



Università di Pisa

Centro Interdipartimentale per lo Studio
degli Effetti dei Cambiamenti Climatici

Centre for Climate Change Impact



Giornata di studio Le attività dell'Università di Pisa sul tema degli effetti del cambiamento climatico

**Welfare state and ecological crisis:
action-research perspectives towards
sustainable social policies**

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General hypothesis:

- Welfare systems are an important *driver* of a model of development that is proving *incompatible with eco-systems limits and properties*

Scope:

- Better understanding relationship between social welfare and sustainability
- Contributing in addressing the sustainability challenge

Answering a call:

- *putting more effort in the search for a more holistic and integrated vision between social policy research and sustainability issues (Ian Gough 2016)*

Welfare system in industrialized countries:

A model of **dependency on growth**:

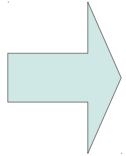
- increasing productivity, employment and (re)distribution of benefits,
- mutually reinforcing each other (alleged virtuous circle)



However:

- Declining effects on well-being and happiness
- No more greater equality and jobs
- Wrecking our ecology and wellbeing conditions

Triple crisis of welfare state



Contradictions between (e.g. Taylor-Gooby 2004, Gough 2017):

- Increasing demands of social protection (changing social risks)
- Aggravating fiscal crisis due to states' responses to economic downturn (austerity) + Secular stagnation
- New social risks due to climate crisis and climate policies e.g. regressive effects of decarbonization efforts

Worker
=
money pump

“Why should we pay for all?”



In the short run: an aggravator of existing social risks

health, poverty, inequality

- Mainly on vulnerable communities / territories
- Displacement and migration

In the long run: the main driver of social risks

(particularly if weak anticipation, mitigation and conservation):

- People/communities and economies on which they depend
- The employment-insurances system on which welfare systems are designed



Tricky distributional implications between individuals and populations, social classes, generations, places

- Sustainability / Equality combined effects

Complexity and non-linearity:

- Every change in one sphere create non-linear unpredictable effects and feedback loops in the overall system (Bateson 1972; Byrne 1998; Room 2011)
- Combination of size, speed, uncertainty, contradiction and urgency

“More welfare”: expansion and social investment?

- Less inequality, stronger states for decarbonization strategies and policies for dealing with eco-social risks, more public good and collective sense-making, consensus towards climate policies
- **But....** Still growth dependence and productivism ?

“Less welfare”: retrenchment strategies?

- Less costs and less growth dependence
- **But....** Counterproductive for inequality and distribution of risks; weaker states and policies, less consensus

A different welfare? Different how and how much?

- **Which paradigm** (green-growth, post-growth, de-growth) and **implications?**
- **How the transition?** Which risks and how to deal with them?

“Climate change is essentially political” (Ruser 2018)

- No mere technical solutions: Institutions, Lifestyle, Learned Habits, Culture, Values ...
- Needs for translation from climate / ecological science
- Interests in conflict and modes/powers for addressing them (not just Top-down or bottom-up strategies)



A much needed research agenda is ongoing

- **Concepts of sustainable welfare, ecological state and eco-social policies ...**
- **Aim:** Addressing societal needs “within ecological limits, from an intergenerational and global perspective” (Koch and Mont 2016)

What is missing / possible perspective:

- Little understanding of interdependence (a steady anthropocentric/biocentric perspective)
- Little attention to the problem of methods/patterns of transition
- Little discussion on the contextual/trans-contextual and organizational dynamics
- Learning through experiments on the field

Our research approach:

- Blending pragmatist observations with systemic analysis (Peirce 1958; Bateson 1979)
- Use of in depth, open-ended and participatory case studies for purpose of comparison
- Methodology: abduction and action-research



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Thank you for your attention!

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