



Politiche Sociali / Social Policies - Special Issue 1/2023

**Call for Papers**

Deadline: 30 April 2022

journal website: <https://www.mulino.it/riviste/issn/2284-2098>

**Towards a sustainable welfare system? Eco-social transitions in times of crisis  
Verso sistemi di welfare sostenibili? Transizioni eco-sociali in tempi di crisi**

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**Background**

The social policy literature has often described the last two decades as a period marked by the so-called double crisis of western welfare systems (Taylor-Gooby 2004). On the one hand, demands for social protection have increased due to the changing configuration of old social risks and the emerging of new ones. On the other hand, the fiscal crisis resulting from the States' responses to the 2008 economic downturn – or to the more recent pandemic – has reduced the room for maneuver that public policy has (Farnsworth, Irving 2011; Vanderbroucke 2017; Béland et al. 2021). These two contradictory dynamics spiraled into one another, posing complicated political dilemmas, which have been addressed predominantly through strategies of *expansion*, *recalibration* or *retrenchment* (Ferrera et al. 2000; Häusermann 2012; Hemerijck 2013).

The design and implementation of such strategies have remained mostly entrenched either in neo-Keynesian or neoliberal ideas of welfare capitalism that have characterized the past decades, thereby making the contradictions of a welfare model dependent on an environmental destructive economic growth more evident (Büchs and Koch 2017). The emerging dilemmas between increasing demands of social protection, fiscal crises, and new social risks produced by the diversified impacts of climate change, destruction and pollution of habitats and biodiversity, impoverishment of soils and natural resources further challenge the welfare state (Gough 2017; Johansson et al. 2016). They also aggravate already vulnerable communities *vis-à-vis* health, poverty, inequality and human security (IPCC 2018, 2020), boosting displacement and migration processes (IDMC 2021). Even mitigation and adaptation policies may easily have strong social implications, due to the potential regressive effects of fiscal

measures, the rising cost of energy sources and consumption goods, the decline and transformation of certain types of production, related industries and jobs, the growing inability of social policies to include those involved in these processes unless synergies are addressed. It is for this reason that the current one may be defined a *triple sustainability crisis of welfare capitalism systems*, where economic, social and environmental aspects interact and fuel one another, while the same paradigms of welfare capitalism, including the more recent *social investment* (Morel *et al.* 2012), may prove inadequate to account for ecological limits (Koch and Mont 2016).

### **The need for further research**

The severe environmental crisis has led some scholars to acknowledge the need of new paradigms to address the current unsustainable growth model. In the past decade, concepts of sustainable welfare, eco-state and eco-social policies have been elaborated to address societal needs “within ecological limits, from the intergenerational and global perspective” (Koch and Mont 2016: 5). They mainly arose from the hypothesis that reducing the dependence of welfare policies on growth is necessary and that, to this aim, reducing measures might be critical. However, it is not merely neoliberal cuts, but rather combinations of recalibration and spending reductions towards post-growth economic models, which emphasize notions of efficiency, sufficiency, as well as substitution (Schaffrin 2014: 7-8). In particular, they look towards welfare systems designed to meet current and future human needs within ecological limits. Recent contributions (e.g. Anguelowski *et al.* 2018; Bouzarovski *et al.* 2018; Corlet-Walker *et al.* 2021; Gough 2021; Laurent 2021; Nicli *et al.* 2020) insist on the need of a fundamental reorientation of social policies identifying some possible main strategies: (1) investing in preventive social policy (education, healthcare, urban planning); (2) promoting economic equality through minimum and maximum income caps, time-banking and by shifting the tax base of welfare states from work towards capital, financial transactions as well as ecologically-damaging goods; (3) meeting citizens’ basic needs through universal basic services and voucher schemes as well as work-time reduction; (4) developing green employment through sectoral shifts, sustainable workers’ rights, and climate insurances; (5) looking at lessons to be learned from the increasingly widespread bottom-up initiatives that follow ideas of low impact consumption and production, community mobilization in renewable energy supply and alternative work contents and organizations (*green jobs*) as well as lifestyles; (6) understanding the trade-offs and synergies between green renewal, ecological retrofitting, energy poverty alleviation and housing affordability .

The still limited literature, however, also identifies several dilemmas related for instance to the labor and wages distribution, welfare funding and costs of the transition, structural, behavioral and political barriers and dependencies. The risks of conflicts and out-of-control processes emerging from the combined effects of social and environmental events and policies, particularly for the most fragile individuals, workers and communities are also highlighted (Doppelt 2003).

As a matter of fact, the ecological crisis and the possible transition presents a profoundly diversified and complex challenge. In particular, understanding the nexus between social and environmental issues requires considering broader analytical approaches both to address the higher level of *complexity* of the issues at stake and to include the environment and time in the equation (Johansson *et al.* 2016: 98ss; Samimian-Darash 2011; Walker, Cooper 2011). Moreover, unlike other social risks, the ones of environmental origin, are not only individually but also collectively unpredictable. For these reasons, in order to address present and future scenarios, research needs to blend social and environmental policies analysis while dealing with multiple scales (Eriksen 2016), problems of synchronization and trade-offs between social security and environmental protection. This seems

particularly crucial, considering several specific angles. First, the current stress test kicked-off by the covid-19 pandemic, which has further exacerbated the contradictions of the current growth model, requiring at the same time urgent and forward-looking measures and perspectives. Second, the ongoing transformations in important economic sectors such as the automotive and the energy system, where social effects are taking place at multiple scales. Third, the still limited attention that the social policy literature pays to the need for implementing an integrated analysis of the related processes of ecological transition and socio-economic transformation of our livelihood and well-being models.

### **Call for papers**

For this special issue we seek both theoretical and empirical contributions expanding the debate on eco-social transitions and transformative change. In particular, we invite papers examining conflicts, trade-offs or positive synergies between ecological, social and economic implications of welfare policies by analysing:

- emerging social risks of environmental origin in different contexts and the related societal reactions;
- different time/spatial/multilevel governance dimensions of risks, responses and outcomes in social and environmental issues;
- experiences of more or less integrated eco-social welfare, eco-social policies, eco-social housing strategies as well as eco-social practices on the ground;
- both positive and negative effects and results of eco-social transition policies and practices;
- lessons from experiences at different levels, achievements and missed opportunities;
- methodological advancements for integrating social policy and sustainability research;
- comparative research on integrating environmental concerns in social policies across different welfare regimes (also bottom-up initiatives).

### **Practicalities**

Proposals (also in Italian language) should be submitted as long abstracts (approx **1.500 words**) including the following information: theoretical framework, research question(s), methods and data used, and main results.

Proposals should be sent within **April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022** to: [politichesociali@mulino.it](mailto:politichesociali@mulino.it). Authors should also send a short bio (100 words). Results of the selection will be conveyed to authors within **May 20<sup>th</sup> 2022**. The first version of the papers will have to be submitted by **September 15<sup>th</sup> 2022**.

All contributions will be blind-peer reviewed and reviewers will be identified by the editors of both the special issue and the journal.

The selected contributions will be included in the focus section of issue nr. **1/2023** published approximately by **May 2023**.

For further information on the journal and guidelines for authors see: <https://www.mulino.it/ri-viste/issn/2284-2098>

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