

Introduction

Social Welfare Changes in European Contexts

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In the last few years there has been a significant increase in the amount of research and the number of books published looking at the major changes to welfare regimes or models throughout Europe. Some of these focused their attention on the similarities and differences between different member States whilst others tried to support the idea of a possible convergence towards a European welfare model as a result of the integration process as a whole.

This book, published within the EUSW (European Platform for Worldwide Social Work) network, using evidence from several European countries, aims to provide a more detailed and original contribution to the international debate on future developments in welfare systems by looking at the relations between national social policies and social work practices, and the consequences for the civil society. In particular, the new liberalism as well as the increasing process of rationalisation of welfare systems that has occurred since the Seventies in most of the European countries as a consequence of many factors – such as significant changes in labour market organisation, the end of full-time employment, a greater involvement of women and a new gender-based division of labour, the population instability etc. – has had a strong influence and impact on social work. All of these changes have directly challenged the specific nature of social work in various contexts and, primarily, the role of social work as a profession.

In modern societies, social work is part of the political and administrative system. Professional and semi-professional social work takes place within an institutional framework, which is dominated by legal elements. In other words, social work is forced to act on an organisational basis. This is true for statutory as well as voluntary work in NGOs.

Apart from this, social work is engaged with social justice and supports solidarity. To summarise: social work pursues the goal of solving or correcting problems and restricting the life-situations of individuals, groups or systems and improving living conditions. This happens in different fields of practice and social workers are using various competencies like counselling, network building, coaching, planning and coordinating, and evaluation in order to achieve the overall aim. They are working towards the

goal of promoting human dignity and social justice in governmental structures as well as in voluntary organisations.

Analysis of the European dimensions of contemporary changes as well as the process of professionalisation of social work has shown an unquestionable role for social workers in creating and sustaining civil societies. As seen from different approaches given by the authors, the professionalisation of social work in Europe is connected with the mainstream of social developments and challenges, not only in relation to the need for the reconstruction of welfare systems, which have to answer some new social problems and serve citizens in civil society, but also to changes in social work's professional activity.

With regard to contemporary reforms and changes in European welfare States, new patterns of social life, processes of modernisation, may be taken into account. In addition, there are other processes, mainly related to privatisation and the development of service sectors, changes in social structures, as well as the development of social professions, often as a result of European policies. With the prospect of founding a civil society, we can vote for extensive education and better competencies for social workers and for creating, through social work, a normative and epistemological basis for a high quality of social life in times when, in many European countries, there is a risk of exclusion.

As part of the social welfare system, social work is involved in the process of globalisation and is not able to evade this issue. Moreover, that has consequences for the delivery of social services. Amongst other things, one can argue in the context of the discussion about the so-called modernisation of the welfare State, that the cost of the welfare State and the functional problems of its institutions are regarded as the cause of economic growth impediments. The pressure of global competition also then serves to put achieved social-State standards fundamentally into question. These discussions go to the heart of the existing self-image of social work. This development defines, with different facets in many European States, the discussion about the future of welfare and the choices for children, young people and adults. The 'active welfare State' is replaced and the slogan belonging to it is 'workfare instead of welfare'. Ultimately, it is about a new model of the social State and its social work. Present social policy, influenced by neo-liberal approaches, is often marked by the tendency to move the welfare of the public interest, rather than the welfare of individuals, into the foreground. Social policy is subordinate to labour-market politics and social work becomes instrumentalised/exploited.

In general, the neo-liberal approach emphasised the importance of individual responsibility, choice and freedom; it supported the discipline of the market against interference by the State, urging reductions in taxation and public expenditure, although it required a stronger State to establish certain modes of family life and social discipline. Thus, an increasing em-

phasis has been put on evaluation procedures, monitoring and assessment, with managers at the very basis of this process. As a consequence, the role of social worker is rapidly changing, moving from that of therapists or case-workers dealing with clients, to care or case managers coordinating and operationalising care packages directed to consumers. Sanders uses the term “social service brokers” in order to describe this new requirement.

Starting from this basis, we explore the outcomes of this process of welfare restructuring in twelve European countries in order to better understand if it has strengthened the role of social work or, instead, has weakened or undermined it.

The book is structured in three broad sections in which countries are grouped according to specific areas of interest. The first section is titled *Restructuring Social Welfare* and deals with the reform of welfare systems in Italy, the Netherlands, Finland and Wales. Using evidence from their research, the authors underline the recent changes in national social policies showing a common trend towards decentralisation and the emergence of new forms of social regulation based on *governance* amongst local authorities and private organisations (profit-oriented and non-profit). In particular, since the end of the 1990s all these countries, following the approval of new national laws, started a structural reform of their welfare systems, implementing new ideas and introducing principles from the private sector such as outsourcing, managerial strategies, competition amongst service providers, evaluation of services produced, and also by looking at a greater individual and personal responsibility.

The Italian experience from the year 2000 onwards, presented by Vincenzo Fortunato and Annamaria Campanini, has been characterised by a significant growth of third sector organisations, which has led to an increase in relations between these organisations and the public sector. Hence, the passage from the traditional welfare State to a model of social protection defined as welfare mix, which results from the interaction between the State and private non-profit organisations. This system is referred to as the *negotiation model* or even as the *social market of services*, and is based on a reduced financial contribution by the State and on its ability to identify families' needs for services in order to orient them towards a private offer coming from accredited organisations in competition with each other.

The same path has been followed by the Netherlands with the introduction, in January 2007, of the *Social Support Act (WMO)*. After years of centralised social policies, the new law approved by the Conservative government talks about decentralisation and subsidiarity, shifting the decision-making process down to local authorities and municipalities. As Peters claims in her chapter, with this reform, the government wanted to stress the increasing importance of ‘horizontal’ rather than vertical relations in planning and implementing social policies. This implies that the State changes

its role, defining the rules and the framework within which private (mainly non-profit organisations) and public actors work together. In accordance with the 'pillarisation' principle non-profit organisations are strongly encouraged by the State to provide social services, while the State only intervenes if there are not suitable organisations to provide social services. In comparison with Italy, the involvement of private organisations seems to be even greater, whereas both the State and the market play a residual (the former) or a marginal (the latter) role.

In Finland, the welfare reform has involved a radical restructuring of the public sector, which has gained greater autonomy and power from the central State. The reform started in 1995 and significantly empowered local governments by giving them the opportunity both to directly provide social services and to contract them out in the market arena. Within this new, more market-oriented framework, social work can also be outsourced by local authorities. As Alavaikko argues, this process would, in fact, require a new form of citizenship in order to be effective as "since the centralised control of local communities has diminished, individuals, lobbies and other groups are to take over the controlling functions over local governments".

A real empowerment of service users as "citizens" is also described by Sanders and Pope in their study on Wales. In their chapter, the authors underline the devolution process occurring in Welsh social policy since 1999, drawing attention to the significant changes introduced as opposed to the previous British social policy. The new and more universalistic approach is based on a reorganisation of social services that focuses attention on efficiency, but also on individual and community needs, on equality and social justice. Furthermore, the large scale reorganisation of social services had major implications for the coordination of care services, both within and between local authorities, as well as on partnership and collaboration strategies in different sectors of the "care economy". According to the authors, this new social and political environment will represent a basis for further developments in the field of social work with an emphasis, where possible, on universal and de-stigmatising strategies.

Although these processes are still *in itinere* and require more time to be assessed, looking at the examined countries as examples of different European welfare models, we can identify some interesting issues and features of welfare restructuring processes. First of all, it appears clear that social policies are still a national matter. In particular, globalisation challenges reinforce the national identity of each single State, which autonomously redefines its own welfare system without a real and active contribution from the European Union. Therefore, the idea of a 'European welfare model' able to take over the various national systems is still far from being realised.

On the other side, it seems that boundaries among traditional welfare models, as they were theorised by Esping-Andersen, are becoming less clear and more uncertain. In fact, although with differences related to their

political, cultural, socio-economic traditions etc., the case studies showed similar trends towards decentralised decision-making processes: from central to local authorities. The traditional top-down logic of social regulation is replaced by a bottom-up approach based on a multi-level governance among a mix of public and private actors. Within this framework, the State redefines its role by defining the rules that private organisations have to follow. Thus, as opposed to those scholars that claim the withdrawal of the State in social policy, our analysis shows evidence that a strong institutional leadership is needed to face problems such as the labour market reform, redefining pension schemes, ageing populations etc.

Most of the European countries have experienced a significant growth in third sector organisations which are deeply involved in the welfare restructuring process throughout a direct provision of social services outsourced by local governments. This is definitely the case in Italy and the Netherlands, but also in Finland and Wales. The real challenge for all the examined countries from now onwards seems to be, therefore, to spread the idea of cooperation amongst the actors engaged in co-designing the system of social policies at both national and local level.

In any case, the type of help, assistance and support will change and the relationship between the claim for help and the reasonableness of the personal contribution of the addressees must be balanced again. This development is valid for most European countries, whereas the new EU members must be especially observed. Looking at Europe, we see the intensification of the reasonableness-criteria at the start of employment, instruments like welfare-to-work, flexibility of employment relationships as well as a new role of the social State. With the keywords “division of responsibility” it should be clear that the tasks and welfare State benefits, from third parties (for example, NGOs) as well, can be produced, if these are better or more cost efficient. The State, however, keeps the responsibility for the implementation and provides a lump sum of funds, for which different players must compete again and again. On the other hand, the principle of the division of responsibility is the appeal to the citizen-commitment and personal responsibility. Social risks become re-privatised and certain tasks are taken out of the public sector and placed into the private or intermediary sectors. Therefore very different sectors, which can differ considerably with regard to professionalisation of social work, legal and financial coverage and acceptance with clients, are created.

In the second section of the book, titled *Social Work Practice within Changing Perspectives*, Libor Musil, Kateřina Kubalčíková and Mirka Nečasová show the consequences of these developments for practitioners in their research on care for the elderly in the Czech Republic. The lack of adequate resources and the increase in clients' demands cause a dilemma. Frontline workers face the dilemma by themselves e.g. they work more, do other things that they aren't paid for or select clients in terms of personal

affection. The position of municipality home-care workers and charity personal care was different in terms of the funding and the division of clients. Municipal home care was financed without any application to the State municipal budget. Charity personal care asked for grants that were eventually, if the application was successful, covered by the same budget. Municipal home care has stable funding and less complex jobs whereas charity personal care has uncertain funding and jobs that are more complex. Not only will the service-offer and the funding of social-State benefits change but also the legal base and provisions, how the service-benefits will soon be offered and from whom. Looking at the contributions of this publication, one recognises that this is an entirely European development. The questions derived from that simply stated are: what must the State still provide and guarantee? What can and should one expect and allow the citizens to be personally responsible for? What should remain in the market for regulation?

In former times, social work was often located between help and control. Nowadays the vertices seems to be *a*) instrumentalisation of social work for external social policy restriction, *b*) expert-critical monitoring of socio-political developments.

The essays in this second section demonstrate this fundamental shift. The changes can have different directions. Torbjörn Forkby underlines that the child welfare system in Sweden has been restructured but with other results and assessments than those described in the Czech Republic. The restructuring of social welfare should be understood in this way:

not that social work or professional social support has been replaced or cut down. This shift has been towards community-based intervention; and this implies a change of content and a new form of relationship between State and voluntary actors in this field. A great change in institutional care is the move from public to private responsibility.

In view of this new situation, we should again keep in mind that capitalistic societies create systematic problems and risks, and that social work is seen as one actor within the society to reduce (soften) these risks. Social work is, then, a functional part of these societies.

In front of this backdrop, Ewa Kantowicz and Zofia Waleria Stelmazuk are working on the question of professional standards for the social care system in Poland. The responsibilities are being repositioned in Poland as well: from State to non-governmental support systems, from the national education system to the social welfare sector. In accordance with a new conceptual framework based on eco-system and cognitive behavioural theories, this leads to new orientation in the training of professionals. Due to legal regulations, professionals should be aware of better cooperation between different socio-educational institutions, which requires

certain competencies to be used by different actors in various institutions involved in the process of diagnosis and support.

The self-developing fragmentation of social professions makes social work weaker rather than stronger as an authority of social formation. Social work will not be able to stop the economic and political developments. You can continue to contact its “tradition of help” – however, not in the sense of unconditional help but as professional reactionary help that is aware of its boundaries and possibilities.

In this tradition, social work has an advocate and support function. It supports and represents individuals and helps, above all, children and teenagers to push through individual rights obverse to society and their facilities. Disadvantaged social groups are, after all, still the main-addressees of social work. Social work as a science aims at acting in practice and that also means that the scientific discourses change if the structure and the contents of practice change. The relation between State, society and citizens is particularly regarded as a crucial issue for social work. That will become clear in section three.

The new social work reality has emerged with the globalisation of economy which has been based upon a neo-liberal vision of the world for the last twenty years. In Spain, as mentioned in the chapter by José Luis Malagón Bernal, José Luis Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano and Evaristo Barrera Algarín, “within the field of social work” the neo-liberal phenomenon is reflected by the strong re-emergence of the individualised work and by re-launching a social and professional community based on voluntary social assistance. In their opinion, neo-liberalism creates the ideology for all that is local, for the civic community. Thus, the term ‘State’ disappears and is replaced by the term ‘society’. This indicates that it is the society as a whole and not the State that has to secure its own welfare.

These ideas had a big impact on the Spanish State, especially in the eighties, when many programmes of deinstitutionalisation were carried out. This took place within the mental health care system, with the process of closing down psychiatric wards in order to integrate mentally ill people into their families and communities. However, it became apparent that forms of preparatory work had not been carried out with the families or the communities, and that there were insufficient funds available for the neighbourhoods to realise the new integration assistance model. As a result, the assistance provided was precarious and public authorities tried to increase the number of voluntary associations to deliver services previously directly provided by the State.

With the prospect of social assistance being privatised, personalised and “de-professionalised” with voluntary assistance, and integrated into the management of social services, Spain and other countries are faced with a paradox. On one hand, we are living in a global society characterised by the predominance of ideas of modernity, rationality and progress, and the

modern world is geared towards great corporations. On the other hand, social action has returned to the community, to the family, to the neighbourhood and to voluntary assistance. Some authors even argue that social work within the public context is restricted and oppressed, considering the private contexts more appropriate for the profession. Arguments like these have come to justify the recent changes to professional perspectives with regard to those who choose to work outside the public context which is strengthening the private or even pseudo-professional contexts of voluntary social assistance.

It can be assumed that, in Spain, neo-liberal economy influences social and family changes. These changes have destroyed the social models which have prevailed up until very recently in society. As Malagón Bernal, Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano and Barrera Algarín argue,

There have been important changes in the philosophy of social assistance – we have moved from assistance based on social rights to assistance based on needs within the context of global liberal economy – that have affected the professional aspect of social work.

In comparison, in France, social welfare and social policies have been redefined by problems of unemployment, urbanisation and migration during the last twenty-five years. Social services began to transform the different approaches and especially the so called *politique de la ville*, which should develop new methods and ways of acting: collective action, mobilisation of populations in the area and empowerment. In the third section of the book, titled *Social Work Contribution to the Development of Civil Society*, Gérard Moussu claims that the events of *banlieues* in France have provoked a realisation of conscience. The problems must be resolved by the ways of employment and social approach, more particularly with the youngest. But social work must redefine the conception of work with the entire population. It must combine both the individual and collective approach.

In France, over the last twenty years, the reconstruction of welfare system has led to a considerable increase in the number of social workers as a result of decentralisation. However, criticism of social work in terms of its economic rationality continued and with the impetus of a managerial train of thought, social work took on an ideology of effectiveness, notably with the use of evaluation which was being applied to many sectors before being transformed into a “quality procedure” since 2002 through new legislation. This recent law had an important effect on social workers’ practices by placing “the user at the heart of social action”. Due to changes in the nature of social problems, social work has had to completely rethink its basic principles and its methods of intervention.

Two concepts appeared in social work practice: the individual project and the evaluation. Individualisation was one of the effects of cultural

changes that occurred with the development of the “civil society”. Social work is concerned with this cultural and normative change and has now taken on the notion of the project, which has become the central and essential element of professional practice. All these changes have directly influenced the concept of training social workers, not only in France but across Europe. Contemporary social workers are educated in the context of new ethics for “normalisation” and users’ rights in civil society, on measures taken to implement legislation, on evaluation procedures, on the methodology of individual or group projects, and as an introduction to the development of local communities.

If we consider Romanian social welfare reform since the country became a member of the EU, we can see that the Romanian government has adopted more liberal and residual social policies. Social work in Romania was developed with sporadic and limited efficiency, and a major contribution was made by the NGOs. Thus, a new construction of social welfare is possible only with the help of the new concept of social work.

Nowadays, the State organizes, and financially and technically sustains, the social services system by promoting a partnership with local community and with the representatives of civil society, as in many other European countries. The local public administration authorities, as well as public and private physical or juridical persons, assure social services. The provision of social services is based on principles of social solidarity, centred on family and community, a global approach, communitarian organisation, partnership, complementary and team work. But the aspect that needs a more detailed consideration is the increasing role of family for the protection of its members.

As pointed out by Melania-Gabriela Ciot, there are a lot of elements missing from Romanian social services: services of basic social assistance because of the lack of these services and the reduced numbers of professionals; social benefits and services for single parents; adequate policies for 2-3-year-old children, to whom parents are back to work etc.

Although contemporary social work in Romania generates the trends of reconstruction, from the paper it appears still under-developed. It doesn't cover all social problems or all social groups with problems. A lot of social stratus are excluded or ignored from the system of social protection or social services. The newest social law from 2001 takes into consideration child protection, elderly protection, people with handicaps and families with children, but it creates a lack of coherency between different forms of social work system. In some recent solutions, different services such as placement or professional maternal assistant care, home care for elderly or personal assistants for people with handicaps can be found. Even some alternative social services as home care services have been developed, although the levels vary in different regions from Romania and they are also organised by NGOs.

National and/or comparative discourses made by the authors in the last section of the book are based on analyses of a wide range of problems referring to contemporary aspects of reconstructing and professionalising social work across Europe. The case studies describe possible ways of constituting professional social work at the beginning of the 21st century as viewed from their own research perspectives. They attempt to show that social work has been a very important field of theoretical and practical activity in their countries and in the European context, which deserves more attention and research.

The authors are showing the diversity of academic discourses and social problems that have become an inspiration to our comparison in the sphere of social work contribution to the development of civil society. Contemporary comparative research on chosen social work issues in different European countries indicates that during recent decades the role of professionals has been dynamically developed and changed in prospect of reconstructed welfare systems, new ethics for "normalisation" and evaluation in social work practice.

In the comparative analyses of European social work discussed, it is worthy to underline that, firstly, European social work has been developed as an element of social policy of the States which, in general, realise ideas of welfare State being in current reconstruction. Secondly, subordination of social work to States' administration (institutionalisation of social work at the national, regional and local level) is consolidated by the rights of citizens to integration, activation and participation in democratic society and creating "civil society". Thirdly, Europe is struggling against similar social problems (poverty, economic migration, family disorganisation, aging etc.), which should also be solved by social professionals, through new approaches to social work reflective practice. Fourthly, contemporary changes which are related with the phenomenon of "social Europe" and the necessity of solving social problems on a local and global scale, should also regulate standards of education and accepted qualifications of social professions, to allow professionals to work and deal with social problems on a national as well as on an international level.

Finally, the changing environments and cultures in social policy at different levels mean that social work has to change. More attention to clients' needs and levels of satisfaction, rationalisation procedures, budget constraints, growing numbers of informal carriers and competition with volunteers or non-professional workers – all of these represent real challenges for professional social workers, but also a resource in terms of opportunities for work within third sector organisations supervising and training people, defining projects, transferring their knowledge and expertise. Social work as a profession must find its place in the welfare system, in competition with other professions and in the course of the neo-liberal mainstream of economy and politics, finding that its society-forming and society-criti-

cal function is up for debate. Social work exists because societies think that their individual situations can no longer be managed by them but, on the other hand, must be overcome socially in order to secure the preservation of the society.

The described developments lead to a change in the structure of the providers of social services: competition among providers and the control-medium of money will increase in importance. The market pressure to be efficient sets aside the question of sense and values. Traditional self-assurances and more or less recognised self and foreign attributes and frames of reference in form and content become questionable.

To cope with these challenges, social work needs a strong professional identity and a greater focus on the education and training paths of social workers at European level in order to always maintain its high level of professionalisation.