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A New Perspective Regard the Information System for Social Services

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Abstract - The article aims at contributing to the debate about the introduction of ICT in social services with a reflection that, on the basis of the development of the ISSS of the Italian Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia , shows that it is possible to set up an information system fill to the particular nature of social work and, in particular, to its methodology of work and to the complexity of social needs and of the relationship between social services' user and social worker. It points out that to get this result is important to give up the deterministic approach to technology as well as the centralized and top down approach to ISSS, and to adopt a relational approach to both these issues.

Keywords : *information system, social work, new technology, community of practice, your keyword here.*

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A New Perspective Regard the Information System for Social Services

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I. Introduction

Recently, Recently, in Italy there has been a widespread increased interest about the informatization of cartella sociale and the development of the Information System for Social Services (ISSS). Cartella sociale (CS) is the main professional instrument used by social workers to register the interventions they plan and intend implementing to take care of people with social needs. The ISSS is the informational system aimed at collecting data and information about the users and the activities of social services in order to plan social policies.

In Italy, up to the present ISSS and CS have been thought of as two autonomous instruments, the first related to directional objectives and the second related to managing objectives. The theoretical reflection and the empirical application have also carried out these issues separately. But this is a great mistake and misunderstanding because ISSS and CS are both tied very strictly at the theoretical and at the empirical level.

The Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) tried to overcome this separation, by experimenting a regional ISSS routed on a peculiar kind of CS, that is, a CS that focuses on the social services user instead of on the social worker activity. From 2005 to 2012, I supported the Department for Health and Assistance of the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) to build this new kind of CS and to set up the regional ISSS. In order to overcome the abovementioned limits and to set up an ISSS useful for local and national levels and suited to collect data produced by information systems of different sectors (in primis from the health sector), I adopted a bottom-up approach. Moving from the consideration of the great importance of social workers' activity in order to collect up-to-date data about social services users and activities, I set up a new CS that differs totally from the traditional one and represents the core of ISSS.

The aim of the article is to present the distinctiveness of this perspective on ISSS and the methodological approach assumed to set it up in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region.

II. The Development of Isss in Italy

Although in Italy the debate on ISSS dates back to 1978, at present there is no national ISSS, but only some regional ISSS which differ from each other even within the same region. This depends on many reasons, but two of the principle ones are: the institutional context - in particular the multilevel governance of social policies, so there are three decisional levels: national, regional and local - and the approach to ISSS development, considered to be a substantially technological issue.

With regard to the first reason, it is possible to see that the debate on ISSS dates back to 1978 when the national law L.N. 833 that set up the National Health System, established to build a national informational system for the National Health System. Since that moment, the interest for a national informational system for social services begun to increase in the social services sector as well. In the 80s, a special national Commission was founded in order to constitute the ISSS. The National Commission failed in its objective. In the absence of a national law for the whole social services sector, it was impossible to regulate this field in order to collect data that represented the same services and interventions. Every region, in fact, organized its social services in an autonomous way. As a consequence, at national level there were many different services and interventions called by the same name. There was neither a common vocabulary to indicate the social services, nor was there a common organization thereof. The failure of the National Commission did not stifle the interest in the settlement of the national ISSS that remained one of the most important issues at national and regional level. The central government as well as the regional governments, in fact, needed more and more data in order to plan and to manage a sector

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characterized by ever growing complex social needs and by more and more numerous actors from non profit and private sectors. In that period, in fact, the non profit and private organizations started to have a central role in delivering public social services and became one of the most relevant partners of the regional and local authorities in planning social policies. Hence, ISSS was considered the most useful instrument to plan social services on the basis of a wide and close analysis of the current state of these services and social needs. ISSS, moreover, is considered as an important instrument to co-ordinate all public and non profit actors involved in delivering social services.

For these reasons, some regions went on by themselves and tried to set up a regional ISSS. But they found the same difficulties at this level too, as there are many different ways to organize social services because each municipality is allowed to organize social assistance in its own way. Hence, the regions have also found it very difficult to set up a regional ISSS.

The national law L. N. 328/2000, regarding the reform of social services sector, brought the attention once more on the ISSS and Art. 21 established that every region must constitute a regional ISSS useful to both the national and regional social services planning. L328/2000 was seen as being the real opportunity of building a national ISSS. But the reforming of the fifth title of the Constitution (L. N. 7/2001), which assigns to the Regions the authority to make laws in matters of social assistance, bereaved the L. N. 328/2000 of its power.

For all these reasons, in Italy at the moment, there is no national ISSS but only regional ISSS which differs each other and also within of the same Region there are a lot of different local ISSS set up by individual municipalities. In addition, these local ISSS are not integrated with information systems of other sectors, such as health, labour market and education, with which it is important for social policies to be integrated. These local ISSS collect administrative data, functional to meet national requirements but not the needs of local municipalities in the planning of local social policies. Integration and information sharing among local municipalities and national agencies is one of the highest priorities of national and regional decision makers in order to plan social policies.

With regard to the second main reason mentioned above, it is possible to recognize that in Italy the reflection about ISSS considers its development as a mere technological question and shows a lack of awareness in the fact that there is a wide range of more complex organisational and people-related factors to be taken into consideration. This shortcoming, very serious in itself, becomes more dangerous in the social services sector. In this case, in fact, the nature of the intervention and of the social services users are so specific that ICT rouses suspicion and fears in social workers. In Italy the social workers' perception of ICT hasn't been explored jet, but a lot of international literature have analyzed this issue and have pointed out that social workers are reluctant to accept the fact that information and the technology that supports the management of information may be useful for them as well. Steyaert and Gould [2009, 2011], for example, reconstruct the current thinking about information technology in social work and categorize social work commentators'critiques under two headings: the humanist and the anti-humanist approaches. «The humanist case is an objection to technology as representing an intrusion into the person-centered project of social work, displacing the authenticity of the encounter between worker and service user and replacing it with pre-occupations with accountability and bureaucratic efficiency (Burton and van den Broek, 2008). A corollary of this is the argument that human reasoning and the heuristics of human problem solving cannot be reduced to algorithms and depend on tacit knowledge (Sapey, 1997). The latter position overlaps with the anti-humanist case, […] focuses on the role of technology in regulating the subjectivity of the person, extending the capillaries of power between actors. This line of critique returned recently in the social work literature in Parton's (2008) assertion that social work is being transformed from the "social" to the "informational". His argument is that there has been "a shift from a narrative to a database way of thinking and operating (Parton, 2008, p. 253) within which the close relationship with individuals is replaced by a more distant concert with subjects reconstituted as the aggregation of the data held about them» [Steyaert and Gould, 2011 p. 58-59]. These considerations about ICT in social services highlight the importance to involve social workers in designing and constructing ISSS. On the contrary, social workers and their intervention have usually been forgotten in the ISSS development. Social workers, in fact, are still stereotyped as technophobic, also there is evidence of their increasingly involvement with technology to enrich professional practice [Rafferty, Steyaert 2007].

In Italy ICT has been introduced in social services under the pressure of the new managerialism and its emphasis on the use of performance monitoring, performance indicators, the evaluation of the end result and transparency. Hence, they have been considered dangerous for the integrity of social work and for the user-social worker relationship. Another reason for the Italian social workers' opposition to ITC and ISSS is related to their limited abilities in using a pc. In many cases, in fact, social workers were not able to use the pc or had only the basic abilities for using it. So they have found many difficulties in using the technologies and programs adopted by the ISSS, that require higher skills. For this reason, the ISSS has often remained an instrument for managers and for a limited number of social workers who are keen on technology or who

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recognize in this a useful instrument for their professional career.

In addition, ISSS development has been carried out following three main approaches: the accountable approach, the encyclopedic approach and the strategic approach. The accountable approach considers the ISSS as an instrument to collect and analyze a limited set of data referred to social services' expenditure, users and workers in order to plan social policies. The encyclopedic approach considers the ISSS as an instrument aimed at monitoring all the social services by the collection of a wider set of data extended to social services' structural and organizational dimension, and to the number and typology of the users and of the workers in the social services. The strategic approach finally considers the ISSS as an instrument to account the input and output of the social services' activities, by the collection of data and indicators referred to supply and demand, quality, efficacy and efficiency. These three approaches have developed three models of ISSS: the top down model, the feedback or bottom up model and the interactive model [Mauri 2007: 32]. These three models, moreover, have been carried out with a centralized method, moving from the national level to the local one. The result of these approaches and method is: the absence of a national ISSS and the presence of some regional ISSS that differ each other and sometimes also within the same region; and the necessity to get data by the expensive collection of data carried out by ISTAT (the National Institute of Statistics) which often contain many errors, missing data and delays.

With the aim to overcome these limits and to set up a regional ISSS useful for the managers of social services as well as for the social workers and for both the national and the regional level of social services system, my colleagues and I have proposed a new approach to ISSS and a new method to set it up.

III. A New Perspective on the ISSS

Our approach regarding the ISSS can be defined relational and operative. In fact it focuses on the relationships between individuals inside an organization and between organizations, and on the social workers' activity.

In our approach the ISSS, before being a data flow, is a relational flow, that is a flow of relationships between individuals inside an organization and between individuals of different organizations that cooperate. This means that the first attention in ISSS development concerns the roles and the positions inside an organization and their interactions. This aspect is particularly important in social services' organizations that are not bureaucratic but adhocratic ones. Social workers, in fact, are semi-professionals, they have a professional autonomy based on the competences obtained by a specific curriculum of studies and training. Hence, they are more dependent on their profession than on organizational hierarchy [Collins 1992]. Moreover, social services' organizations are loosely coupled ones [Weick 1988] that means that relationships between individuals inside the organization have weak ties. Therefore, they are not predefined nor predictable. In this type of organization it may be difficult to define roles and processes with the evidence requested by the ISSS. But, at the same time, flexibility must be allowed by the ISSS. Social work, furthermore, is multi-disciplinary and based on working groups and equipés. ISSS has to reflect all the interactions related to this peculiarity of social work. That means that ISSS cannot only be a data base or a data warehouse that collects data gathered from a lot of different data bases. If it were like this, it would only remain an instrument to archive data with a high probability of making mistakes in registering the data itself, of not recording up-to-date data and of not having data ready available when needed. In our approach, the ISSS is not aimed at collecting data by transferring it from one data base to another, but to build an informational system which puts in relation different informational flows inside the organization itself and between different organizations. ISSS does not transfer data, but connects data flows. That means that the data remains in the flow where it is produced and is the property of its producer. In this way every data producer remains the owner of the data and the person responsible for its validity and reliability. This is a fundamental dimension. The experimentations of ISSS have not paid attention to data producer and have considered the latter as a mere executive who must only provide data, often without any knowledge about its use, and without any utility for his/her own activities. Hence, data producers have no concern for ISSS and consider its implementation a mere obligation or an activity functional to managers or to regional or national authorities. In our approach, on the contrary, ISSS must be useful for data producers as well as for their managers and for other authorities. For this reason it is necessary that data producers know for whom and for what reason they are requested to provide data, and how the data will be analyzed and elaborated. It is also important that data elaboration reflects the original meaning of the data so the producers are able to recognize it in the elaboration. Moving from this convincement, in our approach ISSS must be operative, that is, it should be based on social workers' activity. This, in fact, must be one of the main ISSS's informational flows and ISSS must reflect the process of social work practice. Far too often, in fact, social workers have resisted ISSS because it doesn't reflect their activity and in particular the process of assistance on the whole. In many cases, in fact, ISSS requests from the social workers only single data, extrapolated from

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the context of the assistance project regarding the person they are taking care of.

For these reasons, in our approach CS is considered not only an instrument to document social workers' activity, but also an instrument to implement ISSS. Documentation has always had a fundamental role in social work, in order to support social assessment and planning, to monitor interventions, to involve users in their assistance project, to evaluate how users react to assistance projects and to make the necessary changes. Documentation is also important to account their activity to their managers, but especially to promote reflectivity on the practice. Nevertheless, social workers often consider documentation as a bureaucratic activity only aimed at controlling their interventions by managers or as a personal activity functional only to their practice and not to the whole organization as well [Sapey 1997; Fazzi 2006; Humpreys, Kertesz 2013]. They often don't fill it in completely or register data and information in a subjective way thereby making it difficult to understand it and impossible to use it for organizational objectives and in particular for organizational improvement. The use of technological applications to document the social workers' activities could cause this tendency to grow. If applications are rigid, based on the logic of the data base (Parton 2009), built without paying attention to social work rationale [Rafferty, Steyaert 2007], no other result is possible. On the contrary, if new technologies are adapted to social work methodology, social workers can find in them a real support for their intervention. For this reason, in our approach we used new technologies to support not only the documentation but the whole assistance process and in particular the definition and implementation of the user's assistance project. This has meant the reviewing of the CS in order to make it reflect the user's assistance project in accordance with what is currently happening in the health system with the Electronic Patient Dossier. In fact, the CS may support the social worker's activity only if it does not remain a monitoring instrument but becomes an instrument for planning and evaluation. In other words, it is efficacious only if it is an instrument focused on social services users and not on the social workers themselves. The social services user and the assistance project built for him/her, in fact, is the focal point of the social worker's activity and consequently of social workers' documentation, as well as the focal point of the informational flow from the social work to the ISSS. So, we restructured the CS as a dossier for the social services user.

This passage has entailed the realization of three passages: from the logic of the procedure to the logic of the project, from the logic of categories to the logic of the person, from the logic of automatism to the logic of reflectivity.

The first passage, in fact, concerns the user's dossier which reflects the logic of social planning so it articulates in sections coinciding with social planning sequences that are: assessment, individuation of objectives and expected results, definition of activities, individuation of resources, and evaluation. This characteristic is fundamental to make the user's dossier an instrument useful to support the social worker's activity and not only to account it to managers or to place it in the archives. Social work is aimed at producing a change in social services users by the special relationship built between the user and the social worker. This implies that social work must accompany the development of the relationship and of the changes that the assistance project can make in the users. Hence, the social work needs to be supported by instruments that are flexible, personalized and useful not only to register this subjective dimension but also to promote the reflection about the practice thereof in order to guide the user to attain the objectives of his/her project. For this reason our user dossier reserves special attention in the defining of the objectives of the assistance project. Far too often, in fact, social workers confuse the objectives with activities, or define the activities without indicating the objectives to which the former are addressed. In this way, it is impossible for the social workers to support the user in his/her process of change and to recognize if there has been any change. Without a project, the social worker's activity remains a mere delivery of assistance interventions, defined on the basis of the availability of supply. In addition the user is considered on the basis of the available interventions and with regard to predefined criteria established for access by the users instead of on the basis of his/her real needs.

In the second passage, user's dossier is built with regard to a single person with specific needs and resources, so it reserves special attention for recognizing his/her situation by the assessment procedure and it also defines a personal assistance project by identifying specific objectives and interventions. With regard to these dimensions, our effort has been to avoid the risk of reducing the «assessment to a linear, "tick box" process rejecting any notion of the exchange model of assessment which acknowledges the person's expertise in their situation and gives scope for a sharing of information between client and worker» [Postle 2002 p. 343]. So we tried to find a balance between the logic of the check list, functional to obtain standard information and data useful for statistical elaborations and the «narrative» [Parton 2008] logic aimed at presenting a picture of the social services users which is both subjective and social, and constructed on the basis of the relationship between users and social workers. For this reason the user dossier, in the section reserved for the assessment, offers a check list with a classification of ten macro categories of social problems, each of which articulates in further micro categories, as well as a free field in

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which the social worker can describe in more detail every micro category he/she has selected.

The third passage set up to build the user dossier consists in moving from the logic of automatism to the logic of reflectivity. It is a consequence of the logic of the project that entails the reflection on the development of the project in order to understand whether it proceeds as expected, whether the interventions activated obtain the foreseen results or others and, if so, whether they imply that changes be made or not to the project itself. For this reason, it is important that the user dossier stimulates the social workers to questions themselves and the users about their situation and the development thereof, instead of proving the answers. Asking in-depth questions is necessary not only to reach a better and more complete knowledge but also to produce hypothesis about the causes and the possible solutions of users' problems and difficulties, and also to find innovative ways of tackling them [Bini 2003]. In order to support this kind of mental process, the fulfilling of our user dossier is not an automatic passage from one section to another. Social workers, in fact, are allowed to proceed only if data recorded is coherent with the other data registered in their section as well as in the others. Some problems, for example, can be only tackled with some kind of interventions and the programme identifies whether all the data registered is compatible.

IV. The Role of the Community of Practice

As abovementioned, our approach regarding the ISSS is not only operative but also relational, that is, based on the convincement that unless social workers do become involved in the ways in which ISSS is designed and set up, it will fail to collect constantly up-to-date data and to be used by social workers. In order to set up the FVG Region ISSS we adopted a method based on the social workers' participation and we identified in the community of practice, the instrument to reach it. In particular, we conceptualized the setting up of the ISSS as a process of developing and linking communities of practice. The notion of community of practice was developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger ([Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998] as the basis of a social theory of learning. The basic affirmation made by Lave and Wenger is that communities of practice are everywhere and that we are generally involved in many communities, including families, employee groups, professional organization, sport and leisure groups. We are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we interweave our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words we learn. In time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the expected social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over a period of time by the sustained pursuit of shared enterprises. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities «communities of practice» [Wenger 1998: 45] a community of practice can be defined as a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavor. Communities of practice emerge in response to common interest or position, and play an important role in forming their members' participation in, and orientation to, the world around them. Members are brought together by joining in common activities and by "what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities" [Wenger 1998]. Every community of practice ha its own routines and rituals, artefacts and symbols, stories and histories. In this respect, a community of practice is different from a community of interest in that it involves a shared practice.

We considered particularly useful for the ISSS development the three main characteristics of the community of practice identified by Wenger [1998]: what it is about - its joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members; how it functions - mutual engagement that binds members together as a social entity; what capability it has produced – the shared repertoire of common resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

We considered these three aspects very important in order to set up an ISSS perceived by all the social workers as their own and as an instrument routed in their practice, working methodology and experience and as a consequence, fit to support their daily activity. A community of practice, in fact, involves much more than the technical knowledge or skill associated with undertaking some task. Members are involved in a set of relationships over time [Lave and Wenger 1991: 98] and communities develop around things that matter to people [Wenger 1998]. The community of practice organizes some particular area of knowledge and activity which gives members a sense of joint enterprise and identity.

We considered the community of practice, moreover, very important in promoting imagination and in solving problems in particular, by developing new and alternative ideas and solutions. A community of practice, in fact, includes ways of doing and approaching things shared to some significant extent among members.

For these reasons, our efforts have been to transform the professional community of FVG social workers into a community of practice aimed at developing the FVG ISSS.

First of all, we involved all the social workers in the building of a common vocabulary and in particular a

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common set of categories to describe social needs and social services. According to Marradi [1980, 1988], we assumed that data is not something available in nature and ready to use, but something that needs to be built through specific conceptual operations and agreements. Between the reality and the language used to describe it there is no univocal correspondence. One word can refer to different concepts used to talk about the reality. Hence, it is necessary to define and to share the meaning of the words used to describe the various aspects of the reality. In our case, it was necessary to set the FVG social workers to share the meaning of the terms used to describe social needs and social services intervention, in order to be sure that the data registered would refer to the same aspects as the reality. Since that moment, in fact, every social worker described the social needs of his/her users in a subjective way and every social services organization gave different names to services and interventions that are exactly alike. With the collaboration of all the FVG social workers, through focus groups and meetings, we collected all the classification of social services used by singular organizations and reviewed them in order to elaborate a common classification shared by all the social workers. We also took special care in building a correct classification. Far too often, in fact, classifications in use are not correct because they do not respect the three essential criteria of classification that are, as Marradi emphasizes [1980, 1988]: there is one, and only one, criterion of division – only one fundamentum divisionis; one category excludes all the others – mutual exclusivity of categories; and the categories on the whole are exhaustive. We identified a set of a hundred interventions that cover all the interventions used by the FVG social services. All these interventions are homogeneous and on the same level of generality, but refer to different areas of interventions that are: social work, access to services, housing, work and employment, residential care, semi-residential care and community care. Hence, we identified two distinct levels of intervention: a general level composed of eight macro-categories and a less general level composed of one hundred of micro-categories of intervention. Some of these micro-categories moreover can be further detailed into more specific sub-interventions. In this way, it is possible to describe the social work activity in depth by considering three different and homogeneous levels of complex interventions: the macro-, micro- and sub-micro interventions, which can subsequently be aggregated. We did an analogous procedure to set up a classification of social needs to use for assessment. In particular, we identified ten areas of problems each of which is composed of a set of macro-problems that can be detailed still further in micro-problems. Our effort was to avoid the risk of reducing assessment to a mere check list. In fact, we did not identify a set of micro-problems but left this level to be filled in by every social worker. Hence, after choosing a macro-problem from a set of predefined options, every social worker can describe in a subjective way and in more detail the problem he/she has to tackle.

The participation of the social workers, moreover, allowed us to set up a social services user's dossier that is also an instrument for evaluation. In fact, it was possible to introduce a specific section in which the social worker evaluates the skills of the user and of his/her personal and social network to manage the difficult situation in which he/she is. In this way, it is easier to identify the interventions which better fit him/her and so further empower his/her potentiality. The social workers' collaboration was fundamental in sharing the criteria of evaluation and the scoring.

As you can see, the identification of a set of categories of interventions and of problems and the definition of a set of evaluation criteria are methodological issues that can be handled only with the involvement of social workers and confirm our efforts to adapt the new technology to the specific nature of social work. The social workers, in fact, contribute in avoiding the risk of reducing the assessment to a deterministic, linear process, increasingly far from the complexity of social needs and of the relationship between social services users and social workers. They also contribute to keep the technology used for the documentation of their activities coherent to the nature of social work and to the social workers' day-to-day activity. Moreover, the social workers contribute to the promotion of their reflectivity, the empowerment of their narrative and communicative thinking and the safeguarding of their holistic approach to assessment.

V. The Role of the Web

The ISSS experimented in FVG would not be possible without the New Internet. The New Internet, in fact, is completely different from the data base and its logic feared by Parton [2008]. It has enormously exploded global interconnection and made singular networks more inter-active and inter-operative. While the First Internet, that is the Web 1.0, was characterized by static websites, that made it possible only to send emails and to use research engines but did not allow users to interact, the New Internet, that is the Web 2.0 or 3.0, is characterized by social networks and bidirectional communication [Moruzzi 2012]. By the numerous available technological applications, in fact, users are allowed to participate directly and actively in the communication, not only by reading and answering but also by building on its contents. The New Internet has involved every dimension of life. Hence, we are living in a completely new society called the «web-society» where «action and communication are tied together so strongly that one influences the other and vice versa» and their connection has enormous consequences on

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individuals and on organizations [Cipolla 2013]. On the one hand, individuals connected to Internet may receive at any moment and everywhere an enormous amount of data referred to them and if they want to, and declare their agreement, they can share this data with other people and other organizations. In this way they can be more relational and stronger in the relations with the organizations they are interested in. Individuals become «Citizen Environment» a new organizational entity characterized by a great techno-communication culture, so that they may establish connections with organizations in a more qualified manner, not only as receivers of information but also as producers of more and more personalized communications [Moruzzi 2005]. On the other hand, organizations are involved in a permanent exchange of communication with clients, partners, citizens and other public and private organizations; their traditional boundaries become mobile and can be moved, so organizations extend themselves less along the vertical line and more along the horizontal one [Moruzzi 2005]. In this way, the New Internet develops a new environment characterized by a high level of shared and circulating information that produces a singular synergy between information located in individuals, in organizations and in Internet. So, information may be returned to its producer who is allowed to take possession of it once again and to re-use it for his/her own objectives.

The New Internet offered us the right technological environment to build a relational ISSS and a CS focused on the social services user as described above. In fact, the New Internet not only allows the managing of a huge amount of data but also offers unprecedented opportunities for interaction, interconnection and inter-operability. This enabled us to overcome many limitations and difficulties of an organizational and inter-organizational nature, and to develop highly customized and relational information systems which are not only informative but also communicative. The New Internet allowed us to set up a very flexible user dossier, made up of sections which reflect the process of assistance realized by the social worker together with the user. This process is not linear but goes backwards and forwards, stops and then proceeds and finally joins rationality and irrationality. The user dossier we built with the New Internet reflects all these movements.

In the New Internet, moreover, social work can find a helpful tool with which to effectively address some of the key challenges that are testing it: to get legitimacy by increasingly large groups of people that contest its existence; to respond, in a personalized and equitable way, to needs more and more difficult to detect and that are too complex to be tackled; to guide and accompany the building of social policies in accordance with models of governance that involve a large number of levels and actors.

VI. Conclusion

The aim of the article was to contribute to the debate regarding the introduction of ICT in social services with a reflection based on the development of the ISSS of the Autonomous Region of FVG, that shows that it is possible to set up an information system suitable for the particular nature of the social work and coherent to its methodology of work, to the complexity of social needs and to the relationship between social services user and the social worker. We pointed out that to achieve this result it is important to give up the deterministic approach to technology as well as the centralized and top down approach to ISSS, and to adopt a relational approach to both these issues. On the one hand, this means paying attention to the relational nature of technology and to the relations involved in applying it in organizations. On the other hand, it is important to consider ISSS not only as an instrument to collect data describing the reality but, most of all, as an instrument to develop the knowledge of its users and to promote relationships among them. For this reason, we proposed focusing the ISSS on the day-to-day activity of social workers and building it with their direct and constant involvement. In order to do this, we found the notion of community of practice particularly helpful. The community of practice is a very useful instrument in developing the kind of involvement and mutual commitment as well as the repertory of tools and knowledge that are fundamental to setting up the ISSS. In our experience, in fact, the community of practice among all the FVG social workers allowed to compile a common vocabulary and a set of operative procedures shared by all the social services of the region. As a consequence, the ISSS that we have built reflects the real activity of the social services and collects data which has the same and unambiguous meaning for all those who use it.

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