

SUMMARIES

Reflections on the methodology of comparative studies

by Neil J. Smelser

This article revisits the methodological status of comparative social studies as it was originally presented in the author's *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences* (1976), in the light of the criticism and proposals of the last two decades. In the first part, background, contents and aims of the book are recapitulated. The search for a middle ground between the opposite viewpoints of extreme positivism and relativism is emphasized as characterizing the author's approach. Alternative and subsequent approaches to comparative sociology and politics include those offered by Skocpol, Ragin, Wallerstein, Tilly, and most recently King, Keohane and Verba. An overview of this literature shows that the issue of the logics of inference stands out as the hard core of the debate. The point is whether there is and should be a unity or diversity of methods in comparative studies. Although firmly supporting the idea that there is a unique logic of inference underlying social science methods, the author acknowledges that world-system theories call for new strategies of comparative research in which interdependence among nation-states and relation phenomena are reckoned with.

European integration and national welfare states

by Fritz W. Scharpf

The aims of this article are firstly to point out the extent of the «negative» and «positive» European integration and, then, to discuss the consequences of this historical transformation and its impact on the policy making of the European States. The starting point of the article is the too limited attention paid by the political scientists to the implications of the slow development of «positive integration» and of

the correspondent loss of «boundary control» due to the great expansion of negative integration. The European Commission and the Court of Justice are to be seen as the institutions which have been the strongest beneficiaries of this process.

The second part of the paper is devoted to the discussion of some possible solutions for this problem, using some historical cases, from the American experience and from their recent process of unification in Germany.

The Southern European Model of Welfare State

by Maurizio Ferrera

The article tries to identify some common traits of the welfare states of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, with special attention to institutional and political aspects.

The main traits identified are: 1) a highly fragmented and «corporatist» income maintenance system, displaying a marked internal polarization: peaks of generosity (e.g. as regards pensions) accompanied by macroscopic gaps of protection; 2) the departure from corporatist traditions in the field of health care and the establishment (at least partially) of National Health Services based on universalistic principles; 3) a low degree of state penetration of the welfare sphere and a highly collusive mix between public and non public actors and institutions; 4) the persistence of clientelism and the formation – in some cases – of fairly elaborated «patronage machines» for the selective distribution of cash subsidies.

A number of factors are then discussed to explain these peculiarities of the Southern model. Among these: the historical weakness of the state apparatus in this area of Europe; the preminence of parties as main actors for interest articulation and aggregation; ideological polarizations and, in particular, the presence of a maximalist and divided Left.

In the last section, the article addresses the severe problems which are currently confronting – in various degrees – the four Southern European welfare states. Both the exogenous challenges, connected with market globalization and EMU, and the endogenous challenges (such as rapid ageing, mass unemployment etc.) are discussed. It is concluded that the adaptation of the Southern model to these challenges will be a very difficult process in the years ahead, in both social and political terms.

From Polarized Pluralism to Moderate Pluralism: Sartori's Model and the Italian Transition

by Adriano Pappalardo

This article analyzes the present Italian transition in the context of Sartori's model. An extensive discussion of the model is provided, in order to stress its analytically salient dimensions; namely, the parties' relevance criteria; the concept of polarization and its indicators; the direction (centripetal or centrifugal) of competition; and the bi- or multipolar configuration of political systems. In the Italian case, the party system format appears to be reduced to five relevant actors, (block) ideological distance results at its lowest point in twenty years, the center pole virtually disappears, and the moderate electorate is substantially mobile and fluctuating. Thus, the author concludes that, in structural terms, Italy is on the threshold of moderate pluralism, and that the major question concerns now how long it will take political elites to understand and adapt fully to the new system's rules of game.

Federal and Social Movements

by Marco G. Giugni

Federalism can be conceived as part of the political opportunity structure affecting social movements. According to the political process model, a decentralized institutional structure provides favourable opportunities for movement mobilization, whereas a centralized structure offers less room for political protest. This article explores this general hypothesis with the help of quantitative data on protest events carried out by new social movements in two federal countries (Switzerland and Germany) and in two unitarian countries (France and the Netherlands), as well as qualitative data on these countries and on the United States. Results show that a federal institutional structure has several consequences on social movements. First, movements in federal states tend to address their claims on different levels, while in unitarian states they focus on a national level. Furthermore, the movements' organizational structure reflects the decentralization of the country. Second, federalism, when combined with prevailing inclusive strategies of the political authorities, contributes to moderate the movements' action repertoires. Finally, movements in federal states can quite easily obtain reactive effects. They find more difficult to provoke proactive effects, however, due to the weakness of the state. They may provoke both types of effects in unitarian states when the authorities share the movements' goals. These results have relevant implications for Italy, which seems to be tending toward federalism.