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## **RESEARCHING SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK DERIVED FROM UNDERLYING POLICY SYSTEMS**

**Abstract.** This paper discusses Social Services of General Interest, a political term of the European Union, which lies at the heart of the European Model of Society and Cohesion concepts. How and why is the organization and provision of services across Europe rooted in, and shaped by, the prevailing national constitutional components of social welfare and spatial planning systems? A high degree of interrelation between these two systems is confirmed and Social Services of General Interest are detected and conceptualized as a substantiation of components of both systems. In a concluding step, an analytical framework is introduced which enables us to research Social Services of General Interest from different angles for the purpose of deploying promising policy solutions.

**Key words:** social welfare, spatial planning, European Union, social services, analytical frame.

### **1. INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST AND THE POLICY PROCESS**

‘Social Services of General Interest’ is a loosely defined but nevertheless important term relating to the EU policy process. It remains loosely defined in so far as while there is increasing reference to it on the EU agenda its conceptual operationalization remains primarily based on the notion of subsidiarity with the final decision on how it is to be understood left to the individual EU member states and the prevailing political norms in each country. It relates to similar but often subtly different national terms such as the French *service public* or the German *Daseinsvorsorge* thus presenting something of a vexed scientific and conceptual conundrum. The term entails a social and a territorial dimension and is actually

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shaped by the diversity of settings of the respective policies. On the one hand, socio-economic aspects of service provision are tackled in a state's welfare policy while on the other, the delivery and locations of services can be regulated via spatial planning policy.

Social Services of General Interest are regarded as key features of the European Model of Society, social inclusion and quality of life and so represent an essential characteristic of the European society. Apparently this is why the European political debate on it is so pronounced in recent times of economic crisis and societal consequences. The potential contributions of the policy instrument 'Social Services of General Interest' to a positive societal development are not yet fully explored with regards to the challenges ahead. This asks for a sound scientific approach and conceptual understanding first; preparing for promising empirical results and policy recommendations in further consequence.

In the following, a conceptual discussion of the components and types of Social Services of General Interest as well as European social welfare systems and spatial planning systems – and their interactions – is initiated in order to answer two basic questions. Why the differing constitutional forms of Social Services of General Interest can be reasoned by the shape of social welfare systems and spatial planning systems and how these two systems impact on the organization and provision of different sectors of Social Services of General Interest. These two questions are analyzed under the premise of focusing on ideal-types of systems on a conceptual basis. Neither the discerning of specific insights into the practical functioning of Social Services of General Interest across Europe, the evaluation of 'better' or 'worse' policy approaches, nor the identification, in practice, of potential imperfections are deemed to be within the ambit of this paper. The discussion does however culminate with the outlining of a comprehensive view of the social and territorial policy embeddedness of the organization and provision of Social Services of General Interest while in addition offering three stages of policy connection which allow us to analytically grasp more fully this difficult term and to more easily conduct comparative studies on the macro level as well as targeted in-depth studies.

Before arriving at the outlining of the analytical framework in section 4, Social Services of General Interest, social welfare systems and spatial planning systems are reviewed and clarified in section 2 and analytically set into relation in section 3. While the individual elaborations set out in section 2 can be backed up by reference to an already extensive literature, the combined analysis of services, welfare and planning focused on in this paper has not received significant attention thus far in literature.

## 2. REVIEW: THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEMS AND SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEMS

In this section, Social Services of General Interest, social welfare systems and spatial planning systems are introduced in more detail and discussed in isolation from each other.

### 2.1. The Definition, Organization and Provision of Social Services of General Interest

The character of Social Services of General Interest is normatively defined. This means that it is not *a priori* given but rather that it is shaped by political norms and designs. Approaching the term from a purely scientific, or theoretical, point of view is unlikely then to be particularly rewarding in terms of clarification and indeed could rather blur existing concepts like ‘Public Goods’. Argumentation derived from scientific concepts that are in proximity to Services of General Interest like the elaboration on services and goods of a rival/ non-rival character or the excludability/ non-excludability of services and goods will thus not be further referred to in this paper.<sup>1</sup>

‘Services of General Interest’ is a term that has been used for many years in EU policy circles, evolving from European decision processes and appearing in differing expressions; first with an economic connotation (‘Services of General Economic Interest’), then in a grand – marked and non-marked based – version (‘Services of General Interest’), and later also with a social emphasis (‘Social Services of General Interest’). Already in the founding document of the European Economic Community, the Treaty of Rome 1957 (EEC, 1957), Services of General Economic Interest are mentioned as being subject to the general rules of competition written down in this treaty; limited in so far as this inclusion in competition rules does stop at a point where the fulfilment of their particular tasks is endangered (EEC, 1957, art. 90, par. 2). Already with the invention of the term ‘Services of General Economic Interest’, the lasting and subtle conflict of being a hybrid of market and state affairs appears. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (EC, 2000) draws special attention to the individuals’ rights and ‘recognises and respects access to services of general economic interest as provided for in national laws and practices’ (EC, 2000, art. 36).

This reference to national situations is rooted in the initial rather loose definition of Services of General Interest by the European Commission in 1996 (CEC, 1996) with the importance of Services of General Interest in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> Insight into related theories of public goods is provided by the works of e.g. Buchanan (1968), Buchanan and Tollison (1972, 1984), Marmolo (1999) and Kaul and Mendoza (2003).

European Model of Society and to Cohesion also being addressed here. In 2003, the European Commission launched a Green Paper, addressing the grand version of ‘Services of General Interest’ (CEC, 2003) with the main message that it is left to the Member States and their policy design to finally specify which services are to be understood as Services of General Interest and which are not; in individual cases however the European Court of Justice is in a position to interpret the Treaty and thus the general character of the particular service in question.

The White Paper 2004 (CEC, 2004), following the Green Paper, finally introduces the term ‘Social Services of General Interest’ and refers to it as an integral part of the European Model of Society.<sup>2</sup> Even though no exhaustive definition is given by the European Commission, social service domains of health care services, child care and long term care services, social housing, labour market services, training and educational services, social security and social insurance schemes are all recognized as Social Services of General Interest (CEC, 2007). These above-mentioned domains of Social Services of General Interest can be of economic as well as non-economic character in national contexts but definitely should ‘respond to vital human needs, in particular the needs of users in vulnerable position’ (CEC, 2007, p. 7).

Summarizing the communications of the European Commission and in particular the White Paper 2004, there are clearly several standards associated with the provision of Services of General Interest. Taking the above-mentioned documents as the starting point, five consecutive standards are postulated with a view to delimiting the full provision of Services of General Interest: availability/security, accessibility, affordability, quality and choice/variety. Services need to be (S1) available and provided on a secure basis for the users. There needs to be (S2) fair access to these services in a territorial sense as well as in a monetary sense – i.e. (S3) affordable pricing. Furthermore, citizens have the right to demand (S4) services of quality and services which respond to their needs and, in the best case, (S5) have the opportunity to choose from a variety of similar services. The relative importance of these five standards of service provision decreases constantly from S1 to S5. Furthermore, they each relate more or less to a social and to a territorial dimension, when it comes to service provision. In this respect, accessibility is primarily a territorial matter while affordability and quality is more a social question.

The political and normative problems associated with defining Social Services of General Interest are unlikely to be resolved in the near future though several interesting features of the debate are now clearly discernible. While Social Services of General Interest are rooted in national political contexts and thus are not fully exposed to market rules they do nevertheless require that fair provision is made for all citizens. Regardless of the concrete domain, the organization of Social

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<sup>2</sup> A thorough elaboration of the term ‘European Model of Society’ with a territorial perspective is provided by Faludi (2007).

Services of General Interest needs someone to produce, someone to finance, someone to be responsible for and someone to deliver them. In an empirical study, Humer, Rauhut and Marques da Costa (2013) apply and sub-divide these four attributes. For (O1) the source of production of a service and (O2) the financing of a service we have the complementary options of public, familial/voluntary and/or private commercial. (O3) The main level of public responsibility over a service can be located at the national, regional and/or local tier, or if missing, it is left to the individual level and then outside of public responsibility; e.g. responsibility for certain care services that is mainly addressed within the context of traditional family ties or households. Finally, the mode of delivery is expressed by (O4) the territorial organization of a service, which can be more explicit, only implicit or even missing. These four attributes of organization are situated within social and territorial policies and thus influence the performance of the five standards of service provision (see figure 1).

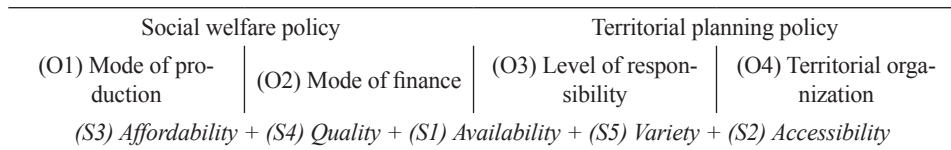


Fig. 1. The organization of Services of General Interest: four attributes relating to social and territorial policies

Source: authors' elaboration

The discussion on standards of provision and attributes of organization highlights the link to social and territorial aspects. This is then addressed in the framework context of social welfare and spatial planning systems in the following.

## 2.2. Components and Types of Social Welfare Systems

‘Social welfare system’ is the framing term for the attributes and functions of social policies in a public sector context. This is not only meant in an additive sense, as the sum-total of individual policies but more, as Arts and Gelissen (2002, p. 139) interpret from the work of Gosta Esping-Andersen; ‘he defines welfare state regimes as a complex of legal and organizational features that are systematically interwoven’. Esping-Andersen’s *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) is commonly viewed as the most influential contribution to social welfare research, bringing the important work of Titmuss (1974) and Wilensky (1975) to a new level and setting the scene for what became a wave of mostly empirically but also some theoretical interventions. Abrahamson (1999), Arts and Gelissen (2002), Nadin and Stead (2008) and Matznetter and Mundt (2012) all review the

multitude of social welfare system typologies and methodologies that subsequently emerged from Esping-Andersen's seminal work. Despite the inevitable critics, his 'three-worlds' typology (Ireland and UK in a liberal/British type; Austria, Belgium, France and Germany in a conservative/Continental type; Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in a social democratic/Scandinavian type) still serves as the main reference point when discussing the features of a social welfare system.<sup>3</sup> With a little variation, authors like Ferrara (1996), Bonoli (1997), Vogel (2002), Alber (2006) and Sapir (2006) argue for a fourth, Southern European type – with Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. At the centre of attention here are the two components that stand behind Esping-Andersen's typology: the degrees of de-commodification and of stratification.

De-commodification is 'when a person can maintain livelihood without reliance on the market' (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 22). Originating from labour market theories, de-commodification is used in welfare system theories to approach the dichotomy of state and market power – complemented by the sphere of civil society/family/household – in assuring basic social needs and financing social services. Basically, two main policy models are to be distinguished. On the one hand, the Beveridgean model that aims at poverty prevention, and on the other, the Bismarkian model that focuses on the issue of income maintenance for employees (Bonoli, 1997). Beveridgean policy is characteristic of liberal and social-democratic welfare systems where most of the budget for social policies is collected through taxation. Bismarkian policy is applied in conservative-corporatist states, where social budgets are fed by employers' and employees' insurance contributions. As such, it is much more labour market and earnings-oriented.

This has an influence on questions of equality and re-distribution and leads to the second component of a welfare system: the degree of stratification – i.e. the degree to which social policy upholds the positioning of people within their social class. In Bismarkian policy the kinds of social benefits and services one is entitled to, and thus the level of stability and integration one enjoys, depends on one's participation in the labour market. Beveridgean policy is more universalistic in its approach seeking to minimising inequalities among citizens (Arts and Gelissen, 2002). Bonoli (1997, p. 356) quotes Maurizio Ferrara's idea of the coverage model, a two-type classification that speaks of universalist welfare states versus occupational welfare states.

Notwithstanding the 'how' of social welfare policies Bonoli (1997) recommends also investigating the 'how much'. In this respect, social expenditures – as a share of GDP – are the main indicator used in welfare typology building. Regardless of the policy settings outlined above the quantity of financial input is

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<sup>3</sup> Esping-Andersen himself has re-discussed single cases of his initial typology several times. E.g. he later constitutes a hybrid character for the Irish welfare system, being in between a liberal and a catholic based conservative regime (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

a crucial factor when discussing the organization of social benefits and services. The ‘how much’ does not necessarily coincide with the ‘how’ of welfare organization as the two strands of Beveridgean policy show, where liberal-oriented states have a much lower level of social expenditures than social-democratic states (Bonoli, 1997). To sum up, the ‘how’ points to the approach taken to policy design, the ‘how much’ to the level of input to social policies.

In addition to these two basic questions in respect of social welfare, a third question, namely, ‘what’ – which kinds of social policies are at stake – needs to be introduced. State expenditure and the funding of social benefits in general are regarded as the steering instrument of welfare policy. Five fields of welfare provision – the ‘what’ – can be distinguished. Following the ideas of the visionary British social reformer Beveridge (1942), Abrahamson (2005) lists five pillars of social welfare services by translating Beveridge’s five defined social risks – want, disease, ignorance, idleness and squalor – into five counteracting remedies – social insurance and assistance, health care, education, employment and housing. The first mentioned remedy assumes a special position by being the means by which the other remedies are received.

Together with the three questions on the focus and functioning of policies on services, a fourth question, the ‘why’, then goes into more detail and looks beyond the policies into the framing conditions of society, economy and territory – in which the organization and provision of services and respective policy choices take place. Socio-demographic conditions – e.g. ageing society – as well as macro- and micro-economic trends – e.g. financial crises, public and private capital – and territorial prerequisites – e.g. urban or rural areas of different density and connectivity – influence the activities and goals of welfare and planning policies.

So finally, the answers to the ‘how’, i.e. social policy principles, the ‘how much’, i.e. social public expenditures and investments in services, and the ‘what’, i.e. social benefits and various other services, express a state’s welfare system; and the ‘why’ allows for a reasoning to be made around the constraints and opportunities that can be derived from external megatrends.

### **2.3. Components and Types of Spatial Planning Systems**

The purpose of spatial planning can be summarized as a translation of public policy structures and goals on various tiers into the territory by ‘managing spatial development and/or physical land use’ (Duehr, Colomb and Nadin, 2010, p. 26). The constitutional, legislative and administrative structure of a state is seen as an important point of departure in terms of national spatial planning systems (Newman and Thornley, 1996; Larsson, 2006; Nadin and Stead, 2008). ‘National’ in this respect does not necessarily mean that spatial planning is predominantly a matter for the national governmental level but rather that the competences in

spatial planning follow the constitutional structure of a state and thus may also be situated on sub-national levels as well – e.g. as in Austria or Belgium. Newman and Thornley speak of five legal-administrative ‘families’ in Europe: *British* (Ireland and UK), *Napoleonic* (Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain), *Germanic* (Austria, Germany and Switzerland), *Scandinavian* (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) and *East European*. *The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies* (CEC, 1997) and its update (Farinos Dasi, 2007) go beyond this legal-administrative framework and offer the most detailed analysis of features of a spatial planning system by also including the roles of public and private sectors or the gap, in policy practice, between defined goals and planning. Four partly overlapping types of spatial planning result from this analysis. First, a ‘regional economic planning approach’ as e.g. identified for France; secondly, the ‘comprehensive integrated planning approach’ of the Nordic and German speaking countries; thirdly, a type of ‘land use management’ to be found in connection with the British planning style, and lastly, something which is termed ‘urbanism planning’ which is predominant in the Mediterranean countries (see CEC, 1997; Farinos Dasi, 2007).

Summarizing the elaborations of the EU Compendium (CEC, 1997) and Larsson (2006), the following components of a spatial planning system are at stake: (P1) legal-administrative structure, (P2) scope, (P3) general understanding and planning culture, (P4) principles and objectives and (P5) character of planning instruments.

(P1) The legal-administrative structure is a result of the general architecture of a state system and appears in three versions in European states. Unitary structures contain the primary competences on the national tier only. Certain operative processes and tasks may be devolved to the sub-national tiers but the major decisions remain to be taken at the national level. Authentic federal structures emphasize the competences of the regional tier which are complemented by processes on the national level by the coordinated actions of the regional authorities. Regionalized states are located between those two other ideal types and are characterized by the devolution of powers from the national to the sub-national level. Besides the spatial planning system, these grand structures also influence all of the sector policies of a state along its vertical dimension.<sup>4</sup>

(P2) The scope of a planning system then relates to the horizontal dimension and differs from narrow-to-broad concerning the level of involvement in sector policies and competences. In a narrow sense, spatial planning is about assigning and allowing uses for a certain plot of land. In a much wider sense however spatial planning is the territorially-based steering and coordination of a wide range

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<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion on unitary, federal and regionalised states and their tiers of planning power see also Balchin, Sykora and Bull (1999).



of policy fields and sectors. Furthermore, planning systems can be understood within a range encompassing continuity-to-flexibility. Continuity-based systems perform in a more stable and secure but also more static fashion while flexible systems allow for quicker interactions and a lighter regulatory touch; the latter being greatly appreciated by the market sector as well as by the lower tiers of the planning structure.

(P3) In addition to the institutional framework the general understanding of planning – or, in other words, the culture of planning – allows a further distinction to be made between spatial planning systems. Friedmann (2011, pp. 167) ‘propose[s] to define planning culture as the ways, both formal and informal, that spatial planning in a given multi-national region, country or city is conceived, institutionalized, and enacted’. Knieling and Othengrafen (2009) combine features of culture and planning into a model that perceives underlying aspects of the societal and planning environments as impacting components on planning artefacts such as the outcomes, structures and processes of planning.

(P4) The principles and objectives of a planning system sketch the practice of planning and are influenced by their respective planning cultures. These principles set out how a spatial planning system should actually function, namely, how decisions are taken, to what extent actors from state, market and private sphere participate and which broader paradigms – such as sustainability – are followed. This is connected to the definition of objectives; which is closer to the operation of spatial planning. Content-related questions of land use, accessibility or socio-economic interventions are tackled and answered in particular cases and for particular addressees.

(P5) Planning instruments are there to set planning objectives into operation – by following planning principles. The character of planning instruments can vary and can be described within the range represented by abstract-to-detailed, binding-to-voluntary and regulative-to-open. Instruments of higher tiers have a tendency to promote rather long-term perspectives. Generally, the more concrete the territorial focus and/or shorter the time line of a planning objective, the more operative the instruments used. Irrespective of the level and timeframe of a planning intervention, binding or rather non-binding plans and instruments can be processed. This characteristic is instead in relation to the division of policy competences and the range of influence of spatial planning in the whole policy arena. While instruments of a regulative character attempt to delimit activities, more openly designed instruments try to offer incentives. Both approaches are nevertheless supposed to steer and control spatial development, though within the context of different modes. The predominant instruments, however they are characterized, within a spatial planning system are always closely connected to the administrative structure and to the scope of the system.

This outline of the components and characteristics of spatial planning systems unfolds in a strong relation to the overall policy arrangements of a state. Empirically, the types of state, across both the welfare and the planning systems, undoubtedly overlap.

#### **2.4. Overlap between the Social Welfare and Spatial Planning Systems**

The grouping in Esping-Andersen's (1990) three worlds of welfare capitalism – and to a greater or lesser extent its variations from other authors – is broadly similar to the administrative-legal families of Newman and Thornley (1996), in which spatial planning systems are embedded. This is explicitly the case for the British and Scandinavian political areas. The conservative-continental welfare model is in large parts equal to the Germanic, and in the cases of Belgium and France, also the Napoleonic family. The latter grouping is perhaps more attached to the Southern European welfare regime initially proposed by some of Esping-Andersen's critics.<sup>5</sup> The EU Compendium's (CEC, 1997) type of British land use planning coincides geographically with the liberal welfare systems while countries exhibiting the urbanism planning tradition coincide with Southern European welfare systems. Continental and Scandinavian types are closer to each other in the EU Compendium (CEC, 1997) than in the purely welfare and administrative-legal oriented typology (Newman and Thornley, 1996) but basically follow a similar grouping. In a more conceptual sense a strong connection between the social welfare and the spatial planning systems can be postulated in geographical and political realities, not only in a static sense but also in an emergent one. Indeed, as Nadin and Stead (2008, p. 44) note, '[t]he changes in spatial planning closely reflect the trends in various recent welfare reforms (e.g. social security, labour market policy, healthcare and immigration)'.

### **3. ANALYSIS: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST, SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEMS AND SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEMS**

In this section, the connections and interdependencies between Social Services of General Interest, social welfare systems and spatial planning systems are discussed on basis of the above-mentioned components for the five pillars of social

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<sup>5</sup> Nadin and Stead (2008) provide a comprehensive overview and exhaustive listing of states into the various typologies of social welfare systems and spatial planning systems. They also develop arguments for a stronger interrelation to be drawn between the two systems primarily through their discussion of the cases of England and the Netherlands.

welfare. In the case of Social Services of General Interest the components are (O) the four attributes of organization and (S) the five standards of provision. In the case of social welfare systems these are the four questions of ‘how’, ‘how much’, ‘what’ and ‘why’. In the case of spatial planning systems these are (P) the five components of structure, scope, understanding, principles/objectives and instruments.

As noted previously, a social welfare system is a complex of systematically interwoven legal and organizational features while a spatial planning system essentially places public policies into a territorial dimension. In other words, a spatial planning system acts as the transmitter of social welfare policies into the territory. Here, the five welfare pillars – the ‘what’ – will serve as the fields of public policies, in which both policy systems interact on three stages. The argumentation in the following is that Social Services of General Interest can be described as the substantiation of the connected policy designs of a social welfare system and a spatial planning system. This is manifest in three stages of connection. (C1) Since it is up to the individual EU member states which services are ultimately defined as being of general interest, the decision is shaped by the respective systems in the different strategic-political approaches of state-exclusive or shared sovereignty in the organization; i.e. the question of ‘how’ in production, finance, responsibility and delivery. (C2) All five welfare pillars – social insurance and assistance, health care, education, employment and housing – can be found on the sector-political agenda of welfare and planning policies though often each has a different emphasis and a different relative importance. (C3) Furthermore, the provision of Social Services of General Interest is shaped by the operational approaches in terms of meeting the five postulated standards of provision under different framing conditions.

### **(C1) First Stage of Connection: The Strategic-Political Stage Defining the Attributes of Service Organization.**

Referring to figure 1, the principle organizational questions, the ‘how’ of a welfare system – i.e. the production and financing of services – and of an administrative planning system – i.e. the level of responsibility and territorial organization – are in the centre of attention during this first stage.

The sources of production and finance lie within the triangle of public authorities, familial/voluntary fulfilment and private commercial activities. Regarding social welfare systems therefore the question of the production and financing of Social Services of General Interest is a matter of the level of de-commodification. In a system with a high level of de-commodification – with an ideal-type of a social-democratic system as a prime example – the state finances services to a vast extent without reliance on the market and without transferring obligations to the individual; this of course implies low individual contributions but high taxation. The actual production of services then may also be fulfilled by the state directly or

in a more liberal system – the British way according to the literature – in partnership with private institutions. Universities and other tertiary education facilities may serve as an example. The sources of funding and the ways of operating for this kind of service differ significantly across Europe.

The two other attributes of the organization of Social Services of General Interest – the level of responsibility and the territorial organization of delivery – are closely related to the administrative-legal prerequisites and instruments of a spatial planning system. The administrative level at which the responsibility is located, is primarily a consequence of the state's structure – be it unitary, federal or regionalized – and secondly a consequence of the rank of centrality of a service that is to be defined in terms of the spatial planning objective. Responsibility over services of ubiquitous demand and therefore rather low centrality – like child care – generally lies within the local level while responsibility over services of higher centrality – like tertiary education – lies with the national or regional level. How explicitly spatial planning is involved in structuring the delivery of services in a territory depends on the state's understanding of spatial planning and the character – regulative or open, abstract or detailed, binding or voluntary – of the applied instruments. E.g. in some European states it might be the case that the decision on locations for labour market services are derived from spatial plans but in some cases the respective sector ministry might not act on the basis of spatial planning instruments but on own rationalities.

### **(C2) Second Stage of Connection: The Sector-Political Stage Defining the Relative Importance of Services.**

The scope of a spatial planning system can to a large extent be derived from the fundamentals of the referring social welfare system. Given the wider scope of planning, the five pillars of social welfare – social insurance and assistance, health care, education, employment and housing – can be seen as objectives of the spatial planning agenda. For the latter four – service-related – pillars, territorial presence is evident through facilities and installations, as well as questions of accessibility to, and connectivity between, these services. The first pillar of social insurance and other beneficial transfer schemes is somewhat detached from this direct planning focus due to its lack of a physical-territorial character but, as noted previously, is decisive in supporting the services entailed in the four, territorially specific, welfare pillars. Moreover, this pillar influences the socio-economic potentials and opportunities of society and thus it indirectly becomes a matter of spatial planning.

The volume of public expenditure and other investments made in respect of services is an indicator of the importance of a service within a state. Since money is a limited resource the funding of various services has to be decided on the basis of a comprehensive, sector-political agenda with some services seen as being, relatively speaking, of greater importance than others. E.g. social housing is a service that receives great attention in some European cities and states while in other it barely

exists. Similarly, this is the case for e.g. care services and other social welfare pillars. This finds expression in the number, density and equipment of service locations and also in the attention some service sectors get on the spatial planning agenda.

**(C3) Third Stage of Connection: The Operational-Political Stage Defining the Standards of Service Provision.**

The notion of different socio-economic opportunities introduces the third stage of connection. Questions of equality and redistribution in a social welfare system do influence spatial planning principles; i.e. the premise under which spatial planning is undertaken. Concretely, this addresses the principal levels of rights and duties of the public side in relation to the level to which the private sector and civil society are supposed to participate in service provision. Similar to the rationale of de-commodification in social welfare systems, spatial planning systems differ to the extent to which residual power is left to private forces. Spatial planning objectives may then either support or counteract the level of stratification of a society whether the objectives address rather selectively certain groups or are set out more inclusively. This has a direct impact on the five standards of service provision: availability/security, accessibility, affordability, quality and choice/variety.

So, the operational-political orientation of social welfare systems and spatial planning systems is important when it comes to the five standards of service provision. Accessibility to services in a physical sense is a matter of spatial planning in two ways. First, the location of services is one of the main issues and second, the connectivity of users to these locations is important. Accessibility in a socio-economic sense is a question of the level of stratification, namely, whether there is universal or selective access for society to services. E.g. there may be restricted entitlements for social housing or for receiving certain care services. The variety and choice offered by different providers of the same kind of service is closely connected to the question of accessibility but also to the way in which services are produced and thus to social welfare systems as well. In more market influenced service provision it may be that different providers at the same time try to satisfy the needs of users with similar services, thus increasing the level of variety in terms of service providers. E.g. in the case of compulsory schooling users may choose between state or private providers, according to their entitlements and opportunities.

The impact of the social welfare system is seen in relation to the standards of secured availability, affordability and quality. The first is the most basic standard of a Service of General Interest rendering obligations *per se*, at least in the case of market failure, on the state. Affordability and the quality of services is, on the one hand, a question of investment and financial benefits, and thus a state question, and on the other, a question of competitiveness and efficiency in production, and thus a market question also.

Notwithstanding the conception and method of delivery in respect of the provision of services, all such services need to respond to external megatrends. The socio-demographic structure of a state requires specific solutions while territorial

preconditions demand regionally targeted solutions – e.g. providing accessibility to services is a more difficult task in peripheral rural areas and the demand for certain social services depends on the age structure of a society. In addition, the economic potential of households and service users must also be taken into account in order to ensure the satisfactory provision of services. Here, special attention may be given to economically limited parts of society through financial reliefs.

At each stage, it is the social welfare system that takes a framing role while the spatial planning system adopts an integrative role. Both systems receive content and a kind of substantiation through their shared objective which is the organization and provision of Social Services of General Interest.

**4. DISCUSSION: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCHING ‘SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST’**

The analysis above highlights the significant impact of social welfare systems and spatial planning systems on Social Services of General Interest when (C1) organizing and (C2) prioritising them; and when (C3) going into operationally-based details of standards of provision. Figure 2 visualises the three stages in which social welfare systems and spatial planning systems are substantiated through Social Services of General Interest.

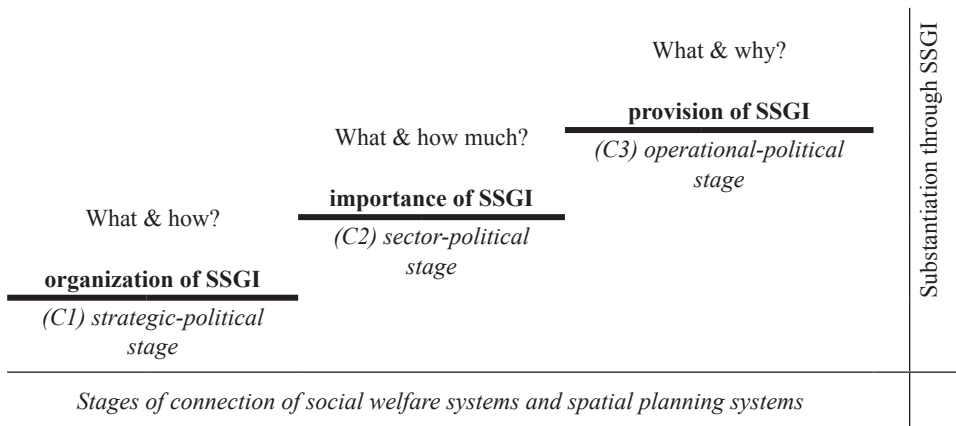


Fig. 2. Stages of connection and substantiation of Social Welfare Systems and Spatial Planning Systems through Social Services of General Interest (SSGI)

Source: authors’ elaboration

The main ideas of discussion result in a conceptual framework that offers three different stages of analysis in respect of Social Services of General Interest. Social welfare systems and spatial planning systems are strongly connected and interrelate with each other in a sense that the former provides the framework while the latter transmits these framing principles into the territory. This connection is made in three stages – strategic-political, sector-political and operational-political. The constitution of Social Services of General Interest as a substantiation of the two connected systems is shaped in each of these stages. In the first stage of political strategies, the organization of Social Services of General Interest is defined. In the second stage of sector policies, a relative weighting of political importance is given to the various Social Services of General Interest taken from the five welfare pillars. In the third stage of operationalization, concrete character is given to the provision of Social Services of General Interest according to standards of availability/security, accessibility, affordability, quality and choice/variety.

How far do these three stages form an analytical framework encapsulating the term ‘Social Services of General Interest’?

Stage 1 – asking about the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ – provides a framework within which we can analyse the policy approaches in respect of Social Services of General Interest from a macro perspective. Comparative studies between states’ service organization along the four attributes of production, finance, responsibility and territorial organization (see figure 1) can help to uncover certain types of policy forms.

Stage 2 – enquiring about the ‘what’ and the ‘how much’ – proposes a quantitative statistical analysis of expenditures on Social Services of General Interest as well as on the attributes of service locations such as number, density and equipment. At this analytical stage of the relative importance of services, again, comparative studies on the local, regional, national or other scale can be conducted in a territorial sense and/or between different services in a socio-political sense.

Stage 3 – concerning the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ – introduces the possibility of analyzing case studies and practices in respect of the provision of Social Services of General Interest under specific framing socio-demographic, economic and territorial conditions. This stage of the analysis can take the outcomes of the initial stages of the framework as background information, goes more in-depth and allows for the drawing up of policy recommendations for specific operational features of service provision, referring here to social welfare policy options as well as spatial planning concepts and instruments.

## 5. CONCLUSION: SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST AS THE SUBSTANTIATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEMS AND SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEMS

Coming back to the questions raised in the introduction, it is clear that components of both the social welfare and spatial planning systems shape the organization and provision of Social Services of General Interest. Understood as the five welfare pillars (the ‘what’) Social Services of General Interest are an objective and a substantiation of the social welfare and spatial planning systems. From the social welfare policy perspective, production and finance shape service organization (the ‘how’), while from the spatial planning perspective, it is the level of responsibility and the territorial organization that are key here. Through financial means and policy instruments, a relative and differing measure of importance is assigned to various sector services (the ‘how much’). Social welfare and spatial planning policies thus need to respond to external socio-demographic, economic and territorial megatrends and therefore service provision finds different expressions in operation (the ‘why’). Taken together, these three stages – strategic-political, sector-political and operational-political – provide a framework that allows us to analytically grasp the complex notion of ‘Social Services of General Interest’ within different methodologies and for different research purposes.

So the added value provided here is a conceptual framework, which is a necessary asset to continue with empirical, evidence-based analyzes. In further consequence, promising policy recommendations may be derived and the potentials of the policy instrument ‘Social Services of General Interest’ towards positive societal development better deployed.

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