

Gruppo Dottorandi Assistenti Sociali (GDAS): the network of Italian PhD students in Social Work

Urban Nothdurfter, Bolzano (Italy)

Since the academic year 2008/2009 Italian PhD students in Social Work have been organizing themselves in a national network. The initiative started quite spontaneously with the idea to create a mailing list in order to get in contact and to keep each other posted about different news and special course offers in their Doctoral Schools. This need is due to the special situation of PhD programs in Social Work in Italian universities. With the exception of the University of Trieste, which offered the first PhD programme in Social Work in the academic year 1993/1994 (even if the former academic preparation in Social Work did not allow to access the programme: social workers interested in doing a PhD had to hold an academic degree in another (!) discipline, such as Sociology, Psychology or Political sciences), PhD programmes in Social Work have been developed only in recent times. It was only with the implementing of the higher education reform, known as the so called 'Bologna process', that Social Work was recognized as a full academic discipline with qualifications in all the three academic cycles (Bachelor, Master, PhD). However, although PhD programmes in Social Work were introduced in some Italian universities, they have been integrated in other Doctoral Schools in the Social Sciences or in Organizational and Administrative Studies. On the one hand this fact has doubtlessly the advantage to promote interdisciplinary approaches and the education of researchers in the social work fields with a sophisticated social research training helps to strengthen the visibility of social work research within the Social Sciences in general. On the other – due to the fact that both PhD students and tenured academics with a social work background are still very few – the PhD programs in Social Work often lack of specific course offers in Social Work and Social Policy and of attention to the specifics of social work research. This was the main reason for the creation of the network GDAS, which allows Italian PhD students in Social Work to share their experiences, to learn from each other and to make their own contribution to the further development of academic Social Work in Italy. The self-conception of the network is defined as a self-organized and independent network of PhD students whose interlocutors should be on the one hand the academia, namely the different departments and faculties offering a PhD programme in Social Work as well as the Italian Association of Teachers in Social Work (AIDOSS) and on the other one the professional community of social workers in Italy, represented by the National Council of the Professional Order of Social Workers. The specific aims of the network are:

- the exchange of information and the creation of a peer setting for processes of non-formal learning between PhD students in Social Work with a qualification as professional social workers,
- the creation of a forum for innovative discussions on social work theory and practice,
- the development of a clearer profile of researchers and academics in the social work fields and the promotion of their visibility in the national and international academic context,
- the organization of meetings and seminars on central issues and innovative approaches in social work research.

The first seminar organized by the network GDAS took place on the 6th of march 2010 at the University of Salento in Lecce. The main topic of the seminar was “The sense of Social Work in a changing society”. All the PhD students got the opportunity to make a short presentation

addressing this topic from different perspectives and on the basis of their own empirical and theoretical work. On invitation of the network two prominent Italian social work scholars, Prof. Silvia Fargion (Free University of Bolzano) and Prof. Fabio Folgheraiter (Catholic University of Milan) were attached to the seminar as 'supervisors'. Their comments on the presentations as well as their encouragement were an inspiring impulse for the further development of the network and its activities.

This post has no tag