Peter Erath, Brian Littlechild (Eds.)

Social work across Europe

Accounts from 16 countries

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Introduction

Social work across Europe – Reports from 16 different countries

To write a book on social work in Europe is desirable and important, but at the same time quite a difficult venture. All these chapters show us the huge variety of existing policies, theories, research results, methods, professional debates, etc. and with this give us a comprehensive survey on tendencies and debates which each reader can use for comparing specific aspects in his / her country with aspects in other countries, or, perhaps even more important, to recognize "meta-developments" across Europe, e.g. marketisation of social work, tendencies towards managerialism, risk management and de-valorisation of social work and the social.

Through the process in which the editors had submitted to the different national authors (each of whom are acknowledged experts in social work) a clear and systematic guide on what we were looking for in the social work and social work education aspects of their country (from historical, political to theoretical, empirical and practical issues), it became clear it was not easy to completely follow the given structure. Within this process, it also therefore became evident hat whilst social work in a general and global context seems to be a key concept in many modern societies in attempts to reduce social exclusion, internal and national perspectives of social work can be very different across Europe (let alone globally): politically, socially and legally more or less important; strong academically and possibly professionally, or seen as a semi-profession; science based or personal – oriented; business-based or not for profit oriented, etc.

These processes convinced us as editors of the benefits of the following texts on social work in 16 different countries across Europe; and indeed, that such texts are necessary for social workers, educationalists, academics and policy makers in order to understand the differences and similarities in social work across Europe, and the importance of such Europe wide appreciations. Indeed, sometimes appreciating the socially constructed and policy-based conceptual frameworks underpinning the different forms of social work and social work education in different countries has been a fascinating challenge for the editors in translating nationally *taken-for-granted* terms. It is not just a question of translating words in to another language, but realising the context within which such terms arise, and therefore how they might be explained in another language, based within the very different contexts in the country using that other language.

We hope this book will make some contribution to aid in these understandings.

But first of all professionals, lecturers and students in social work (or for the French spoken – all participants in the field of social interventions) could use these texts as sound background knowledge about the situation of social work and social services in a specific country. Each text starts with a short abstract from the respective authors about the argumentation which will lead the whole text. At the end of each text the most relevant literature and key references to important internet sites are set out.

Both editors wish to thank all contributors for their kind collaboration and the European Research Institute for Social Work at Ostrava University in the Czech Republic for its support to publish this book and make it available for a broad public.

Peter Erath, Brian Littlechild

Social Work in Italy: How social service in Italy should make the difference

Rino Fasol and Alberto Zanutto

Still today, the Italian social services system is complex and incomplete, and no longer sustainable either politically or economically. The universality of rights is no longer the underlying objective that its actions must pursue.

The economic crisis and the tensions concerning the issues of security and social inclusion generate fears about the future and a loss of identity, giving rise to new demands for social control and reduced prospects of inclusion.

Therefore, what is required is a new phase for the social services system which recognizes their political value and marks a 'political turn' for social work practitioners. The progressive reduction of resources will increase the demand for decisions which select recipients and create priorities. Practitioners are increasingly required to strike a balance among the functions of gatekeeper, helping professional and political actor.

The context in which Italian welfare has developed in the third millennium, between fragmentation and incomplete processes

The development of social protection systems in Italy has had a complex and distinctive history. The general structure arose mainly during the 1970s. Thereafter, the Italian welfare state continued its development by undertaking minor adjustments which nevertheless confirmed the model typical of the Italian bureaucratic system. That is to say, it accepted every new regulatory recommendation and norm, integrating their direct and indirect effects, but never implemented changes and reforms of any organizational importance (Franzoni and Anconelli 2003).

Following enactment of law 328/2000, the national social services system underwent a brief period of great expansion. Thereafter, the political system entered a conservative phase with limited activation of resources for the sector. Indeed, there began a process of redefining the role of the national welfare system so that it could recover efficiency in terms of sustainability and subsidiarity. As a result, the welfare system assumed increasing importance at local level; for, according to law 328/2000, the municipalities were to constitute the core of Italian welfare. On considering the three systems of which welfare consists – schooling, healthcare, and social services – one finds that they have become, especially in recent years, the terrain of fierce political conflicts. They have suffered the effects of a decrease in resources and popular consensus more marked than in other European countries. The expansion and consolidation of the Italian welfare system, in fact, has been due to the combination of two factors: on the one hand, the emergence of an increasingly wide range of needs and a political and organizational commitment to address them; on the other, realization that this development would expand the economy and employment at reasonable costs to the citizen and the system. Accordingly, the development of a rhetoric of social enterprise and tax relief for third-sector organizations generated a myriad of actors with private governance structures (e.g. social cooperatives and associations) and with pronounced business capabilities as well. Toward the end of the 1990s, this process culminated in the fiscal decrees which granted special status to organizations undertaking social and cultural action.

The turn of the century saw growing dissatisfaction with the welfare system due to its high costs in the face of a rate of economic development constantly below the European average. The main consequence was the prominent coverage given to the inadequacies of services by the media. Although health services were regionalized, they constantly attracted the attention of the media, which recounted every episode of malpractice or waste. The crisis of those years, at least as reported by the press, ushered in a crisis of the entire system.

The immediate signal of the crisis was the resumed rhetorical emphasis on the family. Although the Lisbon Strategy (March 2000) had for the first time set targets for 'well-being' and services that every national community had to achieve, one observes in most recent years, at least in Italy, a return to redistributive policies to the detriment of development policies and the reform of services. This process has been marked by a series of battles which have brought the issue of rights to the centre of the political arena, with particular regard to the occupational system. Under the slogan that European democracies produce more deficit than income, owing to their loss of competitiveness, recent years have seen the progressive 'dismantling' of workers' protections. There has therefore been, in Italy, a collective tendency to reduce guarantees concerning the universalist rights of labour-market entrants (young people, and women returning from maternity) if not connected with an open-ended contract. This dual tendency – restriction of universal rights and reduced protection for labour-market entrants – has abruptly halted the process of democratization that began in the 1960s and 1970s, and of which the social services have been part. The family as a subject of public policy has unwillingly found itself having to cope with the contraction of the system of social protection relations. It has been increasingly required to deal directly with minors and provide care services in a context of weakening kinship relations and a further reduction in access to the labour market by women and young people. It is once again the family's task to find the (economic and relational) resources to devote, above all, to the younger generation and the elderly population (Fargion 2003).

In fact, in the past ten years the services system has seen its social representation and legitimation diminish to such an extent that it now performs only certain basic functions. Especially in northern Italy, for at least twenty years, services have been delivered in a specific welfare mix even in situations that require most intervention in terms of services. For this reason, a large part of infant childcare is delivered by the private sector, while contracted voluntary organizations attend to temporary situations of social emergency (management of immigrants, travellers' camps, etc.). There is no doubt that, from this point of view, the progressive regionalization of the Italian welfare system, begun with a 2001 constitutional reform, has increased disparities in the enjoyment and protection of minimum welfare rights at the local level. In this process, the wealthy zones in the country's north have benefited in terms of the quantity and quality of services, without this experiences becoming a real engine of development for the poorer zones of the South (Fargion 2004). Regionalization has exacerbated bureaucratic inflexibility and the lack of support for economic growth in southern Italy's most disadvantaged areas.

Welfare spending: norms, the north/south relation, and innovation

Brief analysis of data on spending and on the types of intervention undertaken by the Italian social services system confirms the observations made thus far.

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA	Expenditure(1)		Average per-capita expenditure
	Absolute values	Percentage values	
North-West	1,714,796,092	31.9	111.9
Nord-East	1,481,425,313	27.5	135.2
Centre	1,159,226,002	21.6	103.6
South	534,974,247	9.9	38.1
Islands	487,192,384	9.1	73.2
ITALY	5,377,614,038	100.0	92.4

Table 1 – Spending on social services by individual and associated municipalities by geographical area – Year 2004 (ISTAT, 2007)

The figures for expenditure on social services, net of structural costs which naturally increase in proportion to spending by local administrations on services, highlight the disparity between the North and South. In the North, the resources devoted to social services amount to 58% of the total, while in the South they do not exceed 10% (Del Boca, Rosina 2009). The most delicate aspect of this disparity in expenditure derives from two considerations. Firstly, it is evident that a developed territory also creates opportunities for the social services to guarantee welfare rights, while a less developed territory is unable to deliver the same services. In other words, territoriality strongly conditions opportunities for social development and is somehow predictive of the well-being of the population, at least in terms of rights. The figures on per-capita expenditure confirm this picture, given that in the North expenditure per capita is double that in the South. The services system is sustained by numerous actors, and many of them operate through the direct transfer of resources, for instance through sub-contracting arrangements. This expands the labour market, providing jobs and social security positions certainly beneficial to citizens, and especially to women. In the South, these positive effects are less frequent, and they often depend on political trade-offs and direct relationships established between citizens and local politicians or local network of influential families.

Expenditure on services directly managed by municipalities is mainly targeted on families, minors, the elderly and disabled. These four categories account for around 80% of the resources employed. In the country as a whole, this means further support for family networks rather than direct transfers for poverty or other forms of support mainly devoted to those out of the labour market. In this regard, Italy lacks structural initiatives for income support benefit. In fact, one of its shortcomings, compared with other European systems, is the absence of employment support connected with the social services (Trifiletti 1999). This is one of the factors that probably most affects the growth of Gross Domestic Product, and whereby Italy is well below the European average in periods of both expansion and recession. In other words, the preference in Italy is to finance the stable network of relations rather than social innovation. The composition of expenditure, in fact, shows the prevalence of support to families and minors over support, for instance, to young first job-seekers. The figures on youth unemployment are striking. The regions of the South have rates which vary from 31% in Basilicata to 37% in Sicily. These data confirm that it is precisely the relationship between generations that is blocked, and therefore that the sustainability of the social services system comes about *within* family networks, both for direct monetary transfers (social security payments used to support the precarious positions of the children) and for the direct delivery of services (e.g. care services).

A look at the data relative to items of expenditure on services shows a highly diversified picture. For example the percentage of municipalities which furnish day nursery services represent 34% of the total, and the proportion of total expenditure on services is around 16%. Hence two-thirds of Italian municipalities do not furnish this service, with a serious reduction of support to households. Analysis by geographical area shows even more dramatically the disparity in the distribution of these services for children. In the South and Islands, day nurseries are present in 14% of municipalities, while in the North the figure is 56%. Particularly in the North, where they are more widespread, the quality of the services is very high and the population is normally satisfied by their quality. Another tangible measure is the absolute value of the costs of services distinguished among professional social service, domestic assistance, and residential structures, which range from 6% in the first case, to 11% in the second, to around 20% in the last case of residential services (Table 2).

Social services	users	expenditure	% in total service expenditure	% in total Italy expenditure	% municipalities furnishing the service
Professional social service		303,656,051	100.0	5.6	

Family and minors	*711,929*	*121,075,8 02*	39.9	2.3	76
Elderly	*522,946*	*76,849,11 1*	25.3	1.4	65
Domestic assistance		569,256,5 13	100.0	10.6	
Elderly	*456,924*	*397,556,7 37*	69.8	7.4	88
Disabled	*38,135*	*115,882,4 92*	20.4	2.2	69
Day nurseries	*146,152*	*850,630,4 82*	100.0	15.8	34
Residential facilities		1,091,894 ,245	100.0	20.3	
Family and minors	*32,417*	*343,259,7 83*	31.4	6.4	62
Elderly	*87,946*	*479,722,4 59*	43.9	8.9	62
Total services selected	*2,815,437, 291*			52.4	
Total Italy		**5,377,614 ,038**		100.0	

Table 2 - The principal social services delivered by individual or associated municipalities (ISTAT, 2007)

This situation seems to confirm the inadequacy of the regionalist measures introduced in the mid-1990s. The national territory is hardly heterogeneous, mainly on the basis of the minimal requirements. The laws devolving powers to the regions, provinces and municipalities, and the reforms implemented with law 328/2000 and the reform of the Title V of the Constitution have not brought significant changes. They have enabled further development and organization of the system in the North and its progressive divergence from the system of services in the South. Likewise, the fiscal policy which allows allocation of 5 euros x 1000 of income tax to non-profit organizations will in the long run give rise to further differences in opportunities between North and South. The North, with its more developed economy, devolves many more resources to social associations than the South does. Moreover, the presence of increasing space (also political) for subsidized or sub-contracted services has further reduced the importance of the social services system as a partner in the innovation of Italian services culture. In this setting, the state increasingly performs the function of a regulator and planner. This also means the stability of professionals' profiles for a long time in public sector. In fact, it is especially in the private sector (associations, foundations, cooperatives, consortia, etc.) that the largest investments are made in the innovation of supply, organization, and skills.
Overlaps and uncertain administrative boundaries make service delivery complex and not always aligned with needs. Networking and negotiation are constantly necessary regarding both recipients and each administration's catchment area.
The general picture which emerges is therefore one of a complex and substantially static system. What role is performed by social service, its methods and its professionals, in this situation?

Methods, theoretical approaches and research areas
On the operational level, the Italian social services adopt a multiplicity of approaches. These have accumulated over time by intersecting with the various organizational cultures that have arisen in services and in third-sector agencies. It is possible to distinguish four main organizational cultures which continue to interweave in everyday routines and planning.

Still robust is the welfare culture which historically characterized the start-up of social services, and which has been accompanied over time by the bureaucratic culture. The latter was sustained and augmented by the universalist development of services from the 1970s onwards. This was followed by the technocratic organizational culture which arose during the 1990s and developed especially in healthcare services. More recent years have seen the advent of the 'client-centred' culture which envisages participation-based interaction between the producer and the consumer of a public service. These various organizational cultures in Italy comprise a variety of models which Annamaria Perino (2010) has classified into twelve types. Of course, they relate more to functional and operational rhetoric than to a repertoire of concrete services. To be stressed is that it is not an experience consolidated and uniform across the country as regards action by services. Some models are characterized by an emphasis on the professionalism of service personnel, others by concern with the nature of the services themselves, yet others by the systemic and therefore organizational logic that guides intervention.

Professionalism	Nature of the intervention	Organizational logic
Problem-solving	Client-centred	Welfarist
Psycho-social	Task-centred	Bureaucratic
Behaviourist	Existential	Technocratic
Systemic-relational	Unitary	Functional
Reflexive	Integrated	Familist-Communitarian
	Unitary task-centred	Network-based

Table 3. A possible typology of intervention models proposed by Perino (2010) and adapted by the authors

The typology of professionalism-related models comprises those that have been historically connoted by the presence of social workers performing different roles and positions in services and with numerous functions. This requires them to have specific competences in a variety of models. A head of planning, for example, will certainly be better able to deal with models of community development or networking among services. By contrast, a counselling worker will activate models typical of psycho-social intervention. This example evidences the wide array of services and functions undertaken by Italian social workers. At the same time, it confirms the fragmentation and complexity of a sector unable to stabilize its functional areas effectively. In this regard, during the last twenty years there has been an evolution in the prevalence of the different models. From mechanistic positions there has been a shift to approaches which emphasise the role of the context and the natural agencies present in local societies. More recently, discourses have arisen which sustain more ecological and inclusive approaches – concepts typical of those who propound the idea of the community's self-organizing capacity. Currently, the systemic-relational model is very often cited by the familist-communitarian and networking ones. These are models also supported by system theory and by the ideological – not just functional – revival of the role of the family and the community. The keystone of these models is the individual/family relationship. This is confirmed by the fact that the family is the paramount socializing agent. The novelty of this resurgence of the family's role is due to two parallel phenomena; firstly, recognition that the household has the resources most important for remedying social vulnerability; secondly, realization that the family should increasingly concern itself with both primary and secondary socialization. Social work thus highlights another crucial aspect. Whereas the family was once viewed critically as a closed space in which relationships, if not correctly oriented, reproduced inequalities and social immobility, today, at least on the rhetorical level, it is regarded as the crucial component of the social fabric, and therefore as the social worker's main ally. The family is attributed a positive value as a fundamental means to cope with social distress. This is an indirect (and perverse) effect of the failed maturation of the universalist scheme of social services. In fact, according to communitarian-familistic models, social work is essentially centred on social relations considered as constituting the resource

most effectively deployed in response to distress. This is interpreted primarily in terms of involvement of the family and other significant relational spaces close to the subject. In particular, the networking model highlights the significant possibility for services to 'link together' in developing joint help initiatives. Networking enables the social services to address social distress at the level of the community and those of its members (individuals or organizations) able to promote initiatives which extend beyond the family. The networking model therefore introduces the idea that case take-up cannot be by the services alone but also by the community (Perino 2010). The rhetoric of this approach comprises the concepts of social capital, relational capital and an information-sharing by supporting the families to prevent instability and vulnerability (Ascoli et al., 2003). The work no longer centres on the person but on the local network, which is helped to become aware of its resources and encouraged to take action in terms of both prevention and specific intervention. The task of the social worker is therefore to make the community's resources visible, stimulate latent ones, and connect isolated ones together. Hence social workers must be able to work both at the individual level and at the level of institutions, groups and organizations. Each of them must devise a sort of strategic plan envisaging opportunities and alliances that require a great deal of flexibility and a capacity for the involvement of diverse actors. Today, in fact, this model is very frequently cited in contexts not specifically related to social service (Morgan 2006).

There are at present several variants of the networking model in Italy, but its constant extension has introduced a new term into the social services vocabulary: namely the 'governance' of care processes. This term highlights the need to involve local actors in planning and assessment activities as well. It is a sort of deferred intervention based on co-responsibility in situations of distress (stakeholder management). This aspect, already envisaged by Law 328/2000, has taken concrete form in multiple combinations and interactions between subjects and the social services. In the short period, the organizational model tends to predominate over the communitarian one. These processes are often accompanied by action-research initiatives promoted and coordinated by social workers themselves. Action-research always produces a twofold effect. On the one hand, it brings out the contents of distress and specifies the resources needed to address it; on the other hand, it brings out relational and social processes able in their turn to create spaces for intervention, information exchange, and support for the social context: an added value which can be spent on current social interventions or future ones. Nevertheless, participatory and enlarged governance also raises the problem of the de-responsibilization of the individual actors involved in regard to the results obtained, and it prolongs procedures and increases costs. For this reason, social service still maintains intact its ability to intervene professionally in projects against social malaise and vulnerability. The social worker, in particular, must be able to intervene with a wide range of competences. S/he may have to sustain weak networks and rarefied contexts, or s/he may perform the role of facilitator and supervisor when resources are networked to respond to the needs identified.

'Social records' are certainly means to innovate and to support intervention processes. Also the social service bred by the bureaucratic fragmentation and separation dominant in the 1970s and 1980s must deal with the problem of the system's scant accountability. Poorly computerized information systems are difficult to share between different services precisely because of the experiential nature of the social worker's everyday practice. Nevertheless, various attempts have been recently made to develop shared work methods and institutional approaches intended to integrate information bases. The reference in the former case is to the endeavour to extend the range of institutional actors and private organizations which share their working methods in order to manage situations of need. In these new contexts, being able to share the information bases which accompany intervention and care processes is of fundamental importance. The differentiation among services and the diverse trajectories followed by the recipients of social services still today produces considerable duplications of data and redundant information. This reduces the effectiveness of interventions, which may, for instance, resort to approaches already tried by social service actors. A second aspect concerns the need to share evaluation processes in order to understand and discuss cases that 'do not change' and languish in the bureaucratic machinery of the public services.

In these cases the system loses efficiency because files cannot be linked owing to the design of the infrastructures or because they are geographically dispersed in different archives.

Today, considerable progress has been made in the transferability of information bases. This is matched by a greater capacity to account for the investments made through the social system, according to indicators decided at the level of regional services. Some regional administrations, mainly in northern Italy, have established filing protocols which at last enable different practitioners to access the histories of care recipients. These attempts have often led to the creation of unitary social 'folders' managed by the public administration which all public and private actors can access in both reading and writing modes. In this way, as well as on the symbolic level, every case became a real citizen provided by an unique 'informatics' citizenship, facilitating both methodological and operative evaluation. Shared information bases, moreover, also allow more accurate and rapid documentation of the costs of the functions performed by the various social services in relation to both performance and cost centres. Although this innovation is certainly potentially both useful and positive, its introduction into ordinary work practices is still at the experimental stage, so that there are difficulties with system standards and effective integration with routine operations. All the actors involved have nevertheless positive expectations and attitudes towards this new type of instrument.

The professionalism of social workers

The role of the social worker in Italy, around which rotates the entire normative system stipulating the tasks and objectives of the social services, is legislatively well supported and receives full cultural recognition. More generally, a social worker is conceived of as a 'care professional' whose functions are defined by organic law no. 84 of 23 March 1993 as working "with technical-professional autonomy and judgment in all phases of intervention to protect, support and recover persons, families, groups and communities in situations of need and distress and who may undertake educational-training activities. S/he performs managerial tasks, participates in organization and planning, and may engage in the coordination and direction of social services. "The profession of Social Worker can be practised autonomously or in dependent employment" (art.1).
 Professionalism has therefore grown considerably over time, and the approximation due to the original 'reparatory' function has today consolidated within services, acquiring a proven professional value well represented by implementing norms and regulations. Also the training of the social worker, which during the 1990s was changed from the vocational to university levels, is now endowed with a structure that credits the importance of the profession within services. At the same time, on the side of social prestige social workers have over time acquired, albeit amid its recent diffusion and qualification, a very positive social space. Today, the social worker is evoked whenever it is necessary to furnish "care, help, accompaniment, and support to persons in a specific relational context" (Perino 2010, 182). The professionalism of the social worker consists above all in stimulating the client and the context in which s/he is embedded with the purpose of promoting a "taken over" by social services. Notwithstanding the complexity of an almost new professional profile and a multiplicity of functions, the social worker has been able to devise a variety of methodological approaches that supersede the reparatory orientation that characterized the profession's origins. Today his/her work is built on the idea of the 'dignity' and the 'freedom' of the person. These principles are consistent with the historical origins of social services. Yet social workers adapt them according to the resources available, territorial setting and the maturity of the social context in which they operate. In fact, alongside this normative 'unitariness' of the professional dimension, apparent in the Italian context is a willingness/obligation to perform the role of the social worker in different ways. The more the organizational system of services is developed, the more the variants assumed by the figure of social worker. In contexts of low organizational development, as frequent in southern Italy, his/her presence reduces to the essential bureaucratic functions envisaged by the law. Among these are the functions undertaken by municipalities in support of minors, adults in difficulty, the elderly,

and the functions performed by the Ministry of Justice. But in the north of Italy, the social worker's functions may range from educational ones according to hardship-prevention programmes to the management of entire social-welfare districts and the planning and management of provincial and regional services.

More generally, the national social service distinguishes four main areas of intervention for the social professions: (i) economic; (ii) integrative (e.g. socialization); (iii) substitutive (referral to specialist facilities); (iv) occupational (e.g. employability and ergonomics). Of course, the social worker is not the only professional figure today recognized by the Italian legal order. Also included in this category are professional educators, although these belong to the social health professions; psychologists, and social health workers (OSS). However, if one considers public and private bodies and their 'innovations' in addressing needs and hardships, the limited availability of official figures is matched by an array of functional and operational figures working on the borders between the public, private, and third sectors. This innovation on the one hand offers new areas of employment and new opportunities to support the transitions of care recipients, but on the other it weakens and fragments the representation of canonical social practitioners, and especially social workers. The latter, in fact, may undertake a wide range of occupational roles in services and, at the same time, move from direct work with individuals to more complex managerial work. The university, which today is tasked with furnishing the social worker with the most suitable skills, finds this variability to be one of the most critical aspects. Social workers usually acquire their first experience of work with social agencies, and as soon as they can, enter the public social services by passing the state examinations and enrolling on the professional register.
 Those unable to enter the public services usually continue to work in the private sector and repeatedly take the state examinations. Further demonstration of this behaviour is the fact that social workers are present in the public and private sectors but have only minimally developed an autonomous and socially recognized professional path. This makes the training process risky, so that, at the beginning of the careers, the main outcome for those entering the profession seems to be bureaucratic work. The two years of specialist training provided by university Masters courses develop coordination, research, and evaluation skills. In those two years, in fact, the refinement of basic functions (help to the person and communities) is increasingly flanked by opportunities to acquire the complex managerial abilities required by social service organizations.
 The problem, however, is that in a profession characterized by a significant experiential dimension, in which professional expertise is acquired through direct experience in the field, there are still today few opportunities for experiential learning which extend beyond the traditional help relationship and routine work with local services.
   It should be borne in mind, moreover, that these opportunities are mainly available in the North, because the scant development in the South of the organizational network of social (both public and private) services makes these processes difficult to activate.

Future scenarios

The foregoing discussion of current developments in the Italian social services, in organizations and in the professions, has highlighted numerous changes. The historical scenario that gave origin and collective value to the social services is today entirely different, and it is likely that other changes will follow. Constant variation of economic parameters will lead in the medium period to the progressive abandonment of the universalist ideology. Its place will be taken by selective criteria which consider real needs (and often only the most urgent ones) more important than rights correlated with minimum services. The economic dimension will long continue to determine the restructuring and reform of services. At the same time,   the organizational dimension will require the system to select the most efficient structures and to verify what innovations can be made to reduce the weight of routine welfare practices. This is therefore a hybrid scenario of increasing uncertainty. For fifteen years, the organizational plan of the social services has been subject to divestments and reductions of resources notwithstanding the legislative intention prior to 2000 to stabilize the system.

The public administrations have constructed, step by step, a structure that has progressively facilitated the outsourcing of public functions, given the greater innovation and efficiency that the private sector is able to deliver. The Italian social services by now exhibit a multiplicity of instances in which the private sector has replaced the public one. In different and not always appropriate ways, it has yielded to the restrictions imposed by the system, generating situations within this system difficult to manage and not always positive. All of this has come about by giving a multiplicity of actors the roles of co-producers of social policies and co-managers of services. This has been driven more by the logic of economic efficiency than by a concern to respond more appropriately to increasingly localized and heterogeneous needs (Esping-Andersen 2009).

This phenomenon is also the long-term effect of two unfulfilled endeavours. Firstly there has been the concern to restructure a system of social services no longer able to guarantee either adequate standards or the universalism required by legally-defined rights. This attempt has been thwarted by the impossibility of maintaining the rates of economic development generated by constant growth in gross domestic product. Globalization and delocalization have progressively 'financialized' the economy and made the concept of income from economic production, and therefore of collective well-being derived from work, increasingly fluid and much more abstract. At the same time, many of the jobs in basic assistance have been given to foreign workers who rarely possess the proper qualifications. In the longer term, this weakens the professionalism of the social occupations, which draw their prestige from social cohesion and the helping relationship.

Secondly, there is an increasing endeavour to create local welfare systems which reflect territorial specificities: a sort of 'federalism', to use a term widely employed in the Italian tax policy that the political majority wants to introduce. This is a welfare centred more on protection of the local community and its members than on rights and concern for the minimum levels of well-being that the state should guarantee for its citizens. Associated with it is an increasing orientation to strengthening social control. In fact, the media constantly report decisions by local administrations which reduce social inclusion. Immigrants, the poor, geographical areas depressed due to Mafia control, are all areas where it is increasingly hard to find people willing to promote cultural movements capable of reading policy and to make political analysis. The common sense of majority is to reduce 'disturbance' and 'dissonance', or in a wider sense, people want to reduce the differences. This has even dramatic consequences for the free circulation of people and information, and for free access to services. Social workers are increasingly forced to deal with emergencies, so that they work increasingly less through the empowerment of persons and groups. This recalls the tension typical of the social professions, whose practitioners are at once gatekeepers and listening professionals who activate inclusion processes; a tension strongly encouraged by ever greater financial and organizational problems.

A specific aspect, but one which is certainly symptomatic of this tension, is the resurgence of xenophobia and homophobia. The population seems cowed by a constant emphasis on security, and therefore seemingly rejects anything that might undermine consolidated well-being and socio-cultural identities. Among the latter, gender identity is an issue recurrent in the media, and it is one of the symbolic areas in which increasing social control is having its most evident effects. In fact, assault after assault inquiry after inquiry, evidence the widespread belief that there is no difference between diversity and deviance. An ageing population and a conservative development policy seem to be the two main factors responsible for the exacerbation of social control.

A new phase is therefore necessary. Whilst on the one hand this stalemate has involved all social and administrative levels, today the start-up of a new political dialectic is possible in the social services. The latter can deploy their long experience in interpreting and addressing the increasing needs and hardships which society produces especially in a phase such as the present one. The recent recession, which has followed a decade without growth, is increasingly pushing Italy into an imbalance between the need for reforms and reorganization of the resources available.

A 'political turn' could restore sense and vigour to a sector that must rethink its working practices and thus contribute to social innovation. In this regard, one can envisage three ways forward.

A first strategy that could guide renewal of the social services system is the establishment of a new relation between the generations. It is inconceivable that services should grow significantly (and at increasing costs) for the adult and elderly population and much less so for the 0-6 age range, with increasingly wide disparities between North and South.

A second line of development could be the creation of integrated infrastructures between the social and health sectors which involve forms of participatory governance able to learn from the evolution of needs and which also identify situations of privilege that immobilize the system. Today, the most dynamic part of Italian society consists of the immigrants who create enterprise, invent new models of development, but nevertheless have neither visibility nor citizenship. Infrastructural work which increases the accountability of the services system could be particularly useful in stimulating reflexivity, innovation, and real control over costs.

A third area of intervention should be the relationship between geographical residence and rights. It is no longer acceptable that a person's place of birth should determine his/her professional and social outcomes and quality of life to such a marked extent as today. This disparity has also produced a disparity in organizational quality and in the competences of the social services. Being a social worker in the North and South of Italy has different implications both in professional terms and as regards public opinion. Harmonization of the system, exchanges and internships as part of in-service training schemes, as well as twinning and consortia with organizations in the South, could reproduce the positive innovations already ongoing for twenty to thirty years in the North. They could generate a virtuous phase of collaboration between the two parts of the country and foster substantial innovation the social services.

Finally, the political turn is made urgent by the fact that in the past fifteen years the political parties, amid the collective disorientation caused by the bipolar political system, have desisted from constructing synthesis processes. Today, consensus on services is no longer guaranteed by political representatives. Nor does it seems that ongoing at the European level is any harmonization of the criteria applied by the social services. Rather, European fragmentation reduces the symbolic value of an European citizenship which could resolve some of the incongruities exhibited by the regulations of individual countries.

Only a web of services and co-responsible citizens, possibly also taking the form of a European network of citizenship, can overcome the immobility in which the social system has languished since the 1990s. What is required now is a new energy in tackling the challenges of social inclusion. A return to politics is necessary.

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With very best wishes
Oldrich Chytil, Dana Sykorova, Peter Erath

To write a book on social work in Europe is desirable and important, but at the same time quite a difficult venture. All these chapters show us the huge variety of existing policies, theories, research results, methods, professional debates, etc. and with this give us a comprehensive survey on tendencies and debates which each reader can use for comparing specific aspects in his / her country with aspects in other countries, or, perhaps even more important, to recognize "meta-developments" across Europe, e.g. marketisation of social work, tendencies towards managerialism, risk management and de-valorisation of social work and the social.

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