



**WILCO**

Welfare innovations  
at the local level  
in favour of cohesion

COMPARATIVE REPORT

## URBAN POLICY INNOVATIONS IN LOCAL WELFARE: CORE IDEAS

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## INTRODUCTION

Having identified the context of innovations in local welfare in the first part of the WILCO project, attention was focussed in WP 4 on the nature of the innovations themselves. In doing so, a distinction was made between the core ideas behind local welfare (the main aim of WP 4) and the concrete approaches and instruments through which local welfare is implemented (WP 5). WP 4 aimed to understand local policy orientations and values in regard to welfare initiatives, which were normally produced in the political arena by politicians, technicians or experts, and the scientific community. In order to understand why decisions have been taken or not, we have tried to comprehend values and politics, technical constraints, and - in particular - expert discourses, which were developed by local *epistemic communities* (Majone 1997). The latter defined the core ideas of what good local welfare practices were, i.e. what successful or innovative efforts aiming to combat social inequality or to encourage social cohesion looked like. They were not only responsible for the coherence of local discourses regarding how policies have to be implemented or problems have to be interpreted; they were also related to other networks of specialists and stakeholders, which created convergences between cities and policies at all levels of regulation (Ferrera 1996).

There are at least two approaches to analysing core values - that of Sabatier, who assumes that there exist coalitions of values (or *belief systems*<sup>1</sup>) and power relationships between these coalitions in specific policy fields (or constellations of actors) (Sabatier 1998; Sabatier 1999); and that of Jobert and Muller, who analyse, from the point of view of the public administration, what global and sectorial value orientations (which they call *referential*<sup>2</sup>) are (Jobert and Muller 1987). WP 4 aimed to combine those two approaches by not only describing general and sectorial orientations, or configurations of coalitions of differences, but by simultaneously focusing on the coherences and contrasts between majorities and minorities, and between general orientations of the public administration and sectorial ones.

### 1.1. Methodological approach

Value orientations can be found easily in the official documents of the public administration and in debates in the local parliament, which also comprise coalitions. A coalition is a discursively coherent group that produces intersubjectively shared realities or truths, which are then reflected in the group's discourses and documents. In order to

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<sup>1</sup> In Sabatier's theoretical approach, a belief system is made up of three strata: 1) the *deep core*, which refers to a set of normative axioms (what is fair, values such as freedom, defence of equality rather preservation of differences of social status, etc.); 2) the *near core*, which is more about policy-oriented approaches, general choices regarding the relevant patterns of intervention; and 3) *secondary aspects*, which are instrumental decisions and search of the relevant information to implement specific public programmes.

<sup>2</sup> We aim to understand the referential of the local welfare system, that is, the set of beliefs, values and technics shaping how participants deal with social inequalities at the local level. More precisely, the referential refers to three dimensions - cognitive, normative and instrumental. The cognitive dimension is how people interpret and define the problems that should be solved; the normative dimension is about the values taken into account in the definition of problems and measures implemented; and the instrumental dimension regards the principles of action according to which relevant plans and programmes to solve problems are separated from the non-relevant ones.

analyse discourses, WP 4 has therefore analysed documents linked to political debates in local parliaments, carried out interviews with stakeholders in order to know better their commonly produced worlds, and organised focus groups with a view to clarifying their diverging or shared positions in interactions.

## 1.2. Documents

At least two debates of the city parliament (city council) on *local welfare* were identified in each city. These debates have had to date back to a maximum of ten years, and they were ideally linked with our main research topics - namely *child care*, *unemployment* and *housing*. But general debates - for instance on social assistance - were also included if specific debates on our topics were not found. In fact, more general debates on the role of the local state in the production of welfare services in general easily permitted us to identify coalitions and values as well as sectorial and general reference systems. These debates were normally documented in different ways:

- minutes of the discussions of the city council;
- discussions in the local media in the days preceding and following a debate;
- political party programmes on the topics analysed and on the role of the local welfare state.

These documents were analysed, focussing, on the one hand, on the dominant general value system - the orientations and values concerning the local welfare state -, and, on the other, on the dominant sectorial values, namely in the field of discussion, ideally child care, unemployment and housing.

Furthermore, we identified the points upon which the main coalitions agreed and disagreed regarding the orientations and values of the local welfare state and the dominant sectorial values in the field of child care, unemployment and housing.

In a next step, the main positions - such as the orientations and values concerning the local welfare state as well as the references and values in the field of child care, unemployment and housing - were found out through an analysis of the last party programme produced by the main three or four political parties.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the analysis of newspaper articles (local press, national press talking about the concerned city) - which mirror the debate in *the public space* - permitted us to identify the main fields of public interest on local welfare. In doing so, we focussed only on articles that met all of the following criteria:

- they were longer articles and comments (at least 250 words), either in the national press or in the main local newspapers;
- they were published up to ten years ago;
- they focussed on our topics;
- they referred only to the local level, i.e. to child care, housing or unemployment in the analysed city.

If the newspaper were not available in digital archives, we worked only on the period in which the debates of the local council took place (carrying on classical library work with

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<sup>3</sup> Party programmes were easily found on the Internet or were requested in paper version directly from the local political parties.

archives or work in the newspaper archives). Through the analysis of the articles, we also reported the main conflicts and configurations of positions.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.3. Interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders were carried out with a view to describing in-depth positions and ideas in the policy field. The following key persons were interviewed in each city:

- at least four policymakers belonging to executive bodies or to the main political parties (the party responsible for local welfare, members of the city government responsible for the welfare programmes);
- at least four responsible civil servants (one for each sector, and one for the general orientation of the local welfare state);
- at least three representatives of civil society organisations named in the analysed newspapers or debates;
- at least three representatives of each of our three chosen groups (one representative from a major migrant association, one from a major association of single mothers, and one from a major association active in the field of unemployment or a trade union, if such organisations exist);
- at least four (relatively independent) privileged observers (from the university, the local press, etc., specialised in one of the topics or in the general local welfare state).

For each city, at least 18 interviews were realised. The interviews described the development of the policy field in the last 20 years (from 1989 onward) and generally covered the following topics:

- the main problems and ‘solutions’ in the three policy arenas or, if nothing was found in the three fields, in a relevant arena concerning the local welfare system;
- the reasons for a need to act in those arenas;
- coalitions and main differences of positions;
- the reasons for the importance or unimportance of a local welfare system.
- The interviews were relatively open in order to bring out the individuals’ positions (rather than the facts themselves, which in general were already known through the documentary analysis). The duration of the interviews was generally between 45 and 75 minutes.

### 1.4. Focus groups

We also realised focus groups in each city. The focus groups brought together interviewed people, some major observers of the social dynamics of the city (such as journalists) and scientific people. The main topics of the focus group discussion were the evaluation of the orientation of the local welfare system in general, as well as in the analysed policy field. Where possible, two small groups of six to nine people with politicians, civil servants, NGOs representatives, scientists and journalists were arranged.

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<sup>4</sup> To exemplify, we find in Bern (Switzerland) a general orientation concerning child care according to which families are responsible for the education of their children. From the point of view of sectorial policy, the orientation could be: ‘We help only in case of necessity’ or the so-called *means-tested* orientation, which signifies that the entitlement to benefit payments is dependent on income and savings. The coalitions were a liberal one (advocating for self-responsibility and subsidiarity) and a socialist one (advocating for more state services and universal access to services).

### 1.5. Textual analysis

For this analysis, several documents were produced:

- summaries of the debates, including all key citations;
- summaries of the party programmes, including all key citations;
- summaries of the analysed newspaper articles, including all key citations;
- transcriptions of all the interviews carried out;
- transcriptions of all the focus-group debates.

The transcriptions were used in the city reports as citations to illustrate or differentiate the analysis.

### 1.6. Reporting

Each city provided the summaries of the analysed debates in the local council, around three to five summaries of party programmes with key citations, around 30 to 50 summaries of newspaper articles with key citations, at least 18 interview transcriptions, and one to three transcriptions of focus-group debates. The 20 city reports were based on a description of the views and values of the stakeholders regarding the local welfare state and the development of measures in the analysed fields (as has been done for the national welfare states by Bonoli *et al.* 1996 and Bonoli *et al.* 2000). Furthermore, they described the ideas that have been defined by the stakeholders regarding ways to solve problems in the main fields of analysis. In the reports, the history of the development of the local welfare state was also summarised, focusing on key moments and discussions in recent years. This historical outline was based on the team's knowledge of the city and - if necessary - on newspaper analysis and interviews with privileged observers, scientists, journalists and civil servants.

## 2. COMPARATIVE RESULTS

Cities move from a hierarchical model of governance to a heterarchical (Willke 1992) one, with many centres of decision. This change can lead to a horizontal integration structure of actors in the city, to synergies between the producers of services and even to solidarity in the city, if the different actors are recognised as producers and if their resources can be combined.<sup>5</sup> But this combination can take different forms, as indicated by studies on alternative orientations of the local welfare state in the fields of social and health services (Blanke *et al.* 1986). From tolerant attitudes to indifference and from exchange to contractual relations, the involved actors have to recognise the others' relevant role in the creation of a workable urban society. But in relation to disadvantaged neighbourhoods or to vulnerability, it is clear that only capacity-building policies lead to reactions in the sense that new (and autonomous) resources are created.

As Donzelot and Estèbe developed in their significant work on the *état animateur* (or *enabling state* - Donzelot and Estèbe 1994) in the French suburbs, it was the shift from a paternalistic to a capacity-building policy that facilitated an improvement in the living conditions of these neighbourhoods. The urban-development policies of these areas provided a kind of self-governance that empowered the powerless - even though one might wonder whether this was the product of a planned strategy on the part of the animator state or just an accidental side effect.

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<sup>5</sup> See Evers on the logic of 'synergetic welfare mixes' (Evers 1993).

In any case, this policy was discontinued in the 1990s - as a result of fiscal cutbacks, and not because the policy had failed. As a consequence, and as many authors have pointed out, living conditions in these areas once again deteriorated. In other words, the incorporation of the resources of the poorest people requires that they have some possibility of developing their own resources - an opportunity they generally take advantage of. This is an investment strategy that has been well documented by Sen's analyses on the building of *capabilities* (see, for instance, Sen 1992).

This political strategy of social responsibility does not need to be opposed to the strategy of economic growth of the city. The *growth machine* (Molotch 1976) needs social policies to be effective as an *innovation regime* (Häussermann and Wurtzbacher 2005). That's why our analysis was sensitive to the relationship between economic and social policies.

### 2.1. Common trends

Analysing our twenty cities, we focused on common trends and principal differences. Regarding the common trends, we realised that all cities are undergoing major challenges and transformations aiming to improve the competitiveness of their economy without exposing the population to more social threats. In the field of social policy, the driving forces were related to this concurrence between cities in a context of the diminishing strength of the welfare state at the national level (as Kazepov 2005; Kazepov 2008 underlines). Cities were forced by social challenges to try to increase their economic attractiveness. If cities were not able to handle social problems, not only would new investors stop coming, but established investors, along with the innovative elite, would also leave (Häussermann et al. 2004).

In this context, the national welfare state is not only facing difficulties from the fiscal point of view in answering the challenges of urban social problems, but it is also limited by the complexity that policy answers to social problems request. The regional and urban level appears then as solution and as a chance for adequate services for complex social problems. It is not a new front between the national level and the urban level that appears, but a rearrangement of the welfare state in which, as in the nineteenth century, the local (and in particular the urban) level receives a new weight (Reulecke 1995).

It is not surprising that in this context cities in federal states (like Bern or Munster) have fewer difficulties in answering these challenges and that their manoeuvring room depends on their economic strength (like Geneva and Nijmegen) and political relevance. The contrasting figures are cities in centralised states, with a poor economic performance and a marginal political position in the country or region. In our sample of cities, we find this weakness in Plock (Poland), Varazin (Croatia) and Pamplona (Spain).

### 2.2. Major policy trends in the governance of social challenges

These shared driving forces also produce common policy results that are more or less visible in all cities. Thus, a common feature of urban policies regarding social problems is the idea of enablement: people, agents and networks have to be helped to act as autonomously as possible. The legislative framework for such policies has to be flexible to permit the continuous adaptation of policies, following evaluations and experimentations. Consequently, urban social policy is characterised more by pragmatism than by ideology or populism. In concrete situations, this orientation opens a field of compromise and consensus, but also possibilities for preventive thinking. Four specific common trends in the governance of social challenges can be identified - co-production, capabilities approach, deconcentration and territorial focalisation.

Co-production indicates the growing models of partnership between public, for- and non-profit organisations that we find in the 20 cities (for the concept of co-production, see Verschuere et al. 2012). The common trend indicates a transformation from state- or economy-driven urban governance to the co-production of policies and services.

Investment in individual capabilities can take different forms, including individual accountability for solving problems, help to empower people to help themselves and a focus on differences or capabilities. The trend moves away from a perspective that focuses on welfare recipients and towards one that focuses on persons and person-centred services.

Democratic de-concentration - through instruments such as offers of participation in neighbourhoods and in projects - are strategies that open public administrations in a democratic way. The trend goes from a hierarchical decision-making system to forms of co-decision making.

A final trend concerns the way problems are addressed. There is a tendency in the analysed cities to focus less on groups and more on situations and territories. The idea is to analyse concrete contexts before intervening and to have a preventive effect through urban-planning instruments and neighbourhood involvement. The general trend here moves away from a problem-based orientation and towards the search for a better quality of life in the city, for the wellbeing of the city dwellers and users (commuters or tourists).

Beside these common trends, the 20 cities are characterised by some major differences concerning the way social policies are tailored and related to urban governance.

### 2.3. Urban Welfare Governance

Working with the data gathered in the WP 4 permits us to understand how social policies are situated inside the logic of governance of the city. Our 20 cities certainly have common features, but they are distinguished by the ways in which they justify, ideologically and practically, social policies. Following a process of typologising, including temporal dynamics and information about values and policy choices, we identified four kinds of regimes characterised by different relations between social and economic policies at the city level. They can be described as follows.

The *governance of innovation* is characterised by the continuous search for synergies between economic and social policies. The political consensus is fragile, but it stabilises ambivalences in the city's driving coalition around the idea of the innovative (or creative Florida 2005) city. The coalition's major orientation is to foster urbanity as a project and as a way of life, bohemian and innovative, open to differences and responsive to marginality. Through urbanity, according to the guiding hypothesis of this regime, economic dynamics will be improved. From the organisational point of view, this governance style privileges welfare mix solutions. All actors share the values of urbanity, pragmatism and efficiency; ideologies are secondary in the definition of policy priorities. Examples of this governance style are Bern, Munster, Barcelona and Varazin. Varazin's orientation was developed following recommendations from the EU.

The *governance of growth* gives priority to economic policies. The orientation is anti-urban, and politics are strongly influenced by economic interest groups. This *growth machine* orientation (Molotch 1976) privatises social problems as individual faults. Pamplona and Birmingham are examples of the predominance of this kind of governance.



The *governance of social challenges* gives priority to social-policy orientations in the production of services. Economic dynamics are handled parallel to social policies and are not related to or in conflict with them. It follows a more traditional social-welfare policy approach, in which the local state plays the primary role in the production and distribution of services. This orientation is characterised by the dominance of political parties and party politics, as well as more paternalistic choices in the field of social policy. Shared values are solidarity and the social responsibility of the state. Cities like Malmö, Stockholm, Geneva, Lille, Nantes, Nijmegen, Brescia, Zagreb, Warsaw and Plock are examples of this kind of governance. Concerning Zagreb, Warsaw and Plock, we again find the EU as the dominant partner in promoting this governance style.

Finally, we identified a conflicting *governance of social and economic challenges*. In this case, a combination of a weak local government and strong economic and social interest groups creates a concurrence between economic and social investments. There is a conflict over values between a social and an economic lobby. Each social policy creates a debate between individualism (and individual responsibility) and solidarity and a collective responsibility. Berlin and Milan are examples of this conflicting governance.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our comparative analysis realised in the WP 4 has produced 20 city reports and will be the basis for different publications that will try in particular to combine the results of the WP 5 with those of the WP 4 in order to answer our central question: are there models of governance that foster social innovation. The results briefly presented here indicate that in recent years, urban (and local) welfare is becoming increasingly important in addressing social challenges. There is also evidence for common trends in the way social questions are tackled. An interesting result concerns the way cities from countries that were recently integrated into the EU shape their social policies. Our results indicate that the recommendations (and financial support) of the EU are central in the production of concrete social-policy solutions for these cities - while the other cities experiment more with bottom-up and local solutions. The question that arises is: how sustainable are imported solutions compared to locally developed ones. An answer to this question would require longer monitoring activity, which could be based on dimensions and insights from our project.

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The main results from the WILCO Project take the form of:

- Various types of publications: research reports, working papers, policy briefs, position papers, grassroots events reports, and summary of findings.
- Two edited volumes on social innovation: > “Social vulnerability in European cities” (2014) > “Social Innovations in the urban context” (2015)
- An e-book “Social Innovations for social cohesion 77 cases 20 European cities” (ISBN: 978-2-930773-00-1. Available in PDF, eReader and ePub)
- A documentary divided in three individual video pieces was produced at the end of the Project:
  - Social vulnerability in European cities.
  - Social Innovations across Europe.
  - Governance of innovation across European cities.

All the results are available on the WILCO Project website  
[www.wilcoproject.eu](http://www.wilcoproject.eu)