Universal Welfare State and Social Capital.

The thesis will propose an analysis useful for a public actor about the correlation between welfare systems, with particular attention to the universal one, and social capital. It is modeled on the classification of Esping-Andersen to navigate between the ideal-typical welfare systems were highlighted by the Danish scholar: liberal welfare (or mean-testing or residual), the Social Welfare (or universalistic or Scandinavian) and conservative-corporatist welfare (or continental). With regard to the theoretical foundations of social capital, the debate is still on among scholars, but it was found a growing consensus around what should be the empirical indicators of social capital, grouped into three main groups: social networks, such as reports within and between families and friends, and adherence to community associations, civic participation, local or national level; social norms, intended as shared values and cooperative behavior; social trust, understood as generalized trust in social institutions and in other individuals. The conservative-corporatist ideal type is not important in the analysis as the other two main regimes. The reasons are several: on the one hand we prefer to compare the two ideal types most radically opposed to the function and structure, on the other hand it is believed mutualism as a welfare system of little interest to the public actor in question, which has an interest in the matter of the share capital: historically liberals and socialists have had opposing views on the matter, with the consequent opposition even in the field of welfare, while the Conservatives have generally perceived the social question as a mere law and order problem. This interpretation makes the analysis of the effects of welfare on the share capital of little interest to an actor with this public policy agenda. One recurring criticism of the welfare state is that it crowds out the social capital. Public support makes the social safety nets (family, volunteering, informal networks) unnecessary and alienates individuals from some of their traditional social environments. But is it really so? The empirical evidence in this sense have always been poor or weak, also because of the fragility of the "social capital" concept and in recent years have increased rather empirical refutations of the crowding out hypothesis. The findings seem to suggest a relationship of opposite type to the crowding out hypothesis: the more extensive a welfare system is, the more it appears to be related to an increased share capital, while the residual welfare seems to be less appreciable. The paradox of a welfare lighter and more unpopular (maybe perceived as too much heavy by those who subsidize with their taxes and as too much bureaucratically oppressive by those who can theorically take the benefits) is only apparent. Actually in the liberal system, taxpayers feel they are wasting money to support people of dubious morality (risk of fraud in the social security system) and the people who use it feel treated as second-class citizens by the bureaucracy that has to control over their eligibility to receive social funds. In the social democratic system instead disappears the strict separation between taxpayer and user of the service. While participating in social spending to varying degrees (principle of proportionality), all receive the same service, thus perceiving, also on a psychological level, a return of the money invested through general taxation. In the liberal system the middle class is excluded from the benefits of cooperation, while in the universal one, the middle class is brought under the umbrella of the welfare state too. Since there is no reason to lie, pretend or bribe in order to have access to the welfare public service, an important source of general distrust disappears. Decommodification seems having positive consequences too: the passage of parental care from the family to the public, for example, does not seem to have negative effects on the relationship of individuals with the elders of their family, but it seems rather to increase quality and intensity of the relationship, being the family released from its more heavy material problems. So the universalistic welfare state enhances the social capital? Not necessarily and not so plainly. If the correlation seems quite clear, causality is a more difficult case: we do not know if a universal welfare state generate social capital or if it is a society already rich in social capital to allow the construction of a more generous and supportive welfare state. We can argue that the universal welfare does not harm but, within certain limits, even enhances social capital, but we can not ignore other problems related to it. The formation of pressure groups and sometimes parties thesis to the defense of certain segments of society dependent in part on welfare (e.g. pensioners' parties which have developed throughout Europe with varying fortunes and consequences) is able to break again the composition of interests promoted (unintentionally?) by the social democratic and, under different principles, by the conservative regime. The most troublesome concept we have to deal with is probably the dark side of social capital. Negative social capital has an important and unfortunately still unclear role in this matter: to which extent it is favored or opposed by various arrangements of the welfare state? This question is probably the most demanding we have tried to give a partial and temporary answer, untill we will have more data on which we could correct and improve our theories. If one of the challenges of modernity is the transition from a primordial social capital (based on family and community) to one based on social organization, it seems to us, as to others, that the role of the welfare state in this area is more than complementarity mediated institutionally that substitution.