

CHANGES IN THE ROLE OF JUSTICE SOCIAL WORKERS IN ITALY: QUESTIONS OF CONTROL, ASSISTANCE AND OFFICERS' TRAINING

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Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the evolution of the enforcement of non-custodial sentences in Italy. In 1975, a new role was introduced, that of the justice social worker, with the duty of supervising the so-called “non-custodial measures”.

In Italy, the available studies on the topic are rather limited in number, whereas in the United Kingdom there has been a rich production, in terms of both theoretical reflection and empirical research. This is why several of the remarks put forth in this paper stem from a comparison between the two systems, as well as from an exploratory qualitative analysis carried out by means of semi-structured interviews proposed to individuals working in the enforcement of non-custodial sentences in both countries, i.e. experts in the officers' training.

The objective of this research is to investigate the ambivalence of the role of justice social workers, deriving from the coexistence of assistance and control. Starting from the model presented by Bondeson (1994), the evolution of the Italian system for the enforcement of non-custodial sentences will be described through the control-assistance dichotomy and focusing on training, a variable that deeply influences the placement of justice social workers along the control-assistance continuum.

Key words: *community justice, justice social workers, probation, Italian penitentiary system, social work*

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research method, using exploratory interviews to a sample of individuals experienced in the probation officers' training field. The sample includes 10 interviews with trainers/experts working in the probation field in the United Kingdom (in particular in England, at the De Montfort University, Leicester) and 18 interviews with operators working in the field of non-custodial sanctions and involved in training activities in Italy (at the Higher Institute for Penitentiary Studies, at the Prison Administration Department, as well as at the Regional Prison Administration Directorate and at the Office for the Enforcement of Non-Custodial Measures of Turin). The general purpose was to compare the Italian and the English ways to fulfil the officers' training and their evolutions, with relation to the more general changes in the alternative to prison values and policies.

The probation officer's role between assistance and control

In general, the potentially conflicted nature of the probation officer's role is linked to the fact that their position forces them to owe a double set of loyalties, to the society and to the users, often guided by interests that are in conflict with each other. In general terms, we can say that a greater focus on the element of support seems to indicate the operators' prevailing intention to protect the users' interests, while a greater focus on the element of control seems to indicate that the operators wish to protect the interests of society. Depending on how much importance is given to each of the two elements, we can identify some ideal types of supervision, as shown in Table 1, borrowed from Bondeson (1994: 108).

		<u>Emphasis on Control</u>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<u>Emphasis on Assistance</u>	<i>High</i>	Welfare	Paternal
	<i>Low</i>	Passive	Punitive

Table 1. Types of Supervisors by Emphasis on Assistance or Control (Bondeson, 1994: 108)

If greater emphasis is placed on control rather than on assistance, the model is punitive: the probation officer's main purpose is that of protecting society from new crimes that might be committed by the individuals they supervise. Conversely, if there is greater emphasis on assistance than on control, we will have a welfare model: the probation officer's main purpose is that of protecting the interests of the individuals under their supervision and the underlying idea is that society can be protected only by fully reintegrating those who committed a crime. If there is great emphasis on both control and assistance, then the paternal model prevails: probation officers try to combine the protection of society and of the offenders. Lastly, if the level of both control and assistance is low, the adopted model is passive and the probation officers decide not to take an active role in protecting the interests of society and/or the individuals under their supervision; they concentrate mainly on their bureaucratic and formal duties. This set of models, to be understood as Weberian ideal types, can be a useful tool to interpret the figures involved in the enforcement of sentences within the community⁴.

Brief introduction to the alternatives to prison organisation in Italy

Non-custodial measures were introduced in Italy by the prison legislation of 1975 (*Ordinamento Penitenziario*). Their forerunners were the so-called *Patronati per i liberati dal carcere*, organisations for the assistance of those released from prison, based on the Christian concept of charity and operating across the whole national territory even before Italy was unified as one nation. Their aim was to provide support in relation to two crucial aspects: juvenile crime prevention and assistance to individuals released from prison⁵.

These organisations were at first set up and managed by private citizens, and only with the new regulations introduced in 1931 did they become public and managed by the judicial bodies (De Vito, 2009, p. 50). Between the 1950s and 1960s, the *Patronati* began the experimental recruitment of personnel with professional qualifications in the field of social assistance. So, the first social workers entered the prisons and the first traineeships for the students of social services schools were organised. This was a major turning point in the prison sector since, for the first time, a portion of the personnel working inside the prisons continued their work also outside the penal institutions, in the environment where the convicts lived, with the purpose of preserving family relations and establishing a network involving the territorial entities (Breda, Coppola and Sabattini, 1999). Nevertheless, the social workers still had rather limited cultural and professional experience and their actions were still oriented towards voluntary aid and assistance (Giuffrida, 2003).

The reform introduced in 1975 brought about the creation of social service centres for adults (*Centri di Servizio Sociale per Adulti* – CSSAs). These agencies were autonomous from the prison institutions but subject to the authority of the Ministry of Justice, and

⁴ Within the Italian scientific debate, control and assistance have been interpreted as expression of the *paternal culture* and of the *maternal culture* (Sarzotti, 1999).

⁵ Just like in the United Kingdom (see Vanstone, 2008; Gard, 2007; Raynor, 2007; Worrall and Hoy, 2005), also in Italy the provision of support to convicts had philanthropic and religious origins.

their duties were specifically limited to the enforcement of measures alternative to incarceration. The first public competitive examination for the recruitment of permanent social workers was organised by the Prison Administration in 1978. One of the elements that characterised the organisation of the CSSAs was that their staff included solely social workers, who covered all the existing professional positions, from the lowest to the managerial levels. In 2005 the CSSAs were renamed UEPEs – i.e. Offices for the Enforcement of Non-Custodial Sentences (Law 154 - 27th July 2005). The renaming of the agencies seems to be linked to the request made by a portion of the officers to have their role further specified in terms of *justice* social workers (hence, integrated within the larger system of sentence enforcement), while abandoning their links to the generic sector of the social services⁶.

In just over thirty years, there has been a progressive increase in the number of cases assigned to the UEPEs. In 1976, the total number of individuals was 599, whereas it reached a staggering 50,228 in the period just before the 2006 collective pardon was approved (which drastically reduced the number of individuals subject to non-custodial measures, since it was applicable to all those who had to serve a residual sentence not exceeding three years). In June 2013, the total number of cases was 22,244. At present, there are 81 UEPEs in Italy, employing a total of 1,030 social workers (Source: Ministry of Justice, data as of 31st May 2013).

The social workers' work environment: from the prison to the external community

In the period immediately after the 1975 reform was passed, social workers performed their activities mainly inside the prisons. The relationship between the social worker and the user was established within a context in which the prison was the key element in the life of the individual. In that period, in order to be placed in the care of the social services, it was necessary for the individuals that their judgement had become final; they also needed to be in prison and to undergo, for at least three months, a procedure of *scientific personality observation* by a team including the social workers, among other professionals (educators, managers, experts). Later regulations, fully implemented by the Simeone-Saraceni law 1998⁷, brought about radical changes in the conditions for access to alternative measures and, more generally, in the cultural meaning attached to the punishment. These transformations also had major consequences on the role played by social workers as well as on their relationship with the users. In fact, the law stated that those who had to serve sentences not exceeding three years should be given the opportunity to be placed in the care of the social services directly, i.e. without being sent

⁶ These evolutions display the same pattern as the process of centralisation of probation services occurring in England and Wales, particularly in relation to the setting up of the *National Offender Management Service*, which brings probation and prison services together under the same institution (see Worrall and Hoy, 2005; Flynn, 2002; Nash, 2000).

⁷ The Simeone-Saraceni Law, signed in 1998, allows prisoners who have a sentence, or the remainder of a sentence, of three years or less, to have their sentence changed into a suspended sentence with a probation order. If they meet specific requirements (a house, a job, etc.) they thus need not enter prison.

to prison, through the mechanisms of automatic suspension of the sentence. Hence, this law was a major step in the process leading to the application of the principles of *minimal criminal law*, which includes, among other concepts, that of using imprisonment as a last resort (Ferrajoli, 1989; Baratta, 1982).

This process had obvious repercussions on the relationship between the individuals sentenced to alternative measures and the professionals entrusted with their supervision.

Basically, the difference lies in the fact that the users perceive the officers in a completely different way. When they approach the social workers, the prisoners see them as a potential way out, because they already find themselves in a state of captivity. Instead, those who are condemned while being free perceive the social workers and the offices for the enforcement of non-custodial measures as potential threats, as those who can make them go to prison. This is why, when faced with these individuals, the officers are caught slightly off-guard in relation to what they perceive as their traditional role (Justice social worker - Italy).

Some social workers describe a situation of more limited collaboration by the convicted individuals who are assigned to their offices when coming directly from a condition of freedom.

The perspective is certainly different, because those who are in prison want to be released and are willing to follow an alternative project, to comply with the rules. While the fact of not going to prison... the sentenced person is less collaborative, because this is an imposition and not a choice (Justice social worker - Italy).

Most officers find that individuals who come from a situation of freedom display lower *institutional dependence* (De Leonardis, 1990) in comparison to those who have spent a long time in prison. "Dependence binds to the institutions not only the individual receiving assistance but also the social worker. The latter too is personally involved in perpetuating a relationship of dependence" (De Leonardis, 1990: 53). In general terms, for an officer it is easier to interact with those individuals showing an higher level of *institutional dependence*, that is a lower level of autonomy and decisional empowerment (a strong "institutionalization", according to Goffman, 1961). The concept of institutional dependence is particularly interesting when investigating how the recent evolutions have affected the officer-user relationship. When the situation becomes unbalanced, i.e. the subject displays much lower levels of institutional dependence while the officer keeps being bound by the usual relationship of dependence on the institution, the latter might fall into a *state of frustration*, which is likely to affect his/her relationship with the user.

In Italy, very little empirical research has been done on the relationship between the social workers dealing with community justice and the individuals under their supervision, differently from what happens in several other countries, above all in the United States and United Kingdom, where empirical research on the topic is much more common and

better established. As one of the few and most recent studies⁸ highlights, some officers believe that placing individuals who have not spent time in prison under the supervision of the social services years after they committed a crime might generate contradictory responses to the re-educational purposes that the community justice should pursue. This is because, for the most part, those who are sentenced to alternative measures while free – often as late as ten years after their offence – have not experienced any kind of separation from their social context. We are thus witnessing a case of failed correspondence between the spirit of the law, which introduces alternative measures with the main purpose of achieving social reintegration (to be pursued above all through finding and keeping a steady job), and the actual application of the law, which might generate *perverse effects* (Boudon, 1967) that go against the attainment of the rehabilitation ideal (for instance, because work engagements become incompatible with the time and space constraints imposed by the measure).

The double task assigned to justice social workers

Many have highlighted the ambivalences implied in the term *treatment*, which is understood both as the set of formal and informal rules regulating life inside the prison establishments and as the set of activities that must be organised by the penitentiary institutions in relation to the process of social reintegration of the convicts (Mosconi, 1991). In the case of social workers, there is a contradiction between their political-institutional duties, which lead them to operate in order to guarantee public security – by ensuring that the individuals subject to non-custodial measures comply with all the relevant requirements – and their technical-professional duties, which imply working to support, assist, and help said individuals in overcoming the obstacles hindering their social reintegration (De Leonardis, 1990). The officers have very different opinions concerning the placement of their role along the assistance-control continuum. Some believe it indispensable to preserve the features and dynamics that are typical of the social services.

In comparison to the prison administration, in one way or another, our offices have always been known for being closer to the users, for providing understanding and support, and for considering the convicts as people who can redeem themselves and be reintegrated. It has always been our strong point (Justice social workers' manager - Italy).

Many other social workers, however, seem to be aware of the fact that there has been an evolution in their role over the last few years, and so they feel the need to implement control and want to be able to use the tools to exercise it.

After the 1975 reform and later modifications, the role of the prison social service has changed very much. Its main function used to be that of supporting the supervision and treatment of

⁸ The reference here is to a research by Centemeri-Fobert Veutro-Giasanti-Palidda, carried out in two UEPEs, one in the North and one in the South of Italy, by using the methods of participant observation and interviews with both the officers and the users (Giasanti, 2004).

convicts, integrating the actions and activities performed by other professions within the prisons, so that it was an additional service. But its function has progressively changed; it is no longer about social service, but specifically about the enforcement of non-custodial measures (Justice social workers' manager - Italy).

Many have argued that the renaming of the offices from “Social Service Centres for Adults” to “Offices for the Enforcement of Non-Custodial Sentences” has not brought about major changes in the organisation of the offices, but rather that it was a political choice aimed at asserting the idea of non-custodial criminal justice, against the idea of community justice in the shadow of prison (Worrall and Hoy, 2005). Nevertheless, the symbolic significance of this change clearly emerges from the interviews with some of the officers, especially in terms of a different image in the eyes of the public opinion. Hence, there seems to have been a major impact with regard to the *symbolic use of the law* (Hespanha; 1999). There is rather widespread and shared awareness that the role has shifted towards control. What is different is how the operators have decided to respond to these changes. The responses range from a resolutely *static attitude* – upheld by those who insist on the peculiar features of the social services and on the need to distinguish between their activities and the activities of other professionals working in the field of sentence enforcement – to a strong *dynamic drive*, understood as the tendency to define a new social worker profile.

This system does not evolve above all because the officers themselves do not want to change the features of their professional content. The system needs to evolve and come to a redefinition of its operating principles (mission, content of activities, meaning of the interventions, and so on). [...] It is necessary for this system to transform itself, to radically change its foundations, and to move from a system based on providing assistance, or providing social service, to a system that implements the sentences from all points of view. Also in the case of non-custodial measures, control is something that must be exercised – and this must not be subordinate to providing help. The social services must evolve in this direction (Justice social workers' manager - Italy).

Within this framework, we can better understand the request, put forth by many, to adopt a specific system for the officers' training, capable of going beyond the traditional features of social service, which can be successfully applied to other fields but not to the extremely peculiar field of community justice.

The officers' training: what kind of relationships between the academic world and the justice system?

The debate on training often becomes a stimulating occasion for discussion about more general issues, such as the role of non-custodial sentences, the function of punishment, the power relationship between the officers and the users, as well as the recent

managerial developments in the field of community justice. In this sense, the debate on training is not a purpose in itself but rather a way of interpreting broader phenomena. While in Britain it has been on-going for at least thirty years and is now consolidated (on a political, academic, and professional level), in Italy it is almost non-existent. The officers' training is discussed to a very limited extent outside the specific institutions created to deal with the matter. The lack of a broader debate involving above all the university leads to fewer chances for profitable discussions and exchanges of ideas between the two worlds, especially when compared to the British case. This paper aims at contributing to the initiation of such a debate.

While in the United Kingdom a specific training system has been in place since 1997 (the Diploma in Probation Studies – DipPS, then replaced, in 2009, by the Probation Qualification Framework (PQF)), in Italy the requirements are limited to generic training in Social Service. Specific training is delivered by the penitentiary administration upon commencement of service. In this section, we wish to focus on the main differences between the two systems and their implications. One of the most relevant differences concerns the type of relationship existing between the justice sector and the academic world, which is much closer in the U.K. than in Italy. Since the 1950s, British universities have played an active role in training probation officers. Besides this specific academic training, another important feature regards how the university and the Ministry of Justice collaborate in *planning* the training activities.

The Ministry has a strong influence on the whole training activity. However, when it wants to change the curriculum, it usually asks us for suggestions about what to change. I do not think that there is great disagreement between the universities and the Ministry about the curriculum to be implemented. First, they offer us a contract and, when it is signed, we sit down at a table with them and discuss what to do (Academic trainer - England).

An example to this end is given by the development from the DipPS to the Probation Qualification Framework, in 2009. Some academic actors presented a Consultation Paper proposal aimed at collecting views from probation officers, trade unions and stakeholders about the introduction of a new qualification framework for probation practitioners (Consultation Paper CP[L] 9/09, published on 16 June 2009). The procedure in itself and the variety of the answers collected shows the connection between the academic world and the probation services and a high propensity to discuss the process of changing.

In Italy, the relationship between the academia and the prison administration is much less consolidated than in the United Kingdom. There is a much wider gap between university education, offering generic Social Service degrees, and the specific training delivered to social workers when they begin their service in the offices for the enforcement of non-custodial measures. The specific training is planned and provided by the penitentiary administration, following ministerial guidelines and mainly using its own internal personnel. Participation by universities is sporadic and it involves lessons based on specific requests made by those who plan the courses, i.e. the prison administration personnel. The university plays no role in establishing the general objectives of the

courses during the planning phase. It must also be noted that university contributions are decreasing, due to reduced funds allocated to the payment of external lecturers, so that the lessons are generally held by the penitentiary administration's internal managers⁹.

Another key feature of the British system, which confirms the strong linkages between university and social service, concerns the professional background of most of the teachers who hold the training courses for the operators. All the interviewees in our survey used to be probation officers before becoming trainers – and this is not true only for the sample in our research: academic positions are usually accessed after a period of practical work in the social services. Instead, the distance between the academia and the prison administration in Italy seems to be confirmed by a very low number of university professors with specific professional experience. This is mainly ascribable to the fact that the Italian systems for the recruitment of personnel are much more rigid than those of the U.K., both in the academic world and in the prison administration, so that moving from one sector to the other is rarely possible.

Some members of the Italian penitentiary administration hope for closer collaborations with the universities, as confirmed by the interview reported below:

We certainly need to collaborate with the universities. In my opinion, the training we provide should be supported and promoted also through collaborations with external teachers. To receive good training, for example in prison law, you need a teacher who can explain in detail how the regulations have changed, etc.¹⁰ (Justice social workers' manager - Italy).

Hence, the Italian framework seems to be characterised by a time separation between *underpinning knowledge* and *overarching knowledge* (Nellis, 2001), i.e. between professional, technical, and operational training and academic, more theoretical education. Focus on both types of knowledge, and their simultaneous presence, is seen by many as a key element in the learning process of the officers who work in the community justice field (Nellis, 2001; Nicholson and Sellers, 2007). It is true that the first part of the social worker's training includes a more theoretical part, but this is more and more often delivered by officers internal to the prison administration, with obvious risks of *self-referentiality*. These officers certainly possess a higher degree of specific, practical

⁹ It must be underlined that this trend, also endorsed by the most recent ministerial guidelines on training, is in contrast with what is stated in Recommendation (97) 12: "Initial training methods should make use of effective learning procedures. When appropriate, use should be made of teachers who are external to the service(s) for the implementation of sanctions and measures" (art.18); and "In the provision of training, use should be made of specialists who are external to the service(s) for the implementation of sanctions and measures. Such training should be conducted in conjunction with specialised bodies external to the service(s) concerned" (art. 23).

¹⁰ In this regard, it should be noted that, out of the 33 degree courses in Social Services offered by Italian universities in academic year 2011-12, only 5 courses included an exam in Prison Law as basic subject, though most of the degree courses offer exams in Criminal Law or in Sociology of Law and Sociology of Deviance. At least six degree courses, instead, do not include any of these subjects. In any case, also the Italian Faculties of Law rarely offer courses in Prison Law.

experience in comparison to external teachers, but they cannot provide the added value of an external point of view. In other words, they can offer the highest possible amount of *underpinning knowledge*, but they cannot guarantee a sufficient amount of *overarching knowledge*. Hence, they are not likely to provide *reflection on action* (Nicholson and Sellers, 2007), which helps the officers in reflecting on the wider context in which they work, in relation to the role they play within the penal system, the function of the punishments they are called to supervise, their relationships with the users, etc. For those who work or will work in the community justice field, the ability to exercise critical thinking is a fundamental prerequisite to avoid being subject to the needs of the system and its strong interests and to produce change (Prina, 2003).

Between generic and specific training: the issue of the control-assistance continuum

One of the most interesting aspects relating to training criticalities and suggestions concerns the crucial role played by training in placing the social worker along the control-assistance continuum. It is generally believed that the generic training currently provided in Italy preserves the typical principles and modes of operation of social work.

The idea is that social service training can be applied to different contexts in different environments; it is then refined after the social worker commences service. Developing only specialised skills does not provide the students with all the disciplinary or theoretical-practical prerequisites that are needed in social service training. [...] Excessively specialised training makes them lose sight of other content (Justice social worker - Italy).

Conversely, others claim that generic social service training greatly hinders the actual management of the profession and they deem it necessary to provide specific training for the community justice officers.

Our social workers are trained for services typically focusing on the *community* and not properly on the enforcement of *non-custodial measures*. This is the major problem and the great limitation our officers have (Justice social workers' manager - Italy).

Such an opinion is often based on the acknowledgement of the control function exercised by social workers assigned to the criminal justice sector. Hence, two options are now possible.

We can set up offices in which there are various professions, and each officer is in charge of a portion of the punishment function (which is what happens in prison or in other situations). This is one approach. The other approach is to have officers trained to take charge of one type of punishment, but from all points of

view. These individuals can no longer be social workers, they must be another type of officers (Justice social workers' manager - Italy).

Nevertheless, also those who believe it necessary to keep the training within the social service field acknowledge that it would be extremely useful to address the specific issues concerning the system for the enforcement of criminal sanctions.

The students find it very difficult to get to grips with the mechanisms of the UEPEs. You always hear talk of social services in the health sector or in the local institutions. But the justice or State social services are somewhat unknown, you hear very little about them, except when studying prison law (Justice social worker - Italy).

Some are worried about the fact that there might be a relationship between the type of training received by the officers and their position along the assistance-control continuum.

Keeping the diploma in social service as the basis helps curb the dimension of control. If you overlook disciplines such as *Principles and foundations*, *Values that move the profession*, *The value of dignity* or if you do not develop all the techniques and methods of social service, you risk losing sight of the meaning of your profession (Justice social worker - Italy).

The fear is that a shift towards more specific training is very likely to distance the officers from the cultural background typical of social work, from which they learn to provide support and to limit the emphasis on control. Hence, using Bondeson's categories, training seems to have a prominent role in causing a shift from the welfare model to the paternal or punitive model.

Some experts are persuaded that the abovementioned shift has already occurred.

Training has changed through the decades because the social services and their organisation have changed. We were hired to do a certain kind of work, because prison regulations talked about help-control and strong emphasis was placed on supporting social inclusion. A lot has changed since then, even though the law has remained fundamentally the same, despite some minor modifications. It's not that change is wrong, but the culture around us has changed quite a bit too. Training has changed because social service has changed and the training needs are different (Justice social workers' manager - Italy).

In conclusion, those working in the field have very different points of view. Some wish to preserve the status quo, by clinging to the traditional principles of social service, whereas others express the need for an evolution in training methods, in order to make the officers

aware of the recent shift toward control and to provide them with the professional tools they will need. It must be underlined that both opinions go well beyond the mere pursuit of work efficiency; they rather refer to much broader issues that have to do with the function of punishment and the role of the officers. The fact that external observers find it difficult to subscribe completely to either point of view is emblematic proof of the seemingly unsolvable ambivalence between control and assistance characterising the role of those in charge of enforcing community sentences.

Conclusion: could Italy learn from probation training in England?

In the United Kingdom, the shift toward control in the probation system is expressed in a much clearer and probably much more conscious way.

For many years the training of probation officers was the same as that of social workers. But probation officers have often shown that they speak a different language from generic social workers, made of control, protection of the citizens, etc. (Academic trainer - England).

According to some authors (Smith, 2001), as for how social workers are trained, the Labour Party's mantra "tough on crime and its causes"¹¹ was mainly translated into the setting up of training courses for probation officers, aimed at developing their skills in assessing and managing risk, recognising and treating *criminogenic needs*, managing offenders, etc. "The new government accepted the definition of probation as essentially a type of punishment, and therefore, as specified in the 1997 Crime (Sentences) Act, not a measure that needed the offender's consent; social work training logically had nothing to do with the delivery an enforcement of punishment" (Smith, 2001:641).

Conversely, in Italy the emphasis placed on control is acknowledged to a much lesser extent. Our interviews clearly show that the officers are aware of the fact that the social worker's role has changed, shifting its focus from support to control. Regardless of the fact that individual officers might approve of this shift or see it as a negative evolution, they all acknowledge that a shift has occurred, and some believe that it should be taken even further. Nevertheless, said evolution has not had any explicit impact on how the officers are trained. They are still required to possess the typical social service background, whereas all the specific skills needed in the penal field are acquired during the initial training phase delivered by the penitentiary administration and in the field. This non-correspondence inevitably causes the officers to be caught unprepared when commencing their service.

Moreover, even though it has not had any significant impact on the everyday life of the social workers and has been mostly seen as a mere formality, the change in name from CSSAs to UEPEs has caused major changes, at least from a symbolic point of view. The choice of removing the tag of "social service" from the name, along with the proposal of

¹¹ See the interview with Tony Blair recorded from transmission BBC-2 (4 July 1993), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/otr/intext92-93/Blair4.7.93.html>

assigning members of the prison police to support social workers in the UEPEs, indicates a major shift towards the element of control and confirms a general trend in the penal system as a whole. However, while the shift has been made very explicit in the United Kingdom, the same is not true for Italy. The result is that the social worker's role is made even more *ambiguous*, since they receive standard social service training but then they are continuously required to respond to pressures that go in the opposite direction, i.e. towards *social panopticism* (Wacquant, 2004). Hence, the matter seems to be that of defining their role more explicitly and, at a broader level, of reflecting on the function currently played by punishment in Italian society.

To this end, can we gather that the English model could take place in Italy? It is hard (and probably inappropriate) to say that the training system is transferable *as it is* to the Italian context, because of the substantial differences between the two judicial and academic systems, on an historical, legal and socio-legal point of view. The main issue here is the probable resistance by a part of the justice social workers, as a consequence of the strong adhesion to the social service values being typical of such professional culture. Do the staff wish for a training which is more oriented toward control? It seems they have dissenting opinions to this end. Then, from an organisational point of view, we have to consider the different ways to recruit the staff: in Italy it occurs through an open competition, the most recent of which took place in 2001. The irregular frequency of the recruitment could provoke difficulties in the training planning and fulfilment.

Nevertheless, in the light of what we have shown up to this point, there are three aspects that Italy should borrow from UK. Firstly, the close relationship between the justice system and the academic world may open the door to a useful exchange, dialogue and comparison. Secondly, a training which is external to the prison administration may reduce the risks of *self-referentiality*. Thirdly, a training which is together theoretical and practical may instruct the officers without diverting them from the broader meaning of their role within the penal field. More generally, the development of the debate on such topics could also enhance the public discourse on the care-control ambivalence, examining in depth the features of such dichotomy.

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