

**STREAM:** 5. Social Work and Social Policy: Control or Empowerment?

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**TITLE:** Implementing integration policies: a case study about new needs, discretion and responsibility in social work

**ABSTRACT:** The increasing complexity of people's needs, mainly connected to individualization of biographical experiences and fragmentation of work careers brought about welfare services to attempt the personalization and adaptation of their actions to individual situations (Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijck, Myles 2002).

This changes lead to modify institutionally structured spaces of discretion and responsibility attributed to social workers: they often have to analyze claimants' requests and personal conditions integrating qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools, construct and delivery interventions with multi-professional competences and a combination of measures and steps, activate supporting networks composed by public and private actors.

Sometimes policies and legislative tools are formally adapted to this new connotation of needs, sometimes their official recognizing takes more time. But, in any case, changing problems modify social workers' tasks and responsibilities. They can 'use' their spaces of discretion to adapt services to emerging needs they daily meet and they need to 'cope' (Lipsky, 1980).

The combination of new and traditional social problems and policies influences services' practices and change their connotation; at the same time, social workers' ideas, competences and decisions influence policies and services system configuration (Brodkin, 1997).

These interactions can create new patterns of intervention and modify the policy aims and their effects.

A case study conducted in central Italy, in the Municipality of Bologna, analyses institutionally structured spaces of discretion, social workers' 'use' of decisional autonomy in everyday practices, its impact in the institutional and political responsibility on equity and quality of welfare services.

The study was conducted with the technique of 'vignettes' (Finch, 1987), in a bottom-up perspective. This has given the possibility to analyse services and policies to contrast poverty and social exclusion, raising from claimants' needs.

**KEYWORDS:** changing needs, social work, discretion, patterns of social intervention