CHAPTER 39

Social Work Education in Italy: Light and Shadows

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Historical Context

Primitive forms of organised social aid date back to the fourteenth century in kingdoms that once ruled what is now Italy. This was a time when the state, alongside charitable work carried out predominantly by charities and community associations, began to set up bodies tasked with providing centrally organised care interventions to face the problem of trampism, the consequences of pauperisation (sixteenth century), increase in the population, and social conflicts linked to the emergence of capitalism (Stradi, 2013).

The answer to these problems was institutionalisation in which the Catholic church played a predominant role. Thus began the marginalising of certain categories of the population. In 1862 and 1890 two laws were introduced to regulate the *istituzioni pubbliche di assistenza e beneficienza* (IPAB, "charitable institutions") and place them under public control. After World War I the Italian state introduced a measure making it directly responsible for supporting specific categories of persons such as war invalids and orphans. Social legislation was even enacted during the years of the fascist government. The first legislation to protect the rights of children in the care of wet nurses, foundling homes, orphanages, reformatories, and prisons was introduced by the fascist government in 1927, which also established the Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia (ONMI), which promoted benefits for mothers and

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S. S. M. et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Work Education*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39966-5_39

children, and the Ente Nazionale Assistenza Orfani Lavoratori (ENAOLI), which supported the orphans of workers.

These progressive acts were driven by the regime's aim to regenerate the Italian race by improving their welfare and promoting a higher birth rate so that Italy could become a great imperial power. Many other forms of social security in the area of work were subsequently introduced such as family allowances for salaried employees, provision of a family and demographic policy, control of urbanisation and internal mobility, and closing the urban labour market to the rural active population. More generally, all these norms had the specific objective of exercising greater social control by making such assistance political. It is in this context that the National Fascist Party along with the Industry Confederation first began to train *assistenti sociali del lavoro* ("social assistants of work") in San Gregorio al Celio school. According to Martinelli (2003, p. 6) the principal aim was to educate "technically and spiritually female personnel who [were] asked to support workers in factories… guiding and advising them in their private life events." However, this school was not considered the birthplace of social work education because its premises were too distant from the ideas and ideals that inspired the promoters of future schools in the post-war period—in any event the school closed in 1943.

Development of Social Work Education

After World War II a lively debate on the possibility of moving toward a social security system took place. The Ministry for Post-War Assistance (1945–1947) and the Administration for International Aid (AAI), a body connected with the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), promoted initiatives to support and ensure standards of professionalism and competence in responding to welfare needs. During the Tremezzo Conference (1946) particular attention was paid to the role and function of the social worker defined as "the one who must be the architect of the great work of social rehabilitation."

The first school of social work in the country was the Scuola Pratica di Assistenza Sociale. It was established in Milan in 1944 by the Compagnia di San Paolo with the support of the Opera Cardinal Ferrari and directed by Odile Vallin, a young French anti-fascist social worker who modelled the school after the École Pratique de Service Social de Montparnasse (Cutini, 2000). Many other schools have opened in Italy since 1945 under the patronage of private organisations of Catholic or secular influence. All these schools were inspired by democratic values and the principles of social work such as having respect for fellow human beings, personalising intervention, and using psychological and social sciences as theoretical supports in identifying the causes of problems. Although many professors in social work schools came from the academic world, this did not stop a very lively discussion

ensuing about the type of establishment in which such education should take place. Ultimately, it was decided that courses would not be integrated within the university education system.

The idea was that the private sector was better equipped to build a curriculum that focussed on both theoretical and practical training. This ambivalence profoundly impacted the development of social work education that at that time did not enjoy formal recognition from the government. However, students aspiring to follow social work courses were required to possess a *maturità* ("secondary school diploma") and pass many entrance exams.

Nevertheless, critical thinking persisted in several directors and teachers of social work schools who highlighted the lack of research and theorisation that had gone into the social work curriculum in addition to non-recognition of the course at the university level. These are the reasons seven universities set up "schools for special purposes" as part of their curricula. These universities included the University of Siena in 1956, the Statale University and the Santa Maria Assunta University in Rome in 1966, the University of Parma and the University of Florence in 1969, and the University of Pisa and the University of Perugia in the 1970s. A review initiated by the Minister for Universities discovered that this new type of education was being carried out not only by these seven universities but also by more than 100 private schools. This analysis led to the legalisation of social work education, which was slowly developed following the enactment of a series of decrees. These decrees state that the only formal training path for the profession would be offered by the university system (D.M. 30.05.1985 under the structure of "schools for special purposes").

Such schools were legally recognised on 15 January 1987 and the university diploma in social work was created on 23 July 1993. These led to the creation of a social workers' professional register (law No. 84, 23 March 1993) that regulates the profession. According to the professional register social work diploma holders are required to pass a state exam to become registered social workers. These state exams were to be held on university premises with examiners made up of academics and social workers appointed by Professional Order. The Research Doctorate in Sociology, Theory and Methodology of Social Work has been available at the University of Trieste since 1994 and an experimental Degree Course in Social Work has been available at the University of Trieste and the University of LUMSA in Rome since 1998. Together, they offered social workers the possibility of gaining a 3-year diploma from either a private or university institution and enrolling at the beginning of each integrative year to obtain a *laurea* (main post-secondary academic degree).

On 19 June 1999 an agreement regarding the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was signed in Bologna by 29 European countries to harmonise diverse European higher education systems and thus increase the employment prospects and geographical mobility of European citizens

(Campanini, 2015). In accordance with the Bologna Process, Italy reformed its national higher education system and established three levels of degrees (BA/MA/PhD) at all university faculties. This resulted in a 3-year Bachelor degree in "sciences of social work" and a 2-year Master's degree in "planning and management of politics and social services."

The lengthy discussions between social work educators and sociologists that ensued eventually led to creation of an MA because many sociologists were opposed to naming the diploma "theory and methodology of social work," as was proposed at the beginning. As a consequence of reform brought about by the Bologna Process the professional register was split into two sections: Section A for those who completed a Master's degree and Section B for those who completed a Bachelor's degree. Consequently, two different exams were introduced. A further change (D.M. 22 October 2004, No. 270) modified the previous decree: the BA was named "social work" (L-39) and the MA "social work and social policies" (LM-87).

For the academic year 2018/2019 a total of 36 BA degrees were included in the L-39 and given different denominations: 22 in "social work," 7 in "social work sciences," 2 in "sociology and social work," and the other 5 in "science of society and social work," "science of social work and no profit," "science of education and social work," "theory, culture and techniques of social work," and "mediator of intercultural and social cohesion in Europe." Concerning the MA degrees there were 35 programmes included in the LM-87 with a vast array of different names such as "social work and social policies," "planning and organisation of social work," "work, social citizenship and interculturality," "social work in complex contexts," "methodology, organisation and evaluation of social services," "society and local development," and "innovation and social work."

Design of the Social Work Curriculum

The structure of the present curriculum can be better understood by presenting an overview of the changes that have taken place in recent decades as a consequence of the global inclusion of social work education in the university context. This has led to a reduction in the number of types of specific social work taught.

A typical programme at schools for special purposes such as the University of Parma includes a 1-year course on principles and fundaments; a 3-year course on casework; 2-year courses on groupwork, community work, and ethics; a 3-year course on applied social work research; and a 2-year course on the administration of social services.

The Decree of 30 April 1985 instituted a study plan that conferred uniformity on social work education in Italy. The decree foresaw a 1-year course on "fundaments and principles of social work" and a 3-year course on "methods and techniques." It also professionalised courses on "the administration

and organisation of social work services" (2-year course), "applied social work research" (2-year course with a single exam at the end), and "social work policy" (1-year course).

Reforms brought about by the Bologna Process resulted in the structure of the curriculum in social work—as for all the other disciplines—being defined at the national level.

Despite strong positioning adopted by the Professional Register and the Association of Italian Teachers in Social Work and despite the orientation of international standards of social work education issued in 2004 by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the structure of social work curricula required by the Ministry of Education left much to be desired. Following ministerial requirements the social work BA curriculum (total 180 credits) is divided into primary and characterising disciplines where it is mandatory to fulfil a minimum number of credits. The primary disciplines cover 36 credits: 15 for sociology; 3 for law; 6 for psychology; 3 can be chosen from economics, politics, and history; and 9 can be chosen between historical, anthropological, and pedagogical studies. The characterising disciplines cover 54 credits: 15 for social work; 9 for sociology; 9 for law; 15 for psychology; and 6 for medical science. Moreover, there is a mandatory practice placement that can cover at least 18 credits while the remaining credits needed to reach a total of 180 can be allocated across all disciplinary areas.

The MA curriculum requires 120 credits of which 48 are mandatory for the characterising disciplines (15 for sociology; 12 for law; 12 between psychology, pedagogy, anthropology, and philosophy; and 12 between economics, politics, and statistics) and 10 for fieldwork placements. The remaining credits needed to reach a total of 120 can be allocated across all disciplinary areas.

Of the 180 credits needed for a BA the ministerial regulation requires a minimum of 15 mandatory credits for social work disciplines (quoted under sociology) and 18 credits for field placement. At the MA level 10 credits are allocated to field placements (very often spent conducting research activities related to the thesis) and no specific mention is given of social work disciplines. This means that students can earn a BA degree in social work after having completed only three exams over the course of their major. Generally speaking, one exam is more orientated toward defining "fundamentals and principles of social work" while the other two relate more to "methods and techniques." To reiterate, there is currently no specific social work course needed for students to gain an MA.

Such a curriculum structure clearly affects the preparedness of social workers who paradoxically require a greater breadth of competencies as a consequence of globalisation. Despite the few mandatory social work courses being very general, none of them deals with specific intervention methods or

clients' problems. Further, none of the mandatory courses relates directly to human rights, social justice, advocacy, or policy practice.

Placements occupy a significant part of social work programmes (Dellavalle, 2011) perhaps because of the scarcity of social work–related courses. They are very limited in terms of hours compared with Italy's European homologues and arguably not as well structured (Campanini, 2009). The organisation of placements varies widely by institution. In some universities there are specific structures tasked with coordinating all activities linked to internships, while in others students are left to their own devices. In some cases supervision is carried out by designated persons located in students' placements, while in other cases supervision is not undertaken by social workers. In only a few universities is it possible for students to reflect on their placements in small groups under the supervision of field teachers. Such cases while rare are hugely beneficial for students to get feedback on their experiences and make links between theory and practice.

Other critical elements relate to curricula not focussing on the preparation needed to face the challenges that social workers are experiencing in social services despite the orientation of the Bologna Process and the Tuning Methodology (www.unideusto.org). Instead, curricula are often shaped by the resources available to faculty at the departmental level. These are the reasons there may be more courses related to sociology, law, political science, or pedagogy depending on the institution and its resources. The education process is not sufficiently orientated toward competencies and the teaching methods employed are still too teacher centred (as opposed to student centred). Italian universities still follow the traditional mode of lecturing (i.e., from the pulpit) while student-centred teaching methods tend to foster more critical thinking. Moreover, too many students get accepted onto courses (between 100 and 400 in some cases) for the number of teachers available. This is due to increased pressure faced by universities to enlarge the number of students to guarantee increments in the financing process. In the past the majority of social work schools accepted only 35–60 students per year. The current increase in the teacher/student ratio is hampering achieving a more student-focussed learning process.

An additional problem is the lack of analysis of the motivations and attitudes of students enrolling in social work programmes. The majority of universities conduct entrance examinations (general questions on culture) for students wishing to apply for social work courses. Scores obtained in this test and grades achieved at high school are the only criteria used to determine student selection. The issue is that selection based on the assessment of student motivations or their attitudes toward the social work profession in Italy is not possible because it is deemed a discriminatory approach. Such discrimination violates the Italian constitution that guarantees the right to all citizens of choosing their education. To improve the preparedness of students in scientific disciplines and to make up for deficiencies in the curricula more seminars

or laboratories should be organised and proper supervision and tutorship in relation to placements should be provided (Dellavalle, 2011). However, the cost incurred in providing these for social work education is viewed as an additional burden universities' administrative bodies cannot afford. Further, the constraining structure of programmes makes it difficult to find the time to undertake such activities.

Despite all these problems there are many initiatives undertaken by social work professors in different universities to utilise more active teaching methodologies (Bertotti, 2012; Fazzi, 2016; Rizzo, 2012). Such professors find themselves juggling with various regulations (e.g., a security law stipulating that all furniture be affixed to the floor) creating difficulties in bringing about less formal ways of teaching. Some universities conduct workshops on a number of issues such as communication and writing skills, intercultural and interdisciplinary approaches, and seminars and groupwork. Doing so enables students to use the conceptual frameworks of different disciplines to understand the type and nature of social problems, to learn about good practice, to train themselves through role-playing activity, and to bring service users into the classroom to relate their experiences. These are but a few examples of good practice that are being carried out in different programmes of social work across the country. High-quality teaching is fundamental to approaching theory and praxis and to supporting students develop reflexivity and self-evaluation competencies. However, the economic crisis of 2007–2009 had an adverse impact on universities and existing policies for higher education in Italy make it even more challenging to maintain such activities.

Social Work: A Neglected Discipline?

Although discussion about the importance of a discipline being recognised as having an autonomy of its own has long been raised by social work representatives such as the National Association of Social Workers (ASSNAS), the Italian Association of Teachers of Social Work (AIDOSS), and the National Council of Social Workers (CNOAS), the result was half-hearted. The reasons for this can be attributed to the history of social work education and the culture of Italian academia and its relationship with sociologists. Getting social work courses taught at university was very problematic. Moreover, there was very strong resistance, especially from sociologists, to considering social work as an autonomous discipline. During social work education's transition from private schools to universities the Ministry of Education failed to adopt measures to protect chairs (professorships) in social work, much as was the case in Spain.[1]

Social work in Italy was thus firmly held in the grip of sociology. Precise reasons for this decision taken by the National University Council (CUN) were based on the so-called insufficient scientific rigour of social work. The long period when private entities ran social work education did not allow

for the creation of a robust academic disciplinary background. Teachers in schools were more concerned in training social workers to respond to the needs of society than publishing theoretical essays or participating in research. American and British experts contributed a great deal to the social work discipline in the first years of social work education in Italy. Moreover, many textbooks from foreign scholars were translated into Italian. Nevertheless, the 1950s to the 1970s witnessed the start of indigenisation of social work when the contents of social work courses became more localised, as evidenced by articles in Italian journals and publications supported by the Amministrazione Aiuti Internazionali (AAI). The most significant move toward building specific scientific disciplinary knowledge came about as a result of analysing collaborative work carried out by the teachers who created AIDOSS. Many seminari and conferences were organised on different issues and topics by this association on different issues and topics ranging from: the processes of help and the unity of methods; the use of other disciplines to build up theoretical models; the concept of training as a part of the educational process and a representation of the theory-praxis relation; and themes concerning social work as a profession and discipline, as well as education in a university context. Such theoretical elaborations encouraged more contributions that once published became a point of reference for the evolution of social work in Italy (Coordinamento Nazionale Docenti di Servizio Sociale, 1987; Dal Pra Ponticelli, 1985a, 1985b, 1987; Giraldo & Riefolo, 1996; Neve & Niero, 1990; Università degli Studi di Siena, 1983). Thus, comparison with other disciplines became ever greater (Bianchi, Cavallone, Dal Pra Ponticelli, De Sandre, & Gius, 1988), particularly with sociology. Nevertheless, social workers teaching in schools were largely excluded from traditional university recruitment. Some continued to teach part-time while sociologists replaced social work professors because they had a chair in general sociology in which social work was included despite not having any specific theoretical knowledge or experience in the field of social work.

The 1980s marked the time when many publishers began to show interest in social work. As a consequence many books have been published in the last few decades. The most notable have been the publication of a social work dictionary edited by Maria Dal Pra Ponticelli (2005) and a new dictionary of social work put together by Annamaria Campanini (2013a). The dictionary is the result of a joint effort between professors, experts, and professionals from different generations and different regions in Italy. Although it is a dedicated work, it was deliberately made open to authors from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, law, and political science. By doing so it contributes to enriching and better defining the social work discipline itself where events, ideas, and scenarios are deployed to illustrate the past, the present, and the future of social work.

Although this process could well testify to and consolidate the autonomy of social work as a credible discipline (Campanini, 1999; Gui, 1999); although it is now possible to affirm that social work has its own specific theoretical background (Dal Pra Ponticelli, 2005; Fargion, 2009; Gui, 2004); and although, as recognised in the words of Suzy Braye when she unveiled the dictionary in Rome,[2] "the volume brings a level of critical analysis that demonstrates the academic maturity and sophistication of the discipline of social work in Italy," social work is still not recognised within academia as a proper discipline.

In the academic year 2018–2019 only 16 teachers (1 full professor, 4 associate professors, and 11 associate researchers) appointed by universities in Italy (Torino, Piemonte Orientale, Milan Bicocca and Milan Cattolica, Verona, Trento, Trieste, Bolzano, Bologna, Ancona, Lecce, Palermo) are qualified social workers. As a result the majority of social work courses are not taught by tenured faculty, but by professionals working in social services or experts in the field with temporary contracts and without regular remuneration. A vicious circle has developed since the financial crisis: there are few teachers of social work in universities, few credits for social work disciplines, compounded by the impossibility of hiring new staff and the difficulty social workers have in obtaining research chairs since the conditions for such competition are defined in the context of sociology—not social work. Consequently, Italian social work research lags behind that of many other countries. Moreover, in its current form the Italian curriculum does not comply with guidelines regarding education standards (www.iassw-aiets.org) approved by the IASSW and the IFSW.

While unveiling the *Social Work Dictionary* in Rome in 2013 Suzy Braye stated "as the discipline takes shape and its scientific merit is established, so we have to ensure that professional education reflects these firm foundations, and that social work takes its rightful place in the curriculum for those wishing to enter the profession."

State of Social Work Research in Italy

The state of social work research in Italy is best analysed by looking at the historical development of social work education. Doctoral studies in Italy started in the 1980s as a response to D.P.R. No. 382/1980 (presidential decree) more than 20 years later than in other European countries. The first PhD in "sociology, theory and methodology of social work" (a 3-year programme) was instituted by the University of Trieste in the academic year 1993–1994.

At the time it was the only social work programme available. Students who were interested in enrolling in this programme needed to complete undergraduate and graduate studies in fields such as sociology, psychology, pedagogy, or social policy to be considered for the PhD programme. The

establishment of a social work BA and MA in 2000 allowed for a more direct journey to a PhD.

Following the example of Trieste other universities introduced social work doctoral studies (Rome, Sassari, Milan Bicocca, Milan Cattolica, Bolzano, Bologna, Lecce, Trento, Calabria, and Marche Polytechnic University) with approximately 80 doctors having now graduated.

It is also worth noting that CNOAS financially supported doctoral studies by providing a bursary for students to help develop and promote a social work curriculum.

The development of third cycle education in social work has encountered many problems not only because of the lack of recognition of the discipline but also because of a new regulation that created doctoral schools between different departments or universities. This was done to connect fragmented disciplinary sectors and facilitate multidisciplinary research projects. Although social workers can apply, admissions are increasingly competitive.

PhD students mainly comprise professionals employed in social services interested in enhancing their professional skills or in pursuing their careers in academia. Since 1997, the year the first Italian social workers received their PhDs, four PhD graduates have been offered positions as associate professors and another four as researchers. All other graduates have continued their work in social services, while some have also been offered part-time teaching positions. This made it difficult to create social work research centres and to develop a strong network between these doctors who are spread across Italy but are not connected by an institutional framework.

The development of social work research can be divided into four periods (Ossicini Ciolfi, 1988):

a. 1945–1955 when particular focus was given to social investigation and the organisation of community projects;
b. 1955–1970 when focus was given to development of the profession and when there was a predilection for action research that allowed the participation of citizens in the processes of planning;
c. 1970–1985 when institutional changes were characterised by the establishment of a number of schools of social work, especially in northern Italy, and by a reduction in the participation of public institutions; and
d. 1980–2020 when peculiar conditions prevail.

Economic considerations have resulted in a number of organisational changes within universities that have impacted social work faculty and the curriculum, as explained in the previous section. There has been a reduction in the number of courses that really need to be part of the social work curriculum such as the research methodology course. Whittling down the number of teachers employed in universities has made it very difficult to develop and sustain research projects that can enhance the knowledge base and build up

course material (Campanini, 2013b). Nevertheless, there are publications in the Italian context written by professors of social work at an individual level or by teams within specific universities sometimes in partnership with other European countries. Notable examples include the University of Verona conducting research on social worker training (Bressan, Pedrazza, & Neve, 2011); researchers at the University of Turin investigating the processes of professionalisation; the Interdepartmental Centre for Research and Services on Socio Health Integration (CRISS) of Marche Polytechnic University examining the role of social work; three international studies two involving the University of Calabria ("The Public Health Implications of Neoliberal Policy and Management on Professions and Vulnerable Rural Populations" and "Civil Engagement in Social Work: Developing Global Models") with partners worldwide and the third by the University of Genoa in collaboration with the University of Helsinki and Lund University on working conditions, welfare, and poverty.

Moreover, the last decade has witnessed some interuniversity research cofinanced by the Ministry of University and Research (MIUR). Such research has been carried out with the participation of some social work professors and has focussed on the following topics: the relationship between social work, social policy, and territory (Lazzari, 2008); the state of the profession of social work in Italy (Facchini, 2010); and the role played by social workers and educators in the promotion of active citizenship (Bifulco & Facchini, 2013).

The development of social work research in Italy took a major step when Italian social work professors participated in activities undertaken by the European Association for Social Work Research, its Board of Directors, and the boards of directors of international journals. Moreover, establishment of the Fondazione assistenti sociali (Social Workers' Foundation) and transformation of AIDOSS into the Social Work Society (SOCISS) contributed to developing this sector further. The Social Workers' Foundation played a prominent role in getting university teachers and doctors involved in extensive research into the reason social workers are subjected to aggression and violated by people they are trying to help. Since 2017 SOCISS has committed itself to organising biannual conferences on research into social work and publishing the best papers presented at such conferences in the journal *La Rivista di Servizio Sociale*.

Challenges and Perspectives

Comparison of the development of Italian social work with that at the European or international level not only highlights the lack of academic recognition of the social work discipline but also the fact that existing university policies structure social work courses within different areas—not as an independent academic subject. Although stringent provisions in ministerial

documents prescribe openly discussing curricula with social actors, this is very often carried out bureaucratically—not as a constructive ongoing dialogue orientated at defining competence strategies fundamental to strengthening the preparedness of the next generation of social workers. Moreover, people using the services are not involved in this process, as happens in other parts of the world.

A law aimed at regulating social work education and the profession was proposed in 2013. The law had a number of objectives such as making it mandatory for social workers to complete 5 years of university studies (a 3-year BA and a 2-year MA), recognising social work as a disciplinary area, implementing specific social work courses in study programmes as agreed with the National Council of Social Workers, creating specific doctoral courses, and employing professors for social work disciplines who had specific social work backgrounds.

The driving force behind this initiative was recognition of the need for social workers to have robust and updated competencies to face challenges relating to the current situation in Italy. Such challenges include the increasing complexity, severity, and burdensomeness of social problems at a time of cuts in public expenditure as a result of a severe lack of resources; heavy caseloads causing both burnouts of social workers and higher levels of hostility toward them; and significant changes in the labour market with new employment opportunities in the third sector requiring active engagement in organisational, managerial, economic, and financial planning (Fazzi, 2012). The Conference of Heads of Social Work Degrees opposed this proposal, even though it was supported by the National Council of Social Workers. Although the bill has not yet been discussed in parliament and a new government having been elected, there is little prospect of any substantial upcoming change.

Another critical point has been the failure to internationalise the curricula despite many initiatives having been put forward in recent years. The inclusion of social work education in universities has made it possible to participate in a number of initiatives undertaken within the Socrates/Erasmus Programme where the participation of students is much more visible than that of professors. This may be because of their precarity in academia and limited proficiency in foreign languages (Campanini, 1999). Moreover, bibliographic material is generally limited to Italian publications therefore reducing the exposure of Italian scholarly work in European and international debates.

A European Thematic Network initiative comprising around 100 partners and spearheaded by the University of Parma (www.eusw.unipr.it) from 2002 to 2008 was important (Campanini, 2002, 2007) in supporting the integration of Italian and European social work.

Since 2010 social work education institutes have begun to actively participate in World Social Work Day by organising a number of initiatives in different Italian universities often in cooperation with regional professional

registers. International conferences have been organised in which colleagues from different countries have participated such as "Social Work Education in a Changing Europe" (Turin, 1993); "Social Challenges and Social Profession" (Parma, 2007); "Social Work Education: Towards 2025" (Milan, 2015); and the "Joint Global Conference on Social Work Education and Social Development" in Rimini in 2020 that is being organised by the IASSW and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW).

Italian social work professors have not only been elected to the boards of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW), the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA), and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), but they have also assumed the presidency of these three international organisations. Nevertheless, limitations inherent in curricula make it very difficult to internationalise curricula, build up a strong knowledge base on human rights and social justice, and ensure social workers have a clear understanding of the effects of globalisation on local practice and be able to play a political role in society. Although social work education should be multidisciplinary, its core competencies need to have a strong scientific and methodological knowledge base and be capable of developing ethical professional attitudes. Critical reflection skills can be attained by integrating theory with practice, by adopting a modular structure, by activating the centrality of students in the learning process, and by utilising innovative teaching methodologies. The development and approval of new curricular structures hinge on the employment of additional professionally qualified teaching faculty in all BA and MA courses.

This chapter has presented the light and shadows found within social work education in Italy. Although it may appear that problems prevail over positive achievements, the social work community is committed to continuous engagement in improving the situation. Although this is widely believed to be an ethical question, only well-prepared professionals can work toward achieving the social work mission of enhancing human rights and social justice in the world.

Notes

1. Real Decreto 1850/1981, de 20 de agosto, sobre la incorporación a la Universidad de Los Estudios de Asistentes Sociales como Escuelas Universitarias de Trabajo Social. BOE No. 206, de 28 de agosto de 1981; 5 Orden de 12 de abril de 1983 por la que se establecen las directrices para la elaboración de los Planes de Estudios de las Escuelas Universitarias de Trabajo Social. BOE No. 93, de 19 de abril de 1983.
2. Speech given by Suzy Braye when she unveiled the *Social Work Dictionary* on 18 March 2013 in Rome.

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