only constraining factors -social externalities and barriers- to be removed by non-redistributive social policies, but also the contingent reshaping and widening of the pattern of intra and cross-national/regional social and spatial inequalities in the EU. In other words, market integration is likely to have short and medium-term regressive distributional consequences among social groups and urban/regional spaces (Kleinman and Piachaud, 1993). On this basis, it is argued that the EU social

policies must be also addressed to counteract these growing, market-based divisions of welfare by assisting those groups and peripheral spaces under processes of dualization and exclusion (Casey, 1993 p.172-178).

It is important to stress that the set of EU social policies which are likely to emerge from the two former perspectives will come to play key legitimization roles. Beyond the goals of supporting the sources of EU-wide growth and helping the losers of transnational economic restructuring, an autonomous legitimizing function emerges. On the one hand, those policies may provide a potential, though restricted, basis for the EU to secure, at least, a pattern of passive acquiescence among wage-workers and low income groups which perceive -often in a diffuse rather than in a structured form- the predominance of a market logic which meets the interests of business. On the other hand, EU social policies are likely to be factors of consensus-building, among the less developed countries, around a model of integration which makes European cohesion essentially dependent on growing profit rates in the central economies²² (Lange, 1993 p.21-29).

(c) Challenging the market-driven model:

placing universal and redistributive welfare at the centre of European integration.

A fragmented constellation of actors -including the ETUC, a number of groups involved in EU-wide collective action in the welfare field and the left political forces in the EP- have clustered around an alternative perspective: the pattern of relationship which renders the EU welfare system dependent upon the market imperatives of economic integration must be challenged. Market integration may appear as a key variable for the restoration of high profit rates, but, simultaneously, it is likely to be the source of new structural and massive-scale distributional disadvantages. For those who sustain this perspective, relying only on non-redistributive social policies, the western European political economy would be placed in the trajectory of the American model. On the other hand, a EU welfare system restricted to the cohesion funds, as central policy instruments, to assist the losers on a short run basis, would fail to control the unfair employment and distributional outcome of the predominant transnational market forces. In consequence, a comprehensive strategy would be required: with employment indicators included as convergence criteria, and with redistributive welfare playing a primary role as an equal partner of growth-based economic policy. A coherent set of social rights with EU-wide universal entitlements would provide the context for full employment policies, upward aligned social protection and gender equality programmes (Leibfried and Pierson, 1992).

5.2. The substance of the EU welfare system:

the social dimension as an arena of low redistributive content

The type of relationship which links the EU welfare system to the process of market integration not only polarizes the goals of the social dimension, but it will also exert strong and direct influence upon the substance of its policies and sectoral regimes. Two questions arise from this thesis: to what extent have the three mentioned goals been translated into actual policy contents?, how have the three mentioned coalitions been acting as actual mechanisms of translation?.

In first place, a full regulatory regime has been designed in order to guarantee the free movement rights of labour, as well as the exportability of the earning-related public benefits of the migrant workers (Laske, 1993. Leibfried and Pierson, 1993 p.339). Both policies are close linked to a rationale of functional support to the single market. Other policy initiatives, strictly inserted in this logic, have not been forged as -over almost a decade since the SEA came into force- there is very limited evidence of both social dumping and regime shopping. The potential delocation of production towards low wage countries becomes usually blocked by counteracting factors, such as comparative disadvantages in rates of productivity. On the other hand, the cultural barriers are stronger for workers and citizens than the potential attraction of welfare magnets. Similarly, as a EU-wide labour market has not been yet achieved in practice, the scope for underinvestment in training, free riding and poaching becomes severely reduced (Silvestre, 1994 p.111-127). Nevertheless, even though this functional basis for non-redistributive social policy has not developed to any relevant extent, it is a fact that the EU welfare system has been recently subject to a dynamics of extension and deepening.

Three policy areas and sectoral regimes, deriving from the goal of counterbalancing the regressive distributional impacts of the single market, account for a relevant part of the late expansion of the European social agenda: the strategies to combat long-term and structural unemployment, the unemployed protection schemes and the anti-poverty action programmes (EC, 1994). All of these policies are forged on the grounds of solidarity -external to the functioning of the single market- although under two constraints of different nature. First, a severe fiscal limit: in 1994, the budget of the European Union amounted to less than 3% of the total public expenditure of its member states. In the social domain, the ratio is even more striking, as the EU social expenditure in 1994 amounted to around 0.9% of the welfare budget of the member states (Leibfried, 1992 p.100-101. Majone, 1993 p.160-161). And secondly, a substantive limit: selectivism as the predominant policy principle (Spicker, 1993). Resources are not allocated on the basis of universal entitlements covering extensive risks, but they are directed to particular target groups facing specific social needs. Moreover, these initiatives involve a predominantly reactive style of action, largely embodying a type of palliative policy response, at the expense of an anticipative and promotional style of welfare-making. Nevertheless, there is an additional aspect which may strength the potential significance of these policy initiatives. They often generate semi-autonomous arenas of political interaction where specific configurations of actors and resources may lead to unpredictable policy outcomes. In this sense it is relevant the strategic policy role of the Commission, which has acted, to a certain extent, as an empowering source of new policy actors (both in its internal structure or by providing incentives to EU-wide collective action) who may be able to influence the content of policy in several directions likely to clash with a crude neoliberal perspective²³.

Finally, the actual welfare-making process at the EU level, drawing upon decommodification goals, shows a complex picture. On the one hand, its main strengths refer to, first, those employment regulations which, by empowering the collective rights of workers (i.e. European Works Council Directive) or by conferring individual entitlements in the labour-market (i.e. Organization of Working Time Directive), bring the EU employment regime near to a perspective of "constructive flexibility" (Teague and Grahl, 1992 p.64-69), beyond simple de-regulatory strategies. And, secondly, to those gender equality initiatives which provide a protection regime for women against labour discrimination in the areas of payment, access to employment, training, working conditions, career advancement and social security (EC, 94b). On the other hand, there is a set of proposals, intended to expand the redistributive and equality contents of the social dimension, which encounter a systematic and blocking opposition on their way to reach a final policy decision (i.e. atypical work and parental leave) or simply the EU social agenda (i.e. minimum wage or European social security system). Here, the key explanatory variable resides in the institutional power basis provided by the right of national veto in the Council, which enables a single neoliberal government to reverse any binding decision in such a sensitive fields as workers' representation or the whole social protection regime (Nugent, 1994 p.318-322). Last, but not least, there should not be underestimated the potential of those social decisions which have been adopted through a range of non-binding instruments. Despite of their symbolic nature, they may perform two key roles: creating the necessary preconditions for future policy action at the EU level (Cram, 1993 p.143) and acting as a catalyst for new action at the national level. In this sense, the Recommendations on financial participation of employees (1992), on convergence of social security objectives and policies (1992), and on childcare (1992) may have established an initial EU policy foundation in such a critical areas as collective workers' rights, social protection and gender equality beyond the workplace. Finally, the Resolution on combating social exclusion (1989) and the Recommendation on sufficient resources and social assistance (1992) not only built the epistemic premisses to the III Anti-Poverty Action Programme but also had a direct impact on the design of new basic income policies within Traditional models of welfare (most of the Italian and Spanish regions).

6. THE SHIFTING RULES OF THE GAME AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE STRUCTURE AND POLICY TYPES OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

6.1. The dynamics of change:
explaining the limited expansion of the EU welfare system

Social policy has continuously played peripheral roles in the European integration process. At the "constitutional" level, the Treaty of Rome provided a very weak legal basis for welfare development. Many key areas of social intervention were directly excluded from the EC agenda, while in those sectors in which the member states had given up their institutional monopoly, the potential level of Community involvement became strictly limited (Brewster and Teague, 1989). Moreover, the social policy game had to be played under a twofold institutional constraint: the system of unanimity voting and the consultation procedure, which reflected, respectively, the weakness of the supranational institutions and the central democratic deficit of the European Community. After thirty years, with the coming into force of the Single European Act in 1987, this adverse legal and institutional framework for the development of a European welfare system began to be removed (Gold, 1993 p.27-35). Deep "constitutional" changes were not introduced, but, crucially, the SEA marked the starting point of a dynamics of progressive expansion and strengthening of the EC social space, materialized in the subsequent approval of the Social Charter (1989), the Social Action Programme (1989), the Social Protocol of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and, most recently, the new Social Action Programme (1995-1997)²⁴.

The real engendering sources of this shift reside in a set of intertwined variables. Two potentially complementary rather than opposed conceptions have formed the analytical keystones of the debate. An "international relations" perspective, on the one hand, which tends to place the driving force of the Euro-polity-making process within a dynamic intergovernmental network of states, has stressed the increasing pace of integration, being fuelled by the single market initiative, as the key explanatory factor (Traxler and Schmitter, 1995 p.193-198). According to the mainstream neo-functionalist thesis, it would produce a range of spillovers which will inevitably colonize key areas of the social policy space (Leibfried and Pierson, 1992). Alternatively, the "bureaucratic politics" perspective, which is more likely to conceive the emerging Euro-polity as the result of a dense web of day to day supranational decisions, comes to emphasize the key policy-making role of the Commission in the field of welfare. Within strong legal constraints, it would have learned to increasingly adopt a institutional strategic behaviour, seizing every opportunity for action and generating the conditions for new social regulatory regimes (Cram, 1993 p.143-144). Beyond these two conceptions, other additional factors should be considered. On the one hand, being the neoliberal perspective consolidated across the main parties of the political spectrum, a broad agreement emerged -under the entrepreneurial role of Jacques Delors- on the fact that some kind of social agenda ought to be adjusted to the new predominant value structure. On the other hand, the two southern enlargements of the EC in the 1980s (Greece in 1981; Portugal and Spain in 1986) had brought a more complex pattern of diversity in the social field, as far as a new transnational type of welfare was inserted into the background of the Community. This fact would not only involve emerging problems, but also new social policy windows at the EU level.

Having discussed the factors which may help to explain the expansive dynamics of the social dimension since the late 1980s, a key question arises whether it has actually led to an all-embracing welfare system, combining all kinds of public intervention. Or, otherwise, the resulting policy agenda - besides low levels of integration and redistribution- still excludes whole areas of welfare politics, the core components of each included sectoral regime and key policy types. The relation between intergovernmentalism and democratic federalism, as competing decision-making frameworks governing the social dimension, will be considered as the key factor influencing both the structure and policy types of the EU welfare system.

6.2. The EU social decision regimes in flux

A bi-dimensional analysis of law-making modes and voting rules in the Union shows the weakness of the democratic, centrally-driven decision regime in the institutional building of the EU welfare system. In Table 5, the horizontal dimension (alternative institutional decision procedures) may be considered as a measure of the potential policy role of the European Parliament with respect to other EU institutions²⁵, while the vertical dimension (alternative voting systems) would measure whether a full intergovernmental logic -protected by the unanimity principle- remains untouched or, alternatively, the

extent to which it is being eroded by the functioning of qualified majorities in the Council. When the policy areas and sectoral regimes of the social dimension are compared, on this twofold analytical basis, with those of the single market initiative, two correlative disparities appear. On the one hand, under the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty most legislation ruling market integration was transferred from the cooperation to the co-decision procedure (i.e. "harmonization for the purpose of completing the internal market", arts 100a and 100b). This shift, by contrast, did not extend into the Social Protocol. The result is a weak potential for a decisive parliamentary input in the post-Maastricht development of the EU welfare system. On the other hand, the degree of erosion of the national sovereignty is much wider in the economic than in the social domain. In this sense, while an emerging neo-federal logic already prevails in the politics of the single market, welfare integration remains firmly subject to intergovernmental decision-making in three relevant and sensible policy spaces: the collective rights of workers and the protection mechanisms of the unemployed within the labour regime and the whole social security system. Therefore, only in the non-class-based regimes of the EU welfare system (gender equality and anti-social exclusion strategies) and in those employment issues which affect individual rather than class rights, social policy may reach the levels of europeanisation "constitutionally" allowed through a decision framework of qualified majority.

Table 5. Allocation of Social Dimension and Single Market policies
under decision rules and voting systems. (Social Dimension policies in italics)

Table 5 not available

6.3. Internal structure and policy types:
a half-hearted, asymmetrical and regulatory social dimension

This overall decision-making framework is likely to have a relevant influence over the policy structure and over the policy types of the European welfare system. Insofar as the member states control the EU social decision regimes, it is reasonable to believe that the substantive, fiscal and management spaces of the social dimension will remain under strong constraints.

-With regard to the policy structure, the social dimension presents a half-hearted and asymmetrical complexion. Its main weakness refers to the exclusion of a range of key policy components of each sectoral regime. Wages determination and the regulation of industrial collective action, within the employment system; health policy beyond the workplace; gender equality in the sphere of family care work and in the type of relation pursued between this and wage employment; housing policies (EC, 1993); and basic income support programmes, within the anti-poverty regime lay all beyond the external boundaries of the EU welfare system. On the other hand, its asymmetrical nature relates to the predominance of a work-based perspective of intervention which erodes the potential citizen-wide dimension of most policy areas. Not only the employment system exhibits the more extensive policy structure and accounts for the vast majority of social directives (almost 80%), but also the other three sectoral regimes become inextricably linked to the sphere of work. According to the Maastricht Treaty and the Social Protocol, the labour-market seems to be the unique source of gender inequality and social exclusion: almost all EU programmes to deal with new poverty are related to long term unemployment, while only few of them are connected to discrimination on the grounds of race, age or disabilities (Room, 1991). As well as the only basis of entitlement for social protection: the high level of policy coordination of contribution-based cash benefits contrasts sharply with the low europeanisation of universal, means-tested or housing-related transfers (Leibfried, 1993 p.145-148).

-With regard to the mix of policy types, the social dimension of the European Union departs clearly from the pattern found in its member states. In the west European national and sub-national forms of welfare the service/transfers package -involving public expenditure financed through direct income and corporate taxation- is the keystone of the social protection, exclusion, gender and urban regimes. Regulation, as a primary type of state action, only occurs in the labour-market of the corporative and traditional welfare systems, since the market and universal types rest mainly on collective bargaining arrangements (Bamber and Lansbury, 1993). By contrast, the intergovernmental form of welfare, which arises from the social decision framework of the Union, is impelled to draw, basically, upon regulatory policies. Two elements help to explain this fact. Regulation is a functional factor for the

"institutional purpose" of the Commission of expanding its power basis and policy role within the bureaucratic architecture of the EU (Peters, 1992). And, even more relevantly, regulation, as a policy type, is costless for the Union and the member states (there is no institutional fiscal space virtually available). Instead, the distribution of costs and benefits resulting from EU social regulation tends to be unevenly shared by non-institutional actors (i.e. the employers and workers). As table 6 shows, regulation is the primary component of action in the employment, social protection and gender equality areas; it also holds an overall favourable balance. It is striking the lack of a single EU-wide

Table 6. Sectoral Regimes, Policy Types and Policy Instruments

Table 6 not available

collective agreement as a result of the Social Dialogue²⁶ or, similarly, of a single EU-wide social transfer mechanism unrelated to the labour-market. The only three direct cash benefit programmes are work-related and strictly selective: they are addressed to protect particular target groups (workers in five standard situations) facing specific risks of unemployment (deriving from industrial restructuring with intensified attention to the steel industry and coal-mining areas) (EC, 1994 p.42-45). The provision of services accounts for the vast majority of initiatives in the social exclusion regime - through the Anti-Poverty Action Programmes- and they are relevant components in the rest of the sectors. Nevertheless, this provision does not involve in any case direct consumption relations between the EU institutions and the individuals. Here, the national and, mainly, the regional and local levels become, on the basis of a goal-driven subsidiarity principle, the appropriate management space of the whole range of programmes.

A final aspect refers to the distinction that must be drawn, within the EU social regulation, between binding (i.e. directives) and non-binding (i.e. recommendations and resolutions) policy instruments. Earlier in this article, the potential relevance of those non-binding mechanisms has been assessed. Now, it appears evident that, in every sectoral regime, they cover a policy space which is highly vulnerable at national level (financial participation of workers, income support to combat social exclusion) and/or it is peripheral to the EU social agenda (equitable wage, childcare, social integration of non-EU migrants). Thus, their pivotal role between legitimising symbolism and policy foundation-making may become, in the next future, substantially enhanced.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that a new type of welfare system is being shaped at the European Union level. Between 1958 and 1992, the development of EC social policy constituted a factual reality under severe legal constraints. The Social Protocol of the Treaty of Maastricht opened the way for a high level of welfare integration on an extensive cross-sectoral basis. Nevertheless, an empirical analysis of the configurative aspects of the EU social dimension, in the mid 1990s, makes evident, at least, three key points. (1) Social policy is unevenly europeanised. The actual degrees of policy integration strongly correlates with the extent to which each sectoral regime is directly supporting market economic convergence and is linked to the labour-market and the world of production. The type of integration is most likely to follow a strategic, goal-driven perspective, breaking with the unviable path of institutional harmonization. (2) The equality and redistributive dimensions of the EU welfare system are not only underdeveloped, but they are permanently under stress, as a result of a balance of policy actors favourable, in many respects, to those who advocate for a social policy restricted to market efficiency-improving normative criteria. (3) The social dimension of the EU displays an incomplete, half-hearted, and work-oriented internal policy structure. It rests on regulation as a primary type of action, with an extremely weak role for the deeply-rooted service/transfer package of the welfare state. These configurative aspects, which render the EU welfare system dissimilar to the basic features of the west European national form of welfare, have been explained on the basis of three explanatory factors.

(a) The pattern of cross-country social policy variation is increasingly complex, as a result of a multi-directional restructuring of the national welfare systems over the past ten to fifteen years. This fact impinges directly upon the degrees of social policy integration, and, in a rather more qualitative way, it determines the nature of this process (configurative aspect 1). (b) The European social arena is not essentially related to a strategy of solidaristic state-building, but to a wider process of economic restructuring and integration. Thus, a logic emerges which places the policies of the social dimension under the pressure to support this process, accommodating rather than challenging its market imperatives (configurative aspect 2). (c) A barely eroded intergovernmental logic prevails in the social decision regime of the European Union. This reality involves a high level of national control and, therefore, powerful constraints, over the transfer of substantive, fiscal and management spaces from the national welfare states to the European Union social dimension (configurative aspect 3).

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