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Italian welfare in the aftermath of economic crisis : Understanding welfare reforms in the light of alternative theoretical approaches

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◖ Abstract ◗

The 2008 world economic crisis had unprecedented consequences in European societies, with repercussions on Southern European countries in particular. In Italy, the crisis itself provided a plausible rationale for policy makers to push forward long needed welfare cuts, resulting in the neoliberal austerity trend fostered by the Monti government (years 2011-2012). In the light of the fact that Bismarckian welfare states from continental Europe are generally difficult to reform, understanding these policy dynamics requires an adequate theoretical framework. This paper seeks to understand the logics behind welfare reforms in Italy after the 2008 economic crisis, by reviewing available theoretical approaches in literature. It is argued that external forces (notably, the European Union) represented the main trigger factor, and that political elites marginalized the role played by civil society, with social problems such as unemployment worsening as a result.

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Key words: Crisis, neoliberalism, welfare reform, European Union, advocacy coalition framework

1. Introduction

In 2008 a massive crisis hit the world economy: the financial system was collapsing, the Lehman brothers financial services company went bust, and there were great hardships for the American bank system. Negative implications soon reflected on the European financial system, more vulnerable to shocks, in the absence of controlling institutions such as the American Federal Reserve (Eurispes 2013). Suddenly the dominant economic paradigm of neoliberalism and its laissez-faire strategies of relegating increasing debt to private households and markets was showing all of its weaknesses at once.

Southern European countries were suffering most from the financial market instability: caught between the unsustainable costs of their public social insurance systems, and the EU requirement to keep their public debt' levels under control, weak economies such as Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal already had comparatively underdeveloped social protection systems for the vulnerable, and less than developed financial institutions; in a word, neoliberal individualization of social risks had already started by the time the crisis hit these countries (Pizzuti 2009, Guillen and Petmesidou 2008). In general, Southern European welfare states differ from their continental European counterparts for their relatively late economic development and democratization, so that 'catching up' on these aspects occurred relatively late for welfare expenditure as well - with 'pre-industrial' forms of welfare provided by the family and the Church still playing an important role (Rhodes 1996). These welfare states have become institutionalized in a fragmented and incomplete way, dominated as they were by a particularistic form of corporatism, whereby each group was trying to preserve its own interests, instead of pushing for universally accepted welfare policies. This translated into unions, pressure groups and political lobbies fighting to favor their own party for the distribution of costs and benefits of social policies. Adding to this picture considerably high levels of political cronyism ("clientelism") reveals a scenario of rigidly social security-based, highly fragmented welfare systems in Southern Europe (Rhodes 1996, Ferrera 1996, Guillen and Petmesidou 2008). Italy represents a particularly interesting case in this sense, due to its recent decentralization policies, which allegedly contributed to increasing levels of overall inequality. Decentralization of power from the central government to local governments has been fostered since from the reform of the Constitution of 2005, however this shift of competencies has not been adequately funded, with provision of social services in particular suffering as a result. The government was de facto giving up many of its social responsibilities without adequately funding them, and the trend was to incentive private provision of social services, as the pension reforms from the 1990s and the regular use of migrant care givers from East Europe also shows. Political rigidities and the dominance of the conservative Christian Democratic party, almost uninterruptedly leading Italian governments from the 1940s through the 1990s, contributed to the development of a top-down, fragmented, and clientelistic social protection system, that was intrinsically difficult to reform in a substantive way (Girotti 1998, Ferrera 1993). This all contributes to explain why the 2008 economic crisis, coupled with EU pressures for keeping public finances under control, found Italian governments unprepared and lacking an ideological and policy strategy to reform the already unequally distributed welfare system. As a consequence, a neoliberal strategy of shifting responsibilities for social protection from the public sector to the private sphere of families and the market was adopted, resulting in worsened inequality in adequately meeting Italians' social needs (Pizzuti 2009).

This study attempts to make sense of the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis in Italy, and in particular to understand what were the mechanisms that let this difficult to reform, "frozen" welfare state (Palier 2010) adopt decidedly neoliberal social policy reforms. What kind of policy reforms were implemented? What were the most important factors that determined such reforms? Which theories are helpful in making sense of this neoliberal shift in welfare reform in Italy? What kind of lessons is it possible to draw from the post-crisis Italian welfare state reform experience?

By reviewing previous research in political economy theory and policy analysis, this article intends to shed light on the social reforms implemented in Italy in the post 2008 economic crisis, and the mechanisms that originated them. The idea is to provide a theoretical framework within which political bipartisanship, the influences of the economic crisis and the European Union, insufficient policy learning mechanisms, and the reduced role of the civil society are all accounted for simultaneously (Sabatier 1988, Palier 2010, Natali 2004, Crouch 2008).

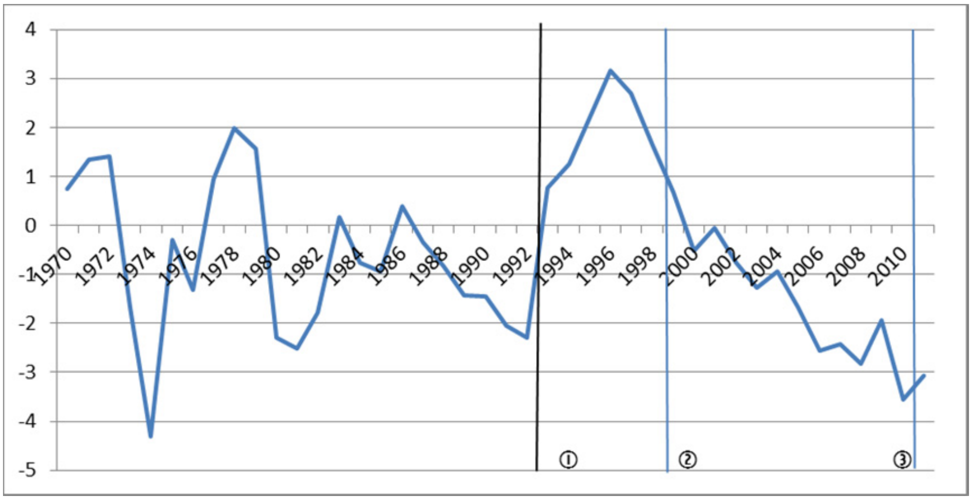
The article is structured as follows. The second section provides a description of the 2008 global economic crisis, and the mechanisms that lay behind it, with a special focus on the case of Italy. While neoliberal ideology had already been a dominant leitmotif in past legislatures, the 2008 economic crisis fostered even more decisive cuts in social expenditure. In the third part an outline of the reforms that have been implemented in Italy after the crisis is provided. Main reforms include those on taxation and public expenditure, on the one hand, and more direct interventions in social policy in the fields of pensions, labour market, health, and social services, on the other. In the fourth part of this study, I attempt to assemble together these elements for a useful theoretical framework, that can help the reader understand the logic behind the austerity-oriented neoliberal reforms adopted in Italy. Going past traditional theoretical approaches in political economy, based on path dependency approaches (Esping-Andersen 1990, Soskice and Hall 2001), I try to explain the influence that the recent economic crisis has had on social policy reform in Italy against the background of pressures from the European Union, the relative lack of policy learning processes and civil society participation, by adopting Sabatier (1988)'s advocacy coalition framework (ACF) composite approach. In the final part, some policy implications for late welfare states such as South Korea are drawn. Understanding the necessity to involve different social actors in welfare reform serves as a lesson that reminds us not to let the needs of the real economy be overlooked by self-referential discourses of policy elites.

2. Economic crisis and neoliberal directions

The 2008 global crisis involved global financial market and uncontrolled flows of capitals, therefore differing from previous economic shocks in many ways. Previous crises were dealt with via 'social Keynesianism' strategies: governments directly intervening in the economy to foster market demand, protectionist measures, industrial policy initiatives pushed forward by active labour unions – in a word, governments were fostering aggregated demand via expansionary macro policies and employment protection, a strategy that, in the long term, would yield negative consequences on inflations and public debts' levels (Pontusson and Raess 2012, Crouch 2008). The 2008 crisis, in contrast, hit a global economy that was permeated by neoliberal ideas according to which public institutions were an obstacle to the full functioning of markets (Pizzuti 2012). In such a context, the strategy of demand management, typical of social Keynesian governments, was replaced by a new 'privatized Keynesianism' according to which "new risk markets to ordinary consumers, via extended mortgages and credit card debt, replace the previous capitalist system based on rising wages, welfare state and government-led demand management" (Crouch 2008: 10). Economy in the European Union, in particular, has been heavily influenced by the German neoliberal model of capitalism, whereby capital goods production and exports were considered more important than boosting domestic consumer demand, so that priority was given to balanced public budgets and avoidance of inflation (Crouch 2008, Pontusson and Raess 2012, Cesaratto and Pivetti 2012).

The assumptions implied by such neoliberal ideas (having access to perfect information, perfect competition, and the like) were in reality detrimental to Southern European countries, not adequately equipped to directly compete with big export-led economies such as Germany. Cuts to public social expenditure in the need to balance public finances have been supported by the wrong assumption that public debt has a negative effect on economic growth (for a discussion, see Reinhart & Rogoff 2010, Herndon, Ash & Pollin 2013), however this privatised Keynesianism proved brutally harsh on the real economy needs of Southern European societies, with the Greek example standing out in particular (Matsaganis 2011). In the absence of an alternative economic paradigm, Italy's political elites, traditionally following a top-down policy making model, have been very keen in responding to external pressures by the EU to correct national public budget deficit, as figure 1 shows.

[Figure 1] Current account balance trend in Italy (% of GDP)

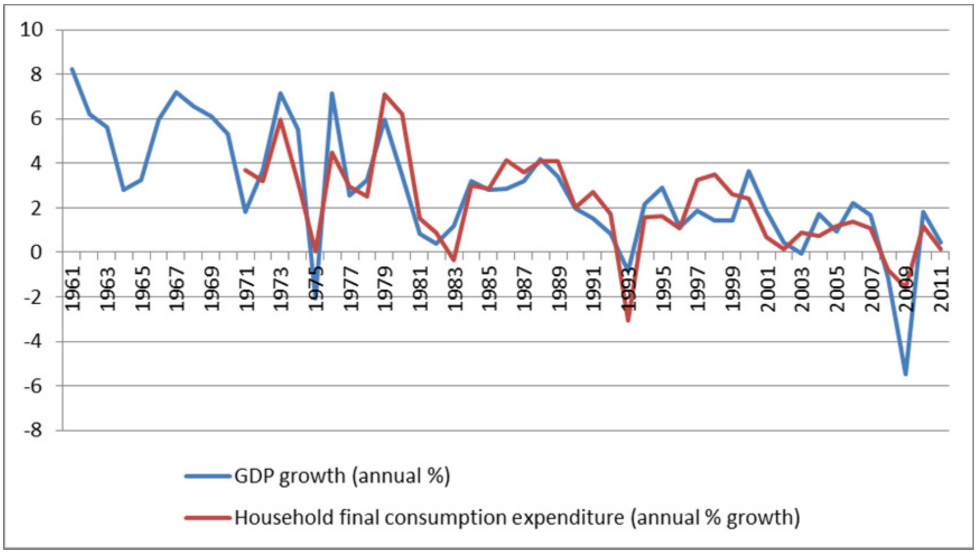


Note: ① Maastricht treaty; ② ECB; ③ Monti government.
Source: World Bank (2012).

Figure 1 displays public account balance trends in Italy since from the 1970s. Apart from the oil crisis of 1973, the 2008 financial shock represented the second worst time in terms of deterioration of public finances. After recovering from the 1970s oil crisis, public spending went through a relatively stable phase that dramatically improved in the beginning of the 1990s, when Italian politics was struggling both to regain some credibility from the bribery scandals in politics (the "Clean Hands" period) and to abide to the economic stability conditions dictated by the Maastricht treaty as a condition for access to the European Union. In the late 1990s the opening of the European Central Bank (ECB) had been announced as well. However, from the end of the 1990s, once full membership to the EU and participation to the monetary union were secured, account balances started worsening again under Berlusconi governments. To this respect, the economic crisis of 2008 only contributed to worsen a situation that was already quite dramatic. In order to keep the situation under control, and with the collaboration of the Italian President of the Republic Napolitano, Berlusconi was forced to resign and a new government of technocrats led by former European Commissioner Mario Monti was formed on a temporary basis (2011-2012) to take charge of the debt crisis according to European directives.

The Monti government took charge at a time when the Italian economy was already in a dire situation. Falling consumption rates (see fig.2), however, were not to be resumed by a socio-political strategy that was admittedly neoliberal and unsupportive of the real economy's aggregated demand. It is now to a brief overview of the main social policies from these years that I turn to.

[Figure 2] GDP growth and household final consumption expenditure growth (Unit: %)



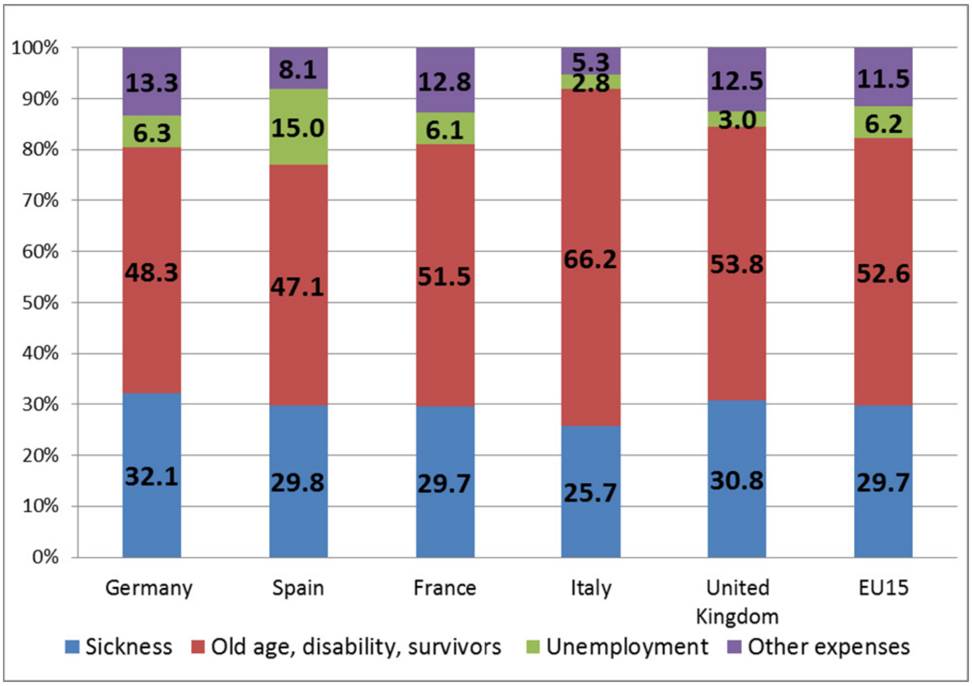
Source: World Bank (2012).

3. Social policy reform trends

1) The Italian welfare state structure

Traditionally, the Italian welfare state has been characterized by a higher proportion of expenditure dedicated to income protection measures, and most typically, for pensions (see fig. 3 for a comparison with selected European countries). When analyzing total social expenditure trends over the last 30 years, it looks as if the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis caused a sudden increase in social expenditure levels, a trend that can be observed for all Southern European countries (OECD 2012). But how did this increase in expenditure reflect on the different policy categories? Expenditure trends divided by policy sector show that the prevalence of pensions and health expenditures remained quite remarkable even in the post-crisis years (OECD 2012), which seems to suggest us that the overall structure of social expenditure in Italy remained substantially the same, in compliance with what has been found in previous studies for other European countries (Vis, Kersbergen, Hylands 2010; Chung, Thewissen 2011). Also, rises in social expenditure levels measured as percentages of GDP might get biased when national revenues decrease in the face of economic crises.

[Figure 3] Composition of social protection spending in selected Bismarckian countries in 2009 (% of GDP)



Source: Raitano (2012).

My argument is that overall expenditure levels might not have changed visibly in the years following the crisis, however this does not mean that previous welfare institutions were left unscathed. Instead, reforms from the Monti government were actually remarkably following a neoliberal logic of welfare cuts and individualization of social risk (Pizzuti 2009), as the next paragraph further elaborates.

2) Monti government's reforms (2011−2012)

(1) Financial market

The priority goal for the technocratic government of 2011-2012 was to balance public finances: this was done mainly by:

① Increasing the level of taxation: increasing indirect taxes on consumption (VAT) and on alcoholic products, reintroducing the local tax on housing (IMU), but also reducing fiscal pressure on the cost of hiring employees for firms (this cost was relatively high in Italy due to the levels of social contributions) (Eurispes 2013);

② Containing costs for the public sector by cutting expenses in the budget for public education and health, and by adopting a three-year freeze on salary increases, along with limits to new recruitment in the public sector since from 2010 (Maino and Neri 2010),

(2) Pensions

As for pensions, the main intent of the Minister of Welfare Fornero was to speed up the shift privatization of the pension system conceived by the Amato and Dini reforms in the 1990s. These reforms basically fostered the individualization of social risk by introducing of the NDC system for calculating the final amount of pensions, and provided incentives for the creation of private sector pensions based on capitalization of funds (홍이진 2012). Pizzuti (2012) has argued that further cutting expenses on pensions in Italy was not justified by a high level of expenditure in pensions, compared to other European countries; additionally, because private funds transfer the costs of the volatility of private finance to the final amount of pensions, beneficiaries pay the highest price for uncertainty of foreign financial markets. What makes it worse, NDC-based pensions are not adjusted on inflation, and beneficiaries bear additional costs of higher administrative expenses and instability (Pizzuti 2012).

(3) Labor market

This reform was met with high expectations, since it was meant to correct inequalities in the highly segmented Italian labour market, where the level of social protection very much depends on the type of employment contract. The Fornero reform, was, however, not adequately addressing these issues: the apprenticeship contract had been introduced, rules for dismissal were modified, granting more discretion to judges; unemployment benefits were not broadened in coverage and the maximum duration for 'mobility' (the time frame from dismissal to finding another occupation) was reduced-in a word, few measures had been taken in a piecemeal and insufficient way, so that this is commonly understood as being an "incomplete" reform (Lavoce.info 2012).

(4) Health

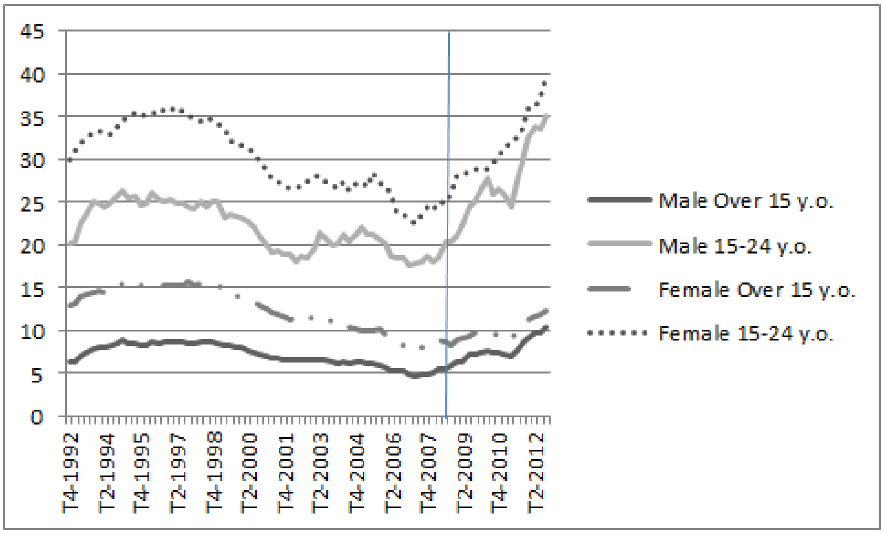
As previously mentioned, due to the reduction of public funds, the National Health System (SSN), financed through general taxation, suffered from budget cuts and reduction of the number of beds in hospitals. Coordinated facilities for primary care should be set, but this depends on the successful renewal of national agreements with general practitioners, as stipulated in the Baldazzi decree (Lavoce.info 2012).

(5) Social services

Social services and family policies were possibly the areas that were suffering the most as a consequence of the post-crisis reforms. Funds for social assistance, child care, long term care assistance are financed through regional budgets, however the 2011 Budget Law caused a serious blow to the amount of public funds dedicated to the regions, which in some cases have been curtailed almost completely. Decentralization of powers and competencies to local governments with no adequate financial coverage from the central governments signified, in a way, neglecting the importance of social services in a moment in which Italian families needed them the most (Maino and Neri 2011).

In a nutshell, neoliberal strategies of cost containment and increased fiscal pressures on Italian families were not adequately balanced by sustaining their incomes and social needs from a social policy perspective. As a result, overall social vulnerability worsened, with unemployment levels soaring up and intergenerational, gender, and territorial inequalities rising and contributing to a difficult social mobility in Italy. As figure 4 shows, unemployment rates have been rising dramatically after the crisis, and dual labour market inequalities seem to have become a more important issue than gender inequalities in these days. Although such worsening outcomes are not completely imputable to the doings of Monti's government, it can be argued that indeed neoliberal cuts and restrictions to welfare expenditure and eligibility conditions were contributing to worsen overall social vulnerability in Italy.

[Figure 4] Unemployment rate 1992–2012, per gender and age (Unit: %)



Source: dati.istat.it

4. In search of a theoretical frame

1) Classical social policy theories

Italy's social protection and capitalistic production systems have long coexisted under the logic of social insurance and long-term employment for male breadwinners. Following a traditional perspective on social risks seen as loss of income in critical situations in life (ex. illness, old age, invalidity), the Italian welfare state has developed incrementally by letting the social protection system grow as the social contribution requirements grew higher in the thirty years after the end of the war. Those were the years of public expenditure expansion, when concerted negotiations between government, employers, and employees were determining the real level of wage of workers in the industry, and social expenditure growth was beneficial to all, and in particular to the Democratic Christian Party (DC), which was dominating in those years and willing to gather political consensus in exchange for a substantial lack of democratic competition.

This essentially static political economy system has been variously interpreted in terms of being a coordinated market economy (CME), a Bismarckian corporatist-conservative welfare state, and a Southern European type of welfare with its very own characteristics, such as high political clientelism, low levels of social expenditure, low levels of redistribution, focus on income protection rather than on direct social services, and a strong degree of institutional stickiness (Hall and Soskice 2001, Esping-Andersen 1990, Ferrera 1996, Schroeder 2008, Raitano 2012, Kammer, Niehues and Peichl 2012, Palier 2012).

However, these approaches tend to be problematic if it is policy change that we want to understand. As previously stated in this study, the economic crisis has seemingly triggered a series of neoliberal responses: is it correct, then, to assume that the crisis alone caused welfare cuts? What was the role of workers and civil society to this respect? How come policy learning mechanisms did not allow social policies to be more responsive of the real economy's needs?

Since welfare state classification theories are better suited to provide path-dependency oriented interpretations, here I am trying to find some more flexible theoretical frames for understanding the dynamics behind the neoliberal turn in the Italian welfare state.

2) Understanding policy change

(1) The reform window's approach

Conservative Bismarckian welfare systems from continental Europe are commonly understood as being structured in a way that is difficult to reform: even when changes were made, they would hardly represent a radical change in their welfare states' structure (Hinrichs 2000, Palier 2010). Italy has been no exception to that, as elaborated earlier. However, this does not necessarily mean that changes in welfare are trivial and path dependency theories apply regardless. Faced with the task of understanding the nature of such changes, Natali and Rhodes (2004) suggested that the space-opportunity for reforms would be the result of two opposing forces, internal and external:

① From inside, industrial relations and institutional inertia/stickiness, tend to keep the system as it is;

② From outside, on the other hand, neoliberal dictates of competitiveness and financial sustainability and the Europeanization process, along with the need to respond to societal problems, tend to push in the direction of change (Natali, Rhodes 2004).

[Figure 5] The reform windows approach for Bismarckian countries

Source: Natali and Rhodes (2004: 3).

(2) The policy arena approach

The policy arena approach is commonly used to understand, through an ideal situation model, what happens inside the policy decision-making process, once that a social issue has successfully entered the political agenda. A typical diagram presents a vertical structure with arrows progressing through subsequent stages, from top to bottom. The policy making path would start with a public policy crisis given by the clash between 'old' and 'new' problems (first stage), which would result in civil and political actors' mobilization and creation of coalitions and institutional projects (stage two). Eventually, these conflicting plans and coalitions would compete in the political arena (stage three), and ultimately, the result of such conflicts would be the generation of reform outputs (stage four) (Ferrera 1993). Girotti (1998) imagined a more static model for describing the development of the modern welfare state: this would resemble a balance between actors in the public administration, the economic system, the civil society, and the government, with the political elites that ultimately make final policy decisions in the politics arena: this is done by putting together possible solutions presented from both political institutions and the socio-economic system.

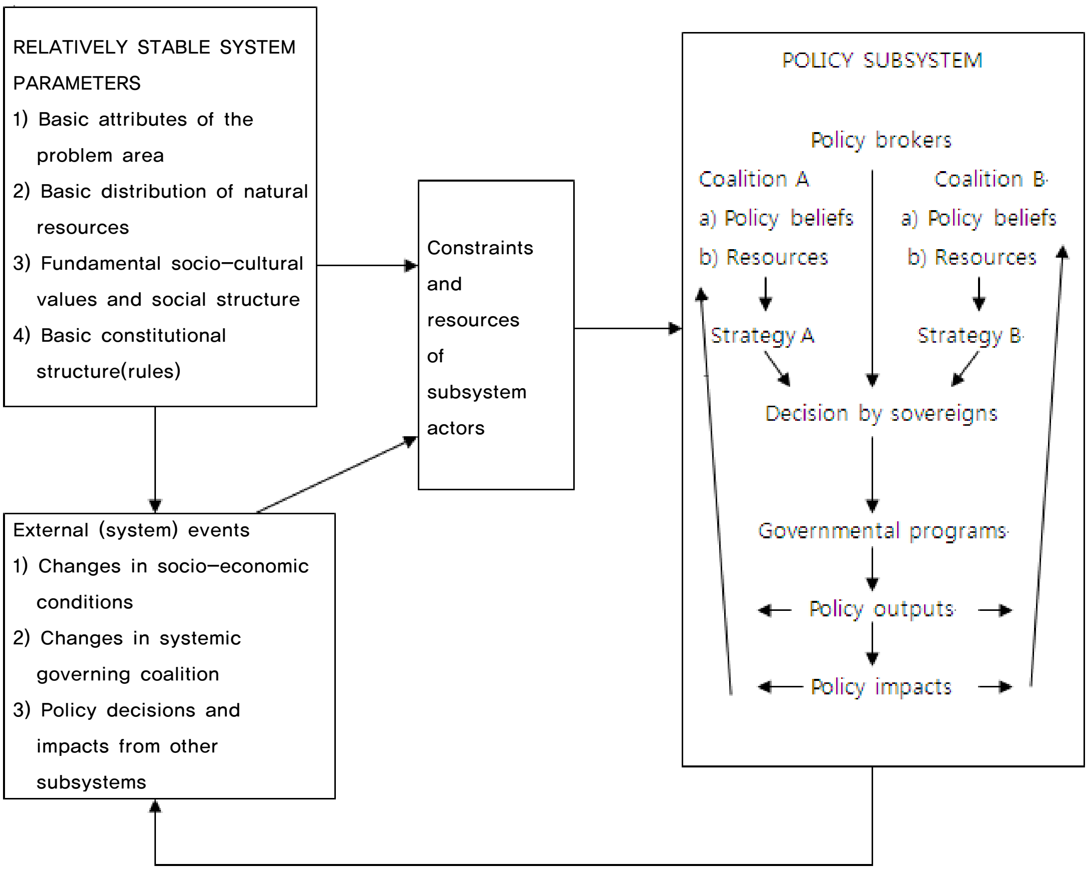
(3) An alternative approach

Natali and Rhodes (2004) are right in stressing the importance of external forces determining policy change, however they are not very specific on the modalities that political struggle would follow. Also, why were real needs of society left unattended in the Italian case? Policy arena theories' main limit is given by the simplicity with which political competition among different coalition is imagined. Power balances and the way in which they communicate is, in fact, much more complicated, and external pressures are not taken into account within these interpretive frames. Why, for example, were trade unions and social movements not successful in influencing the political agenda like they did in the past? What happened to policy learning processes? In the Italian case, it looks as if the political arena was elitist and narrowly self-referential to really care to be responsive to the needs or the real society – possibly, a result of the DC party domination for fifty years in the aftermath of war - whereas it was more responsive to the external influence of the economic crisis and pressures from the EU.

In search of an interpretive model that could properly account for such external pressures and the real economy, I chose to apply Sabatier (1988)'s Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to the analysis of Italian post-crisis welfare reforms. This model has its roots in public policy theory, however its complexity serves well to grasp the dynamics laying behind neo-liberalism in the Italian form, since it stresses the role of advocacy coalitions that can successfully influence the policy agenda, something that can be usefully applied to particularistic corporatism-based Italian policy making. Of course, the ACF model presents various limits: Kim and Roh (2008) have recently pointed out how policy networks should be considered more as metaphors rather than systematic models, since it is not possible to measure belief systems, and therefore it is difficult to predict outcomes. However, I find that its recognition of the policy-making process as being a complex intertwining of political coalitions, that is also influenced by external forces (such as changes in socioeconomic forces, and changes in systemic governing actors), is fitting well when it is post-crisis welfare change in a corporatist country, that we want to account for at a theoretical level.

In Sabatier (1988)'s view, the policy arena ("policy subsystem") is but one of the areas through which policy outcomes see the light of the day; other important aspects that give rise to policy reform processes are the real world and its problems, resources, values, rules ("relatively stable parameters"), on the one hand, and "external system events", represented by external socio-economic and political changes, on the other. So, summarizing, external systems and stable parameters influence the policy arena by defining needs and tasks that the government needs to take up. However, such influences are not easily getting into the political agenda, since they also have to account for the need to be well organized (ex. trade unions, social movements), and the constraints and limited resources of subsystem actors (Sabatier 1988). An overview of the ACF theory can be seen in figure 6.

[Figure 6] General model of policy change focusing on competing advocacy coalitions within policy subsystems



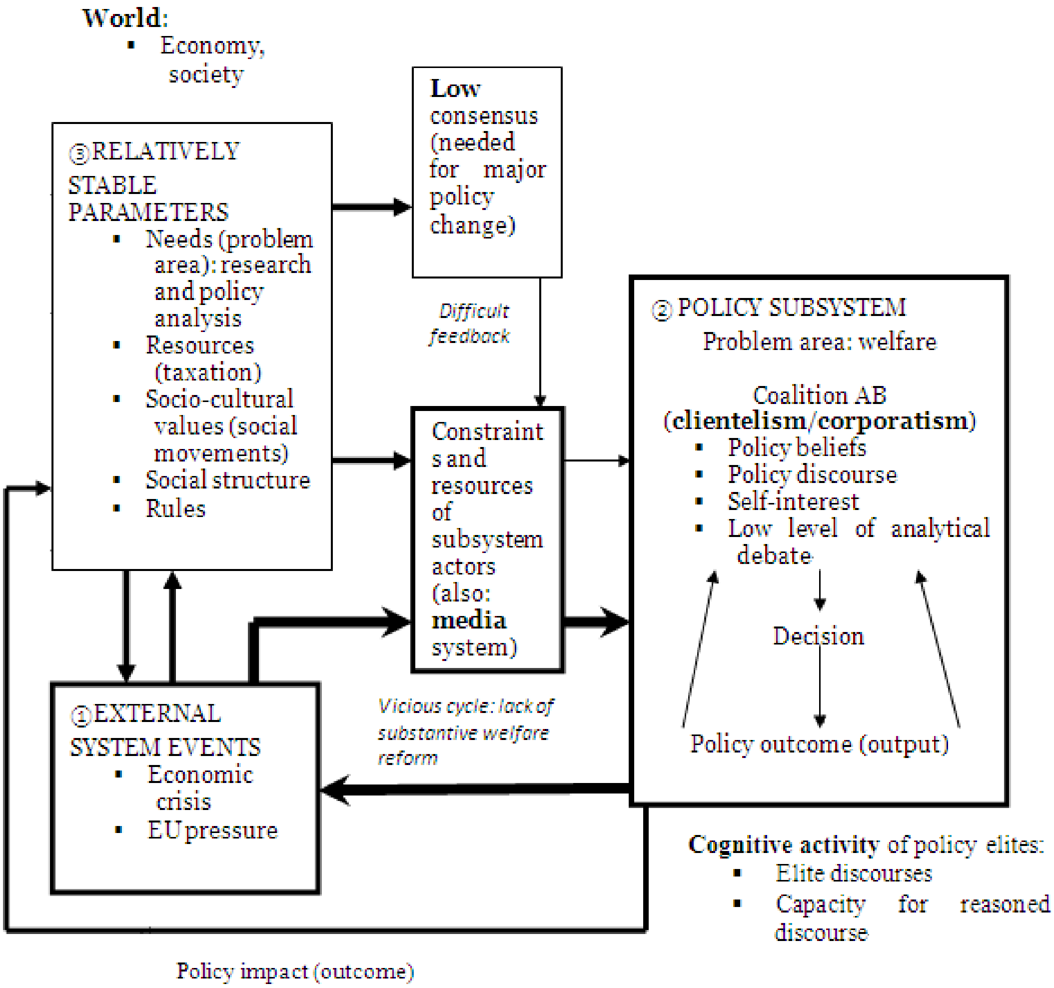
Source: Sabatier (1988: 132).

When applied to the case of Italy, the ACF diagram could be reinterpreted in the form presented in figure 7. Here I drafted the arrows connecting one area to another in thicker black whenever these links are stronger, and in lighter black whenever they tend to be fainter. External system events (box no.1) are, in this case, represented by the concurrent demands given by the economic crisis and EU pressures for fiscal austerity. The policy subsystem area (box no.2) is depicted as the policy decision making process, and the real economy's relatively stable parameters can be seen in box no.3. The most peculiar characteristic for the Italian case consists in the fact that, due to political opportunist strategies of clientelism and big coalitions of governments led by the DC party, democratic competition tended to be restricted: policy discourses, expectations, paradigms, were already given, so that final decisions and policy outputs were quite self-referential, bearing low connections with the real society. In a word, the cognitive activity of policy elites was trapped in a paternalistic, top-down approach to policy making, with discussion among social parts left to a minimum and weak policy learning mechanisms.

Given this conservative political landscape, it was hard for society's real needs (box 3) to gain access to the political agenda, due, in part, to a low capacity for organization from Italian trade unions and civil society organizations, and possibly also due to the indiscriminate pro-government use of television and media that delivered distorted images of societal issues and government's doings, especially during the years of Berlusconi's legislature.

On the other hand, economic crisis and EU pressures for austerity (box 1) were offering a good rationale for the neoliberal political forces to keep on failing to substantively reform the welfare system in a way that could seriously reflect societal needs. This created a vicious circle according to which EU pressures and the economic crisis were pushing towards austerity reforms, this was increasing fiscal pressure and cuts on welfare services for Italian households, and as a consequence, available resources, represented by tax revenues, were shrinking. Ultimately, such a vicious circle bears the risk of pushing the country to the verge of economic recession (Eurispes 2013). Although the Monti government first, and the incumbent Letta government afterwards, repeatedly assured that the Italian economy is recovering, this risk has yet to be averted. If the government and the industry will keep only caring about keeping financial markets afloat through financial bailouts in the absence of compensating support to the economic demand of middle and low-income families, a way out of the vicious circle is difficult to imagine. In the absence of a strategy that does not contemplate participation from real economy's civil coalitions, i.e. keeping up with politically elitist decision making is going to widen the gap between the rationale of electoral competition and the need to structurally reform the Italian welfare system. Mont government's reforms, in this sense, showed all the limits of a neoliberal strategy that has proved to be substantially incapable of pushing the country out of the crisis, the effects of which, the effects of which continue unabashed to this day.

[Figure 7] Applying the ACF model to social policy reform in Italy



Source: Re-elaborated from Sabatier (1988).

5. Conclusions and policy implications

This study has sought to provide a theoretically informed way of looking at the social policy reforms enacted in Italy after the 2008 world economic crisis. Special attention has been paid to 2011-2012 Monti government: its neoliberal strategy of prioritizing austerity measures has failed to fundamentally change the structure of the segmented labour market in Italy and to lessen hardships to impoverished Italian families through better social services. Instead, tax increases and privatization of social protection and retrenchment of regional funds dedicated to social services, education, and health, contributed to aggravate the country's economy. By applying Sabatier (1988)'s ACF theoretical approach to the dynamics of the Italian welfare reform, it has been argued that external pressures given by the economic crisis and European Union's demands for balanced public accounts, coupled with the traditionally elitistic decision-making process in Italy, systematically prevented civil society forces from positively contributing to the reform. In the absence of an adequate democratic competition, the only available economic paradigm was neoliberalism, which had the only possible policy choice of a punitive laissez-faire strategy of individualization of social risks (Pizzuti 2009). To this stage, it is still not possible to rule out the possibility, for Italy, to fall into economic recession just as Greece did (Eurispes 2013).

This analysis of the policy decision making process in Italy can bear useful political implications for the Korean case as well, since leaving important social issues' assessment and policy implementation to electoral competition tends to exacerbate inefficiencies of welfare reform. To put it differently, the decision making process is essentially flawed by the need of being politically more attractive to the masses, and this can lead to a lack of efficient use of public resources, a blurred perception of what are the main social priorities that have to be tackled by national social policies, and vulnerability to the economic requirements dictated by the world's economy and financial institutions whenever the country is hit by a bad economic situation (this can resemble Korea's case back in the 1997 crisis, when it was subject to IMF conditions for bailout). An active involvement of trade unions and civil society to the decision making process, a more transparent media information system, and a more democratic competition in the political arena can help in keeping the whole policy change mechanism, described by Sabatier (1988), work more efficiently. It is particularly important for new welfare states such as Korea not to fall into a post-crisis neoliberal vicious circle, within which external economy's pressures and political elites' self-referential thinking strongly enforce each other in the neglect of the real society's needs, which is clearly a no-win situation for all.

Acknowledgments

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◖ 요약 ◗

경제위기의 이탈리아 복지 현황: 복지개혁을 이해하기 위한 이론적 접근의 고찰

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2008년 세계 경제위기는 유럽 경제에 악영향을 미쳤는데, 특히 남유럽 국가의 피해가 컸다. 이탈리아의 정책결정자들에게는 경제위기가 오래 전부터 실행되었어야 할 복지 예산 삭감 정책을 추구할 수 있는 논리적인 계기가 되었다. 따라서 2011~2012년에 몬티 정부는 신자유주의적인 재정긴축 정책들을 펼쳤다. 일반적으로 대륙유럽의 비스마르크 복지국가들은 개혁하기에 어렵기 때문에, 이탈리아에서 진행 중인 신자유주의적인 개혁을 이해하려면 이론적인 틀이 필요하다. 본 연구는 Sabatier(1988)의 ACF이론을 참고하여 2008년 경제위기 이후의 이탈리아 사회정책 개혁의 논리를 이해하고자 한다. 연구를 통해, 복지 삭감을 설명하는 데에 있어서 경제위기와 유럽연합의 역할 등 외부적인 영향들이 상당히 중요했으며, 정책결정과정에 있어서는 시민사회의 역할이 축소된 결과로 높은 실업률 등의 사회문제가 악화되고 있는 것을 알 수 있다.

키워드: 경제위기, 신자유주의, 유럽연합, ACF이론

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