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Local social policies, family policies, models of service systems and their chances to converge or diverge in Italy after 2000

(Very provisional version, handle with care)

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Abstract

The very clear and harsh vicissitudes of social policies in Italy in the last decade seem to offer a useful case of study for identifying general aspects of rescaling, regionalization and re-territorialization of policies not enough considered and which could be of interest also for other countries: the role of grass-roots participation, the role of cities, the importance of a shared ideal of social care.

Introduction

Italian social policies seem a very interesting case of study to investigate both some features of multi-level governance at the local level and the circumstances of the process of subsidiarization (Kazepov 2008; 2009), a trend today at stake in many countries of Europe, that is, the more and more complex array of actors and decisional arenas involved in an 'Active welfare state', and the relations between them, including the contractual, exchange and network relationships between different public and private subjects and between different governance levels (Newman 2007) and involving a new regulation at different territorial levels.

Governance has been recognized as key feature of the transformation of contemporary social policies (Jessop 1999; Daly 2003)¹ and never the less it is always particularly difficult to distinguish between a nominalistic use of the term (Stoker 1998; Newman 2001; Daly 2003; Keating 2009) and a realistic consideration of the processes involved. Even if the Europe of the Regions was not born as expected (Keating 2008) negotiations between levels and financial decentralization tended to increase (Kazepov 2008, p. 251)

From this point of view Italy has followed a very specific path 'from government to governance', due to its historical weak stateness (Ferrera 1993). It is well known, for instance, that Italy, as a

¹ Even if Daly maintains that the governance approach has been till the nineties only implicit in the study of social policies.

typical Mediterranean welfare regime, is particularly backward in its assistance sector at the national level, being the only European country - with Greece and Hungary - totally lacking a last instance safety net measure of income support against the risk of any, not differently covered, poverty spell (Matsaganis et al. 2003). What is a bit less clear in the debate is that, at the local level all this may sometimes be recovered, even if by very different local solutions². More in general, it is not always clear enough that all the so called “familist” welfare regimes (Esping Andersen 1999; Leitner 2003), and Italy at the forefront, are especially lacking in the development of a family policy, exactly because the family is expected to substitute for welfare measures and services (Naldini 1993; Trifiletti 1997; Matsaganis et al. 2004). Moreover, it has been especially difficult for the democratic governments of the fifties and sixties to introduce national measures in support of the family which could resonate pro-natalist policies of the fascist regime (Trifiletti 1995, cf. Valiente 1995 for Spain and Petmesidou 1998 for Greece) and this lack has never been recovered afterwards.

At the same time, several safety net measures and many family services have been developed at the local level in Italy in the last ten/twelve years³, as if no such dangerous symbolic implications were felt at the local level: it could be very interesting to consider these local governance arrangements as, in a sense, being almost free from institutional and political conditioning and showing a very high degree of local variation, as it is common in all Mediterranean countries. In comparison, for instance, with the same German case⁴ - where after 1989 nothing less than a national reunification was performed of parts of the country coming from opposite political regimes – and where the national institutional frame seems much more effective in conditioning the Länder’s decisions (Gerstenlauer 1995; Wollman 2000a; Bode 2004; Mathias 2005; Keating 2008, p.355), Italy has by now several layers of freedom in local governance practices, as well as a host of other obstacles and difficulties, of course.

It has to be underlined, in fact, that the last Constitutional revision Law of 2001 has invested Regions with the entire and exclusive responsibility for social assistance in Italy, with almost no national frame left for common objectives or standards⁵ and shared means and – what is worse - no subsequent control on the part of the state. Thus, it is not any more correct, by now, to speak of a ‘weak’ regionalism in Italy (cf. Keating 2009), at least for what concerns social policies. It remains

² Even if this often involves “fighting with hands tied behind the back” adopting the well turned phrase of Manos Matsaganis (2005)

³ In some local communities they existed much earlier.

⁴ However the federation was chosen under the influence of the Allies (Keating 2008).

⁵ Even if the Constitutional Law of 2001 let the definition of national uniform standards to the State, no formulation of them has been reached till now, not by case; and consulting the official site of the Ministry for Work, Health and Social Policies we can read that the Ministry is still working at such definition (www.solidarietasociale.gov.it/SolidarietaSociale/tematiche/MonitoraggioValutazione/Studi/ consulted in July 2009).

true that, as many scholars already underlined (Fargion 1997; 2005; Righettini and Arlotti 2009; Ferrera 2008), our multi-level governance remained for long years heavily conditioned by a centralist orientation, by the direct control of the central government on the Conference State/Regions (Bin 2007); and perhaps the control is paradoxically increased in the very last years full of “Devolution” discourses but seeing *de facto* increasing limits to the fiscal autonomy of the Regions. On the contrary, this new circumstance due to Constitutional revision, could probably bring to light, in the diverse blossoming of initiatives to be seen at the local level, some socio-cultural elements at work or some ways of putting together local policy communities or of collecting resources that are less conditioned, in our case, by higher institutional levels and which may even reveal a certain number of structural connections, something surely less easy to detect in other countries.

It is not by case, in fact, that, more in general, Italy in the last decade has been a country in which, as concerns social policies, ‘politics does not matter so much’, since Left-wing and Right-wing governments alternated in the 2000ies sharing the same impossibility to introduce the necessary reforms, exactly in the fields where the rest of Europe saw an intense development of interventions: long-term care (Glaser et al 2004; OECD 2005; Ungerson and Yeandle 2007) social assistance safety nets (Ferrera 2005), and, of course, activation policies (Barbier 2005; van Berkel and Borghi 2005; 2007); even if almost everywhere activation policies, as has convincingly been illustrated, have been more of a ‘negative’ nature than really investment-oriented (Taylor-Gooby 2008).

Since the direction of transformation from a Keynesian welfare national state to a Schumpeterian post-national regime seems to be a general trend investing most western states (Jessop 1999), the somehow deviant case of Italy seems worth of study in order to shed light on possible causal factors not to be so easily seen in more orderly situations, where state institutions are more solid and legitimate before the present transformation. In a sense, this involves the too ambitious task of unpacking the multi-level governance into its component structural parts, or, better, to begin to identify at least some of them.

However, I have to underline that this is only a very preliminary reflection based on a still underway study and that the data collection has still to be readjusted to the central hypothesis which seems to emerge after two data collection stages.

In fact, the perspective I am trying to present here emerged exactly from a certain dissatisfaction about two previous local studies about the offer of social services of a number of towns conducted

in 1998 and 2001⁶, that is, finishing exactly when the Constitutional reform introduced an entirely new scenario and required profound adjustments.

Anyway, since international comparisons usually do not consider enough social services (Anttonen 2005; Anttonen and Sipilä 1996) nor family policy (Daly and Lewis 2000), even if this latter is becoming more and more central for the European social model (Saraceno 2009), focussing on Italy's case could have particularly extreme and particularly clear implications: in fact, Italy is also a very explicit case in which the offer of services has developed very quickly, even if very unevenly, *at the local level* in the period 1997 / 2001 following Centre-Left electoral victory in 1996.

It is surely not by case that in this same period a national RMI was experimented for two years, mostly in the South of Italy, with the intention of subsequently establishing a national social minimum, nor that it finally underwent a really strange destiny (Saraceno 2002; Calza Bini et al. 2003; Sacchi and Bastagli 2005; Sacchi 2007): in fact, only in Italy it could have happened that the right wing Government, without much analysis or evaluation, declared the failure of the experimentation, abolished it altogether, promoting a new type of last resort safety net, which was formulated in a scheme which would be later declared unconstitutional; all this in the perfect indifference of the public opinion. But even before this, three Regional governments instituted a similar measure at sub-national level (Campania and Basilicata Regions and, for a period, Friuli-Venezia Giulia). Again, weak stateness seem to count more than party politics.

But it is more interesting to come back to the sudden and important development of social services in the nineties and 2000s.

2. Historical antecedents of present experiences

The period from 1996 until 2002/2003 is not really the first one of political mobilization at the local level, but reminds other ones when, during the 1970s and again in the 1980s, important seasons of social services development and innovation took place in different parts of the country always at the Municipalities level: such developments often shaped original and innovative social inclusion measures and services. At the time the formula was originally proposed, “l'universalismo va in periferia” (= universalism goes to the margins, that is the universalistic principles lacking at the national level are recovered at the local, periphery, level); and exactly in the seventies and eighties, for instance, after the responsibility for social assistance had been passed to the Regions by DL.

⁶ The first study had been commissioned by the former Ministry of the Family and involved 12 towns in Northern, Central and - to a lesser extent- Southern Italy (Trifiletti 1999), the second one was a follow-up conducted by the newly instituted National Observatory about the Family and Family Policies and involved - even with uneven results - all the 20 big cities head of a Region or an autonomous Province in Italy (Trifiletti 2002). Only 7 towns were present in both studies.

616/1977, a forerunner measure of RMI (*minimo vitale*) already existed in several Municipalities: in Turin since 1978 in Catania since 1983 and in Milan since 1989 and in many others afterwards.

This is of particular interest also from a comparative point of view, since it, in a way, describes the main obstacles and the resilience resources at hand in a process of gradual harmonization of very different - path-dependent - realities of local systems of social services, arrived at diverse stages of consolidation. What is most interesting, however, is that from the mid seventies up to the beginning of the 1990s the role of “Comuni” - the Municipal governments – as well as of transverse policy communities, coalesced around specific policies, and of wider cultural groups fostering social programs was not only devoted to implementation of existing norms, but oftentimes it surrogated and substituted for the non-action and non-decision at the national level.

Local governments (Municipalities, Provinces and Regions), often supported by a very different coalition of parties as the national Government was, were active and introduced innovations exactly where the national regulations were lacking, with a deliberate intention of promoting different political choices from the ones taken at the centre.

In doing so, often they were not so much issue-oriented as, rather, interested in a political-identity behaviour, Municipalities often were considering what other “Comuni” had realized in the normative frame of their “different from Rome” red or - with no big differences - white Region (Bagnasco 1977) and tried to repeat a model: this latter could finally bring to the formulation of Regional frame laws about social policies in general, about childcare, disabled or elderly care (Fargion 1997), in which the full sense of the bottom-up process was preserved, or at least a big part of it. In many cases the most timely and path-breaking ‘policy communities’ (cf. Brinton Milward 1980) which were constituted around some specific policies could profit of historical windows of opportunities as concerns the financing of measures which the late-comers would have definitely missed. Local communities being early activators cumulated advantages that the late comers would never be able to recover, thus increasing territorial inequalities and heterogeneity. Sometimes, local practices already realized in local services could even become the cultural background for national Laws, as it happened for instance in the Fostering Act of 1963 clearly referred to the experiences of the Municipal services of Turin and Milan; or some Regional Law would become a model for the forthcoming reform of social assistance of Law 328/00 (such as the Tuscany Region Law 72/1997). Therefore, Italy should be considered a bit different case today, inside the same trend of decentralisation, rescaling and regionalization – a re-launch of the Regional dimension ‘above and below the state’ (Brenner 2004a; Mc Ewen and Moreno 2005; Keating and McEwen 2006; Keating 2009; Wollman 2000b; Ferrera 2008) - to be seen in other, less “fused” or more “dual” countries (cf. Leemans 1970) after the mid seventies. In Italy, rescaling and re-territorialization was often a

way to come back to the very origin of social policies altogether; at least, as concerns social assistance, what existed was begun only at the local level.

3 What the two data collections in Italian towns could glimpse

Our two explorations and data collections about big cities' social policies at the end of the nineties and beginning 2000's identified several dimensions whose mix could in a way explain the really diverse packages of social services offered by different Municipalities, other things being equal as concerns the initial stages in the past and the important path-dependencies we already alluded to.

The methodology of both studies was based on a *most different systems design* (Przeworski and Teune 1970) and ethnographically inspired, trying to connect the collection of budget data describing the welfare effort to in-depth interviews addressed to local experts or stakeholders collecting 'histories of services' and making use of vignettes (Finch 1987); therefore our results are mainly descriptive, reconstructing the package of services on offer in each town but, in a sense, aiming at describing also the general mood or 'spirit' behind the practices through which welfare is delivered (Mingione et al 2002). The outcome was that each big town, if complexity was really taken into account, ended being almost a case on its own, as in the study of comparative urban governance (Pierre 2005; Catanzaro et al. 2002).

And none the less, some polar opposition have been detected between certain persistent features of Local communities governance: those which invested in an administrative solid and transparent apparatus, in functioning hierarchies and clearly formulated internal rules, on the one hand (Milan, Verona, Ancona), and those, on the contrary, which were committed in developing their terminal endings in the territory, their sensitivity and listening capacity to local needs resulting thus deeply rooted in their context; those which invested in the culture of a specific 'manifesto' service (exporting its experiences and progresses onto other ones) as opposed to those, at the other extreme of the continuum, which had been capable or had been constrained to a general recasting of the whole services package on offer (Trifiletti 1999). These two dimensions could be of course graduated and did intersect in different ways, but the two polar oppositions seemed to be potentially preserved, illustrating that it is somehow not possible to maximise both efficiencies at the same time. The only and, from many points of view, exceptional case of Bologna scored high both in "administrative consolidation" and in good "listening sensitivity" (see figure 1) thus granting an extraordinary high quality of services. And, in a sense, each town tended to maintain its peculiar style in time, its specific mix of cultural and practical choices stratified in these domains, even if this has been verified only for the towns present in both fieldwork stages.

(figure 1 about here)

Just when the first data collection was almost ended, the first effects began to become visible of the important Law 285/1997. It is a Law the left wing government had studied and prepared for a considerable time with experts and stakeholders, in order to fill the gap in social policies for children and adolescents and the promotion of their rights, which had been many times reproached to Italy after signing the Convention of the Rights of the Children in 1991. The Law was for the first time in the history of Italian social assistance adequately funded (around more than 613 milliards Euros in six years distributed only to the 20 Regions and Autonomous provinces, without considering the sums reserved for the 13 towns⁷) and opened a contest among local projects to be presented and evaluated in a number of connected fields: Support of parenting functions and parenting choices, Contrasting family poverty and intra-familial violence, Supporting families with disabled children, Innovative childcare services, Alternative care services avoiding institutionalization of minors and some other minor themes.

13 towns all over Italy had a special reserved funding, a clear expression of the awareness of the legislator of how necessary it was to begin the modernization from big towns.

But perhaps the most important innovation was requiring for each project presented a complex partnership among stakeholders promoting the project and involving institutional and civil society representatives. This introduced for the first time in the field of Italian social policies the practice of participative or deliberative democracy (Regonini 2005; Paci 2008).

At the same time, the Ministry for Social Affairs meant to support the process of learning involved in the process, offered a detailed handbook for helping the drawing of projects and the stipulation of partnerships and it was a precise task - with separate earmarked funding - the one conferred to a national centre of information, consulting, exchange of best practices, building of data banks and technical support offered to project presenters. Not by case, since, in fact, exactly a cultural maturation is at stake. And what existed, again, for the first time in Italy was exactly a unitary 'ideal of care' (Kremer 2007).

At the same time, an extraordinary season of development of social services began all over Italy, profiting of these opportunities, involving administrators, third sector actors and social workers on a par in drawing innovative projects I childcare, prevention, family support, adoption and foster care; and it has to be underlined that for the first time the development had a redistributive effect⁸,

⁷ These continued in the national fund of Law 328/00.

⁸ In fact many criteria the Law indicated for the distribution of funds favoured the Southern Regions of Italy: the proportion of families with children under the poverty line, the number of institutionalized minors the number of drop-out from school, the proportion of minors involved in crimes and so on...

funding arrived to the South and was employed there in non clientelistic ways. Of course not all projects were really innovative, much ritualistic formulation was included, many empty repetitions of the guidelines were involved, but at the end of the day it appeared that the two deeply different cultures of the childhood needs elaborated in the two parts of Italy, say the one of pedagogical services of Emilia-Romagna and the one of Street primary teachers of Naples, could finally meet and even learn from one another in the practice of imaginative services (Trifiletti 2002). Some big towns of the South like Palermo or Messina had the opportunity to develop their ordinary and extraordinary endowment of educational and preventive services and saw a diffused mobilization of civil society, for Naples the label of 'Rinascimento napoletano', Naples' Renaissance, was even proposed (cf. Incostante e Attademo 1997), even if these achievements revealed extremely fragile and exposed to political changes.

Law 285/97 is thus considered a forerunner of the frame law about social assistance, having eased the passage (for instance in the opinion of 66.7% of respondents involved its implementation) (cf. Istituto degli Innocenti 2004, p. 113) and the turn to a new non residualist social assistance. This extraordinary season of development of services, of mobilization and reflexive innovation of course went to an end, with the end of the funding, after the second period of three years in 2003, and many services could not evolve into ordinary ones, but the process of learning in which social workers and administrators had been involved, the elaboration of a common language and ways of doing and the effect of 'noise reduction', of improved communication (Jessop 1998) may by no way be reset to zero. However this was a mainly urban experience (Mingione et al. 2002; Bagnasco and Le Galès 2001).

4 The turning point of the frame Law: what remains to be investigated after 2003

What is happening at present to these developments is open to opposed interpretations and scenarios; probably new categories and dimensions of analysis have to be introduced after 2001, but the whole topic seems to pose, again, interesting questions of not strictly Italian interest.

The reform of social assistance services enacted in Italy in the year 2000 (Law 328/2000) has been a very innovative turning point, despite its nature of frame law to be completed and implemented by concrete contents only subsequently and gradually; or perhaps, we should even tell that it has been such a turning point exactly for this reason: no hierarchical imposition top-down could have, in fact, projected a system of integrated and functioning social services, nor the necessary complex and innovative multi-level governance system involving all the stakeholders and the diverse government levels in such a deeply and long-term diversified local reality.

Some scholars argue that the Constitutional revision of 2001 completely disarticulated and undermined the frame law (Kazepov 2008; Sabatinelli 2009): in my opinion this it is not entirely true. Of course, it has been possible to the central government to impose a slowing down of the process, since the national minimum standards (Liveas) were simply not defined in almost ten years till now (Ranci Ortigosa 2008), and since the fiscal autonomy of the Regions and Municipalities was progressively limited and finally stopped in the 2000's for budget reasons (Righettini and Arlotti 2009).

But the main instrument of the Law, the "Piano di zona", the Area Plan, is a really innovative tool fostering participation and qualitatively new governance practices and local arrangements, (Battistella et al. 2004) beginning to realize a real inclusion process into the decisional process of all the levels of governance and all the actors on the scene (Bifulco and Centemerì 2008).

As the first research based on textual analysis of 100 Area Plans testifies, in around the half of the documents a complex group of actors is described as participating in the drawing, including third sector representatives in 71,4% of cases and citizenship in 30,4% (Teselli 2005). Of course, many Area Plans repeat in their programs the wording of the Law, a third among them is characterised by a traditionalist culture, simply re-proposing already experimented action strategies, but almost a third may be classified as adopting an innovative reformist attitude and 16,7% chooses a mix between innovation and conservatism (Carrera 2005). The scenario is not so exciting, but not so dark either and for the first time inter-institutional informal agreements seem to legitimize practices which allow a better de facto functioning of the abstract model of multilevel government (Bin 2007).

What has to be emphasized then is that an Area Plan really goes beyond the strict urban dimension, since two guiding ideas of the reform were:

1. to propose a wider part of territory as the unit of harmonization among different policy practices (before the exclusive field of the self-government function of the single Municipality), avoiding the previous excess of fragmentation⁹. At the same time a precise mapping of this territory of its needs and resources is required in an ideally knowledge-driven process.
2. to favour the widest possible collaboration among local actors involved in social policies, public subjects and third sector non profit organizations, but also active citizens committees. The first principle involves together in the same zone advanced and backward Municipalities in a process of 'rethinking' their common territory, its needs and the existing measures and services on offer, including their possible specialization in a specific field of intervention, in a sort of holistic constraint; the second one broadens the list of subjects committed to drawing an Area plan, the

⁹ Municipalities in Italy are more than 8000 of which around 5000 are of very small dimension.

main instrument of innovation and governance they have the chance to fill of real, locally shared meanings. Thus, cultural elements, confrontation and contagion of ideas and, particularly, a renovated model of family policy may emerge as a very important condition of learning processes, of sharing basic models of social welfare, of necessary organizational innovations, of substantiating a minimum level of - until now - vague and unequal social rights. All this entails not only production and circulation of social capital (Bagnasco et al 2001) but perhaps in the process of Region building (Keating 2009) or 'stateless nation building' (Keating 2001), it could substitute a traditionally weak sense of national identity Mc Ewen and Moreno by a locally rooted sense of belonging to a precise community and an increased sense of responsibility at the local level, substituting by now the type of "financially irresponsible" autonomy realized in the seventies and eighties (Righettini 2002).

If, for instance, we just try to illustrate several evolution paths on the basis of our previous empirical researches, we can find some indications of a chance to overcome the strict urban dimension in the best practices at hand. If there is no doubt that in many cases the analysis of Area Plans has revealed a tired and ritualistic repetition (Mirabile 2005), in many other cases it is however clear that the main social services in home care, residential services, family support and respite do exist and have been built in the previous phase of uneven development in the eighties and nineties (Carrera 2005); the chance is now open to complete and recast them in a more needs-sensitive approach and in a gradually expanding reformist and modernising culture where the alliances allow it and the network may be woven.

At least two results emerging from the two former studies on Italian towns seem to maintain some valuable interest when looking at the after-2001 scenario: the big blue collar cities as Turin and Genua we described above as more "rooted in territory" and more capable of listening to the specific social needs of their context, often involved in de-industrialization problems, maintain also in Area Plans a larger opening to other Municipalities or local communities of the metropolitan area, thus interpreting more accurately the new philosophy of the zone in the spirit of the Law: to them we have to add Venice, as a town always different, at the margins of a Christian Democratic Region (Fava 2002): these towns are also characterized by a better capacity of bridging their educational and social services, as if citizenship and grass-roots participation and the practice of networking in a sense could preserve from the 'banalization' of democracy (Crouch 2003) and even open a 'race to the top' (Keating 2009) in improving the quality of their packages of social services. On the contrary, the big towns like Milan or Verona, or even Ancona (much smaller) which invested much in the consolidation of their administrative apparatus and in the quality of certain manifesto services, tend to react in a more close way, meaning their zone as strictly corresponding

to the Municipality and, at the same time, so to say, remaining in a stricter definition of urban life which seems more open to the cultural influences of globalization

On the other hand, much remains to be investigated about the destiny of the big towns of the South, since neither Naples nor Palermo seem to be able to resist today de-structuration and demise, even if they invested a lot in networking, participative democracy and sensitivity to the territory, as if a minimally solid administrative apparatus would be a basic precondition to the production of 'a new generation of social goods' which social policies have to grant (Donolo 2005).

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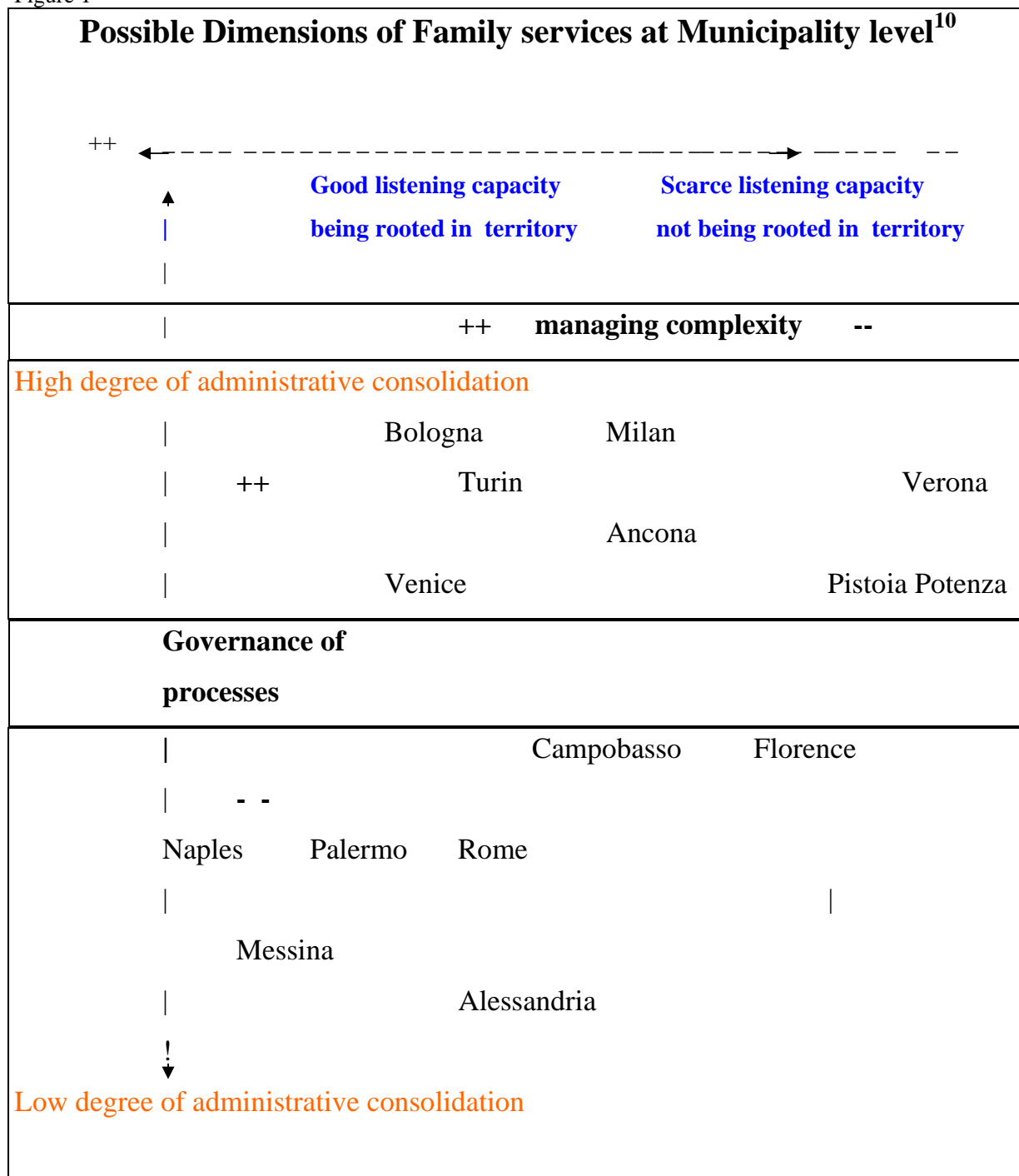
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Figure 1



¹⁰ We did not include the autonomous Provinces and Aosta for their too different regulation nor Reggio Calabria and Bari for gaps in the data collection.