

A short overview of the development and professionalization of Social Work in Romania



Béla Szabó, Cluj-Napoca (Romania)

The contemporary history of social work as a profession in Romania (re)started in the beginning of 1990. It was just after the communist dictatorial regime had broken into pieces, but we shan't forget the fact that the formation and education of social workers was present also before 1990, between 1929-1952. At that time, the specialization had a university-level profile in the frame of the "Princess Ileana" College of Social Work.

From 1953 till 1969 the four-year-based education was reduced to a three year-based post-secondary school level. 1969 seemed to be the beginning of a black period – which lasted until 1990 – as social work was completely taken out from the educational palette. It was considered that all social-related issues can be solved by a simple administrative (or bureaucratic) and political mechanism of the communist regime.

Since 1990 the social work encountered a significant evolution. The country's main universities introduced the social work specialization and many non-governmental organizations were created with a clear mission to help those in needs. Thus, a new era started and the social work profession couldn't have had a better field to develop than a society in transformation as it was the case of the Romanian society after '89. The problems however didn't disappear just by the simple appearance of the specialists. During the transformation process came out not only the pre-existing problems of the society, but also the new ones brought by the transformation, which were absent before (ex. drug dealing, drug consumption, pornography etc.).

The formation of social workers in Romania faced inevitably some changes during this recent history. In the early years of the 90's it was a four year university level program. It was also possible to learn social work as a second specialization – with theology (more exactly religious education teacher) as the main specialization. When distance learning was introduced as an alternative method of formation for social workers, it meant five years of study (it was considered that those in the distance learning system have to study one extra year compared to those enrolled in full-time programs). Before the Bologna process (introduced in the 2005/2006 university year) the two educational forms had equally four years, later it became three years. The application of the Bologna decision introduced some confusion in the university-level education in general, but especially in social work education. The withdrawal of the double specialization is a good example for both situations mentioned. It wasn't possible to learn social work as a secondary specialization, but the Theological Faculties introduced a brand new specialization which didn't had correspondence in the European universities: the "social theology" (and in some cases "theology(cal) social work"). As this specialization had no direct concordance with the jobs listed in the Romanian Job Nomenclature and the developing National College of Social Workers did not consider the graduates as social workers, the original solution was reintroduced: the double specialization.

The tension in the system still exists, as a recent order of the Ministry of Education (nr. 6521/19.12.2012) defines that those who finished the above-mentioned specializations may become a social worker if their curriculum has at least 70% of conformity with the social work curriculum. There is no clear rule whether the number of disciplines or the number of hours or both of them must be considered. Without a clear methodology the decision of the commissions in charge in the universities will be divergent.

The number of the graduates in social work exceeds 16.000 (Sălăjeanu, 2010). As the number of the professionals increases every year, the need to protect the professionals' interests increased as well. There were a couple of initiatives to create professional organizations in these years, but the turning point was in 2005, when the College of Social Workers was created in Romania, as a non-for-profit, independent, public and autonomous professional organization. An important step in the recent history of the College was to introduce the free practice of the profession in 2006. This measure created the possibility for social workers to open individual agencies (or associated agencies). This regulation puts the base of the legal frame for externalizing the social work services in Romania (Sălăjeanu, 2010).

Two important milestones are also important to mention, regarding the evolution of social work in Romania. The first is the appearance of the law regarding the statute of the social workers (no. 466/2004). It clarified many questions which earlier represented real debates among practitioners. One of them is related to the education of the social workers: although the universities organized such specializations (as presented above), other entities organized trainings for social workers at different levels (ex. post-secondary school, short term trainings etc.). The law 466 explicitly defines that social workers must have a university degree. Another merit of the law was the introduction of the College of Social Workers. The appearance of the College (described in the earlier paragraph) was actually based on this law, which dedicates a whole chapter to define its territorial structure, the main attributions, the units inside it and the financial frame. There is mentioned also a national registry of social workers (managed by the College) which is important for practitioners, as only those registered have the legal right to practice social work.

Another important moment was the adoption of the code of ethics of social workers by the College of Social Workers in 2008, published also in the Official Journal of Romania. In spite of the existence of the College, with an emphasis on protecting the professional interest, the social work profession is still confronted with problems. One of them is related to the number of the members in the College. Although every practicing social worker must be registered in the organization, there are a high number of those who practice social work without having the formal approval of practice. Cases can be found both in governmental institutions and NGOs.

Another issue is related to the professional language. The university centres that offer the social work specialization use different professional terms. Goian (2010, pp 82-83) shows that there are many categories of semantic inconsistency in the Romanian social work language. One example from these may be illustrated with the following example (for more detail see Goian, 2010): the author underlines the ambiguous and inconsistent usage of certain terms, having excessive synonyms for basic concepts in social work such as: clients, beneficiaries, persons in needs, soliciting person or social survey, field investigation, home visit, field documentation, filed evaluation, psycho-social report, social history.

References

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Law no. 466/2004 concerning the statute of social worker

Order nr. 6521/2012 privind echivalarea competențelor profesionale și transversale dobândite în cadrul calificărilor academice de Teologie socială și Teologie asistență socială. [concerning the equivalence of professional and transversal competences acquired in Social Theology and Social Work Theology academic qualifications] Issued by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport

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The author works as a lecturer at the Faculty for Sociology and Social Work at the University of Cluj-Napoca (Romania). His main issues are social policy and social work.