



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Choice agendas in disability policy and practice: An analysis through the lenses of professional actors

The cases of England and Lombardy in comparison

Pozzoli, F.

Publication date

2021

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pozzoli, F. (2021). *Choice agendas in disability policy and practice: An analysis through the lenses of professional actors: The cases of England and Lombardy in comparison*.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Chapter 3: Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

Research Questions

The above excursus into the different histories of ‘choice agendas’ and of how choice came to occupy a key role in current public policy and services has shown that the strategies, rationales and interests at play among the various actors calling for more ‘choice’ in public services are not necessarily shared. In his work on the politics of environmental discourse, Maarten A. Hajer (1995) employed the concept of *discourse coalitions* to indicate the ensemble of actors supporting a particular discourse about a specific policy problem. He stressed that the actors comprising a discourse coalition need not have a common goal or share the same meanings while engaging on a specific policy issue; on the contrary, they may have different interpretations and interests even while gathering around what he calls specific *storylines*. And the storylines around which choice agenda supporters have gathered regards, for instance, the failure of traditional welfare states – due to their top-down, bureaucratic and paternalistic structure – and the need to establish new welfare arrangements centred around tailored-made support solutions and self-directed care.

My account of the divergent histories of choice is specifically meant, however, to stress the fact that gathering around specific storylines can be dangerous. Focusing on the storylines of choice agendas rather than their specific histories and development risks putting people (the users of public services) at the mercy of policies while remaining oblivious of their origins and *raison d'être*. It is particularly important, moreover, to stress this point in the context of this research investigating choice agendas through the lenses of the professional actors charged with implementing them. Indeed, I agree with Morris' (2014) argument that when the professionals implementing policies are not aware of the history and background of the policies in question, they may slip into unreflexively bureaucratic and procedural implementation approaches with the consequent risk of either hampering the potential of policies or underestimating their limits. Hence the importance of pointing out (once again) the distinct and not always convergent histories of choice as an introduction to my research questions; these regard in fact the role of different professional actors in translating choice agendas from policy into practice.

In particular, since I am interested in understanding better the effects of choice agendas as they travel from policy into practice, my research questions focus on what I call, drawing on Ball (2012), the ‘translation’ role of policy implementation actors. Like Ball (*Ibidem*), I prefer the word ‘translation’ over ‘implementation’ when referring to (professional) policy actors’ enactment of given policies. The use of this term stresses that policies cannot simply be implemented; rather, they must first be translated. Policy makers usually assume the ‘best possible scenario’ for

implementation, but real life hardly ever provides these ideal conditions. Instead, policies must first be interpreted, made sense of and adapted to specific circumstances (*Ibidem*). And the first actors to carry out these operations are professionals working in the field. With their interpretations, negotiations, mediations and struggles, therefore, professionals come to play a front-line and pivotal role of policy translation, one through which they are able to shape policies and influence the way these policies are received by the citizens using public services. Choice agendas with their promise of more choice for public service users have not diminished the role professionals play in translating policy into practice. On the contrary, the underlying expectation that professionals will hand over ‘choice and control’ to service users has not led to their taking a less active part in the process; rather, as we shall see, it has required them to play a ‘different’ role.

My core research questions thus regard the role professional actors play in translating policy (choice agendas) into practice and the effects of such translation:

How are choice agendas translated into practice by professional actors? And with what effects in terms of choice as offered to public service users?

To answer these core questions, of the many different professional actors involved in enacting choice agendas in the contexts of my study, I will focus on those who perform a key, fundamental role of policy translation. As the literature informing my theoretical framework and which I present in the following section shows, these actors are ‘social workers’ on the one hand and ‘networks’ or ‘network actors’ on the other.

Social workers employed in social services offices represent actors whose professional role and position locate them at the intersection of policy and practice. With their activities, duties and tasks, social workers are involved – on a day-to-day basis – in translating given policies into practice and, in so doing, delivering these policies to users of public services. For the purposes of my project, it is thus of fundamental importance to focus on their role. Indeed, I will draw on Lipsky’s work on *street-level-bureaucracy* (Lipsky, 1980) and Gal and Weiss-Gal’s one on *policy practice* (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2014) to argue that not only can the decisions, actions and daily routines of social workers influence how policy is delivered to public service users on a daily basis, but also that, through such decisions, actions and daily routines, social workers have the power to influence policies themselves, for instance by establishing certain directions for future policy developments. My contention is that both of these ‘influencing’ roles are coherent with the ethos of social work as a profession with a specific professional ethic: that of contributing to the improved well-being of societies’ citizens and, at the same time, fostering fairer and more just societies. Social workers are therefore key actors in the process of framing ‘choice’ as it is presented to public service users, and so my first sub-questions specifically regard their role: **How do social workers translate choice agendas into practice?** and **What choice do they offer to public service users?**

Social workers in contemporary welfare services are rarely, if ever, the only actors translating choice agendas, however. Other actors also take part in this process. For instance, the literature on welfare systems and their transformations (Bifulco, 2017; Cataldi & Cappellato, 2020; Newman & Clarke, 2009) has demonstrated that public welfare systems have undergone hybridisation processes in the last two to three decades which have brought new actors into the sphere of welfare service organisation and delivery. Some scholars have taken a step further to argue that these hybridisation processes have also caused a shift from government to governance, in the sense that the ‘government of unitary welfare systems’ has transformed into forms of ‘governance through and by networks’ (Eggers, 2008; Rhodes, 2007). Whether or not governance has substituted government as a model for welfare states, a question subject to much debate, I would argue that ‘networks’ and ‘network actors’ represent key new actors of policy translation, delivery and influence. And this is why I am also interested in better understanding their role in translating choice agendas into practice. My second set of sub-questions thus regards the role of networks and network actors: **How do networks – and network actors – translate choice agendas into practice?** and **How do networks – and network actors – influence the kind of choice that is offered to public service users?**

With these questions in mind, the next section presents the theoretical framework underpinning this research project in more detail.

My theoretical framework for the study of choice agendas

Policy actors and policy research

The theoretical framework underpinning this research is that of ‘policy actors’ and, in particular, those actors who play a key role in the policy process by translating policies into practice: professionals.

Social scientific interest in the role of these actors is not a recent phenomenon, it could even be said to date back to the origins of sociology itself with Max Weber and his theorisation of bureaucracy. It was roughly a century ago when Weber wrote that the future of the world belongs to bureaucratisation and that it would be sheer illusion to think that mass organisations – whether in capitalist, socialist or democratic systems – could survive without the continuous administrative labour of officials (professionals) working in offices. This is because bureaucracy is a necessity in increasingly complex modern states driven by profit seeking, power expansion, cumulative possession of consumption goods and the need for peace, order and protection (Giddens, 1973). Bureaucracy, according to Weber (1978), is closely linked to systems of domination, especially in

modern Western societies: “The bureaucratic structure goes hand in hand with the concentration of the material means of management in the hands of the master” (*Ibid.*: 980) and professional bureaucrats are key to its reproduction. The element underpinning such a system is not coercion, however; Weber identifies it as the work of individuals acting freely and rationally within the rationale of bureaucracy itself. Weber dedicated long chapters of *Economy and Society* (Weber, 1978) and of his political writings (Weber et al., 2002) to analysing the actors of modern bureaucracies: officials ranked in hierarchies and following a set of rules and regulations. Weber’s work has also inspired other investigations which, focusing on the role of bureaucratic actors, have further developed the study of bureaucratic personalities, for instance (Marx, 1957; Merton, 1963). And yet for many years this attention to the actors of bureaucracies, their actions and powers, was not reflected in the field of policy research: until the 1980s, policy studies paid little attention to their role. Since its inception, policy research has instead adopted a top-down approach to the policy process and used this approach to focus on either the decision-making process of policy or its implementation from a normative perspective (Ham & Hill, 1993).

In the first case – that of policy research focused on decision-making processes – researchers have paid specific attention to the relationship between power and decision-making, on the one hand, and the relationship between rationality and decision-making, on the other, with some authors analysing decision-making processes through rational models and others addressing them as incremental processes (*Ibidem*). In the second case – that of policy research focused on the implementation phase of the policy process – policy analysis has instead taken the further step of also considering how policies, once formulated, end up being implemented in practice and it has done so by comparing the normative input of policy with the outcomes of implementation. As Brodtkin highlights (Brodtkin & Marston, 2013) referring to Graham Allison (Allison & Zelikow, 1971), 90 percent of policy-making occurs during implementation, that is to say after decision-making and legislative enactment. The ‘implementation turn’ thus undoubtedly represents a positive development in terms of enlarging the boundaries of policy research. However, this more recent policy research focus on implementation has not entailed a reconsideration of the role of the actors implementing policy: implementation research has not brought these actors under its investigative lens. The process and stages of implementation are at the centre of implementation research, not its actors. More specifically, this approach aims to identify – in keeping with a top-down logic, proceeding from the normative to the operational level – the possible gaps emerging in the policy implementation process and a result of deviation from given policy objectives. The argument could be developed as follows: we should not assume that the process through which policies are put into action is a straightforward one, there are many things that could go wrong during the implementation phase and these are worth studying (*Ibidem*). Implementation studies

work (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973) thus assumes that it is possible to pay out clear policy goals and the specific operational steps needed to achieve them, forming the basis of policy analysis.

Critics have argued that the main limit of this approach to implementation research is that it assumes clear policy goals, and such goals are actually rare in real life. Indeed, policy objectives are often confused, contested, and sometimes even conflicting. In the face of blurred or unclear policy objectives, it therefore becomes difficult, not to mention misguided, to analyse the policy implementation process in terms of the different stages required to achieve such goals (Brodkin, 2012; Ham & Hill, 1993). It is specifically in this context that the role of implementing actors acquires fundamental importance: their interpretations of policy objectives and how they should be achieved, their decision-making processes and actions are all key elements characterising the implementation process and, as such, should be embraced by implementation studies.

There is a body of research devoting specific attention to the role of these actors, the studies that implementation research literature refers to as bottom-up approaches to the study of the policy process. Contrary to the top-down logic outlined above, these approaches do indeed go beyond the exercise of explaining implementation failures (Brodkin & Marston, 2013), hence beyond an exclusive focus on the gaps between legislative inputs and implementation outputs. The focus of bottom-up approaches is specifically implementation as it happens and they thus grant significant attention to the conditions influencing it as well as the role of implementing actors. The first and main exponents of this approach are Lipsky and two of his former research students, Prottas and Weatherley (Lipsky, 1980; Prottas, 1979; Weatherley, 1979). I will soon expand on their contributions to the field. First, however, I would like to make a brief digression into policy evaluation theories because the role of policy implementation actors has served as the litmus test for distinguishing different kind of approaches in this field as well. All of these approaches are still being applied in the contemporary evaluation of choice agendas, hence the importance of delving more deeply into their origins.

Policy actors and policy evaluation

Different conceptions of policy give rise to different approaches to its evaluation, and the tendency to consider or disregard policy actors in the evaluative framework represents the distinctive feature characterising the different approaches. There are main approaches in this field: the so-called method-oriented, or positivist, approaches to the evaluation of policy and those that are instead theory-oriented (Stame, 2004).

As the name suggests, method-oriented approaches are concerned with the methodology through which policy programmes should be evaluated and, more in particular, with developing a solid

method to verify both the internal and external validity of programmes (or, in other words, the causal relationship between the phenomena under observation – inputs and outputs – and potentially generalisable evaluation outcomes). These approaches to policy evaluation are based on rational choice theories and models: given certain policy objectives, certain policy programmes can be envisaged that entail inputs (actions and measures) to achieve certain outputs (effects). Policy evaluation thus involves careful comparison between objectives and outputs (Biolcati Rinaldi, 2006; Stame, 2004). The implementing actors of policies are not considered in this approach, in the sense that method-oriented evaluations concentrate on explaining the effects of given policy programmes by comparing ideal objectives to actual programme outputs and explaining any observed difference in outputs as a result of the inputs (*Ibidem*). This approach comes up against the well-known problem of the ‘black box’, a metaphor used in the social sciences to indicate the space between given inputs and expected outputs. The underlying assumption of positivist policy evaluation approaches is that, because the box is black, none of what happens inside it can be observed or taken into account. And one of the ‘things’ that might be included in the black box are policy actors: actors with their own ideas about policy programmes as well as those facing a range of possible actions that could be taken in relation to specific programmes.

In contrast to this approach, supporters of theory-oriented evaluation have called for ‘opening the black box’ so as to observe the actors – often referred to as stakeholders in this field of study – involved in policy implementation and to also study their contribution to bringing about certain policy effects. Theory-oriented approaches are based on the idea that assumptions inform both policy programmes and actors’ actions, and that such assumptions should be made explicit in order to also make explicit the theories behind policy programmes (*Ibidem*).

Theory-oriented approaches have addressed the black box problem in different ways (Chen & Rossi, 1989; Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Weiss, 1997), and of these currents of research Pawson and Tilley (1997) have focused most intensely on the role of actors (stakeholders) in influencing policy effects. In their view, the element that has a transformative effect in practice is not policy programmes as such but programmes as they come into contact with actors, the contexts in which they act and the mechanisms they activate in relation to programmes. Such theorisation, known as realistic evaluation theory, it can be condensed in the following formula: ‘context + mechanism = outcome’. The context comprises the conditions which do or do not favour certain mechanisms, while mechanisms represent the kind of interchanges that occur between actors’ individual preferences and institutional constraints. Realistic evaluation thus focuses on the possible combinations that may result from the intersection of contexts, mechanisms and outcomes (Biolcati Rinaldi, 2006) and, as such, they take into account the role played by the actors variously involved in the implementation phase of policies.

While realistic evaluation theories have taken the further step of bringing actors under the lens of policy research, their approach to policy evaluation has nevertheless remained focused on identifying causal relationships between programmes and outcomes, albeit in the context of a theory of causality that does take into account the role of implementing actors (*Ibidem*). Opening the black box has allowed such studies to add the intermediate step of contexts and mechanisms as elements that must be considered to evaluate outcomes. However, this step has not translated into a reconsideration of the premise that there is linear relationship between inputs and outputs. It is as if actors have emerged, but their actions are still studied and interpreted in relation to policy outcomes. To proceed one step further and account for the role of policy actors from a wider perspective, we need to return to the body of work introduced above as bottom-up approaches to the study of policy processes and, in particular, those of street-level-bureaucracy (SLB) theories.

Policy actors and Street-Level-Bureaucracy (SLB) theories

It was with Lipsky (1980) and two of his former students, Weatherly (1979) and Prottas (1979), that the study of the policy process took a new direction, as did research on the role of the actors who enjoy strong discretionary power to influence it, so-called street-level-bureaucrats (SLBs). Indeed, Lipsky took this field of study one step further by focusing solely on the actors involved in policy implementation and their actions, regardless of the specific objectives of the policy in question. In reality, Lipsky is not simply interested in understanding how actors influence policy; on the contrary, his work aims to show how the actions of policy implementing actors can actually make policy in the sense that their beliefs, decisions and actions in relation to policy programmes – combined with the conditions under which they work – can themselves become policy. The focus thus shifted from actors in relation to certain policy objectives to actors as agents of policy. Lipsky refers to these actors as street-level-bureaucrats (SLBs).

SLBs, as defined by Lipsky, are actors who work midway between public service users (policy receivers) and the upper hierarchy of public officials (policy decision-makers). Lipsky's argument unfolds as follows: having to deal with often unstable environments and resources as well as ambiguous if not contradictory demands from the bottom and the top alike, SLBs in their day-to-day routines enact a series of coping strategies and discretionary behaviours which, when considered in a systematic way, not only influence policy but actually become policy themselves. In Lipsky's words: "I argue that the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policy they carry out" (Lipsky, 2010: xiii).

Lipsky's work and the literature that has developed around his contribution to policy analysis thus provide a fertile lens for analysing the role played by the translating actors of policy by bringing

the research focus closer to their routines, decision-making processes and practices. In the following pages, I will consistently draw on such work and literature for my analysis of choice agendas. In particular, I will engage with the debate on ‘discretion’ that has flourished in the wake of Lipsky’s work. Indeed, discretion is one of the pillars of SLB theories: it is discretion that allows SLBs to cope with the complex and often ambiguous nature of their jobs; it is discretion that allows them to develop personal responses and acceptable solutions to their working challenges; and it is discretion, finally, that permits the deployment of those ‘patterns of practice’ which, as we have seen, can effectively represent ‘policies’ in and of themselves as delivered to public service users.

Since the publication of *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services* (Lipsky, 1980), the debate around discretion has taken multiple forms. Extensive discussion has developed around the different ways the concept of discretion can be interpreted, for instance, such as interpretations built around a ‘defensive vs empowering’ dichotomy (Ellis, 2014). In the first case, discretion is associated with what has become known in the literature as the ‘state-agent’ narrative, that is, defensive and conservative practices on the part of SLBs who are perceived as being driven by their self-interests and associated need to make their jobs easier, safer and more worthwhile (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). At the opposite extreme of this interpretation is its counterpart: the ‘citizen-agent’ narrative. This perspective perceives SLBs as being driven by a sense of commitment to their clients and consequent desire to empower and enable service beneficiaries, and sees SLBs as acting in response to their circumstances even when doing so entails more work and effort on their part (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012). In this vein, some studies have focused on exploring the effects of discretion - as in the case of Tummers’ and Bekker’s (2014) investigation of the potentially positive effects of discretion for both workers and clients – while others instead pay attention to the factors influencing discretion, such as individual characteristics and personal beliefs (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Maynard-Moody et al., 2003; Wilkins, 2007; Wilkins & Williams, 2009). Another important body of research on this topic has been dedicated to analysing what happens to discretion in the context of welfare state transformations, such as when new public management (NPM) and managerialist approaches are introduced (Cataldi & Tousijn, 2015; Ellis, 2007, 2014; Evans & Harris, 2004). An example of this current of research is the article by Evans and Harris (2004) on the state of discretion in social work practice under managerialism. This publication also contributes an exhaustive overview of the debate surrounding the ‘continuation’ vs ‘curtailment’ thesis of professional discretion in social work, a debate that continues to be highly relevant to contemporary social work practice.

It is this last field of study around the question of discretion, and particularly the ‘continuation’ vs ‘curtailment’ debate, that is most relevant for my purposes here. Indeed, my research is not interested in formulating taxonomies of discretionary practices or patterns of practices, nor does it

seek to rigorously analyse the drivers (or consequences) of discretion. On the contrary, I am interested in exploring the space for discretion more generally (across different types, with their different influences and consequences) and in the context of the policy changes brought about by choice agendas in the field of social care services for people with disabilities. This focus is motivated by two main factors. On the one hand, discretion is a particularly significant prerogative in the context of choice agendas, given that these policies specifically demand and require that the actors charged with implementing them be free to adapt and respond to people's needs in a flexible and enabling way, based on the clients' specific personal circumstances. As Ellis points out in her article on professional discretion and social work in the UK (Ellis, 2014), personalisation and the principles of choice and control entered adult social care together with the promise of rehabilitating professional discretion in the sense of strengthening the enabling and supportive function of social work. On the other hand, however, the space in which professionals may exercise discretion is influenced by wider contextual factors such as, for instance, institutional and organisational arrangements. As Hupe and Buffat (2014) stress, context matters in SLB research because contextual conditions can have both constraining and enabling influences on SLBs and their action.

New Public Management (NPM) and managerialism represent examples of contextual conditions which can affect discretion in social work, social services and social care. Other relevant examples include the interface between discretion and professionalism (Evans, 2011, 2015); discretion and the penetration of information technologies and digitalisation (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002); discretion and the shift from government to governance (Hupe & Hill, 2007) and, finally, discretion and the role of so-called street-level organisations (SLO) (Brodkin & Marston, 2013; Rossi, 2012; Rossi & Bertotti, 2019).

The 'continuation' vs 'curtailment' debate regarding discretion therefore represents one of the main terrains on which I will address the topic of choice agendas from the perspective of their professional actors. There is, however, another theoretical frame that may prove particularly useful for analysing professionals' practices in the context of choice agendas, especially the field of social care services and social work: the theoretical frame of 'policy practice'.

Policy actors and policy practice

The concept of 'policy practice' is at the centre of Gal and Weiss-Gal book *Social Workers Affecting Social Policy* (2014), a collection of contributions examining the role social workers play in policy formulation from an international perspective. The concept of policy practice refers not to the work of policy actors or SLBs in general, but specifically to the field of social work. In particular, policy practice can be considered a specific type of discretion in the context of social work, a form of

discretion that is imbued with political significance. As such, the policy practice lens is particularly significant for analysing the role of social workers as policy translating actors.

As Gal and Weiss-Gal explain in the introduction to the book, the concept of ‘policy practice’ was first coined by Bruce Jansson (1984) and its foundational idea is that all social workers carry out activities in their professional settings which do or should influence social welfare policy at some level – such as when they engage in agenda setting, problem analysis, policy enactment and policy assessment (*Ibidem*). However, there are characteristics that differentiate policy practice from other types of social work engagement with policies and thus from other kinds of policy work. First of all, policy practice refers to activities which are undertaken in a professional setting and can therefore be distinguished from generic civic involvement or political participation outside such settings. Secondly, policy practice is a concept that encompasses the activities of all social workers, not just a few specialised, expert or dedicated workers. Finally, policy practice can influence policy at multiple levels (organisational, local, national or supra-national) (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2014).

Social Workers Affecting Social Policy can be considered the first cross-national attempt to study this specific aspect of social work practice, namely social workers’ engagement with policy, and the authors draw on cases from eight different countries to contend that the conditions currently exist for social workers to exert greater influence over policy formulation. This claim is asserted – as the authors themselves highlight – despite both the restricted scope of literature on the topic and the limited evidence confirming that social workers’ engagement with policy gives rise to significant outcomes. In view of these limits, I would argue that this claim might be a bit too optimistic in some ways. For instance, two of the book chapters address the role of policy practice in England and Italy respectively, and neither of them present strong evidence to support the authors’ optimistic claim. Nevertheless, I believe the concept of policy practice to be a very useful lens for exploring the role of social workers as translating actors of policy.

Not only can policy practice be seen as discretion imbued with political significance, as mentioned above; it can also be considered a form of discretion that reflects the core ethos and values of social work as a profession. The idea that social workers, through their work, should push policy in the direction of a fairer society that prioritises its citizen’s well-being does indeed lie at the heart of social work itself. Once again taking England and Italy as examples, both these countries’ Codes of Ethics assert this ‘mission’ and both refer to policy-related activities (*Ibidem*), albeit in quite different degrees of detail, as we shall see. Social workers’ policy practice could thus be defined as an instance of what Lipsky would call policy-making by SLBs: if policy practice does exist, this would be an example of how social workers as SLBs can make policy.

There is one final point to be made about policy practice. This concept relies on the notion that the policy process is open and that external actors can potentially influence it. Even though this concept

was coined in and refers to the context of social work, it could be extended to analysing the kind of influence that actors who are not themselves social workers but who work in their same context have on a given social policy, or at least used to compare the different kind of influence different actors may exert in the same context. This last aspect is particularly important if we consider that social workers are rarely, if ever, the only actors implementing specific policies. And this point brings us to the last element of the theoretical framework underlying this research, that of governance and network theories.

Policy actors, governance and network theories

Governance and network theories are relevant to the theoretical framework of my research because they shed light on the welfare transformation processes (and the interpretations of such processes) that lie at the heart of choice agendas. Paraphrasing Brodtkin (2013), in fact, I contend that the changed conditions of street-level work as a result of the consolidation of governance and network dynamics affect what SLBs are able to produce as policy.

SLB theories were developed in relation to a specific context in which the public sector dominated the various stages of policy-making, including that of policy delivery; however, this context has changed drastically over the past thirty years, as have the working conditions under which policy actors carry out their jobs on a daily basis. The literature on welfare studies refers to these kinds of transformations by highlighting the shift from public welfare systems to systems based on *welfare mixes*, and hence a mixed economy of welfare in which both private for-profit and non-for-profit organisations have come to occupy pivotal roles in welfare provision and welfare service delivery (Ascoli & Ranci, 2003; Glasby, 2012). Privatisation, externalisation, public-private partnerships, and contracting-out practices have changed the nature of the public sector, introducing mixed forms of welfare provision and delivery and populating the scene with new actors: not-for-profit organisations, private businesses, cooperatives, associations, and consultancies. All of these actors have become involved in policy implementation processes in different ways, making it impossible to restrict the focus of implementation research to traditional public welfare actors. Brodtkin, for instance, has tried to account for the new role these actors, or at least some them, play in policy delivery by focusing her research on street-level organisations (SLO) as opposed to street-level bureaucrats (SLBs). The SLO frame does indeed allow us to take into account the variety of public, private and hybrid actors that engage in policy delivery and implementation in the context of welfare mixes (Brodtkin, 2012; Brodtkin & Marston, 2013).

Brodtkin's focus on SLO represents one way to account for the role of new implementing actors in the policy process. In this project, I have adopted a slightly different approach. I likewise expand the focus of my analysis beyond the study of traditional professional actors, such as – in the specific

case of my research – social workers employed in social care services for people with disabilities. I do so, however, not by enlarging the lens of SLB to analyse SLO but by moving the SLB frame outside the context of public service offices. In this way, I will account for the role of professional actors other than social workers in relation to policy translation. Depending on the different settings I research, these actors may include professionals working for user-led organisations, charities, foundations and other non-profit associations, consultants working in the private sector, or social entrepreneurs and professionals working for other civil society organisations. Their way of working usually involves collaborative and interdependent practices as part of specific policy networks, hence the particular importance of governance and network theories for my analysis.

The concepts of governance and networks are interrelated. For instance, Rhodes, a very influential figure in the field of policy network studies in the UK, defines governance as ‘governing with and through networks’ (Rhodes, 2007) and – in an article written with Bevir on the constructions of governance in the UK (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003) – describes the shift from government to governance as a shift from ‘the government of a unitary state to governance in and by networks’ (Ibid, p. 41). This shift could be considered a further step in the transformation of public sector services, one which follows the shift involving the typical marketisation mechanisms of New Public Management (NPM) reforms. Indeed, it could be said that public welfare systems have undergone two waves of change. During the first one, the NPM model paved the way for the arrangements characterised above as welfare mixes, hence the introduction of market mechanisms and market incentives into the delivery of welfare services. During the second wave of change, such mechanisms and incentives have been revisited in certain ways. In particular, the idea of competitive markets was substituted by the idea of collaborative and interdependent ones (Bifulco, 2017). The actors of these ‘new markets’ are no longer described as being in competition between each other; on the contrary, they are now framed as actors who collaborate, exchange resources and negotiate their modes and scopes of action. It is at this stage that the construct of ‘governance by networks’ acquires importance (Bifulco, 2017; Newman & Clarke, 2009).

This is how governance by network is introduced by Eggers. Together with Rhodes and Bevir, Eggers has dedicated several publications to the topic of governance: “The hierarchical model of government is in decline, pushed by governments’ appetites to solve ever more complicated problems and pulled by new tools that allow innovators to fashion creative responses. This push and pull is gradually producing a new government model, in which executives’ core responsibilities no longer centre on managing people and programs but on organising resources—often belonging to others—to produce public value. We call this trend ‘governing by network’” (Eggers, 2008, p. 23).

It is important to stress, however, that despite (or possibly even because of) the considerable attention governance theories have recently received, some authors have urged caution in relation to governance and networks literature. Some have stressed that this literature runs the risk of underestimating, and therefore overlooking, those dynamics typical of welfare systems that have actually remained unchanged (Stoker, 2017); others have similarly suggested that there is a rhetoric-reality gap between this literature and the practice of governance and networks, with the first emphasising coherent normative perspectives that are not necessarily reflected in the second (Newman, 2005). Still others, drawing on the Foucauldian conceptualisation of governmentality, actually go so far as to state that the public actor operates through network governance to exercise power and control just as it did before, only now it does so from a different position, at a distance (Triantafillou, 2004). Bifulco (2017) maintains that one of the most controversial aspects of governance is the ways it is conceptualised: originally associated with market-oriented perspectives, governance approaches have gradually reoriented themselves to focus on participatory and deliberative forms of decision-making processes aimed at furthering local communities' empowerment and social inclusion. The intersection of these two perspectives often goes unnoticed, however, as does the role economic actors play in steering them.

Finally, authors such as Ball (Ball, 1993, 2015; Ball et al., 2012, 2017; Ball & Junemann, 2012), Peck and Theodore (Peck & Theodore, 2012, 2015) have engaged with governance and network theories to unveil the way in which policies are differently 'acted by' and 'acted on' the various actors of given policy networks. In the case of policy translation, this generates mixed dynamics of agency and interpretation, on the one hand, and power and subjectification, on the other. Since I am also interested in these kinds of dynamics, I draw extensively on the re-elaboration and application of governance and network theories used by Ball, Peck and Theodore – as well as on their language, concepts and methods – as a useful compass for orienting my analysis of choice agenda translation through the lenses of their professional actors.

With this excursus on governance and network theories I conclude this chapter on the theoretical underpinnings of my project and proceed, in the next chapter, with an outline of the methods I employed to carry it out.