

Long Abstract – Monographic Section

INVESTING IN THE SOCIAL REINTEGRATION CARE FOR DETAINEES: TRENDS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES OF THE ITALIAN WELFARE SYSTEM

edited by Alberto Pesce e Veronica Valenti

“The Young Beyond”. The social reintegration of young prisoners, between representation and reality.

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Over the last decade, public debate has often focused on youth crime and deviance phenomena, detecting both the social, psychological and relational effects of prison and the related processes of social reintegration. This is also due to the imagery provided by cultural products such as the cult serial drama *Mare Fuori* (The Sea Beyond, Rai, 2020-ongoing), focusing on the lives of young adults incarcerated in a juvenile detention center in Naples.

This show provides an insight into a little-studied context such as that of juvenile detention centres, highlighting the complex relationships between inmates and the professionals who work within these institutions, which often play a critical role in guiding inmates' paths toward reintegration and shaping their lives after prison.

Combining different qualitative research tools (media content analysis and in-depth interviews), the study investigates the relationship between on-screen representations and daily experiences of Italian youth penal institutions, highlighting how, beyond the physiological differences between fiction and reality, the social reintegration of young prisoners represents both a demanding and fascinating challenge for professionals such as psychologist, trainers, social workers, police officers.

In *Mare Fuori*, young offenders are depicted with dramatic, complex backgrounds, different family environments, and criminal attitudes. This narrative approach enhances the viewer's empathy but often tends to oversimplify the nature of detention. Indeed, the series portrays the youth penal system as a space marked by intense, and sometimes too empathetic connections between the young inmates and the prison staff, which does not fully reflect the structured, professional boundaries. Furthermore, essential roles such as those of social workers, psychologists, and magistrates are underrepresented or simplified in the show, limiting the public's understanding of the full range of the rehabilitative efforts involved.

The article also underscores that while *Mare Fuori* highlights certain vocational activities as paths to rehabilitation, it does not provide an extensive focus on the critical role of educational programs that lay as a foundation for successful reintegration. Moreover, while the series tends to focus on extreme post-release scenarios – where former inmates either fall back into crime or suffer tragic outcomes – actual professionals clearly emphasize their narrow view of life after detention, pointing out how their role and their greatest efforts are focused on the present and on the attempt to propose to young prisoners a different and alternative model of life to the criminal one, in order to instill in them the “seeds of change”.

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Although *Mare Fuori* has positively influenced public awareness around youth detention, some of its portrayals risk distorting the realities of rehabilitation and societal reintegration, which often involve long-term, intricate processes supported by dedicated professionals.

Given the influence of media portrayals on public perceptions, further developments of this study aim to integrate the audience perspective, involving both the series' viewers and young prisoners themselves, with the belief that audience studies can offer valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between serial narratives, societal attitudes, and policy expectations on juvenile justice and reintegration.

Cite me: Paola De Rosa, Nicola Ferrigni and Marica Spalletta, "Ragazzi fuori". Il reinserimento sociale dei giovani detenuti, tra rappresentazione e realtà in "WELFARE E ERGONOMIA" 2/2024, pp 105-119, DOI: 10.3280/WE2024-002008.