

Ivana Bitto

Faculty of Educational Sciences
University of Messina
Messina, Italy
E-Mail: ibitto@unime.it

**"Onlus" organizations:
the Italian way to cope with the end of the Social State**

In our changing world, characterized by demographical modifications, global economy and the urgent necessity to cut down social prices and taxes, trying to maintain an adequate level of social protection, the most urgent question for the social worker, and for the legislators as well, is to clarify which kind of social model we are building, or just hypothesizing, for the future. Two contrasting position animate the question of the possible future of the Welfare State in Europe:

- the former one tends to reduce unequivocally all costs concerning public services, social security, health and assistance in order to balance the national budgets;
- the latter one proposes to conciliate strictness and sacrifices to find a balance point between State budget, market and civil society.

Considering what the Beveridge Report defines as Welfare State, social services are the central point for all European social systems: they encourage social inclusion and cohesion, promoting the fundamental rights of the citizens. The reform of the Welfare State, so far proposed or realized, engraves on the relationship between public and private. In the evolution of social expenditure in western countries, after the 2nd World War, it is possible to individuate two different phases: the steady growth between the 50's and the 70's and the consequent turnabout in the 80's. Since then the private element in the social expenditure tends to spread everywhere, even if the increasing importance of market logic fortunately didn't coincide with the statement of a model of liberal state. It follows that, the most important changes concerns public services. The natural consequence of this process is that each year every single State invests less in the tertiary, compromising the life's quality of the citizens. The challenge of a fair social state in a time of uncertainty is frequently taken up by the private initiative. NGO are, in effect, the promoters of the social self help, of micro entrepreneurs, social care and assistance, health and voluntary services. In Italy, as in the rest of the European countries, the NGO are a very important social actor: they assure cohesion and inclusion in the social fabric: these participative organizations provide services close to people, finding their own motivation in their peculiar characteristic, i.e. the main objective of NGO is not to gain but to be socially useful. Besides, as voluntary actors, they stay in the middle of the turbulent discourses about partnerships between public and private subjects. Nevertheless, they manage to let people regain the civil social dimension, against the increasing individualism. The traditional NGO are in Italy strictly controlled and supervised by the State; to found a NGO it is necessary to be screened and admitted after a very difficult public selection. After this, the NGO can become the certification and can start its activity. NGO are a sort of voluntary association, but not 100%

based on voluntary work. Volunteers are mostly only those who decide to work for the NGO, becoming just a refund of expenses; the organizing and administrative part is advocated to professional actors. Besides NGO do exist in Italy other forms of voluntary associations, that carry out with success the task of an inadequate Welfare State: the so called ONLUS- acronym for No Profit Organizations for Social Utility- are typologies of voluntary organizations that work in the field of social solidarity, both concerning the final individual consumers or the collectivity. The different operational sectors are:

- Social and socio-sanitary assistance;
- Charity;
- Education;
- Training;
- Amateur sport;
- Tutelage, promotion and valorization of historical and artistic patrimony;
- Tutelage and valorization of nature and environment, arts and culture;
- Tutelage of civil rights;
- Particular Scientific research- for example on behalf of Universities.

The main difference between No profit organizations and ONLUS consists of the fact that ONLUS' activities are directed to third party, not to the members of the associations themselves. The juridical nature of the ONLUS is regulated by the DL n° 460/04.12.1997 and it contains interesting tax reliefs that exempts them to any form of taxation. ONLUS hire every year more than 420.000 people and assure assistance and social engagement in a country where the mixed social model is evolving (or involving) to an unacceptable liberal state where people are getting more and more alone against everyday problems and where the unemployment level is becoming really critical.

Naturally, the fiscal privileges accorded to the ONLUS represent a very interesting incentive for the private initiative and raise doubts about the genuine good nature of the organizations: all the same, ONLUS manage to get jobs for young people and social workers who can't find their place in our feeble professional society and contribute to improve the citizens' quality of life. And, in our opinion, the valorization of these basic historical, cultural, traditional values- solidarity and occupation- should be the distinguishing mark of the in fieri European integration.