



Functions, *governance* and *coupling* in the integrated system of interventions and social services in Italy: the intertwining of the State and a regional case

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Abstract

The paper proposes a reflection on social policies (which necessarily have an effect on the social work organisation), in particular on the construction and implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services in Italy, promoted by the *Framework law for the implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services* (Law no. 328 of 8 November 2000). The proposed reflection problematises this construction process in view of the fact that Constitutional Law 3/2001 reforming Title V of the Italian Constitution makes Law 328/2000 in force, but not binding on the Italian Regions. The paper aims to unravel the ill-defined and complex intertwining of the national and regional levels, choosing to analyse a regional case – Sicily, a Region with a special statute in the south of Italy – in order to analyse whether and how it refers to Law 328/2000. In this direction, it focuses on the inspiring principles of the regulatory framework of reference and on the *governance* structure that the regulatory framework and the planning acts outline through the division of tasks and functions among the public actors of the national, regional and local levels.

Furthermore, the paper proposes to trace the relationship (*coupling*) between the institutional actors involved in the process of construction and implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services, on the basis of four ideal-typical *coupling* dimensions proposed in the literature – choosing to adapt them to the proposed analysis considering *exclusive legislative power* in the field of social policies as the dimension of institutional *distinctiveness* and *governance* structures (network decision-making process) as the dimension of *responsiveness* – and to outline the possible effects of these dimensions on the homogenisation and fragmentation of social policies on the national territory.

Keywords: *Social policies; Social services; L. 328/2000; Institutional actors; Governance; Coupling; Sicily Region; Area Plan (Piano di Zona).*

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1. Introduction

In this contribution we present a reflection on the construction and implementation of the social services system in Italy (which necessarily have an effect on the social work organisation), within the framework of an organic public welfare framework, focusing on the inspiring principles of the reference regulatory framework and on the planning and organisational structure that the regulatory framework outlines through the subdivision of tasks among the public actors of the national, regional and local levels.

This process of construction and implementation finds stimulus and peculiar configuration in two Italian legislative measures: *Law no. 328 of 8 November 2000. Framework law for the implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services* and the *Constitutional Law 18 October 2001, no. 3 "Amendments to Title V of Part Two of the [Italian] Constitution"*.

The *Framework law for the implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services* (henceforth Law 328/2000) reforms assistance in Italy, more than a century after the "Crispi law" (Law no. 6972 of 1 July 1890), i.e. the first organic and national legislation on social services in Italy (Pieroni and Dal Pra Ponelli 2005) which established the *assistance and charity public institutions*, and after twenty-two years from the establishment of the National Health System in 1978, making the problematic connection between social and health activities and consequently the provision of integrated services (Maggian 2001).

Among the salient aspects of Law 328/2000, our attention goes to some general principles (Chapter I), to the institutional and organisational set-up of the integrated system, with reference to the definition of the functions of the public entities (Chapter II) and to the instruments to facilitate the reorganisation of the integrated system (Chapter IV).

Law 328/2000 among its general principles (Chapter I, Art. 1) states that "The [Italian] Republic ensures an integrated system of interventions and social services to individuals and families, promotes interventions to guarantee the quality of life, equal opportunities, non-discrimination and citizenship rights, and prevents, eliminates or reduces conditions of disability, need and individual and family hardship, resulting from inadequate income, social difficulties and conditions of non-autonomy" (paragraph 1). This law specifies that *social services* are to be understood as "all the activities relating to the provision and supply of services, free of charge and against payment, or of economic benefits intended to remove and overcome situations of need and difficulty that the human person encounters in the course of his or her life, excluding only those ensured by the social security and health systems, as well as those ensured in the administration of justice" (paragraph 2, which refers to Article 128, paragraph 2 of Legislative Decree no. 112 of 31 March 1998).

Law 328/2000 is the result of a legislative evolution that promoted *devolution*, first codified by Law 28 August 1997, no. 285 *Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for children and adolescents* (Garofalo, Supino, Caprino 2002), which in fact anticipates the principle of *vertical subsidiarity* (according to which the State intervenes when inferior institutions fail to respond to needs) and *horizontal subsidiarity* (according to which the State creates the conditions, by supporting and coordinating, for citizens to play an active role in responding to needs): borrowing the authors' words, "this law proposes a model of operational integration of the intervention, it re-elaborates the competences among different institutional levels in a participative and cooperative

framework, and it creates conditions for take-off of a new welfare [...] [in which] Central State plays a crucial role of *strategic coordination* among the various agents (local autonomies, private citizens, social organisations)” (*ibid.*: p. 13). The law, in fact, assigns the responsibility for planning and organising the integrated system of interventions and social services “to the Local Authorities, to the Regions¹ and to the State [...], according to the principles of subsidiarity, cooperation, effectiveness, efficiency and cost-effectiveness, homogeneity, financial and asset coverage, responsibility and uniqueness of the administration, organisational and regulatory autonomy of the local authorities” (paragraph 3). Moreover, among the principles for the programming of interventions and resources (Art. 3), Law 328/2000 includes the coordination and integration with health and education interventions, as well as with active training, start-up and work reintegration policies (paragraph 2, letter a), and consultation and cooperation between the different institutional levels (paragraph 2, letter b).

In fact, at the time of its enactment, the relevance of the reform of assistance through Law 328/2000 lay in the fact that it also promoted “equality of treatment” on the national territory, i.e. the “overcoming of differences in the supply and quality of services between the various areas of the country” (Pieroni and Dal Pra Ponticelli 2005: p. 53). Through a definition of the system governance, Law 328/2000 assigns tasks to the various subjects that make up the Republic, including the State – considered as one of the subjects of public administration, not a subject with legislative and jurisdictional functions (Maggian 2001) – the Regions, the Provinces and the Municipalities.

Among the functions assigned to the State (Chapter II, Art. 9), Law 328/2000 provides for the determination of the principles and objectives of social policy through the *National Plan of Interventions and Social Services* (letter a), the identification of *essential and uniform levels of services* (letter b), the exercise of substitutive powers in the event of non-compliance by the Regions (letter e), the allocation of resources of the *National Fund for Social Policies* (letter f).

The same law assigns to the Regions the “functions of planning, coordination and direction of social interventions as well as verification of their implementation at the territorial level” and the regulation of the integration of these interventions, with particular reference to health and social-health activities with high health integration (Art. 8, paragraph 1), the determination [...] of the territorial ambits, of the modalities and instruments for the unitary management of the local system of networked social services (Art. 8, paragraph 3, letter a), the definition of integrated policies on social interventions, environment, health, educational institutions, start-up and reintegration into work, leisure services, transport and communications (Art. 8, paragraph 3, letter b).

Moreover, the law assigns to the Provinces (Art. 7) the task of contributing to the planning of the integrated system according to the modalities defined by the Regions, for example, through the collection of information on the needs and resources made available by the Municipalities, the analysis of the welfare offer, the participation in the definition and implementation of the *Area Plans* (in Italian language *Piano di Zona*)².

Finally, it assigns to the Municipalities (Art. 6), among others, the administrative functions concerning social interventions carried out at local level, the contribution to regional planning, the planning, design, implementation of the local social services network system.

¹ From here on, we capitalise the first letter of the institutional actors listed.

² From here on we use the expression Area Plan (not area plan), even within literal quotations.

In addition to these tasks and functions, “the law fixes innovatively the timing of the game for the involved actors” (Garofalo, Supino, Caprino 2002: p. 14). Specifically, among the instruments to foster the reorganisation of the integrated system (Chapter IV), Law 328/2000 provides that:

- i. the Government prepares the *National Plan of Interventions and Social Services* every three years, indicating – among other aspects – characteristics and requirements of the social services included in the essential levels, priorities for intervention, and that the Regions adopt, in relation to the *National Plan*, a *Regional Plan of Interventions and Social Services* (Art. 18);
- ii. the Municipalities, associated in territorial ambits, together with the local health units, provide, on the basis of the indications of the *Regional Plan*, for the definition of the *Area Plan*, which identifies strategic objectives, priorities and intervention tools, organisational methods of the services, financial, structural and professional resources, as well as quality requirements (Art. 19);
- iii. the State allocates the *National Fund for Social Policies* for the promotion and achievement of social policy objectives (Art. 20).

As Pieroni and Dal Pra Ponticelli observe, after the enactment of Law 328/2000 and its innovative wave of assistance reform in Italy, following the amendment of Title V, Part II, of the Italian Constitution (Constitutional Law No. 3, 18 October 2001), “enthusiasm [...] soon gave way to bewilderment and a state of uncertainty regarding the nature and function of Law 328/2000” (2005: p. 53). The article 117 of the Constitutional Law assigns the State exclusive legislation only in the matter of “determining the essential levels of services [ELS; authors’ note] concerning civil and social rights that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory” (paragraph 2, letter m) and assigns to the Regions “legislative power with reference to any matter not expressly reserved to State legislation” (paragraph 4), including precisely that of social policies. With the constitutional law, in fact, the subject of social assistance became an exclusive matter of the Regions, allowing each Region to decide “whether and to what extent to refer to Law 328/2000 for the construction of the integrated system of social services” (Pieroni and Dal Pra Ponticelli 2005: p. 53), autonomously choosing social policy guidelines and instruments to achieve objectives oriented by the regional policy direction.

Continuing with the authors’ reflection, we point out that the amendment of Title V of the Constitution has in fact rendered the contents and innovative aspects of Law 328/2000 non-binding indications, even though Law 328/2000 remains in force “both for those Regions that have adopted laws in line with its provisions and for those that have not yet legislated on the subject” (*ivi*: p. 54).

However, two other articles of the Italian Constitution – Articles 119 and 120 – seem to want to safeguard against the risk of taking a leap backwards and running the risk of drifting into the drift of excessive differentiation of social policies on a regional basis, recalling that period prior to the enactment of Law 328/2000 in which “also due to the prolonged national regulatory vacuum, social welfare interventions have developed unevenly throughout Italy in terms of type, content, services and access methods, maintaining the gap between geographical areas and in particular between North and South” (Maggian 2001: p. 13) and contributing to generate that “indistinct magma” of social policies (Di Mauro 2005). In fact, the determination by the State of the ELS to be guaranteed throughout the national territory (confirming the application indications of the formal and substantial equality principle of citizens already provided by Law 328/2000), is accompanied by the possibility of allocating additional resources and carrying out special

interventions in favour of specific Municipalities, Provinces, Metropolitan Cities and Regions in order to promote social solidarity, remove economic and social imbalances, and favour the effective exercise of personal rights (Art. 119, paragraph 5), as well as the possibility for the Government to take the place of the bodies of the Regions, Metropolitan Cities, Provinces and Municipalities when the protection of the ELS concerning civil and social rights requires it, regardless of the territorial boundaries of local governments (Art. 120, paragraph 2).

As a matter of fact, after the constitutional law, “the national planning activity came to a halt and in the years that followed the *National Plan* [of interventions and social services; authors’ note] was no longer adopted”, disregarding the approval of the essential levels and causing a heterogeneity of the welfare systems in the Regions (Sicilian Region, *Foreword to the Programming Guidelines for the Area Plan 2022-2024*). Only in recent years has the State defined some essential levels in primary legislation or in the planning documents associated with the national allocations of funds (*ibid.*).

In view of the peculiar configuration of Law 328/2000 (in force, but not binding), the process of decentralisation of decision-making - from the national to the regional level - of the organisation of social assistance set forth by the 2001 constitutional reform, as well as the concern expressed in the literature about a return to the fragmentary structure of social policies across the country, it is important for us to contribute to understanding whether and how the different Italian Regions refer to Law 328/2000. In this regard, we note that part of the literature has taken this cognitive direction: for example, on how local actors and intermediate institutions in the Mezzogiorno perceive the principles and opportunities of the welfare reform promoted by L. 328/2000 (Garofalo, Supino, Caprino 2002); on the subject of the dynamics of participation in the Lombardy Region and the Campania Region (Bifulco and Centemeri 2007; 2008), in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (Zenarolla 2009) and in large Italian cities (Colombo and Gargiulo 2016); on the subject of local social planning in the Piedmont Region (Busso and Negri 2012); and again, on the subject of local welfare implemented through the Area Plans, analysed in terms of *governance* models in the Marche Region (2013) and the Lombardy Region (Salvati 2020). In this scenario we see the possibility of analysing other regional contexts, which spurs us to pursue this aim in this contribution.

Our reflection focuses on an Italian Region – Sicily, a Region with a special statute (with special forms and conditions of autonomy) in the South of Italy – through an analysis that aimed to investigate:

- whether the Sicily Region refers to Law 328/2000 in the construction of its integrated system of interventions and social services (*regulatory measures*);
- how the Sicily Region implements the integrated system of interventions and social services (*governance system and programmatic acts*).

Moreover, considering also that Law 328/2000 represented – and perhaps still represents – an opportunity both to innovate social policies and to promote a new organisational paradigm in the services public management (Di Mauro 2005), our reflection aims at tracing the organisational mechanism underlying the integrated system by assuming the concept of *coupling*, following Orton and Weick’s (1990) conceptualisation and Trein’s (2017) application proposal.

The analysis conducted took a qualitative research approach, using the *documents method*: the institutional documents analysed were regulatory measures and regional planning acts in force.

The contribution is developed in three parts. The first part presents the regulatory and organisational framework of the Sicily Region for the implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services, focusing on the *regulatory provisions*, the *governance system* and the *programming acts*. The second part presents an analysis of the relationship (*coupling*) between the institutional actors of the integrated system of interventions and social services, analysed by considering four ideal-typical dimensions of *coupling*. The reflection ends with hypotheses of future research scenarios.

2. The regulatory and organisational framework of the integrated system of interventions and social services in Sicily

As Maggian (2001) points out, the operational model proposed by Law 328/2000 envisages that public entities – State, Regions and Local Authorities (Provinces and Municipalities) – adopt “the programming method” of interventions and resources. As the author summarises:

- the government has the task of preparing the *National Plan of Interventions and Social Services* every three years;
- in relation to this, the Regions are responsible for adopting *Regional Plans for social interventions and services* and for exercising the functions of planning, coordinating and guiding social interventions, as well as for monitoring implementation at territorial level;
- Provinces contribute to planning, according to regional indications;
- the Municipalities contribute to regional planning, also by formulating proposals based on the outcomes of the consultation of public and private subjects on the assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the services, and plan, design and implement the local social services network system by preparing, on the basis of regional indications, the *Area Plan*, an activity that involves the Municipalities and the local health units associated in territorial ambits, usually coinciding with the health district operating for health services.

In view of this operational model, in order to analyse whether and in which way the Sicilian Region refers to Law 328/2000 in the construction of its social services system and in which way it implements the integrated system of interventions and social services, our analysis examines the *regulatory measures* that have initiated the implementation and strengthening of the Sicilian welfare system, as well as the current *programmatic acts* (tab. no. 1).

Table no. 1. The integrated system of interventions and social services in Sicily: regulatory measures and programmatic acts of the Sicilian Region.

Document
Regional Law (R.L.) 9 May 1986, no. 22 - <i>Reorganisation of social welfare services and activities in Sicily</i>
(Regional) Presidential Decree of 4 November 2002. <i>Guidelines for the implementation of the socio-sanitary plan of the Sicilian Region</i>
<i>The New Rationalised Index for the Drafting of Area Plans – “Regional Programme of Social and Socio-health Policies 2010-2012”</i>
<i>Programming Guidelines for the Area Plan 2021</i>

2.1 Regulatory measures: institutional actors and functions

From a regulatory point of view, the Sicilian Region implements the provisions of Law 328/2000 with the Presidential Decree (DP) of 4 November 2002 “*Guidelines for the implementation of the socio-sanitary plan of the Sicilian Region*”, endowing itself with “a three-year planning document that contains the guidelines and defines the social policies, regulating their impact at a local level but with a unitary perspective” (Fleres 2004).

The implementation of the provisions of Law 328/2000 is inserted in a regional framework already endowed with a regional law preceding Law 328/2000 – *Regional Law no. 22 of 9 May 1986, Reorganisation of social welfare services and activities in Sicily* (hereinafter R.L. 22/86) – which was “a cutting-edge law in terms of the issues and guidelines it dealt with” (Fleres 2004: p. 7) anticipating, as highlighted in the DP of 4 November 2002, innovative aspects of Law 328/2000, including the concept of a network of services, the definition of a three-year plan of services, the reference to a district level of coordination.

The R.L. 22/86, in fact, “promotes, within the framework of social security, the reorganisation of welfare activities through a system of social welfare services” and “participates in the financial support of the related burdens” (Title I, Art. 1).

Among the principles inspiring the regional law for the implementation of the system of social welfare services (Art. 2), we highlight those of a) preventing and removing the causes of individual and collective needs as well as those of social marginalisation; b) ensuring the maintenance or reintegration of individuals in their own family unit and in the environment they belong to; d) favouring the use of services through a network of services accessible to the recipients with adequate interventions, overcoming fragmentation and precariousness.

Among the Region’s competences, R.L. 22/86 provides for planning, coordination, control, technical assistance and financial incentives, carrying out these activities also through the preparation of three-year plans of social-welfare services. Moreover, it provides for the coordination and integration of social-welfare interventions with the services of the local health unit at district level (Title III, Art. 17). Finally, it determines the structural and organisational standards of the social-welfare services (Title III, Art. 19).

As Fleres (2004) argues, recalling passages from the DP of 04 November 2002, the fertile ground for the implementation of Law 328/2000 in Sicily is not the need to re-found the Sicilian social system, but the possibility of adapting and transforming its connotation from “socio-welfare” to “socio-health”, from a territorial welfare perspective that integrates attention to the health of citizens (health aspect) with attention to the needs of the excluded, marginalised and disadvantaged (socio-health aspect).

The implementation of this integration must involve a plurality of actors, sharing roles and responsibilities, requiring coordinated action by the various actors (public, private, citizens and families). This coordinated action changes the role of the Region: “from a solitary protagonist in the definition of its own system of policies in the social field, to a co-participant with the State, Municipalities and private associations, in the realisation of a model that places the person at the centre” (*ibid.*: p. 8).

As set out in the “principles and aims” of the 4 November 2002 DP (chapter 1), the Region “intends to regulate the subject of social and health interventions and services”, using “the instruments of planning, coordination, concertation, cooperation, participation

as well as the integration of social services with health, education, training and labour interventions and policies”. The document goes beyond the transposition of L. 328/2000, in order to put forward a “methodological proposal” aimed at launching a process of defining rules, guidelines, roles and competences for an integrated system of services to the person and the family, envisaging an institutional architecture oriented towards the implementation of a federalist model of solidarity on a regional scale, attentive to the participation of all the social partners, as well as the national and community solidarity networks, while taking into consideration the complexity and uniqueness of the regional dimension outlined by the social services and activities and the local needs expressed in the district Area Plans.

Considering that – as the 4 November 2002 DP specifies – one of the transformation axes of Law 328/2000 is the transition from centralist intervention to the “direction” of the Regions and local authorities, and that Constitutional Law 3/2001 entrusts the matter of social services to the exclusive competence of the Regions, our attention goes to chapters 4. *The development lines of government action: regional objectives*, 7. *Area Plans*, 9. *Spending policy* of the same regional presidential decree.

In line with the provisions of Law 328/2000, the governance of the integrated system of interventions and social services in Sicily sees the Region at the centre, but still in an intermediate position between the State and the socio-sanitary districts³ (fig. no. 1).

The Region “through the definition of the *Regional Social Plan*, provides for the task of programming, coordinating and directing social interventions, as well as verifying the implementation of the integrated system in the territorial area of reference” (point 4.5.). This task involves the exercise by the Region of functions specified by Law 328/2000, including:

- the definition of the territorial ambits (in *chapter 7* these are defined in terms of the *socio-health district*, in which some Municipalities are associated, and 55 are identified);
- the planning, coordination and identification of *Guidelines for social and health interventions* and *Area Plans*;
- the provision of tools for the evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency and for the verification of results achieved in local authorities and health care companies;
- the preparation of the *allocation of state transfers* by district areas and the *Regional Fund for Social Policies*;
- the indication of priority choices based on the needs expressed by the community;
- the definition, in relation to its competence, of essential levels of services;
- subrogate the role of municipalities in the event of manifest non-compliance.

The *Regional Social Plan of interventions and services to the person and the family* lasts three years and at the end of the first three years of application (considered the “operational experimentation” phase) it will be called the Sicilian Region’s social and health plan (point 4.4.) and the *Guidelines for social policies* will be an integral part of it (*memorandum*).

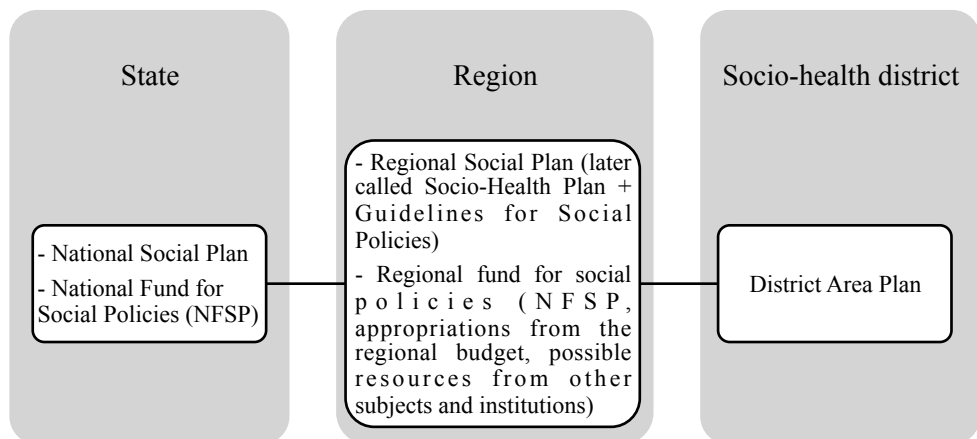
The adoption and definition of the *Regional Social Plan of interventions and services for the person and the family* follow the indications of the *National Social Plan*, which identifies priority objectives in terms of the social welfare of the population (for the

³ The analysis does not take into account the role of the Provinces.

period 2001-2003 concerning family responsibilities, the rights of minors, the fight against poverty, home services for non-self-sufficient persons, immigrants, drug prevention, adolescents), while providing for a discretionary power for the Region given the possibility of integrating the *Regional Social Plan* and the *Area Plans* with other needs and relative intervention requirements (point 4.3.). As specified in the *National Plan of Interventions and Social Services 2021-2023*, “Regional social planning constitutes a fundamental element where the ELSS [Essential Levels of Services in the Social Area] and the guidelines and priorities shared in the *National Social Plan* are integrated with those of regional and autonomous Provinces” (p. 26).

Lastly, the Municipalities, associated in the *socio-health districts*, “are the holders of all the functions and tasks relating to the planning, organisation and delivery of the socio-health services” (Chapter 4, point 4.6), including those defined by Article 6 of Law 328/2000: for example, administrative functions, indication of priorities and innovation sectors, delivery of services and economic benefits, welfare activities, authorisation, accreditation and supervision of social services and publicly managed residential and semi-residential facilities. In addition, the *socio-health district* defines the *Area Plan* - i.e. “the three-year planning tool of the integrated system of social-health interventions and services at the level of the individual district” provided for by Article 19 of Law 328/2000 (Chapter 4., *Memorandum*) – in consideration of the territorial priorities suggested by the demand for social needs and by the supply of services: the Municipalities have a pivotal role in the “process of identifying needs and requirements, as well as possible responses”, also by entrusting a part “of the direct exercise of their functions to private entities operating in the local community” (Chapter 4, point 4.6).

Figure no. 1. Governance of the integrated system of interventions and social services in Sicily:
institutional actors and functions.



The drawing up of the *Area Plan* at district level follows the approval of the *regional plan of interventions and services to the person and the family* and “is implemented, within the framework of the available resources, through forms of agreement with the Municipalities concerned, with the active participation of the personal services agencies, the third sector entities that also participate with their own resources in the implementation

of the services, as well as with the collaboration of the entities referred to in Art. 1, paragraph 6, of Law 328/2000 [citizens, trade unions, social and user protection associations; authors' note]" and "also indicates the priority areas and actions for intervention, the criteria for verification and evaluation, in order to ensure the quality and feasibility of the defined objectives, as well as the constitution of an integrated network of social interventions" (Chapter 8, point 8.1.).

The directing role entrusted to the Region and its intermediate position between the State and the socio-sanitary districts are also expressed through the system of financing social policies. On the basis of Law 328/2000 and R.L. 22/86, the State and the Sicilian Region concur in supporting social spending.

The State allocates the resources of the *National Fund for Social Policies* (hereafter NFSP), on the basis of the lines contained in the *National Social Plan* and of some parameters (demographic structure, income levels, employment conditions of the population), financing the expenditure to be incurred by the Municipalities and Regions, also setting percentage spending constraints for some areas of intervention. In addition to the initial NFSP, the State set up other diversified Funds for social policies (Non-self-sufficiency Fund, Family Fund/Initiatives, Youth Policy Fund, Equal Opportunities and Anti-Violence Fund, Poverty Fund, After Us Fund) to which other funds under the competence of other Ministries and European funds were added.

The Sicilian Region, in the need to manage, plan and control funding from the state and to distribute regional resources, has established a *Regional Fund for Social Policies*, to which the NFSP, appropriations from the regional budget, and any resources from other entities and bodies flow.

2.2 Programmatic acts: governance and procedures

Since the enactment of the 4 November 2002 DP to date, the Sicilian Region has issued a series of regional planning acts, through which the Region gives operational indications – among others – on the *governance system* in charge of defining and implementing social policies and on the *drafting of the Area Plan*. Unlike what was initially envisaged by the 4 November 2002 DP, the programming acts have a different cadence over the years: three-yearly until 2015, biennial until 2020, annual in 2021 (due to the emergency pandemic context), three-yearly in the last programming act (2022-2024). In this paragraph, the reference is to the following current documents:

- *New Rationalised Index for the drafting of Area Plans (Regional Programme of Social and Socio-health Policies 2010-2012)*;
- *Programming Guidelines for the Area Plan 2021 (2021 Guidelines)*;
- *Programming Guidelines for the Area Plan 2022-2024 (2022-2024 Guidelines)*.

Governance system - The *New Rationalised Index for the drafting of the Area Plans* – which recalls the innovations of the *Regional Programme of Social and Socio-health Policies 2010-2012* (DPRS no. 61 of 2 March 2009) – represents the evolution of the previous *Rationalised Index*, prepared in 2003, as well as a reference document still today, albeit in consideration of some changes envisaged by the *2021 Guidelines* and *2022-2024 Guidelines*.

The system of *governance* envisaged by the *New Rationalised Index* features "a series of governing bodies and structures, each with specific functional attributions": the *governance* set-up, therefore, originates from the intersection of the institutional bodies

involved, their relative competences and the territorial level of action (tab. no. 2), which are closely interrelated.

The *guidance institutional level* involves:

- the *Cabina di Regia* (regional control level body) which, as provided for in the 4 November 2002 DP, guarantees “operational guidance and constant monitoring of progress in order to make the most of all available resources” (chapter 8, point 8.5.);
- the *Mayors Conference* (provincial level), composed of the Mayors of the Municipalities belonging to the territorial ambit of the PHA (Provincial Health Authority), “has the task of issuing acts of policy, verification and evaluation on local social-health activities and competences”;
- the *Mayors Committee* (district level), made up of the Mayors of the Municipalities in the district and the director of the health district or the Director General of the PHA, “has the task of forming a common orientation in social and social-health policies by playing a guiding and controlling role”.

Table no. 2. *Governance* structure (bodies, competences, territorial levels) of the Area Plan.

	Guidance institutional level	Social and health integration level	Technical level of support
District level	Mayors Committee	Area Plan	Plan Group
Provincial level	Mayors Conference	Guarantee Committee	Technical Secretariat
Regional level	Cabina di Regia		Plan Office

The *social and health integration level* sees the action of the *Guarantee Committee* (provincial level), which “operates in close connection with the Mayors Conference and the Mayors Committee, and the *Area Plan*” (district level).

The *technical level of support* involves:

- the *Plan Office* (regional level), “a technical commission for accompaniment and assistance”, which is used by the regional steering committee (4 November 2002 DP, chapter 8, point 8.6.);
- the *Technical Secretariat* (provincial level), “functional for carrying out the tasks assigned to the Mayors Conference and the Guarantee Committee”;
- the *Plan Group* (district level), made up of officials and technical operators of the social and administrative-accounting areas of the Local Authorities, a representative of the Health District appointed by the General Director of the PHA, representatives of the Third Sector, representatives of the Third Bodies (Prefecture, School, University, Juvenile Courts, Juvenile Justice Centre, etc.). and in charge of implementing all the measures preparatory to the drafting and management of the Area Plan.

The *governance* structure has been modified in the course of the programming acts following the *New Rationalised Index*. By the way, the recent *2021 Guidelines* – which integrate the *2022-2024 Guidelines* in force – due to slowdowns recorded in the definition and implementation of social policies in some socio-health districts, often linked to the

univocal action of the lead Municipality of the socio-health district, partially modify the *governance* of the district, in order to “strengthen the organisation of the *governance* system and improve the cooperation between the Municipalities on the technical, administrative and management level of the current socio-health district”. The *2021 Guidelines* include the following bodies:

- the *Mayors Committee* (political body) with the function of policy, programming and political-administrative control of territorial welfare management;
- the *Plan Office* (district level), which is made up of technical-social, administrative, accounting and IT staff and is configured as an “institutional inter-municipal coordination structure of a technical-administrative nature operating in conjunction with the proximity offices (Social Secretariat and Professional Social Service) of the individual district Municipalities, “which replaces the Plan Group and the Restricted Group, identified in the previous planning acts, in terms of composition and tasks”;
- the *Territorial Network for Protection and Inclusion*, a permanent *governance* body for the definition of the Area Plans, a place for territorial concertation (public and private bodies) of the interventions supported under the *National Social Policy Fund*, which can be divided into three areas of intervention: a) family, minors and the elderly; b) disability and non-self-sufficiency; c) poverty and social exclusion⁴. The establishment of this network is promoted on the basis of the *Network of Social Protection and Inclusion* established at the national level by Article 21 of Legislative Decree 147/2017 at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, as the coordinating body of the system of interventions and social services under Law 328/2000. The *National Network* aims to foster greater territorial homogeneity in the provision of interventions/services and to define guidelines by drawing up a *National Social Plan*, a *Plan for social interventions and services to combat poverty*, and a *Plan for non-self-sufficiency*.

Drafting the Area Plan - The *New Rationalised Index* provides indications on the drafting of the Area Plan, envisaging that it be composed of the following parts: *Social Report*, *Actions*, *District Budget* (accounting tool) and its annexes. For each part, in order to standardise the presentation formats of the 55 social-health districts, facilitating consultation, comparison, monitoring and evaluation methods, as well as favouring the construction of a regional model for social policies, the *New Index* prepares a presentation form for each part that makes up the Area Plan (tab. no. 3).

Table no. 3. Sections of the annexes (*Social Report*, *Actions*, *District Budget*) of the Area Plan in Sicily.

Sect	Social Report	Actions	District budget
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⁴ Recently (December 2023) the Service 7 – “Fragility and Poverty” of the Department of the Family and Social Policies (Regional Department of the Family and Social Policies and Labour - Sicilian Region), for the purpose of implementing the Regional Plan for Combating Poverty 2021-2023, proposed the establishment of the *Network for Social Protection and Inclusion*, whose main purposes are identified in favouring a greater territorial homogeneity in the provision of services and defining guidelines for interventions. The Network’s main task is to contribute to the definition of the Guidelines for the Area Plan for the use of the NFSP, the three-year Regional Plan for the fight against poverty, and the three-year Regional Plan for non-self-sufficiency for the use of the NSSF (Non-self-sufficiency Fund). The proposal is in the process of being approved by the Regional Government Council.

ions			
I.	Demographic dynamics	Action number	“Input” (resources) and “Output” (interventions) - Municipal and PHA Financial Plans
II.	Poverty area	Action title	“Input” (resources) and “Output” (interventions) - National and regional funds
III.	Elderly area	– Social Indicators Demand – Social Indicators Supply – Reasoned analysis of social supply and demand	Activities description
IV.	Addictions area		Organisational structure and resources definition
V.	Disabled area		Professional figures
VI.	Immigrant area		Financial Plan
VII.	Family, children and youth area		Reasoned specification on management modes
VIII.	System Actions	Activated and to be activated	
IX.	Overall assessment of the needs system	– Community profile – Priority services and interventions to be activated	

The *2021 Guidelines* and the *2022-2024 Guidelines* also define the Area Plan approval procedure, describing the activities and bodies involved in the preparation of the Area Plan (Mayors Committee, District Plan Office and Territorial Network for Protection and Inclusion) and in its approval, which involves both the territorial level (Mayors Conference) and the regional level (Regional Department for Family and Social Policies - Service 4 - Plan Office).

3. The *coupling* between State and Region for the integrated system of interventions and social services

The competences and functions of the State and of the Sicily Region, described on the basis of the analysis of the regulatory framework and of the *governance* system set out thus far, looking at both the national and the regional levels and highlighting the points and modalities of interaction between the two levels, make it possible to tackle the last step of the analysis: tracing the *coupling* between the State and the Region for the integrated system of interventions and social services.

To this end, we take Trein's approach (2017) to the analysis of "horizontal connections of policy sectors", which outlines possible conditions for policy integration (possible, likely, unlikely, very unlikely), and adapt it to our analysis.

Trein moves his steps from the concept of "coupling" coined by Weick⁵ – which indicates "the relation of constituting parts of organisations" – and bases his proposal of the four possible conditions of policy integration on the four *ideal-typical dimensions of coupling* (*loosely coupled*, *de-coupled*, *non-coupled*, *tightly coupled*), which originate from the intersection of two conditions: *responsiveness* and *distinctiveness*. In Trein's approach, *responsiveness* "is collaboration between the actors", i.e. whether the "actors learn, communicate, support one another"; (institutional) *distinctiveness* indicates whether the "institutions [are] vertically and/or horizontally separated". In the words of Orton and Weick, moreover, Trein assumes that "If there is neither responsiveness nor distinctiveness, the system is not really a system, and it can be defined as a *non-coupled system*. If there is responsiveness without distinctiveness, the system is *tightly coupled*. If there is distinctiveness without responsiveness, the system is *decoupled*. If there is both distinctiveness and responsiveness, the system is *loosely coupled*" (1990: p. 205; authors' italics).

Applying these dimensions to the analysis of horizontal connections between policy areas, Trein comes to the conclusion that policy integration is (tab. 4, a.):

- possible in the presence of loosely coupled systems;
- likely in the presence of tightly coupled systems;
- unlikely in the presence of non-coupled systems;
- very unlikely in the presence of de-coupled systems.

Retracing Trein's proposal and adapting it to our analysis, aimed at tracing the relationship between the institutional actors of the integrated system of social interventions and services, we assume that

- (institutional) *distinctiveness* can be represented by *legislative power*, i.e. competence in the field of social policies; this can be *concurrent* (i.e. the competence of the State *and* the Regions) or *residual (exclusive)* (i.e. the competence of the State *or* the Regions);
- *responsiveness* can be represented by the *governance* structure (networked decision-making, i.e. a set-up in which decisions are co-decided by a network of actors), which conversely sees a *government* structure (i.e. a set-up in which decision-making is "centralised").

Assuming these dimensions, we decide to trace the *coupling* dimensions by recalling the social policy scenarios outlined by the evolution of the integrated system of interventions and social services in Italy: scenario before Law 328/2000; scenario conveyed by Law 328/2000; scenario conveyed by Constitutional Law 3/2001, current scenario. Furthermore, we link the *coupling* dimensions to the impact that can be registered on the fragmentation or homogenisation of social policies on the national territory.

Our analytical proposal allows us to highlight the following (tab. 4, b.).

Prior to Law 328/2000, the integrated system of social interventions and services did not exist and the institutional actors were *non-coupled (non-coupled system)*: within the national framework, the Regions legislated autonomously on social policies and the State

⁵ Trein refers to the following contributions: Weick, K. E. (1976) Educational Organisations as Loosely Coupled Systems, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, pp. 1-19; Orton, J. D. and Weick, K. E. (1990) Loosely Coupled Systems: A Reconceptualisation, *Academy of Management Review*, 15 (2), pp. 203-23.

did not legislate (or not extensively) on social policies, leading to a fragmentation of social policies across the country.

The enactment of Law 328/2000 promotes the construction of an integrated system of interventions and social services on the national territory through new forms of local government (promotion and coordination of social policies at the regional level) that outline a network of interdependent actors (*tightly coupled system*), prefiguring the homogenisation of social policies on the national territory.

Following the constitutional reform Law 3/2001, due to the fact that the State has exclusive competence in the matter of “determining the essential levels of the services concerning civil and social rights that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory”, that the Regions have exclusive competence in the matter of social policies and that Law 328/2000 remains in force, but is not binding, the logic of “network” *governance* (national and regional level) seems to be disappearing (*de-coupled system*); in this scenario, the integrated system of social interventions and services *formally* takes on an indeterminate configuration, prefiguring the return to a fragmentary framework of social policies on the national territory.

Recently, despite the fact that the State has exclusive competence in “determining the essential levels of services concerning civil and social rights that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory” – without prejudice to the Regions’ exclusive competence in social policies – the national level has resumed its intervention in social policies through a number of instruments: definition of the National Social Plan, definition of the essential levels of services, allocation of the NFSP, establishment and disbursement of other national funds. It is precisely these instruments that, *de facto* (*substantially*), relate the two levels considered (national and regional) albeit, given the disjointed legislative power, in a flexible and discretionary manner (*loosely coupled system*). Moreover, they hint at the will to homogenise social policies on the national territory. The same *National Plan of Interventions and Social Services 2021-2023* points out that the “Social Plan is the result of a process of elaboration, listening and protagonism of the actors involved, the users, the operators, the stakeholders, aimed at defining a unitary vision of the system, overcoming the parcelling out and closure in sectorial and categorical spheres. The process of defining the Plan is the product of coordination with the other governmental authorities, national, regional and local, each of them having functions in the social field” (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 2021: p. 26).

In this regard, the *Programming Guidelines for the Area Plan 2021* of the Sicilian Region point out that “With the establishment of the various Funds, the national government has abandoned the role of spectator that it had played since the reform of Title V of the Constitution (Law 3/2001), to take on the role of driving force and agent of change, even at the cost of eroding substantial spaces of the autonomy of the Regions”.

Table no. 4. The four ideal-typical *coupling* dimensions applied to the integrated system of social interventions and services.

	a.		b.		
	Responsiveness	No Responsiveness		Responsiveness (governance)	No Responsiveness (government)

					)
	Loosely coupled	De-coupled		Loosely coupled	De-coupled
Distinctiveness	Institutions vertically and/or horizontally separated Actors (interest groups, professions, administrators) learn, communicate, support one another Policy integration possible	Institutions vertically and/or horizontally separated Actors (interest groups, professions, administrators) do not learn, communicate, support one another Policy integration very unlikely	Distinctiveness (exclusive legislative power)	the system is substantially promoted (Constitutional Reform Law 3/2001) - Exclusive competence of the State to determine the essential levels of services concerning civil and social rights that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory - State intervention in social policies through certain instruments: ELS, NFSP, other national funds, NSP, etc. - Exclusive competence of the Regions for social policies Promoting	the system formally has an indeterminate configuration (Constitutional Reform Law 3/2001) - Exclusive competence of the State to determine the essential levels of services concerning civil and social rights that must be guaranteed throughout the national territory - Exclusive competence of the Regions in the field of social policies Return to fragmentation of social policies across the country

				the homogenisation of social policies across the country	
	Tightly coupled	Non-coupled		Tightly coupled	Non-coupled
No Distinctiveness	Vertically and horizontally integrated institutions Actors (interest groups, professions, administrators) learn, communicate, support one another Policy integration likely	Vertically and horizontally integrated institutions Actors (interest groups, professions, administrators) do not learn, communicate, support one another Policy integration unlikely	No Distinctiveness (concurrent legislative power)	the system is integrated (Orientation of Law 328/2000) - The State legislates on social policies - New forms of local governance (promotion and coordination of social policies at regional level) Homogenisation of social policies across the country	the system does not exist (Before Law 328/2000) - Regions legislate autonomously on social policies - The State does not legislate on social policies Fragmentation of social policies across the country

In the same vein, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies itself highlights the delay in assuming this role, stating that “it is necessary [...] to construct and define Essential Levels of Social Services (ELSS)” and observing that, despite Law 328/2000 having identified “a series of areas of intervention that it recognises as essential levels” and that the constitutional law had reserved for the central government the “definition of ELSS to be ensured throughout the national territory”,

“the practical definition of the ELSS has come up against a financial situation and a distribution of competences that *have long hindered the realisation of the necessary investment in the social sphere*. Even Law 42/2009, implementing fiscal federalism, and the related implementing decrees, while

assigning an important role to the essential levels of services, had to acknowledge that they were lacking in the social sphere, *falling back on the identification of service objectives that are only beginning to be implemented in 2021, with a view to the subsequent identification of some ELSS. [...]. The time seems ripe, therefore, to move further towards the definition of ELSS* and thus to give the social services system the reliability and structuring that has long since been achieved in other welfare sectors, such as health and pensions. In the context of current national social planning, an initial group of ELSS will thus be identified, either already identified in legislation or in view of their formal recognition. [...] In a still largely underfunded sector such as social services, the approach can only be gradual and start with the identification of an albeit partial set of services and benefits to be recognised throughout the country. This base will be gradually enriched with the subsequent national planning exercises, starting from the Plan for non-self-sufficiency, up to the definition of a set of minimum services that all persons can count on regardless of the Region and the Ambit in which they are located.” (2021: pp. 8-9; authors’ italics).

4. Conclusions

In this contribution we have proposed a reflection on the subject of social policies, in particular on the construction and implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services in Italy promoted by the *Framework law for the implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services* (Law no. 328 of 8 November 2000). The reflection developed, in consideration of the fact that Constitutional Law 3/2001 reforming Title V of the Italian Constitution makes Law 328/2000 in force but not binding for the Italian Regions, pursued the intention of unravelling the ill-defined and complex intertwining between the national and regional levels, choosing to analyse a regional case, that of the Sicily Region – a Region with a special statute in the South of Italy – in order to analyse whether and how it refers to Law 328/2000. Moreover, with the aim of tracing the relationship between the institutional actors in the process of constructing and implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services, it assumed four ideal-typical forms of *coupling* (Orton and Weick 1990; Trein 2017) considering the legislative power in the hands of the State and the Regions in the field of social policies as a dimension of *distinctiveness* and the *governance* structures as a dimension of *responsiveness*.

The reflection showed that the regulatory framework, *governance* structure and planning acts of the Sicilian Region trace the operational model conveyed by Law 328/2000. Moreover, on the subject of institutional relations, it highlighted that from the enactment of Law 328/2000 to the present day it is possible to trace the four dimensions of *coupling*, coming to the conclusion that, although the integrated system *formally* takes on an undefined configuration, today it begins to be *substantially* promoted by both the national and regional levels.

We think that, in order to understand the overall configuration of social policies on the Italian national territory, the proposed reflections may provide interesting hints for future research scenarios on the way other Italian Regions implement the integrated system of interventions and social services. New reflections, together with ours and with others already proposed (*cf.* Introduction) could help to build an overall vision that would allow

us to ascertain the level of the “hoped-for” *homogeneity* or, on the contrary, the level of the “constant” or “rediscovered” *fragmentation* of social policies on the national territory.

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