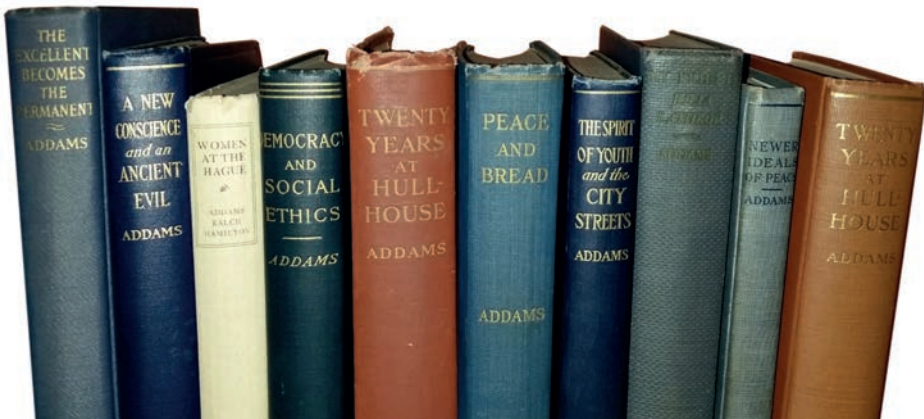


ACTA UNIVERSITATIS UPSALIENSIS
Studia Sociologica Upsaliensia
Nr 65

Jane Addams' Sociology and the Spirit of Social Entrepreneurship

Edited by Vessela Misheva and Andrew Blasko



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

The Relevance of Jane Addams for the Social Sciences in Italy

Andrea Salvini

Introduction

The aim of the following discussion is to briefly examine certain issues concerning how the legacy of Jane Addams may exert a fruitful influence within the social sciences in Italy, particularly in the field of professional social work.

This is a rather straightforward task in one respect because Addams, frankly, remains little known within the scholarly sociological community in Italy. Nevertheless, interest in her life and work has grown noticeably over the last twenty-five years, even though there are still relatively few published references to her vast body of work. The fact that a number of relevant volumes have recently appeared in Italian, including translations of some of her most important essays, assists us in an examination of the value of her theoretical and practical undertakings today.

However, this renewed interest in Addams also makes it difficult for us to evaluate the impact she has had precisely because the materials and studies currently available in Italian are still too fragmentary. Furthermore, not only is Addams now being read from a number of diverse disciplinary perspectives, each of these focuses upon a particular aspect of her voluminous production. There are, for example, discussions concerning Addams' engagement with the social settlement movement in the United States,¹ her notion of social work,² her ideals of peace and feminism,³ as well as her religious inspiration for social action.⁴

¹ Rauty 2011.

² Bortoli 2006.

³ Bianchi 2004.

⁴ Providenti 2004.

Jane Addams and Italy

Two issues stand out regarding Addams' significance within an Italian context, namely, her views concerning the relations between theory, research, and social action, on the one hand, and the roles of the public social services and the third sector in the processes that are changing the Italian welfare state today, on the other.

I would like to begin by noting that Addams' biography contains important connections with Italy. First, Hull-House was located in an area in which there was a significant Italian immigrant community. Consequently, her writings contain many references to the harsh everyday conditions in which poverty-stricken Italians lived – men, women, children, and families – as a result of social degradation and cultural backwardness. It is specifically through the stories of these Italian immigrants that Addams exemplified and illustrated the efficacy of her methods, which turn upon the introduction of small but critical changes in individual and collective behavior through community life, sharing, and socialization. It is well known that a characteristic trait of Addams' settlement house work was for people to live together, whereby networks of relations were established within the informal modality of daily life as both a method and an objective at local as well as global levels.

In addition, many aspects of the dramatic social reality in which Addams worked are present in Italy today, as well as in other countries. For example, Italy constitutes one of the primary points of entry into the European Union for the constant flow of immigrants coming from throughout the world, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Even though current laws impose severe restrictions on such immigration, the latter has not only become unstoppable, it has also brought about significant changes in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the country. Associated issues of pressing importance involve the organization of urban areas where immigrants can settle, processes of integration, the potential for urban conflict, and the incompatibility between local lifestyles and those of the new foreign communities. Although Addams' encountered all of these questions in her reform work, today they possess completely new elements that necessitate a careful examination of the current processes of integration and inclusion. One of the most prominent of these is the way in which recent female immigrants have come to serve as care providers in Italy, particularly for the elderly. It would be most interesting to ask ourselves how Addams would have read and interpreted the role such women now hold within the organization of social welfare and family support in Italy.

The fact that some of Addams' most important essays have been collected in Italian translations in three recent publications facilitates any examination of her impact upon the social sciences in the country. The two more recent of these open with a presentation of Addams' biography and work, which makes it possible to begin a general study before moving on to her many important works that remain in English.⁵ The third has the merit of being the first monograph to present Addams as a person to the Italian public.⁶ It also describes her thinking and her work, setting off from a pedagogical and philosophical perspective.

A number of articles that address the relevance of Jane Addams for social work have also been recently published in Italian professional journals.⁷ There are, in addition, references to Addams in Italian sources specifically devoted to social work, its historical development within the country, and its concepts and methods of action.⁸ Other references to Addams, including a comparison of her and Mary Richmond as sources of inspiration for the development of social services in Italy, can be found in a variety of volumes devoted to historical figures who are internationally important either for the development of social work,⁹ or for the gender perspective within social work.¹⁰

Addams is in fact most frequently referenced in Italian social science literature in connection with the field of social work, where she is regarded, together with Richmond, as one of the founding figures of both the discipline and the profession. Although it is a widely-held opinion among Italian scholars that social work in Italy has been influenced more by Richmond than by Addams – a point discussed below – I maintain that the renewed interest in Addams is an important indicator of the need to introduce new methodologies and theoretical themes into Italian social work. These are associated with a different way of conceiving social action, and they are directly connected with Addams' ideas and with the perspectives of community work and network intervention. We might add that what Addams has to offer for social work and for the development of the social sciences has not yet been fully appreciated in Italy.

The awakening of a new interest in Italy in Addams' life and works is not simply historical in character, but rather represents a response, perhaps still timid but doubtlessly effective, to the need to bring together more

⁵ Rauty 2011; Bianchi 2004.

⁶ Bellatalla 1989.

⁷ Bortoli 2001; 2004.

⁸ Fargion 2009; Bortoli 1997.

⁹ Bortoli 2006, p. 185.

¹⁰ Benvenuti and Gristina 1998, p. 76; Benvenuti and Segatori 2000, p. 90.

closely theory, research, and social intervention. Today's interest in Addams thus arises from the need to explore new methods of research as well as new ways in which to link social knowledge, research, and social change.

In *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Addams describes the case of a man who had worked for an extended period of time in an enclosed area where no physical exertion was required. She convinced him against his own misgivings after he lost his job to accept a position involving manual labor in an open air excavation. He became ill after only a few weeks, however, and soon died. Addams' subsequent reflections, which are not without a certain remorse, are particularly significant on both a human and a methodological level insofar as she expressed the realization that the "proper attitude towards the difficulties of an individual comes from an appropriate and a deep knowledge of his life, his biography, his habits."¹¹ Although this might seem obvious and perhaps even trivial, it in fact anticipates by many years Herbert Blumer's still valid exhortation in *Symbolic Interactionism* that we need to acquire an intimate familiarity with reality.¹² Kathy Charmaz remarks in this regard that

Gaining intimate familiarity means looking, listening, and learning about studied life. It means sustained interactions with people and with written data. It means experiencing wonder about their world, being willing to plunge into it, opening oneself to the unforeseen, and grappling with uncertainty. Gaining intimate familiarity has been called getting an insider view. Now we realize that an insider view always reflects conditions of the particular situation, including the extent to which the researcher shares this situation.¹³

We know that pragmatism constitutes the conceptual basis upon which symbolic interactionism was later grafted, and that symbolic interactionism itself may be understood in certain respects as a type of applied knowledge. We also know that Addams' pragmatist tendencies led her to conceive of knowing as a social endeavor. She thus regarded knowing as always conditional and dependent upon experience insofar as a new point of view can provide a new interpretation of a given problem. Acquiring knowledge from within interaction is consistent with the idea that knowl-

¹¹ See Addams 1912, pp. 161–162. This passage was used in a recent introductory text concerning social work (Fargion 2009, pp. 17–18). The author presented it as an example of her own views about the role of knowledge in social intervention, the importance of constantly redefining one's own perspective, and learning from interaction with people in given contexts.

¹² See Blumer 1969 for a presentation of this point.

¹³ Charmaz 2008, pp. 53–54.

edge cannot be an end unto itself. Knowledge rather implies living a reality, documenting it intersubjectively, and intervening to change it as needed.

This particular circular conception of knowledge, research, and intervention as a unity that is ever flexible, open to the unforeseen, and capable of incorporating new perspectives is present in Italian sociology and social work today only to a limited degree. The development of these two disciplines has been heavily influenced by a reaction to the idealistic orientation, epitomized by the work of Benedetto Croce, which was widespread in Italian philosophy in the early twentieth century. Croce considered sociology to be an unstable science, and the response to this criticism, characterized by an almost obsessive search for supposed scientific objectivity, developed as if in an effort to overcome an inferiority complex. This generated a tendency towards the adoption of standardized and reproducible protocols in both social investigation and social interventions.

Only in the 1970s did a reform movement arise in Italy in both social work and sociology that promoted greater attention to living social actors, particularly those who were more or less marginalized. This made it possible to conceive of the social sciences as a way in which to give – or give back – a voice to people by means of research methods that Addams had promoted many years earlier, including action research, participatory observation, and ethnography. This culminated in legal changes that were in the forefront internationally, the most important of which was the 1978 law concerning psychiatric assistance, better known as the Basaglia Law. Nevertheless, divisions persist within scholarly work, and nearly four decades later there still exists a gap between research and action in the Italian social sciences, even if there has been a slow process of change.

Today we find ourselves in a contradictory phase of development in Italy characterized by two relatively opposed sets of demands. On the one hand, the welfare system is in need of a greater degree of standardization in social intervention procedures. This follows both from the practice and terminology widely employed in epidemiology and in the area of public health, and also from the need to evaluate the impact of intervention in order to assess the rational or effective use of resources in social policy. This has led to the creation of more sophisticated analytical protocols and the identification of specialized synthetic quantitative indicators for policy evaluation.

On the other hand, however, it has become increasingly clear that the more or less widespread risk of social conflict due to economic crisis, changes brought about by immigration, and the resulting current vulnerability of social relations necessitates a qualitative change in both the presence and efforts of social workers within the community. This not only includes a

new way of engaging with local social realities that involves learning from life itself (Jane Addams) or living reality (William James), it also reflects both the meaning and method of Addams' work. This is particularly the case on the level of local communities. Such change will demand a strenuous effort on the part of sociologists and social workers in Italy, whose professional self-definition and organization of work does not include such constant engagement.

This brings us to the second point of the present discussion, which refers to the roles that the public social services and the third sector play today in processes of social reform.

The Role of Professional Social Work and the Third Sector in Social Reform in Italy

Jane Addams was a reformer who built upon the circularity of theory, research, and action. She frequently reiterated that action reveals not only the limitations of a given idea, but also the full range of its ethical implications. We also know that action is embedded in the community, and that it is above all interaction or, in Blumer's terms, joint action.¹⁴

These considerations have a number of implications. Perhaps most significantly, if professional social work strives to be "closer" to the people, it cannot be satisfied with merely shifting one and the same set of procedures from an office desk to the streets of the community. It must instead adopt ways of working and of establishing a presence at the local level that are substantially different from the bureaucratic practices which now characterize a large part of social work. The spread of the network perspective in social intervention that we can observe in Italy today makes such changes possible to a certain degree, even if this frequently remains merely at the level of good intentions or of metaphor. Social workers have long sought to match needs with resources, identifying and acquiring the means needed for those to whom they normally refer as their clients. Addams clearly reminds us, however, that the client terminology which has become commonplace is completely inappropriate for describing the situation of individuals who are in need. Such individuals should always be viewed as *citizens*.

The network perspective in social work should nevertheless be extended because it implies that social work needs to be constantly immersed in the community. Addams draws our attention to this point as well. Community work and the network perspective can come together and reciprocally empower each other to a certain extent so that both can function not

¹⁴ Blumer 1969.

only within primary networks, or the core networks in which people are embedded, but also within larger relational contexts. In the city where I reside, however, which has a population of approximately 150,000 people, every social worker is, on average, requested to assist in more than 100 cases over the course of a year. This unfortunately makes it impossible in practical terms to conduct research on such important issues as how to promote lifestyles directed towards individual and collective well-being within a community, how local communities can become more aware of their own character and resources in order to be more autonomous in their local responses to their own needs, and how community members rely upon each other in respect to mechanisms of beneficial joint action.

Such problems obviously reflect the crisis afflicting the Italian welfare system today. Social services continue to be characterized by an approach that is, in general, derived from the casework tradition in social work, which aims to bring about change in individual subjects through psychosocial therapy rather than by promoting action within the social context. This type of approach is untenable because it in fact prevents the qualitative changes that are necessary in both the orientation and organization of social work.

This point merits further attention even if we are not in a position at the moment to present a detailed picture of the history of social services in Italy, which became a professional discipline only after the Second World War and the end of Fascism. Social workers had been closely tied to the dictatorial regime during the Fascist period, when their role was limited to providing assistance in an essentially paternalistic fashion, particularly in the industrial sector. We can understand the post-war development only in respect to a specific historical context that made it necessary to reconstruct a militarily defeated country not only on societal and economic levels, but also – and perhaps most importantly – on civic and moral levels as well. One could argue with justification that the new type of social work that began to emerge provided a natural outlet for anti-fascist and democratic civil action, and that a central element in this process was the effort to provide a course of professional training for those able to shoulder the burdens associated with the type of reconstruction needed.

The attention given to the need for professional training, coupled with the previous nature of social services in Italy, generated a situation in which a number of different schools of social work arose. While these had diverse sources of inspiration, a predominant role was played by values associated with Roman Catholicism. Another important element in this development was the adoption of models and methods of intervention from countries with more established systems of social work, particularly the United

Kingdom and the United States. Among the different alternatives from which to draw, what may be described in general terms as a person-oriented perspective most closely responded to the needs of the new type of social work. We must not overlook the fact that, in both the United States during the early twentieth century and in Italy after the Second World War, the moral dimension was considered key to gaining an understanding of hardship and social problems, the causes of which were viewed as residing primarily within the individual. In this regard, a fine thread that is primarily religious in character ties together social work in Italy and in the United States, prime examples of which include the Charity Organization Society and the Social Gospel movement. In addition, even though the need to promote social change was not extraneous to the new type of social work being developed, the individualization and “psycholization” of problems, and thus of the modes of intervention, was paramount.¹⁵ This took place under the strong influence of the American social worker Mary Richmond (1861–1928).

Richmond’s approach came to be accepted as consistent with the needs of social work in Italy in three respects. First, Richmond maintained that social work properly had an essentially individualistic character in light of the fact that the fundamental causes of a person’s problems supposedly resided within her personality. This gave rise to the acceptance of the so-called casework model, which has since been widely accepted in daily practice. Second, a methodological formulation that tied together knowledge and intervention in respect to individual situations lent importance to the precise and systematic collection and analysis of information. This led to a further individualizing of the causes of problems, from which it is but a short step to the supposedly scientific individualizing of solutions. This type of perspective clearly responded, from a certain point of view, to the existing need to provide the social sciences and social work with a more solid and reliable foundation than had been the case previously. Third, Richmond’s formulations were appealing by virtue of the highly systematic way in which she articulated her position, which is presented in two volumes that may be described as comprising a handbook or guide for social work.¹⁶ In contrast, the method and approach characteristic of Addams’ voluminous writings is less systematic in nature and much more oriented to narrating accounts of interactions, encounters, and working life that are drawn directly from daily experience.

¹⁵ Fargion 2009, p. 24.

¹⁶ Richmond 1917, 1922.

However, social work in Italy was shaken towards the end of the 1960s by an apparent paradigm shift in the social sciences in Europe, whereby there was a gradual decline in structural-functionalist perspectives and a concurrent rise in critical, interpretative, and constructionist approaches. Important in this respect was a greater sensitivity among social workers regarding the obligation to voice their concerns, which also had a political significance. Greater importance was also placed upon the community-oriented context of the genesis and spread of social hardship as well as the various courses of action adopted to remedy it. Consequently, social work became more focused not only on the structural mechanisms that led to marginalization, but also on the need for social workers to voice their criticism concerning the suffering with which they became intimately familiar in their work. Increased emphasis was also placed upon promoting the well-being of the general population – not just the well-being of individuals – within the dynamics of local community development. This led to the translation of relevant titles that had been originally published in the United States.¹⁷ Although there were only a limited number of references to Addams and to the settlement house movement during that period, and in spite of the rapid decline in Italy during the 1970s of interest in community work, the subsequent practice of social work could not fail to take into account the need to explore those theoretical and operational horizons which emphasized that both problems and solutions are tied to the social context, even if this meant leaving aside references to specific cases.

This broadening of horizons was associated in Italy with the spread of the systemic¹⁸ and integrated¹⁹ models, which were adopted from both the social sciences and social work in the Anglo-Saxon world and modified for the Italian context. Notwithstanding such efforts, which are reflected today in the spread of network models in the literature,²⁰ social work in Italy finds itself torn between the need to provide immediate and concrete responses to situations of particular hardship, which the current economic situation has only accentuated, and the demands of the institutional bureaucracy. The latter, forced to deal with diminishing resources, has imposed both limits and standardized forms upon interventions. This is accompanied, however, by the awareness that social action needs to be conducted effectively on multiple levels and in multiple circumstances, and that there must be a greater involvement on the part of social workers in fostering the needed community-oriented social dynamics. Although

¹⁷ See, e.g., Ross 1963.

¹⁸ Campanini 2002.

¹⁹ Pincus and Minahan 1973; Dal Pra Ponticelli 1985.

²⁰ Salvini 1996; Folghereiter 2004; Serra 2001.

there is no real possibility today for such an understanding to be translated into concrete action, a growing number of social workers in Italy are nevertheless attentive to the possibility that the content of their work can be changed, and that new meaning can be given to their professional presence within local contexts. It is precisely in such a situation that Jane Addams can serve as a unique source of inspiration.

Professional social work in Italy must now find the strength to redefine its position within the welfare system in terms of its community-oriented dimension. There must also be an easing of the pressure associated with traditional casework, and the dynamic and complex constellation of third sector organizations, particularly volunteer organizations, can be particularly important and useful in this regard. The activities of such organizations make it possible to enter deeply into social reality, ensure a continuous presence within local communities, and promote a sense of solidarity and interdependence in respect to the wider relational and spatial context. The community work performed by volunteer organizations thereby facilitates a reduction of social isolation and enables local identities to open themselves to an expansion of their social horizons. Both relational openness and withdrawal strictly depend on the characteristics of the social context as well as the conscious interactions among the various social actors capable of promoting joint action, sharing, and socializing. Addams viewed the latter as providing a “finer social quality that has a greater social value than the more effective individual action.”²¹ This involves a type of communitarianism that is open to new social needs within a process of social and cultural negotiation that is never final and complete, which could perhaps be described in terms reminiscent of Addams’ work as “non-communitarianist communitarianism.”

Volunteerism in Italy comprises a broad range of activities capable of promoting a spirit of solidarity. It is also capable of taking up demands that the rights of citizenship be enhanced, and that social justice be extended through action and interaction with people in the places where they live, work, and study. Italian law, particularly in the reform of social assistance that was enacted in 2000, recognizes the third sector as a collective agent for intervention and social planning. This makes it possible for the professional social services and the third sector to promote a different notion of being, working, and living within social reality without giving rise to competition between public and private forms of intervention.

²¹ Addams 2006 [1902].

Conclusions

I have sought to outline various points of contact between Italy and the work of Jane Addams, with a particular reference to the way in which social work in Italy has developed. It is important to emphasize that the latter can extricate itself from the state of contradiction in which it presently finds itself only through, first, a reduction in the pressure coming from the institutional bureaucracy, which tends towards the standardization of interventions, and, second, the effective transformation, at least in part, of the modalities of intervention from a focus on individual cases to a focus on the community, which involves forms of action that are clearly different from those imagined by the community movements of the 1960s. Although this has been foreshadowed by a steadily increasing interest in network intervention, no more precise role has yet been established for such changes regarding theory and the modes of intervention in Italian social work. Additional factors that apparently indicate new and fruitful developments include the current growth of social volunteerism and the emergence of new forms of collaboration between the third sector and public social institutions.

I believe that the critical re-evaluation of Addams' work which is now underway will point towards, if not answers, at least paths for further reflection in sociology, professional social work, and the third sector. As Rosalie Otters observes,

We social workers revere Jane Addams, but often at a distance; we need to take in the full breadth and depth of her life and thought. She successfully integrated practice with research and theory. It is time to reappraise her work and life. Though this process has been made all the easier because other applied disciplines have also recently reassessed her contributions to their own disciplines, we seem to be standing on the sidelines.²²

In addition, a re-examination of the potential contribution of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism to social work in terms of theoretical reference points, methods of analysis, and modalities of social intervention can be useful for revealing the dynamics of persons-in-interaction and interactions-within-communities.²³ The interactionist viewpoint in sociology, social work, and social policy can help illustrate how individuals adapt their own courses of action in respect to those of others within the complexity of group life. This lends a humanistic quality to both analysis and

²² Otters 2009.

²³ Forte 2004; Johnson 2001.

modes of intervention that should always be the overriding characteristic of social work.

University of Pisa

Department of Political Science

Literature

- Addams, J. (2006) [1902] *Democracy and Social Ethics*. Teddington, UK: Echo Library.
- Addams, J. (2004) *Donne, immigrati, governo della città. Scritti sull'etica sociale*, a cura e con Introduzione di Bruna Bianchi. Caserta: Edizioni Spartaco.
- Addams, J. (1912) *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes*. Memphis, TN: General Books.
- Addams, J., R. A. Woods, and G. H. Mead (2010) *Il social settlement*, a cura di Raffaele Rauty. Lecce: Edizioni Kurumuny.
- Bellatalla, L. (1989) *Tra cuore e ragione. La "filosofia filantropica" di Jane Addams*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Benvenuti, P. and D. A. Gristina (1998) *La donna e il servizio sociale. Identità sessuale e professionale dell'assistente sociale*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Benvenuti, P. and R. Segatori (2000) *Professione e genere nel lavoro sociale*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Blumer, H. (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism. Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bortoli, B. (2006) *I giganti del lavoro sociale. Grandi donne (e grandi uomini) nella storia del Welfare 1526–1939*. Trento: Edizioni Erickson.
- Bortoli, B. (2004) "Impegno sociale e politico fino al Nobel per la pace." *Lavoro Sociale*, 4(1).
- Bortoli B. (2001) "Sociologia e Servizio Sociale agli albori della professione." *Studi di sociologia*.
- Bortoli, B. (1997) *Teoria e storia del servizio sociale*. Roma: NIS.
- Bortoli, B. (2002) "Agli albori della professione del 'lavoratore sociale.'" In C. Marzotto (ed.), *Per un'epistemologia del servizio sociale. La posizione del soggetto*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Campanini, A. (2002) *L'intervento sistemico. Un modello operativo per il servizio sociale*. Roma: Carocci.
- Charmaz, K. (2008) "A Future for Symbolic Interactionism." *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, 32.
- Dal Pra Ponticelli, M. (1985) *I modelli teorici del servizio sociale*. Roma: Astrolabio.
- Fargion, S. (2009) *Il Servizio sociale. Storia, temi, dibattiti*. Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza.
- Folgheraiter, F. (2004) *Teoria e metodologia del servizio sociale. La prospettiva di rete*. Milano: Franco Angeli.

- Forte, J. A. (2004) "Symbolic Interactionism and Social Work: A Forgotten Legacy." *Families in Society Research Library*, July-Sept.
- Johnson, A. K. (2004) "Social Work is Standing on the Legacy of Jane Addams: But Are We Sitting on the Sidelines?" *Social Work*, 49(2).
- Nappi, A. (2001) *Questioni di storia, teoria e pratica del Servizio Sociale Italiano*. Napoli: Liguori Editore.
- Otters, R. V. (2009) "Following in Jane Addams' Footsteps." *The Journal of Social Work Values & Ethics*, 6(3).
- Pincus, A. and A. Minahan (1973) *Social Work Practice: Model and Method*. Ithaca, IL: Peacock Publications.
- Providenti, G. (2004) "Cristianesimo sociale, democrazia e nonviolenza in Jane Addams." *Rassegna di Teologia*, 45.
- Rauty, R. (2010) "Introduzione. Il settlement nella vicenda statunitense." In J. Addams, R. A. Woods, and G. H. Mead, *Il social settlement*, a cura di Raffaele Rauty. Lecce: Edizioni Kurumuny.
- Richmond, M. E. (1917) *Social Diagnosis*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Richmond, M. E. (1922) *What Is Social Case Work? An Introductory Description*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Ross, M. G. (1963) *Organizzazione di Comunità. Teoria e Principi* (revisione e presentazione di Giuliano Giorio). Roma: Ed. Onarmo.
- Salvini, A. (1996) "Progettare in rete." In M. A. Toscano (a cura di), *Introduzione al servizio sociale*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Serra, R. (2001) *Logiche di rete. Dalla teoria all'intervento sociale*. Milano: Franco Angeli.