

Marianna Esposito

Università degli Studi di Salerno

DOI: 1017450/17021

Fabrizio Sciacca, *Social Rights and Social Policy. Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2016

The recent collection of essays edited by Fabrizio Sciacca, *Social Rights and Social Policy. Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*, discusses a topic that is currently at the centre of public debate – the structural crisis of the welfare state – according to a dual perspective of theoretical and empirical analysis which is where the innovative value of the work lies. The authors’ methodical approach highlights a common need to rethink the welfare structure and the reasons for the crisis that has afflicted the European social model for several decades in a perspective that is both critical and political. This need arises for political reasons which, due to a deep economic crisis, are witnessing the crisis of the dominant neoliberal model which has opposed any form of welfare state for over thirty years. To rise to the political challenge, the authors feel the need to go back to the concept that neoliberal rationality is based on, one which, in the name of efficiency, has contributed to dismantling social rights in Europe. We must first acknowledge the neoliberal criticisms of the traditional welfare model in order to create a discourse that recovers social rights in a scenario suiting the ‘ontology of the present’.

The purpose of the analysis, as stated by Sciacca, is “to propose a theoretical model with empirical implications: a model of social rights understood as the most suitable for the realization of the generative welfare compatible with different spatial dimensions” (p. 13). To address the ideological offensive of neoliberal governmentality, there is a need to create a discourse that is not limited, as in the liberal democratic tradition, to justifying the primacy of social rights on a theoretical level, but is also able to identify practices and projects that encourage the active participation and self-management of citizens – a self-empowering aspect of the neoliberal ideology – in response to the passive role that recipients play in the traditional welfare state model. Identifying the concept of ‘generative welfare’ is very interesting in this context: it is a model that moves away from the welfarism and standardisation of social policies and aims to empower beneficiaries by involving them in active and participatory citizenship processes. It is an

innovative version of welfare in which the legitimate request for social rights by citizens, who are increasingly deprived of them, can be transformed “into an opportunity for growth, development and regeneration of resources” (p. 9).

Divided into two thematic sections, the first part of the book – *Theoretical Approaches* – discusses the theoretical question based on the need to update the traditional welfare model as a result of the “change of scenario” and “grammar of democratic participation” (p. 10) shaped by the neoliberal revolution which has been in course since the 1980s. In an enlightening introductory essay, *What are social rights?*, Sciacca analytically clarifies the epistemological difference between social rights and civil and political rights and then, based on this assumption, discusses whether social rights can be justified as ‘primary goods’ as proposed by Rawls. While civil and political rights represent an individual’s rights to freedom, social rights are “services that should be guaranteed to those who need them” (p. 17). For this reason, Sciacca states, based on Rawls, social rights are necessary primary goods: although they are universally recognised by constitutions for all citizens, they presuppose an “invisible” category of excluded individuals for whom the legal system must mobilise specific resources in order to promote “their effective political and jurisdictional protection” (p. 25). These social goods include without doubt the right to health, currently at the centre of discussions regarding the taxation that welfare depends on. In her essay *Health, Truth and Justice. A Philosophical Point of View*, Paola Russo examines the political issue of health from a philosophical and regulatory point of view. Based on the paradigm of the theories of justice, the author examines in theoretical terms the connection between justice and health as a primary good that is “closely linked to people’s substantive and real freedom” (p. 30). In *The challenge of Social Innovation*, Biagio Spoto analyses the standardised model of social policies and sees social innovation - of which he reconstructs the basic concept – as “the political way to promote welfare modernization and to fulfil social needs in a more effective, sustainable and inclusive way” (p. 43). Vincenzo Maimone’s essay, *Which Welfare State? Which Social Politics?* concludes the first section. Here, the concept of generative welfare – based on social responsibility and the empowerment of individuals – emerges as an approach that is capable of resolving the crisis marked by failure of the old welfare state.

The second thematic section – *Empirical Approaches* – looks at a number of practices and institutions whose aim is to update the welfare model analysed in the first section. Gianni Piazza, Federica Frazzetta and Simone Gaetano Romeo, in *Self Organized and/or from below? The alternative forms of Welfare by squatting Movements for Housing and*

Social Centres, examine a topical phenomenon which has so far received very little attention: the “alternative forms of welfare provided by the struggles claiming for social rights” (p. 12) advocated by the squatting movements and social centres in Europe. It discusses the political-generative dimension of a ‘right to the city’ – put into practice by urban occupations of unused buildings reallocated to public use. In the essay *Welfare State in Time of Crisis among European Countries*, Vincenzo Memoli looks at the economic gap that currently divides member states in Northern and Southern Europe brought about by the austerity policies adopted in response to the 2008 financial crisis. In light of this analysis, he points out that “only a reorganization of the European welfare will allow both an economic and political recovery of Europe and its member states” (p. 99). In *Multicultural Local Societies and Generative Welfare*, Carlo Colloca describes “the multiethnic scenario of contemporary Italian cities” (p. 104) and highlights the innovative potential regarding the demands posed by a governance of immigration in a new welfare state.

It is a book that responds to highly topical, interesting issues and one that is capable of intercepting the complex challenges that the European Left must face when formulating a new model of social policies that can reduce inequality and poverty. As it explores the semantics traced by the new lexicon of social policies, the book highlights the complex meaning that the concepts of ‘innovation’, ‘activation’ and ‘empowerment’ assume as part of practices that aim to develop the abilities of individuals in a given territory according to a rationale that identifies needs based on the principles of social and distributive justice.