SW&S | Social Work and Society
International Online Journal

The challenges for social work under the pressures of neoliberal policies: a study of policy changes in the Italian probation

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1   Introduction and hypothesis

The subject of this study is the Italian probation service, which was once characterized by the principle of promoting 'alternative measures to prison' and the subsequent impact of the so-called Mastella episode.

This event concerned the following changes in the Italian justice system. The Italian attorney general Mastella proposed four different draft proposals for legal changes between April and November 2007. In every draft, the goals were the same: he wanted to involve the penitentiary police in the management of alternative measures to imprisonment with a clear orientation towards the priority of social control.

The social workers employed in the UEPEs (Ufficio Esecuzione Penale Esterna), the services in charge of probation in Italy, took a position against this change as labour union representatives and as professional groups. In both cases, they were opposed to the attorney general's proposals and sometimes they sharply criticized those labour unions that agreed with the attorney general. The government sustaining Mastella act fell, therefore we do not know if the campaign by social workers has been effective or not. However, proposals similar to the Mastella Act are still useful in the present government. Actually, it is both trying to reorganize UEPEs and to introduce new rules to control persons under an alternative measure to prison swhich are quite similar to those contained in the Mastella act. The chances of being approved are few ones; however, if so, it would seem that the campaign of social workers originated as a reaction to the Mastella proposal was ineffective.

This event will be interpreted both by analyzing the links between the erosion of the welfare principles in the penal system and the retrenchment of the welfare state in general and by re-considering a new role of the state in the direction of governmentality, where control has been widespread and deeply embedded in the society (Rose 2000; Miller and Rose 2008; Houdt and Schinkell 2014); therefore the purpose is to stand the influence of the neoliberal ideology on an area of welfare in which the balance between care and control has always been precarious; besides the professional arguments in favour of 'care' can apparently be easily dismantled by political references to popular sentiments in favour of punishment (Garland 2001; Wacquant.2006; Wacquant and Gonnella, 2013).

Reminding the analysis mentioned above, the hypothesis is that in recent decades the principle of welfare in the Italian penal system has become eroded and replaced by punishment, deterrent, and control which, even if hidden, became more and more productive (Rose 2009).

The interest for the penal system models is that, according to both Dean (1999) and Hallsworth and Lea (2011), in the awakening of the advance of neoliberal policies in countries like the UK and US , the welfare state model, even if it may be considered essential for the modern capitalism (Garland 2014), is gradually modified thanks to a discourse among each actor and practitioner of penal system (Garland, 2014a; Garland 2014b; Garland 2019), so that the classical welfare state model is being replaced by a different one characterized by the UK and US promotion of a security state (Hallsworth and Lea 2011): therefore, the goals of welfare as a public good are no longer being dominantly pursued and are being replaced by goals emphasizing public law and order. So far, discourses are drawn from the world of social science, law, penal reform, and government action and these primary materials are situated within a broader account of social change derived from a prior scholarship. If these changes were also involving Italian society, social workers employed in the penal system would find new challenges in front of them. In particular, it will be argued that the response by the social work profession has been ineffective on account of a professional orientation generally prevailing among Italian social workers that under-values responsibilities for engagement in social policy processes (Trivellato and Lorenz, 2010). According to Trivellato and Lorenz, social workers are inclined to give more emphasis on their work to relationship issues at personal, individual level; social workers only sporadically consider competencies linked to the political dimension; in particular they do not seem to be sufficiently prepared to consider their work from a broader sociological perspective and to use it to develop a political role in their interventions (Lorenz & Trivellato, 2010).

This hypothesis can be validated or not by analyzing how social workers of the UEPEs argued their position during the Mastella's episode. Some topics as public security, rehabilitation and inclusion can be dealt with considering or not some sociological perspectives and political analysis useful to develop political practice. About security Rose (2000), Miller and Rose (2008), and the above mentioned Hallsworth and Lea (2011) trace the new policy context featuring the erosion of welfare state. Therefore inclusion and rehabilitation have been interpreted in very different and sharply divergent ways: at one hand the labelling theory of Matza and Sykes (Matza & Sykes, 1957; Matza, 1964) suggests that rehabilitation and inclusion protect citizenship from a stigmatization process, at the other hand Pollack (2010) highlights and criticizes a new way of labelling oriented to reduce the potential risk of the offender despite stigmatization; moreover rehabilitation, at first conceived as fundamental for probation, since the '70s in the US has been considered as "went" (Foucault, Simon, and Elden 2017), and now it is considered both as rhetoric stuff (Lynch, 2000), and deeply influenced by the neoliberal effects of responsibilization of offenders (Kemshall 2002).

The hypothesis is that if social workers considered these theories, they would have valid arguments to oppose policies eroding penal welfare; therefore the consideration mentioned above by Lorenz and Trivellato could not have been applied for social workers of the UEPEs.

2   Context of the research and significance of the events

2.1 The social policy context
In general, one of the most essential features of the welfare state decline in recent decades in most European welfare systems was the erosion of a prevailing welfare consensus caused by

neoliberalism[1]. This phenomenon deeply influenced the relationships between social workers and the users of social services by giving them responsibility for their weak social position (Clarke. 2005, Gray 2009, Brown 2012). Before examining the details of the retrenchment of the welfare state in Italy (Sabattini, 2009; Pizzuti, 2019), it is necessary to deal with some general features of neoliberalism. Esping-Andersen (1994) considers neoliberal principles to have a significant impact on current European welfare state models. Therefore, neoliberalism has become one of the determining features of welfare policies, thereby deepening rather than mitigating the crisis of the welfare state (Clarke2009). Whereby neoliberalism has not been openly declared as the guiding principle behind changes in the welfare state, as it is the case in Italy, its traces are evident in various contexts that lead to an erosion of the welfare state.

2.2 The case of the Italian Probation service

The following account of changes in the particular sector of Italian penal welfare during the first decade of the 2000s will illustrate how social workers responded to them in the organizational context of probation.

At the end of 2006, during the annual convention of the penitentiary police, Mastella disclosed his intentions to allocate new tasks to penitentiary police agents in the same direction as the draft mentioned above. He said that the forthcoming changes in penal rules caused his motivation. At that time, the so-called Pisapia parliamentary commission was drafting the reform of penal rules both by decriminalizing some offences, and proposing the possibility of giving probation a role before the definitive sentencing of offenders; this made Italian probation similar to probation in the UK and the US. Mastella said that the penal system had to evolve in the direction of de-penalization; therefore, also the penitentiary police had to change their kind of intervention following the new requirements.

In 2007, the general manager of penitentiary administration distributed a draft Act on the instruction of attorney general Clemente Mastella. The title of that draft Act was 'Intervento del Corpo di Polizia penitenziaria nell'esecuzione penale esterna', which can be translated as: 'the intervention of penitentiary police concerning the external penal duties'.

Other three draft Acts followed the first one in the year 2007 intending to solve problems and disagreement between the general manager of penitentiary administration on the one hand and trade unions on the other.

The negotiation was tough because trade unions took several different positions since every single trade union sometimes represented only the group of social workers in-charge in the UEPEs, only penitentiary police agents, and sometimes the two professional groups together. In this last case, trade unions had to represent conflicting interests because on the one hand penitentiary police desired new roles of control public order and on the other social workers wanted to keep unchanged their role with persons under alternative measures to prison; therefore they tried to reconcile very different positions in a single proposal.

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[1] The neoliberal theories base themselves on the general proposition that the market allocates resources more efficiently than other agencies, so following market rules is the best way to achieve welfare. This principle has significant consequences for the perspective of guaranteeing rights. According to Calhoun (2002), neoliberalism has interpreted the will of conservative parties to stigmatize the traditional social-democratic welfare state. Moreover, Calhoun (2002) states: responsibility for collective goods such as health, nutrition, education, housing, and occupational training has in many cases been transferred from the State to the market or an international, non-governmental charity sector (Calhoun 2002). In this way, private agencies and not public institutions continue to guarantee rights, even if less successfully.

As previously mentioned, we do not know if that negotiation would have ended positively or not; in fact, the last draft Act did not become law with juridical powers because that government fell and the following government did not propose that draft Act again. If one of the drafts had become law, this would have had a profound impact on the Italian probation service; in fact, it would have been an attempt to modify the ways of controlling prescriptions that persons under penal control outside prison usually have to respect.

The different responsibilities of penitentiary police on the one hand and of social workers on the other hand, can be understood by distinguishing their duties inside and outside prison. Their specific duties are determined by some laws governing the Italian system of penal practice. Here we can not deal with every feature of this system, but we can define the most important leading institutions and their roles. The most important of them are the following: the different kinds of prisons, the UEPEs, and the so-called "uffici di sorveglianza" that can be translated as offices of surveillance. Prisons are divided into 'casa circondariale', 'casa di reclusione', and 'colonia penale'. These distinctions are used to decide the best location for prisoners based on the type of offence.

UEPEs, as above mentioned, are the service in charge of probation in Italy, they have been uniformly distributed in the Italian territory.

The "uffici di sorveglianza" characterize the Italian penal system, in fact in Italy the execution of sentences is monitored by the judges of these offices: they warrant that measures are applied according to the rules. Moreover, in these offices, they take decisions alone or together with other judges. When the judge decides alone he promulgates adjudications as to the so-called magistrato di sorverglianza, (magistrate of surveillance); when the judge decides together with other judges, they declare adjudications as Tribunale di sorveglianza (court of surveillance).In every case, the judge decides for the measures after observing the offender both in prison and outside it.

Dealing with the work performed inside prisons by penitentiary police agents, the first consideration is that they mainly work there; moreover, they safeguard the security of prisons, supervise every action of prisoners, and go with prisoners when they have to move from prison to prison, accompany civil servants working inside prisons. Moreover, by following penitentiary rules, they can further limit the personal freedom of prisoners; if the Mastella Act had become law, their responsibilities inside prison would not have changed. On the other hand, social workers, on the whole, do not work inside prisons, their offices are outside prisons in the UEPE, and the directors of prisons call them as advisors to know what the family situation of offenders is, and what the chances for them to work outside prison are.

Dealing with the work of penitentiary police agents outside the prison, they are employed in the UEPEs, but this is quite rare; before the Mastella Act, they safeguarded the security of the sites, managed sensitive data and had a supporting function such as driving social workers outside the location of UEPEs. If the Mastella Act had become effective, penitentiary police agents could keep the previous responsibilities in the UEPEs, but they also could verify if the offenders under an alternative measure to prison had an employment or not.

On the other hand, social workers operate mainly outside prisons both to find out the personal and the family situation of persons asking for alternative measures to prison and to supervise offenders under those kinds of measures. Their specific duties vary due to the different kinds of probation provided for by the Italian law.

If the Mastella Act had been approved, social workers would have kept the same duties, but due to the changes of the organizational context, they would have to work in the same place where the control by police is done. Without this draft Act, the tasks of the police would have continued to be performed outside the UEPEs by other police corps, where only social workers deal with people under alternative measures to prison. If the draft Act had been approved, this vital principle would have been overturned.

2.3 The significance of the Mastella's episode: the reshaping of rehabilitation objectives, and the vulnerability of professional principles of social workers.

The event in question shows how various politicians attempted to subvert for ideological reasons some central principles of probation as rehabilitation and inclusion.

In fact the declaration made by attorney general Mastella that his proposals were in accordance with the goals of Pisapia's parliamentary commission was only strategic; actually Mastella proposed to weaken the present Italian model of probation both through a consistent police control of their work and through merging organisationally and operationally the interventions by penitentiary police with the service organization where social workers were employed as probation officers. Hence Mastella's proposals would not have protected offenders from stigmatizing processes, rather the opposite. Moreover, Mastella declared that the presence of penitentiary police agents in Italian probation would be necessary to safeguard public security when offenders were sentenced to alternative measures to prison. Therefore, according to Mastella, the goals of de-penalization and security had to be brought together; according to him, de-penalization and probation carried potential risks that had to be reduced by penitentiary police interventions within the UEPEs. These measures effectively were in accordance with popular prejudices that social work interventions were 'too soft' and not in the interest of public security.

Further indicators testify the intention of a fundamental reshaping of rehabilitation objectives: the analysis of Mastella's policy documents shows an absence of words such as 'rehabilitation' or 'inclusion'. The first draft Act mentioned rehabilitation and law and order as interchangeable, thereby interpreting the enforcement of laws as the goal of rehabilitation; moreover, in the same draft, this argument was used to justify the control measures by penitentiary police agents as a means of making sure that persons under alternative measures did respect orders. It implies a subversion of the original meaning of terms such as rehabilitation and inclusion. It is an example of how neoliberal policies, aimed at making individuals responsible for having caused social problems, re-define 'liberal' professional terminology of reform and rehabilitation for purposes of social control. The example shows that some 'classical' principles that guided professional social work in probation are susceptible to being taken up by policymakers and being inverted to their opposites. It follows that it is strategically not sufficient for social workers to insist on the validity of such professional principles in abstract terms; such principles and terms need to be placed and interpreted in concrete political contexts in order to render them strategically useful.

3 Methodology

This research was primarily based on the analysis of language and of communication forms because language is a medium used to define reality (Wittgenstein, 1921), and therefore, by analyzing language, we can understand the construction of reality; furthermore, communication is essential not only for its content but because it establishes social relations.

Moreover, to frame a social phenomenon, Garland suggests considering how institutions, laws and practitioners build together a "discourse" (Garland 2019), both analysing, and uncovering "the power relations and ideological frame that were inscribed in modern penal policy" (Garland 2019: 269).

The main feature of communication in the event to be analyzed is that there were conflicting positions, presented in controversies. According to Boltanski and Thévenot (1991), controversies are a chance to investigate modes of justification. Their interpretation of this term seems to be very far from its traditional conception, but in the linguistic context, justification depends on the communication process and is based on grammatical rules (Vitale, 2006). Moreover, during controversies, actors sometimes use words belonging to the same semantic field, while sometimes they take their words from different and even very dissimilar ones (Vitale, 2006). Boltanski and Thévenot use the knowledge of this kind of process in their research about different themes such as abortion (Boltanski, 2003) or public social conflicts in the Parisian *banlieues* (Boltanski, 1990).

In the case under discussion, it has been used a strategy of analysis close to Grounded Theory because this research method can help to identify relations between different issues. It had been found different themes at different levels of generalization; every portion of every text has been labelled and analyzed following Grounded Theory. According to Clarke (2005), the research method derived from the Grounded Theory and initially formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), can be both modified and is compatible with the constructivist theory. Clarke thinks that understanding texts (this term also includes interviews) is necessary to question them; therefore texts are analyzed by asking oneself what one is looking for and what is so far both hidden and unexplored. According tp Clarke (2005), some narrations can be detected by finding both the dimensions linked to the different conceptions one is going to examine and some categories useful to understand what the different meaning is. Different meanings of rehabilitation were originated from early drafts of the above mentioned Act of the attorney general, and it allows to analyze in-depth exploration of themes such as inclusion, rehabilitation, and control of offenders under probation.

The guiding research questions follow on from the hypothesis mentioned in the introduction and are: how do the different actors of the Mastella event frame inclusion and rehabilitation? Are the different actors' frames very similar or very different each other? Did social workers in those circumstances consider a political analysis of the context which they operate in as professionally relevant both for their professional activity in general and specifically for their political proposals? Were they sufficiently skilled in political and sociological analysis, or did they generally adhere both to the individualistic and apolitical orientation typical of most Italian social workers?

Moreover, every available document concerning the Mastella's episode was collected and analyzed; the findings were cross controlled through interviews with social workers, and the data were analyzed under the perspective of the frame analysis. At this regard, according to Schön and Rein (1996) the 'frame' function, in analogy to the structure that supports a house, is not evident, but it prevents the house from collapsing. It may be interpreted as a way to distinguish what deserves our attention and what is not of interest; therefore, this process is similar to examining a picture that can be better focused by its frame. It can be used as a code that allows individuals to interpret and to classify what is happening about its context. Through frame analysis it was possible both to find some categories with a heuristic significance relating to topics of rehabilitation, security and inclusion and to classify them

according to dimensions sometimes directly derived from empirical observations, sometimes from theoretical considerations applied to empirical data.

Moreover, considering that frame analysis gives the chance of exploring the links between the different categories, this perspective has been used to empirically investigate the reciprocal links between the different conceptions of rehabilitation, security, and inclusion. About security, the meanings expressed by different actors involved in the Mastella episode have been explored by applying the considerations of Hallsworth and Lea mentioned above on the link between the meaning of security and the two different kinds of society: the welfare state and the security state. In fact, security can be interpreted as well-being in a welfare state society, or as a means to maintain public order in a security state society.

Concerning the concept of inclusion, the meanings expressed by the different actors involved in the Mastella's episode can similarly be explored concerning the considerations of Matza and Sykes. They see criminal behaviour as a consequence of the processes of stigmatization. Accordingly, stigmatization and not only individual responsibility influences the actions of offenders; stigmatization and hence, the nature of a community play a role in the aetiology of crime.

Inclusion can, therefore, be framed either in such a way that the community carries some responsibility for crime and inclusion becomes a strategy to limit the diffusion of crime; or individuals can be considered to be mainly responsible for a crime, and consequently punishment and not inclusion becomes the main strategy to limit the diffusion of crime.

The goal of getting frame analysis can be reached for every meaning analyzed, and it is possible a cross-tabulation between two dimensions. Therefore other dimensions ought to be found. A way to find other dimensions is to examine if the expressions in the texts are more or less implicit.

The findings based on the four draft Acts of the attorney general, are the following: twenty nine documents that social workers of UEPEs wrote and presented to the attorney general, twenty public statements written by trade unions and one written by the social workers' association, as well as specific press reports, five conference proceedings about the attempt to pass the control tasks to the penitentiary police, and four discussion documents published in social forums. These texts show the different positions that every protagonist wanted to express to the other actors during the Mastella event and the concepts were analyzed from this particular relational perspective. It was followed up by fourteen in-depth interviews with social workers concerning their positions to cross-reference the documentary research.

For the qualitative analysis of the transcribed interview material and the documents, the Nvivo7 software was applied to find the terms, and the dimensions in which themes can be categorized. These categories were related to sociological theories and political sciences concerning the welfare state, crime, and professions, after a comparison among these categories with which the particular frames were constructed.

4   Findings

The main intention of the research was to explore dimensions which framed words such as 'security' and 'inclusion' and to find categories to describe the useful meanings of these words and to understand significant relations among the various kinds of terms used.

4.1 Security intended as public order

In the examined material, the different actors articulated an interest in security basically in two contrasting and seemingly mutually exclusive ways: security by promoting the general well-being of members of society and in particular by helping those who are at risk of endangering public safety, and security by pursuing public order.

The issue of security sometimes was addressed only implicitly, without any evident connection to the term. According to methodology, it was possible to make a heuristic cross-tabulation as follows (see figure 1):

- security as an explicit expression of public order (quarter I);

- security as an implicit expression of public order (quarter IV);

- security as an explicit expression of well-being (quarter II);

- security as an implicit expression of well-being (quarter III).

In this way, it was possible to find similarities and differences between the statements both of social workers and the promoters of the Mastella Act, according to the concepts represented in every quarter of figure 1.
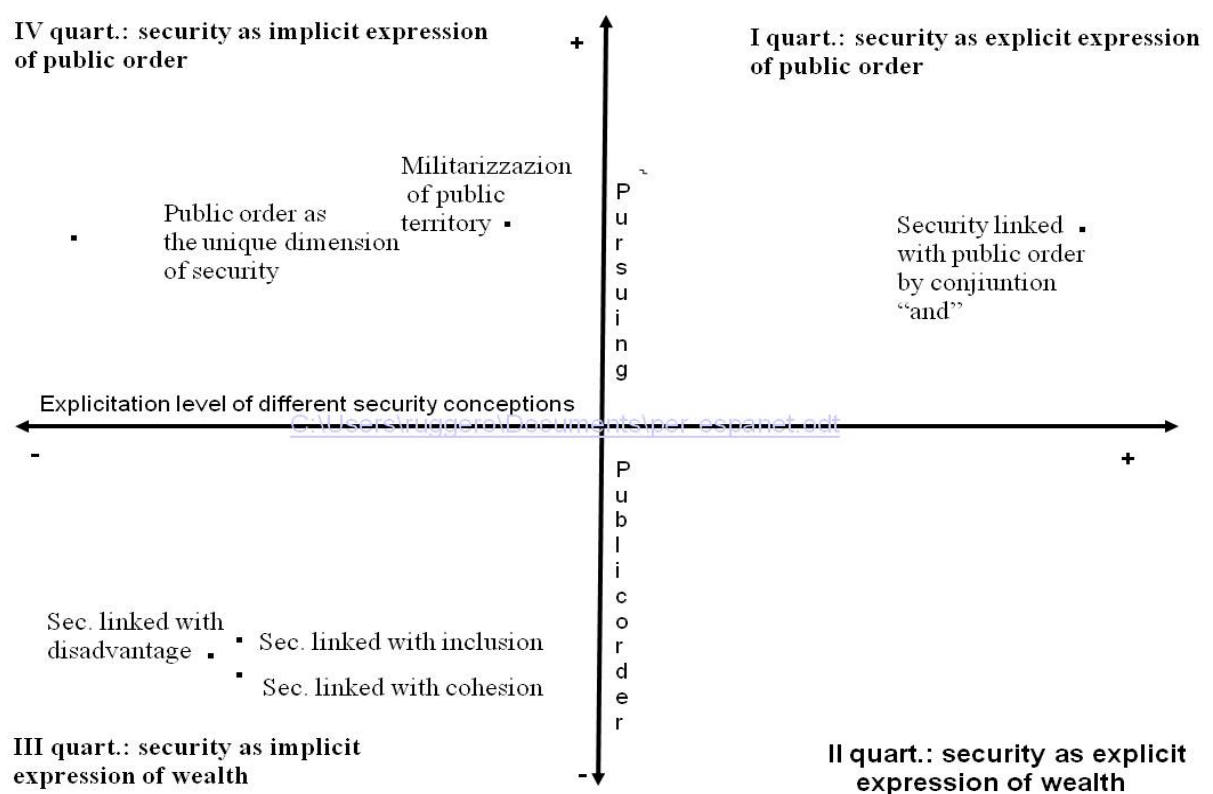

Figure 1: the dimensions of security conceptions

When security is an *explicit expression of public order*, sometimes this is closely linked with public order by the conjunction 'and' (see figure 1 quarter I): 'security and public order' is a widespread expression in the Mastella texts; in this way security and public order are presented as interchangeable. Hence security exists where public order is directly enforced.

Some statements by different informants (e.g. proponents of the Mastella Act, conference speakers, social workers speaking about their position both by e-mail and by interview) use this category of security as an explicit expression of public order. It was found that only CNOAS (the national board of Italian social workers) conference speakers do not represent security as if it were an explicit expression of public order (see figure 3).

Among the actors mentioned above, some communicated publicly or privately an understanding of security that was only implicitly associated with public order, independent on their agreement or disagreement with the Mastella draft Act, (see figures 2 and 3). For them, public order seems to be an unspecific public condition not requiring explicit measures that constitute a security.
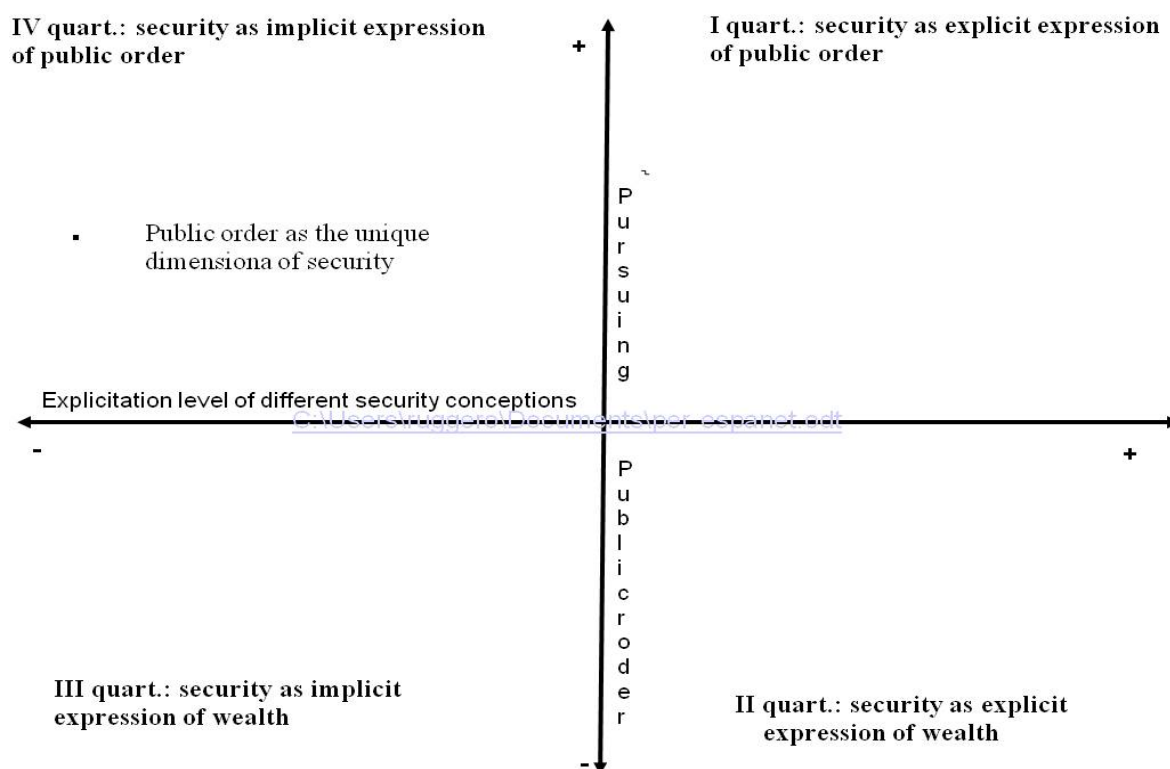

Figure 2: The dimensions of security conceptions for the proponents of Mastella's draft act

Sporadically, social workers use the term 'security' with a meaning implicitly connected to public order: in this case, they represent this latter concept in a negative sense. They criticize, for instance, the so-called 'militarization of public territory'. According to them, if the Mastella act had become effective, the community would have been 'militarized' because in this case, police officers would exercise control. A particular nuance of this concept has been expressed in a document written by UEPE's social workers who depict the consequences of the control by penitentiary agents on the community; they present community life for persons under alternative measures to prison under the control of penitentiary police as 'a prison without bars'.
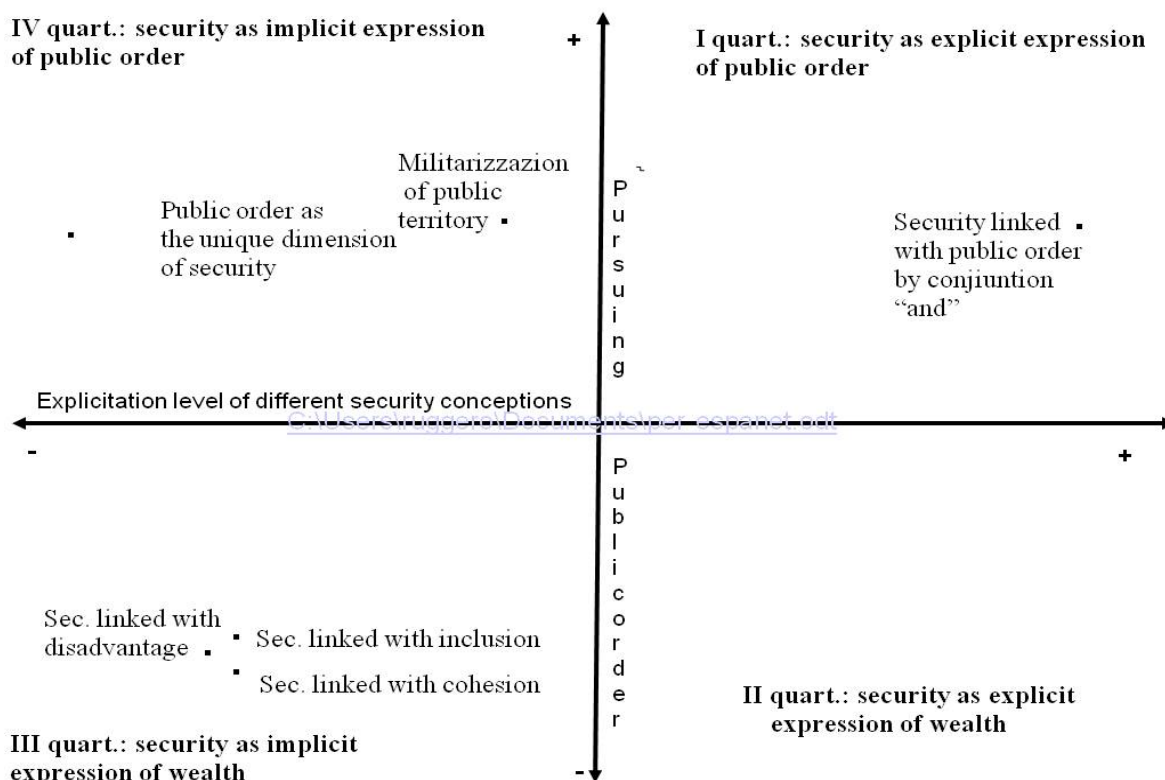
Figure 3: the dimensions of security conceptions for the opponents of Mastella's draft act

Security was found to be connected to the promotion of well-being in seven texts: two of them belong to conference speakers, social workers have written five documents. Moreover, well-being is often implicitly expressed (see figure 1). The actors using this category are social workers who are against Mastella's proposals: they hold their positions publicly, none of these actors has been interviewed.

The different expressions in which the term security is implicitly connected to public order have one of the following meanings: inclusion, care for the disadvantaged, and social cohesion intended as a way to warrant integration among the different parts of society.

In summary, many representations by social workers are also about security as public order; social workers express security as promotion of well-being only in a few texts. This low interest in the promotion of well-being may suggest that there are only sporadic connections between some actions of social workers in the UEPEs and a hypothetical will to build or to promote a welfare state policy. This hypothesis has been confirmed by further results of the research showing social workers often in disagreement with the meaning of security as public order, but without succeeding in giving clear alternative meaning to security.

Further consideration of the result of the present analysis ween is the little difference between public statements and private interviews with the researcher.

Overall, the social workers' abilities to make public and to offer a critique of the social tendencies promoting a security state rather than a welfare state seem to be rather weak.

4.2 Rehabilitation and inclusion to emphasize individual responsibilities.

The research results show that according to some statements, education and rehabilitation should be achieved by giving more responsibility to offenders under alternative measures to prison. Although the number of texts belonging to this category is small, they emphasize that making the offenders responsible seems to be a way to rehabilitate them. In the examined texts, rehabilitation is linked to concerns with individuals instead of political or community issues.

Dealing with actions of inclusion, they were portrayed by social workers as a professional principle, but they consider acting upon them as residual due to a reduction in financial resources; therefore a term closely linked to professional principles of social workers is perceived by themselves as weak and residual for policy and society. Even if social workers criticize this trend, they do not offer theoretical arguments that underline the importance of promoting policies for inclusion.

In particular, it was possible to make a heuristic cross-tabulation according to the research methodology of frame analysis. These categories are (see figure 4):

1. inclusion seems both a strong defining objective and close depending on a social dimension (see figure 4, first quarter);

2. inclusion seems both a weak defining objective and closely depending on the social dimension (see figure 4, fourth quarter);

3. inclusion seems both a strong defining objective and closely depending on the individual dimension (see figure 4, second quarter);

4. inclusion seems both a weak defining objective and closely depending on the individual dimension (see figure 4, third quarter).
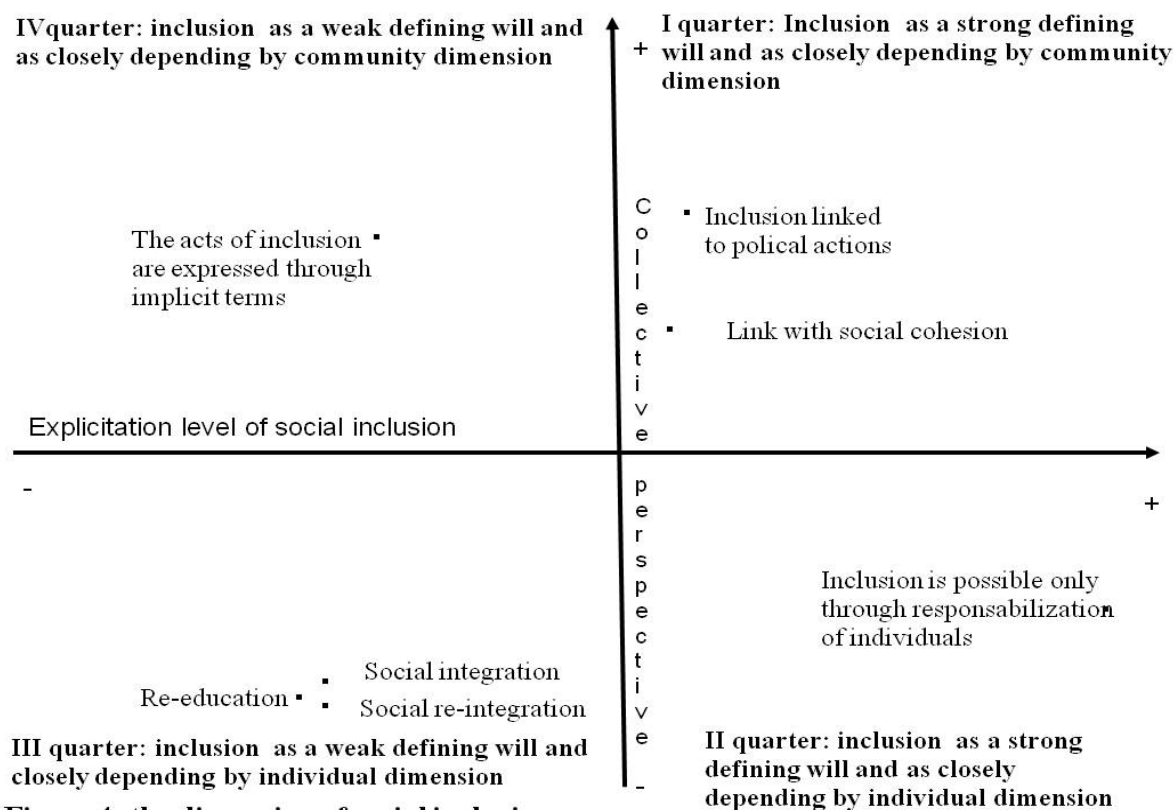
Figure 4: the dimension of social inclusion

Sometimes inclusion is represented as a clear target depending on the community dimension, and it is linked to political actions. Sometimes it is linked to social cohesion. Actors that represent this kind of category disagree with the Mastella Act and at the same time show their position publicly. Therefore, these actors are conference speakers and social workers that disagree with Mastella's proposals in some written documents; among these actors, no social workers have been interviewed.

When inclusion is not closely represented as a clear purpose depending on the community dimension (see figure 4), the act of inclusion seems to be expressed through implicit terms. In this case, the most frequent words are connected with the notion of territory, and they only touch on the social dimension.
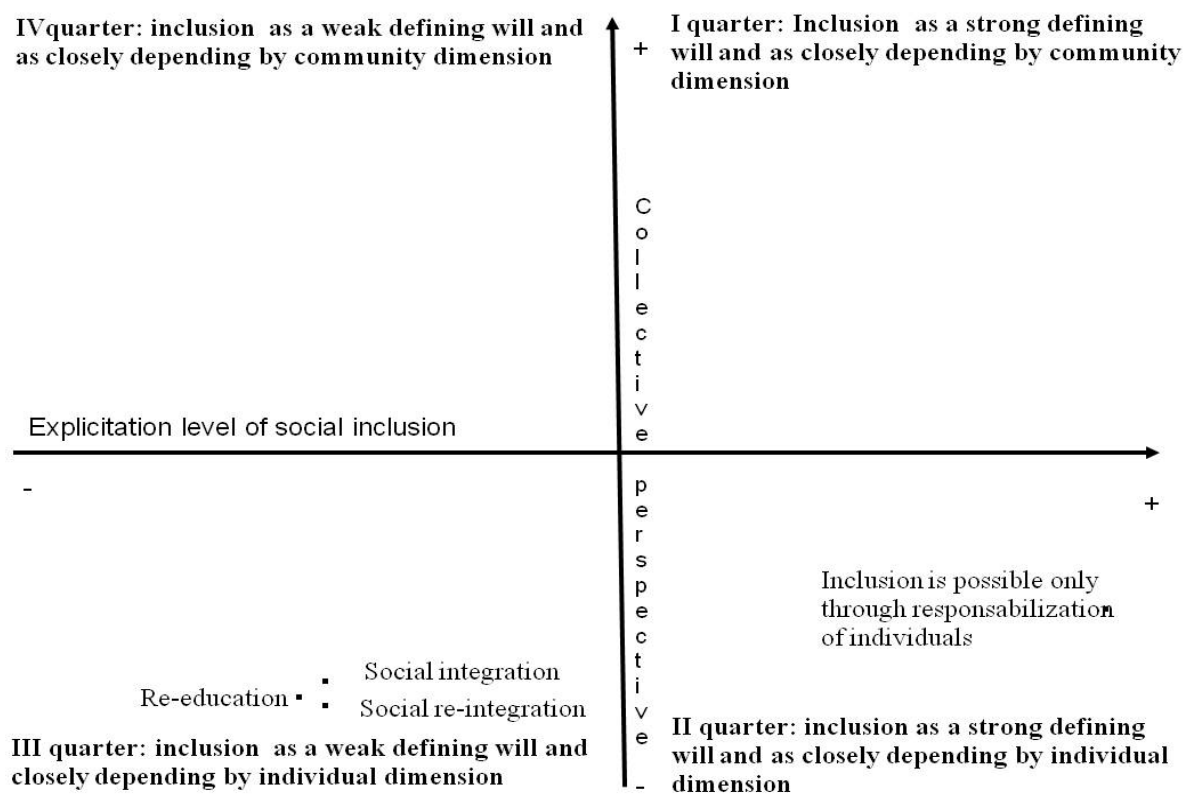
IVquarter: inclusion as a weak defining will and as closely depending by community dimension

I quarter: Inclusion as a strong defining will and as closely depending by community dimension

Collective perspective

Explicitation level of social inclusion

Inclusion is possible only through responsabilization of individuals

Re-education   ▪ Social integration
          ▪ Social re-integration

III quarter: inclusion as a weak defining will and closely depending by individual dimension

II quarter: inclusion as a strong defining will and as closely depending by individual dimension

Figure 5: the dimension of social inclusion for the proponents of Mastella's draft act

The documents that express inclusion both as a weak defining target and as closely depending on the individual dimension are the most frequent. The words re-education, social integration, and social re-integration belong to this category. The actors that express this kind of category are both social workers that disagree with the Mastella Act and its proponents (see figures 5 and 6). The first ones take this kind of position independently if they express their opinion publicly or during interviews.
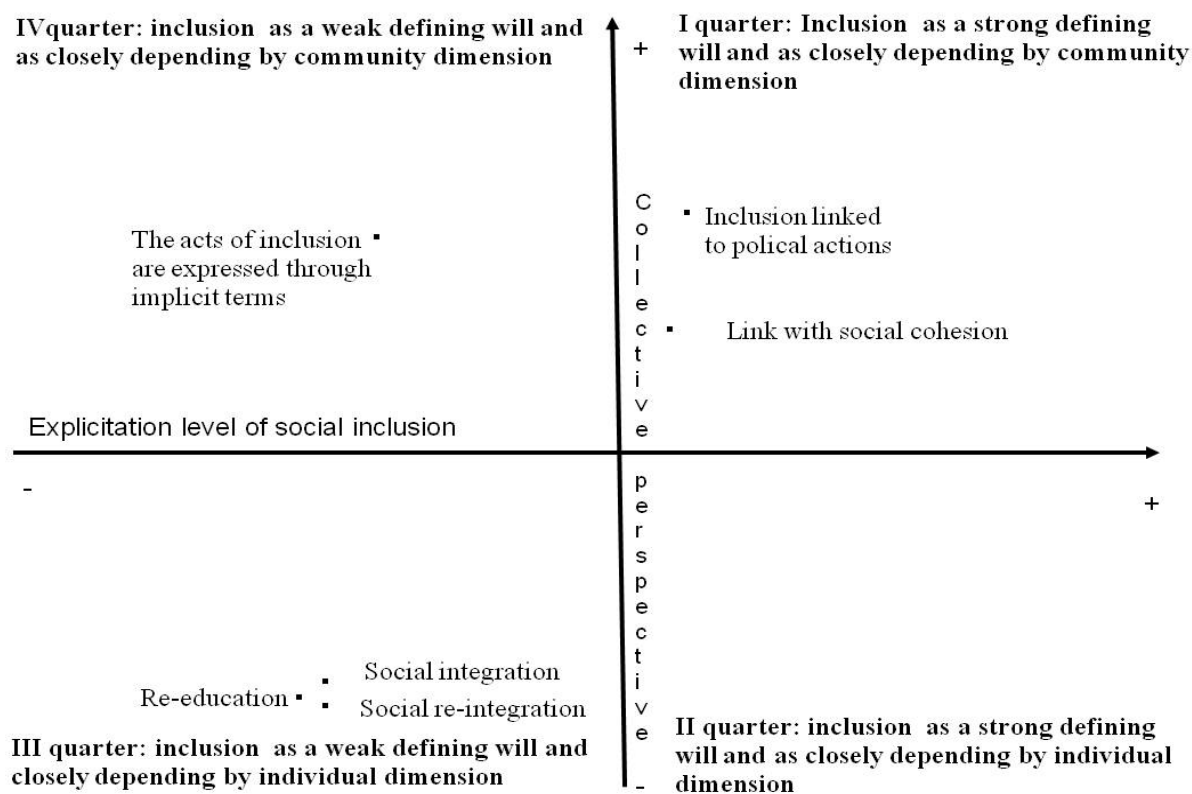
Figure 6: the dimension of social inclusion for the opponents of Mastella's draft acts

Therefore, in this regard, there is no difference between informants who express their positions publicly and those who communicate them only to the interviewer. Only the last three Mastella draft Acts present inclusion both as a high defining objective and as closely depending on the individual dimension (see figure 6).

This category shows an increasing subversion of the meaning of inclusion as far as penitentiary police agents out of prison can stigmatize.

To summarize, in the texts about Mastella's initiative, it is evident that a large number of actors tend to think of inclusion as an individual dimension and not as a collective one; moreover, the individual dimension seems to affect also the meaning of rehabilitation: individual responsiveness seems more important than the collective one, therefore, in this way, rehabilitation can also be reached through punishment instead of through an attempt to reduce the risk of stigmatization of offenders.

5   Discussion

The results from the examination of texts concerning the Mastella episode indicate greatly differing uses of the concepts of rehabilitation, security, and inclusion; in it, they correspond to other terms with specific features.

Findings, above all those resulting from the previously quoted cross-tabulation, reveal some significant links between different nuances of meanings of rehabilitation, security, and inclusion: therefore it is possible to define a structure about the relation between policies aimed by welfare state in the penal area on the one hand and the behaviour of social workers in front of their erosion on the other. In fact the analysis of different nuances of words, as, e.g. security, was useful not only to simply describe the features of Mastella's event, but also to

understand some dimensions which are considered as effective both in the present Italian society and in the Italian social services of the penal area.

In general, the Mastella draft Act underlined the trend both to replace the meaning of rehabilitation and inclusion with other words like control and punishment, and to empty them of their original meaning. These kinds of alterations in the meaning of terms like security and inclusion create new associations of the same words which confirm the phenomenon of the welfare state erosion and frame the reactions of social workers to them.

In particular security and inclusion are words linked both to changes of society and to professional principles of social workers. A change of society in the direction of security as public order seems both to reduce the space for inclusion and to limit the same sense of it. While the goals of security shift from well-being to public order, the community dimension is no longer considered as essential to preventing crime. So the preferred way to prevent crime is punishment or education of individuals; implicitly social workers become the actors who punish and educate individuals without any competence for the community and policy dimensions. In fact, care to counter-act stigmatization is not seen any more as a strategy to contain crime. When security is intended as public order, the principle of inclusion is no longer defined by social workers in the communitarian dimension. Therefore some methods traditionally considered by social workers as a means to fight against stigmatization lose their importance. Social workers continue to use the same words that gained their importance and became significant during the development process of the welfare state, but now their meaning has been modified, and social workers seem unaware of this matter; in any case, they do not refer to theories that would address the issue.

Findings reveal that on the one hand there is a secure link between changes of policies, amounting to an erosion of the welfare state, and new associations of the term "inclusion" closely related to the professional principles of social workers. They do not contrast the reshaping of the term "security" in the direction of public order, so professional principles based on policies of welfare state lose their original meaning and drift in the same direction of erosion.

Moreover, on the other hand, the categories drawn from the above-quoted cross-tabulation show that when the objectives are promoting favourable conditions for the diffusion of welfare state principles, in other words when security is intended as care for the collective well-being, social workers can present inclusion as useful to prevent stigmatization. It follows that it is not sufficient for social workers to insist on the validity of such professional principles in abstract terms; such principles and terms need to be placed and interpreted in concrete political contexts in order to render them strategically effective.

6   Conclusions
The Mastella episode seems to confirm for Italy Hallsworth and Lea's (2011) analysis that the welfare state seems to change toward the so-called model of the security state. In particular, the language is changing; it seems that the Mastella's draft Acts, despite not having been implemented, were creating a new discourse where old words assume new meanings.

The process of change emerging from the research seems compelling and to corrupt conceptions such as rehabilitation and inclusion. This process is closely linked to general representations of society and is indicative of a society oriented more to ensuring security than to providing welfare.

This new perspective does not seem to have been sufficiently perceived by social workers; most of those involved in the episode understood neither characters nor consequences of this process. Moreover, they expressed their position with a kind of language already characterized by the erosion of the original professional meaning of concepts like rehabilitation and inclusion. It indicates a lack of reflective professional thought on their part.

It confirms Kessel's comments on the necessity for social workers to develop reflective professional thoughts, particularly under current social policy conditions (Kessl, 2009). Adopting such reflexive competences would allow them to both assist their clients more efficiently and to have a more substantial professional position on the policies that may endanger the welfare state.

Besides, the research shows that the social work profession has to face up to current political dilemmas and address them constructively; public discussion has not sufficiently addressed these dilemmas, nor a private context, such as the interview situation.

Can this difficulty perhaps be generalized also to other work contexts? It would be useful to extend this strategy of analysis to other research projects about different work contexts and the dilemmas social workers are currently facing, not just for purposes of academic research but in order to stimulate a more critical reflection on political developments and their impact on practice.

These results confirm Lorenz's and Trivellato's (2010) findings of the tendency of a social worker to overvalue the importance of the relational dimension in their intervention for social workers in the UEPEs.

Moreover, Italian social workers employed in the Italian probation offices have to overcome their lack of skills in sociological and political analysis. In particular, thereby that sociological one gives important pieces of information to better frame the Mastella's event from a critical perspective, this creates the basis to better-refined analysis useful to make proposals oriented to stimulate policy practice,

 Only in this way, they can gain a critical view of political and societal changes and can enforce their professional position. It may provide a chance to influence policies that restrict the welfare state directly, which is ultimately a question about how to formulate and put into practice the best available social work professional knowledge including better strategies that social workers can use to redress policies that limit the welfare state.

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