

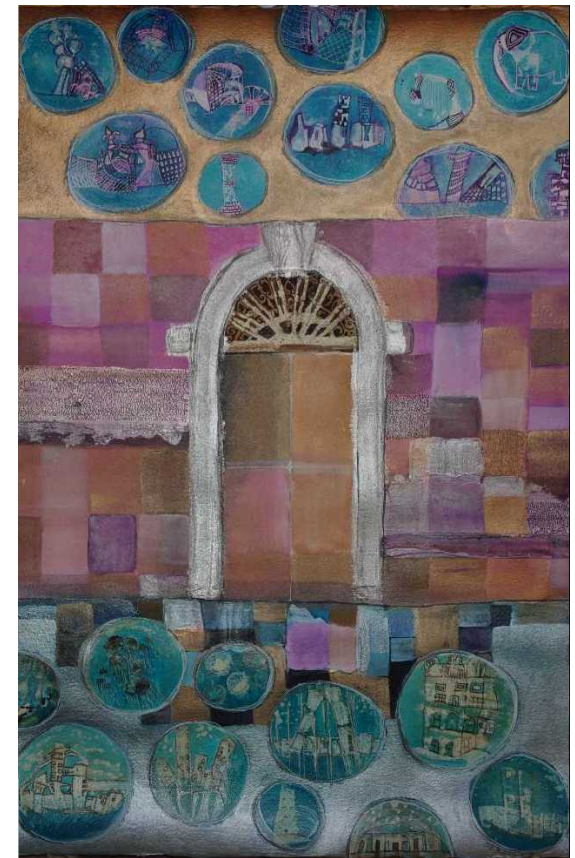
Social Policies and Social Work for Social and Environmental Justice Approaches and Challenges in an International Perspective

Blended Seminar - Monday 21 June 2021, 10:30 – 13:30

Auditorium Le Benedettine, Piazza S. Paolo a Ripa D'Arno, 16, Pisa
<https://blue.meet.garr.it/b/mat-uti-rbr-3op>

Towards a Sustainable Welfare: Is There a Room for Social Work?

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Topic: Role of welfare system, and social workers, to address the sustainability challenge.

Welfare and sustainability: welfare systems are an important *driver* of a model of development that is proving *incompatible with the ecological limits/properties* .

Current research / literature:

- A research field under development but in need of greater, deeper and faster efforts
- Not easy getting out from ideas “evolved in a previous age” (sector-specific, simplifying-anthropocentric assumptions)
- Not easy connecting grand narratives and paradigms and fieldworks about methods, practices and patterns of innovation
- Not easy drawing a map of different scientific and political perspectives, concepts and narratives

Need: more holistic, dynamic and integrated visions between social policy research and sustainability issues (Gough 2016)



Sustainable welfare: “towards the satisfaction of human needs within ecological limits, from the intergenerational and global perspective”

Ecological social policy: address social issues and risks while acknowledging “the ecological embeddedness of societies and the implications this has for the use of natural resources”

What about:

- Growth / Post-growth lifestyle? Wants vs. universal basic needs?
- Nation state vs. more sub- and supranational design?
- Current and future generations?
- Individual, category, universalism, context, organizational design?
- Bureaucratic/Managerial vs. more self-organized?

In brief:

- Which paradigms/models?
- How to approach them?
- **Which role of social work in a sustainable welfare and the transition towards it?**



Tony Fitzpatrick (2011: 3):

Sustainability “is the sine qua non of everything else”: we need a politics based around this principle [...] “If we don’t get this right, we don’t get the chance to make anything else right either”.

“Wait and see, should not be an option” ... it would end up costing much more, from every point of view: environmental, economic and social (Hodgson and Philips 2011).

Then ten Years After....



Ten Years After....

No one would say that? Maybe ...



But... *Tinkering* should not be an option either:

“no amount of political tinkering can save the old system, only a fundamental change in ideas” (Gregory Bateson)

Same view of the German high court?

The Court ruled the 2019 law on climate because it violates young people's "fundamental rights to a human future" by failing to set adequate emissions-reduction targets.

Politics of the possible? No, of the necessary

- **However political tinkering** seems the very way in which major environmental issues are addressed
- **Why?** Habits, interests, path dependency, unsolvable trade-offs and conflicts, complexity, capabilities, ideas.... ?
- **What about social policy and social work?**



Observing interdependencies between

- types of social and environmental risks,
- the policies/modes/tools to address them,
- emerging trade-offs and conflicts
- the possible role of welfare.

Through a pragmatic-systemic observation
at regional and local level

As part of a national research design that includes the application of a macro-simulation
model by ecological economists



Identified cases:

- Situations of considerable complexity
- Environmental, economic and social aspects intertwined in many ways.
- Several trade-offs and conflicts
- Multiple actors who do not often recognize each other



Few provisional data:

- Apparently limited capacity for strategic innovation (*tinkering*) at both local and regional level
- No clear (multi-level) governance, apart from industrial relations
- No evidence of eco-social policies... welfare who?
- Local social workers and services: significant but implicit role in dealing with social effects

→ **Complicated and hardly predictable transition processes**



The covid crisis: a (unheard?) stress text for the climate crisis

- What kind of crisis?
 - Which coping strategies?
 - Which effects of (greater) inequality?
 - Which understanding of the crisis?
-
- What about social policies and social workers?
 - Learning from this crisis or pushing ourselves deeper into the evolutionary vicious cycle?



Few considerations:

- Dealing with the crisis with the same obsolete ideas?
- Learning to integrate socio-economic, health, environmental knowledge and action?
- **Extraordinary welfare policies:** reflecting the typicality of systems or reveal and learning about their (in)ability for innovation, reaction, adaptation?

- **Local social workers and services:** which role in extraordinary time?

→ **An ecological – adaptation crisis or A temporary emergency??**

→ **Lessons learned toward systemic change or Back to "normal"?**

"The days never end': life under lockdown in one of Italy's poorest communities

The Zen neighbourhood, on the outskirts of Palermo, feels abandoned by the government – and the mafia have moved in



If we consider emerging data from ...

- Our research
- The Covid-19 experience
- A varied and difficult territory, with many fragil internal areas.... as well as high seismic and hydrogeological risk
- The many risks associated with climate change
- Those related to the exploitation and mismanagement of soil, biodiversity and urbanization processes

... The role of welfare and social work appears:

- Ancillary, marginal and mostly implicit, reactive and not pro-active,
- Still often fundamental in the involved communities' life,
- But based on bottom-up mobilization on a professional/voluntary basis.



Analisi del Rischio

I cambiamenti climatici in Italia



However... there are different experiences



1. USC - promoting social cohesion within a suburban neighborhood;
2. MDW - promoting socio-economic actions to relaunch development and welfare in mountain communities at risk of depopulation



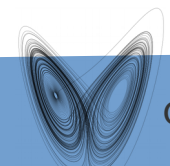
- Passive adaptation → context-based potentials for change (economics of flexibility)
- Individual users → Social actors
- Individual- and category-based principles → More context-based ones

Source: M. Villa. *The transformative role of the social investment welfare state towards sustainability. Criticisms and potentialities in fragile areas*, Sociology and Social Policy, 3/2016



However, there is nothing systematic yet:

- These are still local experiments that stem from specific intentions
- Experiments of which this country is rich in so many fields
- But where policy and sometimes even research are not particularly active and present



Discussing the role of social work in relation to possible transition frames:

Some issues:

- Time and speed of crisis and strategies
 - *Climate crisis, risks and policies*
 - *Social risks and policies*
- Varying geographies and space dynamics
 - *spatial organization and integration of policies*
 - *multi-level governance and participation*
- Welfare organizing principle:
 - *Universalism*
 - *Category-based*
 - *Context-based*
- Welfare Activation/Mobilisation:
 - *Top-down*
 - *Bottom-up*
- Sustainable Welfare Paradigms:
 - *Social investment, Eco-social investment, Retrenchment, Recalibration, Degrowth, Post-growth, Circularity, Sufficiency, Global and intergenerational*



Understanding from an ecological perspective the possible changing role of social welfare and social work in a kind of self-destructive mode of civilization:

Some points:

- **Overcoming a steady anthropocentric perspective** and ideas “which evolved in a previous age” (Espinosa and Walker 2011)
- **Integrating** social and Environmental research, practice, perspectives
- **More attention** to trans-contextual and organizational dynamics
- **Overcoming dualisms, dichotomies and category-based separations:** human/nature, social/environment, social policy/social work, welfare and social work categories
- **Developing methods** for integrating knowledge and action and different types of knowing and for supporting *transition paths* as sort of changing patterns through time, **e.g.:**

Abductive approaches - Action-research methods



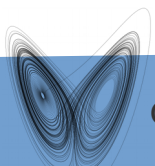
Good news?

Recently, the Italian Union (Ordine) of social assistants has introduced a principle in its deontological code:

The Social Assistant contributes to the production of development models that respect the environment, ecological sustainability and social survival, being aware of the difficulties in the relationship between human beings and the environment.

However,

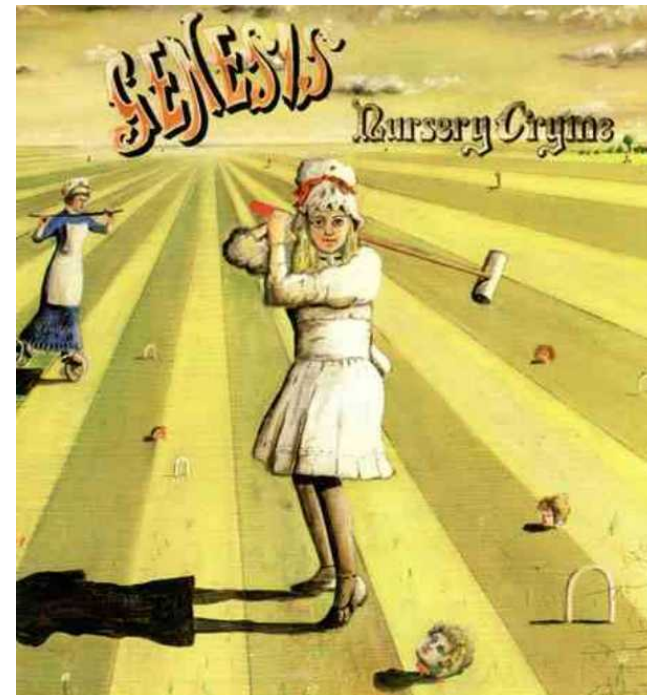
- social work in Italy, despite important differences, seems to be stuck in a dynamic of fragmentation, bureaucratization and impoverishment of territorial social policies and interventions
- that has been going on for years and makes it very difficult practicing this principle:



G. Bateson: *ecological understanding (and practice) must be ecological...*

Policy makers, practitioners, social worker and researcher:

What direction are we going to take?



In the centre of Fedora stands a metal building with a crystal globe in every room. Looking into each globe, you see a blue city, the model of a different Fedora. These are forms the city could have taken if, for one reason or another, it had not become what we see today. On the map of your empire, O Great Khan, there must be room both for the big Fedora and for the little ones in glass globes. Not because all real, but because just supposed. The one contains what is accepted as necessary although it's not yet so; the others, what is imagined as possible and a moment later no longer.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*
Painting: Mariella Bertolio

Thank you for your attention!

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