

HOW RESILIENT IS THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL MODEL? FLEXIBILITY OR/AND SECURITY?

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Abstract

Our paper aims to assess the resilience of the European social model (ESM) against recent challenges. Resilience depends on effectively managing the contradictions of the ESM. Flexicurity is an example of managing contradictions between security and flexibility. The contribution of flexicurity to the resilience of the ESM is determined by the development of the abilities necessary for resilience. Our research evaluates the performance of these abilities using statistical and document analyses. The results show that flexicurity policies perform satisfactorily relative to their resilience abilities. Still, the ability to respond is less effective due to significant differences among the Member States (regarding the implementation of flexicurity policies) and to insufficient openness and functionality of the European labour market. Nevertheless, the European flexicurity policies redefine the ESM by adding a touch of a more mobile, autonomous and free-spirited approach, thus representing a solution to both preserve valuable tradition and modernise the ESM.

Keywords: European social model, employment, flexicurity, resilience

Introduction

The concept of resilience is increasingly being used in the analysis of systems and organisations because it provides a more complex perspective on both risks and solutions for survival and development. This paper aims to apply the concept of resilience to the European social model (ESM). It is a new approach because ESM is not, strictly speaking, an organisation or a system.

The ESM is a key factor in the legitimation of European Union (EU), as it creates the axiological consensus that builds the European identity, prestige and self-esteem. Compared to other social models, the ESM has provided more welfare, social justice and protection of human rights. However, nowadays the ESM is in a crisis provoked by both exogenous and endogenous factors.

In our analysis, said factors are economic, demographic and political, as well as social and cultural, more specifically the new attitudes, values and lifestyles of

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21st century European citizens. Increased adaptability and flexibility are required to address these challenges and preserve the safety/security of the ESM. However, it is feared that flexibility could affect the identity and specificity of ESM. Reforming the ESM could mean the change of European social values and a decline in the legitimacy of the EU. The solution to preserve this identity is the effective management of the tensions, contradictions and paradoxes that describe the present ESM (for instance, national/supranational, unity / diversity, convergence / subsidiarity, enlargement / harmonisation, etc.).

Such a tension occurs between security and flexibility. To demonstrate the actual possibility of combining both security and flexibility for a resilient ESM, we will use the example of the European employment policy reform based on the new concept of flexicurity. Employment policies, in our view, play a key role in defining both ESM tradition and reform. Resilience, security and flexibility work together, like the reed which bends in the storm but does not break.

Applying the concept of resilience to ESM, in general, and to European flexicurity policies, in particular, led us to certain delimitations relative to the literature of the field. We use a concept of resilience rooted in the literature on the four key abilities (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001; Kendra and Wachtendorf, 2003; Hollnagel *et al.*, 2006; Hollnagel, 2014, 2015). Hollnagel (2015, p. 2) believes that resilience does not exist; it is a potentiality rather than a quantity or degree, which would contradict the title of the present paper. The title does not mean, however, that we aim to measure resilience. Instead, we want to explore the applicability of this concept and make a rather qualitative estimation. Hollnagel's statement (2015, p. 6) that "Resilience is functional and not structural" is too trenchant; we believe that function cannot be separated from structure ("function creates the organ") and we intend to demonstrate this for ESM and flexicurity policies.

Likewise, we made adjustments to the definition of resilience given by Hollnagel in order to make it compatible with our object of study. Hollnagel (2015, p.1) believes that "A system is said to perform in a way that is resilient when it sustains required operations under both expected and unexpected conditions by adjusting its functioning." It results that resilience refers to systems. Neither ESM nor public policies can be defined exclusively as systems. We believe that the above-mentioned definition is a limitation of the concept. This paper aims to push the boundaries of the concept of resilience, so as to overcome the systemic paradigm by appealing to the interactionist paradigm, which takes into account interactions among people, social groups, political and social actors, in general. The combination of these two paradigms is very useful for understanding the multilevel functioning of ESM (supranational, regional, and national).

According to the literature cited above, four abilities are necessary for resilient performance:

- The ability to respond: "Knowing what to do, or being able to respond to regular and irregular changes, disturbances, and opportunities, by activating



prepared actions and resources, or by adjusting current mode of functioning” (Hollnagel, 2015, p. 3).

- The ability to monitor: “Knowing what to look for, or being able to monitor that which is or could seriously affect the system’s performance in the near term – positively or negatively” (Hollnagel, 2015, p. 3).

- The ability to learn: “Knowing what has happened, or being able to learn from experience” (Hollnagel, 2015, p. 3).

- The ability to anticipate: “Knowing what to expect, or being able to anticipate developments further into the future” (Hollnagel, 2015, p. 4).

- Other authors (van der Vorm *et al.*, 2011) widen the conceptual framework of resilience by adding – besides the four abilities – a flexible and appropriate structure as well as a culture based on values and symbols that support cohesion and flexibility. Moreover, these authors add the need for sufficient resources and effective leadership. Our concept is even broader, also taking into account the need for consistency among the four abilities and the preservation of identity.

- Based on the above mentions, our research goal is to understand the contribution of flexicurity to the resilience of ESM. Our research questions refer to:

- How developed are the four abilities necessary for resilience in the case of flexicurity? (**Potentiality** of resilience reflected in official documents and institutional and normative frameworks).

- What is the actual functioning of these four abilities in the case of flexicurity and how does it contribute to the resilience of the ESM? (**Resilient performance** reflected in employment indicators).

Our methodological approach is rooted in sociology and social policy and it is based on mixed, mostly qualitative research styles. The research design is founded on secondary analysis using statistical and document analyses. The main sources are the European employment surveys, employment statistics, and the recent changes regarding the employment acquis.

This paper is structured in three chapters. The first one discusses the strengths and limits of the concept of resilience and its usefulness for understanding the dynamics between security and flexibility within the ESM. The second one discusses the characteristics of the ESM, as well as its strengths and weaknesses in the face of recent challenges, especially in the employment field. The third one is focused on European employment policies, as one of the most important dimensions of the ESM. We discuss the paradigm shift operated by the introduction of the flexicurity concept in these policies. Further on, we evaluate how the abilities necessary for resilience are met by the European flexicurity policies, both as potentiality and performance.

The main contributions of this paper are: adapting and developing the concept of resilience; providing an evaluation of the resilient performance of the European flexicurity policies; estimating their role in the resilience of the ESM.



1. The utility of the concept of resilience for understanding the dynamics between security and flexibility within the ESM

The concept of resilience is close to system theory and to the holistic paradigm in general. In sociology, the holistic paradigm is illustrated by the American structural-functionalists (Parsons, Merton) or by French structuralists (Crozier). For a system, the main value is the function (i.e., its survival and development). Everything that threatens the function of the system is evaluated as negative (pathological) and everything that favours the function as positive (normal). System theory has a strong sacrificial connotation: even though within a social system there are subsystems, groups and individuals who want something else, they have to obey and sacrifice themselves for the sake of the system. The system can safely integrate some internal and external disturbances, adjusting itself creatively, operating changes inside and outside.

Therefore, flexibility is used to obtain safety and security but change can still affect the identity of the system. System theory has become very influential and promises to be a unifying paradigm, applicable to both nature and society.

However, this theory has been criticised since its inception because it is latently promoting the ideology of social control and *status-quo* (Lillianfeld, 1978). Criticism has increased by the end of the 20th century, in postmodernity. The complexity of the global economic, political and social changes of this century has rendered the claims of system theory inoperable: one cannot control the uncontrollable, rationally manage irrational phenomena, attempt to predict unpredictable changes, and unify a fragmented and diverse reality.

Lately, resilience has also been addressed by the interactionist paradigm. Based mainly on qualitative methods and more on the desire to understand than that to explain, this paradigm is illustrated by sociologists in ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and dramaturgical approach (Garfinkel, Becker, Goffman).

For interactionism, institutions are not objective realities, but subjective constructs, results of human interaction. Social systems and structures are not above passions, interests, conflicts, personal ambitions or fights for power. This paradigm takes into account the “human factor”, a variable that rather generated dysfunctions, entropy and problems (Hoos, 1972, p. 59). Thus, resilience can be analysed not only with reference to organisations but also to groups and individuals (Tillement *et al.*, 2009).

This paradigm shift can also be applied to the study of the ESM, initially seen as an institution, as a supranational welfare state which synthesises the characteristics of national welfare states, generalises best practices and imposes minimum social standards. Contemporary reality shows the ESM rather as an outcome of negotiations, compromises and interactions between various social and political actors.

During the *trente glorieuses* (1945-1975), the ideology on which the ESM was based was a Promethean and Enlightenment one, which believed in the



capacity of the State (as the supreme administrator of the collective effort) to identify the problems and to solve them in a rational and planned manner. Unfortunately, people have a limited ability to look into the future and see the consequences of their actions. The failure of this ideology is also illustrated by the collapse of planned economies and the end of the myth that humans can control nature (including human nature). EU and the ESM must abandon this rigid ideology based on the illusion of rational control and cultivate greater flexibility instead.

The concept of resilience stems from psychology (Tillement, 2009, p. 232) but was defined and redefined later so as to synthesise ideas of the paradigms mentioned above, applied to various organisations. Alongside the four basic abilities, material, financial, informational and particularly human resources are taken into account: not only expertise and experience, but also the relationships among persons and groups and their ability to communicate and work together. Resilience no longer results from certain technical, objective, structural features of a system; it depends on the willingness and the ethos of the people, on their values and attitudes. It is indissolubly linked to organisational culture (van der Vorm *et al.*, 2011). It is, after all, a political variable, including the type of power and authority relationships, social control, legitimation processes, and leadership styles. It also depends on many psychosocial elements: (mis)trust, feelings and emotions, moods, pessimism/optimism, (de)motivation, compliance with norms or anomy.

In conclusion, at present, resilience is a multidimensional, dynamic and subtle concept: “Resilience refers to something that is multifaceted rather than something that can be described by a single quality or dimension” (Hollnagel, 2015, p. 6).

2. The ESM and the European Employment Policies: identifying challenges

In this chapter, we will discuss the concept of the ESM, identifying its specific features and the challenges it faces nowadays.

The term *European social model* was invented precisely when this model was in a deep crisis. By introducing this expression in 1990, President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, was proclaiming awareness of the crisis facing both the European welfare states and the supranational European institutions. The awareness of the ESM crisis has accelerated the processes of reforming the European social policies both at national and supranational levels.

There are almost 20 different definitions of the ESM in the official documents of the European Union (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2014). Although the official definitions of the ESM have changed over time, they have a stable core, considering it to be a social model based on good economic performance, which combines a high level of social protection and education with social dialogue creating a balance between economic prosperity and social justice and ensuring recognition of social partners (*Presidency conclusions*, 2002, p. 9).

As a model of social policy, the ESM is an ideal-type, synthesising the common features of the Western European welfare states (George and Taylor-Gooby, 1996; Garabiol, 2005; Jepsen and Pascual, 2006):

- extended social protection;
- more active involvement of the state in social protection, economy and society in general;
- comprehensive public services;
- stricter regulation of the labour market;
- institutionalised social dialogue;
- reconciliation of family and work life;
- social inclusion;
- specific social values shared by both European publics and elites: solidarity, equality, inclusion, dialogue, great expectations regarding the social support provided by the State, security, avoiding risks (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2014).

We can see from the above list that, for the ESM, security was more important than flexibility. However, the ESM is an evolutionary concept, changing particularly as a result of the economic crises and EU's successive enlargements. The reforms that began in the late 1980s were predominantly adaptive and failed to fight the backsliding of the EU (as compared to USA and Japan). Europe's disadvantaged position was illustrated by relevant statistical indicators in official reports from the European Commission. For instance, at the time of launching the "Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs", in 2000, the unemployment rate in EU-15 was 7.7%, compared to 4.0% in the United States and 4.7% in Japan (Sapir *et al.*, 2004, p. 117). In 2008, the EU-27 unemployment rate fell to 7.1%, compared to 5.8% in the US and 4.0% in Japan (Commission européenne, 2011, p. 20.).

One explanation for the lower competitiveness of Europeans is, as the Kok report (2004) has shown, the low flexibility of their social model and, in particular, of the European employment policies. Europeans like stability and fear risks, sudden changes and fluidity. The emphasis on employment security has led to an increased cost of European labour as well as numerous and generous social benefits guaranteed during lifelong employment. Other statistical data also illustrate the gap between Europe and the more competitive US economy: the employment rate in Europe is 63%, in the US, 71%. The employment rate for women is 55% in Europe and 65% in the United States. R&D expenditure in GDP is 1.9% in EU, compared with 2.8% in the US (Kok, 2004, p. 12). Thus, the United States of America meet the Lisbon criteria better than the EU itself! The American labour market is more flexible and, therefore, more inclusive:

The less regulated U.S. labour market is far better at integrating the workforce at the lower end of the scale, providing economic opportunity and upward mobility that particularly affects immigrants, young people out of high school or college, and women. Immigrants, for instance have about the same unemployment rate in the U.S. as the general population, whereas in



Germany and France the unemployment rate for immigrants stands at 25 percent. (Dale, 2005, p. 2).

The overregulated and rigid European employment policies, with an unrealistic goal – full employment – have been one of the major areas of reform of the ESM. The reform was needed to fight the crisis of the ‘classical’ European employment policies. This crisis was provoked by many factors that can be grouped into demographics, economic, technological, social and cultural.

From the demographic point of view, the highest pressure was exerted by aging, which caused the imbalance of the dependence report and endangered social security systems based on intergenerational solidarity.

From an economic point of view, the decline of industry and the development of services have had a major impact on the labour market and employment flexibility. Among the benefits of flexibility are: increased worker autonomy, reduced monotony, better motivation, better working relationships due to teamwork, and increased female employment. The disadvantages of flexibility are: greater job insecurity, even precarious work; less attention paid to working conditions, health and safety at work.

The spectacular rise in women’s employment rates has led to significant changes in employment policies. The general tendency is towards flexibility and the deregulation of microsocial arrangements for adapting the workplace to the specific needs of women. At the same time, employers have used this flexibility as a reason for lower salaries, less stability and lower social security. Thus, alongside other groups, women are a category that develops new social risks linked to employment, single parenting and the difficulty of reconciling career and family.

Amongst the technological factors, digitalisation changes the workplaces and the organisation of work, creating opportunities for new occupational statuses other than employees (Eurofound, 2016, p. 15).

Globalisation also has a major impact on employment. Many European businesses have decided to relocate their activities to emerging countries, contributing to growing unemployment in Europe. Another increasing risk of globalisation is external immigration (Eurofound, 2016, p.72).

In terms of cultural factors, we mention the identity crisis and the erosion of the solidarity values, which were characteristic of the ESM. Social solidarity is less and less seen as a solution to new risks; on the contrary, the emphasis falls on individual responsibility. The welfare state is no longer able to cover major risks in contemporary society: instability, uncertainty, fluidity of work and life arrangements, single parenting, loneliness of the elderly and long-term unemployment.

In conclusion, the ESM, and particularly the European employment policies, should adapt to the contemporary challenges mentioned above; they should be more flexible in order to preserve their security. The following chapter will discuss



the European solution to integrate flexibility and security within employment policies.

3. Flexicurity as a solution to improve the resilient performance of the European employment policies

In the previous chapter we observed the symptoms and causes of the crisis of ESM and its employment policies. In this chapter, we discuss how European employment policies are adjusting to these changes using protective and proactive measures. Our analysis focuses on the employment policy innovation that we consider the most significant for ESM resilience, namely the European flexicurity policies. First, we will present the concept and the setting-up of flexicurity as a European policy. Further on, we will evaluate how flexicurity fulfils the four abilities necessary for resilience

3.1. Setting up the European flexicurity policies

Facing the harsh realities of the unfavourable gaps and the imperatives of globalisation, EU has sought to improve the competitiveness of the economies of the Member States and the organisation as a whole. In this respect, deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation measures have been taken since the 1980s. Social policies were also reformed in the same neoliberal paradigm, but there was greater resistance in terms of culture, values and mentalities. That is why Europe maintained its high level of social protection expenditure, despite all the reform measures. Esping-Andersen (2002, p. 2) mentions, however, that the reform of ESM does not mean, first of all, the reduction of spending but the introduction of new objectives and new principles of social policy. Giddens (2006) is one of the authors who support the change of paradigm in social policy, by moving from corrective policies to proactive and affirmative policies.

Women have begun to represent an important target group for the new employment policies. Thus, in the European Employment Strategy (1997), equal opportunities represent one of the four pillars, alongside with employability, adaptability and entrepreneurship. More and more European countries create, through special policies, favourable conditions for work-life balance.

Continuing the paradigm shift started in the late 1980s (change based on liberalisation and deregulation), in the mid-2000s, a new hybrid term – flexicurity – was introduced in the jargon of European institutions. The concept of flexicurity is based on the core values of the ESM, which aims to combine high economic performance with the welfare and security of employees. It's a difficult goal to achieve, and some critical voices say it is theoretically and practically impossible. However, statistical indicators show that the ESM, especially in its Nordic submodel, has succeeded in reconciling the necessary flexibility for economic development with security and various workplace benefits.



The emphasis no longer falls on job security but on people's security, on building their skills to adapt to a changing economy. Flexicurity is related not only to the changes in the economy, but also in mentalities, aspirations and values: people want greater autonomy, greater freedom, and fewer restrictions; they want to decide for their own, according to their specific individual interests and not because of an abstract identity.

Among the policy measures embedded in the concept of flexicurity, we mention: the flexibility of layoffs compensated by substantial unemployment benefits; provisions for atypical employment contracts; training courses; facilitating occupational insertion, reinsertion and transition between successive jobs; employment incentives for hard-to-employ socio-demographic categories; new financial incentives for employers and employees. *Grosso modo*, flexicurity measures can be divided into tools to stimulate flexibility and tools to boost security.

The European *acquis* in the field of flexicurity was established in the 1990s, comprising documents, institutions, values, and principles. The “Common Principles of Flexicurity” – a document published by the European Commission on 27 June 2007 – is its birth certificate (Communication from the Commission, 2007).

The European approach to flexicurity consists of four components: flexible and secure contractual arrangements; lifelong learning; effective active labour market policies to facilitate transitions to new jobs; modern social security systems providing social support during transitions (Communication from the Commission, 2007).

3.2. The ability to respond

European flexicurity policies were conceived precisely as a response of the European employment policies to the recent challenges. European flexicurity policies have the merit of setting common goals and solutions for employment flexibility in order to stimulate employment but, at the same time, to limit perverse effects, such as: precariousness, inequality, social exclusion, and segmentation of the labour market.

The abilities for the resilient performance of these new European policies were put to the test the very next year after their establishment, in 2008, when a new and very strong economic crisis began to affect the EU.

The first response was to rethink the flexicurity as an instrument for recovery. Therefore, at the beginning of the recent economic crisis, the European Commission published new documents on flexicurity: “European Economic Recovery Plan” (2008), the Communication “A Shared Commitment for Employment” (2009), “An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: A European contribution towards full employment” (2010), and the Communication “Towards a job-rich recovery” (2012).



Even the Europe 2020 Strategy (2010) can be considered a proactive employment strategy. It aims to reduce the traditional disadvantages of the ESM compared to other social models and to strengthen the advantages (quality of employment, working conditions, observance of employees' rights, and qualification of labour force). However, the crisis has highlighted the disadvantages and reduced the benefits of European employment policies (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2014).

Another response was to allocate sufficient resources for the European flexicurity policy. These resources include the European Social Fund, the Globalisation Adjustment Fund (set up right during the crisis) and the "Progress" program.

Many Member States have tried and succeeded in implementing (at different rates) the European flexicurity principles, but always giving priority to the specificities of the national context (i.e., institutional framework, economic situation, financial resources and challenges that need to be addressed). In general, however, the balance of these measures has tended towards flexibility rather than security, for example, simplifying the dismissal procedures (ICF GHK, 2011, p. 49).

During the recovery, the main challenges were the creation of new jobs and social inclusion (Commission européenne, 2011). Unfortunately, EU has a limited role in these areas, more specifically to make recommendations, to coordinate, monitor and analyse actions at a national level, with little involvement in enforcement. The supranational responses have remained rather at the level of declarations, having little practical impact. Inclusion of mobile EU citizens has been neglected at both the national and the EU level (Eurofound, 2016). The single labour market is not yet sufficiently open and functional, as its mobility and flexibility are still low. Benefits related to work and insurance status are somewhat difficult to transfer from one Member State to another (Kessler, 2005).

In conclusion, the ability to respond exists mostly as potentiality; in fact, its performance is limited because of the insufficient development of the single labour market. Also, the level of integration between Member States regarding the flexicurity policy is still low, mainly due to two reasons: the wide diversity of national traditions, cultures and practices concerning employment, and the reduced involvement of the EU in implementing national strategies in the field.

3.3. The ability to monitor

The European Union has formed and consolidated a culture of collecting, analysing and using information in its policies. Thus, the ability to monitor is excellently developed: there are many programs and databases on European employment policies, including Eurostat, the European Employment Observatory (EEO), the European Employment Policy Observatory (EEPO), and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). Since 1991, Eurofound has been monitoring progress on the improvement of



working conditions in Europe through the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS).

The research carried out before, during and after the crisis allows the assessment of the resilient performance of flexicurity by following the evolution of some key indicators, such as: the general unemployment and employment rates as well as the risk group unemployment and employment rates (women, youth, minorities); the long-term unemployment rate; the expenditures for lifelong learning and active policies in general; employment security; inclusion.

During the crisis, the unemployment rate in EU increased from 7.1% (2008) to 9.5% (2011) (Commission européenne, 2011, p. 20). Unemployment is higher among non-EU immigrants (20%) and young people (25%) (Commission européenne, 2011, p. 25). Also, these two categories are more likely to have poor contractual arrangements, risking being fired easier.

The EU average employment rate in the 15 - 64 age group was 65.9%. The employment rate of immigrants is only 58.5% (Commission européenne, 2011, p. 55), roughly the same as for ethnic and racial minorities, with Roma people being the most disadvantaged.

During the crisis, there was a proliferation of atypical forms of employment: in 2002, only 10% of the average workforce was employed in atypical forms; in 2014, the proportion was around 15% (Eurostat, 2015). Also, 41% of total employees had enjoyed some working time flexibility (Eurostat, 2015).

Certain researchers noticed that workers' rights and working conditions deteriorated and violations on occupational safety and health increased with 5 - 20% (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2014, p. 56). Fewer resources were allocated for active labour market policies (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2014).

The crisis has therefore led to a more flexible but more segmented European labour market, less inclusive, more distanced from the identity of ESM principles and values. However, there are large differences (ICF GHK, 2011, p. 96): the Nordic, Anglo-Saxon and Continental social submodels have the highest employment rates. The female employment rate is higher in the Nordic model but it is noteworthy that all submodels registered an increase in the average female employment rate in the post-2007 period compared to the pre-2007 period. The highest unemployment rates were recorded in the Southern and Eastern European submodels.

Despite the negative consequences of the crisis, monitoring the impact of flexicurity on some key indicators (before and after 2007, the year of establishing European flexicurity policies) demonstrates that the impact of flexicurity was predominantly positive (See Table 1).

We can see from the above table that the submodel with a higher level of flexicurity (Nordic) is performing better, even during the crisis. On the contrary, the submodels with poorer balance between flexibility and security (Anglo-Saxon and Southern) registered lower performance.



Table 1. Key indicators before and after 2007*

Sub-model	Indicators	Employment rate (15 to 64 years) (%)	Enterprise birth rate (%)	Long-term unemployment (%)	Expenditure with active labour policies	Percentage of the adult population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training	Labour force with tertiary education (%)
Nordic	Before	72.7	8.7	1.5	3.1	20.6	26.3
	After	73.8	10.4	1.1	2.4	22.1	28.2
Continental	Before	64.3	9.1	3.1	2.3	7.8	21.1
	After	66.5	8.7	2.7	2.2	8.9	23.7
Anglo-Saxon	Before	69.2	13.2	1.3	1.1	15.1	25.7
	After	67.7	10.5	2.5	1.8	14.9	30.3
South ern	Before	61.5	8.9	3.3	1.4	4.9	16.2
	After	62.3	7.7	3.3	1.4	6.5	19.3
Eastern	Before	59.7	12.4	5.7	0.5	5.4	15.3
	After	62.1	13.4	3.7	0.7	5.6	18.5
EU average	Before	63.2	10.6	4.1	1.9	7.8	18.9
	After	64.9	10.9	3.2	1.8	9.1	21.6

Source: ICF GHK, 2011, pp. 110, 113, 116, 118, 119.

*Before: data from 2006; after: data from 2010.

The significant differences between the regional social submodels show the insufficient convergence in the employment field and the low impact of the European flexicurity policies on local specificity.

3.4. The ability to learn

The importance of learning in public policies is not a new idea. For instance, Peter A. Hall (1993) has applied Hecló's concept of 'social learning' in social policies to macroeconomic policies during 1970 - 1989, when there was a true paradigm shift, from Keynesianism to neoliberalism (especially during Mrs. Thatcher's term in office). Thus, public policies are based on a continuous process of mutual learning, and finding and disseminating of best practices. However, this model of good practice has a limited applicability because of national contexts, characterised by specific institutional and cultural factors.

European flexicurity policies are innovative and very much based on the ability to learn, through the dynamic interconnection between the supranational and the national levels. European flexicurity policies have learned from good practices in the Netherlands and Nordic countries, which refer to a mix of flexibility and security. These practices were then transferred and developed at the supranational level in the form of the flexicurity *acquis*, and, afterwards, at the level of all Member States, through more or less successful processes of legislative harmonisation and social convergence. But integration is becoming more and more difficult due to the successive enlargements that brought to the EU countries with social models that are quite different from those in the founding states. Therefore, employment policies are no longer implemented through directives but in a decentralised manner. To make the connection between the European and the



national employment policies more flexible, a new working method has emerged - the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) - as a new convergence strategy. The OMC has two main paradigmatic sources: entrepreneurial optics, which includes, among other things, management by objectives, performance indicators and evaluation culture, and the participative culture, public debate and involvement of civil society in political decisions, as a second major source of inspiration. Although well-intentioned, this method has yielded little relevant practical results. The impact on national policies is relatively low and there are important difficulties in implementing national flexicurity plans and strategies.

Despite these shortcomings of the OMC, the European flexicurity policy is undoubtedly a favourable framework for exchanging good practice and mutual learning between Member States and for generating innovative ideas. This framework is also open to social partners and other social and political actors, so that negotiation itself becomes a learning process. These things are explicitly recognised and implemented through The Mutual Learning Programme, in accordance with Article 149 of the Treaty on the Functioning of EU (TFEU), which is an important tool for the OMC in the field of EU employment policy.

Learning means communication, information exchange, and interaction among people, groups, and institutions. It also means understanding the significance and relevance of monitoring by interpreting objective and subjective, quantitative and qualitative indicators. From this point of view, some interesting things can be learned from the crisis: although unemployment has grown significantly in the EU, this growth has been less pronounced than in other social models, such as the American one. The main role in this relative advantage of the ESM has been played by partial unemployment measures – e.g. Kurzarbeit in Germany (Commission Européenne, 2011, p. 29) – and by a higher employment security, which did not allow easy layoffs. In conclusion, we have learned that the optimal strategy is not flexibility but flexicurity.

3.5. The ability to anticipate

Despite the great accumulation of expertise and intelligence that exists in the various European institutions, the latter often ignore warnings from experts or public intellectuals, and even the warnings contained in numerous researches, analyses and monitoring reports prepared specifically for them. For example, it has often been pointed out that major disparities between Member States are harmful and can only be diminished by effective and operational implementation of the four free movements. Despite these warnings, we cannot talk about a completely free movement of the European workers.

Even the anticipatory and strategic documents (starting with the European Employment Strategy, the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020) have many inconsistencies and contradictions that are hard to reconcile. These inconsistencies partially explain why the goals have not been achieved yet. At present, there is no



clear official perspective on the future of EU. There are five proposed scenarios, instead (European Commission, 2017). Within public and academic spaces the opinions are of a wide variety and the consensus is non-existent.

From the employment point of view, the current context is fluid and unpredictable. There are always new risks for which employment policies are not prepared enough. Contemporary European society is a “risk society” (Beck, 1992). Rosanvallon (1998) mentions that contemporary society redefines the notion of risk. Risk is no longer an exceptional situation, which society as a whole is capable of managing, but it is becoming a widespread and long-lasting situation: “The phenomena of exclusion or long-term unemployment often indicate stable situations, unfortunately.” (Rosanvallon, 1998, p. 34). Rosanvallon believes that the welfare state compensates for material risks (loss of income) but ignores risks that are not directly related to income insufficiency: “urban delinquency, family breakdowns, international threats, etc.” (Rosanvallon, 1998, p. 37).

The EU vision regarding the post-crisis flexicurity policies does not bring new fundamental ideas but only adaptations of the old ones (Commission Européenne, 2011, pp. 30 - 35): the introduction of open-ended contracts for certain precarious occupational statuses; increasing investment in lifelong learning; a better targeting of allocations and subsidies; public-private partnership in employment services (PARES), facilitating geographical mobility across the EU. However, there are no effective European policies to integrate immigrants (especially third-country nationals) into the EU labour market.

These policies remain more at the declarative stage, with some Member States imposing obstacles to cross-border workforce mobility. Still, concerns about immigration are unjustified: 80% of the migrants are of working age and, consequently, they are able to contribute to the demographic and economic equilibriums of the host countries (Eurofound, 2016, p. 70). Also, the fear of social tourism is unjustified: internal immigrants are receiving proportionally less social benefits than the natives.

In conclusion, even if the ability to anticipate of flexicurity policies has a certain potentiality, its performance is not sufficiently developed.

3.6. Other factors favouring the resilient performance of flexicurity policies

Apart from the four abilities mentioned above, the structural and cultural factors also play an important role in achieving resilient performance: functional and open institutions, a new ethos of public servants, consensus between elites and the public, social and political values congruent with necessary adjustments, the positive mood of the population, inspired and courageous leadership, citizens’ participation in decision-making and the legitimacy of the flexicurity policies.

From these points of view, the current context is not very favourable. The latest waves of the European Social Survey and other studies have shown the predominance of the negative feelings that characterise the Europeans’ mood:



incertitude, anxiety, fear, pessimism, and concerns (Hilmer, 2016). 68% of the interviewed persons in such a survey have worries related to labour market issues (Hilmer, 2016, p. 5). The majority (59%) approves the free movement (Hilmer, 2016, p. 12). Mistrust in the capacity of the EU to solve problems and manage crises is shared by 70% of the respondents (European Social Survey, 2013). Europeans fear risk and incertitude and 70% of them expect support from the government (European Social Survey, 2012). In conclusion, many of the Europeans' social attitudes and values are not congruent with living and working in an unpredictable world.

Conclusions

Our paper shows that the European flexicurity policies perform satisfactorily on their resilience abilities. These abilities are based on changes in the European employment acquis, establishing effective responses to the contemporary challenges in employment. There are also available resources (specific European funds and programmes). Still, this ability to respond is mostly potential: resilient performance is limited because of the weak role played by the EU in the enforcement at national level. Consequently, there are important differences in the implementation of flexicurity among the Member States. At the supranational level, the greatest inability to respond concerns the insufficient openness and functionality of the European labour market.

The ability to monitor is excellently developed by many research programmes, databases and European agencies. We believe that, in this respect, both potentiality and performance are accomplished.

Referring to the ability to learn, the European flexicurity policies have sufficient instruments (mainly OMC, and Mutual Learning Programme) for sharing information and good practice and for generating innovative ideas. Still, many of these ideas are superficially disseminated and implemented in certain Member States and the relevant practical outcomes are very few. The large differences among the regional social submodels regarding flexicurity demonstrate the insufficient convergence in the field and the low impact of the ability to learn on the specific national context. The flexicurity acquis often remains a “world of dead letters” (Falkner and Treib, 2007, p. 5) because certain Member States are reluctant to comply with it.

The most important lesson learnt from the recent crisis was the confirmation of flexicurity as optimal employment strategy, as the social submodels (for instance, the Nordic one) with good levels of flexicurity handle better the new challenges. On the contrary, the submodels that predominantly use flexibility without being compensated for by an adequate level of security (for instance, the Anglo-Saxon one) have had poorer results. Insufficient flexibility is also an obstacle for resilient employment policies.



The ability to anticipate is less developed, especially regarding its resilient performance: the post-crisis flexicurity policies do not bring any fundamentally new perspective.

Regarding the coherence of the four abilities, the main gap is found between the conclusions of monitoring and future responses.

Discussing the ability of preserving the identity of the ESM, the European flexicurity policies redefine the European social values by adding a touch of a more individualist, mobile, autonomous and free-spirited approach. This is consonant with the new generation lifestyle. Still, there are researchers (Pochet and Degryse, 2012) who believe that the austerity policies implemented during the crisis changed the ESM fundamentally. There is a real risk to expand employment flexibility in the detriment of security, especially for discriminated social groups. Therefore, flexicurity (not just flexibility or just security) is, in our opinion, the correct solution to both preserve valuable tradition and modernise the ESM.

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