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Research reports

THE NEW CARE MIX.

**Reality and perspectives of elderly care,
between public (local) and private (transnational)**

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Preface

Irene Ponzo

This research study is included in FIERI research area started with the project “Multiwelfare. The transformations of local welfare in the immigration society”¹, devoted to the investigation of local welfare transformations in a society of migration, featured by an increase in immigrant population and cultural diversity. The attention for the connection between immigration and welfare state starts from the idea that the first influences the second, both on the supply and on the demand side, especially after that a huge presence of immigrant workers has entered the care sector.

Besides the changes caused by immigration, the local welfare system is going through a radical transformation, not so much because of structural reforms, but especially as a result of substantial economic cuts, which are forcing the various subjects to reconsider strategies, actions and mutual relations. Since they are changes that are scarcely identifiable through the analysis of legislation, FIERI studies the actual functioning of the local welfare with the aim of offering policy tools able to distinguish these changes and to develop effective and knowledge-based policies. In order to do this, FIERI has put the concept of welfare mix or “mixed welfare model” at the core of its analysis. Indeed, this concept enables to catch the role of non public subjects, which over the last few years have strongly contributed to produce welfare at local level and during the economic crisis are becoming more and more crucial. We think that this approach facilitates the understanding of the actual functioning of local welfare on the whole, beyond what laws and regulations call for, enabling the development of refined and precise cognitive and operational tools.

In this research study, in particular, we have applied the concept of welfare mix to the care sector, creating the expression “care mix”. The care sector is indeed strategic both in terms of policies, as the rapid growth of the demand of care from a population that grows old quickly makes our welfare system in front of challenges which cannot be avoided and cast a shadow on the sustainability of the current system, and in theoretical terms, as it is based on the massive presence of immigrant care workers. This field therefore deals with immigrants not only as welfare beneficiaries and workers, according to the most widespread ideas, but also as welfare providers and fundamental subjects in the care mix. In this way immigrants encourage a deep reformulation and re-conceptualisation of their role in the receiving society.

Again, in order to produce a deep knowledge of these complex phenomena, we have analysed the care mix from two different perspectives: from above, looking at the policies, and from below, looking at how the care mix is translated in the ordinary life of families, often forced to build it day by day, mixing resources coming from the state, the market and from family and community ties. The results of the research study, which is therefore also the result of a specific effort of interdisciplinary cooperation, have been organised in three sections.

¹ See <http://fieri.it/2013/09/12/multiwelfare-le-trasformazioni-dei-welfare-locali-nella-societa-dellimmigrazione/>

The first one briefly outlines the socio-demographic framework which is producing a growing demand for care in Italy, the peculiar traits of the national policies in this sector and the practices promoted by the local entities over the last decade.

The report continues by illustrating the results of a mixed methodology which puts together the tools of the panel and the case study analysis and focused on a small group of families from Turin that included elderly people looked after by immigrant care workers. The panel has built the “care stories” of these families, that is the process of development of the relations among the elder, the family, the care worker and the local welfare. To be more precisely, the people involved in the care relation were interviewed many times from spring to autumn 2013, in order to understand how the welfare mix is translated into the everyday experience of families and what kind of strategies are implemented to answer complex and unstable care needs.

The report ends up with a chapter on the policies, devoted to a special configuration of the welfare mix, the community welfare. Starting from the literature review, integrated with interviews to key-informants and an online survey to policymakers and scholars, we have tried to explain the terms of the current debate on the possible development of community welfare systems in the care sector, with the aim of contributing to a discussion which is still rather immature and uncertain in Italy. The report also includes a case study on a good practice implemented in Reggio Emilia, where the local government has experienced practices of community welfare for elderly care, showing how the principles at the core of this specific configuration of welfare mix can be concretely translated into practice.

To sum up, we started from the reconstruction of the current Italian care mix, went on to analyse its contextualisation in the every day experience of families and care workers, and ended up by looking at possible perspectives of local care mix reforms for the future.