

### 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*

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#### *Social reintegration of incarcerated persons: neuroscience, epigenetics and welfare*

Luca Muglia and Aurora Maria Di Leverano

The paper questions the possibility of using neuroscience to develop social and criminal policies for the rehabilitation of prisoners.

In the first part of the work, the focus is on the most relevant ethical and legal issues concerning the re-education of offenders in the light of international principles. We intend to emphasize the inadequacy of punishment, as traditionally understood, which is the result of cultural representations that consider - unreasonably - the sanction as an instrument capable of ensuring the containment of criminal acts.

The paper focuses on the most recent neuroscientific studies that show how our actions are closely related to our environment. This means that if the living conditions inside prison institutions are not such as to favor social reintegration, the risk that prison will fail to carry out that attempt at re-education imposed by national and supranational principles grows disproportionately.

The reference to cognitive, social, or affective neurosciences leads to a brief examination of the different perspectives that scholars have adopted in addressing the phenomenon, from those that are more markedly deterministic to those that, on the other hand, recognize autonomy in the choices made by the offender.

Different approaches are proposed based on neuroscientific studies that can lead to a progressive abandonment of the prison-centric view of punishment. In this regard, the mechanism of neuroplasticity is analyzed, which indicates how the nervous system changes by adapting to the stresses coming from outside, with the consequence that only an improvement of the prisoners living environment can lead to a true and lasting re-education. All this requires a substantial change in the way educational, therapeutic and rehabilitative interventions are conceived, as well as sanctions.

Also helpful is the approach offered by epigenetics, according to which what we are results from a dynamic interaction process between our genome and the environment. We also mention the role of the so-called mirror neurons, which induce empathic replication in the brain of the emotions of others, thus emphasizing that degraded environments and inhuman living conditions do nothing but reduce, if not eliminate, the possibilities of re-education. Therefore, learning by imitation, as well as languages and experiences that convey positive emotions is essential.

Lastly, a series of penal intervention models are proposed that pursue the project of emotional-psychological reintegration of the offender. In particular, we focus on optimistic models of punishment according to which people are more inclined to conform to social rules by virtue of

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emotional interaction with fellow offenders than by virtue of the deterrent mechanism of punishment.

From a comparative perspective, we specifically analyze the Norwegian prison system, which the international community recognizes as the most exemplary application of the principles of legal civilization in prisons.

In conclusion, the paper aims to demonstrate how modern neuroscience can significantly contribute to the protection of fundamental rights, the humanisation of treatment, and respect for the dignity of the person.

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