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A *responsible* welfare state: individual responsibility as the new rationale of the welfare state

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Introduction

The research project focuses on the concept of individual responsibility and its relationship to the Western welfare state. Indeed, it will be argued that from the 1980s onwards, individual responsibility became a core element of many reformed welfare policies in many Western, and especially European, countries. Of course, this is not an isolated phenomenon, but it is inscribed in a broader process of individualisation of western society (Bauman, 2013). The turning point coincides with the end of the huge economic growth that characterised the post-war period. From then on, a profound change in context led to the emergence of a new rationality. The globalisation of markets and the emergence of new international actors transformed people's social needs and the role of nation states. The welfare states, already fully developed in the post-war period, had at this point to adapt the existing system to the emerging new social needs, whilst concurrently experiencing a reduction in state funding. Neoliberalism was the economic and institutional theory that prevailed, offering a simple answer to be implemented in order to face the new scenario. The existing welfare state, developed in a period of economic growth and, above all, social and political expansion after the suffering of the war, was intended not only to help the least advantaged but also to guarantee as many social rights as possible to all. The market was the mechanism for the production of social goods, ensuring the mediation of the exchange between capital and labour, but when the mediation failed, the state intervened to socially regulate economic action; social insurance, social provision and social rights were intended to rebalance the system and enable everyone to participate fully in society (Garland, 2016). On the contrary, neo-liberal rationality blames state intervention for market failures which, if left free to operate, would regulate themselves (Friedman, 2020; Hayek, 2014). In a free market, all people would have the chance to find their role in society, and it would be distributed according to each person's merits. As a consequence, the role of the state should be as minimal as possible and focused on reintegrating people into the labour market. Indeed, those who are not able to achieve their position, if not because of external obstacles, are responsible for their situation because of a lack of effort

or other non-proactive behaviour. This rationality supported a transformation of the welfare state, a reduction in the funding of policies that should be directed to those who were "naturally" in need or to the benefit of the market. The existing welfare state was too generous and indiscriminate, with the result that many people relied on it and made little effort to get back into work.

These ideas have polarised the political debate to such an extent that they have been embraced not only by historically liberal political forces, such as the Conservatives and centre-right parties, but also by many left-wing parties. One of the most prominent examples is that of the New Labour Party in the UK, which in the 1990s challenged the Conservative Party on its ground by developing a third way between liberalism and socialism, with the aim of reconciling the "neo-liberal emphasis on economic efficiency and dynamism with a traditional left concern for equity and social cohesion" (White, 1998, p.17). Key concepts in this political theory are opportunity, responsibility and community, which is conceived as the space in which opportunity is guaranteed and responsibility is exercised (S. White, 2001). Opportunity is conceived as the real possibility of having access to all the basic goods that make a full life possible, and civic responsibility as the need for everyone to participate fully in the labour market and to be able to acquire, as far as possible, the means of subsistence through the market. The motto, well expressed by one of its theorists, is "no rights without responsibility" (Giddens, 1998, p.37). This is a fundamental statement which marks the difference with the previous conception of the welfare state and which places the Third Way close to the neoliberal theories. Indeed, for both approaches, one of the main problems of the welfare state is its imbalance on the side of rights. This would make the measures too easily accessible, with the consequence of discouraging people from applying themselves in the labour market. On the contrary, the new measures should rebalance this relationship by emphasising the side of duties or responsibilities that individuals should fulfil. The collective dimension of the welfare state, based on the idea of social rights, is being reduced and in its place the individual dimension is gaining in importance. Whether it is the neoliberal ethic of self-reliance or the new labour ethic of civic responsibility, individuals should first fulfil their responsibilities and only then have access to the measures of the welfare state. Today's uncertainty acts as an individualising force (Bauman, 2013), and the individual is fully responsible for all successes or failures. Responsibility is no longer a shared and reciprocal element, but is completely reduced to its individual dimension. Individual responsibility is then one of the core elements of the new rationality that has spread from the economic sphere to the other

spheres, first and foremost the political and institutional. It has therefore become a core element of the new welfare policies, which aim to differentiate people's situations according to their degree of individual responsibility and to favour access to welfare measures for those whose circumstances are due to factors beyond their control. The social dimension of causation becomes secondary, and outcomes are assumed to depend mainly on the choices and actions of individuals.

As a result, the conditions for access to measures are made more stringent and the target groups of beneficiaries are reduced. This means that citizens will find it more difficult to obtain state assistance and that those in need will receive less support, to the point where the very idea of social rights is threatened. In fact, it is no longer enough to be entitled to a right; in order to actually have access to the right, it is necessary to prove that one is deserving, i.e. that one is not responsible for the situation of need. A representative example of the new policies are the workfare measures that have become widespread since the end of the 20th century. These are policies that aim to reintegrate people into the labour market by introducing compulsory incentives to participate in training or job search programmes, with the loss or reduction of benefits if these programmes are not followed (Trickey & Lōdemel, 2001). The fact of being excluded from the labour market is no longer an outcome dictated by the system itself, but is seen as an individual fault. It is therefore up to the individual to resolve the situation. In this way, policies designed to support people who have left the labour market through no choice of their own (end of contract or dismissal) are transformed into a mechanism to maximise people's participation in the labour market and reduce their dependence on welfare as much as possible (Peck, 2001). Moreover, it is precisely the introduction and spread of workfare programmes at the end of the twentieth century that contributed to the strengthening of the trend towards conditionality within social assistance regimes (Trickey & Lōdemel, 2001).

A further step in this direction, although not yet implemented anywhere, would be the introduction of deservingness in the medical field. According to this view, even access to health care should, to some extent, depend on the degree of individual responsibility people have for their illness. Thus, if people suffering from lung cancer have smoked all their lives, they should pay for treatment even in a free healthcare system. The process of individualisation of society and the new role that individual responsibility has gained in welfare state policies have consequences not only on the concrete level, but also on the theoretical level. Indeed, in addition to the arguments that have been raised about the actual welfare policies and how they should work in concrete terms, mainly formulated in a

technocratic way, many thinkers have instead discussed the implications of the welfare state in terms of social justice, equality and solidarity (Garland, 2016). Among these, the egalitarian debate on social justice is particularly relevant for research. In many sociological works (see for example Esping-Andersen, 2002) it is possible to find references to egalitarianism as a theory that supports a justification of the welfare state in terms of fairness, claiming that inequalities in society are only acceptable if they do not violate the principles of fairness and are thus justifiable in terms of social justice. From a sociological perspective, however, a deeper analysis of the egalitarian debate is lacking and will be provided from a philosophical perspective. Surprisingly, there is a very similar trajectory between the development of the welfare state and that of egalitarian theory, which is based precisely on the concept of individual responsibility. In his work, the father of liberal egalitarianism Rawls developed the principles that he believed should guarantee the construction of a just society. A first principle guarantees rights and freedoms to all citizens, while a second, more important at this point because it is closely linked to the role of the welfare state in society, states that the only acceptable inequalities are those that make the worst-off groups in society better off than they would have been without them (Rawls, 2005). Thus, an unequal situation is preferable to a strictly equal one if the distribution of resources improves the conditions of the least advantaged. And this is what the welfare state mechanism does: it collects resources from everyone through taxation and redistributes them to those in need through welfare measures. However, starting with Dworkin (Dworkin, 1981a), many Rawlsian scholars have argued that an element is missing from the analysis, namely the proper consideration of the concept of individual responsibility. The criticism is that it would be unfair to redistribute resources to all people according to their level of need without taking into account their degree of responsibility for the situation they find themselves in. A distinction needs to be made between those people who find themselves in bad circumstances for reasons beyond their control, and those who find themselves in need as a result of choices they have consciously made. Thus, once equal opportunities have been secured for all, the way in which they are used is the responsibility of the individual, and redistribution is denied or reduced to those who are directly responsible for their conditions, since it is the result of their choices and actions.

The convergence around a renewed central role for the concept of individual responsibility in determining fair access to resource redistribution and state assistance is thus a major novelty both on the side of the welfare state reform process and on the side of the egalitarian debate on social justice. Highlighting this link would be one of the main

purposes of the research. In particular, a bridge will be built between the sociological debate on the welfare state and the philosophical reflection on social justice, in order to show the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches that emphasise the role of individual responsibility.

However, and this will be the purpose of the third part of the thesis, whether or not Western welfare states are generally moving towards systems with stricter levels of conditionality, regardless of different institutional histories or similarities in social security and social assistance provisions (Peck, 2001; Trickey & Lōdemel, 2001), on the more concrete ground of actual policies there still seem to be many differences between countries. According to Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen, 1990), the different Western countries can be associated with different welfare state ideal types on the basis of some major features both in terms of the policies implemented and the theoretical idea on which they are based. He identifies a liberal, a continental and a social-democratic regime. There is thus a conflict between the existence of regimes which have a major impact on the form and purpose of welfare states and the process of welfare reform which, on the contrary, tends towards convergence. It would then be interesting to understand at what stage this process of convergence is in each welfare regime, to see if it is well advanced or if instead regime differences still prevail. In particular, the analysis will focus on the concept of individual responsibility, to see how much and in what nuances this concept is present in the public discourses of politicians.

The thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter focuses on the sociological analysis of the new welfare state transformations that began in the 1980s, concerning increase in invidual responsibility. In the first section, the history of the welfare state is reconstructed in order to contextualise the novelties of the new idea of welfare compared to the previous ones. From the first social policies implemented in Prussia at the end of the nineteenth century, to their maximum expansion after the Second World War, to the current welfare states, there have been many changes both in the policies implemented and in the objectives set. This is an important first step in understanding the characteristics of the new welfare concept. The second section analyses the relationship between rights and duties in welfare policies. Indeed, one of the justifications for the welfare reforms is the need to rebalance an unbalanced relationship. In the Beveridgeian welfare state, the emphasis would have been too much on the side of rights and too little on the side of duties. The Marshallian conception of social rights as a fundamental component in guaranteeing full citizenship and access to social life and the consequences of the new emphasis on duties

are discussed. The third section then turns to the merits of the new welfare policies. It analyses the central role given to individual responsibility and how its meaning has changed in relation to the Beveridgean welfare state. Finally, the implications of this shift for actual policy are explored.

The second chapter focuses instead on the philosophical analysis of egalitarian theory and the role of individual responsibility in it. The first section examines Rawls's principles of justice to argue that they could provide the basis for justifying the welfare state. It is also shown that there is no account of individual responsibility in his theory. In the second chapter, the luck egalitarian theory is analysed. The differences with Rawlsian egalitarianism are highlighted and the central role of the concept of individual responsibility is explained. The third section analyses another account of egalitarianism, namely relational egalitarianism, in order to highlight the limitations of luck egalitarianism. Then, the fourth chapter considers the free will scepticism debate. Indeed, the fact that it is impossible to fully determine the extent to which decisions and actions originate in people's will or are instead strongly influenced by external factors calls into question the luck egalitarian claim of individual responsibility.

Finally, the third chapter focuses on empirical analysis. In order to understand the real impact that the new welfare concept has already had on the welfare state regimes, with a particular focus on the concept of individual responsibility, the public speeches of the Prime Ministers of Italy, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden are analysed. It is argued that the emergency situation of the pandemic forced the individual countries to base their responses on the previous concepts, which at the time were related to the type of welfare regime to which one belonged. It is therefore possible to distinguish between countries that emphasised an active concept of responsibility and others that emphasised a passive one. The first section presents the theoretical framework, the second section explains the selection of case studies and the pandemic context of each country, and the third section explains the method of analysis and data selection. Finally, the fourth paragraph presents the analysis of the data and the conclusions.

1
Welfare state transformations, individual responsibility and conditionality

1.1 The historical evolution of the Western Welfare State

Our analysis focuses on what is considered to be the third era of the European welfare state[1]. As a result of the socio-economic changes of the 1970s, both material and theoretical, since the 1980s the Western welfare state underwent a period of major reforms which called into question its fundamental justification: on the one hand, the economic crisis has changed people's habits developed during previous period of growth; on the other hand, the spread of the neoliberal theories of the School of Chicago has also changed people's belief about society, the market and the role that the state should play in it. First with Thatcher and Reagan, then with Blair and Clinton a new paradigm was established, both in the public discourse and in the actual welfare policies. The aim was to *end welfare as we know it*, as Clinton put it in 1991.

However, the history of the welfare state is at least a hundred years longer, and it is impossible to understand today's welfare state without knowing how it has evolved over time. It is only by tracing its history and highlighting the main features of each period that it is possible to fully understand these changes, which were not only driven by material necessities but were also the result of a theoretical shift. The history has generally been devided into three main periods or eras, defined by different conceptions of the objectives of the welfare state and by different mechanisms and policies. Indeed, as the social context changed, so did the policies and the idea of the welfare state itself, in order to meet the demands that arose from time to time according to the prevailing socio-political beliefs (Béland et al., 2021).

1 In this first part of our analysis focuses on the history and evolution of the European welfare state considered as a whole. Even if differencies between countries obviously exist - they will be analysed them in the last chapter of this work, our interest here is to show the traits that generally characterize the different welfare eras. There is a need to specify that the US are normally included in the analysis and all the ex-sovietic countries are instead excluded.

The history of the welfare state is relatively new, usually traced back to the period between 1878 and 1881 when Prussian Prime Minister Otto Von Bismarck introduced the first social insurance programmes (Palier, 2010; Stolleis, 2013). The reasons of their introduction are linked in various ways to the industrial revolution and the spread of the capitalist economy. Rapid industrial development reshaped the society; many people began to work in the new industries, changing their lives and the structure of the cities. The new organisation of work has created new opportunities, but also new needs and social risks. The latter included, in particular, poor working conditions and the insecurity to which workers were exposed. In fact, there were no alternatives in the event of inability to work, whether due to injury, illness or old age, with the consequent risk of lack of income. Moreover, with many households having only one income earner, the risk of falling into absolute poverty was real.

The 19th century in Europe was also characterised by the emergence of the working class movement, obviously a direct consequence of the new social structure and working conditions. Ideologies such as marxism and socialism questioned the existent organisation of society, moving both material and ideal claims and demanding better material conditions but also a different division of power and organisation of society. In short, the emerging new social risks and needs were brought to the attention of the whole society. But while some scholars have seen the new social policies as the direct result of this class struggle (see for instance Saville 1957), most agree that its role was mainly indirect. Indeed, the new policies have been a successful top-down attempt by the elites to maintain their leadership and soften the demands for change coming from the emerging working class. As Palier put it, it was not a victory of the working class but an initiative of the government "to guarantee social peace by building cross-class compromises" (Palier 2010, p.38). The ultimate goal was to mantain the *status quo*, keeping the masses under the authority of the ruling elite. In Machiavellian terms, the intent was to "step up the repression of social democratic movement with the activation of "positive" measures" (Stolleis, 2013). Moreover, those were years of positivist impulses that promoted a scientific approach to all knowledge, contributing to the development of the new scientific disciplines which fostered the possibility to solve social issues in a systematic way (Althammer et al., 2014). Therefore, the implementation of social policies, able to cover some worker's needs, was believed to help reaching the aim. The institutional environment was also favourable to the development of new policies. Indeed, at the end of the 19th century, Germany was a newborn state and the ideals on which it had been built still had great strength.

Parliamentary democracy and the rule of law provided a strong impetus for the institutionalisation of state support for the most vulnerable members of society. Among its new tasks was the promotion of social equality among citizens (Edling, 2019).

Overall, however, these first welfare policies had a different meaning from the common understanding of the welfare state (Petersen & Petersen, 2013). The term is usually used to refer to the post-war welfare state, which is mainly characterised by solidaristic and redistributive intentions. Along these lines, Briggs' famous definition of the welfare state is that the welfare state is "an organized power deliberately used in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three directions" (Briggs 1961, p.35). The three directions are to guarantee a *minimum* income to all individuals and families no matter what, to enable all individuals and families to cope with certain social contingencies and, finally, to ensure the best possible standards for all citizens. It is important to note that this definition not only describes the *minimum* characteristics of a social service state, but also points out that the welfare state should always strives for the *optimum*, seeking to guarantee the higher standards available to everyone. On the contrary, the first welfare measures were implemented for very different purposes. They had no solidaristic aim, but rather reactionary ones, that is to preserve the power of the elites (Baldwin, 1990). Therefore, they do not change the distribution of money or resources in society in any way, but the sole aim was to secure people's position in the labour market and their income (Palier, 2010). The potential beneficiaries themselves are the ones who finance the measures, since the workers, through compulsory payments, contribute to the fund from which those in need could receive benefits.

Moreover, this first implementation of welfare state was very narrow compared to the post-war one. It was very limited, mainly covering specific risks affecting only a part, albeit a large parte, of the population, namely the working class. Therefore, labour was the main element able to provide, through income, the resources necessary to satisfy people's needs. In this system, social measures were only a residual part, covering only extreme situations. This is a very important element, not only to understand historically the emergence of the welfare state, but especially the reasons for the mechanism chosen and the difficulties that some welfare policies are experiencing today. Bismarck's social policies were, in fact, social insurances, which included sickness insurance for workers, accident insurance law and old-age and invalidity insurance (Stolleis, 2013). As with any other form of insurance, social insurance entails the payment of a specific sum per individupal, thus enabling the individual to access benefits in the event of necessity. In instances where the worker is

temporarily incapacitated due to illness or injury, or permanently unable to work as a result of an accident, disability, or advanced age, the resulting income shortfall would be addressed and compensated by the state. All insurance policies are based on the premise that the risks covered by the policy are rare. The financial viability of the system is ensured by the principle that if the financial burden of the fund is shared by all, only a small proportion of the population will actually claim benefits. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the current crisis affecting pension systems in many European countries. This crisis can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that risks which were once considered rare have now become commonplace. Indeed, at the end of the 19th century, life expectancy was so low that only a small proportion of workers lived long after reaching the retirement age; today, the opposite is true, with only a small proportion of people dying before or just after the retirement age. As a result, the amount of money that each individual pays in is much lower than the money they will receive in retirement, undermining the sustainability of the whole pension system.

Of course, insurance was not invented at the end of the 19th century, but already existed at that time. The real change introduced by Bismarck was to make them compulsory for all workers, whereas before they had been optional (Palier, 2010). It was no longer an individual choice, but was made compulsory in order to guarantee a system that would always work for those in need. However, the implementation of such policies has not been driven by a cost-benefit approach, nor by altruistic sentiment, but only by a paternalistic will to limit the demands of the working class. Benefits were not yet seen as a right to which every citizen was entitled, but as a form of charity from the state (Baldwin, 1990).

The second period in the history of welfare state is characterised by the maximum expansion of the welfare state itself, when all three welfare mechanisms have been implemented. In fact, in addition to the social insurances, the social assistance and the social security mechanisms were also introduced. Many scholars trace the beginning of this period to the end of the Second World War. This period represented a favourable conjunction[2], a “continuous and rapid growth, achieved by technological innovation, rising productivity and full employment” which - according to Marshall - is “the main foundation of social welfare” (Marshall et al. 1992, p.59). Thanks also to the Marshall plans and a general influx of money to help with post-war reconstruction, this was a period of strong economic growth and high employment rates, to the point that has been defined the *trente*

2 In this regard, it should also be considered the impact that the European colonialism had on the economic growth and consequently in the development of welfare states. To explore the issue further please refer to (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2018).

gloriouses[3]. The war itself is believed to have played a fundamental role in the change, accelerating the pace of reforms (George, 2018). Moreover, it contributed to the formation of a sense of solidarity between citizens which facilitated the implementation of a welfare system that was not only insurance-based, but also aimed at redistribution and solidarity (Thane, 2016). In fact, the welfare state has been interpreted as a fundamental element of the post-war recostruction process, guaranteeing a minimum set of resources to everyone after the deprivations of the war (Edling, 2019).

However, other scholars have questioned the starting point of the period as coinciding with the end of the Second World War, arguing that the process leading to this new phase in the history of welfare began much earlier. Indeed, they point out that it was already in the period after the First World War that a series of new social policies began to be introduced in many countries. Therefore, according to this interpretation the period of introduction of innovative policies was longer, starting before the Second World War, and actually ending in 1950, when the comprehensive welfare state was finally completed (Béland et al., 2021).

In order to move beyond this debate it may be helpful to analyse the term *welfare state* historically and conceptually. Indeed, as Garland has shown, the term did not appeared in the UK until the early 1950s (Garland, 2016). This means that, although it sometimes appeared as a translation for the German concept of *Wohlfahrtsstaat*, the use of the term to refer to the new social policies only began when the welfare state as a system was fully formed. In addition, the concept was not unambiguous and was used by each actor according to its own objectives. In conclusion, the author identifies three main connotations of the term, which refer to different degrees of abstraction: the first meaning is the direct *empirical reference* to the new social services and institutions of social security; the second is the *political economy reference* to the new socio-economic order, which involved greater state intervention and planning in the market; finally, there is the *political reference* to the new type of state, based on a new social contract with citizens, grounded on the new social policies implemented. Thus, despite this divergence of opinion on the beginning of the new welfare era, there is agreement that the thirty years following the Second World War saw the welfare state reach its maximum expansion, to the point that this period has been called the “golden age” of the welfare state. Scholars also agree on the end of the period, which can be traced back to the years after the 1973 oil shock, which halted the huge economic growth experienced until then.

3 The term was coined by James Fourastié in 1979 to emphasise the thirty years between 1945 and 1975 of rapid economic growth but it was then widely used also by scholars of the welfare state to refer to the contemporary period of maximum extension of the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 2002).

Starting with the introduction of social insurances at the end of the 19th century, other mechanisms have been introduced over the years to cover other needs and risks of the population. While Germany and Bismark played a key role in the intproduction of the first welfare policies, the full development of the welfare state can be traced back to Britain and the figure of William Beveridge, to what has been called the *Beveridgeian era* of the welfare state. In fact, in 1942 he published a report on what he considered to be “the five giants on the road to reconstruction” (Beveridge 1942, p.5). Three were the guiding principles that inspired the report (Timmins 2017), both in terms of the context and the content of the new welfare policy. Firstly, althoug the wartime was terrible, it made room for a new beginning and gave the opportunity to implement something completely new, not just a patch to the old system. Secondly, the main aim of the new social security system was to tackle the five giants, first and foremost “want” through a guaranteed income, but also measures to combat disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. Finally, the new social contract established by the welfare state sealed a reciprocity between the state and the individual. The state provided a safety net, a minimum of resources as a right for all, and idividuals were left free to follow their own paths and achieve more than the minimum secured. More specifically, the Beveridgeian welfare state moved from a system of support limited to workers to an idea of social security for all citizens financed by the state (Boyer, 2021). A clear example of the new rationality is the introduction of the National Health Services, which is based on the idea that social risks include also those risks that regularly affect all citizens and which must therefore be protected by the whole of society and granted as a right to all. The community of risk has expanded to include the entire human community (Baldwin, 1990). Every individual is potentially exposed to certain social risks, and the state should be able to cover as many of them as possible.

Moreover, in the same years, Keynesian economic theory began to spread. Opposed to the neoliberal economic theories, it supported the intervention of the state in the economy, claiming the fundamental role of the state in ensuring economic stability through the the financing not only of policies that cover risks, but also of active public policies to support employment (Filho & Terra, 2012). The new era brought important changes, down to the very purpose of the welfare state itself (Alber, 1988). Initially, the welfare state was conceived as a set of measures to guarantee a minimum level (a *minima*) of provision for the marginalised groups of society. In fact, the scope of the social insurance schemes already analysed was to cover, through a system of contributions, only specific needs and risks of the working population. Rather, the new idea of welfare aimed to provide an

optimal level (an *optima*) of provision for all citizens, extending the coverage of social risks. In the beveridgean welfare state the approach to social insurance converged with that of social citizenship. Therefore, the welfare state should not guarantee only a very limited set of measures to cover specific risks arising from the very poor working conditions, but should constitute a composite set of measures able to cover as many risks as possible, affecting different social groups and different aspects of citizens' livpes. According to this view, then, the social insurance mechanism was insufficient to cover all the new social risks identified by Beveridge. This is why, in addition to the social protection mechanism, the social assistance and the social security mechanisms have been introduced, with the aim of providing more comprehensive protection to as many citizens as possible, and not to just a certain section of them. The social assistance mechanism has been and still is targeted at specific categories of citizens and it works through spelective processes to identify the population with similar characteristics, such as the poor. The difference with the social insurances is the method of financing, since it is not the beneficiaries who directly finance the measure. On the contrary, it is funded by general taxation. The logic behind this is that the risk covered by this mechanism is seen as something that is a consequence of the system itself and therefore, even if it only affects a part of the population, the whole population should contribute to it. Thus, poverty is considered to be one of the consequences of the capitalist system, and therefore the measures to help the poor should be financed by the contribution of the whole of society, that is from taxes. It also has a redistributive effect, bringing money to the poorest part of society.

Instead, there is another logic behind the introduction of the social security mechanism. This family of social policies is aimed at all citizens without distinctions, since the risks it seeks to cover are considered to be in everyone's interest. Again, a clear example is the establishment of national and universal – as accessible to all - healthcare systems. Sickness is indeed a risk to which everyone is exposed, and therefore the policy that covers it must be financed by general taxation and directed to averyone who needs it. So social security is therefore conceived not only for a specific part of the population but for society as a whole, in the belief that by helping people in need, it would also promotes national prosperity. It aims to address the full range of risks affecting society in positive and creative terms, ensuring that people have the opportunities and means to live a full life (George, 2018).

The analysis of different welfare mechanisms shows the many changes that took place between the first social insurance schemes and the fully implemented welfare systems of the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, the new mechanisms depend on a change in the very

idea of welfare and its objectives. If, in the Bismarckian era, the welfare state was conceived as residual compared to work, since it only covered risks directly linked to the lack of income, in the Beveridgeian era the welfare state it was conceived as an institution potentially able to address all the risks present in society, reaching different social spheres and groups. It went from being primarly focused on addressing the needs the working class to a comprehensive welfare state with the objective of ensuring the well-being of the entire population (Briggs, 1961).

At the theoretical level, there are many ideas that serve to justify the full development of the welfare state. First, there has been a change in the rationale of government, from supporting the *laissez-faire* liberalism to the idea that the state has a responsibility and therefore a role in supporting the lives of citizens (Garland, 2016). According to this view, the welfare state should be seen as a safety net, able to protect citizens from the social risks that are a natural consequence of the modernisation and the capitalist economy (Thane, 2016). Although the market is undoubtedly the institution that mediates human interaction and guarantees economic growth through social cooperation, it can also sometimes fail. The state therefore has a responsibility to rebalance these disruptive features and help those who end up worst off. In addition, through welfare measures, the state is able to intervene and change the course of the market to the benefit of society as a whole (Freeden, 2003). Indeed, it was believed that the inequalities that plagued society could be eliminated (Thane, 2016). There was extreme confidence that it was possible to liberate every citizen from the Beveridgeian “want”. Clearly, the strong economic growth experienced at the time was an important element in supporting this optimism. Social insurances are designed to be a simple alternative to the earned income, and those who benefit from them do so because extremely in need. Social assistance and even more social security mechanisms are instead designed to help people not only to survive, but also to guarantee the means for a full development of their talents and will.

In addition, following the conclusion of the Second World War, the conceptualisation of human rights as a universal entitlement constituted a pivotal catalyst in the development of a comprehensive welfare state. Indeed, the acknowledgement of social needs as human rights, categorised within the domain of social rights, provides a further significant basis for the establishment of a system that encompasses the coverage of social risks for all members of society. Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail in the second paragraph, Marshall's analysis of social citizenship included social rights among the fundamental elements of citizenship (Marshall et al., 1992).

Much began to change from the oil crisis of 1973, which marked the end of the economic growth experienced since the end of the Second World War and the beginning of a period of stagflation and fiscal constraints for the states. As a result, the welfare state, whose huge expansion had benefited from the financial capacity of the post-war period, is from now on under pressure. Accordingly, the belief in the possibility of infinite growth came to an end, as it did the idea of the state as a power capable of reconciling the expansion of the market with intervention in social policy. On the contrary a renewed trade off between economic efficiency and equality emerged (Béland et al., 2021).

Given the chaged context, both policy-makers and welfare state researchers, albeit for different reasons and purposes, agreed that the Beveridgeian welfare state was no longer able to cope with the new challenges. Moreover, the new context allowed neo-liberal economic ideas to replace the keynesianism that had been strong during the previous welfare era (Friedman, 2020; Hayek, 2014). According to them, the economic crisis is not due to the market mechanism, but rather to the excessive government intervention that has altered the natural functioning of the market. As a result, neoliberals argued that the centrality of the market should be reaffirmed by leaving it free to operate and self-regulate. Moreover, on a concrete policy level, this neoliberal logic of austerity, which implied a reduction in public spending, was politically attractive for governments (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017).

However, it must be emphasised that austerity measures have not only economic consequences, but also imply a general reduction of the role of the state as a social mediator, thus giving way to the privatisation and marketisation of society (Spicker, 2022). They supported a negative idea of the state (Hemerijck, 2012) that should intervene as little as possible. As a result, the welfare state was also seen as an unnecessary expense. It was no longer considered as the institution capable of guaranteeing the equilibrium of the system by correcting market distortions, but as one of the elements that altered the equilibrium of the market and contributed to its failure. To say it in Alber's words "welfare state critics usually charge that the state schemes impede economic productivity and jeopardize individual freedom, while fostering social security only ineffectively" (Alber 1988, p.467). Therefore, the welfare state should have been re-imagined on every level, from the actual policies and measures to the very core of its nature. Driven by this idea, the conservative governments that emerged in the 1980s – notably Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US – introduced profound changes to welfare provision and to the very idea of the welfare state.

Thus, from 1979 to 1997, the Conservatives in power challenged the post-war welfare system, which was seen as costly and inefficient, and introduced active social security schemes to redress the perceived imbalance on the side of the rights, which did not take sufficient account of the responsibilities of recipients (Page, 2007). These plans were continued also by the more progressive governments that succeeded the Conservatives. The main example is New Labour in the UK, which, as anticipated in the introduction, sought to reconcile traditional left-wing values of equality and social justice with the neoliberal drive for a dynamic and efficient economy (S. White, 1998). However, the abandonment of traditional socialist goals in favour of neoliberal imperatives resulted in the implementation of welfare policies thato were more concerned with supporting the market, to which egalitarian values were subordinated (Page, 2007). Then, at the end of the 20th century, it is evident that the convinctions which had previously guided the development and expansion of the Beveridgean welfare state have now been relinquished by both neoliberal and progressive political forces (Kaufmann, 2012).

Clearly, the economic crisis and the spread of neoliberal ideas, while very important, were not the only factors determining change, but it was a combination of various exogenous and endogenous[4] factors that changed the context in which the welfare state had flourished. The former include the globalisation and internationalisation of markets and economies (Béland et al., 2021; Ferrera, 2008; Kaufmann, 2012; C. Pierson & Castles, 2006; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017); the change in the demographic composition of countries, determined by a double and intertwined phenomenon (Ferrera, 2008; Kaufmann, 2012; C. Pierson & Castles, 2006): on the one hand, there has been a decline in the birth rate, only partly offset by increased migration, and, on the other, there has been an ageing of the population; the increasing precarisation of the labour market (Hemerijck, 2012). The latter include the emergence of sovranational institutions, such as the European Union or the regions, to which nation-states have transferred some of their sovereignty; or the institutional organisation of the nation-state itself, which could be an obstacle to policy change, such as the difficulty of transferring money from one policy to another, or the phenomenon known as "path dependency". (P. Pierson, 2000).

4 It should be noted that the difference between exogenous and endogenous factors is sometimes referred to, in the literature, as either to the state as a whole or specifically to the welfare state. This leads to a difference in the allocation to one group or the other. for example, if we look at demographic change, it would be considered an exogenous factor with regard to the welfare state, but an endogenous factor if we look at the state as a whole. As the focus here is on the welfare state, the factors are assigned to the two groups in relations to the welfare state.

All these factors profoundly changed the context in which the Beveridgean welfare state developed. The increasing globalisation of markets has exposed both workers and companies to international competition, making it easier for them to move from country to country in search of better conditions. This will have a significant impact on their public finances due to the lack of tax revenues and will lead to increasing difficulties in financing social policy programmes. In addition, the emergence of transnational institutions and collective actors, which have gained the capacity to take decisions that go beyond the confines of national legal systems, has led to a crisis of governance in nation states, as the capacity to formulate effective social policy decisions has become significantly more difficult (Kaufmann, 2012). In addition, globalisation and the new trans-national actors also determined a shift in the relationship between different countries, leading to a greater degree of interconnectedness and interdependence. Ultimately, it has led to the emergence of a global perspective in which the world is increasingly perceived as a single entity bound by a common destiny. European societies are also undergoing demographic change, with an increase in the number of older people and a decline in the birth rate. This combination has an enormous impact on the pension system and the labour market, creating an imbalance in both. The exponential increase in the number of people reaching retirement age and spending many years in retirement will have a huge impact on the finances needed to cover this expenditure. In many cases, the simplest solution implemented by governments is to raise the retirement age. While this measure has a negligible impact on the pension system, it does have an impact on the labour market. The persistence of individuals in the labour force has a negative impact on labour turnover, exacerbating the challenges faced by younger people in securing employment. This is in addition to a labour market that is already undergoing important changes due to international competition and technological innovation. This change has also meant fewer guarantees, less security and more income insecurity for workers (Hemerijck, 2012). The result has been a reduction in available job opportunities, lower wages and an increased need for lifelong learning to keep up with constant change. Another important phenomenon affecting the labour market has been the transformation of gender and family relations. This, in turn, has affected the composition and size of households (Ferrera, 2008). As a result, the rigid division between the male breadwinner and the female carer that characterised the previous period began to break down. This shift has had a significant impact on the structure of the labour market, with increasing numbers of women entering or seeking employment.

The combination of these many drivers of change has had a profound impact on the structure of society and, consequently, on the welfare state. Indeed, as a result of the changes, new social risks and needs have emerged that are radically different from those previously considered (Béland et al., 2021). Consequently, in addition to the impact on the potential target population and on sustainability, there has been a need to develop new dimensions and sectors of welfare that did not exist before in order to cover the emerging new risks. The previous conception of welfare was seen as no longer able to cope with the new challenges and a new paradigm was needed.

Nevertheless, the existing literature does not reach a consensus regarding the implications of these changes and offers divergent interpretations. An important, albeit debated, interpretation is that which understands the transformations as welfare retrenchment. In a period of permanent austerity (P. Pierson, 2002), the generous measures that characterised the Beveridgean era had to give way to a season of cuts and narrowing of the welfare expenditures. According to this perspective, even if a degree of resilience is acknowledged, the process that characterises the European welfare state is marked by a progressive reduction in the social protection it guarantees (Starke, 2007). The new welfare measures were found to be comparatively limited in terms of both resources and the extent to which they addressed needs, in contrast to the Beveridgean welfare provisions. While retrenchment was perceived as a means of overcoming economic stagnation, it is evident that this approach, by reducing resources and restricting the beneficiaries, resulted in a reduction in the level of social security and an increase in social inequality (Béland et al., 2021). This interpretation has been contested by other researchers, as the analysis of the data does not demonstrate any indications of retrenchment (Greve, 2020). In reality, despite the extensive theoretical discourse surrounding the necessity for the reduction of welfare, the data on actual policies does not reveal any indication of such a retrenchment; rather, there is an increase in public expenditure over the years.

From this standpoint, the alterations in the extent and quality of the welfare state have been understood not as retrenchment, but as recalibration, modernisation, recasting or restructuring (Ferrera, 2008; Hemerijck, 2012). The idea is that all the changes should not be dictated by a desire to dismantle the welfare state, but to profoundly reorganise it so that it can respond to new social risks and needs. The new welfare measures should be calibrated to the new context. Sustainability and efficiency are therefore fundamental characteristics. At a more general level, however, the conditions created by this period of permanent austerity pose a dual challange that is difficult, if not impossible, to resolve. On

the one hand, the need to implement new policies capable of addressing new social risks; on the other hand, the need to ensure the economic sustainability of existing social programmes (Béland et al., 2021). With specific reference to the labour market, Ferrera (Ferrera, 2008) speaks of a trilemma between the variables of a high level of social equality, the level of employment and fiscal discipline, where only two of them can be achieved together. Moreover, with the fiscal constrainsts that followed the creation of the European Union, the trilemma became a dilemma between creating new jobs and maintaining equality. Faced with this trade-off between efficiency and equality, it seems that the only viable option is that of a profound restructuring of the welfare state. This trend can then be observed in all European countries, albeit at with different speeds and with different variations (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017).

It is clear that a shift is taking place, with some areas of welfare receiving less funding and others more. Many areas of social policy, especially those related to the labour market, are undergoing a change, mainly in the rationale behind their operation. Indeed, there has been the introduction of stricter conditionality and a shift towards active measures that require recipients to be proactive in order to access or maintain benefits. This shift in welfare policies is in line with the prevailing discourse that the previous welfare state was overly rights-based and that the changing nature of the labour market requires new responses in terms of benefits. The welfare state is no longer understood as an institution that aims to redress market inequalities and increase social justice through redistribution, but also as a productive factor (Busilacchi & Giovanola, 2023).

However, the idea of welfare as a productive factor and the emphasis on the activation of recipients do not have a univocal interpretation. On the one hand, they are in line with neo-liberal ideas that support the containment of welfare costs and the importance attached to the concept of individual responsibility. Ideas that, in practice, would determine an active approach to welfare measures, with greater targeting, selectivity and a general financialisation of social protection. On the other hand, a different perspective is offered by the social investment approach, which gained a growing consensus towards the end of the 20th century, to the point that it is now supported by many supranational actors such as the EU. The social investment welfare state should be able to reconcile the social inclusion and well-being of recipients with its own sustainability over time (Hemerijck, 2017). It can be described as a “capacitating and investment-oriented social policy” (Béland et al., 2021) that aims to increase capital stocks, maintain a fair work-life balance and promote inclusive buffers. The changing context also implies a change in the nature of social risks, which are

now less stable, less predictable and no longer linked to specific life stages. As a result, social provision should be more focused on securing the opportunities and means to develop the skills and talents needed to promote the integration of individuals into the labour market. Given the changes in the labour market, it is not only a question of initial opportunities, but support should continue throughout the life cycle. The emphasis on opportunities is aimed not only at enabling beneficiaries to lead independent lives and reduce welfare dependency, but also at reducing welfare expenditure and thus ensuring greater sustainability over time. A shift in rationale is evident: the "freedom from want" pursued by the Beveridgean welfare state gives way to the "freedom to act" pursued by social investment, which would make welfare recipients active participants in society and able to provide for themselves (Bagadirov, Hemerijck, Puertas Roig 2025).

Social investment distances itself from the neoliberal approach to welfare, which would completely flatten the economic dimension. Indeed, apart from the fact that welfare provisions should be reduced to a minimum and the market left to adjust, public spending on welfare is seen as an economic investment whose main task is to bring recipients back into the labour market. On the contrary, social investment would have a broader scope, not only limited to the economic sphere, but also aimed at guaranteeing the material and immaterial well-being of citizens. Social policies should focus more on risk prevention than on simply compensating for market failures through redistribution. The concept of need is understood as multifaceted, and therefore it is considered fundamental to provide each individual with the capacities that would allow them to have control over their lives. It also distances itself from the social democratic attempt to reshape the welfare state for the new context, the Third Way of New Labour. In contrast, social investment would focus more on skills and a broader notion of individual participation in society, whereas the Third Way emphasises a strict understanding of individual responsibility as the core element of the theory.

Given its characteristics, social investment would be based on a different normative vision, the principle of which is stepping-stone solidarity (Bagadirov, Hemerijck, Puertas Roig 2025). Social policies do not focus exclusively on income protection, but above all on the empowerment of individuals. The idea is that the state should not only intervene ex-post, redressing inequalities and helping those in need. On the contrary, it should intervene ex-ante, by enhancing citizens' capabilities to avoid deprivation in the first place. In the new context, ensuring social protection - as important as it is - is no longer sufficient to deal with the new social risks. The welfare state should then facilitate the reintegration of

beneficiaries into the labour market and reduce their welfare dependency, while respecting the changed social dynamics. However, the new welfare paradigm is not so clear and the claimed differences with the neoliberal approach or the Third Way are not so obvious. Indeed, if it is true that the emphasis is on empowering individuals by securing opportunities and capacities, it is also true that at the same time the importance given to reintegrating recipients into the labour market could be seen as a disengagement of the state from supporting citizens who should find the means and resources through the market. Therefore, as Busilacchi and Giovanola (Busilacchi & Giovanola, 2023) argue, social investment can be interpreted in two ways: "in a positive manner, as a tool to widen the range of citizens' social rights and increase their empowerment and capabilities, or in a negative and punishing sense, as a way to restrict social rights to deserving recipients". The same tension can be found in the concept of individual responsibility. Indeed, the revaluation of the concept as a core element of welfare policies is justified by its importance in encouraging citizens to participate actively in society, to take charge of their lives and to lead an autonomous existence. At the same time, however, the introduction of stricter conditionality in welfare policies and the need to distinguish between citizens who are responsible for the conditions in which they find themselves, and those who are not, can have negative consequences. In the following paragraphs, these implications will be analysed in order to show the risks of such an approach in different dimensions. It could indeed have consequences for the actual policies implemented and their ability to address social risks, but also for the very concept of social rights and the normative basis of the welfare state.

1.2 Rights and duties: from reciprocity to activation

As shown in the first chapter, the welfare state is not a granitic entity, but it changed in shape and especially in the normative ground over time. Three main periods or eras have been identified, each one linked to a precise idea of society and the role the welfare state should have in it. During the golden age, at its maximum expansion, the main goal of the welfare state was not only to protect people from what were considered the most important social risks, but also as a fullfilment of a right each citizen had. Indeed, in that period the idea of human rights was taking hold, also due to the International Declaration of Human Rights. This spread the idea that every individual had a number of conditions and states

that should be secured or provided based on the fact of *simply for being human*. Among these rights are those that guarantee people can meet their *basic human needs*. These are known as social rights and are supported by the welfare state, which would be the institution responsible for protecting these rights. So, providing everyone's basic needs is not an act of charity, but an obligation to respect people's rights (Wilensky, 1975). The right to a minimum set of resources, which are needed to survive, is a right owned by everyone. However, the relationship between social rights and the welfare state is not straightforward, and scholars have expressed different views on it. The main disagreement is about whether social rights should have the same legal status as other human rights, or whether they should have a different status because of their nature.

First of all, rights can be divided into groups depending on when they were first guaranteed (Vašák,1984)[5]. The first group includes civil and political rights; the second group includes economic, social and cultural rights; finally, the third group includes human rights that focus on environmental and development issues. Specifically, the second generation of human rights, among which are the social rights, emerged during the period of development of the welfare state (from the ens of the nineteenth century to just after the Second World War). However, this distinction doesn't tell us anything about the difference in nature of these rights, since it is only a division based on when they emerged. Instead, the establishment of a distinction in status between rights can be accomplished by examining their inherent characteristics. This process reveals that certain rights are to be prioritised over others. To illustrate, civil and political rights – otherwise termed *liberty rights* – are to be accorded a primacy over social rights. Consequently, the integration of social rights within the ambit of human rights is to be precluded (Cranston, 1983; Jones, 2013; Mclachlan, 2005).

The primacy of liberty rights over social rights is predicated on the former's universality, in that they apply equally to all citizens. In contrast, social rights are limited in application to specific categories of the population. However, this assertion may be subject to criticism. Historically, some social rights have been implemented with a universal logic, as demonstrated by the previous historical reconstruction. A case in point is the universal healthcare systems that are in place in numerous countries, which are intended for all citizens without exception. Conversely, there are civic rights that are not universal in

5 K. Vašák, *Pour une troisième génération des droits de l'homme*, Inaugural lecture, Tenth Study Session, International Institute of Human Rights, July 1979, now in C. Swinarski (ed.), *Studies and Essays on International Humanitarian Law and Red Cross Principles in Honour of Jean Pictet*, Martinus Nijhoff, L'Aia, 1984.

nature, such as the right to vote, which is exclusively reserved for citizens of full age (Pino, 2016).

Another alleged difference would be between positive and negative rights. Again, liberty rights would have a higher status because they would be negative rights, while social rights would have a lower because they would be positive rights. In general terms, this means that in order to respect negative rights, people should simply refrain from doing something, while in the case of positive rights they should do something instead (Narveson, 2001). Or, at the state level, it means that for the former states do not need to allocate any resources or apparatus, but that it is sufficient to implement a law, while for the latter laws are not sufficient and the states need to take other measures to make them effectively enforceable.

Nevertheless, this rigid dichotomy has been contested, with proponents of the argument contending that the delineation between positive and negative rights is not as unambiguous as it is often presumed to be (Shue, 2020). The assertion is that it is not straightforward to allocate liberty rights within negative rights or social rights within positive rights. This is due to the fact that no right exists that does not necessitate positive action for its protection. This is evident in the case of social rights, which necessitate the presence of resources and institutions to be effective, yet the same is true of any right, including liberty rights. Consequently, to ensure the preservation of individual freedom, it is insufficient to merely prohibit harm to others; effective institutions such as law enforcement and the legal system must be in place. Shue's further claims that every right requires duties in order to be fulfilled, thereby overcoming the distinction between negative and positive rights. Specifically, three duties are posited as guarantees of the fulfilment of a right: the first is to avoid depriving a person of some necessity; the second is to protect people from deprivation; and the third is to help them when they are deprived.

Finally, it has been argued that the content of social rights is indeterminate, rendering them non-justiciable (Nolan et al., 2009). The implementation of programmatic norms and rules is imperative for the enforceability of such rights; in contrast, the well-defined content of liberty rights renders them more readily enforceable in a court of law. However, this assertion appears to accentuate a distinction between rights that is not as pronounced as it might be perceived. It is posited that both liberty rights and social rights share a common form, being general rights that necessitate translation into more specific norms for effectiveness and justiciability. This assertion is further substantiated by the observation that all rights require the implementation of specific institutions for enforceability, as previously discussed in response to the claim that positive and negative rights differ.

Consequently, while all rights are present in declarations and constitutions, they are also all specified in national or international norms. This suggests that it is not possible to prioritise one family of rights over another according to their differences, and that the different categories of rights are not opposed to each other, but rather interdependent.

It is contended that there are no marked differences between liberty rights and social rights, but only between singular rights per se. In this instance, a double dimension of each right emerges: on the one hand, the formal definition present in declarations, and on the other, their substancial explanation in laws, necessary to make them practically enforceable. Furthermore, if it is true that all rights aim to have a material impact on people's lives, this is even more true of social rights. In particular, their objectives of protecting against social risks, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups, and of redressing social inequalities, find their justification in the principles of solidarity and equality, which are meaningless unless they are materially realised. According to these principles, social rights can be defined as "rights to public services (solidarity) aimed at preventing any material or vital deprivation (health, poverty, unemployment, etc.) from hindering the full human development of the person and his or her participation in the social life on the basis of freedom and equality (substantive equality)" (Pino, 2016).

As Berlin asserts (Berlin, 2002), political liberties can be expressed in two contrasting ways: in a positive sense, or in a negative sense. On the one hand, negative liberty is defined as the absence of interference from external sources, beyond a frontier that is always recognisable and which shifts over time. Conversely, positive liberty is defined as the capacity to achieve goals and to be autonomous and self-ruling. It follows that, if the fundamental rationale for human rights is the safeguarding of liberties, both perspectives must be considered. Defending negative freedoms and promoting positive freedoms are vital to ensure comprehensive protection of people's liberties.The defence of negative liberties is concerned with the enactment of legislation and the implementation of the institutions responsible for ensuring compliance. Conversely, the advancement of positive liberties emphasises the provision of resources and opportunities to individuals, empowering them to pursue their objectives autonomously. This perspective proposes the inclusion of social rights among human rights, with the objective of ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to freely develop their lives. Furthermore, as Sen posits, opportunity cannot be constrained to material resources alone; it must also be guaranteed the broader protection of the "opportunity to achieve valuable combination of human functionings" (Sen, 2004).

In this vein, other scholars have argued that social rights take primacy over all others, as they address the needs associated with a hypothetical right to subsistence (Beetham, 1995; Mancilla, 2019). Indeed, according to this perspective, the enjoyment of any other right is contingent upon the first securing of subsistence, thereby establishing social rights as a fundamental prerequisite (Lichtenberg, 2009). The fundamental purpose of social rights is to ensure that all citizens have a minimum level of resources necessary to meet their basic needs. Consequently, it is argued that without social rights, securing a decent life for all would be unfeasible (Beetham, 1995; Mancilla, 2019). This asserted priority is not normative, but rather logical, as the objective is to enable the state to guarantee a minimum of resources for a worthy life for all citizens, especially the most disadvantaged members of society (Ashford, 2011; Nickel, 2016). The objective of social rights is to ensure a more expansive right to subsistence, the parameters of which must be periodically defined in order to promote the integration of each individual into society. From this standpoint, ensuring the means of subsistence is a prerequisite for empowering all citizens to act and take control of their lives (Gewirth, 2007). This is a significant outcome of social rights, further substantiating their central role in the rights framework. The necessary conditions for human agency form the foundation of social rights (Beetham, 1995). Furthermore, rights are intertwined with the concept of community, as they serve to delineate the boundaries of citizenship. Consequently, the possession or absence of a right exerts an influence on an individual's status, signifying their inclusion or exclusion from the collective moral community (Nagel, 1995). Consequently, the primary concern should not be the establishment of a single, overarching category of rights, but rather the incorporation of both liberty and social rights as fundamental individual rights grounded in the value of human dignity. This approach, as proposed by Ansuátegui Roig (Ansuátegui Roig, 2014), positions human dignity as the ultimate objective of rights, with each right aiming to contribute to this end within its respective domain of competence.

The absence of consensus on the legitimacy of incorporating social rights within the framework of fundamental or human rights constitutes a pivotal issue for the present research. Indeed, the integration of social rights within fundamental rights would render it more challenging to justify their subordination to other conditions, such as individual behaviour or choices. Conversely, it would reinforce the imperative to secure them irrespective of any other condition, given that they would be regarded as indispensable for all lives. Consequently, welfare state measures would serve as the tangible manifestation of

these rights, ensuring that the fundamental needs of all citizens are met without the element of charity, but rather as a fundamental respect for these rights (Wilensky, 1975).

In this scenario, social rights, amongst the other rights, are considered a fundamental element in the process of building a modern society. The State's role is to mediate, ensuring that all citizens are able to realise their own concept of freedom. The neutralisation of inequalities serves to ensure the stability and efficiency of the system (Ferrera, 2016). The dual nature of social rights, as articulated by Baldassarre (1989), encompasses both subjective and objective dimensions. The former aspect pertains to the entitlement of individuals to partake in the advantages of social existence, whereas the latter refers to the regulatory framework through which the state undertakes its function of mitigating social disparities. As Cossutta notes, social rights are “an absolute positive duty, that is erga omnes, borne by the public sphere” (Cossutta 2012, p.22) and therefore the state must ensure their implementation and take all the actions in order to make them fully enjoyable by all. Furthermore, Ansuategui Roig contends that social rights must be conceptualised as intersubjective rather than objective or subjective, emphasising that “the relationality is precisely the element that allows the full exercise of authentic freedom” (Vantin 2015, p.431). This assertion underscores the notion that individuals cannot be free in isolation. Accordingly, social rights are relational in nature (Longo, 2014), given that individuals are inherently projected beyond their own singularity and included within a community that is predicated on the concept of human freedom rather than citizenship (Vantin, 2015). In this view, social rights are the result of the social being of individuals, and are the expression of their solidarity and of the vitality of social contexts. Given this dependence on social contexts, the content of social rights is not fixed but is always in progress, as the result of negotiations that constantly recalibrate their specific purposes in relation to the changing needs and desires of people.

A parallel can thus be drawn between the changes in the views of the welfare state and those in the interpretation of rights and human rights that have taken place since the 1980s (Dean, 2004). The direct link between social rights and human rights is contested, with the category of human rights being interpreted to give centrality to the concept of individual responsibility. Neoliberal ideas emphasise the individual duties associated with rights as a justification for introducing conditions for the enjoyment of rights. In contrast, references to the concept of social security have been conspicuously absent from public discourse. Rather than being regarded as a public service, social and welfare rights have been shown

to promote a consumerist perspective that is predicated on an individualistic ethic of self-responsibility, self-reliance and prudence (Dean, 2008).

Having conducted an analysis of the correlation between human and social rights, the subsequent stage involves an examination of the relationship between rights and their corresponding duties. It is important to note that each right, in conjunction with the protection against social risks or needs, imposes both individual and public duties. The relationship between rights and duties is a contentious one. This debate is of particular relevance to our research focus, as the perceived need to rebalance the relationship between rights and duties is one of the justifications for the welfare transformations that began in the 1980s. Indeed, according to the proponents of the shift, the Beveridgeian welfare state was unbalanced in favour of rights without sufficient emphasis on the associated duties. Conversely, the new welfare paradigm aims to redress this imbalance by placing greater emphasis on citizens' obligations. The prevailing sentiment was that it was unjust for individuals to receive benefits without contributing their share. Consequently, welfare measures were implemented to restrict benefit access exclusively to those who demonstrated specific behaviours.

Throughout the history of the welfare state, the relationship between rights and duties has been articulated in different ways in each era, reflecting the prevailing conceptions of welfare. Initially, there was no direct relationship between the two elements. The welfare state, or rather the laws that introduced social insurances to cover what were considered to be the most common risks faced by the workers, played only a residual role compared to work. The scope of welfare measures was limited to circumstances where individuals were unable to work due to extreme situations, such as illness or advanced age. In such cases, the state would provide benefits to compensate for the individual's lost income. Consequently, the obligations associated with rights held precedence over the rights themselves. This was due to the fact that the ability to benefit from rights was contingent on active participation in society, such as through workforce participation. The Bismarkian welfare state, as previously mentioned, was exclusively focused on the working population to address the most critical situations, such as the absence of wages and the consequent risk of impoverishment. This was done with the overarching objective of mitigating potential protests that could have jeopardised their political stability.

The development of the Beveridgeian welfare state gave rise to a more complex articulation of the relationship between rights and duties, with social rights, as a set of social protection mechanisms, being extended to all individuals, irrespective of their role in

society, on the sole condition of citizenship. The concept of social rights in the Beveridgeian welfare state is commonly derived from Marshall's theory. According to the English sociologist, social rights, in conjunction with civil and political rights, form a fundamental component of citizenship, as they guarantee to all individuals the opportunity to “live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (Marshall et al. 1992, p.8). As previously mentioned, social rights ensure that all individuals have the means to participate fully in society and, consequently, the possibility of enjoying any other right. However, it is important to note that social rights do not exist in isolation, but rather are intertwined with corresponding duties (S. White, 2000). These duties are inherently embedded in the relationship between the individual and the community in which they reside. The concept of reciprocity between the individual and the community, mediated by the State, is a fundamental aspect of this theory. While the State is responsible for ensuring that all citizens have access to the resources necessary to fully develop their talents and potential, citizens, in turn, have a responsibility to contribute to the social life of the community. As Marshall asserts, “If citizenship is invoked in the defence of rights, the corresponding duties of citizenship cannot be ignored[...] But they do require that his acts should be inspired by a lively sense of responsibility towards the welfare of the community” (Marshall et al. 1992, p.41).

The concept of “social” duties emerged as a consequence of the right, without exerting a direct influence on its enjoyment. The purpose of social rights was to ensure the minimum resources necessary for survival in situations of need. Since social rights were designed to provide everyone with at least the basic necessities for a decent life, it was expected that in return, individuals would actively participate in and contribute to society. There is no direct dependency between the two, and together they form the virtuous relationship between the individual and the community.The most important feature of social rights is that they are a fundamental part of citizenship, one of the pillars on which full membership of a given community is based (Moses, 2019). This is not to be considered in opposition to the market or as a complete centralisation of the state, but rather as a synthesis between the two, mediated by social rights that only mitigate the inequalities created by the market economy (A. I. Cohen, 2004). Finally, although Marshall recognised that both rights and duties were at the heart of citizenship, the reference to duties was brief, and the emphasis was on the side of the rights (Dwyer, 2000).

Cooper and Szreter (Cooper & Szreter, 2021) identify the principle of *collectivist individualism* as the core of this welfare conception, whereby citizens are “empowered and

encouraged to take economic risks but within a supportive framework”. Society is constituted by the reciprocal relationship between the State and its citizens, in which both have rights and duties to comply with. In this paradigm, citizens' obligations should not be perceived as mere compensation for their rights, but rather as a profound expression of solidarity with their community. This concept transcends the conventional function of rights, representing an “autonomous value that goes beyond the mere function of servant” (Longo, 2014). The concept of reciprocity plays a pivotal role in this regard. Each individual has the potential to contribute to the collective production, and in the context of social rights, this contribution takes the form of access to measures and benefits in times of need. Conversely, individuals have a responsibility to contribute to production in some capacity. From this perspective, social rights are not intended as unconditional access to a resource, but rather as the “unconditional right of reasonable access to a given resource” (S. White, 2000). Consequently, the right ensures that every citizen can access social services with minimal effort, while the duty is exercised through some kind of contribution to social life.

The conception here is diametrically opposed to the utilitarian perspective that prevails in contemporary society. Instead, the concept of citizen freedom is predicated on the mutual relations that exist within society, unencumbered by the imposition of state-imposed duties.It is more appropriate to speak of social duties, emphasising the notion that citizens should freely utilise their talents to contribute to society. This contribution is not an obligation, but rather, it is understood as the natural exercise of human capacities. In Aristotelian terms, social duties are a fundamental characteristic of human beings and an essential element of a good life (Carens, 1986).The transition to the third welfare era witnessed a significant shift in the conceptualisation of the relationship between rights and duties. One of the major criticisms of the Beveridgean era was precisely the perceived imbalance in this relationship, with an excessive emphasis on the rights. The prevailing emphasis on rights, as previously outlined, was deemed inadequate, and a more explicit correlation between rights and duties was deemed necessary.

Consequently, since the 1980s, welfare policies have undergone a redesign to rebalance this relationship by placing greater emphasis on the obligations. Advocates of the proposed change argue that the Beveridgeian welfare state, with its emphasis on rights rather than duties, would encourage a passive attitude among recipients, promoting assistance as an end in itself and a culture of passivity. Conversely, the introduction of conditions and incentives designed to obligate duties would restore the fair balance between the state's

assistance and what recipients should give back in return. From this perspective, the relationship between rights and duties is conceptualised as a zero-sum game, where the state and the recipients fulfil their respective obligations. This paradigm shift, from a focus on rights to a prioritisation of duties, is a fundamental aspect of the emerging new welfare paradigm (Mounk, 2017).

In this context, the fact of being in a situation of need is not always considered sufficient to access benefits; rather, a distinction must be made.There are situations where citizens are considered deserving of help simply because of their condition. However, it is believed that many other recipients, especially in relation to labour market measures, would use benefits with little commitment to return to work. Without activation incentives, these measures would become a burden on society, as they would simply be public expenditure without benefits. Furthermore, the welfare state, which does not require any kind of activation on the part of recipients, would promote a culture of dependency, with the result that self-reliance and individual responsibility would decline (Cox, 1998). Conversely, it is argued that people's laziness should be combated by transforming passive measures into active ones, by introducing obligations that would act as a repayment for the right enjoyed.

A significant distinction from the preceding conception of welfare is the introduction of explicit and binding duties, which render recipients unable to evade their obligations. This development marks a "retreat from the idea of welfare as a social right" (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020), a principle that was integral to Marshall's theory of citizenship. Instead, there is a shift towards a perspective where rights are conditionally linked to individual duties that must be fulfilled. Consequently, human rights and the concept of citizenship are interpreted in a different manner. The former is no longer understood as a solidaristic concept of human dependency, but rather as a contractarian one (Dean, 2008). In the former, dependency is regarded as a positive value, since individuals are viewed as mutually interdependent. In this perspective, people rely on each other, and the development is shared by the entire community. In contrast, the latter perspective regards dependency as a negative value, positing that individuals should cultivate their independence and relationships with others as a form of exchange between autonomous and unrelated individuals. This prevailing ethic of individual responsibility conceptualises the individual as an atomised entity, independent of others, and consequently, dependency is perceived as a burden, where individuals benefit from the commitment of others to avoid exerting effort.

It is important to note that this does not indicate a return to the initial welfare measures, which had only a marginal impact alongside work, as previously mentioned. There has

been a significant shift from the Beveridgean welfare state, characterised by a growing belief that the welfare state should have a limited role in relation to the market. Indeed, in the neoliberal perspective, the market is regarded as the primary catalyst for economic growth and welfare, and the welfare state should intervene to provide support only when deemed essential. The state no longer has an obligation to provide a basic minimum of resources for all citizens; rather, it should obtain them through the market. Furthermore, state assistance should be restricted and focused on fostering the job market, regarded as the ideal domain for ensuring the means to fulfil one's life.The market and work form a self-regulating system that, if permitted to function autonomously, can guarantee performance and stability. In this market mechanism, individuals committed to achieving a desired position in society can realise their aspirations. Conversely, any external intervention can disrupt market functioning and lead to distortions. Therefore, the market should be regarded as having primacy over the state, with individuals' participation in society being constrained to the domain of employment. In the event of government intervention being deemed necessary, it should be limited to the introduction of measures designed to encourage individuals to resume their participation in the labour market. Any further intervention by the state, particularly in the form of the welfare state, serves as an impediment to the free development of the market.

The phenomenon of individuals encountering circumstances of necessity can be attributed to a failure to assume responsibility, notably the failure to adequately pursue employment opportunities. This perspective posits that individuals encountering such difficulties are not merely victims of circumstance, but rather, are responsible for their own situation due to their lack of effort. Individual challenges are viewed as the outcome of personal choices rather than systemic issues stemming from market mechanisms. Society is no longer conceptualised as a shared space for collective action, where both positive and negative outcomes are distributed among all members. Instead, it is viewed as a collection of individuals engaged in competitive endeavours, with the primary objective being economic success.The prevailing responsibility of citizens is to maximise their labour participation in order to achieve personal fulfilment.

However, the renewed welfare state has placed a significant emphasis on the activation of beneficiaries, i.e. the return of these individuals to the labour market. This has resulted in a shift towards a different conception of rights and duties, which are now considered as part of a reciprocal calculus carried out through workfare measures (Dean, 2004). The conceptual shift is such that social rights are not regarded as a means of aid or assistance to

individuals experiencing economic hardship, but rather as a tool to be utilized in the service of the labour market, which is regarded as the sole means to achieve genuine societal advancement. In the analysis of Watson, “this increasing emphasis on workfare arguably represents a new vision of the welfare state. Instead of protecting society from market forces, social policy is now being used as a tool to actively commodify labour” (Watson, 2015). The objective of providing solidarity-based social security to citizens has been undermined (Cox, 1998), paving the way for a comprehensive array of initiatives aimed at combating what is perceived as a pervasive phenomenon of *laziness*. The introduction of new welfare measures saw a rise in the level of conditionality, with the intention of encouraging recipients to take on individual responsibility (Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

A first attemp is by Rossi, who interprets compensation as "social restitution (and not a monetary payment or participation in the cost) for those who receive a service" (Rossi in Zancan 2012, p.107). Consequently, compensation takes the form of activities that the individual must fulfil for the benefit of the community, rather than being an individual cost to be paid back to the state. The concept of *circular solidarity* (Rossi in (Zancan 2012) is proposed, whereby the state's commitment to solidarity is manifested in the implementation of measures aimed at the removal of barriers to equality. Concurrently, citizens' solidarity is demonstrated through their fulfilment of obligations pertaining to their engagement within a structured community. The implementation of this solidarity principle is expected to facilitate recipients' social integration into society, thereby offering dual benefits: first, enhancing their capacity to cease their welfare dependency, and second, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the welfare system.

Another attempt is that of White (S. White, 2003), which is based on the concept of fair reciprocity. Duties are considered essential for the functioning of the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society, and the general idea is that there should be a suitably proportional relationship between the contribution of individuals to the community and what they can claim back in terms of goods and services. Despite the absence of explicit delineation of the content of active participation, it is imperative that it be obligatory and of a substantial quantity. However, in order to mitigate the obligatory nature of this responsibility of participation, White posits that it should be on the individual's abilities and circumstances, and that it should only be demanded once the basic needs are met. The responsibility for guaranteeing the means of a decent existence for all rests with the state, and only subsequent to the fulfilment of individual contributions can the demand be

made.The equalisation of opportunities engenders a sense of solidarity between people, thereby creating a virtuous mechanism where individuals do their bit in order to contribute to the broader community to which they belong. In this paradigm, reciprocity is situated within a mutual democratic framework, wherein the community establishes the conditions of mutual advantage, yet its actualisation necessitates the active commitment of all individuals.

The rationales behind these approaches, while supporting a clearer and stricter relationship between rights and duties, are more aligned with the Beveridgean or Marshallian concept than with the neoliberal perspective. However, it is important to note that, as was evidenced in the political sphere, where there was unanimous support for the introduction of conditionalities in welfare measures directed at recipients' activation, many egalitarian thinkers also supported this transformation (Mounk, 2017). It is crucial to recognise that the introduction of activation duties into welfare measures does not necessarily align with the concept of social solidarity. The integration of mandatory duties as a form of compensation for rights has the potential to give rise to a number of complex issues, primarily due to the close association between rights and duties, which is not applied to all types of rights, but is emphasised in particular in the context of social rights.In the context of social rights, strict conditions have been introduced with a view to limiting access to them. Conversely, in the context of other rights, non-compliance with duties rarely results in sanctions that impede access to the right in question. To illustrate, consider the case of the right to vote, which may be revoked only in a limited number of exceptional circumstances. Furthermore, the introduction of conditionalities in welfare measures is problematic not only in terms of material consequences, but also in terms of theoretical implications. Indeed, the conditions can extend, as has been previously demonstrated, to the denial of access to the right itself.

Nevertheless, as previously stated, the mere existence of conditions does not automatically confer novelty. Indeed, it is inevitable that certain minimum criteria of eligibility will always be present in any welfare measures (Phillips, 2021; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018). A notable shift has occurred in the eligibility criteria for welfare benefits. In order to qualify, individuals are now required to consent to meeting specific mandatory obligations (Deacon in M. White 1994). These obligations are related to the individual's choices and behaviours. The new welfare conditionality can be referred to as behavioural conditionality (Standing, 2011), in order to highlight the specific characteristics that distinguish the new welfare measures. The concept unites the tenets of behavioural economics, which posits that human

decision-making is not solely driven by rationality but is also influenced by psychological, cognitive, emotional, cultural and social factors. It is also relevant to the tenets of libertarian paternalism, which asserts that individuals must be guided to make the right choices.The introduction of this kind of conditionality in welfare measures intended to create an *architecture of choice* (Standing, 2011) will force recipients to adhere to the desired behaviour. It is the responsibility of the individual to behave in accordance with the conditions set out in order to regain independence and exit the welfare system. Failure to comply with these conditions will result in the imposition of sanctions, which may ultimately result in the loss of the right itself.

In order to circumvent these potential consequences, other scholars, such as Ashford (Ashford, 2011), posit that a duty and the associated conditions cannot be coercive in any manner. Consequently, the fact that individuals consent to “an option only because the alternative is destitution' counts as coercion, because it is not a genuine expression of agency (since the alternative 'option' is unsustainable)” (Ashford 2011, p.108). It is imperative to reiterate the notion of duties as relationality. Despite their inherent association with associated rights, this correlation does not imply an obligation to fulfil duties in order to access rights. Instead, duties should be regarded as an autonomous element that individuals undertake voluntarily as a means of participating in their respective communities, rather than as an obligation that would otherwise restrict their entitlement to social rights. The sustainability of a duty is contingent upon the ability of individuals to decline it without compromising their status or jeopardising their own subsistence. Furthermore, the correlation between rights and duties through coercion is likely to yield unfavourable outcomes. Indeed, the higher the level of coercion, the more ineffective welfare measures become, as social rights fail to fulfil their primary objective of supporting those in need. Conversely, if social rights and social duties are conceptualised as relational, it is imperative that they are implemented in conjunction with one another. This ensures that while the resources necessary to lead a dignified life are guaranteed to the beneficiaries of the measures, the condition to escape political marginalisation and exclusion is also guaranteed to them. Consequently, in the implementation of social policies, it is imperative to recognise the needy not only as passive beneficiaries but also as active agents capable of making choices, decisions and taking actions.

1.3 The *age of responsibility*: conditionality and recipients' activation

In the preceding paragraph, an analysis was conducted of the relationship between social rights and human rights, with the conclusion reaching that social rights can be regarded as human rights to subsistence. Furthermore, a description was given of the evolution of the rights and duties concept over time, with particular reference to a shift in the paradigm of the welfare state from the 1980s onwards, influenced by neoliberal ideas and fostering a stricter relationship between rights and duties. This shift has resulted in the tightening of conditions required for accessing welfare measures, a change that has been justified by invoking both contingent and more theoretical reasons.The subsequent paragraph will delve deeper into the analysis to consider the theoretical implications of this shift and to demonstrate the divergent interpretations that the concepts in question could potentially assume.

Moreover, the economic slowdown, which has resulted in a contraction in state expenditure, has contributed to a reassessment of the contemporary welfare state and the emergence of new ideas of reformation.This shift in perspective concerning the relationship between rights and duties has revealed that an inversion of this relationship is necessary. This shift in focus is characterised by a re-evaluation of the obligations that individuals have towards the state and their own communities. The prevailing perspective emphasises the rights of individuals, and the obligations that accompany these rights. This line of reasoning suggests that welfare programmes should impose more rigorous conditions for access, with the aim of encouraging active participation among welfare recipients. It is perceived that many recipients are passive in their approach and are abusing the benefits system. This perspective views the determination of need as largely influenced by a perceived absence of individual responsibility, which it is argued should be instilled through the mandatory activation of beneficiaries.The purpose of this paragraph is twofold: firstly, to delve deeper into the concepts of responsibility and activation, elucidating their multifaceted meanings and applications; and secondly, to demonstrate the implications of divergent interpretations of welfare recipients and of societal structure, thus offering alternative perspectives.

This emphasis on responsibility and activation has been linked to the concept of reciprocity as participation in society. As Dwyer (Dwyer, 2004) observes, wealth is the product of social cooperation and all individuals should contribute to it according to their abilities.

However, as previously stated, the intention is not anymore that of fostering a general idea of reciprocity between society and the state and its citizens. Rather, it is specifically to promote the individual conception of it.

Consequently, there was a tendency towards the privatisation and implementation of market-like welfare measures (Barker & Lamble, 2009).Moreover, the conditions were tightened to make it more difficult to access welfare benefits and to encourage recipients to participate in society, which is primarily conceived as (paid) employment. This represents a pronounced departure from the Beveridgeian welfare state, which prioritised fundamental social security, towards a novel paradigm of welfare that incorporates market prerogatives into its measures. The beneficiaries of welfare are no longer regarded as right holders, but rather as customers who enter into a contractual agreement with the state, obliging them to adhere to its terms in order to maintain their benefits. The welfare measures have undergone a transformation into disciplinary mechanisms, with the objective of modifying the behaviour of recipients and ensuring their compliance with market rules.The new logic of assistance has been redefined as conditional cash transfers, with the intention of fostering the desired behaviour of recipients (Sandermann, 2014).The idea of welfare as a fundamental right of citizenship is no longer a viable proposition. The state is required to differentiate between those who are genuinely in need of assistance and those who have made conscious choices and taken actions that have resulted in their current situation. This implies that only those who adhere to the established socio-economic norms are eligible to receive welfare benefits in times of need (Eriksen, 2019).

It is important to note that the shift in policy received support from both the conservative and progressive political parties, in contrast to the previous eras of the welfare state, which were supported by one party and opposed by the other. Firstly, at the end of the nineteenth century, the conservatives introduced the first welfare provisions in response to the threat of losing their political hegemony due to social protests, particularly from the working class. Secondly, the Labour Party developed the Beveridgean welfare state, despite the fact that the Beveridge Report, which played a pivotal role in the formulation of the new measures, was requested by the conservatives. In contrast, the contemporary welfare era is distinguished by a notable continuity between conservative and progressive political factions in endorsing the novel concept of the welfare state. While the 1980s were marked by a predominantly conservative-led transformation, spearheaded by figures such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively, the 1990s witnessed the ascendance of democratic or progressive parties in

spearheading the reform process. It is evident that while these two parties exhibited differences, these did not result in an irreconcilable divergence. While the conservative choices were influenced by neoliberal ideas, the Democrats developed a distinct theory that sought to reconcile market and equality. As previously mentioned, this new theory, known as the third way, originated in the UK under Blair's leadership.This new political ideal espoused the necessity to transcend the conventional conception of the welfare state.In its place, a novel welfare system focused on the distribution of skills and capacities would have supplanted the erstwhile redistribution measures. The state expenditure should be directed at providing equal opportunity and fostering individual responsibility, thereby enabling individuals to become self-sufficient and capable of providing for their own needs, primarily economic (Blair and Schroder in (Boxhoorn & Scott-Smith, 2021; Giddens, 1998).

Fukuyama’s “end of history” (Fukuyama, 2006) conceptually captures the conclusion of the grand utopias that characterised the 20th century, including the belief that the welfare state could facilitate the realization of a society free from fear and want. Conversely, the prevailing adoption of neoliberal ideologies has the potential to restrict the range of available alternatives. This perspective posits that the global triumph of capitalism has brought an end to ideological trends and the possibility of their invention, with the result that the political debate would no longer encompass diverse political positions, but would be confined to the examination of different pragmatic approaches. In contrast to pursuing a long-term political objective, the focus is on the short-term and on addressing specific and urgent problems. The politicians would be at liberty to disregard or move away from historical political stances if they are considered no longer able to address or solve the issues. This would also have consequences for the welfare state, which must undergo restructuring as it is no longer capable of addressing the evolving social challenges or has reached its capacity for expansion. Therefore, it would be "unlikely that universality as a principle of social provision could survive for long" (Powell and Hewitt 1998, p.3).

As previously stated, the proposed solution to the issue of disparate socio-economic circumstances is to end welfare as we know it, a concept perceived to be excessively weighted in favour of rights. The previous concept of welfare was criticised for fostering a passive use of benefits and creating dependency among recipients. In order to address this issue, it is imperative that the new welfare measures re-examine the concept of responsibility, a timeless value that has been overshadowed by social democratic policies (Eriksen, 2019). In the new paradigm, this revaluation takes the form of the recipients’

activation, which should rebalance the relationship of reciprocity between recipients and society and sanction them when non-compliance occurs.

The shift, in addition to the practical transformations it brought about, also resulted in changes on the theoretical level, particularly in regard to the conceptualisation of society and the relationship between individuals and the community. In contrast to the Beveridgeian welfare state, which emphasised the importance of collectivist individualism, and thus sought to empower individuals to pursue their own development in a secure environment, with the state providing a safety net in times of adversity. On the contrary, the new measures adopted from the 1980s adopted a more individualistic approach characterised by a focus on personal responsibility and self-reliance, what Cooper and Szreter define as *harsher outright individualism* (Cooper & Szreter, 2021). This approach advocates for a state that prioritises safeguarding negative freedoms, intervening minimally in market forces. Consequently, the state's active involvement in supporting individuals or correcting market distortions should be limited to the essential.The argument is made that welfare should support market forces through the implementation of active social security schemes. Otherwise, it would incur significant costs and prove ineffective, potentially resulting in recipients exercising rights without assuming responsibility (Kaufmann, 2012). Concurrently, the majority of welfare recipients are not perceived to be genuinely in need, but rather as exploiting the benefits system. It is postulated that the measures were designed in a manner that did not sufficiently encourage recipients to become active, and that they should encourage and direct recipients' behaviour, which would otherwise be neglectful and indolent. Ultimately, the necessity of these benefits is believed to depend on the recipients' lack of effort. It is therefore the responsibility of the beneficiaries to surmount this situation, and the state should intervene only to support this assumption of responsibility.

The notion of individual responsibility, as it pertains to the contemporary welfare paradigm, is not confined to the potential consequences of those who fail to adhere to the incentives associated with the welfare measure. Instead, it possesses a more extensive scope, encompassing all life choices and behaviours adopted by potential recipients. The concept is of such significance in the new welfare measures that this period can be designated, as Mounk (Mounk, 2017) contends, the “age of responsibility”. This expression does not imply that the concept of responsibility has only been considered in the current welfare paradigm; rather, it aims to show that in this paradigm it gained greater importance and that there has been a change in its meaning. Consequently, since it has

evolved from a more collective to a more individualistic connotation, it would be more appropriate to refer to this period as the age of individual responsibility. Mounk (Mounk, 2017) posits that the Beveridgeian welfare state was rife with the concept of *responsibility-as-duty*, which has a more collective or cooperative connotation. This concept is inextricably linked to the notion of reciprocity between individuals and society, and the expectation that individuals should be responsible towards the community in which they reside. This is a concept that is similar to the one that has been already analysed. In this model, on the one hand, society, through the state, ensures that all citizens have the means and the opportunity to freely develop their lives; on the other hand, the citizens have the responsibility to participate in society, which means to develop and to use their talents. In contrast, the concept of responsibility in the new paradigm of welfare has shifted towards a conception of *responsibility-as-accountability*. This notion of responsibility is characterised by its individualised nature, establishing a direct correlation between an individual's behaviours and choices and their eligibility for public assistance in the event of adverse outcomes. It thereby connects an individual's personal responsibility directly to the responsibility that the state or society has towards its members. In essence, the principle asserts that individuals bear the primary responsibility for their own well-being, within the limits of their capabilities. A failure to uphold this responsibility is expected to result in a corresponding diminution of the collective obligation to provide assistance (Mounk, 2017).

Those who advocate for the introduction of individual responsibility in welfare measures offer two distinct justifications, each founded on a distinct set of premises and resulting in divergent conclusions. A pertinent exemplification of this can be found in the discourse between Schmidtz and Goodin (Schmidtz et al., 1998). On one hand, the rationale for holding citizens accountable for their actions is predicated on the assumption that their behaviour is a contributing factor to their impoverished state. This conception of responsibility is understood as accountability, and consequently, the implementation of welfare conditionality would be carried out in a punitive and blame-allocating manner. Conversely, the conditions are intended to serve as a means of task allocation, with the objective of motivating and encouraging recipients to take action. Despite their differences, these two justifications can be regarded as representing two sides of the same idea in terms of how individuals are conceived in relation to the society they inhabit.

This is another important aspect of the discontinuity between the Beveridgeian welfare state and the age of responsibility. Previously, the relationship between the individual and society was one of reciprocity and mutuality. Each individual contributed to the social

production of the common good. In return, the community, through state institutions, guaranteed the conditions for a decent life and support in times of need. At its most idealistic, this idea of collective action for the common good could aspire to a social structure that would allow each member to enjoy the highest material well-being compatible with the context (George, 2018). According to this perspective, the potential for freedom and fulfilment depends on interdependence and co-responsibility (Dean, 2004). Growth and efficiency would be realised through the collaborative efforts of individuals, while the control and balancing systems provided by the state would address market failures. Both successes and difficulties were seen as a shared responsibility and should therefore be addressed collectively by the community. In contrast, the conceptualisation of society in the new policies is markedly different. It is dominated by the rules of the market, which should be left as free as possible, since it is assumed to be capable of self-regulation and optimising its efficiency. Society is conceived as atomised and fragmented, consisting of a sum of individuals, each of whom is self-centred and whose interactions are mediated mainly by market exchanges. The goal of these individuals is to advance their personal interests to the greatest extent possible in order to achieve the desired social positions that are potentially accessible to all (C. Pierson & Castles, 2006; Shewell, 2010). However, this pursuit is mainly conducted through competition rather than cooperation. Each individual is framed as independent, but with the implication that they are disconnected or unbound from others, rather than as autonomous beings (Dean, 2008). The structure of society can be described as a pyramid, with a limited number of individuals occupying the positions at the top. The dominant market perspective, which emphasises privatisation, shapes the understanding of social processes and outcomes. This perspective influences the design and implementation of welfare state policies, with the aim of aligning them with the logic of profit. Citizens are not seen as interdependent or morally bound to one another; the prevailing view is that individuals are autonomous selves, independent of one another (Carens, 1986). Self-interest is the primary motivator of human behaviour, with altruism emerging as a secondary consideration. The values of self-sufficiency and independence are fundamental. It is therefore essential to avoid any form of dependency, as mentioned above. Dependence is only a negative condition for welfare recipients (Halvorsen, 1998). Individuals are seen as fully capable of shaping their own destinies and circumstances through their choices and actions. The environment is not seen as a significant factor influencing people's lives. Consequently, structural social problems are de-socialised by focusing on the individual as the primary agent of change, rather than examining the

broader social context (Ahola-Launonen, 2015). This means that social risks are perceived as individualised, rather than as a consequence of the functioning of the system. As a result, the deeper social and structural roots are overlooked (Curchin, 2019), and both success and hardship are seen as purely the result of individual choices and actions. The triumph of the morality of individual responsibility, of all against all, has the effect of undermining support for collective provision and the resulting idea of solidarity (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017).

However, the change in the conceptualisation of the relationship between the individual and the community should not affect the results of the novel approach to welfare, which is based on promoting the autonomy of recipients, encouraging their responsibility and providing them with resources for empowerment. Once the activation goal has been achieved, citizens will be able to leave welfare dependency and assume a productive role in society, thereby restoring the virtuous reciprocity between the individual and the state. This would be an important feature for any individual, regardless of the conception of society adopted, whether communal or atomistic. The achievement of this goal justifies the introduction of behavioural conditionality and the emphasis on individual responsibility.

Since the mid-1990s, in addition to and in opposition to the workfare approach, another important theory of welfare state reform has been proposed: the social investment theory (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Hemerijck, 2012, 2017; Morel et al., 2011). This approach aims to overcome the limitations of the traditional welfare state model, which has been deemed inadequate to address the evolving social risks and challenges of the contemporary context. It also seeks to counter the negative effects of neoliberal economic theory, which advocates a reduction in the role of the state in the market. Social policy is seen as a productive factor within the market, rather than a burden or waste of public resources. The welfare state must be able to guarantee both social protection and its own sustainability. This is only possible if safeguards are put in place to protect future taxpayers. Consequently, the integration of beneficiaries into the labour market remains a key factor. Social investment focuses on the knowledge-based economy, which is a defining feature of the current era. It seeks to activate beneficiaries in a positive way, promoting their autonomy. Training a skilled and flexible workforce that can adapt to the frequent changes in the labour market would be an effective way of achieving this. It is important to note that the empowerment derived from the possession of appropriate skills should enable individuals to directly influence these market changes. The next stage of development is the use of human capital in a market environment to promote social inclusion. At the same time, the welfare state must continue

to provide basic guarantees and public services. The influence of Sen's Capability Approach (Sen, 1992) is evident, and therefore the focus of this theory should be on providing everyone with the opportunity to develop the most appropriate functioning for each individual. A significant number of countries, including the European Union, have incorporated the social investment approach into their reform processes to the extent that Hemerjik has proposed a different division of welfare state eras (Morel et al., 2011). He suggests that the era of welfare state expansion and class compromise, the golden age of the welfare state, was followed by two distinct periods. The first is the period of welfare retrenchment and neoliberalism, followed by the era of social investment. However, as other scholars have shown, the theoretical proliferation of the social investment state has had only a limited impact on actual social policy, which remains more characterised by the concept of individual responsibility (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). Furthermore, the claim that social investment represents a different model from neoliberalism in its actual implementation has been debated. It has been observed that the emphasis on activation has served as a rationale for benefit cuts and has facilitated the acceptance of jobs that may be of poor quality. In this respect, it resembles workfare rather than being an alternative to it (Morel et al., 2011).

In this perspective, conditionality will continue to be a defining feature of the new welfare era. It is the basic tool to encourage recipients to participate in society and to return to the labour market. However, a broader examination of the concepts of participation and activation is necessary, given the numerous possible interpretations. Indeed, it has been argued that participation in society cannot be fully subsumed under paid work and that there are numerous other forms of reciprocity that are not contractual (Halvorsen, 1998). A pertinent example can be found in the debate over the Malibu surfer, which is often used to criticise the introduction of a universal basic income (Van Parijs, 1995; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2019). It is argued that it would be unfair to provide a basic income to surfers because they do not contribute to the production of wealth. Instead, they spend their entire lives in leisure activities. Several objections have been raised against this claim. The first concerns the defence of universalism, which refers to the fact that everyone who is alive should have secured a minimum of resources to survive. This recalls the previous paragraph and the defence of social rights as human rights of subsistence. But the second point is more important for our analysis. It states that surfers are entitled to a basic income because they contribute to society in ways that cannot be quantified in economic terms. Rather, they contribute to the cultural capital of society by preserving skills and a

subculture that would otherwise disappear (Mckinnon, 2003). There are also many forms of civic participation that are not recognised as work. These include care work and voluntary community service. In both cases, these individuals make valuable contributions to society that are not immediately identifiable or attributable to the economic or market sphere.

Another issue related to the activation of beneficiaries concerns their level of self-esteem. Indeed, on the recipient side, the activation mechanism should promote the ability of recipients to take charge of their lives and develop their potentials, which would also strengthen their self-esteem (Mckinnon, 2003; Reeves & Loopstra, 2017). On the other hand, on the institutional side, welfare measures should be designed to treat citizens not as passive clients but as capable agents. Consequently, policies should be genuinely responsive to each beneficiary, actively involving them in the processes to which they are subject. They should be empowered to make decisions according to their personal circumstances. This is a fundamental step in changing the concept of reciprocity. Rather than being seen as an obligation on the part of recipients to reciprocate the benefits they receive, reciprocity should be seen as a guarantee inherent in the externalities of the welfare state, which also benefits the community. The welfare state should be supported as a result of the mutual acceptance of the whole community (Eriksen, 2019). It is not enough for welfare measures to guarantee a minimum level of resources to those in need; they should also be able to maintain or even improve the social status of the recipients.

The question, then, is whether this is actually valid in the context of the new welfare state paradigm. On the face of it, the need to distinguish between deserving and undeserving claimants would lead to a high degree of intrusion into people's lives, with the consequence of mining their privacy. It also requires the implementation of a sophisticated and costly control system. Van Oorshot (Van Oorschot, 2000) identified five potential criteria that should be able to determine who is or is not deserving of, and therefore entitled to, access to social assistance. Some of the criteria relate to the personal circumstances of claimants. These include the degree of control over their need, which is an indication of their degree of responsibility for their condition, and the degree of actual need. Another criterion is the level of identity, which concerns the degree of closeness or comfort that other members of the community feel towards those in need. The last two criteria relate to the way in which the needy respond to the measures in question. The first criterion concerns the attitude or degree of docility, compliance with conditions and gratitude for the benefits received. The second criterion concerns the degree of reciprocity, i.e. the extent to which the needy have

earned the support received and what they have given in return. It is clear that this is a difficult calculation to make, particularly given the high degree of discretion given to street-level bureaucrats in assessing specific situations. Consequently, there will be considerable variation in the assessment of the behaviour and willingness of recipients.

The emphasis on activating recipients of the new conditionalities has led to the emergence of disciplinary and coercive measures (Barker & Lamble, 2009). The obligation to comply with a series of conditions has the effect of restricting recipients' ability to act freely and diminishing their autonomy, self-respect and dignity (Halvorsen, 1998; Mckinnon, 2003). The new measures designed to encourage recipients to work require them to actively seek employment. This is to ensure that they do not lose their benefits. Moreover, recipients are obliged to accept any job offered to them, regardless of the conditions or position. This has the potential to create a hierarchy of status between them. This would be in addition to the already existing stigma associated with the welfare state in general, which makes recipients second-class citizens because of their dependence on measures and inability to be autonomous (Halvorsen, 1998). This double reduction in social status would also lead to a vicious circle in which the measures challenge the autonomy and dignity and self-respect of the recipients. At the same time, they contribute to the decline in the consideration of the recipients by the community, since they encourage this very phenomenon. Furthermore, the paternalistic approach of the state is evident in its failure to recognise the capacity of individuals to make autonomous decisions (Standing, 2011). It is assumed that recipients are capable of changing their behaviour and overcoming the need for welfare, provided they are sufficiently motivated and encouraged to do so. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the state to facilitate activation in order to prevent individuals from becoming welfare dependent. However, if the state were to act in this way, it would appear to recipients as unresponsive to their needs and fundamentally untrustworthy, leading to a general distrust of institutions (Watson, 2015).

Behavioural conditionality is ultimately proving to be ineffective in empowering recipients, and instead leading to their disempowerment. The rhetoric of 'something for nothing' has transformed basic needs into a conditional good (Barker & Lamble, 2009). Consequently, the need to prove one's eligibility for assistance would be an additional challenge for those already in need. The most vulnerable groups in society are harmed in two ways: firstly, the sanctions they may face increase their material vulnerability and make them even more precarious, and secondly, they are seen as responsible for being in a situation of need (Barker & Lamble, 2009; Curchin, 2019). The new welfare policies

become mechanisms that set recipients up for failure. This is because, as Reeves and Loopstra note (Reeves & Loopstra, 2017), “neoliberal governamentality reconfigure citizenship by creating insecurity and anxiety as a means to motivate activity and change of behaviour”.

In the context of the emerging welfare paradigm, the concept of individual responsibility is conceived in its punitive dimension (Mounk, 2017). Consequently, the mere fact of being in a situation of need is no longer sufficient to confer entitlement to social rights. Rather, behaviours and choices that have led to the status of need must also be taken into account. Individuals' entitlement to benefits depends on their behaviour and choices. Consequently, when individuals are seen as responsible for their own circumstances, their access to welfare benefits is restricted. The welfare state is no longer seen as a fundamental institution that maintains equilibrium within the social system by providing assistance to those in need. Moreover, it is no longer able to guarantee citizens' social rights. Instead, it is perceived as an institution that should only provide assistance to those citizens who are considered *deserving* or who are not considered responsible for their situation of need. The shift then represents a significant change in the fundamental concept of welfare, namely the role that welfare should play in society.

This chapter presents an analysis of the transformations that have taken place in the Western welfare state. It examines the content of these transformations and their potential outcomes for both recipients and the policies implemented. The analyses are conducted from a sociological perspective, showing how the welfare state has been transformed in relation to the economic and socio-political changes that have taken place in society. The next chapter focuses on the philosophical debate on social justice. It is argued that the luck egalitarian approach provides a theoretical justification for this shift. The second part of the chapter considers another perspective. The debate that is sceptical about the possibility of ascribing free will and responsibility at all, with important consequences for individual responsibility and its applications to the welfare state, is discussed.

2
The egalitarian debate:
Luck egalitarianism and individual responsibility

1.1 Rawls’ egalitarianism, responsibility and the welfare state

In the preceding chapter, an analysis was conducted of the evolution of the Western welfare state, with the main features of each welfare era being highlighted. At the beginning of the 20th century, the first social insurance schemes were introduced with the aim of providing security for the working population in the event of illness or old age. Following the Second World War, the welfare state underwent significant expansion, reaching its greatest extent during the trente glorieuses. However, from the 1980s onwards, a period of major transformations in the welfare state began, characterised by a reduction in public expenditure and an emphasis on the conditional side of the welfare measures. It has also shown how the concept of individual responsibility underpins the new welfare policies, i.e. restricting people's access to benefits if they are deemed responsible for their situation of need. Then, the debate on social rights has been analysed to argue that they should be considered as fundamental rights as well as liberty rights, given their importance in ensuring everyone's right to subsistence, a necessary condition for the enjoyment of any other right. According to this view, the introduction of conditions in welfare policies will lead to the conditionality of the entitlements themselves. Indeed, a right's core attribute is its enforceability, and the introduction of conditionality would render the enjoyment of a right contingent on external conditions. Consequently, the mere possession of the right is no longer sufficient for an effective access to it. Furthermore, it has been proposed that social rights not only are instrumental in ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to lead the lives they desire, but also constitute a fundamental aspect of social justice. This standpoint asserts that social rights serve as a pivotal mechanism for redressing the imbalances inherent in the economic system, thereby facilitating the reduction of disparities in status that impede the ability of certain citizens to lead a satisfactory existence. Indeed, the circumstances of one's birth, whether into a wealthy or impoverished

family, or the possession of greater or lesser natural abilities, give rise to differences between individuals that influence both their initial opportunities and their life prospects. Nevertheless, the concept of social justice is also invoked by those who advocate for the introduction of conditional welfare measures, as the distinction between deserving and undeserving citizens is perceived not only as a means of reducing public expenditure, but also as a matter of social justice. According to this perspective, it would be unfair to treat individuals who have acted prudently and those who have not in the same manner.

In consideration of the preceding points, the second chapter will analyse the philosophical implications of this perspective, with the aim of highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. The analysis will concentrate on the liberal egalitarian debate about social justice for two reasons. Firstly, Rawls's difference principle has been interpreted by some scholars as the theoretical justification for the institution of the welfare state. This chapter will demonstrate the compatibility of the welfare state with Rawls's theory, particularly with the difference principle as its foundation. Secondly, it will elucidate the divergences between Rawls and his disciples, the so-called luck egalitarians (Anderson, 1999), with particular emphasis on the concept of individual responsibility and its function in the theory of justice. Indeed, although not central to Rawls, this lack is precisely what is criticised by luck egalitarians while they develop an alternative egalitarian account in which the concept of individual responsibility plays a key role. By attributing this key role to individual responsibility in ensuring social justice, a parallel can be drawn between luck egalitarianism and the novel conceptualisation of the welfare state, particularly its emphasis on the necessity to assess the degree of individual responsibility in order to create a fair welfare system. Consequently, it will be argued that, albeit indirectly, luck egalitarianism could be interpreted as the theoretical foundation for the new conditional welfare measures.

According to Hirose, egalitarianism can be defined as “a class of distributive principles, which claim that individuals should have equal quantities of well-being or morally relevant factors that affect their life” (Hirose 2014, p.1). Consequently, it is a theory of distributive justice, seeking to identify the principles that would ensure a society as egalitarian as possible. It is evident that equality is not a defining feature of egalitarianism, as many other theories also espouse equality. In addiction, as well explained by Parfit (Parfit in Clayton & Williams, 2000), equality can be pursued either because is regarded as a value in itself and therefore inequality is understood as bad, which is the case of *telic* egalitarianism, or instead because equality is considered instrumental to secure other values and therefore

inequality is seen as unjust, as is the case of *deontic* egalitarianism. Furthermore, equality can be supported unconditionally or upon the occurrence of other conditions; that is, it would follow after the securing of other values. In the many versions of egalitarianism the goal a society as equal as possible is often achieved through a balance between equality and other factors, as defined from author to author. This would be because, in order to achieve a just society, a multitude of values are required, and although equality is of great importance, it plays an instrumental role (Moss, 2014).

Furthermore, the emphasis is placed not solely on the outcome situation and the status of equality achieved, but also, and most importantly, on the manner in which the final state of affairs was produced (Parfit in Clayton & Williams, 2000). It is evident that circumstances may arise in which the presence of inequality is unavoidable. Indeed, these situations are the most prevalent in actual society. In such cases, despite the implementation of measures aimed at redressing these imbalances, it is not possible to attain a state of absolute equality. Consequently, the overarching objective becomes the establishment of a society in which, while acknowledging the inevitability of inequalities, they are regarded as legitimate outcomes of a just process (Hirose, 2014). In order to achieve this, egalitarians concentrate on identifying the fundamental principles of equality that are universally accepted. These principles can then serve as the foundation for a just society and ensure that when inequalities cannot be solved they are the outcome of a fair process. Consequently, the principle of equality does not necessitate uniformity in outcomes or treatment across individuals. Instead, it is crucial that the outcome of any given process is the result of a fair and just procedure. In pursuit of this objective, egalitarians advocate for the implementation of an egalitarianism-based system, with the aim of guaranteeing a just system as equal as possible. However, among those who espouse egalitarianism, a prolific debate concerning the object of the equalisation process has emerged, leading to the development of disparate approaches that are guided by varying principles of justice and patterns of fair distribution (Arneson, 2013).

The analysis will concentrate on the concept of liberal egalitarianism, as initially formulated by John Rawls. While the theoretical framework is abstract, the principles developed are intended to be applicable to actual societies. The liberal approach is predicated on the guarantee of fundamental liberties for all members of society, while the system of social cooperation is believed to be able of ensuring the resources needed to everyone to live a decent life. In his foundational work, “A Theory of Justice” (Rawls, 2005), Rawls articulated the fundamental principles that should underpin the construction

of a liberal-egalitarian society. Specifically, he identified two principles of justice which, when considered together, should guarantee individual liberties and ensure the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens associated with social cooperation across the entire population. In Rawls' conception of a just society, individual liberties are the primary concern, but once they are secured also a concern about the most equal mechanism for the redistribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. This is considered necessary since not only natural differences in resources and talents depend on arbitrary contingencies, but also each person's effort depends, although partially, on social circumstances (Rawls, 2005). The importat role that external factors have on people clearly influence also how people end up in their lives; given that what a person is able to achieve, either in a positive and negative way, does not exclusively depend on her but is highly impacted by chance. The natural endowments, the context and the situations that happen over the lifetime have a huge impact on people's potential and on the actual outcomes of their choices and actions. In light of this, how people end up is not due to merit but to chances, and any appeal to meritocracy is rejected by Rawls. Indeed, a meritocratic society would make better off those people favoured by chances while leaving behind those less fortunate (Rawls, 2005). Moreover, this approach appears incompatible with a robust conception of individual responsibility, and individual circumstances must be considered in relation to society as a whole.

The first principle is that of "equal liberty", which strives to ensure that all individuals are afforded an adequate framework of fundamental rights and liberties. These include political freedom, freedom of expression, assembly, conscience, and thought, in addition to physical and psychological rights (Rawls, 2005). This principle pertains to all rights to which all individuals are entitled as members of the communities in which they reside, irrespective of their position or status. The objective is to construct an egalitarian society by guaranteeing that every member is entitled to the same fundamental rights. However, the first principle is insufficient for ensuring genuine fairness within society. Such a society would be one in which all individuals were identical in terms of both their nature and their circumstances. In reality, there are natural contingencies that determine differences between people, which would also affect the overall distribution throughout people's lives. Furthermore, as previously argued in the first chapter, there may be a section of society with such a lack of resources and talents that it would be impossible for them to effectively enjoy the rights and freedoms to which they are supposedly entitled. It is therefore necessary to take measures in order to mitigate these differences, so that they do not

become the cause of inequalities. The task is assigned to the second principle of justice which is comprised of two distinct parts or sub-principles: the “difference principle” and the “fair equality of opportunity principle”. Taking together they are meant to “arranges social and economic inequalities so that everyone benefits” (Rawls, 2005, p.61). It can thus be postulated that a dissociation from an equal distribution of all social values - liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect - is only possible on the condition that this is to the advantage of all individuals.

Starting from the latter, the principle of fair equality of opportunity is concerned with the equalisation of the prospects that an individual has of fully developing their talents. However, it must be noted that this does not imply the mere assurance of careers open to talents; rather, it encompasses the impact that context and chances have on these opportunities. Instead, Rawls contends that the accessibility to social positions should guarantee that all individuals have the opportunity to obtain the qualifications necessary to access diverse social positions, while simultaneously ensuring that no external factors influence this process. These external factors include chances, natural goods, such as health, intelligence and imaginations and the social primary goods, such as rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth (Rawls, 2005).

The combination of the first principle and the principle of fair equality of opportunity asserts that in order to reach a just society all individuals should be equal in terms of rights, freedoms and opportunities. However, Rawls argues that the equal distribution of rights, liberties and opportunities is insufficient to prevent the organisation of society from being unjust. Furthermore, an equal distribution of social primary goods would not be sufficient. For instance, the uniform distribution of these goods and values does not ensure that all individuals will be able to live a decent life. In fact, given the initial unequal state, an equal redistribution of resources would perpetuate the same inequalities and would not address the fundamental issue of justice. In response to these concerns, Rawls introduces the difference principle, which aims to address the possibility of deviating from a strict egalitarian society and to define the circumstances under which such a deviation would be considered justifiable. In accordance with this principle, inequalities are deemed acceptable only if they benefit the most disadvantaged members of society. That is to say, the unequal situation should result in a net improvement for the worst-off, relative to what they would have experienced under different distributional patterns.

It is imperative to delve into the difference principle with greater scrutiny, as it constitutes a fundamental element in the subsequent stages of the analysis. Initially, it is crucial to

elucidate the content of the difference principle. What inequalities are being discussed by Rawls? And who are the most disadvantaged members of society? In addressing the first question, Rawls introduces the difference principle with the objective of correcting the distribution of primary social goods among citizens. The primary social goods are defined as resources, whether material or non-material, which the basic structure of society is expected to distribute among all citizens (Rawls 2005, p.63). These include social primary goods such as rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth, as well as self-respect and self-confidence. Additionally, natural primary goods such as health, intelligence and imagination are also included in this category. In essence, primary goods cover all the basic needs that every human being requires and would therefore select above all else, irrespective of the ultimate objectives they are pursuing (Rawls 2005, pp. 92-93). The difference principle, therefore, asserts that the fundamental structure of society should be organised in a manner that ensures, in the event of inequalities in the distribution of primary goods, such disparities are offset by an increased allocation of these resources to all members of society, with a particular focus on those who are most disadvantaged, who would otherwise have less access to them. A further crucial aspect of social primary goods is that they are the result of social cooperation. This is a key reason why they should be accessible to all members of society. As all members of society contribute to the collective good, it follows that the benefits of such a system must be mutual and extend to the betterment of all (Rawls 2005, p.77). In a society founded upon principles of liberty, the difference principles serve to safeguard against the most detrimental outcomes, whilst simultaneously fostering the self-respect of citizens. It is the difference principle that constitutes the element of distributive justice, which recalibrates unfair distributions, rendering them acceptable only if they are in favour of the most disadvantaged members of society (Hirose, 2014). A second point that requires elucidation is the meaning of the term “the worst-off members of society” as used by Rawls. A general description of these individuals can be found in “A Theory of Justice”. The least advantaged are those “with the least authority and the lowest income” (Rawls 2005, p. 94). A few pages later (Rawls 2005, p.98), Rawls refers to unskilled workers as the threshold for distinguishing the least advantaged from other members of society. All elements with income equal to or less than theirs are part of the worse-off section of society.

A more precise delineation of the least advantaged is provided in “Justice as Fairness. A restatement” (Rawls, 2001). In this context, Rawls refers to them as those belonging to the income class with the lowest expectations once the principles of equal liberty and fair

equality of opportunity are secured. He specifies that natural characteristics are not the determining factor in defining them, but rather that they are the least advantaged in a given scheme of cooperation (Rawls 2001, p.59). Nevertheless, he subsequently clarifies that the worst-off are not the unfortunate or the unlucky, but rather "those to whom reciprocity is owed as a matter of political justice among those who are free and equal citizens along with everyone else" (Rawls 2001, p.139). It can thus be concluded that all principles of justice apply to those who contribute to the production of primary goods and participate in the system of social cooperation. In summary, the difference principle can be understood as a principle of mutual benefit that expresses a conception of reciprocity. The principle of reciprocity is of particular significance in this context, being also the content of the principle of fairness, which stipulates that only those who contribute their fair share are entitled to access the fruits of the cooperative labour of others (Rawls, 2001).

It is precisely because of these characteristics, as well as the content, of the difference principle, that it can be seen as a theoretical justification for the introduction of welfare state institutions in society. Indeed, an examination of extant capitalist societies, in which the means of production are privately owned, reveals the presence of "grave injustices" (Rawls 2005, p.274). Rawls then adds that a conception of justice is necessary but not sufficient, and that actual policies must therefore be implemented. It appears that the necessity for the development of a mechanism that redistributes the products of social cooperation in order to improve the situation of the most disadvantaged members of society is therefore compatible with these statements. As demonstrated in the first chapter, this is one of the fundamental aims of the welfare state, which, through taxation, enables the enhancement of well-being of the worst-off.

However, even though all these elements could be used to support the welfare state, Rawls himself entered the debate by analysing which social systems should be the best realisation of the principles of justice. In this analysis, he favoured a *property-owning democracy* over a *welfare-state democracy*. In order to gain an understanding of the differences between the two regimes, it is necessary to look at "Justice As Fairness. A Restatement", given that Rawls himself affirms that the previous book did not emphasise this contrast (Rawls 2001, p.139). The two principal issues that render property-owning democracy a superior system are those of monopoly and that of reciprocity. Welfare state capitalism would permit a small number of individuals to control the majority of the means of production. Furthermore, it would not adhere to the principle of reciprocity, since it is based on the assumption that no person should experience a decline in their standard of living. As a

result, a welfare state capitalist system would create an “underclass” of “chronically” dependent individuals who would not engage in social activities (Rawls 2001, p.140). Conversely, a property-owning democracy would facilitate the distribution of ownership of the means of production among citizens, thereby encouraging their active participation in society. On the ideal level, then, the property-owning democracy is the system that Rawls argues ensures the best realisation of the principle of justice.

Another element that should be considered is the distinction between pre-distributive and redistributive forms, as outlined by Thomas (Thomas, 2016). It is one thing, indeed, to develop a theory that imagines how a just society should ideally be organised, as Rawls does, and another to deal with an already existing and unequal society. In the former case, it is possible to design the principles that, if correctly applied, would give shape to a society that is equal and just. It is also essential to acknowledge that human beings are rational beings and that the evolution of society over time is aligned with these principles. On the contrary, in the second case, the analysis is focused on an existing society, with its established institutions, inequalities and unfair distributions. In this context, the only viable approach is to intervene ex post, designing forms of redistribution that would make society fairer.

This analysis posits that the welfare state is an institution with the capacity to implement the principles of justice, particularly the difference principle. This assertion is supported by Knoll's (Knoll, 2018) observation that the principles of justice imply that citizens should have the opportunity to participate fully in society. Furthermore, these principles entail the provision of solutions to assist those who are unable to do so, thereby facilitating their participation in a manner that is as inclusive as possible. Furthermore, in order to provide greater clarification regarding the difference principle, Rawls (Rawls, 2005) introduced two additional concepts that may also serve to support the establishment of the welfare state. The first of these is the principle of redress, which states that any inequalities that are undeserved require reparation. The second is the principle of fraternity, which is related to the difference principle and states that people do not want to have greater advantages if they do not benefit others, especially those who are less well off (Rawls, 2005). In conclusion, the three principles collectively reinforce the concept of establishing an institution that, in the name of reciprocity, guarantees the ability of all individuals to engage fully in societal activities, rectifies unwarranted imbalances, and redistributes the fruits of social collaboration in a manner that fosters the development of skills and talents for the collective benefit (Knoll, 2018).

As posited by Thomas (Thomas, 2016), property-owning democracy can be conceptualised as a advanced stage of egalitarian society, with the potential to enhance the principles of justice and render them more efficacious. It can thus be argued that the welfare state, even if not yet fully developed, represents an attempt to realise the egalitarian principles. The objective of the welfare state is to implement a socio-economic redistribution that would enable the most disadvantaged members of society to participate in society, thereby rebalancing the initial differences between people, as stated in the difference principle. From this perspective, the collective responsibility to guarantee all members of society, together with their liberty rights, an adequate level of resources, is appealing. The state, through the welfare state, could be seen as the institution responsible for fulfilling this responsibility.

Moreover, some parties advanced that not only a general claim about welfare state, but also support for universal and unconditional welfare measures, such as the basic income, could be justified on the basis of Rawlsian theory (Birnbaum, 2010). Usually, the critiques against these radical measures opposes leisure and work. According to this critique, allowing people to spend their lives not working but, for example, surfing, would not respect the principle of reciprocity. Therefore, in order to guarantee reciprocity, the measures must include mechanisms that encourage the activation of the beneficiaries. In primis, the second principle of justice, which combines the need to ensure equal prospects for all and to ensure that inequalities are to the benefit of the least advantaged, can support the guarantee of an adequate social minimum for all. Additionally, also the critique that opposes leisure and work is rejected. To do this, return to Rawls's notion of self-respect. It is, according to Rawls, the attitude by which a person recognises his or her own worth or value. This is linked to the belief that individuals have a life plan and system of ends that they consider worth pursuing and that they are capable of achieving. Self-respect is so central to everyone's life that Rawls considers it not just one of the primary goods that everyone must want, but the most fundamental of them (Rawls, 2005, p.396). Therefore, social institutions should protect it from the social conditions that can undermine it, and promote attitudes of self-respect so that individuals can gain confidence in pursuing their goals and life plans. In this perspective, it is conceivable that leisure may occasionally be preferred to a job that would otherwise compromise these values.

Moreover, as supported by Esping-Andersen, the fact that Rawls includes participation among other social primary goods widens what participation could be. It is not only participation in the labour market but includes many other activities which are not directly

linked to an income such as care activities towards friends or family and voluntary social or cultural work. In these cases too “individuals make valuable contributions to society that are not immediately identifiable or attributable to the economic or market sphere” (Esping-Andersen 2002, p. XII). In conclusion, it can be argued that universal and unconditional welfare measures, even a universal basic income, can be seen as an effective means of improving the social and economic prospects of the most disadvantaged members of society without breaking the reciprocity pact. Indeed, the need for citizens to play an active role in society is not directly exhausted by the labour market, but could be addressed in a much broader way. This type of measure is also a means of providing opportunities for social recognition and non-subordination. (Mckinnon, 2003).

It is important to note, however, that, as in Rawls's analysis (Rawls, 2005), the difference principle is the final element in the lexical order. Consequently, the principle of equal liberty and the equal opportunity principle must be secured first. In this regard, it is possible to refer to the criticism – analysed in the first chapter – of the hierarchy between different types of rights, in which liberty and political rights would be prior to social rights. However, as has been demonstrated in the first chapter, all rights are of equal importance, as the satisfaction of basic needs is a prerequisite for the enjoyment of any other right. Therefore, while it is reasonable to prioritise one principle over another in Rawls's analysis, given that it is hypothetical and conducted from an original position behind a veil of ignorance, it is not logical to ascribe a hierarchical difference to rights in an already organised society, where they are all required to address different situations.

Moreover, the fact that the difference principle is positioned last in the sequence of principles ensures that the unequal redistribution of resources in favour of the less well-off members of society does not lead to a restriction or violation of the rights of the others. The redistribution of resources is permitted, provided that it does not threaten the liberty rights and opportunities of other members of society. This implies that, initially, the safeguard of liberty rights is essential to ensure that all individuals enjoy equal freedom and equal access to positions within society. Subsequently, if a society exhibits an unequal distribution of primary goods that contravenes the second principle of justice, corrective measures should be implemented to restore equal opportunities and outcomes for all. In conclusion, any other distribution of resources that does not improve the situation of the most disadvantaged members of society is unjust. Therefore, the redistribution of resources should not exceed the limits of everyone's freedom, but rather complement it.

Having conducted an analysis of Rawls's principles of justice and explored the relationship between these principles and the welfare state, the subsequent stage of this research is to consider the role played by the concept of responsibility in Rawls's theory. This is a significant undertaking for two main reasons. Firstly, the concept of responsibility is the central focus of this thesis. Secondly, it is also one of the most extensively critiqued aspects of Rawls's theory by various scholars, which will ultimately inform the development of the Luck egalitarian theory. Indeed, scholars argue that Rawls's account fails to adequately address what they perceive as a fundamental element of distributive justice, namely individual responsibility. Their objective, therefore, is to advance a distinct conceptualisation of egalitarianism in which individual responsibility occupies a central position, as they believe it should.

In Rawls' analysis, the concept of responsibility is not entirely absent, though it is not as prominent as in the luck egalitarian theory. Firstly, a specific concept of responsibility can be derived from the previously presented analysis of reciprocity. This principle, linked to the difference principle, determines the responsibility of citizens to contribute to the production of social goods and, in general, to participate in society. In accordance with the distinction proposed by Mounk (Mounk, 2017), this conception of responsibility can be associated with the notion of responsibility-as-duty. This is a relational concept of responsibility between citizens and institutions, whereby citizens are expected to engage in the mechanisms of social cooperation, but within a framework of security provided by the institutions. This is distinct from the concept of responsibility-as-accountability, which emphasises accountability as a condition for accessing social benefits.

In the context of Rawls's theory of liberal egalitarianism, the concept of justice is understood as the most general principles that are consistent with the most extensive liberties for all individuals. The initial principle of justice, as outlined by Rawls, asserts that each citizen is entitled to pursue their own conception of the good, provided that it is consistent with contingency. The common scheme of social cooperation, to which all members of society are expected to contribute, is intended to be of mutual benefit. This is achieved by enabling all individuals to pursue their different ultimate ends and specific conceptions of the good. In alignment with this notion of liberty and a pluralistic understanding of the good, Rawls introduces the concept of responsibility. The concept of a social division of responsibilities entails that society secures “equal basic liberties and fair equality of opportunity, and for providing a fair share of the other primary goods for everyone within this framework, while citizens (as individuals) and associations accept the

responsibility for revising and adjusting their ends and aspirations in view of the all-purpose means they can expect, given their present and foreseeable situation" (Rawls 1982, p.170).

The ability to pursue objectives and to adapt them to changing circumstances is contingent upon the assumption that each individual possesses a moral personality, which endows them with a sense of justice and enables them to collaborate with one another for mutual advantage. According to this perspective, individual responsibility and social responsibility are inextricably linked. Consequently, even when related to the individual, responsibility is not conceived in an atomistic manner, but is always related to the social context and inextricably linked to that of the other people who inhabit it. The principles of justice proposed by Rawls can be interpreted as responsibility-insensitive, insofar as responsibility is not a factor in the redistribution of status and resources among citizens, and accountability for outcomes is not taken into account. The principles of justice are designed to ensure the conditions necessary to facilitate the agency and self-realisation of individuals, regardless of their initial circumstances. In accordance with this conceptualisation, all citizens are allocated their equitable share of primary goods without the necessity of demonstrating that they merit such an allocation (Blake & Risse, 2008). The sole responsibility of citizens is to select appropriate goals that align with their circumstances and those of others. All individuals should be afforded equal opportunity to occupy any position in society, and the products of social cooperation should be distributed among its members in a manner that enhances the well-being of those in the most disadvantaged circumstances.

2.2 Luck egalitarianism and individual responsibility

As outlined in the previous paragraph, Rawls's theory does not accord a central role to the concept of responsibility, nor does it draw a clear distinction between choices and circumstances (Scheffler, 2003). The only reference to choice concerns the act of choosing one's own ends. Consequently, responsibility is linked to the idea of reciprocity and mutual respect, as everyone should participate and contribute to society with the aim of achieving their chosen end. There is no reference to responsibility as accountability, that is to say, the degree of responsibility for an outcome or situation would determine the consequences for the individual. The absence of an account of responsibility was deemed inadequate by his

critics, and in particular, the difference principle is open to question (Kymlicka, 2002). Indeed, it would negate any appeal to a distinction between choices and circumstances, resulting in a dual outcome. Firstly, by necessitating a distribution that advances the most disadvantaged members of society, it would require some individuals to bear the burden of others' poor decisions. Secondly, it would also fail to address those who suffer from undeserved natural disadvantages, as they would not be eligible for compensation.

Consequently, Rawls's scholarship developed an alternative liberal egalitarian theory in which the concepts of responsibility and choice were given significant emphasis (G. A. Cohen, 1989). It is precisely the centrality assumed by the concept of individual responsibility in the luck egalitarian theory which, as it will be argued, would make it the theoretical basis for the new welfare conditionality.

As previously stated, luck egalitarians assert that the incorporation of the concept of individual responsibility should be regarded as a fundamental aspect of social justice, with the objective of integrating both state assistance and the accountability of individuals. From this perspective, the limitations of the difference principle are that it "looks at only the end-state distribution, and not at people's intentional choices that led them to the end-state distribution" (Hirose 2014, p.43). In Rawls's perspective the crucial point is how individuals end up, which should be an improvement on their position compared with that they would have without the application of the principles of justice, regardless of the extent of their personal responsibility for their circumstances. In accordance with this theoretical position, once liberty and fair opportunity are granted to all, differences in outcomes between people are primarily determined by differences in talents or circumstances. Consequently, Rawls supports the idea that those with more natural talents or advantageous circumstances should be encouraged to profit from them, but to ensure fairness despite the differences, their gains should also result in everyone's improvement.

Conversely, proponents of luck egalitarianism posit that these disparities are substantial and must be recognised as a foundational component of distributive justice. Consequently, individual accountability assumes a pivotal role in the pursuit of social justice.It is not the case that all differences in outcomes are inherently inequitable; rather, only those that individuals have some degree of responsibility for. If the disparities in outcomes are a consequence of individual choices, they are not only tolerable but also justifiable. It can thus be concluded that a just society is achieved through the differentiation of the varying degrees of responsibility that individuals possess, namely their choices and actions. These

determine the legitimacy of redistribution. A distribution that does not permit discrepancies in outcomes resulting from choices and actions would be profoundly unjust.

Ronald Dworkin was the first proponent of an egalitarian theory that prioritises choice and responsibility. In his celebrated article "What is Equality?", published in 1981, Dworkin offered a critique of Rawls's equality of welfare and proposed an alternative: equality of resources (Dworkin, 1981b). This distinction between two forms of luck proved pivotal in the subsequent development of luck egalitarianism. The fundamental premise of this argument is that this distinction provides the foundation for a theory that can reconcile the egalitarian ideal of equality with the concept of individual responsibility, which is believed to be crucial for accurately framing justice. The equalisation of welfare is not a solution that can account for the differences that arise from the preferences and choices of people. As a result, the community would ultimately bear the burden of individual choices, particularly when they entail significant costs (such as those associated with expensive preferences). In summary, a redistributive approach based on equality of welfare would lead to outcomes that are considered to be unjust and unfair. Consequently, while the concept of welfare is not rejected, Dworkin's focus shifts to equality of resources, aiming to equalise the value of the resources that individuals possess privately, thereby enhancing their overall welfare (Dworkin, 1981a). This occurs within the context of a hypothetical market mechanism, wherein all participants start with an equal initial endowment of currency. Subsequently, individuals will be at liberty to procure what they deem necessary and satisfactory in accordance with their preferences. Furthermore, in order to address all the outcomes that are not the result of deliberate choices but are caused by natural or social circumstances, Dworkin introduces a hypothetical insurance market through which people can protect themselves from these outcomes. A further fundamental element introduced by Dworkin is the distinction between two types of luck. On the one hand, there is what is defined as brute luck, which concerns the fortune or outcome over which individuals have no control. On the other hand, there is what is defined as option luck, which is the result of risks that are in some sense deliberately taken and for which individuals have responsibility. Nevertheless, the presence of two distinct forms of luck in the market of goods is limited to the domain of option luck. This is due to the fact that, despite individuals commencing from an identical position, the choices they make can be transformed by the insurance market mechanism to a certain extent, whereby initial brute luck resulting from natural and social circumstances can be transformed into option luck.

This is because individuals have the capacity to deliberate and choose whether or not to insure those risks (Reeves, 2018).

In light of these considerations, the resulting distribution in order to ensure justice must take into account the different types of luck. Thus, redistribution would be not only acceptable but also fair, provided that the unequal distribution depended on differences in option luck. However, it would be unfair in the presence of brute luck, consequently requiring compensation. In the luck egalitarian view, justice as fairness entails providing assistance to individuals who are in need due to factors beyond their control. Conversely, it is considered unfair to treat similarly situated individuals who have ended up in different circumstances as a result of their own choices. Ensuring that everyone has equal access to opportunities, including resources, is crucial. However, if individuals fail to thrive as a result of their own actions, they are not entitled to redistribution.

As Blake and Risse (Blake & Risse, 2008) delineate, there are two distinct perspectives on the relationship between Rawlsian egalitarianism and its counterparts – that is, luck- or responsibility-catering egalitarianism. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that some scholars view responsibility-catering theories as a continuation of Rawls's own work (Blake & Risse, 2008). While acknowledging the presence of some differences, they contend that these theories address a gap in Rawls's theory, namely the failure to consider the role of responsibility in distributive matters. In contrast, other scholars, including Blake and Risse, have emphasised the discontinuity between these two theories. Consequently, even if all egalitarians acknowledge the distinct role that individual responsibility plays in these theories, this would represent a significant change that would influence the evolution of theories that are considerably disparate in their fundamental tenets from those of Rawls.

The distinction between brute and option luck, as proposed by Dworkin, is regarded as the first attempt to integrate choice and responsibility at the core of social justice (Knight & Stemplowska, 2011). Given its significance, Anderson (Anderson, 1999) defined this distinctive egalitarian approach as "luck egalitarianism". As previously stated, this introduction signified a significant shift in the egalitarian discourse, and the crucial role of choice and responsibility was consistently acknowledged and upheld by all authors of luck-egalitarianism.

Therefore, the subsequent debate internal to luck-egalitarianism focused on the delineation of the threshold between luck and responsibility and the selection of the appropriate currency of equality, which would allow a clear assessment of responsibility (Arneson, 1989; G. A. Cohen, 1989; Fleurbaey, 2008; Vallentyne, 2002). For instance, Arneson and

Cohen advocated for equality of opportunity in welfare rather than Dworkin's resourcism (Arneson 1989; Cohen 1989). Arneson, indeed, posited that an exclusive focus on the equalisation of resources, coupled with an assessment of individual responsibility and the distinction between deserved and undeserved compensation, would prove challenging in the complete separation of context-dependent and individual-controllable causes. This approach also neglects to consider individuals' initial positions and disparities in ability to optimally utilise resources. Conversely, equality of welfare is also subject to limitations. Firstly, there is no consensus on a single, universally accepted definition of welfare. Secondly, the concept fails to acknowledge the discrepancies between individuals' actual needs and preferences. Consequently, it fails to consider individual choices and responsibility. In contrast, the concept of equal opportunity for welfare entails the prospect of preferences satisfaction for all individuals through the securitization of effectively equivalent options. The objective is to guarantee the opportunity, as defined by Arneson (Arneson 1989, p.85), as “a chance of getting a good if one seeks it”, taking into account the discrepancies in the capacity to negotiate the desired options or to render these options non-equivalent in order to offset inequalities in the capacity to negotiate options. Therefore, despite the discrepancies in the proposed equality, he emphasises the significance of acknowledging individuals’ accountability for their decisions and actions. Consequently, if individuals can be held accountable for the foreseeable consequences of their voluntary actions, this has implications for the legitimacy of the right to compensation in the event of need. The optimal means of achieving an egalitarian society is not through the pursuit of absolute equality, which fails to account for differences in responsibility, but rather through the guarantee of equal opportunity for welfare. This approach ensures that all individuals have access to the same amount of opportunity, taking into account their diverse necessities. However, once opportunity is guaranteed, it is incumbent upon individuals to pursue the desired level of welfare. They should exercise prudence but also exert effort to attain their goals (Arneson 2000).

Cohen (G. A. Cohen, 1989) endorsed Arneson's perspective, albeit with a slight modification, namely, that of equality of access to advantages. The assertion is that the advantage should be an actual possession rather than merely a formal opportunity, as Arneson proposed. Once more, it is argued that all individuals should have comparable access to advantages in order to meet their needs and develop their capabilities. However, the legitimacy of compensation is contingent upon whether the situation is a matter of choice or luck. Consequently, advantage is a term wider than welfare, extending to include

resources. Similarly, access is deemed superior to opportunity since it specifically pertains to the actual fulfilment of preferences, rather than merely their possibility. An alternative approach, which remains consistent with the principles of luck egalitarianism, is that proposed by Lippert-Rasmussen (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2001). He challenged the assertion that differential option luck could reconcile choice and responsibility, a claim that had been made by other authors. The distinction between brute luck and option luck would be too stark, and thus Lippert-Rasmussen highlighted the importance of differentiating between gambles and quasi-gambles. The distinction between the two is not intrinsic to the gamble; rather, it depends on the gambler's attitude. A quasi-gamble is when the gambler accepts the expected value of the gambles without facing the actual gamble, with the confidence that they will be able to predict the outcome. In light of this, Lippert-Rasmussen agreed with Dworkin's argument, albeit solely in relation to gambles and not quasi-gambles. This is because, in the latter, the individual displays a certain degree of prudence in comparison to the former.

The various formulations of luck egalitarianism do not challenge the significance of individual choice and responsibility. However, they are all concerned with the degrees of responsibility which considerations of distributive justice should factor in order to be fair. Indeed, as well shown by Hirose (Hirose, 2014), the difference in degrees of responsibility and in the level of the threshold below which individuals can be legitimately held accountable paves the way for more or less radical approaches. Some authors, such as Dworkin, have developed a “crude choice view” luck egalitarianism, as evidenced by his assertion that all individuals, if held directly responsible fof the outcomes, should bear the consequences of their preferences. Others instead, such as Cohen, espoused what might be termed the “genuine choice view” of luck egalitarianism. This is based on the premise that there should be a clear distinction between a taste or preference that is the result of a genuine choice and one that is not. Furthermore, he advanced the idea that even expensive tastes could be *genuinely involuntary*.

The example provided (G. A. Cohen, 1989) is that of two individuals with disparate interests: photography and fishing. One of these interests is more costly than the other, thereby limiting the ability of the individual with the greater interest in phography to pursue it. Cohen claims that the costs associated with his photography interests should be subsidised, given that he is not at fault for his preference for photography over fishing. Nevertheless, even if it is not a necessary pursuit that would jeopardise one's livelihood, it is a case of a genuinely involuntary and costly hobby. Another noteworthy perspective,

connected to the concept of equality of opportunity, is the “reasonable avoidability view” put forth by Vallentyne (Vallentyne, 2002) and Segall (Segall, 2010). In this case, it is only if it would have been reasonable to expect individuals to have avoided those choices that they can be held responsible for the outcomes. Furthermore, Vallentyne challenges the notion of equality of initial opportunity in the context of brute luck egalitarianism. Once more, the significance of individual responsibility in the context of social justice is not denied; however, it should not be the sole determining factor. Consequently, individual choices should not be considered in all cases, and brute luck should not be equalised in all instances. Vallentyne opposes the idea of a substantive principle of accountability and therefore compensation. He believes that it is only due if it increases people's initial opportunities; otherwise, the situation should be left as it is. However, regardless of the equalisandum chosen, what is fundamental for all luck egalitarians is the core value that choices and responsibility have in relation to justice. As Cohen (Cohen 1989, p.922) puts it, “the cut-off is between individual responsibility and bad luck and not between differences and resources”.

Accordingly, a fair distribution must possess two distinct characteristics (Hirose, 2014). Firstly, it must be responsibility-, choice- or ambition-sensitive, that is to say, it must distribute resources in accordance with the choices made by individuals, reflecting the respective options available to them. Consequently, if one individual experiences a negative outcome and another a positive one as a result of their differing choices, there is no requirement for compensation in terms of distributive justice. Secondly, the distribution of resources must be endowment-insensitive, that is, it must not depend on differential brute luck. This implies that individuals should be treated as equals. This perspective maintains that fairness necessitates an examination of individual choices and their impact on the distribution of resources. It would be unjust not to take into account individuals’ choices. Consequently, compensation should be provided exclusively to individuals who cannot be held accountable for the outcomes in question, and not to those who have deliberately chosen to engage in the behaviours that have resulted in those outcomes. In essence, all proponents of luck egalitarianism concur with the fundamental significance of differentiating between various forms of luck in the context of social justice.

In conclusion, the core role of individual responsibility is one of the constitutive and innovative aspects of the luck egalitarian approach. In order to construct a just society, individual responsibility in relation to people's circumstances must be taken into account. Consequently, redistributive mechanisms aimed at rebalancing social inequalities should be

reserved to address those unequal outcomes that are not a consequence of individuals' conscient choices and actions.

In light of this, a parallelism with the ongoing transformations in the welfare system can be suggested. As shown in the first chapter, indeed, the new welfare rationality is based upon the idea that state help should incorporate in a more stringent way the concept of individual responsibility. Therefore, a stricter conditionality should be introduced in the welfare measures and the access to them is reserved to those citizens whose needy situation is not ascribed directly to their choices and actions. On the contrary, for those citizens considered responsible the access is restricted or at least limited.

This perspective emerged and gained traction between the 1970s and 1980s. It occurred concomitant with a shift in economic theory towards neoliberalism, which exerted pressure on the prevailing consensus. Additionally, the subsequent election of conservative administrations in numerous prominent countries introduced neoliberal ideas directly into public policy. The state's role required reshaping, with the conviction that the market should be left as free as possible to ensure optimal functionality. Furthermore, the notion that the market possesses the capacity for self-regulation was endorsed, with the assertion that it can ensure that those who are qualified obtain employment opportunities in accordance with their aspirations. The marginal role that the state should play in the economy has implications for the conceptualisation of the welfare state, which should be scaled down and focused on facilitating the reintegration of individuals into the labour market. To this end, the conditions that incentivise recipients to re-enter the labour market are being tightened, and individual responsibility is being promoted as a means of differentiating between deserving and undeserving citizens in terms of state assistance. Nevertheless, the significance of contemplating the extent to which individuals assume responsibility, and the establishment of more stringent conditions, has not been the exclusive domain of conservatives and neoliberals.Convergence on this approach has also been observed among social democrats. This is exemplified on the political ground by New Labour’s Third Way, which seeks to reconcile widespread neoliberal values with the social democratic tradition, and the importance of a reappraisal of individual responsibility. A similar tendency is observable among the proponents of luck egalitarianism. Despite maintaining an egalitarian stance, these theorists have undergone a shift towards the pronounced integration of individual responsibility within their theoretical framework. This novel development was regarded as both a theoretical critique of Rawls's theory and a significant counterbalance to the ascendance of right-wing libertarianism as the prevailing

political ideal. It also served as a response to non-egalitarian critiques (Knight & Stemplowska, 2011). Cohen (G. A. Cohen, 1989) indeed asserts that Dworkin's incorporation of choice and responsibility into egalitarian theory constituted a significant contribution to the field, effectively integrating a pivotal concept espoused by the anti-egalitarian right. From that point onwards, the concept of individual responsibility became an indispensable element in discussions surrounding both welfare policies and luck-egalitarianism. In addition to meeting budgetary requirements, the centrality of individual choices and actions in determining compensation mechanisms was primarily justified by their perceived fairness compared to other mechanisms. In this regard, it would be discriminatory to provide equal access to benefits and compensation for those who have acted in accordance with or in contravention of the foreseeable risks associated with their choices and actions. Consequently, the advantages or disadvantages that arise from individual choices should not be compensated, as individuals should be held responsible for them.

2.3 Relational egalitarianism, individual responsibility and the limits of luck egalitarianism

It is important to recall the interdisciplinary nature of this work. The objective is to establish a connection between the sociological literature on welfare state transformations and the philosophical debate on social justice, with a particular focus on the egalitarian debate. Indeed, by highlighting the characteristics of both the new welfare measures and the luck egalitarian approach, many similarities emerge between the two trends. This is an important element which suggests a comprehensive turn, both on the political and theoretical level and from the left and the right, on the role individual responsibility should have both in the conceptions of the public policies and the role of the state towards its citizens as well as in the built of a just society. The state would no longer function as an institution that provides a secure and nurturing environment for individuals to fulfil their potential. Rather, it would become a marginal institution that intervenes solely in the cases of those individuals who are deemed deserving and who are not responsible for their own circumstances. As has been demonstrated, both at the level of welfare state policy-making and within the theoretical discourse of the 1980s, there has been a consensus on the

necessity of repositioning the concept of individual responsibility and people accountability at the centre.

It is important to note that the proposed connection is not direct, given the divergent objectives of the two approaches. On the one hand, public discourse on conditional public policies was oriented towards critiquing the inadequacy of the prevailing welfare state. On the other hand, the emphasis on individual responsibility, as espoused by the luck egalitarian perspective, aimed to address the perceived absence of consideration of this concept within Rawlsian egalitarianism. However, despite the indirect connection, a parallelism can be drawn between the two trends which show a similar mechanism involved: the importance of individual responsibility to determine a distinction between deserving and undeserving individuals to help as a matter of fairness. Then, in view of the above, it could be argued that a reappraisal of the concept of individual responsibility from a philosophical standpoint could also prove a valuable tool for re-examining the welfare trajectories of reforms. Furthermore, it is argued that emphasising the critiques that have been directed towards luck egalitarianism within the egalitarian debate could assist in elucidating the limitations of the contemporary welfare state conception.

In her seminal article, "What is Equality?", Elisabeth Anderson (Anderson, 1999) introduced the term “luck egalitarians” to describe the approach examined in the preceding paragraph. Additionally, she referred to them as “equality of fortune” to underscore the pivotal distinction between disparate forms of luck at the core of the theory. The various accounts of luck egalitarianism have been delineated, with a particular focus on the multiple currencies or equalisandums. However, as has already been demonstrated, they all concur on the centrality assumed by individual responsibility and the necessity of taking into account people's choices in order to establish a fair and just compensation system based on the distinction between brute or option luck. Furthermore, they all agree that the objective of justice is the individual's well-being, assuming that people are driven by atomistic egoism and self-sufficiency (Anderson, 1999). In her analysis of the limitations of luck-egalitarianism, Anderson (Anderson, 2010) develops a distinct version of egalitarianism, known as *relational egalitarianism*. The two approaches exhibit significant divergences, despite their shared affiliation with the egalitarian tradition. The former approach focuses on the distribution of non-relational goods among citizens. It posits that a just society can be achieved by modifying the existing distributive patterns, as any existing injustices are merely accidental. In contrast, the latter approach emphasises the importance

of relational aspects, particularly the virtue of agents. Consequently, the concept of injustice is closely linked to the unequal distribution of authority, status and standing.

The primary criticism that Anderson levels at luck egalitarianism pertains to the limitations that such a theory would have in addressing issues of injustice and inequality. It would be a highly reductionist approach to restrict considerations of inequality solely to the domain of resource allocation. In any given society, there are numerous levels of inequality, including those pertaining to the allocation of resources. These inequalities concern the manner in which individuals are regarded and treated. In this regard, the egalitarian objective should be the elimination of socially imposed oppression and the rectification of the allocation of resources, which would represent a minor component of a more comprehensive goal. The focus shifts from the currency that should be equalised to the social relationships that exist within society (Scheffler, 2003). The primary objective of the relational egalitarians, from which the term *democratic equality* is derived, is to establish a community in which individuals are in a position of equality with one another (Anderson, 1999). Consequently, equality is not merely a matter of resource distribution; it also encompasses the manner in which people interact with one another within society.

An examination of social justice from this perspective reveals significant critiques of the luck egalitarian approach. The theory, by placing significant emphasis on individual responsibility and focusing exclusively on the distribution of resources, would effectively contravene the fundamental tenet of any egalitarian approach, namely, the understanding of individuals as equal and not situated within a hierarchical order of inferior and superior individuals. Indeed, the distribution of resources by the state in accordance with a luck egalitarian approach would be in virtue of the concept of inferiority rather than equality. This is because only those individuals who are deemed to be in need and deserving are able to access benefits. Such individuals find themselves in a situation of need as a result of adverse events or contingencies that are not dependent on or a consequence of their own choices and actions. However, this approach fails to afford the same respect and consideration to those who have experienced misfortune as it does to others, ending up disrespecting them. This would represent a significant limitation of the theory, to the extent that the ultimate outcome would be the betrayal of egalitarian values, which, conversely, should be those of ending oppression and providing the principles to achieve a society as equal as possible. Luck egalitarianism, in contrast, only focuses on the removal of the impact of brute luck on people, and, moreover, it could lead to outcomes that are disrespectful.

A further significant distinction between the two theories pertains to the underlying justifications. As Anderson (Anderson, 2010) notes, those who espouse a luck egalitarian view appeal to a third-person or impersonal conception of justice, whereas those who adhere to a relational egalitarian perspective appeal to a second-person or interpersonal conception of justice. Consequently, the former is founded upon premises that are both normative and factual, yet fail to consider the identities of the individuals involved in the actual situation under examination. The resulting theory would remain at a general and abstract level, which could result in a lack of flexibility in dealing with specific situations. Conversely, the latter theory, which appeals to a second-person conception, is more flexible and is able to consider the most reasonable terms for each situation, as it takes into account the specificity of individuals and their relations with one another.

Anderson (Anderson, 2010) presents a number of illustrative examples which demonstrate the existence of a range of discriminatory practices directed towards individuals. A disabled individual would be denied a guide dog if they were blind due to an accident they caused (discrimination among the disabled) or compensation for a natural disaster would be denied if the house was deliberately built in an area known as at risk (geographical discrimination among citizens). Furthermore, the refusal to allow free medical care to the faulty driver who caused the accident (abandonment of the negligent victim) would also be discriminatory. Consequently, the driver who was responsible for the collision due to a failure to comply with traffic regulations is left to die, despite the fact that she required medical assistance, since she was uninsured.

The disparate manifestations of discrimination that would emerge in the practical application of luck egalitarianism would consequently give rise to twofold consequences. Firstly, the socio-relational inequalities that would be determined would be those between negligent victims and other citizens, with the former being regarded as less valuable and undeserving of equal respect on the basis of their choices. In particular, (Wolff, 1998) argued that luck egalitarianism would result in the disrespectful treatment of individuals, leading to a loss of respect due to the *shameful revelations*. Indeed, in order to ascertain the specific form of luck that has resulted in a given individual's circumstances, intrusive analysis may be conducted, potentially leading to the revelation of aspects of life that the individual is ashamed of. Secondly, the distributive criteria of luck egalitarianism would be too harsh, potentially leading to the exclusion of individuals who bear responsibility for deliberately taking risks that have resulted in a given outcome. Furthermore, Inoue (Inoue, 2022) asserts that the harshness objection represents the most significant challenge to luck

egalitarianism. If true, it would be in conflict with the fundamental values of egalitarianism, particularly insofar as it places undue emphasis on individual responsibility. Those in need but responsible for their situation will be abandoned, resulting in disrespect and a failure to acknowledge the moral equality of all individuals. The general scheme is that, even in the presence of a person in need, assistance and support will depend on the degree of responsibility the person has in the situation.

The implementation of luck egalitarianism in practice would give rise to a dual consequence. From the relational egalitarian perspective, the accusation of harshness depends on the effect that the application of the luck egalitarians' mandates would have on those who are unable to meet the standards of society. Indeed, those individuals who ultimately require assistance would be required to demonstrate their eligibility for benefits and, consequently, their inability to meet the established standards. Such an experience would result in feelings of shame, which would subsequently lead to a deterioration in self-respect and the degree of respect accorded to them by others (Preda & Voigt, 2022). The hyper-stress and emphasis on responsibility in these situations could have damaging consequences, potentially leading to individuals being viewed as imprudent and lacking a safety net to navigate complications. Conversely, for those eligible for compensation due to unfortunate circumstances beyond their control, the state may perceive them as inferior, which could evoke feelings of shame and negatively impact their self-esteem.

A number of scholars responded to the allegations by presenting a more complex and nuanced analysis of the implications of luck egalitarianism. Furthermore, they respond to Anderson's critics, demonstrating that her positions are not entirely satisfactory and that relational egalitarians do not diverge significantly from luck egalitarians in terms of outcomes. Firstly, the objection regarding harshness can be directed to Anderson and the relational egalitarian as well. The example provided by Lippert-Rasmussen (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2012) is that of a vaccination programme that is freely available to the entire population, yet there is a small proportion of the population who refuse to take the vaccine for religious reasons. The luck egalitarian approach respects individual choices; however, the application of the relational egalitarian approach would oppose the vaccination of the majority, as it would result in a hierarchical inequality between the two groups. Consequently, the choice of the majority, and the majority itself, would be regarded as disrespectful.

Furthermore, Albertsen and Nielsen (Albertsen & Nielsen, 2020) indicate that the objection to luck egalitarianism on the grounds of harshness is not a unified concept, but rather

encompasses at least four distinct formulations and interpretations. Nevertheless, if three of the objections could be addressed by revised versions of luck egalitarianism, there is one that has sufficient strength to impede the revised theory as well. Indeed, the *counterintuitiveness objection* – which claims that the treatment reserved to the imprudent would clash with commonly shared intuitions about distributive justice – the *badness objection* – according to which luck egalitarianism would allow too bad consequences – and the *disproportionality objection* – which addresses the disproportion between people's actions and how badly they end up – could be overcome by luck egalitarians. Firstly, the theory could be revised to condemn only the most extreme version of it (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2012). Secondly, the theory could be expanded to include a plurality of values or to deny the unfairness of the outcomes allowed. The fourth objection, the *inconsistency objection*, is distinct. It asserts that luck egalitarianism is unable to treat people as moral equals, a value fundamental to every version of egalitarianism. Consequently, a theory that is unable to align with this value would not be egalitarian. Furthermore, the incorporation of a plurality of values or a revised version of luck egalitarianism would not be a viable solution, as luck egalitarianism *tout court* would result in disrespectful outcomes for the imprudent individuals.

Inoue (Inoue, 2022) nevertheless challenged the assumption that the so-called inconsistency objection would be as compelling as Albertsend and Nielsen had asserted. Firstly, it is claimed that Anderson's critique is directed towards luck egalitarianism as a *deontic* conception of justice. This implies that the focus is on the conduct of agents in order to ascertain what is just or unjust, rather than on the state of affairs itself, as would be the case with a consequentialist conception. Furthermore, luck egalitarianism is a responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism, which implies that it “presumes both rational agency and availability of reasonable options” (Inoue 2022, p.2576). It is only when these conditions are met that individual choices can be considered to determine the fairness of a distribution. In light of this, Inoue rejects the notion that luck egalitarianism would disrespect the imprudent and badly-off. This is because, when the reasonable person standard is applied, it is evident that no one would be allowed to die only in the absence of insurance. Similarly, since individual choices play a pivotal role in the theory, the decisions of different social groups would be accepted, even if they result in an unequal situation. Conversely, as previously stated, relational egalitarianism would not permit the minority to make their own choices, which would be perceived as harsh.

Moreover, as posited by Lippert-Rasmussen (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2012), proponents of relational egalitarianism contend that the primary focus of egalitarianism should be on addressing inequalities pertaining to oppression and the manner in which individuals are treated, rather than on socio-economic disparities. Conversely, this would be the primary focus of luck egalitarians, who would develop a system in which socio-economic inequalities would be compensated for those who have been victimised by bad brute luck. Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated, socio-economic inequalities constitute a concern for relational egalitarianism, albeit in an indirect manner. Indeed, socio-economic inequalities give rise to a disparity in status between citizens, which is a matter of concern for the relational egalitarian. Consequently, they must be reduced or compensated in order to preclude the emergence of hierarchical distinctions between citizens. It is evident that relational egalitarianism possesses a more extensive scope than luck-egalitarianism. This is due to the fact that the concern regarding socio-economic inequalities, as espoused by luck-egalitarianism, can be incorporated into the overarching framework of relational egalitarianism. This would entail a shift in focus from relational aspects to non-relational goods, which are necessary for the establishment of a just society. Indeed, for those who espouse the luck egalitarian view, the attainment of equality of material resources and situation in accordance with the responsibility principle would be sufficient. However, this would represent only a partial step for those who adhere to the relational egalitarian perspective, who seek a more comprehensive notion of equality, focusing primarily on the nature of relations between individuals within society.

From this analysis, it can be seen that while relational egalitarianism may appear to be a more effective approach in addressing specific situations and considering the nuances of individual relationships, it has also been demonstrated to potentially result in adverse outcomes when dealing with the choices of a minority group that may ultimately be disadvantaged as a consequence of these choices. Consequently, while relational egalitarianism may offer a means of overcoming some of the limitations of luck egalitarianism, it also presents its own set of challenges.

In the following paragraph, the egalitarian debate will be set aside in favour of an examination of an alternative approach. This approach is rooted in the scepticism about free will, and it interrogates the very possibility of attributing responsibility to individuals in its absolute sense. Should this be the case, it would effectively undermine the underlying principle of luck egalitarianism. The premise of luck egalitarianism, indeed, rests upon the idea of ascribing responsibility to individuals in a fair manner. However, the ability to

make such distinctions between deserving and undeserving individuals would be compromised if the possibility of attributing responsibility fully to individuals did not exist.

2.4 Free will skepticism and individual responsibility

The egalitarian debate has constituted the philosophical reference for the majority of welfare debates in recent decades. As has been previously indicated, there is a discernible parallelism between the transformations of the welfare state and the luck egalitarian critique in relation to Rawls' theory. In both cases, the significance attributed to individual responsibility constituted a pivotal element. In order to differentiate between those who are deserving and those who are undeserving citizens, welfare rights and, more broadly, social justice should take into account the choices and responsibilities of individuals in relation to their circumstances. Consequently, welfare measures and rights would be accessible only to those who are deserving, that is to say, those who are not considered responsible for the outcomes.

A primary issue arises from the necessity of attributing degrees of responsibility to individuals in order to ascertain the direct consequences of their actions, as opposed to those that are contingent upon contextual factors or external circumstances. Scholars have highlighted that this will require individuals to engage in shameful revelations in order to demonstrate their worthiness for assistance from the state. Furthermore, the very possibility of identifying outcomes that are solely determined by the individual agent has been challenged. to say it in luck egalitarian terms, the distinction between brute and option luck is seen as a challenging proposition. The common belief is that individuals are responsible for their circumstances and, given their awareness of the potential to choose, they are held accountable for their actions.

The possibility of responsibility is inextricably linked to the concept of free will, as it is a necessary condition for its existence (Morris, 2018). Indeed, it is defined as "the variety of control required for agents to be morally responsible" (Vargas in Clark, Kiverstein, and Vierkant 2013, p.326). Both accounts of free will and moral responsibility assume the capacity of individuals to act and choose in accordance with reason as the fundamental element. Once more, as we have observed in the context of neoliberal theory, individuals are regarded as rational agents. In this instance, the notion of agents' free will and the

existence of genuine moral responsibility are taken for granted. Individuals make decisions in accordance with their volition and subsequently act in accordance with those decisions. Consequently, it is possible to determine the degree of responsibility for the outcomes of these choices and actions, and they can be rewarded or punished in relation to it. The assumption that people have free will and are morally responsible is taken for granted. Furthermore, Morris (Morris, 2018) asserts that free will is one of the grounding principles of Western civilisation over the past few centuries. However, what would occur if this attribution of responsibility was not straightforward or even impossible to determine? What if free will was denied or at the very least, doubted?

The debate about free will scepticism would provide insight into this matter by examining the implications of this contrasting perspective. The rationality of agents is called into question, and a society with no account of moral responsibility is subjected to scrutiny. Vargas (2013) posits that the influence of situational factors on human decision-making and behaviour is often underestimated, whereas the impact of fixed individual characteristics is frequently overestimated. To question moral responsibility would be to remove one of the most common grounds for the attribution of blame and punishment. As Nadelhoffer (in Sinnott-Armstrong and Nadel 2010) notes, there are two principal approaches to moral responsibility: desert-based and consequentialist-based. This implies that, in the case of the former, the infliction of punishment for an action is regarded as having an intrinsic value, whereas in the latter, it is considered to have an instrumental value. In the context of consequentialism, the justification for the imposition of rewards or punishments is contingent upon their capacity to influence the repetition or avoidance of the action in question in the future. Conversely, the latter concept posits that the consequence, whether positive or negative, is directly and exclusively related to the action itself. In considering the notion of desert, that is to say, the ground on which moral value is based for the purpose of judging actions, it is only the action in itself that should be taken into account in order to determine whether a reward or punishment should be given. Consequently, desert-based responsibility is a backward-looking concept, as justification for the reward or punishment of an action is contingent upon the desert associated with that action. In contrast, consequential-based responsibility is a forward-looking concept, as consideration of future effects is necessary for the justification of reward or punishment of the agent. Pereboom (Pereboom, 2001) posits that the agent is deserving of blame or credit solely on the basis of having performed the action, grounded on a basic notion of desert that justifies retribution consequent to the action. Those who support the existence of free

will and the possibility of ascribing genuine moral responsibility to agents are known as libertarians (Nadelhoffer in Sinnott-Armstrong and Nadel 2010). They may be event-causal or agent-causal, depending on which responsibility they espouse. For them, determinism is a fallacious theory, and all individuals are, at least on occasion, free to choose and act in a way that allows them to be considered morally responsible.

Some other scholars, however, are compatibilists and thus believe that determinism and moral responsibility are not mutually exclusive. This perspective posits that moral responsibility is contingent upon an individual's capacity to comprehend and act in accordance with moral principles. Conversely, there are those who eschew the notion of holding individuals morally accountable, citing the pervasive influence of determinism as a barrier to the exercise of free will. The rejection of a fundamental basis for moral responsibility, however, does not negate the very concept of moral responsibility itself. Instead, it is postulated that moral responsibility may manifest in other forms.

The various approaches that deny the existence of moral responsibility nevertheless exhibit a common thread: the rejection of free will and moral responsibility that is based on desert (Caruso, 2021). The initial form of free will scepticism is inextricably linked to a rigid determinist interpretation of reality, exemplified by the theories put forth by Spinoza (Spinoza, 2004). This perspective asserts that a determinist reality is incompatible with both free will and moral responsibility. The entirety of the world is but a finite mode, a modification of the singular substance that is *causa sui* (cause of itself). Thus, the potential for what is possible or impossible is determined by the causal links that extend back to the substance, and is not within the power of the individual modes. It is evident that human beings would be modes too, lacking free will but subject to causal determination by factors that are beyond the agent's control.

Another argument for moral responsibility scepticism is that put forth by Strawson (Strawson, 1994), who presents the “basic argument” against the possibility of free will and moral responsibility. Even if not linked to a determinist view of reality, it is based upon the concept of causa sui, which would make it impossible for people to have full control over the situation, since there would always be a part which is outside their control. Therefore, it would be impossible to ascribe moral responsibility to individuals for their actions, given that there are always external factors outside of their control that determine how they are. The basic argument posits that, given that nothing can be causa sui, in order to be truly morally responsible, one must be causa sui. Consequently, no individual can be truly morally responsible, since the attempting to ascertain whether an individual is

genuinely responsible for their actions would inevitably result in an infinite regression, seeking the initial point of determination itself. No individual can be considered fully self-determined, and thus the manner in which an individual behaves or changes cannot be attributed entirely to that individual alone.

Then, another free will skeptical approach may prove particularly fruitful for the research. In this case, the question of whether reality is structured deterministically or not is irrelevant, as the possibility of free will is ruled out not by ontology but by luck. Hard determinism is replaced with the hard luck view, as it is believed that free will exists for reasons other than determinism. However, in luck egalitarianism, as the name itself indicates, the role of luck and the differentiation between its various forms serve to distinguish those individuals who are genuinely deserving of state assistance and compensation. The distinction between brute luck and option luck enabled the ascription of moral responsibility for the outcomes of actions or the situation to individuals. Conversely, the concept of luck is addressed with the opposite purpose: to demonstrate the non-existence of free will and moral responsibility, and thus the impossibility of holding individuals morally accountable for their actions.

Levy (Levy, 2009) posits that luck can be classified into two distinct categories, both of which have implications for individuals' daily lives. The first type is that of present luck, which can be defined as a lucky event that is significant for the individual in question, and which is inherently uncertain and beyond their control. The second type is instead constitutive luck, that is, those events or states of affairs that are significant for agents, beyond their control, but that could als be not chancy. Constitutive luck, also referred to as remote luck, pertains to the role of chance in the formation of an individual's characteristics and attributes. The distinction is therefore determined by the presence or absence of “chancyness”. According to Levy, luck is composed of three factors: control, significance to the individual, and chance. An event is deemed chancy for the individual if, in a multitude of hypothetical universes where the event occurs, a substantial number of them do not feature the event. It should be noted that these alternative worlds are only marginally different from the actual one in the moments preceding the event's occurrence. According to this, an event may be beyond people's control and significant, yet not be considered chancy. This could be exemplified by the event of death. Conversely, an event may be beyond people's control and significant, yet be considered chancy. This could be exemplified by the event of the lottery. Therefore, death is not considered a lucky event, whereas the lottery is. The relationship between luck and control is pivotal in determining

whether luck precludes the possibility of free will and the consequent moral responsibility that arises from it. Luck is inherently incompatible with control, as external factors exert a significant influence on choices and actions, effectively negating the capacity for free will and moral responsibility.

Having analysed free will scepticism, it is now necessary to consider the implications that such an approach would have in society, and in particular in the context of the welfare state, which represents the main focus of this research. This is a fundamental aspect of the free will debate, as the existence of free will is mainly directed towards ascribing moral responsibility to individuals, and consequently, rewarding or punishing, praising or blaming them for their actions (Caruso & Morris, 2016). Furthermore, as Russel and McKenna state , “free will is just the capacity that gives persons the relevant sort of control required for morally responsible agency” (Russell & McKenna, 2016). It is therefore evident that retributivism represents a significant objective for those who advocate for free will. Furthermore, this practical dimension must be challanged too when questioning the existence of free will.

Some scholars, while mainting skepticism about the common understanding of free will, have attempted to disentangle the perceived inextricable link between free will and moral responsibility. The concept is that free will is a distinct element from moral responsibility, yet an essential attribute of the human condition. Indeed, by rejecting the concepts of moral responsibility and free will, there is a risk of eliminating the capacity for human action and decision-making. This could result in a worldview where everything is predetermined, with no room for individual autonomy. Conversely, they argue that free will and the capacity for individuals to choose and act freely are intrinsic to human nature and cannot be simply dismissed. To illustrate, Dennett (Dennett, 2004) does not refute the existence of free will; rather, he posits that it is not an inherent attribute of human beings. Conversely, it is a quality that individuals cultivate over time, shaped by contextual factors, cultural influences, and personal experiences. The capacity for free will is one that develops over time and is necessary for individuals to anticipate potential outcomes and consequences of their actions, and to modify them accordingly. Therefore, even if a relationship between free will and moral responsibility can be discerned, external factors exert a considerable influence, rendering the accurate attribution of responsibility a challenging endeavour. Situational and experiential factors contribute to the diversification of the capacity for exercising free will and its manifestation in individuals. Consequently, it is difficult to

apply a retributivist framework of free will to individual cases and determine the varying degrees of moral responsibility.

This perspective is supported by other scholars (Clark et al., 2013; Mele & Shepherd, 2013) who emphasise the influence of contextual factors over the capacity of individuals to exercise control. Once more, the notion of free will is not entirely rejected; however, it is postulated that external factors exert a pivotal influence on the configuration of circumstances and the capacity of individuals to act freely. In this account, the concept of free will is understood as a practical capacity of individuals, rather than an intrinsic character trait. It is posited that individuals may exercise freedom not in an independent manner, but in accordance with the circumstances they find themselves in. This implies that individuals' capacity for control is always situated within a context of action, which interacts with the function of agents and structures the possibilities of action itself. Such an approach could result in a pessimistic assessment of human agency and control, given that individuals would be constrained by limited freedom or subjugated to external factors. Conversely, these authors espouse an optimistic interpretation of the view, emphasising the capacity for behavioural education (Mele & Shepherd, 2013), or the ability to learn from situations and act accordingly. Furthermore, this capacity allows for the retention of agency and control, albeit through a distinct mechanism that is continuously shaped by a multitude of external influences. These influences encompass not only natural factors but also a significant proportion of social elements, including societal structures, governmental policies, and cultural norms. Consequently, social knowledge and education assume a pivotal role in society, equipping individuals with the competencies and expertise necessary to navigate the complexities of their environment.

Waller (Waller, 2006) provides another example by questioning the necessity of absolute control over an action. According to him, free will does entail some degrees of control, but in accordance with the possibility of alternatives and the capacity to make choices from these. It is essential to consider the various alternatives available to an individual and the environmental conditions that influence their behaviour, as these factors play a significant role in shaping human actions. The concept of free will and the potential for individuals to exert control over their circumstances does not automatically confer moral responsibility. This is evidenced by observations in the animal kingdom, where species that lack an understanding of moral responsibility demonstrate the capacity to exercise control and make choices.

Caruso and Morris (Caruso & Morris, 2016) contend that this notion of free will devoid of moral accountability contributes nothing to the discourse. Indeed, a free will lacking of moral responsibility would be of no consequence in determining when and how individuals should be punished or rewarded for their actions. Consequently, it would be rendered entirely irrelevant from a philosophical and practical standpoint. This criticism is fundamental and can be extended to most accounts or theories that deny the existence of free will or, at the very least, that challenge the possibility of linking free will to moral responsibility. The defence of moral responsibility and, in particular, of free will is considered to be of great importance precisely because of its practical implications. The possibility of ascribing moral responsibility to people is a fundamental aspect of social organisation, as it allows for the allocation of rewards and punishments. Without this possibility, it would be impossible to resolve social offences in a manner that is perceived as fair by the majority of society. It is frequently asserted (Baumeister et al., 2009; Vohs & Schooler, 2008) that questioning the existence of free will would have adverse consequences for society, namely a reduction in prosocial behaviours relative to an increase in antisocial behaviour. Furthermore, it is proposed that the absence of moral anger in support of punishment would render it less efficacious, as people would be less inclined to adhere to social norms (Morris, 2018).

Those who espouse free will skepticism contend that the inverse is true. They posit that a society devoid of free will could conceivably be structured in a manner that is less punitive and more efficacious. The proposition that free will should play a different role in people's lives does not entail, as Waller (Waller, 2006) asserts, a rejection of punishment *in toto*. Indeed, it appears to be a challenging proposition to envisage a society lacking of any form of punishment. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily entail that punishment is just. Rather, the focus is on the presumed indissoluble link between punishment and moral responsibility, particularly in relation to the latter. The rejection of moral responsibility does not negate the necessity of punishment; however, it does prompt a re-evaluation of its fundamental tenets and applications. If the concept of justice is not anymore the rationale for the implementation of punishment, other values should be work as justifications. In this way, it can be seen that punishment is never justly deserved, but that it is nevertheless a consequence of the commission of an offence. It is imperative to elucidate this point: if punishment is inherently unjust, it follows that no individual can ever be deserving of it. This has significant implications for the practical dimension, as it does not aim to redress the imbalance of injustice, but rather to influence the behaviour of the wrongdoer.

Consequently, the application of punishment could be reduced to its minimum with the sole intention of promoting an alternative behavioural pattern. Indeed, as Morris (Morris, 2018) states, the establishment of punishment on factors other than moral indignation would result in a more effective process. The criminal justice system would be more concerned with the welfare and rehabilitation of criminals, resulting in a reduction in recidivism compared to a system that is primarily focused on retributivism.

The most illustrative example is that of the prisons, which, even if not abolished, could be developed as places of genuine rehabilitation, capable of fostering positive change rather than exacerbating existing issues. The absence of a moral dimension would eliminate the motives for cruelty and limit the brutality of the system as much as possible, thereby reducing the associated psychological damage. This line of reasoning is supported by the findings of numerous studies (Baraza, 2020; Kelly, 2018) which have demonstrated that blame and punishment are not an effective deterrent to criminal behaviour, but rather have a counterproductive effect. This reinforces the argument previously made about the fundamental role that knowledge and power play in society. This is not only at a general level, influencing individuals to act and choose in accordance with the context, but also specifically in relation to fostering a behavioural change amongst those in the criminal system.A further significant consequence of the scepticism of free will is the manner in which individuals are conceived in relation to society. Indeed, as Vargas (in Clark, Kiverstein, and Vierkant 2013) asserts, numerous accounts of free will are atomistic, positing that individuals are rational agents with the capacity for free choice and action. Furthermore, the capacity to exercise free will is intrinsic to the individual and is executed in a state of isolation, independent of the social and physical context in which they exist. It is assumed that, regardless of the context, each individual is capable of making the most rational choice based on their own thoughts and reasoning. If, on the one hand, this limitless ability ensures the possibility of ascribing a pure form of moral responsibility, it also has consequences for the collective dimension of society. In the absence of a shared dimension of solidarity, society could function without a collective commitment to the common good. This is because individuals are potentially able to act according to their own desires, and the fact of not acting or choosing the wrong path is ascribed to them individually. There is no safety net to catch those who err, and the only mechanism in operation is the punitive one.

A key assumption of those who espouse the doctrine of free will is that of the manner in which individuals are conceived in relation to society. It has been demonstrated that in

order for individuals to possess unadulterated control and freedom of action, they must be regarded as highly rational beings. Thanks to their capacity for rational thinking, individuals are able to make decisions and act in accordance with their considered judgement. Furthermore, moral responsibility and blame or reward can be attributed based on the consequences of an individual's actions. Furthermore, Vargas posits that numerous accounts of free will are atomistic, whereby individuals are deemed capable of undertaking fully rational actions and decisions in isolation, without the influence of social and physical contexts. Accordingly, free will is posited as an innate capacity of individuals, contingent solely upon their own volition. Those who espouse skepticism regarding free will challenge this assertion, proposing that the underlying process governing action may not necessarily be rational or even entirely irrational. Consequently, they contend that the notion of freedom in humans is a fallacy (Vargas in Clark, Kiverstein, and Vierkant 2013).

Nevertheless, analogous assumptions are posited by the majority of neoliberal theories, which conceive individuals as rational actors wholly detached from the context in which they reside. As a result, it is possible to predict how they will react to changes made in socio-economic policies. In terms of the social dimension, these assumptions may also be used to justify a society that lacks any shared dimension of solidarity. This is because individuals are assumed to be able to act as they wish, and any inability or wrongdoing is attributed to them individually. No safety net is provided, and the only mechanism in operation is the punitive one. Once again, individual responsibility is seen as determining how people end up. Furthermore, this is considered politically and morally fair, with no need for intervention.

The proposition put forth is that the changes that occurred from the end of the 1970s, which have already been described in the preceding chapter, extend beyond the policy and political realms to encompass the philosophical dimension as well. As asserted by Rosanvallon (Rosanvallon, 2015), these three dimensions represent the facets of change that emerged from the significant reversal, which precipitated a profound transformation in the welfare state. In concrete terms, the new era is characterised by a reduction in growth and the end of reformism, which had been a defining feature of the post-war period. However, the change was also ideological, characterised by a crisis of legitimacy of the state as a result of its perceived inability to effectively manage social risks, and philosophical in nature. This is linked to the emergence of new social issues and concerns the disintegration of traditional principles of solidarity and the inadequacy of social rights as a framework for addressing social problems (Rosanvallon, 2000). In contrast, the

preceding notion of the welfare state was situated within a social framework. As previously discussed in the initial chapter, this conceptualisation entailed the socialisation of responsibilities towards members of society. Conversely, the resurgence of liberalist capitalism, now the dominant economic paradigm, has precipitated a crisis in the very notion of equality and social solidarity, thereby contributing to the ascendance of the individual dimension (Rosanvallon, 2013). The insurance society has witnessed a decline, giving way to the implementation of policies that are oriented towards the punitive and controlling of deviant behaviours.

The change can be situated between two different forms of individualism: that of universality and that of singularity. The former is associated with the concept of equality and the recognition of similarities between individuals. This concept is analogous to the veil of ignorance posited by Rawls (Rosanvallon, 2000), which postulates that any individual may potentially find themselves in a situation of need, and thus, it is the responsibility of society to implement safety nets to assist those in need. The latter is associated with the concept of a wholly personalised experience, which has been employed by neoliberalism to introduce an alternative notion of responsibility and utilitarian reductionism. A new social knowledge is posited, which has the effect of lifting the veil of ignorance and enabling a clear distinction to be made between those who are and are not responsible for their situation. The shift in perspective has been from an individualism that situates the individual within a broader collective dimension to one that extends the individual perspective onto the communal dimension, envisioning society as a sum of subjects. However, these subjects are not conceived as singularities, but rather as uniform rational free will agents. Here, utilitarianism and its supporters are unified by their monistic conception of society. Free will supporters assume individuals to be able to act as they wish, without any involvement of the context (Vargas 2016), while utilitarians reduce the singularity to a rationality which aims at the same goal of maximizing utility (Scheffler, 2003).

In opposition to this tendency, Rosanvallon advocates for the reaffirmation of what he terms the “age of singularity”, a novel model of solidarity and integration. This could be better supported by a non-monistic approach which, in relation to free will, would take into account the multiple factors involved, the agential structures and the combinations of powers that constitute freedom (Vargas 2016), as well as a pluralistic approach to egalitarianism over neoliberal utilitarianism. This would entail considering individuals as singularities, which are relational variables linked to the value of reciprocity and mutual

recognition (Rosanvallon, 2013). The absence of a robust conception of moral responsibility would facilitate the restoration of social solidarity, promoting a relational self-interest and empathy towards others (Morris, 2018).

From the analysis of luck egalitarianism and the neoliberal approach to welfare. Indeed, despite operating within disparate disciplinary frameworks, both perspectives emphasise the necessity of incorporating individual responsibility as a fundamental aspect of social justice. The provision of state assistance and the implementation of egalitarian justice are deemed to be equitable in their assessment of the varying degrees of responsibility borne by individuals. However, this approach may result in the exclusion of certain individuals from the welfare system or the distributive scheme. This shift is necessary because the previous conceptualisation of the welfare state and Rawls' egalitarianism failed to adequately address the role of individual responsibility. The limitations of this approach have been demonstrated with regard to its philosophical underpinnings through a comparison with another egalitarian sub-theory, namely relational egalitarianism. Subsequently, an alternative perspective has been examined, namely the one which challenges the very possibility of free will and, consequently, of moral responsibility. This has led to the emergence of a distinct conceptualisation of individuals and society, particularly with regard to the punitive approach to social policy.

3
Individual responsibility and the Covid-19 outbreak: comparative analysis of Denmark, Italy, Sweden and UK

3.1 Context and research question

In the preceding chapters, the notion of individual responsibility has been examined through the lenses of sociology and philosophy. The analysis has been conducted primarily at a theoretical level, with the objective of demonstrating, firstly, the fundamental role that the concept plays in the present European welfare state's reform trajectories and, secondly, its substantiation in terms of social justice theories. The analysis has revealed that over time in both debates the concept of individual responsibility has emerged as a mechanism that supports the distinction between those considered responsible for their circumstances and those who are not. This mechanism is endorsed by political parties and economists who advocate for a deep reform of the welfare state, as well as by egalitarian philosophers who emphasise its significance in achieving a more equitable society.
Moreover, it has become clear that the notion of individual responsibility is not unambiguous and that at least two opposing conceptions of it can be distinguished. According to Mounk (Mounk, 2017), it is precisely the shift from one meaning to the other that characterises the transition from the Beveridgean to the new idea of the welfare state. The Beveridgean welfare state emphasised the concept of responsibility-as-duty, which frames individual responsibility in a collective dimension. Individuals are linked in reciprocal relationships between themselves and society. This allows individuals to participate and take risks in society, but with a safety net provided by society in case of need. In contrast, the contemporary welfare state emphasises the concept of responsibility as accountability, which instead frames individual responsibility individually. Individuals are urged to participate in society and to take risks, but the consequences directly attributable to them fall exclusively on the individual. The shared dimension of help is limited to those consequences caused by factors external to the individual. What used to be understood as social risks generated by the functioning of society is now individualised,

privatised and attributed to people themselves (Ebbinghaus, 2015; Horn, 2017). This shift marks the beginning of a new era of the welfare state, the age of responsibility (Mounk, 2017), which has gone from being a fundamental part of citizenship rights, necessary to ensure full participation in society, to a residual institution aimed at helping only a marginal, and only if deserving, part of the population. Increasing levels of conditionality are being introduced, and citizens' eligibility for welfare is being tested in order to make it accessible only to deserving citizens.

The analysis then turned to the egalitarian debate on social justice to show that it supported a similar conception of individual responsibility. Indeed, according to luck egalitarians, a just society could only be achieved by distinguishing between deserving and undeserving individuals, with only the former entitled to state support and redistribution of resources. On the contrary, it would be unfair to help those who have misused their resources and end up in need. The limits of such an approach and an alternative view have been analysed. The free will skepticism debate questions the possibility of attributing moral responsibility to individuals at all, with important consequences also for the political dimension. Given the impossibility of distinguishing between deserving and undeserving individuals, since it is not possible to clearly separate what people do consciously from what is forced on them by context or situation, it would be fairer and more effective to opt for a more universal welfare policy that helps all people in need without distinction.

However, the theoretical dimension analysed so far has ignored any differences between countries and has considered all Western countries as a single block. But this is clearly not the case, and although the general trend of welfare transformations can be observed in almost all countries, the different systems and institutional structures lead to different implementations of the new policies from country to country (Palier, 2013). There is then a new general trend of welfare transformations, but it applies to systems that are already differently shaped. Faced with this duality, it is necessary to understand whether the new idea of the welfare state has spread sufficiently and thus generated a convergence of reform processes, reducing the differences between national welfare states, or whether the idea has been implemented differently in each country, according to its peculiarities.

The differences between welfare states were summarised by Esping-Andersen in his seminal book “The three worlds of welfare capitalism” (Esping-Andersen, 1990) into three macro-ideal types of regimes. According to groups of nations, each regime not only provides the basic source for the design and implementation of policies, but also contributes to the shaping of social beliefs. Indeed, as the Danish author argues, the welfare

state is not only a corrective mechanism but also a system of stratification that actively shapes social relations. Different welfare regimes are based on, but also influenced by, different views and conceptions of society and citizens' attitudes. It is therefore to be expected that each regime will have a different understanding of the concept of individual responsibility and accountability. As a result, the implementation of the new policies would differ between countries that frame individual responsibility more collectively and those that frame it more individually.

The distinction between welfare regimes concerns how each country organises the three main providers of welfare, namely the state, the market and the family (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Depending on the main organisation and policy design, these main pillars of Western society are combined in different ways. The first regime identified is the “liberal” welfare state. The United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia are examples of this regime. It is the closest to neoliberal theory, which sees the welfare state as a residual element in support of the market. In fact, market failures are the result of state intervention, which must be kept to a minimum, helping only the very worst off. The liberal welfare state then supports the market by providing only a minimum set of welfare measures. Moreover, eligibility conditions are strict, often associated with stigma, and means testing and the scarce use of universal measures are designed to push able-bodied individuals back into the labour market. People's job flexibility is encouraged, but little support is provided in case of need, as the market is the main welfare provider.

The second regime is instead the “corporatist” welfare state. Examples of this regime are France, Germany and Italy. However, according to Ferrera's introduction of a fourth “Mediterranean” or “Southern European” regime (Ferrera, 1996), Italy would be included in the latter. This type of welfare state is mainly conservative and strongly committed to guaranteeing social rights. Their peculiarity lies in the targeting of recipients, since welfare measures are designed to support specific categories of citizens and therefore rights are mainly secured according to class membership or status. The result is limited redistributive power and the perpetuation of differences between social groups. Moreover, the focus is on traditional social institutions, with measures concentrating on passive income maintenance, strong job guarantees for the male breadwinner and support for family related issues.

Finally, the third regime is the “social democratic” welfare state, so called because social democracy was the political force that designed and implemented the policies. The emphasis is on equality and guaranteeing the highest possible standards for all. Everyone must be able to participate fully in society and enjoy the rights of the better off. Policies

should not only be targeted at those in need, but should be seen as fundamental support in many dimensions of the individual and at many stages of life. The universality of the measures and the high level of benefits should meet many needs and make individuals as independent as possible. On the contrary, the need to be related to the market or to the family is to be kept as low as possible. People are encouraged to be flexible in the labour market, but with strong support in case of need, which encourages them to take risks.

Given these differences between welfare state regimes, it might be expected that not only has each country incorporated the concept of individual responsibility into its policies in different ways, but also that its meaning has shifted according to the welfare regime. Regimes that emphasise a more universal and generous conception of the welfare state might be expected to support the concept of responsibility-as-duty, while those that support a more market-based or individualised conception of welfare might be expected to support the concept of responsibility-as-accountability. However, the globalised world and sopranational institutions, which limit the freedom of states to act, sometimes to the extent of making them obliged to implement policies, would make it difficult to distinguish which force is more influential in the reform process. In consideration of the above, the fundamental question guiding this chapter is whether the implementation of policies sensitive to individual responsibility can still differentiate between welfare regimes, or whether a level of convergence has been achieved that has significantly reduced the disparities between countries.

First, the concept of convergence needs to be clarified, as the idea itself is not so clear and the literature uses different and overlapping concepts as synonyms for policy convergence, but on closer examination they are not the same (Knill, 2005). Indeed, concepts such as policy transfer or policy diffusion are distinct from policy convergence. The first two focus on the processes that may or may not lead to policy convergence, namely the exchange of knowledge between countries and the socially mediated diffusion of policies across political systems. The latter focus instead on the effects, or rather where effective policy convergence ultimately occurs. Policy convergence is more akin to isomorphism, the process of homogenisation of characteristics between units with similar environmental conditions. With this in mind, Knill defines convergence as "any increase in similarity between one or more characteristics of a certain policy (e.g. policy objectives, policy instruments, policy settings) across a given set of political jurisdictions (supranational institutions, states, regions, local authorities) over a given period of time" (Knill 2005, p.768).

Moreover, he also identifies the different possible causes of policy convergence. Some of these are coincidental, resulting from similar responses to similar problems without any planned coordination. Others, on the other hand, are the result of supranational institutions that impose the implementation of policies or the harmonisation of policies with international law or international integration, as is the case for the European Union. Then the process of market globalisation is another external factor driving policy convergence. Finally, there is convergence through international communication, when countries actively exchange and confront their different policies in order to gain inspiration.

As shown in the first chapter, all these factors characterise the current period and have contributed to the crisis of the welfare states, which has led to the need for reforms. For this reason, it might be expected that there would be a trend towards convergence between the countries, in particular for the European countries. However, despite the fact that policy changes have taken place in all countries, with clear differences in the extent from one country to another, the degree of convergence and coordination appears from the data to be much less than expected, with many countries also facing problems in the reform process (Esping-Andersen 2002).

These difficulties could be explained by a social policy concept, that of path dependency, which obstructs or at least complicates major policy changes. Pierson (P. Pierson, 2002) compares the concept of path dependency with that of increasing returns in order to better define its nature, given the vagueness that exists in the literature. This second concept is borrowed from the economic literature because it describes well what path dependency refers to. The idea is that each step forward increases the costs and risks of changing direction, making it more likely to continue along the same path. Therefore, if at the beginning the given conditions, which are consistent with increasing returns, potentially allow a wide range of different outcomes (multiple *equilibria*), the number of possibilities is obviously drastically reduced by the events that occur over time. This reduction in the possibility of change is not necessarily determined by important events, but any event, even a small one, if it occurs at the right time, could have a major impact on the process (contingency). Timing is indeed a crucial element, and what happens at the beginning is more important than what happens later, given this reduction in the chances of changing course. Moreover, the same event occurring at the right or wrong time could have an enormous influence or no influence on the process (a critical role for timing and sequencing). Finally, once the process of increasing returns is achieved, its equilibrium, ensured by positive feedbacks, will be extremely difficult to change (inertia). The political

dimension is also fertile ground for path dependency. There is a multitude of institutions that exercise authority and power in an asymmetric way. Also important is the fact that institutions tend to preserve the existing organisation and *know-how*, driven by the need to maintain consensus over the short electoral cycles. Indeed, a major policy change would reduce the consensus of all those groups negatively affected by the change, with consequences for the next election. Instead, a longer period of time is needed to see the potential improvement generated by the new policy, so that the credit can be taken by the government in power after the next election. Given this scenario, opting for a major policy change represents an enormous risk, which most governments prefer to avoid in order not to risk a permanent loss of consensus, both among those who will be cut off by the new policy and among the general caution of the population in the face of change.

The evidence so far suggests that, given the existence of different welfare state regimes and the obstacle to policy change posed by path dependency, the new policies would be implemented in a mild manner, in line with the regime differences. However, it has also emerged that many welfare policies, especially those related to unemployment benefits, have strengthened the conditions associated with individual responsibility. Indeed, the neo-liberal idea that the level of individual responsibility should be taken into account when determining who deserves state assistance and who does not is now a core element in many aspects of welfare reform in Western countries. There has been a broad consensus, from both the right and the left, that the introduction of greater conditionality could have been the solution to the problems of welfare states. By emphasising the active role that individuals should play in the welfare state, the aim was to reduce the expenditure needed to finance welfare measures and also to encourage people to be better able to cope with a changing labour market that requires more flexibility and skills.

Given this tension between a strong theoretical shift in the conception of the welfare state and actual policies that are informed by it but have not yet completed the transformation, the analysis aims to understand the way in which individual responsibility has been intended in each country, from welfare regime to welfare regime. Indeed, as has already been shown, personal responsibility is not a univocal concept and can have at least two different meanings. Have all countries adopted the same account of responsibility, or has each welfare regime developed it in its own way?

In order to shed light on this, there is the problem of distinguishing between the different forces at play that might contribute to the change. Indeed, the shift towards a particular concept of responsibility could be dictated by international pressure, or by shared

knowledge with other countries, or instead by the beliefs attached to the regime of belonging.

In a normal situation, all these forces would be constantly in play, making it really difficult to separate them and understand their unique impact on the process. However, the extraordinary situation of the recent Covid-19 pandemic may have provided a rich context to facilitate analysis.

Indeed, the virus outbreak represented a huge challenge for our societes, upsetting our everyday life and putting under pressure the governments which had to deal with it. It has been a moment of extreme crisis which required immediate and effective actions, a response as quick as possible in order to limit the spread of the infection and consequently the deaths. Therefore, there has been the need of the introduction of an emergency legislation with no matter of the institutional costraints already in place.

In such an emergency situation, there was no time to coordinate or develop a common response plan with other countries, resulting in individual national responses, each based on the particular pandemic status, political system and structure of society. Moreover, given the nature of the emergency, a virus that spreads dangerously and rapidly through human contact, it is to be expected that individual responsibility would have played a central role in many of the measures introduced and would have been one of the main messages conveyed by governments. Indeed, until a vaccine was found, only a change in individual behaviour would have made a difference, as only non-pharmaceutical measures such as physical distancing, hand washing or wearing masks were available as effective ways of limiting the spread of the virus (Desvars-Larrive et al., 2020).

Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic may provide a special and fruitful situation to shed light on our research questions. This extraordinary context will help to highlight the idea of individual responsibility already present in each welfare regime, and the similarities and differences with the guiding idea of the new welfare ideology. Was individual responsibility emphasised differently in different countries? Moreover, did all appeals to individual responsibility refer to the same meaning? Finally, is there a link between different uses of individual responsibility and the welfare regimes to which each country belongs?

There is another important factor that strongly influences which conception of individual responsibility is emphasised from country to country, and that is the level of social trust that exists in society. Social trust refers to the extent to which citizens trust each other in general, that is, without having any information about them other than that they are fellow

citizens. On the contrary, particular trust is the trust in people who are already in our group and whose behaviour is known (Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2013; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). In addiction, social trust also concerns the level of trust that exists between individuals and institutions, first and foremost the government. Therefore, the level of social trust in each country also has a strong influence on the policies that are implemented and the support that citizens give to these policies.

There is general agreement in the literature that a strong relationship exists between the level of social trust in society and the size and generosity of the welfare state. Societies with higher levels of social trust have larger and more generous welfare states (Gelissen et al., 2012). This would be because trust is linked to social solidarity, and therefore societies that are more trusting also believe in the existence of a social responsibility to help those citizens in need (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Moreover, social trust is associated with many desirable things at both individual and community levels. It promotes positive attitudes towards institutions, encourages social participation and increases social tolerance.

Obviously, trust will also play an important role in supporting government policies, especially the welfare state. Indeed, if people trust their fellow citizens and believe that others will cooperate, avoid undesirable behaviour and share the burden of social policies, this would lead to increased support for welfare policies. The same applies to the level of trust citizens have in the institutions, which, when high, leads to greater support for social policies (Daniele & Geys, 2015). As shown by Bjørnskov e Svendsen (Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2013), social trust, along with political trust, good legal quality and low levels of corruption, has an important influence on the quality of institutions and the shape of policies implemented. First, social trust helps to maintain a large welfare state, as it would help to make the welfare system, especially its bureaucratic apparatus, more efficient and sustainable over time. Socially trusting citizens would also accept a higher level of taxation, which will lead to higher revenues, and in a high trust society there is a smaller underground economy and less presence of free riders and people who cheat to get the benefits.

Another important consequence of high levels of trust in society is support for more generous and, in particular, universal welfare measures (Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2013; Rothstein et al., 2012; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). It has already been shown how trust binds individuals to other people without the need to know them, fostering a sense of solidarity and reciprocity between citizens. They all feel that they are part of the same

group with a common destiny or, to put it more concretely, that they are all part of the same system which creates imbalances between people and therefore requires a mechanism of rebalancing and redistribution. Moreover, a trusty society witnesses less uncivic behaviors which contribute to greater efficiency.

Between trust and universal welfare measures a positive vicious circle is formed. Indeed, universal measures, given their redistributive nature, boost economic equality; they also increase the sense of equality of opportunity and minimise the bureaucratic intrusion in people’s lives. On the contrary, the means-tested policies generate the opposite result. They create a trap of inequality which determine a decrease of optimism, greater in-group identification and finally less trust between people, who fear that some people would behave in uncivic manner and take advantage of benefits.

However, other scholars (Algan et al., 2016) show a different relationship between people's expected behaviour and the resulting size of the welfare state. If it is true that societies in which citizens engage in civic behaviour are more likely to have larger welfare states, the opposite could also be true. The relationship between efectiveness and the size of the welfare state is non-monistic, and therefore a society with many people engaging in uncivic behaviour would require more expenditure to finance social policies than a civic and more effective one. Moreover, as the people who take advantage of benefits are also the ones who think that the more resources are available, the more abuse of them will be possible, the uncivic individuals might also be the ones who support a larger welfare state.

The existence of a strong link between trust and the welfare state is established and those societies with higher level of social trust are also wealthier (Newton et al., 2018). What is more controversial is how the causal relation works. Is it the high level of trust that determines a larger and more generous welfare state, or is it the presence of a larger and more generous welfare state that increases the level of social trust? It is not entirely clear whether it is the characteristics of the welfare state that determine the level of social trust, or whether, on the contrary, the level of social trust determines the characteristics of the welfare state (Kevins, 2019). Thus, the literature does not show a strong consensus for one or the other idea, and often they appear together as evidence of the strong link between social trust and the welfare state. Some scholars are more inclined to support the idea that it is the high levels of interpersonal or social trust that lead to support for welfare measures (Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2013; Daniele & Geys, 2015), or at least the fact that the data point in this direction and evidence of reverse causality is missing (Bergh & Bjørnskov, 2014). This would be mainly due to the fact that trusting citizens are more inclined to the

idea that social needs should be addressed by the whole of society, and that those who trust their fellow citizens to behave correctly are more supportive of universal welfare measures. As a consequence, where the trust levels are higher more generous welfare states are in place (Bergh & Bjørnskov, 2011). Indeed, those countries with very high levels of trust, namely the Nordic countries, are those that have developed the most extensive and generous welfare states. As the measurement of trust levels shows, these countries are not only those with the highest levels of trust, between 65 and 70% for Sweden, Norway and Denmark, while Finland and the Netherlands have 59%, but they are also at a level much higher than the average for most other countries, which is below 30% (Daniele & Geys, 2015). These are also the countries, with the stinking example of Sweden, that have reformed their welfare states to make them sustainable over time and better able to meet new social demands (Bergh & Erlingsson, 2009). They have managed to build the largest and most redistributive welfare systems, also thanks to the fact that citizens have accepted high tax burdens (Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2013).

However, other scholars are more inclined to argue that the causality between trust and the welfare state runs in the opposite direction, and that it is the design of the welfare state that drives or restrains the level of social trust. In those countries where there are bigger and more generous welfare states higher level of social trust are generated (Kumlin et al., 2018). Moreover, some of them support the idea that the perceived quality of state institutions has a strong impact on citizens' trust levels (Daniele & Geys, 2015). Reciprocity is therefore fundamental and citizens should be assured that they would receive support from the state in case of need. Therefore, fair and impartial societies will increase social trust, while, on the contrary, societies with highly corrupt and inefficient institutions will have a strong negative impact on social trust (Rothstein et al., 2012; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). If the general perception of institutions is an important driver of social trust, the design of policies also has a strong impact on social capital, helping to create or destroy it (Kevins, 2019; Kumlin et al., 2018). Governments that are honest and pursue equality would be more inclined to implement universal welfare policies, with the consequence of increasing social trust, while those that maintain means-tested policies will worsen social trust. Finally, societies that implement more universal and redistributive policies will achieve higher levels of equality in both the social and economic dimensions and, as a result, will experience a strong increase in social trust (Bjørnskov & Svendsen, 2013). The policy design is also an important factor, given that univeralist and redestributive policies tend to generate higher level of trust compared to more conditional

ones (Kumlin et al., 2018). With the former, indeed, recipients are more autonomous and tend to a develop a higher level of trust towards the institutions, especially on a local level (Betkó et al., 2022).

In conclusion, there is a strong and reciprocal link between social trust and the welfare state, even if it is not entirely clear what causes what. Levels of trust and the design of welfare policies influence each other and change over time, along with the influence of other factors. It is important for the analysis to highlight this robust relationship, without needing to know what comes first in the causal chain. Indeed, no matter in what verse the relation is conceived, it is possible to link bigger welfare state with higher level of trust in society. As a consequence, it has been shown that the nordic regime of welfare state leads to an increase in the level of trust over time, while the conservative and especially the liberal regime of welfare state cause an erosion of the level of trust (Larsen, 2007). So, in the emergency of the pandemic, governments had to act quickly and the reaction period was so short that the consequences in terms of social trust of the legislation implemented could only have been noticed later, if at all. Therefore, the only factor that really mattered was the level of trust that already existed in each society before the pandemic started, which could have strongly influenced the decisions taken to limit the spread of the virus. This factor is related to the type of welfare state, as there is a positive relationship between the size and generosity of the welfare state and the level of social trust in society. The Nordic welfare states will then have the highest levels of social trust, while the other regimes will have lower levels. It is therefore to be expected that citizens in the countries with higher levels of trust would have given more support to the policies implemented and followed the recommendations than in the other countries. At the same time, believing that citizens would have followed the rules, the government had less need to resort to stricter measures.

The analysis of the relationship between social trust and the welfare state also revealed the link between trust and people's behaviour. In fact, where there is a high level of social trust, citizens are assumed to be solidary among themselves and supportive of the measures taken by the government. Moreover, given their respect for the collective dimension, less individualistic behaviour is expected. Conversely, where levels of social trust are lower, means-tested and conditional welfare measures are more common. Here, both citizens and governments fear that some individuals will behave in an uncivic manner and, in particular, take advantage of benefits even when they are not in need.

This suggests that, among other factors, beliefs about human behaviour and motivation have a strong influence on policy design and implementation. What individuals think about their fellow citizens would determine their support or lack of support for a particular policy, and what governments think about how people behave would determine the choice of more conditional or means-tested policies. Le Grand (Le Grand, 1997) analysed this relationship from the point of view of policymakers, who, he argued, are driven not only by contingencies or the institutional system when implementing or changing social policy, but also by their beliefs about expected human behaviour.

The current welfare transformations would then also be driven, among other things, by a shift in the beliefs of policy-makers. Le Grand divides the beliefs of policymakers into three distinct groups, which he calls *knights, pawns* and *knaves*. Knights would be citizens driven by altruistic behaviour, willing to take their role in society and advocating a society that redistributes social goods and helps those in need. Pawns, on the other hand, are those citizens driven by passive behaviour, seen as incapable of taking up their lives and gaining an active role in society, and who end up needing benefits and benefiting from a generous welfare system. Finally, the knaves are the current view that all human beings are essentially driven by self-interest and that therefore conditional measures should be introduced to indulge this supposed behaviour and to bring as many people as possible back into the labour market so that they can provide for themselves. Less solidarity and redistribution mechanisms should be in play, as they won't be supported by these self-interested individuals.

The belief in the existence of different types of behaviour between people led policy-makers to implement the Beveridgean welfare state, which aimed to promote the participation of the strong in society but also to provide a safety net for the weak. On the contrary, in the current welfare era, policy makers understand all individuals as knaves, sworn to their own interests without any solidaristic or communal dimension. The concept of knaves is in line with the new libertarian and neoliberal theory, which since the 1980s has supported the return of deregulation and privatisation of social protection in the name of strong individualism (Esping-Andersen, 2002). As a result, new welfare policies are designed with strong means-tested and conditional mechanisms to prevent self-interested citizens from taking advantage of benefits and to ensure that only the truly deserving have access to them. All others should only make the effort necessary to find their place in the labour market in order to obtain the means of subsistence.

This distinction between knights, pawns and knaves is comparable to the distinction between different accounts of responsibility. If citizens are mostly seen as knights or pawns, then the idea of responsibility as accountability would be emphasised; in fact, only the introduction of mandatory policies would lead to a change in behaviour (distinction between good and bad, deserving and undeserving citizens). If, instead, citizens are seen mostly as knights, then the idea of responsibility as duty would be emphasised; according to this view, individuals would already be interested in acting as part of a community and politicians should only encourage this behaviour. Similarly, politicians' beliefs about citizens may have influenced the design of the legislation implemented during the Covid-19 outbreak. Governments needed to ensure that action was taken to limit the spread of the virus. Each country had to rely solely on its pre-existing beliefs, as there was no way to plan comparisons or joint actions. Did all countries treat citizens as knaves and therefore implement highly restrictive legislation, or did different countries implement different policies according to their beliefs about people?

3.2 Case studies selection, method and data choice

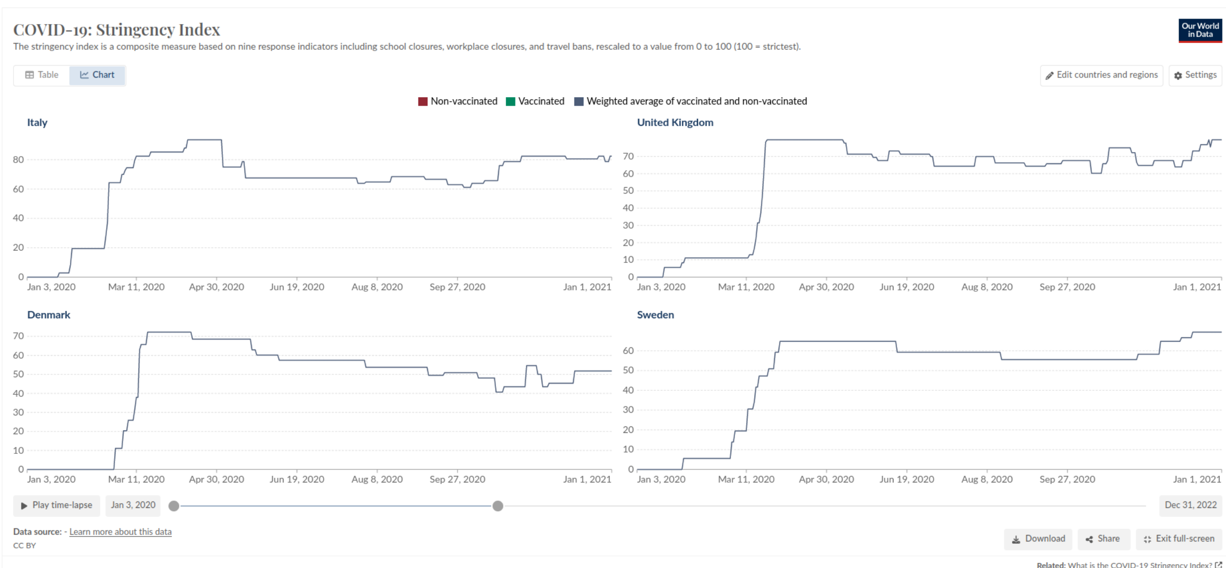
Having established the theoretical framework, it is now time to move on to the selection of case studies and the method of analysis. As already anticipated, since the aim of the analysis is to understand the relationship between welfare regimes and the emphasis on one or the other conception of individual responsibility at the time of the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, countries with different welfare regimes were selected. The choice of Italy, UK, Sweden and Denmark is a mixture of *diverse* and *extreme* case selection. The former methodology aims at covering the maximum variance among the cases included (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Specifically, the countries selected belong to the three different welfare state regimes identified by Esping Andersen (Esping-Andersen, 1990): continental, liberal and Nordic. However, if we take into account Ferrera's addition of a southern European or Mediterranean welfare state (Ferrera, 1996), then Italy would belong to this type, leaving the continental type unchanged. Nevertheless, the choice to include two countries belonging to the Nordic welfare state, despite the inclusion of all welfare regimes, is dictated by the other case selection method. Sweden is in fact an extreme case, as it has very different values in one of the variables when compared to others (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). In fact, among all the countries analysed, Sweden represents an exception in the response given to the pandemic, being the only one that did not introduce

a lockdown or a strong mandatory restriction of people's behaviour (Hale et al., 2023). The Swedish peculiarity is of great interest for the analysis because, as will be shown, the whole response was based entirely on the concept of individual responsibility. The concept of individual responsibility being perceived as a contrary approach to the implementation of stringent restrictions is vividly illustrated by the English Prime Minister Boris Johnson's address in February 2022. In this address, the Prime Minister signalled a shift in the English approach to the pandemic, stating that the nation would henceforth tackle the issue “in a very different way, moving from government restrictions to personal responsibility”.

So, in order to avoid the risk of considering the Swedish response as a feature of the Nordic welfare regime and to test whether, on the contrary, it is an outlier even within its own regime type, another Nordic country, namely Denmark, was included. Moreover, the Swedish exceptionalism, which is of course less pronounced when compared with the other Nordic countries, is also present in the nature of the welfare state itself. Indeed, Sweden scores highest in many welfare state characteristics, such as the amount spent on welfare provision, the generosity of the policy and its redistributive effects (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Before moving on to the analysis, it is important to compare the selected countries in order to better understand the different pandemic contexts that characterise each of them. The graphs describing the different dimensions, such as deaths, the economy or trust in government, show how the pandemic has affected each country and how effective its response has been.

The first important graph is the “COVID Stringency Index” (*figure* 1), which shows, through the analysis of nine different indicators, how strict the pandemic response has been in each country. (ourworldindata.org).



(*figure* 1)

Indicators include the main measures that countries immediately took to limit the spread of the virus, such as closing schools and workplaces or banning travel. In the absence of a clear understanding of the nature and impact of the virus, the first reaction almost everywhere was to stop, as far as possible, all situations in which people were in physical proximity to one another, starting with public gatherings. Taken together, they provide a picture of how quickly and decisively each country reacted to the outbreak. As expected, during the whole pandemic period (2020-2022), Italy and the United Kingdom have a higher average level of stringency at 54 and 44 respectively, while the Nordic countries have lower levels. Surprisingly, Denmark and not Sweden is the country with the lower level, albeit by a very small margin. It has a level of 36, compared with 38 in Sweden. However, the two levels are close enough to suggest that, overall, the two Nordic countries have acted in a similar way, at least in terms of the stringency of the measures introduced. So, according to this graph, Sweden is not an outlier, but is following the same path as the other Nordic country. Even without the introduction of lockdowns, some form of restrictive legislation has been adopted. A similar picture emerges when looking at the peaks of strictness reached by each country during the pandemic. This time, Sweden is the country with the lowest level of policy stringency (70), followed closely by Denmark (72). Again, the Nordic countries are very similar, with levels of stringency much lower than Italy or the United Kingdom, which introduced much more stringent measures, peaking at 88 and 93 respectively.

Another element that emerges from the graph is the evolution over time of the stringency measures introduced. The timing, and in particular the evolution of the legislation, was clearly strongly influenced by the evolution of the pandemic in each country. The first European country to be hit by the virus was Italy, which was therefore the first to introduce a Covid law at the beginning of February. For all other countries, however, legislation did not start until the beginning of March, when the virus had spread throughout Europe. The same applies to the peaks, when the strongest legislation was introduced, which usually coincides with high numbers of infections and deaths. Again, the situation varied from country to country: Italy and Denmark reacted immediately to the outbreak, with the most stringent measures in place by April 2020. On the other hand, Sweden and the UK did not introduce the most stringent measures until 2021, suggesting that they initially tried a milder approach to the pandemic. However, the analysis of peaks alone could be misleading, as the UK and Sweden also introduced quite strong measures early on, as shown by the indexes of 79 in the UK and 64 in Sweden in March 2020. It should also be noted that the Danish peak is lower than the high levels reached by the UK and Italy, even though they were not at their peaks, suggesting less stringency overall. The fact that Denmark along with Italy were the two countries to introduce strongest legislation earlier on shows that Denmark did not wait to reach an emergency situation before acting, but it started to move all the way, as soon as it realised what was happening in Italy or i countries more hit by the pandemic. This is sure an element which contributes to the explanation of the fact that Denmark is the country which managed the virus the best. On the contrary, Uk also had a sudden introduction of stringent policies, but following a worsening of the domestic situation. Sweden, instead, show a route which goes on by adjustments, probably chasing the evolving situation.

Another important indicator is the “Containment and Health Index” (*figure* 2), which combines 13 different indicators, some of which are already included in the COVID Stringency Index and others that measure health policies such as face coverings, testing, contact tracing and vaccination policies (ourworldindata.org). As it includes, among others, the same indicators as the stringency index, it is clear that the trends shown by each country are similar to the previous ones. Italy is the country with the highest average and maximum score of 85 points. Italy is also the country that shows a limited decline over time, remaining above 40 points throughout the period examined. This is an important element because it shows that Italy was more reluctant to stop measures despite the evolution of the pandemic. Of course, this could be due to the most severe situation

suffered, but it could also be linked to the approach chosen in response to the pandemic, which will be analysed later. What is different is the evolution of the index in the United Kingdom. In 2021, it reached a peak very close to that of Italy, 81 compared to 85, but it also saw its values gradually fall to the lowest level recorded for the four countries.

COVID-19 Containment and Health Index

This is a composite measure based on thirteen policy response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, travel bans, testing policy, contact tracing, face coverings, and vaccine policy rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.

Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford – Last updated 24 July 2023
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

(*figure* 2)

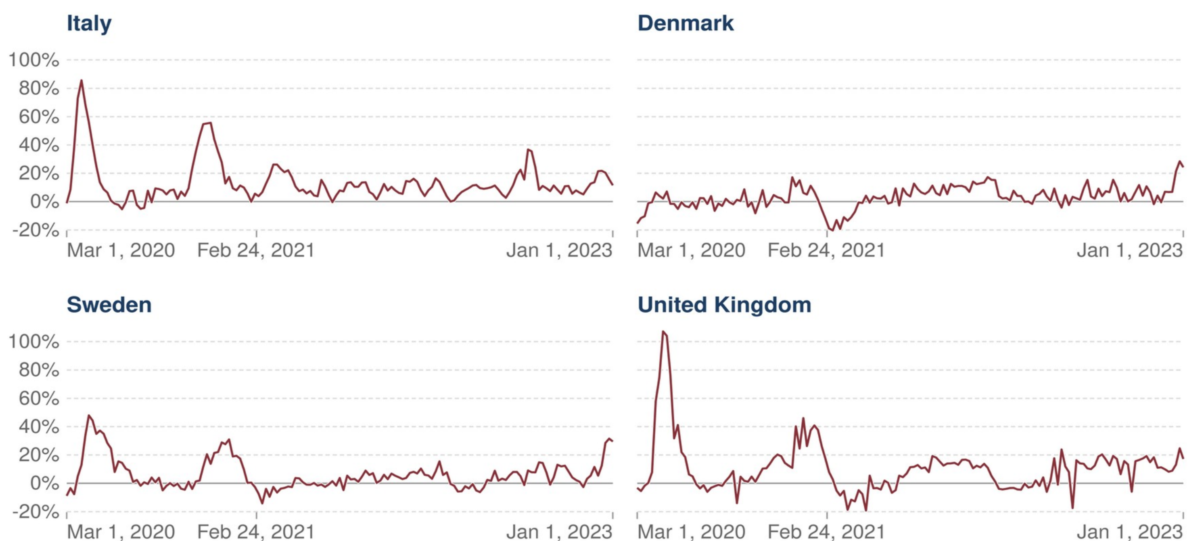
Moreover, at the beginning of the pandemic outbreak UK levels are way more similar than to Denmark than Italy, maintaining them around 60 points. Both data are in line with the liberal welfare state it belongs to, which put the market and individual freedom above all. Therefore, the Uk conservative government showed hesitancy in implementing strict measures, which would damage the market and limit individual freedom, and it provided to loose as soon as possible those put in place as extremely needed. As emerged previously, the nordic countries show a similar progression, with Sweden conferming to be the country with the lowest levels of the index, as shown by the lower peak reached in March 2021 (64) and by the fact that even in the first and harder phase of the pandemic maintained the lowest level compared to the other countries.

Accordingly, both indexes show the differences in the responses put in place by the countries selected for the analysis. But how have these different responses performed? Did they all work, or were some more effective than others, with the result that some countries were better able to contain the spread of the virus, with better consequences for the health of the population? How the pandemic affected each country and how different responses worked is another important element to analyse. For example, the Swedish decision not to introduce a lockdown has attracted much criticism, and in many countries newspapers have singled out Sweden as the country with the worst response to the pandemic, putting its population at risk. However, the data do not show such a difference and there are more similarities between the countries than has been suggested.

The first graph is that of the "Excess Mortality Rate" (*figure* 3), which shows the number of all deaths that occurred in each country during the covid compared with those of the previous years. Unsurprisingly, in some periods when the virus was less severe, there were fewer deaths than before, clearly because many other causes of death were prevented by social distancing. On the contrary, in the periods when COVID hit hardest, there was a large increase in deaths. However, what the data show is not what was expected. In fact, apart from the two peaks in 2020, which are also common to the UK and Italy, Sweden does not show a significantly different number of deaths.

Excess mortality: Deaths from all causes compared to projection

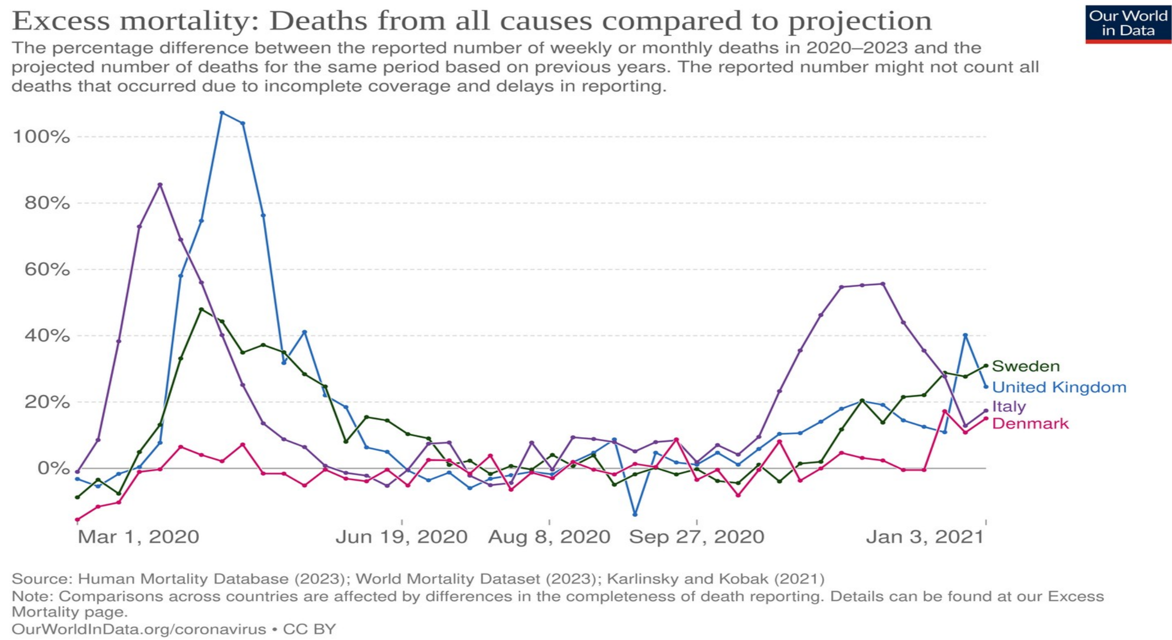
The percentage difference between the reported number of weekly or monthly deaths in 2020–2023 and the projected number of deaths for the same period based on previous years. The reported number might not count all deaths that occurred due to incomplete coverage and delays in reporting.



Source: Human Mortality Database (2023); World Mortality Dataset (2023); Karlinsky and Kobak (2021)
Note: Comparisons across countries are affected by differences in the completeness of death reporting. Details can be found at our Excess Mortality page.
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

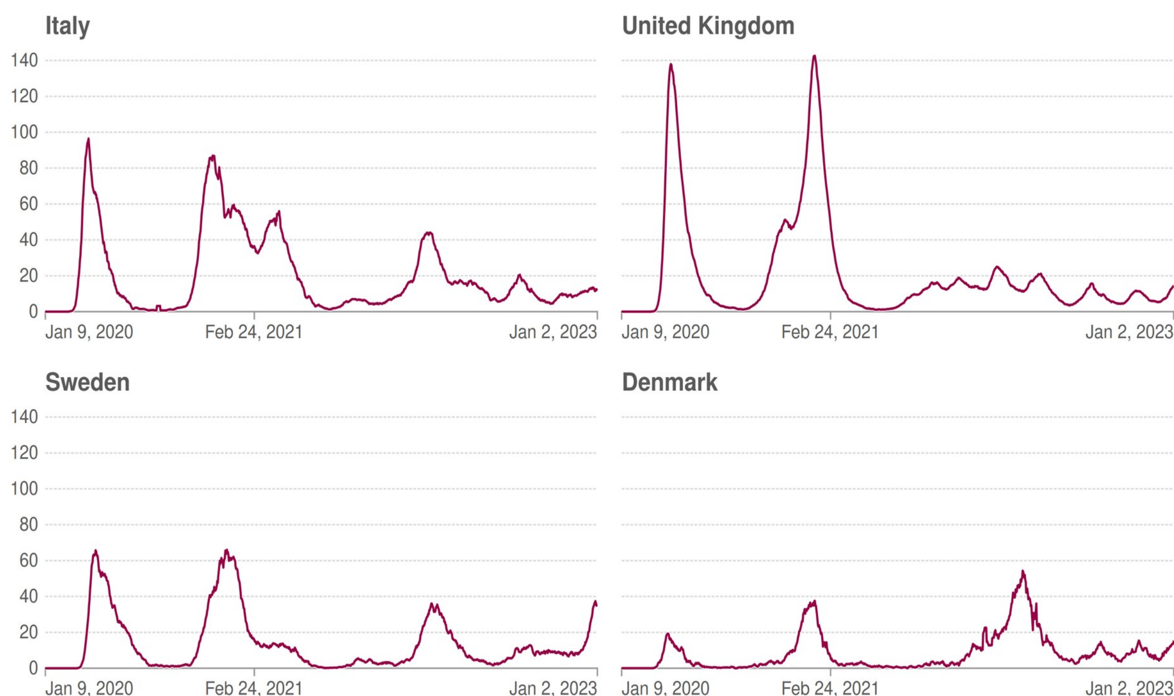
(*figure* 3)

Looking more closely at the first year of the pandemic (*figure* 4), it is easier to see how the UK is more affected by the first peak of infections, which may be explained by the initial scepticism in the UK compared with the sudden intervention in Italy. Sweden tends to follow the UK and Italy, especially at the beginning, breaking the "Nordic" link with Denmark, which shows almost no peak in the first year of the pandemic.



(*figure* 4)

Overall, the graphs do not show a very different result for Sweden compared to the other countries, suggesting that the difference in approach did not significantly alter Sweden's performance. These data could also be influenced by other factors, such as the timing and intensity of the pandemic in each country, and especially the size of the countries. It is indeed likely that a larger country with a larger population would have experienced a higher number of cases and deaths. Even though the data may not be extremely precise due to differences in protocols and challenges in attributing deaths to covid-19 between countries, the graph "Weekly Confirmed Covid Deaths per Million People" (*figure* 5) helps to better understand the impact of the pandemic by adjusting the data with the size of the population.

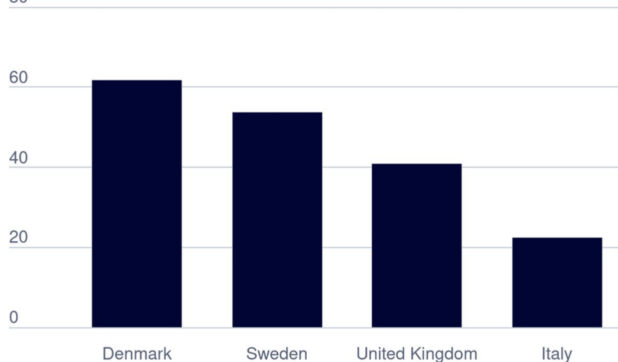


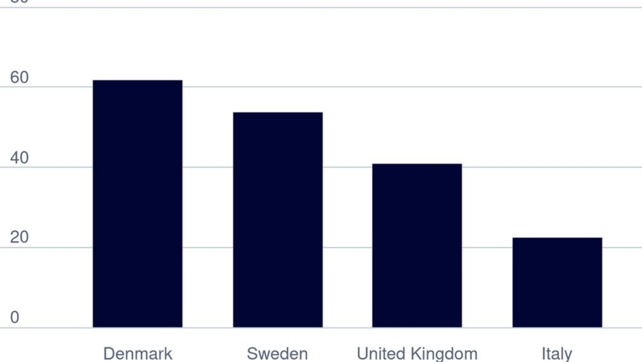
(*figure* 5)

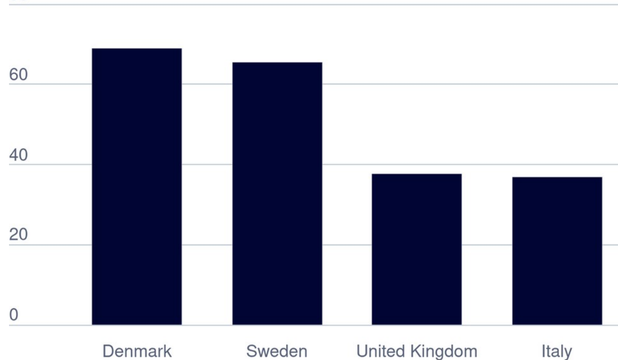
The picture that emerges is not so different from that shown in the other graphs. The UK is the country that experienced the worst peaks in covide-related deaths, one at the beginning of the outbreak and one between 2020 and 2021. This seems to be in line with the country's strong liberal identity and conservative government. After initial scepticism about the introduction of severe restrictions on individual freedoms and the closure of commercial activities, the UK also showed a rapid relaxation of COVID legislation as cases declined. However, after these two peaks, it managed to maintain a lower and stable trend until the end of the emergency. On the contrary, all the other three countries experienced another peak in 2022, albeit with different intensity. Again, Denmark emerges as the country less affected by the pandemic, able to limit the impact of the peaks and maintain a low trend throughout the pandemic emergency.

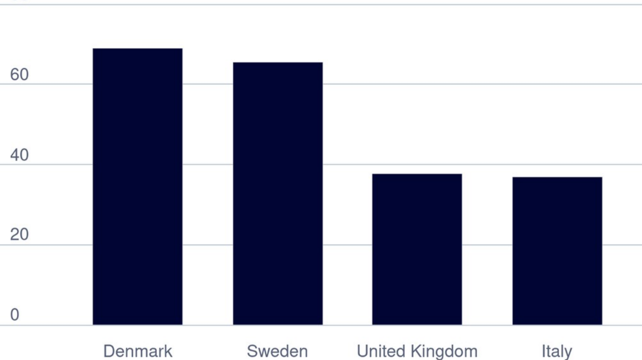
Another important graph that could be helpful in the analysis is the one showing the levels of "Trust in Government" (*figure* 6) over the years for each country. As shown in the analysis of the relationship between levels of social trust and social policy, many factors

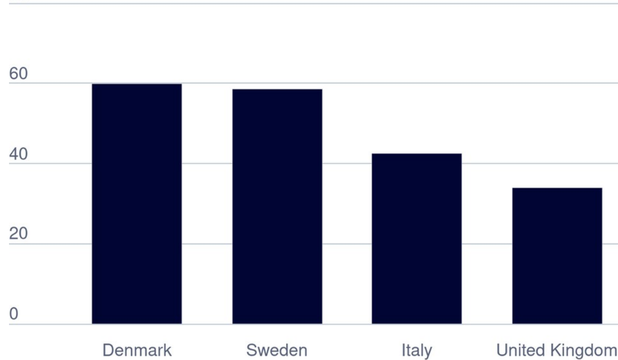
contribute to this. During the pandemic, however, it is very likely that the way in which government operated and, in particular, the way in which it was perceived by citizens should have had a major impact on levels of trust. The responsiveness, determination, honesty and clarity of the rules and laws that were implemented had an impact on the level of trust that citizens had in governments. As has already been seen in the analysis of the relationship between social trust and the welfare state, the Nordic countries started with higher levels of trust not only among the countries selected, but also some of the highest levels in the world.

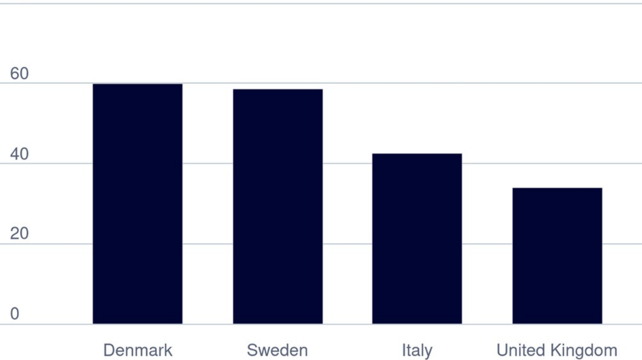








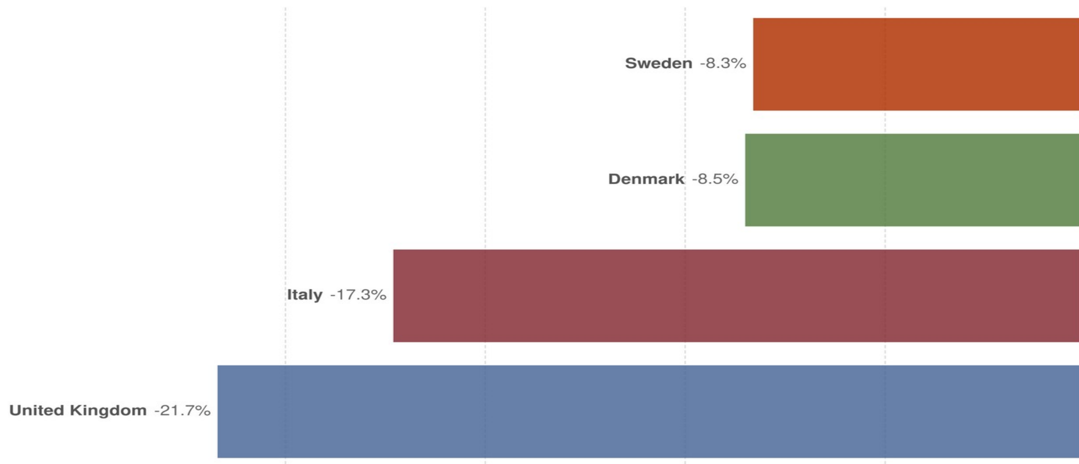




(*figure* 6)

Therefore, both before and after the pandemic, the two Nordic countries show higher levels of trust than the UK and Italy, but it is important to look at the changes that occurred over the years of the pandemic. The years 2018 and 2019 show no change in the level of trust, with Denmark leading the way, followed by Sweden, then the UK with 40% of trust and finally Italy just above 20%. Much changes in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, when the levels rise for Denmark and especially for Sweden, which goes over 50%, and Italy, which reaches the levels of the UK, which have now fallen, at almost 40%. This could be due to the initial dismissive attitude of the British government, which first denied the emergency and then acted late. On the contrary, the decisiveness of the Italian and Danish responses has brought huge benefits in terms of trust in government. The same is true of the Swedish approach, despite its uniqueness and international unpopularity. 2021 does not show any significant change, but 2022 does. It is important to note that the Nordic regions have lost trust in government, with Denmark losing more than Sweden, although it still has the highest levels. The United Kingdom also suffered a significant drop, while Italy is the only country to continue to rise, reaching over 40%. The year 2022 confirms the same levels as 2021, with the UK at the lower percentage.

Another element to be taken into account is the economic development, which has been severely affected by the restrictive measures. In fact, although the main focus was on the health of the population, all the possible consequences of the closures had to be taken into account. In fact, the need to limit physical contact between people as much as possible led to the closure of all unnecessary activities and the prevention of meetings of any kind, which had a damaging effect on the economy and other dimensions of people's lives, such as mental health, job and income security, care and education. Clearly, the economic dimension was the one that was most emphasised, and much of the scepticism about the introduction of strict measures and closures stemmed from concerns about the damage that might have been caused.



(*Figure* 7)

The graphs show that this concern was well founded. The data for the second quarter of 2020, the three months in which the effects of the lockdowns introduced at the start of the pandemic are visible, show a general recession compared with the data for the previous year. However, despite the claimed trade-off between protecting physical health and the economy, the data do not show this. In fact, the two Nordic countries with the lowest number of deaths were also those where the pandemic had less of an impact on the economy (CITA ourworldindata). Compared to the economic performance of 2019, Sweden and Denmark experienced a decline of 8.3% and 8.5% respectively. On the contrary, the economies of Italy and the United Kingdom were significantly more affected by the restrictive measures, reaching a decline of 17.3% in Italy and 21.7% in the United Kingdom.

Having shown how each country responded to the pandemic in terms of the restrictive policies implemented and the consequences that the pandemic had in each country in terms of infections, deaths and economic performance, it is now time to analyse the role that individual responsibility played in each country, the meaning attached to it and its relationship with the welfare state regime of belonging.

3.3 Method of analysis and data choice

The research aims to focus on the different responses implemented in Italy, the UK, Denmark and Sweden, to see which meanings of individual responsibility have been emphasised by each country. A series of laws were implemented in each country to deal with the pandemic situation. Given the ongoing emergency, the new rules had to be communicated as quickly as possible so that all citizens were aware of them. Therefore, prime ministers and all relevant ministers gave frequent speeches to address the citizens and announce all the new legislation, along with news about the pandemic status and some general advice on behaviour, i.e. washing hands and keeping distances. Thus, these speeches were the most direct form of communication, then recalled by the media, that the governments used to communicate with the population, to explain their plan to face the pandemic, but also to share their point of view on it. An analysis of the speeches would therefore also allow to determine how each country emphasised the idea of responsibility and the beliefs they had about how people would have behaved and acted in relation to the new norms.

The method of analysis is Qualitative Content Analysis (hereafter QCA). According to Krippendorrf, QCA is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2019). QCA has some characteristics that distinguish it from the quantitative approach. First of all, the purposes are different, because if the quantitative approach aims at weighing the presence of a data, the qualitative one aims at constructing a meaning that is not given in advance, but constructed during the research (Schreier, 2012). It is therefore used when meanings are less obvious and would not work in the presence of highly standardised meanings. For this reason, it is able to deal with real-life situations, messy contexts in which to search for meanings. The work is interpretative and not merely descriptive, inspired by hermeneutic thinking. Moreover, given the complexity of the situations analysed, QCA must be a highly flexible method, which, even in a systematic way, should be able to change or incorporate the new findings during the research process. In order to do this, QCA cannot have the same standards as a quantitative approach and also the goal is less general, it does not aim to find a long-term and universally valid theory, but rather to establish intermediate theories (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). The procedure gives less importance to the preparatory work, in order to be less strict during the analysis, to be

adaptable in relation to the data and with the different phases, which can merge into each other and are not strictly separated. Another important aspect of QCA is that, through the analysis, it focuses only on the relevant aspects of the material, reducing it only to the important aspects for the research question and linking the data to the previously constructed categories, which are more abstract but still able to capture all the nuances (Schreier, 2012).

A mixed approach, both quantitative and qualitative, is the most appropriate for this research. Counting the number of occurrences of each phrase in the speeches gives an idea of the importance and emphasis given to individual responsibility in each country, while the qualitative analysis makes it possible to understand the meaning that individual responsibility acquaires in each phrase. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis ensures that appeals to individual responsibility in a sense not relevant to the analysis are not included, as would have been the case with the purely quantitative approach. Indeed, the latter only counts the occurrence of a word or phrase and not its use. Compared to other research methods, the main advantage of QCA (Prior, 2014) is that it avoids all the risks associated with direct collection. The documents analysed already exist and are intended for a different purpose, so the researcher has no possibility of influencing or modifying them. On the contrary, in direct data collection, the presence of the researcher could alter the data collected. Furthermore, the method uses previous theories and research to guide the analysis, with the aim of supporting or even extending them (Krippendorff, 2019).

However, these strengths are also the main risks of the method. On the one hand, the need to reduce the material to be analysed, in order to limit the data to those that are relevant to the research question, gives the researcher a great deal of freedom, which increases the risk of arbitrariness and subjectivity. Given that it is the researcher who determines and interprets the words and phrases to be included in the analysis, all passages and choices must be extremely well explained and supported. On the other hand, the use of existing theories and research could also represent a strong bias that influences the research choices and the analysis of the data. Again, great care must be taken to explain all the links and connections.

Now, before moving on to the actual analysis of the data, it is also necessary to clarify the choice of time period and the choice of documents (given what has been said about QCA). The documents selected are the set of press conferences and political speeches given by the Prime Ministers of each country from March, when the first measures to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic were implemented, until the end of 2020. The decision to focus on the

first year of the pandemic was based on two considerations. Firstly, two pandemic peaks were experienced across Europe during this period, which is an important element as it allows us to examine not only how and to what extent the concept of individual responsibility was invoked, but also its variance and intensity during the different phases of the pandemic. Secondly, the idea of looking at the first year of the pandemic is dictated by the need to look at the period of greatest emergency. In fact, the very first period of the pandemic must be considered in order to have less influence from the international dimension. As already mentioned, at the very beginning of the outbreak there was no possibility of international comparison or debate, since the virus affected different countries in different ways, nor was it something that had already been experienced. Therefore, each country referred to its previous beliefs and existing institutional system to stop the spread of the virus in what was considered the best way given the specific context. Then, as time went on and the situation stabilised, more comparisons could be made between countries and legislation could become more and more similar everywhere. In addition, by the end of the first year of the pandemic, the certainty of a vaccination programme against the virus emerged, which influenced the subsequent response strategy.

Moroever, the decision to focus on speeches from the highest offices of the state is also due to the fact that the main messages to the population were delivered through public speeches. Indeed, in such a moment of emergency, communication had to be as unambiguous and clear as possible, so it was centralised and delivered by only a few politicians. Prime ministers in particular addressed the country, sometimes with the support of the scientific council or the ministries in question. Another characteristic of the speeches was their high frequency, especially during the acute phase of the pandemic, given the exceptional nature of the situation. Frequently, sometimes several times a week, politicians had to address the nation in order to communicate the evolution of the pandemic and, in particular, the implementation of the Covid legislation, which was undergoing rapid change. The introduction of lockdowns, their ease, the need for social distancing and the simple measures required to slow down the spread of the virus, such as washing hands, had to be communicated frequently and clearly so that the whole population understood.

Public speeches are usually made to achieve two main goals: policy-making or consensus-building (Charteris-Black, 2013). Politicians use public speeches to promote the political decision made and the new policies implemented. Indeed, it is important to communicate the new policy directions taken and it is fundamental to link them to the political party that promoted them. Otherwise, politicians use public speeches to promote shared values in

society and thus increase their political consensus among citizens and society. Political consensus is obviously of the utmost importance to those in power, since their re-election depends on it. The two objectives are not mutually exclusive, but they are often present together in public speeches, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, given the emergency situation, the speeches had to pursue both the communication of policy and the building of consensus on the new legislation being implemented. The speeches were intended to inform citizens about the status of the pandemic, with a particular focus on the regulations that had been put in place to deal with it, but at the same time they also referred to some common values to support the new regulations and encourage people to follow them. Both political and moral values and beliefs were present in the speeches.

In the transcripts of the speeches, the word "responsibility" was searched and contextualised in order to distinguish when it was relevant to the research and when it was not. In fact, the appeal to responsibility could have been made with many purposes, and in particular to different subjects. For example, all references to the responsibility of public institutions or governments were not included in the analysis, as the focus of the research is on the responsibility of citizens.

Moreover, looking only for direct appeals to individual responsibility would leave out all the expressions used to convey the same concept. On the contrary, it is important to include those expressions and phrases that are indirectly linked to the concept of individual responsibility in order to obtain all the appeals to this concept made by the speakers. Of course, the link between expressions and the concept of individual responsibility could be arbitrary and subjective, so much attention should be paid to explaining this link. Also, sometimes even the words or phrases referring to individual responsibility may not be sufficient to understand their meaning, and it may be necessary to add other expressions or parts of the speech in order to understand them well. Context is then a fundamental element in fully understanding when and in what sense individual responsibility is being referred to; for example, when there are direct references to the welfare state or to the socio-political traditions of countries. Indeed, in analysing political speeches and discourses the context is a highly relevant element which influence what it is said and how (Randour et al., 2020). Therefore the context should always been added to the analysis and the choices about how the analysis is conducted should consider the context and calibrated according to it.

At the start of the pandemic, governments had to make sure that they would take action and limit the spread of the virus. Each country had to rely on its own pre-existing beliefs, since,

as mentioned above, there was no way to compare or plan joint actions. Did all countries treat their citizens as knaves and therefore implement very restrictive legislation, or did they implement different policies? In an emergency situation where, at least initially, the best way to slow the spread was to keep people apart and to wash hands, one would expect frequent appeals to individual responsibility. However, the sense in which individual responsibility is used varies from country to country. Each country may have emphasised a more active or more passive notion of responsibility, depending on its beliefs about citizens' behaviour, and this may have changed over time. Moreover, governments' beliefs about citizens are not something that change in a short period of time, especially in an unexpected situation such as the pandemic emergency, and therefore it can be expected that the policies implemented to face the covid outbreak were influenced by pre-existing beliefs. Le Grand's distinction between people who are seen as knights, pawns or knaves is useful here (Le Grand, 1997). Indeed, it is likely that governments have emphasised individual responsibility differently according to their beliefs about citizens. In countries where citizens are seen as knights, able to actively follow rules and act in the best interests of the community and other people, active responsibility would have been emphasised. According to this view, individuals would already be interested in acting as part of a community and politicians should take advantage of this predisposition and only encourage this behaviour. On the contrary, in those countries where citizens are seen as pawns, or better still, knaves, and everything is focused on their singularity, the passive concept of responsibility would have been emphasised. In other words, in order to get people to comply with the new legislation, the punitive element had to be emphasised, otherwise it is believed that the majority would have failed to act. The analysis must therefore operationalise the different variables in order to capture the different appeals to individual responsibility and to categorise them in terms of the active or passive account.

It is now time to look specifically at the expressions and phrases that appeared in the speeches that could be linked to the concept of individual responsibility, paying attention to the different meanings that were emphasised from time to time. It is likely that different countries belonging to different welfare regimes, which has been shown to be associated with different ideas of society and differences in the policies implemented, had one or the other emphasis on individual responsibility. All expressions referring to individual responsibility must therefore be assigned to the active or passive side.

The table (**Tab.1**) lists all the words and expressions that can be attributed to the idea of individual responsibility in the speeches analysed. They are divided into the different

nations and the number of occurrences is also given. Below, the different words and expressions are explained and contextualised in order to justify the choice and to highlight the sense, active areor passive, in which they were used.

The first term to be considered is clearly that of “responsibility”. The decision not to add other words first, such as “individual”, is dictated by the fact that it might be useful to understand the many variations that the general idea of responsibility could take. In most cases, the use of the word “responsibility” alone refers to the government's or state's responsibility to act in response to the pandemic outbreak. It is also used in its aversive “responsible” mode to emphasise the fact that the new legislation and the new rules introduced, given their strong impact on people's lives, are as balanced as possible in relation to the extremely delicate and dangerous situation. However, as already anticipated, these meanings are not useful for the analysis. When responsibility is directed at actors other than citizens, such as governments or institutions, it does not in fact point to how people should behave or to the considerations that governments have towards citizens. Instead, it has been considered when it is used to address citizens and their behaviour. In these cases, the term is aimed at communicating to people that they should act responsibly, but without any further specification. Interestingly, when used in this vague sense, the term goes in the opposite direction to the need to communicate in a clear and unambiguous way. It does refer to a general idea of responsibility, a general suggestion to pay attention to actions and to encourage citizens to act according to a supposedly common behaviour. But this is left to the interpretation of the individual, who, in the absence of a specific recommendation, is free to act according to his or her conscience. Therefore, if it has to be included in a category, it would be that of the active idea of responsibility. However, it seems to be more of a rhetorical device aimed at highlighting the other contents of the speeches, especially those relating to actions and behaviour.

What is different are the direct appeals to “individual responsibility”. Although the two possible meanings of the term have been demonstrated, when it is actually used in speeches it is usually intended in its active sense. The government's intention is to emphasise the autonomy of the individual in deciding how to behave from time to time, according to what they believe is best for the situation. The aim is to develop people's sense of citizenship and to encourage them to act in the best interests of the community. The behaviour to be adopted is not imposed but left to the individual's own responsibility. The highest frequency of use of this term was found in those countries that had less strict Covid legislation. The rhetoric is the opposite of that behind conditional welfare measures, which

instead appeal to individual responsibility to hold individuals accountable for their behaviour and to punish them if they behave differently from what is required.

Another direct appeal to responsibility and the need to act in a certain way is made by references to “responsible behaviour”. Again, given that much depends on people's behaviour to slow the spread of infection, it is to be expected that governments would appeal to the need to act in accordance with the recommendations. However, the need to promote measures that would have slowed down the spread of the virus was general, making it impossible to draw a clear distinction between a passive and an active or passive notion of individual responsibility. In fact, the term could have been used both to urge compliance with the rules and to encourage people's ability to adapt their behaviour according to the circumstances. Therefore, in order to better understand which meaning was used in the different countries, the term needs to be related to other contextual expressions. Then, especially in those countries that have introduced stricter measures to control the virus, we can also expect to find references to “following the rules or the recommendations”. In these cases, responsibility is framed passively, as the message is that individuals should simply accept and comply with the new rules that have been introduced. There is no possibility for people to actively choose how to behave in different situations. Moreover, this expression could be reinforced by references to police intervention or by the introduction of fines for those who do not comply with the rules. Here, the passive idea of responsibility is overtaken by a punitive one; not only the introduction of mandatory rules, but also the direct threat of punishment if they are broken.

Then, as already mentioned, not only the direct appeals to responsibility should be included in the research, but also all those expressions whose meaning recalls that of individual responsibility. Thus, another group of expressions that can help to distinguish which idea of responsibility was emphasised by each country are those that refer to the need to stick together, to be in this thing together, or - where the war rhetoric was more pronounced - to fight together. On the one hand, there are appeals to “unity”, which could have both meanings depending on the context, to the need for “sacrifices” and “efforts” that individuals should make in order to overcome the pandemic. These expressions refer to war or nationalist rhetoric, i.e. in times of danger or simply as a consensus-building tool, governments appeal to the pride of the people to protect their country and their fellow citizens against an external enemy. Here, a “dysphemic metaphor” is used to frame the virus as an invisible and dangerous threat in order to justify and build consensus for the new Covid legislation and restrictions imposed (Williams & Wright, 2024).

On the contrary, the appeals to “contribute, care, look after, help and support” each other are intended to emphasise a solidaristic and communal sense of responsibility, conveyed through references to the relational dimension of society. It promotes a view of society as a community in which arepeople actively help each other in times of need. The reference is to the active dimension of responsibility, as people are encouraged to act as part of a community where individuals are close to each other. The collective dimension is directly mentioned, supporting the idea that society is not a sum of separate individuals, but is made up of the relationships between them. People are always connected and it is the shared dimension that determines the shape of society. Further in this direction are the direct appeals to “social responsibility”, “shared responsibility” and the sense of “solidarity” between citizens, and the idea that behavioural change should be driven by 'altruism'. These are all expressions that promote the idea of society as a community, the idea that there is a mutual responsibility between individuals. In the case of the pandemic in particular, this means that they should act in the best interests of the community, because only by acting together can the goal be achieved.

Tab.1 *The table outlines the expressions found, dividing them into active and passive accountability and indicating the frequency of each expression in each country.*

Concept	**Expression**	**Active/ Passive**	**UK** (77)	**Italy** (23)	**Denmark** (25)	**Sweden** (7)
Responsibility		none	3	17	5	3
Individual responsibility		active	6	6	17	15
	Responsible Behaviour	none	3	11	1	20
Follow the rules, recommendation		passive	45	5	8	3
	Comply with	passive	2	0	3	0
	Stick with it	passive	5	0	1	0
	Police enforcement, fines	passive	14	6	4	0
Shared, social responsibility	We as society	active	2	0	2	1
Do our bit, everything we can		none	8	3	11	3
	Playing the part	none	4	0	2	0
Unity		none	11	1	7	0
	Cohesion	none		1		3
	Effort	passive	17	11	11 (mostly joint)	0
	National effort	passive	14	0	0	0
	Sacrifices	passive	19	11		2
	Gone the extra mile	passive	2	0	0	0
	Collective discipline/self-discipline	passive	5	0	0	1 (self)
	Collective action/ability	active	4	0	1	0
Each other	Look out for/ after/help	active	6	1	45	7
Solidarity		active	1	6	3	3
	Altruism	active	2	0	0	0
	Selflessness	active	3	0	0	0
	Sharing	active	1	0	0	0
	Sense of/spirit of community	active	5	3	24	5
Trust		none	2	1 (be smart)	1	0

3.4 Individual responsibility in the Covid-19 pandemic, similarity and differences between UK, Italy, Denmark and Swden

After explaining the meaning of the different terms analysed, the next section presents the results nation by nation in order to understand which concept of responsibility has prevailed.

United Kingdom

During the first year of the pandemic, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his deputies made 77 speeches, some of which were made by other government officials because the Prime Minister was in hospital with a severe Covid-19 infection. Among the countries analysed, UK is the country where the Prime Minister made the most speeches, although most of them were quite short. The change in approach from the beginning of the outbreak and the introduction of lockdowns to force people to stay at home and avoid all unnecessary contact with others is striking. Strong was the statement where Boris Johnson, in communicating the acceptance of the fact that the virus would soon have spread much further, said that “many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time” (12-03-2020). Shortly afterwards, as the actual danger of the virus became clear, the initial scepticism gave way to the introduction of strong measures to stop normal business and restrict individual freedom. The need to restrict individual freedom is a sensitive issue in the most liberal countries, such as the UK. In fact, it is not only considered an inviolable value, but even a specific characteristic of the British being (Andreouli & Brice, 2022). In a liberal society, where individual freedom and people's individuality are among the most important social values, it would also be expected that citizens would be seen as scoundrels. Consequently, given their egocentric attitudes and a culture of strong individualism, people were expected to be intolerant of the covid legislation, with the result that many people did not follow the rules imposed. Boris Johnson himself links the breaches of the covid legislation to the fact that the new measures introduced “go against the freedom-loving instincts of the British people” (20-03-2020). Therefore, a constant appeal to compliance was considered necessary and this is underlined by the widespread use of expressions such as “follow, comply with or stick to the rules or the

recommendation”, the most frequent in the speeches, appearing 52 times. The need for “collective” and “self-discipline” (5 times) was also stressed, as was the need for “collective action” (4 times) in order to succeed in stopping the virus.

The high price of having to give up individual freedom in order to slow down the virus is also evident from the recurring references to the fact that this change of attitude is something serious but required by the emergency situation. People are asked to make an “effort”, which is the second most frequent word, appearing 31 times in the speeches, and often (14 times) it is combined with the word “national” to emphasise that the whole nation is needed in this change of behaviour. Another recurrent word is that of “sacrifice”, which appears 19 times, again in line with the liberal vision of society in which individuals are seen as atoms and their personal freedom is paramount. The introduction of coercive measures to restrict individual freedom would then represent a denial of the liberal ideal and would be justified as a temporary sacrifice due to the emergency situation.

Both the terms “nation” and “sacrifices” refer to the war rethoric often used in politics, especially during the pandemic, to motivate citizens and, above all, to justify the severe restrictions imposed (Andreouli & Brice, 2022). In fact, they are necessary because an external enemy is threatening the country and this is the rhetoric that allows the introduction of what Boris Johnson himself defines as “the toughest restrictions on our freedom in memory” (11/05/2020). A final indication of the government's lack of faith in the ability of citizens to regulate themselves is the repeated mention of police intervention and fines for those who do not respect the new rules imposed.

All the terms described, those most frequently used in the British speeches, refer to the passive idea of responsibility, which seems to be the dominant one. On the contrary, there is much less emphasis on the active idea of responsibility. There are few references to “individual responsibility” (6) and “shared responsibility” (2). However, the fact that appeals to “individual behaviour” (3) appear in very few circumstances seems consistent with the liberal approach based on the idea of giving everyone maximum freedom. Moreover, in the UK, there was a constant reiteration of the key behavioural changes needed to stop the transmission of the virus; most speeches included the slogans “work from/stay home”, “wash your hands” to “protect the NHS” and “save lives”. Instead, there are some references to “caring and looking after each other” (6 times) and to “a sense of community” (5 times), suggesting the need to reaffirm a sense of community in a society characterised by individualism. Awareness of the risk of loneliness in a period of social

distancing is also reflected in the introduction at each stage of the pandemic response of the possibility for lonely people to meet at least with another household.

Only at the very beginning and then at the end of the pandemic, when the most restrictive measures were not yet in place or had been relaxed, appeals to individual responsibility have been more common. Usually, however, these appeals appear to be a justification for government inaction rather than active encouragement of individuals. Indeed, for this to happen, governments should provide an appropriate and supportive environment that enables this exercise of responsibility and not just leave it in the hands of individuals (Reicher et al., 2022). On the contrary, in the absence of this, social inequalities also played a role in distinguishing between those people who could act in the most appropriate way to slow down infections and those who couldn't, because they had to continue working, because of caring responsibilities or because of the absence of a supportive bubble. Finally, it must be emphasised that the UK government's communication was extremely confused, partly because of the change in approach from initial scepticism and inaction to the introduction of lockdowns and mandatory social distancing (Williams & Wright, 2024). Contradictory and mixed messages and unclear communication were exactly the opposite of what was needed in a time of emergency characterised by an unknown pandemic. In contrast, in politics, clarity in communication is a key element in helping people to understand as much as possible about what is going on and, consequently, to act accordingly, assuming the best behaviour.

Italy

Italy was the first European country to be hit hard by the pandemic, and the first to introduce strict legislation on quarantine and restrictions. Compared to England, there was no scepticism and from the very beginning the government took all the necessary measures to slow down the infection rate. In fact, it introduced one of the toughest laws in the world, even stricter than China's for a while (Bull, 2021). At the sub-regional level, however, there has been some scepticism. At the very beginning, before the nature of the pandemic was even recognised, the mayor of Milan, Sala, promoted the hastagh #Milanononsiferma (Milan does not stop) to address concerns about economic and social life after the closures. It was still a time of uncertainty, when it was not clear what was going to happen, but then he regretted it and apologised. The region of Lombardy did indeed have the first cases of

COVID, the first clusters of infection, and it was subsequently the region hardest hit by the pandemic in terms of infections and deaths.

During the first year of the pandemic, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte made 23 speeches to the nation. As Columbano, Pianezzi and Steccolini (Columbano et al., 2025) show, the speeches revealed conflicting values and different forms of responsibility as the emergency evolved. If at the beginning there was an attempt to preserve a plurality of values, such as physical health, the economy and social relations, as the situation deteriorated physical health became the primary value to be safeguarded. At the same time, if at the beginning the government took “paternalistic responsibility”, declaring that it was in control of the situation and able to manage the emergency, it then moved to “political responsibility”, claiming that it was still in control despite the growing number of infections and even able to maintain a balance between the different values, and finally to “communal responsibility”, recognising the emergency as a huge challenge and the need for citizens to take responsibility and change their behaviour.

This shift is confirmed by the data, as the most frequent expressions were the appeals to “efforts” and “sacrifices”, both of which appeared 11 times. Both the request to limit social life, in a population accustomed to socialising and meeting people, and the rigour of the measures taken to contain the spread of the virus, are justified as an exceptional and temporary necessity to face the emergency that has arisen. Citizens are therefore asked to make an effort and to adhere to the prescribed behaviour as the only way to overcome the emergency. Then, for the same reasons, the concept of “responsible behaviour” is often directly invoked (11 times). As already mentioned, changing behaviour is indeed considered to be the most effective solution for limiting infections. However, in contrast to England, there are not many direct appeals for compliance, although this might have been expected given the low level of trust between citizens and institutions. Instead, given the low level of confidence that people would follow the rules, strong references were made to police intervention and fines for those who broke the rules (6 times). In practice, police presence and controls were increased throughout the country and a strong media campaign was launched against those who did not comply with the new legislation. The image of a lone man sunbathing on a beach in Rimini, surrounded by municipal police on quad bikes, or the video of a jogger being chased by policemen are emblematic of the media coverage of police actions. Of the same type is the advice: “don't be clever”, which is similarly linked to the belief that Italian citizens are relaxed about regulations. The strong repressive implantation suggests that people are perceived as knaves or pawns, i.e. passive and self-

centred, not inclined to act for what is best for the community, but to maximise personal utility.

There were many references to the general idea of responsibility (17 times) and only a few (6 times as in England) to the notion of “individual responsibility”. Indeed, in line with the low level of trust in citizens, appeals to the need to change behaviour were considered more effective than emphasising individual responsibility. In fact, what was needed most was a change in behaviour and compliance with rules, rather than people being left free to regulate their own behaviour in relation to the situation. References to responsibility, on the other hand, are consistent with the shift in perspective from government to citizen responsibility. Until it was believed that the government was in control and able to contain the outbreak, references to its responsibility were frequent, but then diminished with the worsening of the pandemic and the need to address social distancing and individual behaviour.

The emphasis, as in England, is on the passive dimension of individual responsibility, believing that individuals must be pushed to follow the rules or they will not comply.

Conversely, there are few references to expressions that promote an active sense of responsibility. There is only one reference to the need to 'help each other' and none to “shared responsibility”. Instead, there are references to “solidarity” (6 times) and “sense of community” (3 times). A possible explanation could be the fact that in a society characterised by family and corporate relations, also confirmed by the welfare regime of belonging, closeness and support between individuals are assumed to already exist (Fogli & Pastorino, 2021). Therefore, in a time of emergency, when instead interpersonal relations and physical proximity should be limited as much as possible, it was considered more important to emphasise the restrictive side more than the solidaristic one. However, this natural attitude of Italian society may have been taken too much for granted, since the emphasis was placed on health care, to the detriment of both mental health and social relationships. Indeed, if it is true that family units are larger and more intergenerational than in other places, and that people are less inclined to be alone, this was also a major problem in Italy during such a period of crisis.

Denmark

Denmark's approach to the pandemic outbreak, as summarised by Olagnier and Mogensen (Olagnier & Mogensen, 2020), was to “act fast and act with force”. Indeed, as

soon as there was clear information about the danger of the virus, and in particular news about what was happening in Italy, the Danish government intervened and was one of the first European countries to introduce strict restrictive measures and closuregs (Rubin & de Vries, 2020). However, even though it was the first to act, as the stringency index shows, it also implemented less stringent measures overall than Italy or the UK. These differences in approach compared with Italy and the UK are also evident in the 25 speeches made by Danish Prime Minister Mette Friederiksen during the first year of the pandemic. The minister was always accompanied by ministers and authorities involved in the issues discussed.

The data clearly show the emphasis on the active idea of responsibility. The most frequent expression is “helping each other” (45 times), followed by appeals to the “sense of community” (24 times), which refers to a sense of solidarity and reciprocity between citizens. This is consistent with a country in which the social dimension is understood as a shared dimension in which reciprocal relations take place. This specificity of Danish society is emphasised by the Prime Minister: "we (the Danes) have a very unique social model and it is showing its worth now" (date). Principles such as community, solidarity and trust are deeply rooted in society, as demonstrated by the existence of a large and generous welfare state; social needs are shared among citizens and everyone contributes to them. There is a strong sense of social responsibility, an attitude that is particularly helpful in an emergency situation such as the Covid pandemic (Olagnier & Mogensen, 2020). Then, as shown above, Danish society has a high level of social trust, which means that people trust each other. This is clearly a fundamental characteristic in a pandemic, and the Prime Minister emphasised this: “The spring showed what we can do when we dare to trust each other” (06/10/2020). It also means that people trust their government and are more likely to follow rules and advice.

Thus, despite the introduction of strict corrective measures, appeals to the exercise of “individual responsibility” were frequent (17 times). In fact, the belief that people would have followed the government's recommendations allowed a strong emphasis to be placed on people's ability to choose their behaviour depending on the situation. This is the highest frequency of terms among all the countries analysed, suggesting that the Danish government struck a balance between implementing legislation and trusting that people's natural behaviour would have been the right one. In fact, Danish people already had lifestyles and social attitudes that were more compatible with what was needed during the pandemic. Compared with the lifestyles of other countries, especially those in southern

Europe, the Danes have less physical contact, for example they are not so used to kissing or hugging each other. Moreover, they lead a more socially distant life, which is demonstrated by the phenomenon as the *hygge*, that is the plasure of spending a lot of time at home with the close ones, a typically Danish attitude (Olagnier & Mogensen, 2020). This is another element that could have made the Danish people more inclined to accept the measures implemented.

Other references that support the emphasis on the active idea of responsibility are the references to “unity” (7 times), which supports the need to act together and in solidarity with one another, and the term “efforts”, which appears (11 times). Undoubtedly, these references are aimed at justifying the implementation of strict closures and social distancing measures by recalling the need for joint action. The term “effort”, which was previously associated with a passive notion of responsibility, here has a more nuanced meaning. In fact, it is not just an effort that is required, but a “common effort” that is more likely to support the idea that each individual should act and behave in a way that is more appropriate to the collective, and therefore follow the advice of the government. Once again, great importance was attached to the unity and solidarity of individuals, which was the only guarantee of overcoming the emergency. Surprisingly, but in line with the introduction of strict rules, the emphasis was on “following the rules”, which was mentioned 8 times, and not on “shared responsibility”, which was mentioned only 2 times.

On the contrary, the passive idea of responsibility is mainly addressed by the extensive use of follow or comply with the rules, which appears 11 times. This is understandable, given the implementation of a strong containment legislation and therefore the need to promote compliance with the new rules. In the same direction are the references to police intervention. However, it should be noted that one of the authorities always present at the public speeches was the national chief of police, and most of these references came directly from the police themselves, not from politicians. Of course, since this is their area of expertise, one would have expected them to emphasise this aspect, while trying to explain the new containment measures and their coercive nature. Instead, there is almost no reference to “responsible behaviour”, which was used only once. It is assumed that citizens follow government communication almost naturally, so there was no need to insist on reminding people how they should have behaved.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight the fact, which was partly expected, that among the countries analysed, Denmark was the country that coped best with the pandemic, with a relatively low number of infections and deaths. Of course, many factors contributed to this

result, but what is important is that the fact of being a small country with a low population density was not the most important one. Instead, we have shown how Denmark has managed to do better, even in relative terms. Moreover, compared to similar countries such as Switzerland, Denmark had much better performances and results (Olagnier & Mogensen, 2020). The existence of a public, i.e. equitable and free, health care system is also an important element. But it seems that the nature of Danish society, its way of life and the high level of trust between citizens and institutions have played an important role, creating a virtuous circle. The government was quick to implement strong measures, knowing that the citizens would have followed the recommendations, and at the same time the citizens followed the recommendations, confident that the government was acting for the benefit of the population.

Sweden

Finally, there is the analysis of the Swedish case, which is the most interesting because it is the only one to have adopted a different strategy from the others. As already mentioned, Sweden did not introduce a lockdown and the pandemic response was mainly formulated through non-compulsory recommendations. An important factor that partly explains this difference in response is the organisation of the institutional systems. Compared to the other countries analysed, even Denmark, despite the many social and cultural similarities, Sweden has an important institutional difference. In fact, the Swedish authorities have a high degree of independence from the government, to the extent that during the pandemic crisis the government had to follow the advice of the National Board of Health, as ministerial governance was not allowed. Given this difference, Prime Minister Stefan Lovren addressed the nation only 7 times during the first year of the pandemic. Even though the government had to follow the instructions of the Public Health Agency, it is interesting to analyse their speeches to understand how they communicated and supported the decisions made. They also had to translate politically what was being indicated scientifically.

Before moving on to an analysis of the Prime Minister's speeches, a number of other features of the Swedish pandemic response need to be highlighted. First of all, the fact that Sweden has chosen a different approach than the other countries, despite the strong international criticism, is more in line with the history of health crises. Indeed, as Rubin, Baekkeskov and Oberg show (Rubin et al., 2021), a comparison with the response to the

2009 swine flu pandemic shows that Sweden adopted the same response. Instead, other Nordic countries such as Denmark and Norway changed their approach in both pandemics. If in 2009 all three countries gave more importance to the health authorities, in 2020 only Sweden stuck to giving priority to the health authority during the Covid crisis, while Denmark and Norway gave priority to the political authority, which opted for stricter measures and lockdowns.

The second important feature of the Swedish response is that the active concept of individual responsibility is not only dominant in the speeches, but it is the principle on which the whole response was based. In fact, the decision not to introduce binding rules and restrictions, but to give mainly advice and recommendations, was based on the expectation that individuals would autonomously adopt those behaviours that would have protected other people. However, as already shown, this did not mean that the emergency management was completely left to the individual, as in Sweden, too, measures were implemented, sometimes in an even stricter way than in Denmark.

Given that the response was based on individual responsibility, it is to be expected that the term will be used repeatedly in the Prime Minister's speeches. And this is indeed the case, as “individual responsibility” was the second most common term, appearing 15 times. This is almost as many times as in Denmark, despite having the fewest number of speeches.

In addition, people's active role in the fight against the pandemic was encouraged through calls to “help each other” (7 times), “community spirit” (5 times) and “solidarity” (3 times). As in Denmark, concepts such as community, solidarity and trust play a fundamental role in Swedish society. Moreover, the high level of social trust and the existence of a large and generous welfare state have been important factors in coping with the Covid outbreak. The strong social solidarity that exists in Sweden, and which is a constitutive element of Swedish citizenship, was directly addressed by the Prime Minister when he pointed out that “no one is strong alone and that all citizens are connected to each other” (06/06/2020). The importance of community and the need to be together in order to contain the pandemic is also addressed by the references to the need for “cohesion”, which appear three times. This strongly communal view of society also leads to the idea of reciprocity between individuals, so that everyone has “rights and obligations” and “a place and a role in society”, which on the other hand provides the means of realisation and a safety net in case of need. This is even more evident during the pandemic, with all the interventions that governments are putting in place.

On the other hand, on the side of the passive idea of responsibility, there is a high presence of the term “responsible behaviour”, which is the most recurrent (20 times). Even if the term refers to the passive idea of responsibility, its frequent use is not so unexpected. Indeed, as the answer is based on the concept of individual responsibility and therefore on people's autonomous choices, it is to be expected that there is a frequent appeal to responsible behaviour.

Even if a passive notion of responsibility is used, the nuance is likely to focus more on individuals actively adopting a caring attitude towards others, rather than a simple change in behaviour. Furthermore, there was no reference to police intervention or fines, and only three times was there an appeal to “follow the recommendation”. Again, since the Swedish response was based on the concept of individual responsibility, and consequently fewer corrective measures were introduced, it follows that appeals to sanctions were less necessary. At the same time, as the measures were less severe, they had a milder impact on people’s lives. Indeed, there were few references to the need for “effort” (3 times) or “sacrifice” (2 times). Therefore, institutional specificity certainly played a role in explaining the difference in approach, but social and political considerations were also important. Indeed, the belief in people's ability and willingness to act in the most appropriate way to protect the community favoured a long-term view of the sustainability of the measures taken.

	Welfare regime	Covid measures	Ind. Resp.	Trust in government	Stringency index (peak)
Denmark	Social democratic	Mandatory	Active	High	36 (72)
Sweden	Social democratic	Recommendations	Active	High	38 (70)
UK	Liberal	Mandatory	Passive	Low	44 (88)
Italy	Continental	Mandatory	Passive	Low	54 (93)

(**Tab.2**)

It is now possible to summarise the results in another table (**Tab.2**), which combines the different factors: welfare regimes, the approach chosen, the prevailing idea of responsibility, the level of trust in government and the stringency index. In this way, the data collected from the public speeches are combined with the contextual element highlighted earlier in order to establish a relationship between the welfare regime, the way in which the pandemic was handled from country to country and the prevailing idea of

responsibility. The purpose of the comparison is not only to show how each country emphasised the idea of individual responsibility in different ways, but also to show the link with welfare regimes. Looking at each country's approach to the pandemic is then important to show how, despite different responses to the pandemic, similarities emerge between countries belonging to the same welfare regime. Indeed, despite the different approaches taken by Sweden and Denmark, there is a direct link between the social democratic welfare state and the active meaning of responsibility. On the other hand, the liberal and continental regimes, which implemented a stricter response to the pandemic, are associated with the passive meaning of responsibility. Here, the UK and Italy responded in a similar way, emphasising a similar idea of individual responsibility.

This suggests that existing beliefs about people's behaviour and the characteristics of the welfare state played an important role. Differences in terms of social trust between different welfare regimes have been previously shown. In countries with higher levels of social trust and larger and more universal social policies, such as Denmark and Sweden, it was possible to cope with the emergency by introducing less restrictive measures (as shown by the stringency index, see *figure 1* p.99). Indeed, it was believed that citizens would have followed the advice and adopted the best behaviour to protect the community. On the contrary, in countries with lower levels of social trust and more conditional welfare policies, stricter measures were introduced to stop the pandemic. In the UK and Italy, where there was less faith in people's ability to behave properly, and where the welfare state was weaker and less able to compensate for the consequences of the crisis and legislation, they had to resort to stricter measures, stricter closures and emphasise a more passive and punitive notion of responsibility in order to get people to comply with the rules imposed.

Conclusion

The thesis has focused on the concept of individual responsibility, arguing that it is one of the core elements in the process of welfare state reform that started in the 1980s. In a changing scenario characterised by fiscal constraints, the establishment of a globalised economic-political dimension and the emergence of new social needs and risks, it was felt that the role of the welfare state should also change (Esping-Andersen, 2002). In fact, the welfare state was designed to meet the needs of a different social context and therefore its policies would not be appropriate to the new one. Its main purpose was to guarantee social rights to as many citizens as possible and to mediate between citizens' lives and the market. However, the major changes affecting the labour market, such as increasing flexibility and precarisation, clashed with a right-oriented welfare state designed to compensate for market failures. On the contrary, the debate on the welfare state and the actual policy implementation pointed to a new role for the welfare state, i.e. to support these changes in the labour market by fostering the reintegration of able-bodied welfare recipients into the labour market (as in the case of workfare measures) or by focusing on developing their flexibility and multi-skilling (as in the case of social investment). The focus is therefore on the activation of recipients in the name of respect for the duties and reciprocity that each individual has towards the State and the community. Within this framework, the concept of individual responsibility is emphasised. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the individual, supported by the state through welfare measures, to find his role in society and especially in the labour market, and if the individual does not commit himself to this, he can be held responsible for the failure. The consequence is a limitation of state help for those who are considered responsible for their situation.

The research claims that this emphasis on individual responsibility does not only concern the concrete dimension of the implementation of welfare measures, but is the consequence of a change in rationality that affects the broader concept of society and the welfare state. According to this view, with the spread of neo-liberal economic theories, a different concept of society has been established, with consequences for many areas, including the

welfare state. Both politically and theoretically, individual responsibility has been seen as the core concept of the restoration. This has been supported by the merging of the sociological literature on the welfare state with the philosophical literature on social justice and egalitarianism. Indeed, a common path towards the centrality of the concept of individual responsibility has emerged on both a political and a theoretical level, and the idea has gained a general consensus from both the right and the left: on the one hand from the conservative parties and the neo-liberal thinkers, and on the other from the New Labour Party with the Third Way and the luck-egalitarian theorists. An equal and just society could only be achieved by taking due account of individual responsibility; on the contrary, it would be unfair not to take account of the different degrees of responsibility people have for their circumstances. Clearly, such a shift in rationality has important consequences for the welfare state. While on the one hand it could have a positive impact on the reintegration of citizens into the labour market and on public finances, on the other hand it also entails important risks, such as the restriction of access to social rights, the harsh consequences for people already in difficult situations and the potential for unequal outcomes in terms of social justice.

The first chapter has shown how the welfare reforms, although driven by external factors such as the economic crisis and the new fully globalised international context, were based on a new conception of society and the role that individuals, and consequently the welfare state, should play in it. The imposition of neo-liberal theories, which promoted the infallibility of the market, which should be left to operate freely with a minimum of state intervention, spread from the economic sphere to the political and philosophical spheres. The market is believed to be able to guarantee everyone the resources necessary for full development and participation in society. Consequently, success is attributed to people's effort and merit, while failure is attributed to their laziness. How a people ends up depends entirely on their exercise of individual responsibility.

This approach is discontinuous with the beveridgean view of society, which did not question the centrality of the market, but accepted that it could sometimes fail. Thus, the fate of people is not entirely their own doing, but at least a combination of internal and external factors. This idea underpinned the introduction of welfare state measures designed to provide a safety net in the event of such occurrences. Moreover, and this led to the development of the Beveridgean welfare state, the social rights secured by the welfare state were seen as a fundamental part of citizenship, providing everyone with the means to participate fully in society. Social rights are the consequences of a welfare state that

mediates with the market, ensuring its stability and the redistribution of the products of cooperation among all citizens. However, the emphasis on social rights has been another critique of the Beveridgean welfare state. A new emphasis is needed on the duties that go with rights, so that people do not take advantage of them. As workfare policies show, entitlement to welfare is secondary and individuals should first demonstrate their active participation in the labour market. Various forms of conditionality are introduced, so that the measures that were accessible as a right, and therefore only in case of need, now require people to fulfil other conditions, often not directly related to need. To continue with the example of workfare, the introduction of obligations related to the need to actively look for a job in income support measures does not directly address the right to have a minimum amount of money to live on. Instead, they address another right, namely the right to work. Moreover, by making access to the right conditional, there is a risk of undermining the right itself, which by its very nature should be directly accessible to all those who lack the state to which the right is addressed.

However, stricter conditionality, the emphasis on activation of recipients and the importance of individual responsibility are core elements of the new welfare concept, to the extent that it has been defined as the age of responsibility (Mounk, 2017). Responsibility is not a univocal term, but its meaning has changed over time. In the Beveridgean welfare state, responsibility was understood as a reciprocal relationship between the individual and society. People were encouraged to find their role in society, but with a safety net in case they failed. Later, on the contrary, the idea of responsibility is individualised and people are responsible for the consequences of their choices. If they find themselves in need because of wrong choices or actions, no support is given.

As shown in the second chapter, this conception of individual responsibility is also justified theoretically as a fundamental element in the construction of a just society. According to luck egalitarianism, it would indeed be unjust to treat people who have exercised their responsibility differently as equals. This is an important distinction from Rawlsian egalitarianism, which has been accused of ignoring individual responsibility. Rawls identified the two principles of justice on which a just society should be built. The second is of particular relevance to the research because it has been understood as justifying the introduction of the welfare state, according to which inequalities are acceptable only to the extent that they improve the conditions of the least advantaged in society. However, no consideration is given to differences according to the degree of individual responsibility; all the worst-off members of society should benefit from the unequal distribution of

resources or, in the case of the welfare state, redistributive mechanisms should be implemented to help those in need. On the contrary, according to the luck egalitarians, the redistribution of resources should be granted only to those people whose situation of need is due to external factors and not to choices made.

However, relational egalitarians criticised luck egalitarianism for being too harsh on people already in need, with the risk of making their situation worse. Moreover, luck egalitarians would only consider inequality in the area of resource allocation, whereas there are many other dimensions. Therefore, relational egalitarianism, while critiquing luck egalitarianism, develops a different conception of justice that focuses on the relationship between people on a broader level. Thus, treating people as equals would mean not only providing them with the material means to live, but also treating all individuals as equals rather than in a hierarchical order.

Another important criticism of luck egalitarianism and the possibility of distinguishing between deserving and deserving citizens comes from the philosophical debate on free will. In particular, free will sceptics claim that it is impossible to attribute moral responsibility to individuals. Indeed, there are too many factors at work in people's decisions and actions for it to be possible to distinguish those that are accountable to the individual from those that depend on factors external to the individual. Clearly, the impossibility of attributing moral responsibility to people, that is, the impossibility of holding them accountable for the outcomes of their choices, would undermine the idea behind the new welfare state. Without moral responsibility it won't be possible to distinguish between deserving and undeserving individuals, and therefore no conditionality based on it can be introduced. However, if on the one hand the possibility of implementing punitive policies that make access to social rights conditional on certain behaviours, on the other hand it opens up other possibilities. Instead of conceiving of individuals as atoms, society could be conceived as a mutual dimension, where the choices of individuals are always intertwined with those of others and with the context. Therefore, in order to achieve changes in behaviour, the focus should be on the community dimension, educating people to solidarity and to be an active part of this community. In this perspective, individuals should then be seen always in relation to each other. Solidarity, relational self-interest and emphasis should be the values to be promoted instead of individualism and merit. Without the possibility of total control over one's own actions, individualism and merit lose their meaning. They can only be valid in a shared vision where the self is understood as relational and not individualised. Individual freedom and autonomy would only be possible

in a society that actually guarantees equal opportunities for all. Welfare state policies should then aim to guarantee this, and more generally all policies and social relations should be based on the relational egalitarian principle of t*reating people as equals* in 360 degrees. Moreover, meritocracy should not be seen as the triumph of the best, but as the process by which society enables everyone to give their best. Indeed, without treating all people equally and balancing out all factors that might influence outcomes, the so-called "best" would tend to be people who had the most advantageous backgrounds and the best opportunities. In this way, society would once again function as a common ground where people could take risks in the market, follow their different paths and try to find their place in society, but with a safety net in case of need.

In the last chapter of the thesis, the focus was on analysing the actual level of diffusion of the new welfare state rationality. Indeed, if it is true that we are in the age of responsibility, it is unlikely that every country has reached the same stages in terms of actual policy implementation and political discourse. The aim of the final chapter of the thesis was therefore to test this change empirically. Is the spread of individual responsibility in political discourse universal, or does it differ between different welfare regimes? Moreover, individual responsibility is not a single concept but has at least two different meanings. Have all countries emphasised the same account of responsibility or have different regimes emphasised different accounts of responsibility? On the one hand, differences in welfare regimes and path dependency are forces that could make deep changes in welfare policy more difficult. On the other hand, the rise of globalisation and the increasing importance of international organisations are pushing for convergence of policies and strategies across countries. These different forces are often intertwined and it is difficult to analyse them separately. However, there is a specific period in recent history that might help to answer this question. In fact, the Covid-19 pandemic provided a fruitful situation to study how countries with different welfare systems used individual responsibility. The emergency situation forced governments to act quickly to slow the spread of the virus, without the benefit of previous experience or comparison with other countries. They then had to rely on their existing institutional system and beliefs about people in accordance with the welfare regimes of belonging. The analysis looked at all the references made by the Prime Ministers of Italy, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden in their speeches to the nation in the first year of the pandemic, when no comparison with other countries was possible and when vaccination was not yet ready. The choice of cases was intended to represent all of Esping-Andersen's regime types (Esping-

Andersen, 1990), but the decision to include two countries with social democratic regimes was instead dictated by Swedish specificity. Indeed, Sweden was the only one of the selected countries to opt for a different pandemic strategy, not introducing lockdowns and basing its response on the concept of individual responsibility. People were left free to adapt their behaviour from situation to situation, showing a high level of trust in people's ability to act according to the recommendations given. On the contrary, in all other countries, although with varying degrees of severity, lockdowns were introduced to force people to maintain social distancing. The data shows that despite the difference in approach, the two social democratic Nordic countries were very similar in emphasising the same sense of responsibility, the active one. They both encouraged people to act by adopting the right behaviour to limit the spread of the virus, emphasising the need to act in solidarity and help each other rather than introducing coercive and punitive measures. On the contrary, the other two countries, although belonging to different welfare systems, acted in a similar way, emphasising a passive account of responsibility. Here it is assumed that people are not capable of following recommendations autonomously and therefore coercive measures are introduced to direct their behaviour. Even if the causal relationship between levels of trust and the welfare state is not clear, the existence of a solid link between them is claimed. The results are also in line with this, since socially trustworthy societies such as the Nordic countries are better off. Finally, the analysis shows that there are still differences between welfare regimes, and in particular that social democratic welfare states tend to emphasise the active idea of individual responsibility, which supports more generous and less conditional welfare states. The liberal and continental welfare states, on the other hand, emphasise the passive idea of individual responsibility, which is also supported by the new welfare rationality. Here, stricter conditionality should be introduced into welfare policies to prevent people from taking advantage of benefits and to ensure that only those who deserve state assistance receive it.

However, further analysis is needed to obtain more reliable results. Other sources could be added to the analysis, such as the speeches of the scientific committees or media communication. In addition, more countries could be included to have a greater case history and the exclusion of a very different case such as Sweden could change the results. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic was a very specific and exceptional period, so analysis of more normal years could be included for comparison.

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