Social work education in Italy. The complex process of academisation.

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Introduction

• A strong *body of specialised knowledge* is necessary to all profession that strives for a recognition, to gain status, and to acquire greater discretion for their desired jurisdiction

• create a *distinctive knowledge base* presupposes the establishment and development of profession-specific education and research opportunities scientific journals, a theoretical framework and a research culture” (Dellgran & Hojer, 2013 :344)

• Having a *distinctive body of knowledge* and a *profession-specific education* are two distinctive characters of a profession
the *academisation process*

- is intertwined with the professionalization process
- Is linked to the establishment of social work as an academic discipline (*disciplinarisation process*)
- This presentation will focus on social work education: Its origin, the pre academic period, the actual situation, the future
The pre – academic period

1) From Italian social work official birth date, after the II WWW (1946 - until the end of the Eighties
   a. private organizations, inspired by democratic values and social work principles -follwing the post- war UN aids.
   b. the majority of social work schools developed outside the universities  with various structures.
   c. A variety of paths, with some excellences courses: small groups. Social work teachers. Some very weak
   d. The development of sw discipline is fostered by teachers associations
   e. Social work (education and profession) was not officially recognized

2) The period of “school with special purposes” (1982- 2000)
   a. social work education regulated at national level as a three years course to be provided by the universities within the Schools for special purposes (a ‘lower status  than the degrees) The only educational path for SW
   b. Establishment of the national register (1993)
   c. Social work teachers often recruited from previous schools
Steps of recognition: a long way from 1985 to 2000

• 1985 - Social work education can only be delivered by Universities
• 1987 - Recognition to the professional title of “assistente sociale” linked to an established curricula of social work (three years)
• 1993 Establishment of the professional register, as mandatory. A self government body
• 1999- 2000 - Bologna Process and establishment of the BA degree of social work – in “Social work sciences”. And Master degree in “Planning and management of social services - 2000
• Accordingly, professional register established two sections
The academic period: swe in the University

• An issue discussed at that time, with advantages (recognition of a higher status for professionals and development of social work discipline.)

• And concerns of loosing peculiarities of social work schools (connection with practice, wide space to social work methods and theories, social work professional teachers)

• After negotiations, social work courses were included in Sociological departments but wasn't recognized as an autonomous discipline (it is considered as a branch of sociology – ‘applied sociology)
BA and MA curriculum structure

• Defined at national level, with minimal requirements

• Bachelor curricula – 180 credits (CFU)
  • Basic disciplines (36 cfu) : sociology (15), law (3), Psychology (6), economics, politics, history, anthropology, pedagogy (12),
  • Characterising disciplines (54): social work (15) sociology (9), law (9), psychology (15), medical sciences (6)
  • field practice – Mandatory, at least 18 credits
  • Remaining can be allocated freely by each university
BA and MA curriculum structure -

- Master degree curricula – 120 credits
  - Characterising disciplines (48): sociology (15), law (12), psychology, pedagogy, anthropology, philosophy (12); economics, politics and statistics (12)
  - fieldwork placements – 10 credits
  - Remaining (62 credits) can be allocated freely by each university
  - no social work discipline is required
Social work schools in Italy

• Italy: around 60.000.000 habitants – 42.000 registered social workers

• 38 universities (out of 100 in Italy) deliver 42 Bachelors in Social Work and 38 Master courses

• Some courses (BA) has limited access. Number of students ranges from 180 to 30 per course – [1.300 enrolled 1st year nationally]

• Doctoral schools: changing picture. First PhDs, late ‘90 – since then almost 60 phd SW students. Very few enrolled in the Universities

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An unsatisfactory picture ...

• The ministerial requirement gives a picture quite unsatisfactory

• But Universities have the space (the credits left) to modify the structure of the curricula-

• [Autonomy and competition among Universities enforced after 2010’ reform]

• An heterogeneous and diversified picture all over the country: regarding subjects taught, and teachers/scholars involved
Social work discipline and the academic body

• ‘A study carried out by the Italian Association of Social Work educators (AIDOSS), aimed at describing the disciplinarisation’ of social work – The establishment of social work as an academic discipline - (Hojer & Dellgran, 2013)

• Aims at knowing
  • The balance between SW disciplines and the other subjects
  • The state of art regarding the recruitment of social work teachers.

• The study examine curricula of two academic years (2013-14 and 2014-15)
Social work and other disciplines
42 BA courses deliver an amount of 7560 CFU credits of which 851 (11.25%) are related to social work disciplines.
Social work educators in Italy

- 75% of the social work educators are ‘contract teachers → high level of precariousness and low salaries.
- 23% (33 out of 141) belongs to other disciplines and don’t have specific knowledge in SW
- Established academics are rare

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Signs of changes: Light and shadows

• some universities are increasing the number of credits assigned to social work and seek to recruit Soc work academics.
• Slow increase of social work scholars qualified as professors (and hopefully employed) – but still weak community
• Publications increase
• More social workers in PhD programs – But less Phd programs specialised in social work
• Italian society of Social Work Research
• Shortage of resources increase competition
Some learnings from the Italian experience

• It is not enough that social work courses are taught in the University – there is the need to

• Need to consider the ‘politics of social work knowledge’ (Hojer):
  • **from the within** → strengthening the recognition of social work as a specific discipline and strengthening the vital connection between practice, research and education -
  • **With the outside** → negotiating with neighbour disciplines, considering that reduced financing increases competition –

• Need to cultivate and foster **strong alliances** between profession and discipline. Separation will not strengthen social workers

• We have an history of more than 100 years that can tell us something...

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References


With good luck for all of us

Thank you for your kind attention