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## **Social Work Practice in Time of Crises**

What social work deliver? Who benefits? In which interest?

Starting from these three questions we will try to discuss about social work role, its weakness and its strength in times of crisis. In fact, in the face of this dramatic global and financial-economic decline social work might constitute a new starting point to rebuild (or reenact) the society in a newer light. As we can notice, at this first stage of crisis existing forms of public help, at least in Italy, are becoming weaker and weaker because of the constriction of the public intervention. In the meanwhile, the extent of poverty is growing dramatically with long-term effects on life chances of all the population. It's time to think upon the options for social work in order to deliver the professional and effective support. The discussion should go out of the dualism public-private practice in social services, including third sector as a middle range. Considering that economic resources are becoming fewer and fewer in the near future Governments will be reticent to put money in social services. So, social work as a profession should make a new strategy up both sharing public resources with other professions and trying to provide new useful services into the market. Given that in the Italian context social work came to the life from the outside of public social services, in order to redefine its role, could be helpful to take a look at the roots of the profession. In fact, since now its value and its methods are not completely integrated in the institutional frame of reference (Florea 1966) and this fact might be an opportunity of making coherence with the future socio-political organization. Differently from Italy it is possible to notice that in Western World social work originated more in the civil society, depending on the social policy structure of the respective country. For instance, in Germany the city administration launched a kind of social work service named "Elberfeld System" while in the UK and US private charities – in opposition to public services – gave rise to social work services like the Charity Organization Societies (Lorenz 2007). At this purpose, trying to get a deeper understanding of its origins it is necessary to remark that one of the most important social work concern is enabling people to make use of social and community resources. Too often social workers have been seen as professionals doing little more than supervising the deterioration of people's lives, without taking into consideration that professional practice is being performed serving in a cross day-to-day practice both middle and high-class citizens as well. In order to

get helpful insights it is supportive to make a virtual journey through the history of the Italian social work institutionalization process.

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