Policy integration in practice: evidence from anti-poverty policy in Italy

Matteo D’Emilione
INAPP
Giovannina Giuliano
INAPP

In Italy, over the last few years, policy to combat poverty has been designed assuming that the integrated provision of social and employment services should represent one of the essential conditions (a minimum standard) of the policy. Since ‘integration does not just happen by design’, what happens when an integrated policy approach is put into practice? Using some of the main evidence of a recent survey on more than 400 Local social planning authorities (local institutions responsible for coordinating social policies) an index of service integration has been developed in order to analyze and measure the capacity of local administrations to deal with the paradigm of coordination and integration.

In Italia, negli ultimi anni, le politiche di contrasto alla povertà sono state concepite partendo dal presupposto che l’offerta integrata di servizi sociali e occupazionali dovesse rappresentare una delle condizioni fondamentali (un livello essenziale) della politica. Dal momento che “l’integrazione non avviene solo sulla carta”, cosa succede quando un approccio di politiche integrate viene messo in pratica? Utilizzando alcuni dei principali risultati di una recente indagine su oltre 400 autorità locali di pianificazione sociale (istituzioni locali responsabili del coordinamento delle politiche sociali) è stato sviluppato un indice di integrazione dei servizi per analizzare e misurare la capacità delle amministrazioni locali di affrontare il paradigma del coordinamento e dell’integrazione.

Introduction

In the context of public policies, those dedicated to fighting poverty are of increasing importance. The very concept of poverty, however, is characterized by multi-dimensionality (Alkire 2018; Bray et al. 2019) and wickedness (Peters and Tarpey 2019). Those aspects would therefore require an integrated approach according to which different institutions and different people should work together, with the same aim (OECD 2015). Often invoked at the political and regulatory level, integration is difficult to implement, as the complexity of integration processes as well as the problems that these processes aim to solve are underestimated. Again, the policy-maker should find the right compromise between

This work follows the participation to the International Conference on Public Policy 2021 in Barcelona (session on policy problems and policy integration - Chairs Guillermo Cejudo and Philipp Trein). Many ideas and suggestions were collected on that occasion and in the following months.
desirability and feasibility of policy integration, assessing its expediency (Candel 2021). This seems to be the case with what is happening in the UK with the implementation of Universal Credit: integrating six types of social benefits in the hope of making everything simpler and more effective. The results, to date, say something else (National Audit Office 2018); more than 10 years have passed since the launch of the measure and still there are numerous problems of implementation, from the additional costs for local organizations that help administer Universal Credit and support claimants, to the difficult adjustment of claimants to the new ICT based procedures.

In Italy, over the last few years, poverty has found an important place in the political agenda setting and policies to combat poverty were designed assuming that the integrated provision of services should represent one of the essential conditions (a minimum standard) of the delivery process. Collaboration between social services and employment services as well as the role of the multidisciplinary teams have gained momentum on the national, regional, and local level.

Through what we can define as a ‘whole-of-government’ approach (Christensen and Lægreid 2007; Perri 2004), the national policy maker, namely the Ministry of Labour and social policies, has provided a quite strong regulatory input, challenging the heterogeneity and fragmentation of Italian welfare administration (Catalano et al. 2015). By strong regulatory input we mean, in particular, the indications contained in the decrees implementing the adopted measures to combat poverty which provide for the integrated offer of services (mainly social services and public employment services) which should represent a basic standard feature of the social benefits system.

Therefore, the adoption of such an approach seems to be due, on the one hand, to a process of re-centralization already under way in various policy areas in Italy (Bolgherini et al. 2019), and on the other hand, to the “external problem pressure” caused by the worsening of poverty which required policy integration and administrative coordination reforms (Trein et al. 2019).

But what happens when we try to put norms into practice? What is the current level of cooperation between services belonging to different sectors? How do the operators and professionals from different services interact? Since “integration does not just happen by design” (Cejudo and Michel 2021), we carried out a survey to evaluate (ex post) the implementation process of the first real national measure to combat poverty called REI (Inclusion Income) and tried to understand if and how the integration processes at the local level had changed, accordingly with the provisions of the legislation, strongly focused on strengthening the coordination mechanisms of the social services and promoting its connection with public employment services.

The survey involved more than 400 Local social planning authorities (LSPAs), intended as institutional bodies responsible for coordinating social policies at the territorial level, more than 400 public employment services and a sample of more than 2.000 municipal social services. To our knowledge, this is one of the few national surveys that place the issue of integration between services at the center of an ex-post evaluation on the implementation of a measure to combat poverty, also considering the absence of administrative data on the subject. Using some of the main evidence of the survey, an index of (service) integration has been developed, in order to measure the capacity of local administrations to deal with the paradigm of integration.

The overall picture that emerges from the index results was characterized by significant territorial heterogeneity and clear margins for the improvement of local and regional welfare governance mechanisms. It is appropriate to highlight how the local welfare system has been ‘put to the test’ by the central policy maker, without taking these differences into consideration, generating implementation difficulties, especially in the weaker institutional territories.

The outline of the paper is as follows: the first section provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical issues concerning the integration processes

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1 Another interesting experience to consider is the norwegian welfare reform, launched in the early 2000s (Askim et al. 2009).
2 Legislative Decree n.147/2017 (art. 23) establishes that “the integrated offer of interventions and services according to the coordinated methods defined by the Regions and autonomous provinces constitutes an essential level of the service performance”.
3 The survey was financed by the European Social Fund within the National Operational Programme on Systems of Active Employment Policies (PON SPAO 2014-2020).
4 For each local institution involved, the manager or the main contact person was interviewed asking to provide his point of view (subjective perception) on a series of issues relating to the implementation of the measure, but also, where possible, administrative sources data.
between services involved in the implementation of policies to combat poverty; the second section focuses on the Italian welfare institutional context; the third section, highlights the main evidence that emerged in the survey and the main results of the integration index; in the end, we focus on some speculations concerning the way integration can be measured.


Integration at an institutional, organizational, and professional level represents an issue that is found with increasing intensity and diffusion in regulatory provisions, operational and guiding documents in the sphere not only of social policies, but also of those of employment, health, and education.

The conceptual issues associated with the theme of integration are numerous (Trein et al. 2019). It is therefore complex to stand for one definition rather than for another, dealing with a “plethora of terms” (Tosun and Lang 2017). In general terms, researchers are faced with a large number of expressions that can overlap with that of integration, such as collaboration, coordination, and cooperation. In this sense, an essential reference is to consider (horizontal) integration as a continuum that goes from a situation of complete fragmentation to one of perfect connection between services and systems (Keast et al. 2007) where cooperation, coordination and collaboration represent the three possible stages. From a different perspective, there are different ‘degrees’ of integration: from the simple dialogue between institutions, to the full integration with ad hoc new institutional bodies creation (OECD 2015).

A second aspect that forms the background to the analysis of integration processes concerns the explanatory factors of the success (or not) of these processes, with a careful eye on individual, organizational and system capabilities as well as on the necessary skills even on a political level (Kekez et al. 2019).

In recent years, as already mentioned, it is possible to identify a renewed interest in the concept of integration between services, in particular in the field of social and labor policies (Finn 2016; Provan and Milward 2001), developing issues that in the health sector have always been the subject of in-depth reflections (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2016; Valentijn et al. 2013; 2015).

In 2015 the European Social Network (ESN) promoted a specific study at European level on how local public services, in particular those with a ‘social purpose’ (education, work, health) worked together in order to improve the well-being of citizens (Montero et al. 2016). Among the reasons and objectives that can be directed towards the integration of different types of service, the most present are related to the improvement of the ‘outcomes’ for beneficiaries/customers, to the coordination between services and to the ‘re-orientation’ of the system of care services. Furthermore, with respect to the methods of integration, the choice of setting up multi-professional teams presents significant organizational challenges: the commitment to encourage dialogue between professionals accustomed to different communication codes; the management of ‘leadership’ within these work groups; the identification of well-defined roles and procedures to ensure the balance of the team; the sharing of relevant information, effectiveness of communication processes and supporting information systems (Petch et al. 2013).

While recalling the importance of the concept, however, these documents underestimate in some cases how the integration processes are, in general, long and complex phenomena that do not always, and not necessarily, produce the desired effects. A recent study by the European Commission on the provision of integrated social services aimed at activating minimum-income beneficiaries (Eftheia 2018) effectively explains the opportunities, obstacles and results of some integration processes that have taken place in numerous European countries. The study highlights some relevant issues such as: the variety of ‘approaches’ to integration, from reforms based on low-intensity integration tools to reforms based on real ‘institutional merger’; the effects of these reforms in terms of poverty reduction and creation of more user-friendly services and better accessibility of the services themselves. This last issue is interesting for two reasons: the first concerns how these effects have been measured, opening up an important question on how to measure integration processes and their validity; the second concerns the characteristics of the reforms that more than others have succeeded in obtaining positive effects on the three dimensions considered.

Among the success factors we find: the consensual approach as a way to introduce and run reforms, with a broad institutional base; an intensive support programme; an ‘experimental culture’, running pilot schemes before the scaling up of the reforms. However, these aspects must take some relevant issues into
consideration: the greater the number and variety of subjects involved, the greater the difficulty in the decision-making process; the short-term approach of the political agenda, ‘incompatible’ with experimentation and implementation of complex processes. In general terms, it is possible to advance the hypothesis that reform processes that focus decisively on formal collaboration between several services can achieve positive results.

Against this background, our work aims to make an original contribution to this debate by analyzing the coordination capacity of the public administrations involved in the implementation of recent measures to combat poverty in Italy. As stated by Candel (2017) in reference to the so-called Integrated Policies Strategies (IPSs)5, “whereas the assumption that better-integrated policy results in better outcomes is widespread among both scholars and policy-makers, it is not supported by a strong evidence base”.

Our work seeks to bridge this ‘evidence gap’ by assessing the institutional capacity of local authorities to implement a top-down and complex integrated policy design through different but complementary perspectives: highlighting the importance of territorial heterogeneity as an essential interpretative key; identifying the organizational and implementation dimensions that seem to affect this capacity, from the availability of human and financial resources to the cultural differences between different services; exploring possible associations between a better integrative capacity (Candel, 2021) and other essential aspects such as an improved local authority to solve implementation problems and to guarantee better coverage of the needs of the population in a given territorial context.

The theoretical framework underlying the concept of integrative capacity allows us to define more precisely the boundaries within which our work moves. In fact, if we take into consideration the capacities that are important for the policy integration proposed by Candel, we find many of those which we have taken into consideration. In particular, for the purposes of this work, we focus more on the ‘operational capacities’, some-how extending the field of observation to the analytical ones: the presence and functioning of multidisciplinary teams for the assessment of welfare recipients’ needs, understood as an example of cross-sectoral structures and coordination mechanisms; the intensity and quality of institutional relations between LPAS and other stakeholders at the local level as part of flexible strategic management processes that involve all relevant entities; the availability of funds and human resources; the quality of information flows between institutions involved, intended as a ‘metric’ to understand the availability and exchange of knowledge and information across sectors. An interesting aspect that our work does not investigate but whose importance is crucial is what Candel called integrative leadership, with respect to which an ad hoc investigation would be necessary.

Before dealing with the results of the survey, it is useful to provide some information on the functioning of the Italian welfare system, which represents the context in which the policies to fight poverty are implemented.

2. The Italian context: seeking for policy coherence to combat poverty

It could be argued that, triggered by the financial-economic crisis (2008) and spurred on by the pressure of the European institutions and by the advocacy action of some national movements (The Alliance Against Poverty6 and CILAP7), poverty became a prominent subject on the Italian policy agenda (Béland and Howlett 2016). Italy was also, until 2017, one of the very few Member states of the European Union that did not have a minimum income scheme in its welfare system. The reality of the facts, to date, is that over the last few years we have gone from zero to an ‘overproduction’ of measures both at national and regional level.

From the first pilot measure (New Social Card) in 2013, which involved about 27,000 people, we have now reached over 3 million people within the Citizens’ Income (less than half in the case of the Inclusion Income).

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5 Candel defines IPS as “explicit governmental attempts to address one or more crosscutting concerns [...] in a holistic manner and for that reason prescribe concerted policy-making efforts across sectors and, possibly, levels within a polity” (Candel 2017).

6 The Alliance Against Poverty, born at the end of 2013, brings together a large number of stakeholders who have decided to contribute collectively to the construction of adequate public policies against absolute poverty in Italy. (https://alleanzacontrolapoverta.it/)

7 Collegamento Italiano Lotta alla Povertà (Cilap) is a network of non-profit organizations founded in 1992 in Rome, aimed at contrasting poverty and social exclusion. It is the Italian representative of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN), founded in 1990.
A process that has been only apparently seamless where one measure rapidly (and sometimes abruptly) replaces the other, particularly in the transition between the two broader measures. In fact, in March 2019, the Inclusion Income was replaced by the Citizenship Income \(^8\) (Jessoula et al. 2019) without having given the first measure time to be actually implemented, an example of how the vagaries of politics can negatively affect important processes of change (Hudson et al. 2019). These changes have increased the implementation burdens for the local institutions involved, faced with the need to manage new financial resources as well as different and ever-increasing benefit recipients: a process that seems to have generated a policy accumulation mechanism (Knill et al. 2021), not timely supported by the central level of government.

Furthermore, each step took place without a real monitoring and evaluation activity to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the individual measures, not favoring the policy learning process. Added to this, is the constant change of the rules of the game by the central policy maker (the Ministry of Welfare), with evident impacts on the governance of the local service system. Without going into the specifics of the interventions to combat poverty mentioned above, it is useful to highlight how, generally speaking, they are interventions that can be identified within conditional cash transfer schemes, already widespread in developing countries (Cecchini and Atuesta 2017). Following a proof of means, the beneficiary of the measure signs a personalized pact for social inclusion with social services or public employment services. Alongside the monetary component, therefore, specific services are offered (in kind component).

A fundamental role in the management of the measures is assigned to social services. An important change took place with the implementation of the last measure, Citizenship Income, where public employment services are supposed to play a key role in managing certain categories of users (e.g., short-term unemployed).

These institutional changes took place in a historically fragmented welfare system: the specific configuration of the Italian welfare system and social assistance policies to combat poverty has been focused on categorization and has led to the fragmentation of welfare and poverty reduction policies (Kazepov and Barberis 2013). The design and management of the social services system in Italy involve different public responsibility levels, mainly regional and municipal (Bifulco and Centemeri 2008). At municipal level, most of the resources were allocated to families with children, disabled and elderly people and, residually, to fight poverty and social exclusion, to support immigrants and people with addictions. It is necessary to highlight the fundamental role that municipalities have in the planning and management of the social service system at local level considering the number of municipalities (about 8,000). This ‘administrative issue’ is obviously a core problem when a national social policy is supposed to guarantee homogeneity at the territorial level in terms of the quality of public services (and among these, social services). As we will see below, LPSAs play (or try to play) a key coordinating role in this fragmented situation.

Furthermore, the welfare system is part of a broader framework, that of the public administration, which in Italy suffers considerable delays in terms of (perceived) quality of public services and low trust on the part of citizens towards national and local institutions (Eurofound 2017) as well as an increasing age of public employees over the last years due, among other things, to “the hiring/turn over freeze that is putting an obstacle to the entrance of young people (and ideas) in the public sector” (Cepiku 2018, 510). These latter aspects are of fundamental importance for any public policy and any process of institutional collaboration to take place effectively, considering the institutional capabilities involved.

3. Towards the creation of an index of integration

Against this background, between November 2020 and April 2021, a survey was carried out to assess the evolutionary implementation process (Browne and Wildavsky 1984) of the above-mentioned first anti-poverty measures, the Inclusion Income, and the first rolling out step of the Citizens’ Income. The Inclusion Income, namely the first single measure to combat poverty in Italy, representative of

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\(^8\) As reported by the ESPN Flash Report 2019/35 the Citizenship Income (or Reddito di Cittadinanza in italian) can be defined as a means-tested cash benefit which is targeted at poor and socially excluded households and conditional on participation in job-search activities (Jessoula et al. 2019, 1).
a new policy course, combined economic protection, through income support, and activation of the individual to promote social and work inclusion by entrusting a key role to local welfare.

Its implementation envisaged some actions through different phases, involving the management of complex situations, at an organizational and operational level. To name but a few, the procedures for the interception, control, and engagement of users eligible for the benefit of the measure, up to the realization of the entire implementation process that required the synergistic action of several subjects and different levels of governance involved in the exercise of the functions envisaged by the regulatory mandate.

In the policy choices regarding the fight against poverty, new paradigms intervene to guide, in the various forms and in a matrix of interdependence, the following implementation strategies and expected results:

- the introduction of a single measure to combat poverty meant as an essential level of performance, homogeneous throughout the national territory;
- the multidimensional perspective in the analysis of poverty and the consequent need to adopt a logic of integrated offer of social interventions;
- the adoption of a perspective of activation of both the beneficiaries and the system of local services;
- the territorial paradigm and the centrality of the multilevel governance dimension between the various players in the area involved in the implementation of the measures and in giving life to the local welfare system.

One of the characterizing and qualifying aspects of the Inclusion Income is that of having emphasized the operational dimension of social services, as well as the multidisciplinary and integrated approach in the provision of interventions. The innovative and somewhat ‘disruptive’ element of the measure, for the national panorama, is that of having established by decree that some phases involving users targeted by the measure constituted essential levels of performance (particular, to the multidimensional assessment of the need, the construction of the customized project and more generally, the integrated offer of services).

The survey focuses on the three main public actors involved in the implementation of the measures at local level, namely the Local social planning authorities (LSPAs), the Public employment services (PESs) and the Municipal social services (MSSs). They represent the main ‘nodes’ for the implementation of national income support schemes. In the context of this work, taking into account the specificity of their role in the integration process, we will focus mainly on the evidence emerging from the survey on the LSPAs and, when useful, we will consider some evidence relating to the other two types of local institutions involved in the survey.

LSPA can be defined as an “organizational setting” (Previtali and Salvati 2021) whose objective is to coordinate the management of social services at local level (the municipal social services), dealing with welfare fragmentation. Specifically, each LSPA can be constituted by one or more municipalities, with a technical reference office called the Planning Office composed of different professionals, coordinated by an LSPA manager. It can be intended as a local government institution and a policy space to enhance local connectivity (Agranoff 2018). LPSAs originate, in fact, from National Law No. 328/2000, a framework law explicitly aimed at integration in the field of social policies.

Over the last few years, within an institutional reconfiguration process, LSPAs have assumed a more defined and meaningful role in social policies, since they are no longer just entities with coordination tasks but also, and increasingly, entities with major financial responsibility. These responsibilities derive from the management of new funds (and new rules) for the implementation of the anti-poverty policy, namely the National operational programme for social inclusion (PON Inclusione)\(^9\) and the National Poverty Fund\(^10\).

Within the implementation of the Inclusion Income, the LSPAs have therefore played a fundamen-
tal role for at least three reasons: first, in a logic of multilevel governance they had to play a role of connection between the territory (municipalities) and the national and regional levels; second, they had to manage and redistribute the significant financial resources dedicated to strengthening the service network; third, they had to foster the coordination mechanisms at local level between different services. They, therefore, represented one of the fundamental ‘hubs’ both in terms of vertical and horizontal integration.

One of the key themes of the survey, as mentioned above, was the horizontal integration of the different actors involved at the local level. This research objective was consistent with the strong regulatory focus on fostering dialogue between administrations as an essential condition for the effective implementation of anti-poverty measures. It is thus possible to provide some important empirically based policy indications referring to the three above-mentioned key institutional subjects responsible for implementing the policy local level.

Unlike other surveys carried out on the same local institutions with similar aims (Alleanza contro la Povertà in Italia 2019), our survey reached a significant coverage of all the LSPAs, more than 80%, ensuring more sound data availability, even at regional level.

The same coverage has been reached for Public employment services and for the Municipal social services (MSSs) sample. For each of the local institutions involved, the respondent was in most cases the person in charge/manager of the organization.

An integration index has been developed to investigate the integration process at a local level. The index is composed of continuous indicators built on the dimensions considered to be explanatory of the integration process and aims to measure the capacity of LSPAs to manage and foster several integration mechanisms at the local level. The integration index is the sum of the five composite indicators described in the Annex 1, i.e., it is an additive index derived from a process counting type. Quite predictably, the described indicators and the relative dimensions considered are positively correlated (annex 1, table 2).

To date, in the academic literature, the examples of such indices are not many and those existing have been mainly developed in the health sector (Henrard et al. 2006; Mayhew et al. 2016).

The selection process of the dimensions considered was inductive, considering, on the one hand, the experience gained in similar surveys carried out in recent years (D’Emilione et al. 2019), on the other hand, the regulatory aspects specifically aimed at the integration of the services provided for by the law implementing the measure. As already mentioned above, each dimension identifies what we could define as an (institutional) capacity of the LPSA to manage and oversee an effective process of integration and coordination action. The dimensions considered are the following:

- LSPAs capacity to promote the integrated management of activities in the territory.
- LSPAs capacity to support the establishment of multidisciplinary teams.
- LSPAs capacity to encourage (greater) involvement of different stakeholders at local level/degree of participation.
- LSPAs degree of collaboration with different actors present in the territory.
- Quality of information flows between LSPAs with the National Social Security Institute11 (Inps).

The dimension that unexpectedly seems to be poorly connected with the others is the one related to the quality of information flow. Even changing the indicator and considering the quality of the flow, not only with Inps but also with PES does not change the result. What increases the surprise for this result is the fact that more than a third of the LPSAs assess that the quality of information flow with Inps is poor and the same happens when we asked the same question about the PES network.

Among the possible explanations, we choose two: first, as already mentioned, the index is based on a single question which alone is perhaps not sufficient to properly capture the phenomenon and its complexity; second, the average level of the information systems on which the service network is based is so low that, in fact, it does not affect (or is not capable of affecting) the integration process. This last observation was partly

11 Inps plays a fundamental role in administrative control of applications to obtain the measure, informing local institutions involved (social services and public employment services) about the outcomes of the procedure.
confirmed by some structured meetings, in order to share and discuss the results of the survey with those involved in the survey\textsuperscript{12}. The information platforms rather than the simple exchange of information are perceived as enabling factors to make the policy work effectively, but at the same time are so problematic that the \textit{street level bureaucrat} (Lipsky 2010) chooses different strategies to overcome the obstacles, since the \textit{process can’t be stopped}. The development of an indicator to analyze the perceived quality of the information flows between actors involved in the implementation of a policy is a first attempt to shed light on the communication process as a driver for better integration since the supply and processing of information can affect policy outcomes (Cebul \textit{et al.} 2008). We are fully aware that it should be further refined in view of the role that information systems and e-government will increasingly play in shaping public policies, elaborating, and adding new questions.

\textbf{Findings}

Through the use of the index, it is possible to develop two complementary lines of reasoning: on the one hand, it is possible to answer rather effectively the question asked in the introduction on what happens when passing from theory to practice; on the other hand, it is possible to highlight some associations (and non-causal relationships) between a good level of integration and other variables/aspects concerning the local governance of welfare systems.

According to the first level of analysis, it is possible to show how the index varies at a regional level. It is quite clear that there is not only a significant variability between regions but also within regions. This gives rise to two important considerations for the objectives of this work: first, whether integration between services and local actors should be an essential element of the policy to fight poverty; the application of the index says that there is still a long way to go; the second reflection concerns the different ability of the LPSAs to promote an integrated and coordinated action in the territory of competence.

Figure 1 illustrates the levels of integration achieved at the regional level, taking into account that the index varies from 0 to 16 and that the average value at national level is 8,5. As with other welfare issues, the index confirms significant heterogeneity: the variability within and between regions is high. More than differences between North, South and Centre – except for Puglia, the South is almost always positioned at lower levels than the national average – it is interesting to highlight how even in regions that have always considered themselves more performing at an organizational level (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Piemonte, Lombardia) there is still work to be done to calibrate the variability within the territory.

The results of the index highlight two aspects of utmost relevance for the implementation of the policy and which confirm at least in part what was found in previous works\textsuperscript{13} (D’Emilione \textit{et al.} 2019): firstly, they somewhat call into question the achievement of one of the main objectives of the policy, namely that of integration/coordination between services and different entities as an essential condition of the provision of services; secondly, the heterogeneity of the situation at territorial level is a major obstacle precisely in the identification of effective implementation models or policy solutions that apply at national level.

If we were to interpret these two aspects according to the analytical categories proposed by Bali \textit{et al.} (2019) to imagine an effective policy design, we could say that we are facing some operational problems both in terms of instrumentality (\textit{Is the instrument operationally feasible?}) and capacity (\textit{Does the agency have the accountability mechanisms, coordination mechanisms, and trained bureaucracy necessary to use the tool?}). However, we are more interested in understanding what the determinants of this variability may be and what this means in terms of lesser or greater ability to implement an integrated policy. Thus, what explains so much variability, what are the factors that can determine and affect the index values? The data available in the survey allow us to delve into this issue using a question asked at the end of the survey.

Respondents were asked to indicate how much

\textsuperscript{12} Five inter-regional web seminars have been organised between October and November 2021, involving more than 200 professionals involved in the survey.

\textsuperscript{13} Between 2017 and 2018, Inapp carried out a survey on LPSAs with the aim of understanding what were the governance mechanisms of social policies at the local level. The survey also analyzed the level of integration between different policy sectors and between different actors in the territory.
the main implementation components of the measure had represented a weakness rather than a resource (an opportunity/added value), positioning on a scale of values between 1 and 5, depending on the intensity (positive or negative) that they wanted to attribute to the different dimension.

If we focus on the extreme values of the scale\(^{14}\), thus excluding the share, albeit significant, of those who took less clear-cut positions, we get some interesting results (figure 2). Selecting those dimensions that seem to influence the index value the most, we can notice that the lowest average values of the index are associated with four dimensions in particular: accessibility, information, financial resources availability and relations with previously unknown social service users. In a slightly less clear-cut way, the same applies to the availability of human resources and the cultural differences between operators involved in the implementation of the measure.

Generally speaking, the LPSAs that identify as most problematic in the above-mentioned dimensions have values of the integration index considerably lower than those that express a positive opinion on the same dimensions.

While this is not a causal relationship, it is interesting to note that the integration process at the local level can be influenced both by strictly ‘functional’ issues (if I do not have sufficient human and financial resources it is more difficult to implement and oversee the integration process), as well as cultural aspects such as the different cultural approaches of the operators involved.

On this last issue, we have tried to see whether there are significant differences between integrated LPSAs and poorly integrated LPSAs in terms of the specific need for further training to improve the ability to work together in order to implement the new measure, the Citizen Income: the data tell us that the need for joint training between different services is very strong and there are no major variations depending on the level of integration. Regardless of the level of interaction achieved, the need for further specific training is nevertheless strongly perceived, even in the more integrated LPSAs. It is possible, in fact, that in these very contexts there is a greater awareness of the importance of training to work better together. Again, if we take into consideration the dimension relating to the relationship with unknown users to the services, it seems that the less integrated contexts have had more problems in responding to new (emerging) needs and new welfare recipient profiles, in a phase of a sudden increase in the total number of the

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\(^{14}\) The weaknesses are defined with the values 1-2, while the values 4-5 define the ‘added value’ dimensions.
beneficiaries of the measures to combat poverty.

As mentioned above, the purpose of the present work is not only to understand if and how integration occurs at local level, but also to understand whether certain dynamics are associated with better (or worse) integration. In particular, with the data available, we focus on four main aspects: the ability to solve Inclusion Income implementation problems that emerged in municipalities coordinated by the LPSA; the ability to cover the needs of the population by the services; the resilience of the service system in addressing the effects of the pandemic.

Concerning the first aspect/issue, the LPSA’s ‘problem solving’ capacity is based on the following question: To what extent have the following critical issues, emerged at the municipal level and concerning the Inclusion Income implementation, been addressed by the LPSA?

Respondents were asked to choose between five options: addressed and solved; addressed but not solved; not addressed/discussed; no problem detected; don’t know.

The issues to be dealt with are related to three macro categories: user relations, organizational issues and issues related to resources (human, financial, etc.). By relating the responses to the average values of the index, it emerges quite clearly how the ability to face and solve problems or the absence of problems tout court are associated with a higher level of integration as measured by our index (table 1).

A second level of analysis highlights how better integration according to the index seems to affect the level of coverage of the needs of the main areas of intervention of the social services system at local level. The higher the average value of the integration index, the higher the (perceived) capacity to respond to the needs of users depending on the services offered was (see table 2).

The differences in the level of integration between LPSAs that claim to be able to effectively intercept the needs of people and those that, in fact, fail to do so are significant in all the services considered.

The third issue addressed is what we could define as the “degree of resilience” of the welfare system coordinated by the LPSAs to the effects of the pandemic. As we have said/argued before, in fact,
over the last two years the system of social services has been put to the test by the pandemic, forcing services to reorganize and reinvent themselves in order to meet the needs of vulnerable people.

Since we know that in the last five years a process of refinancing social policies and in particular those devoted to fighting poverty has been launched, in the survey it was asked whether and how this strengthening process had helped the local administrations to deal with the pandemic. Specifically, the question was asked as follows:

Do you believe that the strengthening of services to fight poverty, which occurred in the last years, before the pandemic, mitigated the social impact of the Covid-19 emergency on the beneficiaries?

Accordingly, respondents could choose between five options, depending on whether the strengthening process took place and had positive effects or had never occurred (table 3).

The table shows, again, that the average value of the index is sensitive to the dynamics to which it is related: the greater the level of integration, the greater the resilience in terms of the ability to respond to people’s needs through the strengthening process put in place. As a general consideration, it is noteworthy that most of the LPSAs have benefited in some way from the strengthening process, with a small share that states anyway that what has been done has not been enough.

The important aspect to highlight in this case is that the LPSAs with a higher level of integration are those that have reacted best to the challenges of the pandemic, also because they have been directly involved in a process of strengthening services which have provided more financial and human resources. Both are important aspects, the latter, which, as indicated above, can affect the integration process.
Conclusions

Having always in mind that the concept of coordination “is an eternal and ubiquitous problem in public administration” (Perri 2004, 131) and that the same applies to the concept of integration, with our work we have tried to deal empirically with this complexity, proposing different perspectives.

As a general consideration, the survey on which we base this work is not born with the specific and unique objective of analyzing and measuring integration within a predefined theoretical framework. The survey was carried out with the main objective of understanding how the main national measures to fight poverty in Italy had been implemented by the welfare network at local level: “an attempt to assess the implementation and performance of integrated strategies across a range of governance systems and sectors” (Candel 2017). The theoretical frame of

Table 2. Integration and social service capacity to cover people’s needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage people needs capacity</th>
<th>Index mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social service case management</td>
<td>Poor 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair 8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good 8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent 9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traineeships aimed at social inclusion. People’s autonomy. Rehabilitation</td>
<td>Poor 7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair 8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good 9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent 10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home care services</td>
<td>Poor 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair 8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good 9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent 9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>Poor 7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair 8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good 9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent 9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural mediation service</td>
<td>Poor 8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair 8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good 9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent 9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Inapp 2021 data - CAWI survey on the implementation of the Inclusion Income and the transition to the Citizenship Income

Table 3. Integration and resilience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% LPSAs</th>
<th>n.</th>
<th>Index mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Social services have proven to be more prepared to deal with the situation</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. But local social services operators had to change how they work</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. The strengthening process was not enough</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. The strengthening of services has never concerned this administration</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Inapp 2021 data - CAWI survey on the implementation of the Inclusion Income and the transition to the Citizenship Income
reference for the work presented here is therefore questioning the possible reasons for ‘failures’ or successes in the implementation of a public policy designed to combat poverty through complex coordination mechanisms between different levels of government and subject to continuous changes in the institutional and political scenario (Cejudo and Michel 2017; Hudson et al. 2019).

Again, territorial differences, as well as different institutional capacities and administrative capacities (Christensen et al. 2019) can generate differentiation in access and treatment and, more generally, in the concrete implementation of a complex policy that must be implemented in very different contexts (Domorenok et al. 2021), considering how much this diversity can weigh on the development trajectories of these territorial contexts (Rodríguez-Pose 2020).

Against this background, the evidence gathered tells us that from the point of view of the LPSAs involved in the survey, intended as real policy implementers, the road to take to guarantee a homogeneous integration capacity is still quite long. According to the values of the integration index, the heterogeneity found both between regions and within regions is high and persists. In this sense, it is possible to raise the question of what are the conditions for an institutional isomorphism to occur (Di Maggio and Powell 1983), or rather, what are the needed times and enabling factors so that local institutions, even territorially close to each other, begin to resemble each other in terms of their ability to work in an integrated way. In a provocative way, the data at our disposal raises the question of how realistic (and effective) qualifying the integration of services as an essential level of performance is, being aware of this heterogeneity. And yet, alongside this level of interpretation, the results show that there is a more solid basis to support those integrated strategies that at the local level can improve the effectiveness of political action in the context of social policies. We have highlighted some dimensions that more than others seem to facilitate or hinder the integration process at the local level: from the availability of human and financial resources to the level of accessibility of services to the role of the communication processes when implementing a specific policy. The quantity of data available and the launch of a new survey will allow us to investigate and monitor the progress of many of the dynamics associated with integration processes at the local level in the context of social policies.

**Annex**

**Survey and integration index description**

The survey was based on CAWI methodology (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing), using a structured questionnaire. The table describe the results of interviews for LSPA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A1. LSPA coverage (census survey)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LSPA (national)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complete CAWI interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coverage %</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Inapp 2021 data - CAWI survey on the implementation of the Inclusion Income and the transition to the Citizenship Income

**Table A2. Correlation between indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Capacity to promote the integrated management</th>
<th>Capacity to encourage (greater) involvement of different stakeholders at local level</th>
<th>Degree of collaboration with different stakeholders</th>
<th>Capacity to support the establishment of multidisciplinary teams</th>
<th>Quality of information flows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to promote the integrated management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.215**</td>
<td>0.245**</td>
<td>0.178**</td>
<td>0.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to encourage (greater) involvement of different stakeholders at local level</td>
<td>0.215**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.220**</td>
<td>0.218**</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of collaboration with different stakeholders</td>
<td>0.245**</td>
<td>0.220**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.238**</td>
<td>0.167**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to support the establishment of multidisciplinary teams</td>
<td>0.178**</td>
<td>0.218**</td>
<td>0.238**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.112*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of information flows</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.167**</td>
<td>0.112*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).
Source: Inapp 2021 data - CAWI survey on the implementation of the Inclusion Income and the transition to the Citizenship Income
The questions used in the survey have the same logical sequence for themes to be analyzed for each of the local institutions involved. The questionnaire is structured with questions mainly closed-ended. The survey offers a complete map of the territorial system of the services involved in the implementation.

The integration index is composed of five composite indicators derived from the dimensions of the survey and present in the integration index.

The first, concerning the promotion of integrated management, shows whether the LPSA has been able to put into practice three types of activities provided by the law governing the measure, namely: promotion of territorial agreements aimed at creating an integrated offer of interventions and services between social services and other entities (PES, education and training, housing policies and health); promotion of territorial reconfiguration as to make the LPSA territory coincide with health districts and Public employment services; promotion of specific instrumental forms for the associated management of social services at the territorial level aimed at ensuring managerial, administrative and financial autonomy. The indicator checks whether there has been compliance with these three working methods: at least one, at least two, or all three.

The second indicator seeks to analyze whether the LPSA has played an active role in the creation of multi-disciplinary teams as a key body/subject in the process of assessing the needs of welfare beneficiaries: from a specific coordinating role to any role played.

The LSPAs capacity to encourage (greater) involvement of different stakeholders at local level is measured according to the construction of an indicator that takes into account nine different modes of involvement: from the creation of thematic tables to co-production or co-design experiences.

The fourth dimension is based on the construction of an indicator that seeks to measure the intensity of structured and non-occasional/episodic collaboration between the LPSA and other actors. Specifically, twelve different types of actors are considered (from health facilities, schools, and vocational training bodies to private and public employment services). The higher the number of people with whom the LPSA claims to have established non-sporadic collaborations, the higher the level of integration.

The last indicator measures the quality of the information flows between LPSAs and Inps, one of the most important national players in the implementation of Inclusion Income, according to four different ‘ratings’: poor, fear, good and excellent.

The integration index is the sum of the five composite indicators just described, i.e., it is an additive index derived from a process counting type. The described indicators and the relative dimensions considered are positively correlated, although not always strongly (table A.2).
Kazepov Y., Barberis E. (eds.) (2013), Il welfare frammentato. Le articolazioni regionali delle politiche sociali italiane, Roma, Carocci
Previtali P., Salvati E. (2021), *Area Social Plans and Local Governance of Interorganizational Collaborations*, *Sustainability*, 13, n.2, pp.1-16

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**Matteo D’Emilione**

m.demilione@inapp.org


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**Giovannina Giuliano**

g.giuliano@inapp.org