COMMENTARY TO "LOBBYING FOR ENDORSEMENT OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA"

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Can the Australian Struggle also happen in Italy?

The struggle to have community psychology endorsed as one of the recognized psychological specialization among the health professions could not happen in Italy in quite the same form, since in our country the most prestigious professions (doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers etc.) are regulated through "professional orders" , which are instituted through specific laws passed in Parliament. University graduates aspiring to practice one of these "legalized" professions must pass a special examination (similar to the bar exam for lawyers in the United States) to become members of the professional order. Different professions can create scientific or professional associations, which have less prestige and power than professional orders. In fact, many requests by professional associations to become an order often remain in the form of proposed laws for years in the Italian parliament. In Italy, a big battle, which required most of the same lobbying described by our Australian colleagues, actually took place in the seventies and eighties to obtain the passage of this kind of law.

They were years of intense debate, and of open conflict with the Medical Order. Psychologists had to gain the approval of most parties to try to have the law passed. The Italian Scientific Psychological Association (SIPS), which had less than a thousand members in the sixties grew tremendously after the first college degrees in Psychology were instituted in 1970 at the University of Rome and Padova; and students, mostly female, flocked to them. In the seventies several laws were passed aimed at moving educational, social and health services from secondary and tertiary prevention to primary prevention, encouraging citizen participation, and networking among services. All these laws provided new job opportunities for psychologists who were looking for new professional roles. In this climate, in fact I published, under the sponsorship of Augusto Palmonari and Bruna Zani, social psychologists from the University of Bologna, who had invited me to hold a seminar on my experiences in community psychology in the United States[12] the first Italian article (Francescato

2007 a), on community psychology, which was entitled: "Community Psychology: a new role for psychologists?" The late seventies and early eighties saw the birth of community psychology in Italy, the first books were published (Francescato 1977b, Palmonari and Zani 1980) and Community Psychology became a Division of SIPS, in 1981.

In the early eighties there was still no public university training in community psychology, but the new division of SIPS, of which I was the first National coordinator, promoted theoretical seminars, training sessions, debates and annual conferences, and the division grew to have as many as 300 members including teachers, social workers, and other non-psychologists interested in community psychology. We allied ourselves with social and clinical psychologists in academia to obtain the introduction of community psychology in the psychology degree programs. It took several years of lobbying because then the Italian university system was very centralized and the introduction of new subjects had to be approved not only at the university level, but also at the national level. For years I taught informally community psychology contents in a course called, "Personality investigation techniques", while other Italian psychologists taught CP in the their social psychology or clinical psychology courses. Only in 1985 I became the first Professor in community psychology. After much struggle in 1986 a major national reform was passed, which changed from four to five years, the academic degree granting programs in psychology: CP was finally formally introduced as a fundamental discipline and began to be taught in all major Italian universities offering a new degree in clinical and community psychology. Both academic and professional psychologists lobbied together to get legal endorsement for the profession and finally in 1989, the Italian Parliament passed law Number 56, which created the Professional Order of Psychologists.

After winning the battle for the creation of the Order, SIPS decided to terminate its existence. In

see Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky, & Montero, 2007; Vazquez Rivera, 2010 and Francescato 2007 and 2008).

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[12] For more information in English on the development of community psychology in Italy

its place the Italian Association of Psychologists (AIP) was created with experimental, clinical, work and organization, health, social, developmental and other divisions. Community psychologists decided instead to create an independent organization and so SIPCO (Italian Society of Community Psychology) was born in 1994. Most Italian psychologists work in private practice as psychotherapists; community psychologists work in the third sector in cooperatives, volunteer organizations and in the territorial services of public health organizations, where they are hired as psychologists, the professional title protected by the Order of Psychologists. In contrast to the Australian experience, Italian psychologists are not hired formally as clinical or community or health psychologists. In Italy, a national law passed in 1978 as a major health reform, requires psychologists to be present in what are called "territorial services" which include mental health centers, and a variety of services that cater to the needs of women, children, people with handicaps or of people with behavioral problems such as drug abuse, alcohol, abuse etc. However, not all territorial services have full time psychologists on their staff because every Italian region has its own specific law, which may "permit" but not "require" hiring of psychologists. Furthermore, to cut surging health expenses in the last decade, no new hiring have been allowed. Only hiring pro –tempore (for definite periods ranging from a few months to two years) have been permitted to substitute psychologists on maternity or sickness leave. Most psychologists were hired by these territorial services in the 70's and 80's, but are now reaching retirement and are not often being replaced. The situation is even worse for psychologists who want to work in hospitals. Very few regions have laws that require the presence of psychologists among hospital staff, mostly permit the employment of psychologists, but do not make it compulsory to do so. So the actual number of psychologists present in Italian hospitals in 2007 varied widely ranging from 276 in Lombardy, where the law does not require but permits the presence of psychologists in hospitals, to one in the southern region of Molise**.** The Order of Psychologists has now about 90,000 members, about one third of all psychologists in Europe. The phenomenal growth of psychology in Italy has created new problems since more than a third of psychologists are unemployed, under-employed or employed in jobs which do not involve professional psychological skills. So Italian universities are now pressured to cut the number of students they admit in psychology for undergraduate and graduate training. This year for instance, the University of Sapienza at Rome,

where I teach, which in 1970 instituted the first psychology degree in Italy, has cut by one-half his maximum student enrollment in its undergraduate three-year bachelor degrees. In general, University funds also have been cut for doctoral programs.

Advantages and disadvantages of community psychology association (SIPCO), not formally connected to organized psychology (AIP)

If one chooses as a criterium the number of members, creating a separate community psychology association (SIPCO)not connected with AIP, has been a disadvantage. While the old Division of community psychology within SIPS reached a maximum of 400 members under the coordination of Marco Traversi (prematurely deceased after having done a wonderful job of spreading CP among professionals), SIPCO members have been fewer, ranging from 50 to a 100, and they have been mostly academics and graduate students, from 1994 to the present. However, the decision to create a separate association SIPCO has allowed community psychology a certain amount of visibility and given it the freedom to promote yearly seminars and conferences on topics of specific interest for community psychology such as empowerment and self-help, community psychology and politics, adolescents needs and social service, intercultural issues and empowerment, and European-Mediterranean intercultural dialogue. SIPCO has held biannual conferences in prevention for schools and communities and also promoted the birth of the first Italian Community Psychology journal, It also publishes a newsletter and has a site (http://www.sipco.it). Among the most important achievements of SIPCO is the organization of the first European Congress of Community Psychology in Rome in 1995, where the European Network of Community Psychology (ENCP) was created and a European perspective to community psychology began to emerge (Francescato and Tomai 2001). ENCP promoted the foundation of the European Community Psychology Association (ECPA) in 2004.

Italian community psychologists have developed and refined a variety of tools to deal with social and human problems and to promote empowerment at the individual, group, organizational and community levels. Among these are: (a) community profiling and network building to identify strength and problem areas of a local community, along eight profiles, and to promote broadly networked community projects (Francescato, 2007; Francescato, Solimeno, Mebane, & Tomai, 2009; Martini & Torti, 2003); (b) multidimensional organizational analyses to

empower people working in organizations, to detect interconnections among points of strengths and problems areas along four organizational dimensions, and to plan desired organizational changes (Francescato, 2007, 2008; Francescato, Tomai, & Solimeno 2008; and Francescato, Mebane, Benedetti, Rosa, Solimeno, & Tomai 2010); and (c) affective education and empowerment training, to help people belonging to the same small groups to improve their group skills, solve conflicts and create a mutual help climate (Francescato 2007; Francescato, Solimeno, Mebane, Tomai, 2009.

All of these participatory intervention strategies use among other tools, personal, organizational, social and media narratives (Francescato, 2007, 2008, 2010; Martini & Torti, 2003. Other instruments include: mediation strategies for handling conflicts among family members and social groups, and ways to promote and support both conventional and new forms of civic and political participation, as well as to promote self-help groups (Cicognani & Zani, 2009; Zani 2012). Several Italian community psychologists have made important theoretical contributions, integrating constructivist and neo-positivistic perspectives, or revisiting the theoretical frameworks of Latin American writers who focus on a critical analysis of reality and on action aimed at social change and the transformation of existing power relations (Amerio, 2004; Zani 2012). Francescato, Tomai, and Ghirelli (2002) have formulated some guiding principles for a 'theory of practice' that outline how community psychology views the interaction between person and context, considering the complexity of the social system, focusing on protective factors and on the crucial role of personal and social narratives and on the link between individual empowerment and collective political struggle (Francescato, Arcidiacono, Albanese, & Mannarini, 2007). Some Italian researchers have redefined key concepts such as social capital and sense of community underlining also the dark side of these phenomena. People can have a strong sense of community and high social capital but be very hostile to newcomers, or they can have a high sense of belonging and still have negative emotions toward their community, and mistrust local institutions and other citizens (Arcidiacono & Procentese, 2005; Cicognani & Zani, 2009; Marta & Scabini, 2003). Others have re-examined the various historical meanings of 'community', from those rooted in a territory to virtual online communities (Francescato, Tomai, & Mebane, 2006; Mannarini, 2009; Mebane, Francescato, Porcelli, Iannone, & Attanasio, 2008; Reich et al. (2007), and Vazquez Rivera (2010)).

SIPCO also tried to promote academic CP in Italy, but with mixed results. Since the late 90s, various major legal reforms have taken place in Italian Universities, granting them much more autonomy than in the past. This led to CP being taught in several universities as part of widely different psychology degree programs, focused on clinical, social, educational and work psychology. The drawback has been that while from 1986 to 1995 CP was a compulsory subject for all clinical and community psychology 5-year degree students, the new reforms created two levels of degrees: a three-year undergraduate and a two-year Master degree program, in which universities were free to offer or not to offer community courses. So community psychology disappeared in some curricula and prospered in others. For instance, Lecce, Torino and Palermo promoted the first interfaculty community psychology doctoral program was opened, which trained several young community psychologists. Now this doctorial program has been closed, so graduate students now learn community psychology only within social, educational and health doctoral programs. Today community psychology is taught in about 30 undergraduate and Master level degree programs, but as several senior community psychologists have retired in Torino and Lecce, or are near retirement, and few new university positions have been created, the prospects for community psychology in Italy are not too bright. Now, there is no public doctoral program in CP, and there are only scant opportunities for some professional training in CPin only one of the more than 300 private post graduate schools, who train for four years psychologists with a Master Degree to become therapists (ASPIC in Rome offers a training in both psychotherapy and community psychology). C P remains a minority subject both in academia and in professional areas. Community psychologists are less likely to be supported in psychology departments, since attention and funding are going increasingly to neuroscience. Moreover, as state funds for education are cut because of the financial crisis, the field is getting even more marginalized within psychology departments. The interdisciplinary attitude of CP has a detrimental effect on its institutionalization as a psychological sub-discipline. The site of the National Order does not even mention community psychology among the professional areas of employment. We have no reliable data today on how many community psychologists actually work in Italy. We know for certain we will have to lobby as hard as our Australian colleagues and be very creative in the next few years if we want CP to sail over troubles waters in Italy.

The paradox of community psychology in Italy today: more and more needed and less and less offered in this period of crisis

Elsewhere (Francescato & Zani 2010) we have outlined how the recent economic crisis has worsened the lot of the poorest and most marginalized groups of citizens, increased the number of people unemployed and underemployed, and augmented fears for the future in many segments of the population, living in contexts already beset by environmental, social, political and financial problems such as found in Italy. As community psychology theorists have postulated, human problems have a social side, because most problems are born in social contexts and in them one can find the cultural and material tools to seek their solution, but they have also an individual side because it is a person who suffers and who must cope with them. Given our hierarchical social contexts, which offer opportunities and obstacles in an unequal manner for different groups of persons, it is likely that most obstacles, and most suffering will increasingly be faced by less empowered groups, who will also have less access to services, have more health problems and suffer more family disruptions. The worsening of the crisis in Europe has already increased in the last two years personal, interpersonal and family conflicts along pre-existing social divides: between natives and immigrants, women and men, young and old, who are now pitted against each other to compete for fewer resources, and find it harder to live together.

The poor–rich, migrants–native differences and the generational and gender gaps create multilevel problems that would be best handled with a community psychology oriented approach.. These complex problems could best be tackled through community psychology programs that are based on the guiding principles that problems have to be faced simultaneously on several levels since transactions among individuals and the hierarchical social contexts are multidirectional and occur at multiple levels (other individuals, small groups, organizations, local and virtual communities (Francescato & Tomai, 2001).CP programs, however, are less likely to be financed, deepening the social justice imbalance already prevailing in most European countries, especially in countries beset by heavy national debts such as Italy. To make CP more visible outside academia is particularly crucial in this period of economic crisis, since the way problems are tackled could be modified utilizing a CP perspective. In fact community psychologists underline that structural and economic interventions, which are generally implemented when countries face economic crisis,

are needed but are not sufficient. We have also to work with people, by rebuilding their trust, and rekindling interpersonal and social ties. Community psychologists therefore, have to increase the visibility of the evidence that policies and intervention based on CP's values of empowerment, participation and social justice produce more collective and individual well-being than those deriving from predominant neo-liberalistic, competition-oriented and consumerist values. Community psychologists need to become more media oriented, using radio, TV and above all the Internet to make CPmore known. We need to provide compelling evidence that community psychologists have the competencies to tackle (with other professionals) today's complex problems. Community psychologists should document that they can act as successful facilitators in increasing: a) social ties and trust; b) empowerment of individuals, small groups, organizations and communities; c) active participation in local communities and politics; d) constructive solution of conflicts; e) consolidation of social networks; and e) the sense of community.

The decrease in the socio-political empowerment of European youth is particularly troublesome for CP, which is becoming all over the world mostly a female profession (Mebane, 2008; Vazquez Rivera, 2010). CP unites clinical psychology's traditional concern with the welfare of the individual with an interest in the legislative and political processes that create the conditions in which individuals live. However, the increasing feminization of psychology students may make it harder to get them interested in CP. Women's cultural heritage pushes them toward the 'caring professions', while the same cultural heritage coupled with the present individualistic Weltanschauung pushes them toward the 'privatization' of social problems, and furthers their interests toward clinical psychology. In spite of changes promoted by feminism, Italian women, for instance, are still less likely than men to be actively interested in politics or to become activists in political parties and movements, and much less likely than men to occupy top positions in most fields (Gelli, 2009; Mebane, 2008) Moreover, in most Italian degree programs, psychology majors are offered dozens of subjects related to clinical topics, yet very few require students to take courses like contemporary history, sociology, economics, political psychology or gender studies, which could provide opportunities for students to understand the relevance of politics to their professional careers and their personal lives. Therefore, we may in the future fail to have an adequate number of motivated female students, who will choose CP as their

specialty. And obviously we need to recruit more males in psychology. We need to promote interdisciplinary endeavors, to better identify our unique contributions and areas of theoretical and methodological overlaps with other disciplines. To enhance the academic standing of community psychology, we have to develop innovative strategic alliances and create joint programs with other disciplines (not only sociology or pedagogy but also political science, urban planning, architecture and economy). We have to improve graduate training giving students practical opportunities to become skilled not only in action research and program evaluation, as now occurs in most programs, but also in intervention methodologies at the individual, small group, organizational and community levels (Francescato, 2007; Reich et al., 2007).

At a more general cultural level, support for the values of social justice and equality is dwindling, compared to the seventies and early eighties when CP first developed in Italy. Then, political and social engagement was favored by the existence of a huge variety of social movements fighting for collective goals. Today individualism prevails; thanks to popular media programs, which glorify values of individual success, the restless pursuit of visibility, money and entertainment. Is CP then going to die or become hopelessly marginalized in these troubling socio-economic, cultural and academic contexts?

Undoubtedly in the near future CP in Italy will have to face besides the problems already outlined other challenges which require us to act on many different level. We also need to evaluate more the efficacy and efficiency of different action strategies, and to develop methodologies which are also more respectful of the decision-making capacities of the people we work with. We have to overcome the gap between academic and professionals. Many psychologists and other professionals work in health and social services, in organizational and community planning or in human resources departments using CP tools but having almost no contact with academic CP. How to secure funds through private and public new sources is another key issue. We still hope that the European Union will keep financing action research in the health and social domains. However, we need to find other sources of private funding besides the European Union (foundations, unions, ethical banks, professional associations, etc.). Making our discipline more visible could help in securing new sources of funding.

How to exploit the opportunities provided by virtual communities to promote social capital is yet another challenge facing community psychology in general. Different action studies have shown that integrating CSCL (Computer Supported Collaborative Learning) and community psychology interventions can increase social efficacy, socio-political empowerment, bonding and bridging social capital in university and high school students (Mebane et al., 2008; Tomai, Rosa, Mebane, D'Acunti, Benedetti, & Francescato, 2009). We need to study how belonging to Facebook and other online settings affects the social capital of users, and how sense of community, and other key constructs can or cannot be applied in virtual communities.

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