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URBAN POLICY INNOVATIONS IN LOCAL WELFARE IN BRESCIA, ITALY

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Debates on social policies in Italy: setting the frame

The way in which debates about welfare develop at the local level in Italy is conditioned in our view on one hand by the type of debate that develops at the other institutional levels (national, regional, provincial), and on the other hand by the configuration of the relations among those different levels. Before analysing debates on welfare issues at the local level in Milan, we will therefore briefly set the frame for this analysis.

At the national level, the debates are shaped by the main features of the Italian welfare system that, as it is known, are the typical characters of the Southern European model. The bulk of social protection revolves around the core sectors of old-age pensions (besides health and education), that is monetary-based schemes born to cover a social risk that was typical of the industrial fordist economy. The emergence of new social risks linked to the shift to post-industrial societies, that was a delayed and slower process here than in Nordic and Continental countries (Bonoli 2007), coincided with a major change in the Italian political system. For decades a number of parties formed - around the large Christian Democrats party - unstable governments that lasted short or very short periods, without anyhow giving rise to any real turnover, since the largest Communist Party in Europe was steadily at the opposition. The latter steadily supported the enlargement and consolidation of the social protection, but social expenditure was a way for all parties to achieve social consensus and obtain or maintain votes. Especially in the Seventies, this was at the basis of the out-of-control increase in public expenditure and public debt, that still conditions the room for manoeuvre of Italian Governments nowadays (Ferrera *et al* 2012). With the fall of the iron curtain at the end of the Eighties and the burst of a capillary network of corruption scandals at the beginning of the Nineties, a switch was observed from this situation of impossible alternation to a political system that aimed at becoming based on two political poles, aggregating the different parties. As in other countries, the Italian parties progressively turned from ideological parties, addressing specific social groups, to catch-all parties, seeking votes across all social groups.

The Bismarckian feature of the Italian welfare system has contributed to focus the debates on the retrenchment/defense/recasting of monetary measures protecting against “old” social risks: several subsequent reforms of old-age pension schemes have polarized the social actors, although different governments, both political and technical, either supported by centre-right or by centre-left parties, or even by large coalitions, have passed restrictive pension reforms from the mid-Nineties until 2011. These reforms were however more aiming to reducing public expenditure, than to reorienting it towards other social risks or groups of population. On family issues, divisions formerly juxtaposing left-wing vs right-wing parties were replicated inside the re-aggregated political poles (also due to the presence of politicians defining themselves as ‘Catholic’ in most parties). This has played a role in the fact that the debate focused almost exclusively on ethically sensitive issues (such as the regulation of assisted reproduction technologies, or of biological will), often treated on an ideological basis, rather than on welfare reforms (Saraceno 2003).

At the same time, since the constitutional reform of 2001, that regionalized all competences about social policies (except for contributory monetary schemes, such as old-age pensions, unemployment benefits, family benefits), the room of maneuver on welfare reforms at the national level has been made much more complex, since in order to define or redefine social rights, as well as to earmark funds, agreements must be reached between the State and all the 19 Italian Regions and 2 Autonomous Provinces.

The debate on policies against new social risks (e.g. care policies, activation policies) is also limited by the fact that the bearers of new social risks tend to vote less, to have less voice, and to be less represented in democratic and decision-making arenas (Bonoli 2008).

The relevance of debates at the regional level has increased since the cited constitutional reform of 2001 that regionalized most responsibilities about social policies. At this level, the core of debates on social policies is concentrated on the health sector that, having been regionalized ever since the early Nineties, and involving huge resources that make up most of the regional budgets, has constituted the main field for institutional building of Italian Regions in the last two decades, and especially since the introduction of direct elections of regional governors in 1999 (Pavolini 2008). In particular, debates have developed about the diverse ways in which different regions have organized their health system, and the ways in which relations between public and private actors are managed, with Lombardy being the frontrunner of a quasi-market regulation, later reproduced also in other policy fields.

Since the management of public housing is also regionalized, some debates can be detected, especially about the existence of opportunistic behaviours of recipients, the poor quality of dwellings and the decay of neighbourhoods with high concentration of public residential buildings (see below § 3).

Provinces have limited powers as to social policies, except in the field of employment policies, since they manage the Public Employment Services (*Centri per l'Impiego*, see §4). The main public debate at this level regards the legitimacy of the existence of this institutional level, that was supposed to be suppressed once the Regions would come into function (what happened in 1970), and are nowadays blamed to be useless bodies, with little competencies, but contributing to the high costs of politics. Some attempts for their suppression have been started, all of them encountering severe institutional resistances. Supporters of the maintenance of this institutional level claim that they represent a crucial link between regions and municipalities, and a preside on the territory. At the moment we write this report it is not clear whether provinces are going to be suppressed and when.

Debates on local (municipal) social policies are rather limited, generally speaking. Despite competencies in some fields, such as early childcare and social assistance are largely devolved to cities, the scarce centrality of these policy fields in the Italian welfare system, the frail (for childcare services) or nonexistent (for minimum income benefit) national frame, and the insufficiency or residual amount of resources devoted, contribute to limit the scope of possible reforms or innovations, and thus also debates are generally limited to issues related to the access to, quality of or management of facilities, like for instance waiting lists for day-care centres or conflicts between the city council and the private bodies managing outsourced facilities (see § 2). Compared to public debates that have developed around other areas of local regulation, like for instance the introduction in 2012 of a congestion charge in the city centre, issues of local social policies appear as rather neglected, both in representative and decision-making arenas, and in the local press.

1.2. Brescia, a brief overview

Brescia is a middle-size city situated in the East of the Lombardy Region, with 189,085 inhabitants¹, and is the chief-town of one of the 12 provinces of the Region. It is the second Municipality in the Region by population after Milan. The metropolitan area counts around 500,000 inhabitants, and the province is the fifth most populated in the country, and the second in the region. The strong ageing of the population has been partly compensated in the last decades by very important rates of migration (Costa and Sabatinelli 2012b). The province of Brescia is the second in the Lombardy Region, after Milan, also by economic size (in terms of overall added value). The province is one of the most industrialized areas of the whole country (Provincia Brescia 2011), with a strong industrial vocation, mainly based on medium and small and family-based firms. The city has a long-lasting history as an university site, with around 25,000 students in 2013.

Social Catholicism has been a major element in local policy and politics in Brescia. In the post world war period Brescia was mainly governed by coalitions guided by the Catholic party (*Democrazia Cristiana*). Between 1948 al 1975 the Municipality was administered with no interruption by the same Christian Democrat Mayor, Bruno Boni, under whose government many urban infrastructures (including some state-of-the-art projects and some controversial interventions) have been built. The predominance of the Christian Democrats in local governments continued until the political shock that invested Italy at the beginning of the Nineties, as a consequence of the major corruption scandals known as *Tangentopoli* ('Bribes City'). Afterwards, the Municipality has been governed for many years (1992-2008) by centre-left coalitions. Between 2008 and 2013 a centre-right wing coalition was in power, including the localistic Northern League party. In June 2013 a new change brought a centre-left wing coalition to win the municipal elections again, with a candidate mayor that had won the primary elections, Emilio Del Bono, who had been the centre-left candidate defeated in 2008, and had been head of the opposition in the city council for five years. Del Bono has a professional background in social cooperativism and a political backdrop in the centre-left parties born from the dissolution of the Christian Democrats.

The relevance of social-Christian doctrine is also evident in the civil society, with a long-lasting, consolidated tradition of social solidarity organizations, especially expression of the Catholic Third Sector. The wide presence of third sector organizations in town also includes a capillary network of social cooperatives; ever since the 1980s, a provincial consortium of social cooperatives was created in the area ("Sol.Co.", whose acronym means "furrow"). The contribution of cooperativism to the development of the city was relevant in the construction sector, as it is clearly visible in the residential areas built in the Sixties in the urban periphery.

The most recent intense local debate was about the freshly built city underground, a controversial project since - according to many - the size of the city would not necessarily justify such a an expensive intervention.

Not as strong and spread in the city appear debates about local welfare in the last decade, although the recent alternation, unique in the history of the city, from a centre-left coalition (until 2008) to a centre-right one (2008-2013) to a centre-left one again (from June 2013) has given rise to quite a strong political juxtaposition in general terms.

A general contrast can be observed in the approach of the two political poles towards the reduction of available resources due to austerity measures. The previous centre-right city councillor stated that its coalition had approached the issue in a way that promoted innovative re-organizations, without reducing quantity nor quality of social interventions.

¹ January the 1st 2012 (<http://demo.istat.it/>).

However, the present centre-left coalition claimed during the electoral campaign that the previous administration had widely reduced public provision (and especially the payment of income support benefits, tightening access criteria and reducing the amounts paid), having applied “linear cuts” across all areas of municipal spending, and did not try to safeguard expenditure for social policies. In what follows we give account of issues that concern more specifically the childcare and the housing fields.

2. LOCAL DISCOURSES ON CHILD EDUCATION AND CARE AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES AND SERVICES

2.1. Childcare issues in Brescia local press²

At the national level, attention on national press on this policy area is mostly focused around two main themes:

- the comparative low level of female employment;
- the delay in policy development in Italy, with respect to the rest of Europe, particularly as to the provision of childcare for children <3 (with explicit reference to the European Lisbon targets) and parental leaves;

The two elements are often linked together, roughly identifying the second as one of the main causes for the first.

In particular, news focusing on early child education and care (ECEC) service provision also touch upon more specific issues:

- the high cost of day-care services and other care solutions for families;
- different ways to enlarge the provision of childcare services, that in most cases are seen as complementary rather than as alternative:
 - expansion of publicly financed day-care centres, either directly managed or outsourced;
 - the social responsibility of employers, and particularly the development of, and possibly the public support to, ‘company crèches’ and other family-friendly programmes;
 - regulation of and/or financing support to family-based micro day-care centres (*nidi famiglia o asili condominiali*).

² The press review was carried out with the collaboration of Michela Sempredon, that hereby we thank. The research included, as far as possible, the period January 1st 2002 to May 13th 2012. Research was done first of all on the local pages of the national newspaper ‘Corriere della Sera’, and on the local newspaper ‘Corriere di Brescia’. The search focused on two fields of social services: childcare and housing. It was done by using a filter and in particular key words (in their singular or plural version, as adequate), which were selected by thinking of the main debates that have been developing over time on ‘childcare’ and ‘housing’. An excel sheet was created to record for each key word the total number of articles found for each year. Articles were saved in folders named after the general theme (‘childcare’ and ‘housing’), the city of reference and the ‘actors’ the article refers to. The selection of article has been based on: local relevance; relevance of debate (more the 3 articles on the same issue); articles that are representative of a given debate, as they report on the opinions of more actors, thus ‘resuming’ the debate.

Articles in local press also tackle the same themes, declined in the Brescia context. Articles either generally tackle a theme (e.g. ‘reconciliation of work and family responsibilities’) or report on specific initiatives. Frequently articles report claims by parents on insufficient provision of services, and/or tell the experience of working mothers. Contents about values and orientations of local actors are rarely expressed.

The research on press was made on the basis of the following key words:

- ASILI NIDO (day-care centres)
- CONCILIAZIONE FAMIGLIA-LAVORO (family-work conciliation and related issues)
- BABYSITTER/TATE (babysitters and nannies)
- SERVIZI PER L’INFANZIA (services for babies and children)
- BAMBINI STRANIERI + SERVIZI PER L’INFANZIA (foreign children + services)
- MADRI SOLE (lonely mothers)

A secondary search was done with the following key words too, but it emerged relevant articles had already appeared in previous searches:

- LISTA D’ATTESA (waiting lists)
- ANTICIPO SCUOLA/ASILO (early entry in kindergartens)
- NIDI ACCREDITATI (day-care centres accredited by the municipality)
- RELAZIONE NONNI-NIPOTI (children-grandparents relationship and grandparents’ help for childcare)
- ORARI ATIPICI (flexible working hours and flexible hours of services)
- CENTRI ESTIVI (summer services)

As table 1 synthesizes, the main actors involved in the debates reported by the local press are:

- local politicians, especially the city councillors with responsibilities on family policies, childcare services and equal opportunities;
- local political parties;
- local cooperatives and associations managing services;
- trade unions;
- parents interviewed on their satisfaction as users of the services, or on their opinion on changes in the services;
- exceptionally researchers, in occasion of the presentation of results of studies.

Most relevant articles on ECEC policies and services refer to one of the following themes: access to and shortage of services; cost of services for users (fees); reconciliation of work and family responsibilities and the general local programming agenda on the subject.

In addition articles refer to alternative, possibly more flexible services provided by the third or private sectors (*nidi famiglia* or *di condominio*). No relevant article was found, instead, on the theme of early admittance to kindergartens and the Spring classes for children aged 2 to 3 introduced nationally as a possibility to reduce waiting lists for day-care centres and at the same time reduce costs both for public bodies and for the families.

A few articles refer to the issue of availability, regulation and cost of baby sitters and child-minders in view of facilitating work-life balance for families. Some articles about lone mothers refer again to reconciliation, but also focus on their risk of poverty and the need for economic and psychological support targeted to them.

An issue debated in local politics and reported on the local press in the last decade, and that reflected a more general debate present on the national press in the same years, regards the integration of migrants' children into schools, and particularly the concerns - during the centre-left local government in the 2003-2008 period - of the localist party Lega Nord about the high share of children with non-EU foreign parents in compulsory schools, especially in some of the primary and lower secondary schools in Brescia city centre, and about the financial burden for the Municipality of integration programs and of Italian language courses, considered too high by the same party that called for national *ad hoc* financing (eg. Corriere di Brescia 10 September 2005).

Table 1: Newspaper articles on family and childcare policies and issues in Brescia 2002-2011

Themes	Main actors	Main articles titles/contents
ASILI NIDO (day care centres)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City councillor responsible for social policies • City councillor responsible for family related issues • Private nurseries associations • Candidate mayors • Association "Compagnia delle opere" • Municipality • Parents • Right-wing political parties: Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord • Italian housewives movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives run by Compagnia delle opere • Municipality help desk • Baby sitter services • Magazine 'madre' • Regional financial support available for childcare services (Law 23/1999) • Candidate mayors for elections and their programs, with reference to childcare services • Confrontations between residents and political actors (via the newspaper) on childcare services • Shared management and coordination of services between the Municipality of Brescia and municipalities in surrounding areas • Debates on vouchers and summer nurseries • Access and enrolment to day-care centres • collaborations between the Municipality and the third sector in the delivery of services
CONCILIAZIONE FAMIGLIA-LAVORO (family-work reconciliation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City councillor responsible for 'time policies' • Municipality • Ordine Architetti di Brescia (Architects' representative body) • CISL trade union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piano zona and Piano politiche famiglia (Programming documents and plans) and Conciliation family-work • Office for 'time policies' and conciliation family-work • Information desk on conciliation family-work issues organised by CISL trade union • Association 'donne IN'
BABY SITTER/TATE (baby sitters and child minders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compagnia delle opere • Municipality • Local co-operatives and associations • Italian housewives' movement • Candidate mayors • Local Church community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local church communities and course for babysitters • List of babysitters and relevant courses • Vouchers for babysitting services • Management of access and enrolment to babysitting services

SERVIZI PER L'INFANZIA (childhood services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political parties • Municipality • Parents 	
BAMBINI STRANIERI + SERVIZI PER STRANIERI (foreign children, services for foreigners)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right-wing political party Lega Nord • Parents • Researchers 	
MADRI SOLE (lone mothers)		Reconciliation family-work Poverty Need for economic and psychological support
ANTICIPO SCUOLA INFANZIA (early entry in kindergarten)		No relevant article was found

Other issues concerning childcare policies debated in local politics are almost not represented in local press, and they can only be reconstructed through interviews to representatives of different political parties and coalitions. We will discuss two examples in the next section.

2.2. Childcare issues in Brescia local politics

In this section we attempt to highlight how different political positions observable in the Brescia municipal context approached two issues related to childcare services and solutions. The time frame is the last decade, embracing the last one of a long period of centre-left coalition governments (2003-2008), the only centre-right coalition government that Brescia underwent (2008-2013) and the beginning of the new centre-left coalition government in power since June 2013.

2.2.1 Regulation of municipal day-care services and diversification of childcare solutions

New rules to access municipal day-care centres for children aged 0-3 were introduced in February 2009 by the city councillor with responsibility about Family of the centre-wing coalition that had been in power for a few months back then [Corriere di Brescia, 15 February, 2009]. The changes concerned the requirements to access municipal day-care centres, and the criteria to define the ranking of applications³.

³ More specifically, rules to access day-care centres were changed as to what concerns the following five points: 1) income ceased to be a criterion to access day-care centres, but only to define the fee level. This was meant to consider day-care centres as a service to families, not as a social service (anymore). If a low-income family should be excluded by day-care centres, it would be given a 560€ monthly voucher to reduce the cost of a private accredited day-care centre; 2) a new distribution of points for access criteria by occupational conditions of parents was introduced, with a maximum consideration for households in which both parents are employed, a minimum evaluation for those in which both are unemployed, and a special treatment reserved to lone parents. This ranking rules aimed at privileging the function of day-care centres in terms of reconciliation of family and working responsibilities; 3) a reduction in fees was introduced for parents who were fired or were put in short-hour work schemes (*cassa integrazione* and the like), in order to tackle the effects of the current economic crisis (5 cases in the first year of implementation); 4) the presence of handicap ceased to be considered only at the individual level of the child to be received in the service, but started to be evaluated at the household level: the same points, in the process of ranking applications, started to be

In parallel, waiting lists for day-care centres had been brought close to zero (if calculated not at the beginning of the school year but at the end of the insertion period), due on the one side to the diversification of supported solutions and on the other to the impact of the crisis on unemployment, that has reduced the demand for full-time day-care. A relevant exception is however registered, with 50 cases of parents who did not accept alternative solutions and preferred to wait for a place in a municipal crèche.

The diversification of childcare solutions was basically pursued through an enlarged use of monetary benefits and vouchers. This was obtained by increasing the income thresholds to apply for:

- monetary benefits to support persons in parental leave (that passed from 484 in October 2008 to 745 in October 2009, + 54%, with an expenditure that passed from 200 to 300 thousands euros);
- vouchers for families paying an accredited private day-care centre⁴ (that doubled, from 47 to 94, with an expenditure that passed from 165 to 273 thousands euros);
- vouchers for families hiring a baby-sitter (that also increased, but still remained really marginal, passing from 2 to 7).

The document changing access rules to municipal day-care centres was approved unanimously by the “Day care centres Commission”, composed by representatives of parents of children attending the services, and presidents of neighbourhoods’ councils (*circoscrizioni*). The councillor in charge back then defined the new rules a “manifesto of political choices aimed at putting the child and the family at the centre, in a pedagogical rationale”⁵, and declared that the unanimous approval “demonstrates the new rules are good”. It must be said, however, that many of these interventions had already been programmed or designed by the previous centre-left administration. In fact, after the councillor in charge outlined the reforms in the Municipal Commission a “quick debate” followed, in which only the opposition representative (from the Democratic Party) and former city councillor for Social services intervened defining “very good” the results, and just asking for a more precise calculation of the number of households receiving monetary benefits. [Corriere di Brescia, 10 November 2009].

This wave of diversification of support to childcare solutions initiated in 2009 matched with an evaluation of the effects of the persisting economic crisis on the demand for full-time day-care. Since more families are directly caring for their young children because they lost their job, or are involuntarily working part-time or at reduced hours, applications for day-care centres decreased, also because many families cannot afford to pay fees anymore. On the contrary, demands for integrative services, such as ‘family centres’, have increased. These are places where children can spend a few hours a week with a reference adult (a parent, a grandparent, a child-minder), together with other children with their reference adult, and with educators. Goals of these services are early socialization and education for children, and socialization also for the adults and parenthood support (see Costa and Sabatinelli 2011). The previous councillor from the centre-right coalition stated it was important to economically invest in the development of these services, because

assigned if in the household there is a disabled child or a disabled parent; 5) in favour of large families, disregarding the income level, the fee for day care centres became free for the fourth child (16 cases in the first year of implementation).

⁴ Private day-care centres in the city were 8 back then, but the criteria for accreditation were about to be changed in order to facilitate an enlargement of the supply.

⁵ Words that are very similar to those used in a quite different approach in the case of the “Maggio 12” project in Milan (see Costa and Sabatinelli 2013b).

they are crucial to avoid a large number of families to be excluded from a relation with the services, and to live parenthood in a totally isolated way. It should also be mentioned that they are largely less expensive than traditional full-time day-care centres.

The support to this type of services is also fostered by the present municipal councillor from the new centre-left coalition, who confirms that the crisis is eliminating the waiting lists for municipal day-care centres, and that the municipal services will have in the next years less a work-family reconciliation function, and much more a social function, to support families at risk of social disadvantage. In order to fulfil this function, the challenge for services is in his view to succeed in intercepting social needs that do not clearly express themselves as a social demand. In relation to this, the present administration aims at overcoming the use of the voucher instrument. This seems in fact inadequate to create real ties between families and the administration, and among families themselves, and harder to use exactly by those families who would be most in need.

2.2.2. *Fostering a territorial network on family policies and municipal welfare*

Both the previous centre-right and the present centre-left councillors and coalitions declared the ambition to reform the local welfare system, to pursue integration and innovation, and to reserve to the Municipal administration a coordination role, rather than a role of direct production of welfare. The way these keywords have been declined, though, is fairly different.

For the previous, centre-right coalition, integration appeared the key-word for the management of local social and family policies in times of crisis, with increasing demands and decreasing resources. Inspired by a new “Social welfare” concept, social policies were said to need to be integrated with cultural, sports and leisure and housing policies, in order to promote a “welfare and security condition” [Corriere di Brescia, 15 March 2012]. In order to maximize synergies among territories (also fostered by the Lombardy Region) and among sectors, the previous city councillor also advocated shared programming between different ambits, such as Reconciliation Family-Work and Youth Policies for instance. A new ‘Plan for family policies and municipal welfare’ was introduced in February 2012. The plan designed for the municipality a role of coordination, rather than of direct service provider. The aim was to enlarge and strengthen the collaboration with Third Sector actors in order to “avoid to replicate the provision of services that are already efficiently supplied”, and to involve the third sector actors also in co-programming, and not only in outsourced provision, as also foreseen in the local Area Social Plan 2012-2014. The municipal social secretary service would maintain its role to comprehend and filter the social demand expressed in the territory. When the plan was presented, the opposition representatives from the Democratic Party advocated an urgent meeting with the municipal social workers, defined as “sentinels of territorial dynamics”, for a confrontation [Corriere di Brescia, 28 February 2012].

The institution of an *ad hoc* table with third sector actors was also foreseen by the previous councillor, not in view of delegating responsibilities but of “confrontation to define a new welfare model”. The project was rather vaguely inspired by the experience of “some municipalities in other regions”. The system was announced to be about to “change in continuity”. Change was considered necessary to tackle the (“clear-cut”) reduction of resources⁶, but - it was stated - would be implemented in a “fair and

⁶ Transfers from Region were in 2011 less than the half of the previous year; the Fund for dependent persons was brought to zero; transfers from the State passed to 1.8 millions euros in 2012, 2.4 millions less than the year before (already reduced by 0.5 million with respect to 2010) [Corriere di Brescia, 15 March 2012].

sustainable way”. [Corriere di Brescia, 15 March 2012]. Nevertheless, this project had by Spring 2013, shortly before the municipal elections, not taken off. The former councillor blamed this failure to the fact that on the one side local stakeholders might be worried to lose degrees of autonomy, and the possibility to be allocated resources; on the other that such a project was not favoured by a short-term time horizon. Therefore it was postponed to after the upcoming local elections, confirming however that it remained an objective of his coalition, in case it was confirmed (see also Brescia WP5 report, Costa and Sabatinelli 2013a). As mentioned, however, that majority was reversed at the June 2013 elections.

The approach of the new administration is quite different. The city councillor for social policies of the present centre-left municipal coalition has declared the objective for his area of competence is to substitute the approach that fosters competition among private non profit actors providing welfare services with an approach that favours collaboration instead. In this view, the emphasis on competition of the last years has ruined a relevant patrimony of horizontal relations among local actors active in welfare production. We can deduce that this might have had an impact in the failure of the coordination table attempted by the previous councillor, due to the inner contradiction between competitive methods and cooperative goals. In the words of the new city councillor, Brescia should become the first “zero-tender” Municipality in Italy, privileging all other existing forms of contract for outsourcing and public-private collaboration, not or less competition-oriented, such as the pre-commercial public procurement and others (Scalvini 2013). The rationale is that the energies of local actors should not be devoted to defeat competitors in tenders, but rather to innovate the process of welfare production, in order to find ways to reduce the costs without discharging this reduction onto the workers of welfare services, either underpaying them or worsening their working conditions. This shall be part of a general change of mentality fostered in the whole city, and especially - but not only - in the municipal social services. The decrease of available resources shall be tackled in two ways. On one side, an attempt to invert the trend and increase the budget, also through the creation of a specific social fund for the city of Brescia, pooling all available resources, including big and small donations. On the other, a wide development of social innovation to be pursued at the territorial level, making of the municipality a “diffused incubator” for new ideas, and turning Brescia into a “social smart city” (ibid.).

Integration with other municipal sectors is also actively pursued by the current administration, for instance between social services and housing sector, that is the object of the next section.

3. ACTORS, DISCOURSES, VALUES AROUND URBAN REGENERATION AND HOUSING WELFARE POLICIES IN BRESCIA

In this paragraph we will illustrate the general references and values that emerged in the Brescia in the last ten years towards urban regeneration policies and welfare housing policies as well as the main stakeholders and coalitions (and the expressed conflicts) in these policy fields. As explained before, we could not rely on political parties documents for analyzing the local welfare political milieu so our analysis is based mostly on interviews and on the newspaper articles review. We analyzed the data base of the two more important newspaper articles from 2002 to 2011: Corriere della Sera and Giornale di Brescia, the first one being a national newspaper with a local edition and the second one being a very local media (with no digital database!). The interviews focused pretty much the issue of innovation (and lack of innovation!) and actual orientations but without forgetting a historical perspective that gave us the means to contextualize nowadays projects, policies, discourses and cleavages.

3.1. Urban Regeneration

In the last 10 years two have been the “big issues” of the urban transformation in Brescia. The first one refers to *the* flagship urban renewal project that led to the “recuperation” of the central and historical neighbourhood called “Il Carmine” since 2001 through a planning tool called “Recuperation Plan” (using the law 457/1978). Il Carmine was, at the beginning of the century, mainly inhabited by migrants because properties were very degraded and rents were quite low compared to other areas of the city. The City Plan of 1961 included the need of measures aimed at the protection of estate property, thereby resuming the demolition of crumbling buildings. Il Carmine turned to be more and more attractive for the huge immigrant flow that characterized the city over the decades: up to the 60s migrants arrived mostly from Veneto region, in the 70s they started to arrive from Southern Italy and in the 90s migrants started to arrive from other countries, from the ex-Yugoslavia area and from Asia and Africa. At the end of the 60s the development of San Polo’s residential area, next to Carmine, started to attract the Italian migrants expelled from Il Carmine because of the demolitions. Carmine’s population decreased quickly but it had been soon replaced by the incoming flow of non EU immigrants. In 2004 they counted for almost 40% of the residents. After the abandonment of the area by the locals and before the arrival of a fresh flow of immigrants, housing property in Carmine was in the hands of a restricted number of landlords. The newcomers were subject to illegal rules of housing. Nevertheless, to avoid being officially registered as residents, they accepted unfair contracts with high rents, which forces them to sublet rooms or even beds by the hours. They were subject to any kind of unfair arrangements like sudden end of their contracts due to property sales. Overcrowding and the habit of foreigners to occupy common spaces, favoured the birth of many ethnic business that were able to attract non residents as well as locals.

The first symptoms of the degrading quality of life were observed as a consequence of similar deterioration of houses. From the mid of the 90s the piling up of problems caused by poverty, overcrowding and micro criminality was presented by the local press as an issue of cohabitation between locals and migrants and at the same time as a clash of cultures. The “Piano di Ricupero” (Recuperation Plan) of 2001 started as a consequence of this press campaign aiming at enforcing security and legality in the district, since degradation was seen as a fertile land for illegal activities.

The overall present state of Carmine after its renewal is regarded as highly improved as far as housing and security standards are concerned. Criminality has been greatly reduced and a more serene environment is perceived. However two problems remain unsolved. The first issue is the increased cost of rents resulting from the enforcement of the Recuperation Plan. At the beginning, the Carmine Plan had not yet fully assessed the impact of clearing of the crumbling buildings on the surrounding housing market. The most problematic cases caused by such clearance have been tackled successfully by the moving of families to the adjacent San Polo district and to other urban areas. Many migrants bought their own dwellings in the Carmine district but affordability remains an issue because of gentrification processes. The second issue refers to the importance given by the Plan to improve the building fronts, which turned the whole environment more pleasant, but had not taken into account the fact that immigrants coming from the south of the world have the habit of living preferably “outdoors”. If the local political agenda seems to ignore the presence of immigrants people, despite the existence of a strong network of foreign entrepreneurship in the district, it is certainly due to the press campaigns of the 1990s.

Articles citing Il Carmine mostly report on criminality issues relating (or supposedly related) to residents of immigrant origins. Few articles also report on the life of immigrants and on their shops, as well as on some good examples of pacific cohabitation or

efforts in this direction and of problems connected to it. None of the articles found is relevant as far as housing issues are concerned. This representation is coherent with what stated below. Il Carmine also has been progressively depicted as a valued neighbourhood, plenty of social, economic, historical and architecture resources, as the process of renewal of the buildings and of the public space moved on. The right-winged local government in some way promoted the idea that Il Carmine have been valued because it was in some way “cleaned” of migrants in what concerns housing. Il Carmine as a touristic attraction has also dominated the last years of the decade till nowadays.

The second big project that catalyzed the city attention has been the construction of the new neighbourhood called “San Polino”, contiguous to “San Polo”, the neighbourhood built at the end of the 1970s characterized by a high stock of public housing, at that time considered as a good example of new urbanization with a high density and a high standard of services but then turned to be a concentration of many problems (social and environmental ones). San Polino had been raised in the period 2005-2008, it is composed by 1,800 dwellings (most of them in “edilizia economica popolare”) that host nowadays about 2,000 residents.

Another issue that has dominated the public arena is the insertion of San Polo in a big regeneration project financed by Lombardy Region and the Municipality, “Contratto di Quartiere”. San Polo has around 17,000 dwellings, 20,000 residents in 350 hectares. Both neighbourhoods see the presence of migrants but with a lower proportion than in other parts of the city (about 30%). These two areas of the city have been at the very centre of the public arena and matter of political conflict due to their high rate of public housing stock, the increased number of migrants (see the specific sub-paragraph below) and their problematic social situation. In the media there have been some debate about the “Contratto di quartiere S. Polo” program and its capacity to achieve a desirable social mix in the neighbourhood. A specific but paradigmatic issue concerns two multi-store towers of public housing dwellings sited in San Polo that were part of the Contratto di Quartiere. These two towers, named Torre Cimabue and Torre Tintoretto, 385 dwellings, have been at the heart of political debate because the Paroli government (right-winged) pushed for their demolition (which has in fact been announced many times) as part of the “Contratto di Quartiere” actions. The opposition by contrast, fought for their renovation and for policies that could change their social mix. Nowadays the Torre Tintoretto is empty because the Municipality tried, unsuccessfully, to sell it for Euros 14 million. The refill of the tower is one of the problems/opportunity of the new left- winged administration.

3.2. Welfare housing policies

Brescia is a city that along with Milan, has produced a huge stock of affordable housing for its low and middle low income inhabitants in the last 50 years, both through public policies that supported the construction of affordable apartments to buy and to rent and through the action of private non profit actors. But according to our interviewed, welfare housing policies are and were not at the centre of any debate in the city in these last 10 years. This is due partly to the fact that public resources for housing have decrease very sharply but because the high availability of private dwellings created a kind of “secondary market that was thought could meets all housing demands”, as according to explained in the wp3 city report, Brescia is characterized by a high number of private empty dwellings. Estimates done by the Municipality indicate them as being around 4/5,000. The right-winged government introduced in 2009 a special bonus for tenants in order to support lower income families in the payment of rents at “canone concordato” (moderate rents fixed by local agents). It is called “bonus a sostegno della locazione a canone concordato”. Its’ eligibility rules were quite stringent and according to some observers it was a way to avoid any consistent investment in this policy field. As a matter of fact this bonus has not

been used at all because of the quite selective criteria and mistrust of potential homeowners that this support could really prevent risks for their goods/dwellings (the support could be equal to maximum one year of rent).

The only aspect that emerges clearly in the public debate is the development of housing opportunities to the grey part of the market, those who are not poor enough to enter in the “social social” public housing market and not wealthy enough to enter in the private market. In this sense we could assist to a convergent attention and consensus through the development of a renting stock to low-middle class individuals, eligible to rent with the so-called “canone moderato” (a moderate rent in the public regime, about 60 euros/month) or with the “canone convenzionato” (same values, in a “private” regime). Public actors (ALER Brescia and the Municipality) and private ones (social housing developers) allied their forces to promote this kind of housing, especially from 2008 onwards⁷. Very generic statements have been done in favour of young couples seen as the best solution to promote also the desired social mix, a kind of “guiding” (ad quite rhetoric) criteria of most housing policies and urban transformations in many Lombardy cities.

It can be stated on the basis of our empirical evidence that most of the political scene has been played around the many different meanings of “social housing” as a lever to solve the existing housing problems in the city. But “social housing” in the Italian context, as clarified in the wp2 and in wp3 is a policy and action field pretty new and subject to many ambiguities⁸. In Brescia this is quite evident as productive stakeholders stick to this generic formula without giving birth to a fruitful debate and just using the opportunity windows given by regional and local legislation as well as financing opportunities. For example, in the press review we have done, many articles report the term ‘edilizia convenzionata’ (which is part of but normally they do so only to point out that it is planned for given projects, without reporting on debates, discussions, opinions, good practices or specific complaints that somehow highlight or give clues to any local debate. The leading values could be summarized as: “if it is social housing (whatever it means) is good for everybody”. Only marginal stakeholders (in terms of economic and political power) refused the fact that welfare housing problems could be met through social housing initiatives. These actors are the renters local unions as well as associations fighting for “rights for all” (like the Association “Diritti per tutti”).

Something changed with the economic crisis. More attention in the public arena has been given to very deprived families, specially evicted ones. Evictions grew quite sharply in Brescia in the last 5 years which reawaken the political debate around the housing question for the poorest in society, a question that was present in the political debate at the beginning of the century. A great division among stakeholders in this case emerged as well as their declared values. Brescia Municipality, ALER and the local government assumed (and continues to assume) a “legalist” position stating that although evictions are painful they have to be enforced, that rules have to be respected. In the other side,

⁷ Most requests in Brescia are related to the “social regime” and concern families with very low incomes (maximum 17,000 euros/year; Costa and Sabatinelli 2012b). Eligible requests within the “moderate contracts” reached 8.4% of the total ones in the second bid of 2010. Municipality housing units available for “moderate” rents are very few but there is clear strategy of expanding them and differently from other Municipalities they are completely allocated. Furthermore, social housing parameters could permit to agencies as ALER go “get into the market”, a mandate that the new legislation on public housing agencies enforces.

⁸ And that is one of the reasons why we decided to analyze two cases of “good” social housing in the WP5 report on Brescia, assuming that offering cheap renting opportunities is *the* issue of social housing in this country (Costa and Sabatinelli 2013a).

evicted or under eviction families, the association “Diritti per tutti” and the GGIL (Trade union) territorial organizations state that “arrears in payment are not guilty” and that people have to be preserved in their housing situation considered that they are hit by other hardships like the loss of employment. In the middle, as mediators, we find religious organizations, the Brescia Church and its associations that support migrants (see below).

According to our informants, we are assisting to a change in this “legalist” position with the new government (left-winged). For instance, those who occupied some months ago the little houses prior devoted to the subway workers near San Polo and who have been evicted or who used to be homeless, have not been removed as would have done the previous administration. The municipality promoted a dialogue between occupants and the land owners in order to permit the first ones to temporarily live there. Even if formally there are some instruments to support the evicted, this new government is in some way “realistic” and do not enforce the law trying to look for more participated/non violent/non disruptive decisions.

It’s important to acknowledge that poor families housing needs are coped only by ALER and the Municipality with their own public housing stock and by the Congrega Apostolica, a religious organization that deserve all their dwellings to very deprived families but without any parallel social project to foster social inclusion.

In some way the economic crisis and specifically more extreme situations in terms of housing needs have differentiated this policy field and the position and values of the main actors. The policy field is very fragmented and no strategic lines can be seen, neither by public nor by private actors. Brescia did not develop a housing agency to match offer and demand or to manage the existing resources as did other Italian cities (for example Turin). For example, private actors are trying to use public stock empty apartments to renew them and manage them directly but it is quite hard to do it because of this fragmentation and bureaucratic limits. That is why cooperative actors and associations are trying to aggregate their voice to “talk” to the public actors but this is still in the way. Important private actors are: Immobiliare Sociale Bresciana (see Costa and Sabatinelli 2013a) as an innovative social housing developer with a “cooperativistic soul” and the Congrega, thanks to its huge dwelling stock. Cooperatives are not so develop in nowadays Brescia and few of them still operates for renting (cooperatives “a proprietà indivisa”, cooperatives that own and do not sell their dwellings but rent them all over the years).

3.2.1. Migrants housing issues, values and actors

A specific attention is now given to how migrants and housing issues have mobilized different actors in the last decade in Brescia. The first decade of the century was characterized by pro-migrants attitudes, at least till 2008 when the local government passed to right winged parties. The Municipality hosted⁹ from 1989 a huge “Migrants office” called “Servizio per l’integrazione e la cittadinanza” (Service for integration and citizenship), employing people from many continents, able to communicate and interact with migrants from all over the world, helping them in their day by day problems, be working, housing, social assistance, insertion, inclusion, discrimination ones. According to the interviewee, the beginning of the decade was characterized by “a diffuse solidarity and institutions that collaborate to overcome human and social degradation”.

The city, took part to an European network composed by 23 cities (and Brescia was the only one in Italy) that fostered migrants integration (supported by the Dublin European

⁹ Hosted but not fully institutionalized which means that the office was composed by collaborators that hold temporary contracts.

Foundation). Housing migrants integration was an important issue, approached with neutral policies and a specific attention against discriminations in the private market. Some projects (see for instance the one illustrated in Costa and Sabatinelli 2013) have been developed to support migrants in their housing ordinary needs even if even in those years more attention has been given to migrants urgent housing needs (with the creation of 5 centers for emergency housing, now only 2 and destined to Roma people) or placed in deprived contexts like the Cimabue and Tintoretto towers mentioned before, where an intercultural social project have been developed to support migrants (also Roma) to live in these dwellings.

No debate or political conflict emerged about the presence of migrants in waiting list for the existing public stock till at least half of the 2000s when a regional law imposed at least 5 years of residence in Lombardy to be eligible for public housing. From 2005 onwards some political conflict emerged at the local level: left winged parties along with third sector and migrants associations re-stated the importance of using a neutral evaluation system for migrants, considering them as other citizens. Right winged parties have denounced the fact that migrants would be proportionally more present in the waiting lists than Italians because they are relatively more poor which would subtract public housing opportunities to the autochthonous population. A regional law gave birth to a local conflict that is not new in the Italian and in the Brescia context.

Housing for migrants as well as for other targets disappeared from the public arena in these last years. In general the theme of immigrants and housing have been mostly dealt with reference to squatting and illegal access to housing with the Association “Diritti per tutti” always involved in defending migrants housing rights.

What about migrants and their presence in the Il Carmine? The Carmine neighbourhood recuperation project has been developed to renew historical buildings and a high quality real estate stock as well as the public patrimony to host the University of Brescia (now installed in 3 buildings + the university library). The impacts of the recuperation project are: The increase in dwellings prices (to rent and/or to buy); the increase in control activities specially on migrants (a special municipality office devoted to check housing conditions as overcrowding has been opened which reached all the dwellings in less than 2 years); the neighbourhood has been “securitized” and “X-rayed” (as declared by one of ours interviewed); poor populations (migrants and elderly people) have been pushed to other neighbourhoods, frequently to the outskirts of the city.

No debate have been developed about migrants (of first and second generation) destinies which were the main residents of Il Carmine and that had to move¹⁰ because of the augmented cost of living there. Only some academics have pointed out that the Recuperation Plan had some negative implications for them (as well as for other vulnerable

¹⁰ Their main destination in term of housing have been:

- a) Via Milano (“Milano road”), pretty near the city center, a road that is attractive to migrants because renting prices there are pretty low due to the fact that it is quite polluted (it was a manufacture site till the 1980s and not fully reclaimed from PCB and similar components);
- b) San Polo and San Polino: migrants have been concentrated in two towers (whether the rest of the dwellings are low multifamily houses) called “Tintoretto” and “Cimabue”. Despite of their names (recalling two great Italian painters) these towers turned to concentrate a lot of migrants in very deprived situations. At the beginning of the 90’s they were occupied by Senegalese, Moroccans and Tunisians, at half of the 1990s by people coming from India, at the end of the 1990s by Pakistanis and further on by Bengali individuals.

populations). Migrants continued to live Il Carmine as workers and consumers. The neighbourhood has a very high concentration of ethnic commerce and represents a reference for most migrants communities living in Brescia. As stated before, this reality have been well represented in the media and also in the political debate.

3.2.2. Housing welfare policies and issues in the newspapers

How welfare housing issues have been depicted in the Brescia media in this decennium? We have looked for articles¹¹ in the “Corriere della Sera” and “Giornale di Brescia” containing the following keywords: squatting, social housing, social rent, housing risk, increase in cost living and housing, increase in loans, house evictions, subsidized housing, students housing, housing vulnerability, housing tension, urban regeneration and “Il Carmine” neighbourhood. Not all of them were useful. In the following table we summarize the main findings of the selected articles, their titles and general contents and the actors that have been cited in them.

Table 2. Newspapers articles on housing welfare policies and issue in Brescia 2002-2011

Key-word	Main actors	Main articles titles/contents
Squatting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens • Municipality 	<p>Articles mostly refer to complaints against squatting and interventions against it on the side of local institutions and local housing actors. Selected articles focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants/nomads and squatting at the beginning of the 90s • Complaints on squatting by citizens in various neighbourhoods • Interventions, and in particular inspections, by municipalities and ALER against squatting
Social housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aler • Municipality, trade unions, PDL right wing political party¹² 	<p>Articles mostly refer to the national debate on social housing. Selected articles focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives on social housing • Study on social housing by CENSIS • Delay of Italy on social housing <p>And at the local level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible use of social housing against poverty • Access to social housing by immigrants: debate of for and against
Social rent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left wing political party Rifondazione Comunista • Citizens • Municipality • Regional Authority • Trade Union • Aler • Neighbourhood committees 	<p>Articles mostly refer to problems connected to the eventually demolished 'Residence Prealpino' (occupied and squatted largely by residents of Senegalese origins) and to the financial support of the Regional Authority to strengthen the social housing sector as well as to increase the access to flats with 'canone moderato'. Selected articles focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-years plan on social housing and financial support by the Regional Authority • Regeneration of the neighbourhood 'Carmine' and changes 'against' social housing/canone sociale • (debate) Admission of migrants to social housing • Immigrants and difficulties of access to housing • Local regulation on right to access to social housing (with limitation for those who having been living in the region for over 10 years) • Municipal desk service to 'assigns' flats with 'canone sociale' • Flats for elderly and young couples made available by the Municipality with 'canone sociale' • Fostering, improvement and enlargement of the social housing sector

¹¹ See note 2 for more details.

¹² Note that Isacchini is the President of ALER and also a local representative of the political party PDL and he often voices his opinion in the name of both.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal for housing policy to move from the promotion of 'canone sociale (for poor people) to 'canone moderato' (for average family unit) • Lega nord protest against assignment of social housing to immigrants • Issues relating to 'Residence Prealpino', inhabited for long by Senegalese squatters and eventually 'emptied' • (debate) 'Contratto di quartiere S. Polo' and the search for social mix
increase in cost living and housing, increase in loans	-	Only few articles were found on this theme. However the theme increasing loans emerges only in relation to the national debate, "increase in cost of living" and in the "cost of rents" emerges mostly in relation to local data.
Evictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left wing political party Rifondazione Comunista • Municipality • RentersTrade Union • Association 'Proprietà Edilizia' • Aler • Association 'Diritti per tutti' 	<p>Articles mostly refer to the problems of increasing rents and of 'sfratti' in general and to the plea of 'sindacati coinquilini' and of some political parties to postpone them. Selected articles focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in rents and petition on the theme by neighbourhood committees • 'Edilizia convenzionata' plans by ALER • Plan by the municipality to allow 'residenti morosi' (residents who are late in paying their rent) to pay within 2-3 years • Flatmates Trade Union plea to postpone evictions • Data on evictions in the Municipality • Proposal by the Renters Trade Union to help 'residents with payment arrears' by providing them with social housing and by setting up an observatory on evictions • Plea by the Association 'Diritti per tutti' to postpone evictions • Creation of a roundtable on evictions at the Prefettura • Protest by the Association 'Diritti per tutti' and groups of immigrants against evictions/ and counter protest by the Association 'Centro Migranti'.
Subsidized housing	Municipality and Private construction companies	<p>Many articles report the term 'edilizia convenzionata' but they do so only to point out that 'a part of edilizia convenzionata' is planned for given projects, without reporting on debates, discussions, opinions, good practices or specific complaints that somehow highlight or give clues to any local debate. Selected articles focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edilizia convenzionata

Building cooperatives and residents cooperatives are not relevant in the media debate as well as La Congrega della Carità Apostolica.

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