Foreword. Why a mosaic on social work around the world is a picture by itself

A global view on what social work is around the world is a necessity for everybody, social worker or scholar, who are involved in international activity or interested in having a more critical and comparative reflection on social work training and education in his or her own country.

The official global definition of social work that was last revised in 2014 provides a common ground and understanding that is valid everywhere in the world. This, together with some basic literature read and studied almost everywhere, represents a good starting point to a wider and worldwide perspective. Nevertheless, sometimes it is useful to go deeper into the national situations, to draw specific pictures of them so to highlight commonalities and differences.

The aim of this special issue of *Visioni LatinoAmericane* entitled «Social work around the world. Colours and shapes in a complex mosaic» offers the reader perspectives about social work practice and education in ten countries across three continents; namely Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, England, Italy, Romania, Russia, Spain, South Africa and United States of America. In addition, a greater understanding of what «International social work» means will become better understood.

Most of articles in this special issue originate from two initiatives aimed to create international connections in social work education and research.

The first is the annual international seminar jointly organized by Chicago Loyola University, University of Calabria and University of Milano Bicocca. The first two editions of the Italo-American seminar took place at the headquarters of Loyola Chicago University in Rome

where social work teachers and students from Loyola and four Italian universities (Calabria, Milano Bicocca, Parma, Trieste) gathered to study and discuss issues related to migration (2009) and aging society (2010). Then University of Calabria welcomed Italian and American students interested in studying social work with families and children (2011) and social work fighting against poverty (2012). This 2013 seminar was focused on social work in the international arena comparing different national realities, with specific reference to the efforts made by social workers to work on/with clients/users, organizations and communities. This exploration was grounded in the understanding of the major features related with social work in eight countries located in three different continents and part of the paper presented there have been revised and proposed in this issue of *Visioni LatinoAmericane*.

Scholars from some of these countries came to Italy because of the second events that made possible the realization of this special issue of *Visioni LatinoAmericane*: the beginning of the Irses Marie Curie research «Civil engagement in social work. Developing global models». This program involved universities from 10 countries and was aimed at analysing the relationship between social work and civil society, through the description of social policy structures and reform processes, of civil society institutions and configurations, of socio-political contexts plus the role and position of social work within such contexts. The network created in this occasion produced some of the contributions in this special edition.

The lucky coincidence of the two events above, the kind availability of scholars from other two countries not involved in the mentioned programs (Costa Rica and Chile) and the interest expressed by Francesco Lazzari, editor of *Visioni LatinoAmericane*, have brought to this issue to fruition.

The articles are all describing the state of the art of the social work education and practice in the ten countries involved, but in some cases the Authors wanted to give some additional focuses: for example, on the historical background (Chile and Italy), on social problems and situation arising after the end of Ussr (Russia) and of the apartheid (South Africa), on the involvement of the social workers in the movement against the indiscriminate cuts in welfare state (Spain), on the impact of neoliberalism and managerialism on social work (England).

A mosaic is made by setting small colored pieces of stone or other material into a surface to form an image or a decorative design. Are the eleven tesserae, that is the eleven articles in the next pages, forming a composite picture? Do they show more differences or similarities? Does social work really have a strong common base or each national declination is significantly different?

The readers will give their own answers but the drawing emerging from the national «snapshots» in the next pages definitely confirms that everywhere, as stated by the global definition mentioned above, «social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people».

Of course, in many parts of the world social work has still to fight (or has to start again to fight) to reaffirm its role and mission, but it is clear that a global view, understanding and action can contribute to a successful, even if never-ending, walk in that direction.