

The dynamics of policy reform in regional minimum income schemes

Alessandro Nardo (University of Antwerp)

In 2013, Veneto region introduced a regional anti-poverty measure, the Active Inclusion Income (RIA), initially limited to regional capital cities (Comuni capoluogo) and then gradually extended to reach the whole regional territory in 2019. This case represents a path departure for the region in the minimum income (MI) sector and it is particularly interesting in the Italian context of MI for two reasons: first, the measure was introduced by a right-wing regional executive, unique regional case in Italy, where only the most recent national MI measure – the Citizenship Income – was introduced by an executive including right parties; second, Veneto’s measure was confirmed and extended despite the institutionalisation of the national MI scheme after 2017: that was not the case for most regional MI schemes in force at that time, which were removed by regional governments. The research questions of this paper are thus: which political and institutional dynamics lead to a path departure in the MI sector in Veneto? Specifically, is it possible to read RIA’s trajectory under the lens of the analytical framework of credit-claiming dynamics between socio-political demand and supply (Natili, 2019) or should other dimensions be considered? The research is based on qualitative data gathered from a process-tracing analysis mixing official documents analysis with 13 semi-structured interviews with relevant actors in RIA’s policy design. After a short introduction on the most recent developments concerning MI trends in Italy at both national and regional level, the analytical and theoretical framework on the evolution of MI will be first described. Both the literature analysing the political dimension and the institutional dynamics at the base of MI will be considered. Then, the case study of Veneto region will be presented: the regional trends of labour market, poverty and material deprivation will be first analysed to evaluate the potential functional pressures leading to support for the introduction of a MI scheme. At the same time, the regional political and electoral historical trends will be addressed to evidence the hegemonic role of right-wing and regionalist parties in Veneto’s electoral system. Then, the RIA measure will be deeply described. The MI policy trajectory in Veneto will be traced and the configuration of demand and supply for MI in Veneto will be explained by investigating the regional “actor constellation” and the preferences of the main political, social and institutional actors towards in MI policy in Veneto. Finally, the dynamics of political competition and the institutional relations which opened to a path departure in a centre-right-governed region will be explained. Multi-level institutional dynamics and spill-over effects arising from “innovation at the margin” (Madama, 2010) emerge as the main factors underpinning the MI reform in Veneto. On the other side, the political dimension appears to play a marginal role, in contrast

with what the evidence that has so far been raised by the literature on MI determinants.