Welfare States, Labour Markets, and the Political Opportunities for Collective Action in the field of Unemployment: A Theoretical Framework

GIUGNI, Marco, BERCLAZ, Michel, FUGLISTER, Katharina

Abstract

As sociological neo-institutionalist theories have shown, social and political institutions are not only a set of rules, procedures, organizational routines and governance structures (see March and Olsen 1984), but they also provide norms and habits that determine individual choices and behaviours. In this chapter, we would like to apply this line of reasoning to propose a theoretical framework for the study of collective action in the field of unemployment politics.

We propose a framework for analysis based on the idea that the form and content of political claim-making on issues relating to unemployment are influenced in important ways by the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state and the consequent institutional approaches to unemployment.

Reference

Chapter 8
Welfare States, Labour Markets, and the Political Opportunities for Collective Action in the field of Unemployment: A Theoretical Framework

Marco Giugni, Michel Berclaz, and Katharina Füglistier

Prevailing Conceptions of the Welfare State as Political Opportunity Structures for Collective Action in the Unemployment Political Field

As sociological neo-institutionalist theories have shown, social and political institutions are not only a set of rules, procedures, organizational routines and governance structures (see March and Olsen 1984), but they also provide norms and habits that determine individual choices and behaviours. In this chapter, we would like to apply this line of reasoning to propose a theoretical framework for the study of collective action in the field of unemployment politics. We propose a framework for analysis based on the idea that the form and content of political claim-making on issues relating to unemployment are influenced in important ways by the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state and the consequent institutional approaches to unemployment.

This chapter draws in part on a previously published article (Berclaz et al. 2004). More generally, the line of reasoning followed in this paper is based on the UNEMPOL project (‘The Contentious Politics of Unemployment in Europe: Political Claim-making, Policy Deliberation and Exclusion from the Labour Market’). The project includes the following countries: the UK (Paul Statham, University of Leeds), Switzerland (Marco Giugni, University of Geneva), France (Didier Chabanet, University of Lyon), Italy (Donatella della Porta, University of Florence), Germany (Christian Lahusen, University of Bamberg) and Sweden (Anna Linders, University of Cincinnati and University of Karlstad). The project was financed by the European Commission (HPSE-CT2001-00053 UNEMPOL) and the Swiss Federal Office for Education and Science through the 5th Framework programme of research of the European Union. We thank all the members of the UNEMPOL research consortium for their contribution to the project. See the project’s web site for further information (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ics/euro/unempol/). The project’s main findings are summarized in the final report (Giugni and Statham 2005). We thank Giuliano Bonoli for comments and suggestions on a previous draft.
Our general argument combines two theoretical traditions that so far have followed quite separate tracks (see the introductory chapter). First, we draw from the literature on social movements and contentious politics, in particular the works that have stressed the impact of political opportunity structures on social protest (see Kriesi 2004 and Meyer 2004 for reviews). Second, we look at the literature on the comparative political economy of the welfare state, in particular the works that have emphasized variations in the dominant discourses and institutional practices about social security (see Arts and Gelissen 2002, Green-Petersen and Haverland 2002, and Pierson 2000a for reviews). We aim to combine these two traditions in order to propose a theoretical framework for the study of the ‘contentious politics of unemployment’, that is, the public debates and collective mobilizations pertaining to unemployment (Giugni and Statham 2002).

Our point of departure is represented by recent work on the interrelations between configurations of citizenship, political opportunities, and the claim-making in the political field of immigration and ethnic relations (e.g. Giugni and Passy 2004, 2006, Koopmans and Statham 1999b, 2000, Koopmans et al. 2005). Following this perspective, the collective definition of citizenship – or citizenship models – provides a set of institutional and discursive opportunities which affect the political claim-making and collective mobilization of actors when they take a stance on migration issues. Following a neo-institutional perspective, the authors show that prevailing conceptions of the nation and citizenship, as well as their institutionalization in political practices and policies, shape in significant ways the political claim-making in the field of immigration and ethnic relations (Koopmans et al. 2005). In this perspective, such ‘configurations’ or ‘models’ of citizenship play a crucial role in defining and structuring the socially and politically contested field of immigration and ethnic relations. They form a political opportunity structure for the mobilization of collective actors in this field. These opportunities enlarge or constrain the margin of manoeuvre for the action of the collective actors who mobilize on issues pertaining to migration and channel their intervention in the public domain. In other words, they are a specific opportunity structure – which works both at the institutional and discursive level – that determines the option for action in this field and channels the claim-making bearing on these issues: who intervenes in this field, through which means, on which specific issues, through which discursive practices, and so forth.

We think that this way of conceptualizing the relationship between collective action frames and political opportunities can be applied to other issue or policy fields as well (Berclaz and Giugni 2005). In particular, we suggest that it can be applied to another central issue field in contemporary Europe: unemployment. Like immigration, this is a highly contested – and contentious – issue and, like immigration, it is an issue whose regulation involves the state. If citizenship models form a specific opportunity structure in the field of immigration and ethnic relations, politics, we suggest that, in order to find the institutional and discursive context influencing the claim-making on issues pertaining to unemployment, we look at the principal state institution in charge of the social and political regulation of unemployment: the welfare state.
We argue that the prevailing view of the welfare state specific to a given country impinges in significant ways upon the ‘contentious politics of unemployment’, that is, the public debates and collective mobilizations pertaining to unemployment. Dominant conceptions of the welfare state define a political opportunity structure that enlarges or restricts the options for action by collective actors who intervene in this field. In particular, by leading to specific ways of framing issues relating to unemployment, cultural notions of social providence and dominant conceptions of the welfare state determine which demands concerning unemployment and the unemployed are considered as reasonable or acceptable, which constructions of the reality of unemployment are considered as realistic, and which claims and collective actors involved in this field are considered as legitimate within the political system. This, in turn, channels the claim-making of actors intervening in the public domain on these issues.

Such prevailing views of the welfare state are reflected in institutional approaches to dealing with unemployment, mainly in state measures to fight unemployment. However, we should stress the fact that, when dealing with a political field such as unemployment, labour market regulations and policies should also be taken into account, in addition to unemployment legislation, as they have an important impact on the unemployment political field by the fact that they can be a functional equivalent to unemployment policies (Bonoli 2003). Therefore, in order not to miss an important piece of the story, our framework must also consider labour market regulations and policies. Institutional approaches to unemployment include both state measures directed to the target population of the unemployed (as a part of the welfare state) and those addressing the labour market. In other words, they have both a social and an economic dimension.

In the remainder of this essay, we elaborate our argument that the prevailing conception of the welfare state represents an opportunity structure for the political claim-making of collective actors intervening in the field of unemployment politics. First, we propose a typology that we hope helps to identify cross-national variations in political opportunities as stemming from differences in dominant views of social security and in labour market regulations. Second, we propose a way to operationalize the typology so as to make it is useable for empirical research. Third, we advance a number of tentative hypotheses concerning the impact of dominant conceptions of the welfare state on collective action in the unemployment political field.

Conceptualizing Prevailing Conceptions of the Welfare State and Institutional Approaches to Unemployment

The comparative literature on the welfare state usually distinguishes between three broad models (see Arts and Gelissen 2002, Green-Petersen and Haverland 2002, and Pierson 2000a for reviews): the liberal or residual welfare state typical of the Anglo-Saxon countries, the bismarckian or insurance-based welfare state that...
characterizes continental Europe and the universalist or social-democratic welfare state found in the Scandinavian countries. This trilogy is present in numerous other authors, although with some differences from one author to the other. The most well-known proponent of it is probably Esping-Andersen (1990), although he goes well beyond the framework of state intervention to define welfare state regimes as rather stable institutional arrangements between the private sphere, the market and the state. In his perspective, variations in welfare state regimes depend on the level of decommodification, the forms of social stratification, and the public–private ratio in the provision of social goods (Merrien, Parchet and Kernen 2005).

This three-fold typology is drawn from the more basic distinction between the bismarckian and beveridgean models or insurance-based and occupational models. The former has a universalistic logic, while the latter follows a corporatist logic. Bonoli (1997) has suggested that classifications of welfare state should be based somewhere on a continuous line between these two ideal-typic models, on one side, but also the quantity of provided welfare on the other. Similarly, Ferrera (1993) proposed a classification based on the level of coverage of the social protection scheme: universal when the population is covered by a single scheme and occupational when different groups in society are covered by different schemes.

Esping-Andersen’s (1990) approach has been criticized for various reasons. Some have pointed out that its typology puts too much emphasis on the role of the male breadwinner, hence neglecting the gendering of the welfare state and the changing division of gender roles in contemporary society (Lewis 1992, 1993, O’Connor 1993, 1996, Orloff 1993). Others have criticized the fact that his typology leaves out a major type of welfare state, namely the Mediterranean model including the southern European countries, in which the family plays an important role and can be a functional equivalent to the state when it comes to social security (Ferrera 1996).

Focusing specifically on exclusion from the labour market, Gallie and Paugam (2000) have proposed a typology aimed at studying the impact of the welfare state’s type on the experience of unemployment. They consider three factors that may influence the experience of unemployment: the degree of coverage, the level of financial compensation and the importance of active measures for employment. Based on these three factors, they distinguish between four ‘unemployment-providence regimes’. The sub-protecting regime (examples: Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) provides the unemployed with a protection below the subsistence level. The liberal/minimal regime (examples: UK and Ireland) offers a higher level of protection, but does not cover all the unemployed and the level of compensation is weak. The employment-cantered regime (examples: France, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium) offers a much higher level of protection, but the coverage remains incomplete because of the eligibility principles for compensation. Finally, the universalist regime (examples: Denmark and Sweden) is characterized by the breath of the coverage, a much higher compensation level and more developed active measures.
It is important to stress that typologies are mainly heuristic tools and that each actual welfare state has its particularities. In particular, quite important nuances exist within the bismarkian type. For example, while France and Germany are generally classified together in the continental-corporatist model, Germany can be considered as a pure bismarkian model and France is a pluralist and segmented form of that model. Similarly, Switzerland is often classified differently according to different typologies and, although it is considered to be a continental welfare state, it displays strong liberal traits in some sectors, such as healthcare. Finally, Italy, another country often pictured as a continental type of welfare state, has certain characteristics of the Mediterrane model.

Yet, typologies are helpful and capture certain common features of the ways in which social welfare is both collectively defined and institutionally approached in different contexts. We can certainly draw from them in our effort to delineate prevailing conceptions of the welfare state and how they provide different sets of opportunities for collective action in the field of unemployment politics. However, in order to do so, we have both to restrict and enlarge our perspective. On the one hand, the comparative literature on the welfare state and the typologies offered by it usually go beyond unemployment benefits to cover the various social policies, hence including pension systems, healthcare systems, and so on. We need to focus more specifically on unemployment, although one might expect a strong correlation between the prevailing view of the welfare state as a whole and collective definitions of how the state should deal with unemployment. In this sense, Gallie and Paugam’s (2000) approach is closer to our own purpose, as their typology is based on indicators of policies aimed at fighting unemployment. However, these authors have studied the effects of the degree and modalities of state protection on the experience of unemployment. The creation of a typology that allows us to link the forms of the institutional treatment of labour and unemployment to collective action in this field remains to be done.

On the other hand, such an endeavour requires us to expand the definition beyond legislation addressing unemployment to cover labour market regulations and policies. As Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) has pointed out, labour market regulations are central to an understanding of the modern welfare state. In addition, Sapi (2005) stresses the fact that different types of welfare state tend to have a different labour market organizations. If we are interested in the specific opportunity structure for collective action in the field of unemployment politics, we need to consider that labour market regulations participate actively to the elaboration of such an opportunity structure. Labour market regulations and policies, in addition to unemployment legislation, can have an impact not only on unemployment itself, but also on the debate about unemployment and the unemployed. First of all, we need to take into account the type and level of active measures concerning the labour market, as such measures represent a strong link between unemployment legislation and labour market regulations. Furthermore, labour market regulations have a central influence because the level of flexibility of the labour market has become a major issue in the debate on unemployment.
Depending on the ideological stance, flexibility can be viewed either as an effective means to fight unemployment or as a path leading to social exclusion and job insecurity. Harsh labour regulations are accused in particular of contributing to rising unemployment because tougher dismissal laws tend to make employers hesitate to hire people and create a wall between those who are inside the ‘regular’ labour market and the others. They are also accused of keeping wages low and producing working poor. Thus, the legislation about the degree of flexibility, the rules concerning dismissals and the levels of regulation on minimum wages, for example, are all important factors that participate in the creation of the employment environment and therefore can have an important impact on the debate surrounding unemployment.

The Specific Political Opportunity Structure for Collective Action in the Field of Unemployment Politics: A Typology

As countries differ in the prevailing conception of the welfare state and in the institutional approach to unemployment, they also provide different political opportunity structures for collective action in the field of unemployment politics. Figure 8.1 illustrates graphically the relationship between prevailing definitions of the welfare state and collective action in this field. According to our argument, nations are characterized by a prevailing conception of the welfare state which, in turn, leads to country-specific institutional approaches to unemployment, concerning both unemployment and labour market regulations. The mix of regulations adopted and implemented to deal with the problem of unemployment forms the specific opportunity structure that, in the end, affects and channels collective action in the field. Unemployment and labour market regulations, of course, are to some extent interrelated. Finally, it should be remarked that opportunities stemming from the prevailing conception of the welfare state are both institutional and discursive, a distinction that we draw from the works mentioned earlier concerning the migration political field (Koopmans et al. 2005) and to which we shall return in more detail opposite.

We would like to propose a typology aimed at capturing such cross-national variations in the institutional and discursive opportunities for actors intervening in this field. Following the discussion above, such an attempt to define a specific political opportunity structure for collective action in this field has to take into account both the social and the economic dimensions of the institutional approaches to unemployment. The social dimension refers to state policies aimed at fighting unemployment and its (negative) social consequences. Gallie and Paugam’s (2000) approach mentioned earlier, which is based on the factors that may influence the 2

2 Denmark has tried to solve the tension between protection and flexibility by developing a flex-security approach that combines a flexible labour market with a good level of protection for the unemployed.
experience of unemployment (degree of coverage, level of financial compensation
and importance of active measures for employment), points in a similar direction,
although it aims to explain a different phenomenon.

Inspired by this approach, in a previous work (Berclaz et al. 2004) we proposed
a typology of conceptions of the welfare state resulting from the combination of
two analytical dimensions: the formal criteria of eligibility to social rights (in
particular, the rights concerning the loss or lack of remunerated work) and the
obligations relating to eligibility (in particular, the obligations for the recipients of
the rights concerning unemployment). The first dimension refers to the criteria that
define the conditions of access to social provisions for job-seekers as well as the
quantity and ‘quality’ of such rights. In other words, here we want to know who
has the right to benefit from which social provisions in the field of unemployment
and under what conditions. The criteria of eligibility can be more or less restrictive
(exclusive) or loose (inclusive). The second dimension refers to the obligations
attached to the condition of unemployed. In other words, here we want to know
what are the constraints that weigh upon the unemployed who have the right to
social provisions. The obligations relating to eligibility can be more or less heavy
or light. The choice of these two indicators was justified by the fact that we were
interested in particular in defining political opportunities for the mobilization of
the unemployed deriving from the rights and obligations underlying the eligibility
to social provisions.

Yet, as we evoked earlier, the rights and obligations deriving from
unemployment legislation and, more generally, from state-granted social security
are only one side of the coin. In order to have a more complete picture, we need
to take into account those stemming from state intervention in the labour market.
Our earlier effort at finding a way to define a specific opportunity structure in
the field of unemployment politics has not paid enough attention to this crucial
aspect. This could be done by looking at country-specific levels of flexibility as
measured, for example, through the existence and level of a minimum wage, the
type of job contracts, regulations concerning dismissals and the overall level of

protection of workers. In addition, the existence of a clear distinction between protected workers, precarious workers and unemployed can also be considered as a consequence of the type of labour market regulations.

Taking into account this political-economic dimension, in addition to the social one, we would like to propose a new typology with unemployment regulations (welfare provisions for the unemployed) on one axis and labour market regulations on the other. Unemployment regulations can be defined either as exclusive or inclusive scale, taking both rights and obligations (which were distinct in the earlier typology) together. Labour market regulations can be defined either as rigid or flexible. Of course, this oversimplifies a more nuanced picture in reality, but such broad distinctions can work for analytical purposes.

Figure 8.2 A typology of the specific political opportunity structure for collective action in the field of unemployment politics
Welfare States, Labour Markets, and the Political Opportunities

1 Figure 8.2 shows the four ideal-typical institutional approaches to unemployment resulting from the combination of these two analytical dimensions. Since these two dimensions are to be considered as continua rather than discrete categories, this typology represents a bidimensional space allowing us to locate the actual conceptions of the welfare state. Those ideal types insist on the form of relationship between social partners that is created by the mix of labour and unemployment laws. Thus, the ideal-types yielded by the combination of the two dimensions are models having heuristic value rather than concrete empirical realities.

2 The first type, which we call full protection, characterizes by inclusive welfare provisions in the field of unemployment and rigid labour market regulations. This combination gives birth to a confrontational climate between employers and employees, with quite strong expectations on the state to deal with conflicts concerning employment and the labour market. Furthermore, it is likely to create a cleavage between protected employees, on one side, and precarious workers and unemployed, on the other. If we want to compare our typology with the ones mentioned earlier, this situation resembles that of the corporatist welfare state.

3 Depending on the level of rigidity and protection, the Mediterranean welfare state would also fit in this model. The second type, which we call economic protection, combines exclusive unemployment regulations (i.e. restrictive eligibility criteria and heavy obligations attached to the benefit of social provisions) and rigid labour market regulations that make it very difficult to proceed to dismissals. This situation puts strong pressure on both employers and employees/unemployed and gives an important role to state regulations. The third type, social protection, has both a flexible labour market and inclusive welfare provisions. This implies a willingness to negotiate between employers and employees. Employees enjoy rather a high level of power and security, even in the absence of job security. In this situation, the level of decommodification is high. Therefore, the social-democratic welfare state best corresponds to this model, which resembles what is often called flex-security, or flexibility in security. The fourth and final type, precariousness, combines flexible labour market regulation and exclusive welfare provisions. In this situation, employers have more freedom, employees are less protected and the role of the state is less important. Wage inequalities are likely to be higher and unemployment lower. This situation is most likely to appear in a liberal welfare state.

4 From Conceptions to Practices: a Proposal for an Operationalization of the Typology

5 The typology outlined above lends itself to a comparative analysis of welfare states and their impact on the claim-making pertaining to unemployment. However, making a typology remains a purely academic exercise if it is not complemented by an operationalization that allows us to use it in empirical research. Here we would like to suggest some ways to do so. We identify a number of aspects allowing
the differentiation of welfare states in their operating mode for each of the two dimensions of the typology.\(^3\)

On the first dimension (unemployment regulations), we should find indicators for its two underlying components (eligibility rights and obligations), as they both contribute to defining the situation with regard to welfare provisions to face unemployment. Concerning the first component (the formal criteria of eligibility to social provisions), we look at the following five aspects: (1) the formal prerequisites for obtaining social provisions; (2) the level of coverage; (3) the extension of coverage; (4) the existence of differentiation among recipients; and (5) the existence of state structures and activation policies favouring the insertion of job-seekers into the labour market.

**Formal Prerequisites for Obtaining Social Provisions**

The first aspect relating to the formal eligibility criteria concerns the conditions that a jobless person must fulfil in order to be considered as unemployed and therefore have the right to receive unemployment insurance compensation or, depending on the country, compensation from another institution of social security. Among the possible indicators are the minimum duration of contribution to the unemployment insurance necessary to obtain the right to compensation and the amount of this contribution (for example, as a percentage of the salary).

**Level of Coverage**

It is necessary to determine to what extent the compensation allows the unemployed to maintain their living standard and for how long. The indicators of this aspect are the amount of the coverage (for example, as a percentage of the last salary), the duration of the coverage and the possible existence of a minimum compensation.

**Extension of Coverage**

Here we look at who is insured or compensated in the event of unemployment, who is not and more generally what the possibilities are for financial aid for people who have lost their job. Two indicators can be used to capture this aspect. First, we can look at the number of recipients of the unemployment insurance as a proportion of job-seekers (i.e. the coverage rate of the unemployment insurance). Second, we should also take into account the possible existence of one or several

---

\(^3\) It should be noted that the indicators proposed here bear above all on the unemployment insurance. However, in order to have a broader picture of the social protection system in the case of loss of remunerated job, but above all in order to be able to compare the criteria of eligibility across countries that have different welfare-state regimes, it is important to take into account both the compensations of the unemployment insurance and the allocations coming from other social security institutions.
state social institutions that cover the unemployed who have exhausted their rights or who do not fulfil the criteria for having a right to unemployment insurance compensation.

Differentiation of Recipients

The degree of openness or closedness of the social security system in a country is not only given by the formal conditions of access or the scope of the coverage, but it also depends on the presence of rules that open access to certain groups or individuals, while closing it for others. Here we therefore look at the existence of a differential treatment of recipients at the admission level and at the coverage level of the unemployment insurance or other social security institution. Such a differentiation could be applied to certain categories of unemployed, such as for example youngsters, women or people close to retirement age.

State Structures and Activation Policies for Insertion into the Labour Market

In the 1990s, many European countries have witnessed a trend towards shifting from a passive perspective of social allocations to more active measures in the labour market. The goal is no longer to simply compensate for a loss due to unemployment, but to provide the unemployed with structures aimed at favouring integration by giving them, for example, the possibility to attend vocational training courses, professional reorientation or aid allowing them to follow an independent activity. Therefore, this aspect includes the measures created by the state aimed at facilitating the reinsertion of the unemployed into the labour market (according to the rights that are granted to them). Among the possible indicators are the amount of public spending on active measures (showing the relative weight of active measures in the overall management of the unemployment), the obligation at the legislative level to create structures aimed at insertion and reinsertion into the labour market and the accessibility of such structures.

Concerning the second component of unemployment regulations (the obligations relating to eligibility for social provisions), we will look at the following three aspects: (1) the general conditions for obtaining social provisions; (2) the existence and types of counter-provisions required of the recipients; and (3) the existence and types of sanctions in case of failure with respect to the conditions on the part of the recipients.

General Conditions for Obtaining Social Provision

The first aspect of the obligations relating to eligibility concerns the conditions that a person who has lost their job has to meet in order to belong to the category of the unemployed and therefore have the right to social provision. One of the first objectives of any policy in the field of unemployment is the reinsertion of jobless people into the labour market. Therefore, the search for a job remains
1 the primary obligation for a recipient of unemployment insurance. Furthermore, 1
2 the unemployed must accept a job considered as convenient or acceptable by the 2
3 legislation in the field. On the basis of these elements, we take into account the 3
4 following indicators: the definition of a convenient or acceptable job as foreseen 4
5 in the existing legislation (according to several criteria such as the salary level, 5
6 the requirement for a professional reorientation or the geographical distance from 6
7 the place of work), the obligation to apply and the quantity of applications that the 7
8 jobless person must make to have the right to social provisions.

9 Counters-provisions

10 The second aspect is the obligations which the unemployed person must fulfil in 10
11 order to remain a recipient of the social provisions. These include the obligation 11
12 for the jobless person to attend occupational programmes in the context of the 12
13 active measures of the labour market or vocational training. In both cases, the goal 13
14 is to improve their employability. However, this kind of measure can also indicate 14
15 the implementation of a workfare system. Here we need to determine the extent to 15
16 which active measures include constraining elements for the unemployed, pointing 16
17 to a workfare approach to unemployment. We also need to determine what kinds 17
18 of incentives or pressures are associated with active measures. Clearly, active 18
19 measures inspired by a workfare approach produce an unfavourable environment 19
20 for the unemployed.

21 Sanctions

22 The last aspect of the obligations relating to eligibility concerns the rigidity of 22
23 the system, and more precisely the measures and instruments created to control 23
24 the abuses of the recipients. These include the following indicators: the existence 24
25 of financial sanctions if the unemployed person does not fulfil their obligations 25
26 relating to obtaining the compensation; the frequency of the use of the sanctions; 26
27 the restriction of access to training; and, as extremus ratio, the suppression of social 27
28 provisions.

29 On the second dimension of the typology (labour market regulations), the 29
30 main aspect of state intervention in the labour market that may have implications 30
31 for unemployment is the overall level of protection or exposure of employees. 31
32 Although it does not refer directly to the status of unemployment, this is important 32
33 to the extent that it defines the potential risks of becoming unemployed. Here we 33
34 look at the following aspects: (1) the main types of job contract; (2) the regulations 34
35 for dismissals; and (3) the existence and level of a minimum wage.

36 Main Types of Job Contract

37 This aspect provides information about the level of protection given to employees 37
38 in terms of the most common types of job contracts. It also indicates the 38
1 existence of different categories of employees with different levels of protection. Furthermore, the types and forms of guarantees included in job contracts can have an impact on the decision of an employer to hire someone and therefore on the level of unemployment. The more protected the workers are, the less flexible the labour market is. In addition, the existence of differentiated types of job contract in terms of protection and duration of employment may indicate the existence of a dual job market with important differences in the levels of security of employees. Furthermore, the existence of several types of job contracts can create a difference in the quality of employment and contribute to the emergence of an insiders/outiders cleavage among protected and precarious workers. Finally, protected and precarious workers face a different risk of unemployment in relation to the provision associated with the type of job contract. In addition, the level and type of unemployment compensation can also vary with the different forms of job contract.

2 Regulations for Dismissal

This aspect is very important with regard to the level of flexibility of the labour market. The difficulty of firing workers for employers can have an impact on their decision to hire them. Here one should look for an example of resignation delay, at the kind of behaviour or condition that can justify a dismissal and at the compensation given to a worker who is made redundant.

3 Existence and Level of a Minimum Wage

The existence and level of a minimum wage has an impact on the general wage level and the type of employment. Furthermore, it affects the job-equality trade-off. Minimum wages tend to limit the creation of a working poor, but make it very difficult for low-skilled workers to find a job and they thus create unemployment. Therefore, minimum wages lower the flexibility of the labour market.

4 Explaining Cross-national Variations in Collective Action in the Field of Unemployment Politics: Some Hypotheses

The indicators listed above should allow us to place countries within the typology and therefore to characterize specific opportunity structures for collective action in the field of unemployment politics on empirical grounds. Such a demanding endeavour goes well beyond the scope of the present paper. However, for illustrative
purposes, we can tentatively locate the six countries included in the UNEMPOL project mentioned earlier. On the first dimension (unemployment regulations), if we classify them following the exclusive/inclusive distinction, the UK, with its strong emphasis on both indicators (eligibility and obligations), represents the most exclusive system. Switzerland is also quite exclusive on both criteria, although the level of wage replacement is more generous. France and Italy should be more or less in the same position within the typology, having more inclusive eligibility criteria and the looser obligations typical of corporatist welfare states. Germany should be similar to these two countries, but perhaps a little closer to the exclusive end. Finally, Sweden, with its more inclusive eligibility criteria and weaker obligations, typical of the universalist welfare state, is the most inclusive country in terms of unemployment regulations.

On the second dimension (labour market regulations) and in particular concerning the level of flexibility as well as the level of protection of employees, the UK and Switzerland have a very flexible labour market with relatively low levels of unemployment, but rather high levels of wage inequalities. France, Germany and Italy have developed a fairly rigid labour market legislation and a sort of dual corporatist labour market with protected insiders, exposed precarious workers, and relatively high levels of unemployment. Finally, Sweden represents an intermediate case, as it has a more flexible labour market, but at the same time people who have to leave it are more protected and the chances to enter or re-enter it are higher.

How do these different institutional approaches towards unemployment reflect in variations in collective action in the field of unemployment politics? In the study on contentious politics in the field of immigration and ethnic relations that has inspired our approach, the authors could show how the collective definitions of the nation and citizenship determine a set of opportunities, both institutional and discursive, which facilitate or constrain the mobilization of certain actors and channel the claims toward certain issues rather than others (Koopmans et al. 2005). Thus, for example, a closed system, to the extent that it rests on an ethnic and monist (i.e. assimilationist) conception of citizenship, restricts the possibilities for action of migrants and tends to channel public debates towards issues concerning the regulation of migration flows (i.e. the criteria of entry into and exit from the nation), whereas a more open system, insofar as it rests on a civic and pluralist conception of citizenship, provides migrants with more opportunities and results in public debates that stress issues relating to minority integration.

We suggest that, in order to study the impact of the specific opportunities stemming from the institutional approaches towards unemployment – in terms of unemployment regulations and labour market regulation – on collective action in the field, we can follow a similar line of reasoning. The four ideal-typical situations we have outlined provide different sets of political opportunities to collective actors mobilizing in this field, at both the institutional and discursive levels. At the institutional level, different combinations of state regulations concerning unemployment and the labour market provide different sets of concrete
opportunities’ (Kriesi et al. 1995), for example in terms of perceived chances of
success of a given action, perceived repression or facilitation by the state, and
perceived threats or reforms following state action. In other words, specific
configurations of unemployment and labour market regulations give the social
and political actors the motivation to mount collective action or, on the contrary,
rob them of such motivation. For example, strongly inclusive unemployment
regulations may discourage mobilization by organized groups defending the rights
of unemployed, as the existing policy is favourable enough not to create further
discontent with respect to the situation of the unemployed. Similarly, very rigid
labour market regulations could also lower the motivations for action, as people
could feel that the existing policy is favourable enough to protect the rights of the
unemployed. Following the same logic, the reverse may be expected in the case of
exclusive unemployment regulations and flexible labour market regulations.

However, the most important effects perhaps occur at the discursive level.
This line of reasoning is inspired by the literature on framing processes in social
movement studies (see Benford and Snow 2000 as well as Snow 2004 for reviews).
On this level, specific combinations of unemployment and labour market regulations
provide different sets of discursive opportunities (Koopmans et al. 2005, Marx et
al. 2002) to social and political actors intervening in this field. More specifically,
the four ideal-typical situations lead to different degrees of public visibility and
resonance as well as of political legitimacy of certain actors, identities and claims
(Koopmans et al. 2005). For example, organized unemployed and pro-unemployed
groups should be more visible and legitimate in acting in a context in which the
dominant discourse stresses the rights and interests of the unemployed rather than
those of the economy and the market. In contrast, employers’ organizations have
more visibility and legitimacy where unemployment regulations are exclusive
and labour market regulations are flexible, that is, in the context we have called
precariousness.

We may also expect certain claims to ‘resonate’ better with and to be more
visible within a given conception of the welfare state – and therefore with a
given configuration of specific opportunities – than others. For example, we may
expect claims focusing on the unemployed as a social category, rather than on
unemployment as a social and economic problem, to be more resonant and visible
where unemployment regulations are more inclusive. In contrast, in the presence
of exclusive unemployment regulations, workers threatened with redundancy
should be most often at the centre of claims. Also, we may expect the discursive
climate to be more positive in the context of full protection, as this institutional
approach is more open to the unemployed, while the context of precariousness
forms a more hostile discursive climate which could lead collective actors to make
negative statements concerning the unemployed.

Discursive opportunities can also give rise to – or, conversely, deter – feelings
of injustice among the population, provide social groups with cultural resources for
identity-building and give them a sense of agency, that is, of being able to change
things judged as unjust or unfavourable (Gamson 1995, see further Gamson 1992

---

1 opportunities’ (Kriesi et al. 1995), for example in terms of perceived chances of
2 success of a given action, perceived repression or facilitation by the state, and
3 perceived threats or reforms following state action. In other words, specific
4 configurations of unemployment and labour market regulations give the social
5 and political actors the motivation to mount collective action or, on the contrary,
6 rob them of such motivation. For example, strongly inclusive unemployment
7 regulations may discourage mobilization by organized groups defending the rights
8 of unemployed, as the existing policy is favourable enough not to create further
9 discontent with respect to the situation of the unemployed. Similarly, very rigid
10 labour market regulations could also lower the motivations for action, as people
11 could feel that the existing policy is favourable enough to protect the rights of the
12 unemployed. Following the same logic, the reverse may be expected in the case of
13 exclusive unemployment regulations and flexible labour market regulations.
14
15 However, the most important effects perhaps occur at the discursive level.
16 This line of reasoning is inspired by the literature on framing processes in social
17 movement studies (see Benford and Snow 2000 as well as Snow 2004 for reviews).
18 On this level, specific combinations of unemployment and labour market regulations
19 provide different sets of discursive opportunities (Koopmans et al. 2005, Marx et
20 al. 2002) to social and political actors intervening in this field. More specifically,
21 the four ideal-typical situations lead to different degrees of public visibility and
22 resonance as well as of political legitimacy of certain actors, identities and claims
23 (Koopmans et al. 2005). For example, organized unemployed and pro-unemployed
24 groups should be more visible and legitimate in acting in a context in which the
25 dominant discourse stresses the rights and interests of the unemployed rather than
26 those of the economy and the market. In contrast, employers’ organizations have
27 more visibility and legitimacy where unemployment regulations are exclusive
28 and labour market regulations are flexible, that is, in the context we have called
29 precariousness.
30
31 We may also expect certain claims to ‘resonate’ better with and to be more
32 visible within a given conception of the welfare state – and therefore with a
33 given configuration of specific opportunities – than others. For example, we may
34 expect claims focusing on the unemployed as a social category, rather than on
35 unemployment as a social and economic problem, to be more resonant and visible
36 where unemployment regulations are more inclusive. In contrast, in the presence
37 of exclusive unemployment regulations, workers threatened with redundancy
38 should be most often at the centre of claims. Also, we may expect the discursive
39 climate to be more positive in the context of full protection, as this institutional
40 approach is more open to the unemployed, while the context of precariousness
41 forms a more hostile discursive climate which could lead collective actors to make
42 negative statements concerning the unemployed.
43
44 Discursive opportunities can also give rise to – or, conversely, deter – feelings
45 of injustice among the population, provide social groups with cultural resources for
46 identity-building and give them a sense of agency, that is, of being able to change
47 things judged as unjust or unfavourable (Gamson 1995, see further Gamson 1992
48
49
The Politics of Unemployment in Europe

and Gamson, Fireman and Rytina 1982). For example, it is more difficult for the unemployed to build a strong collective identity in a context in which they have few rights and the market is the main focus of debates and policies, while identity formation should be easier where the unemployed have rights and protection.

These are only a few examples of how one may derive hypotheses from the general approach we have outlined. Generally speaking, if we look at this from the perspective of social movements, we can think of the four types (full protection, economic protection, social protection and precariousness) as representing more open or more closed situations for the mobilization of collective actors in the public domain to address issues relating to unemployment politics. In particular, the mobilization of the unemployed, which is the constituency group in this field, is likely to be affected not only by the general opportunity structures deriving from the institutional features of the political system such as the degree of openness or closedness of the institutionalize political system, the propensity and capacity for repression on the part of the state, the presence or absence of powerful allies and the configuration of political alignments (see McAdam 1996), but also – and perhaps mostly – by the specific opportunities stemming from state regulations in matters relating to unemployment.

In this sense, the situation we have called precariousness is perhaps the most ‘closed’ in terms of opportunities for the mobilization of the unemployed. In such a situation, both institutional and discursive opportunities are rather weak, tend to weaken the position of the unemployed as political actors. At the other end of the scale, the situation we have called full protection is probably the most ‘open’ in this respect (the other two types representing intermediate situations).

As a result, following the literature on political opportunity structures and their impact on the mobilization of social movements (Kitschelt 1986, Kriesi et al. 1995, Tarrow 1996, 1998), we may expect the unemployed to be more active in countries in which the precariousness type prevails and less active under a full protection type. The comparative works on political opportunities have also shown how closed opportunity structures tend to radicalize action, whereas open opportunity structures favour moderate types of action (see, for example, Kriesi et al. 1995). Therefore, always following this research tradition, we may expect the action repertoires of mobilized unemployed to be more radical in the former, more closed, situation and more moderate in the latter, more open, situation.

Conclusion

In this paper, we wanted to suggest that collective action in the field of unemployment depends in important ways on the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state and, more specifically, on the dominant definitions of the role of the state with regard to unemployment and the unemployed. Such conceptions and definitions, which are culturally and historically anchored in the process of state formation,
translate into country-specific institutional approaches to unemployment at both the social and economic levels. In other words, they lead to different state regulations to deal with unemployment and with the labour market. These institutional approaches, in turn, provide different sets of specific opportunity structures for collective action on unemployment politics. In this regard, we have distinguished between four ideal types of institutional approaches to unemployment, that is, four opportunity structures specific to this field, which we have called full protection, economic protection, social protection and precariousness, depending on which combination of unemployment regulation and labour market regulations prevails in a given context. We have then proposed a number of analytical dimensions and more concrete indicators that might help to operationalize the proposed typology. Finally, we have suggested a few linkages between the typology and collective action, in the form of hypotheses.

The proposed approach, however, is admittedly tentative and incomplete. In spite of our aim to be as systematic as possible, at this stage we could only give a taste of what we think could be done to proceed along the lines we have suggested. Most importantly, we have not shown any empirical evidence that might either support or undermine our entire approach. This was not our aim. Yet, analyses conducted elsewhere give some indications that the institutional approaches to unemployment have an impact on collective action in this field. For example, cross-national variations of the mobilization of the unemployed reflect more or less the institutional approaches to unemployment we have outlined (Chabanet and Giugni 2008, Giugni 2008). Furthermore, other characteristics of the claims dealing with unemployment are also at least in part influenced by the specific opportunity structures resulting from the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state and the institutional approaches that have inspired them (Giugni and Statham 2005). Much more theoretical and empirical work has to be done if we are to provide at least a satisfactory account of the relationship between welfare states, labour markets and the political opportunities stemming from them, on one hand, and collective action in the field of unemployment, on the other. This impact of institutional and, especially, discursive opportunities has been shown effectively for immigration and ethnic relations politics (see Koopmans et al. 2005), but has just started to be investigated for unemployment politics.