

SOCIAL WORK BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION AND RESPECT FOR CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

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Abstract: As a modern profession that adapts to very different social, political and cultural contexts, the social work must respond to a lot of specific problems encountered in a certain society at a particular time, but in a professional manner, without losing its identity. At this moment, the evolution and the shape of the social work are influenced by the globalization, and at the same time is a factor of globalization itself.

This article analyses the aspects of social work that are influenced by globalization, such as the understanding of the social problems and needs, the social work theories and practice, the legislation in the field and the social work education. There are emphasized the importance of keeping the cultural sensitivity, of the adaptation to the local conditions, and the ways in which the social work contributes to the occurrence and development of some elements of globalization.

Keywords: social work, globalization, social context, cultural sensitivity, indigenization.

Since the 90s began to be published essays, studies, books on globalization and its relation with the welfare state, in general, and the social work, in particular. This means that a link exists indubitably and that it raises a lot of questions.

This article is divided in four parts. First part is dedicated to globalization in general and in relation with the welfare state, the second part is about the social work profession. The subject of the third part is the changes in the social work as a consequence of globalization (theory, practice, legislation, role, education and training). A distinct part, the fourth, is talking about the social work as agent of globalization.

Globalization and welfare state

Globalization is a complex concept and phenomenon, including many dimensions: economic, political, demographic, social and cultural. People, as well as the processes at them are part suffering international influences. The term itself is the subject of debates and many definitions. (Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann, 2006, Pugh and Gould, 2000). "Globalization is a term describing a growing interconnectedness and integration of economies across national borders, through the movement of capital, goods, services and technology, and also involving the diffusion of social, cultural and political ideas" (Healey, 2008, p. 16). The concepts as interconnectedness, integration, communication, circulation, global are key words in the discourses about the subject. The space and time are compressed: means of transport are very fast and widely accessible, the electronic communication takes place instantly, cancelling the huge distances, and the information travels with an unprecedented speed. The same information is available thanks to the Internet anywhere in the world, one of the consequences being that a lot of practices and policies are taken sometimes successfully, sometimes as an artificial overlay, which itself becomes source of many problems, instead of solving them. Not only the economy, money, transport, communications, trade, politics, ideas and cultural practices, social protection, but also ecosystem constitutes topics relating to globalization. From this point of view, some effects of the globalization put in danger the

survival of the Earth and the humanity itself, if it will be not appropriately addressed. (Sahtouris, 2000) Having a lot of important implications for human well-being, it is obviously that this phenomenon affects the social work evolution.

Is the globalization good or bad? There are a lot of arguments pro and contra, but this is not our study concern. We take the globalization as a reality, whether we like it or not. Genschel (2004) analyses three stories about the globalization–welfare state nexus: globalization theory (globalization as the cause of the chronic crisis of the welfare state), globalization sceptics (globalization is not part of the things that cause the welfare crisis) and revisionism (globalization as a consequence of the welfare state crisis, and part of the solution). It is important how we conceive this phenomenon because by this it depends how we will act: will we surrender to globalization, will we disregard it, or will we encourage it? The studies about this subject are not conclusive, but we agree with Genschel (2004, p. 633): “In this sense at least, globalization may indeed push towards ‘one world of welfare’,” and certainly, the social work occupies a very important role in this world.

Many studies reflect the analysts' concern regarding the way in which the welfare state is affected by globalization. (Genschel, 2004, Gizelis, 2005, Jacoby & Meunier, 2010, Pineda & Natarajan, 1999, Pugh & Gould, 2000, Suter, 2003, Sklair, 2009, Went, 2004, Williams, 1999). Some consider that the globalization poses a major challenge to the welfare state, while for others the main challenges are not external in nature, but domestic. For example, “demographic changes such as an aging population can indeed impose severe constraints on the ability of European states to maintain their current levels of welfare spending” (Gizelis, 2006, p. 141). It is about changes in demographic patterns, in social norms and in economic area. The demographic change includes the increasing participation of women in the labour force, the extended longevity of the European populations, combined with lower fertility, partially due to the increasing numbers of divorces and lower rates of marriage. The changes in social norms permitting non-traditional forms of households, e.g., single parent households, cohabitations create new challenges. In economic area, European states are confronting with increasing rates of unemployment (Gizelis, 2006, p. 144-145), crisis, inequality of incomes generating “problems of social exclusion and poverty that affect all countries to greater or lesser degrees, and the social polarization and potential and actual social disorder they produce are conditions of modern living that transcend individual nations.” (Penna, 2000, p. 110)

Others are preoccupied with the understanding in a paradigmatic way of the phenomenon. Ardalan analyses the theoretical views about the relation between state and globalization and discusses four paradigms and their views with respect to the nature of globalization and state. “The functionalist paradigm views globalization and state as eroding state power, the interpretive paradigm views globalization and state as maintaining overall state power, the radical humanist paradigm views globalization and state as dividing the power of state, and the radical structuralist paradigm views globalization and state as the domination of stronger over weaker states” (Ardalan, 2012, p. 248). This kind of approach creates the frame for an orderly analysis, despite the risk to be reductionist and limiting. In our analyses we agree with an eclectic approach, based primarily on the functionalist perspective.

Many are agree that the globalization erodes the existing arrangements for welfare, as well as other arrangements of the society. The growing of the taxes, prices and production's costs, the changes in the consumption increase the social exclusion, the gap between riches and poorer, as well as the need for welfare. In the same time, there is a pressure to reduce the resources available to meet these needs (Pugh and Gould, 2000, p. 125; Penna, 2000). Distinguishing between the globalization of first wave, started immediately after the Second World War, based on the human rights, on the promotion of freedom of trade, of the development of social work and of the concept of social responsibility, Trevillion notices that the globalization of the second wave, is antagonistic to social responsibility because this always leads to increased social costs. (Trevillion, 1997). The welfare state philosophy was affected, and neoliberalism seems to be the central and dominant ideology of the globalization, that presumes that the power of the state must be minimal in order to preserve the liberty of individuals, and that the free market provides the most efficient basis for social and economic reproduction (Penna, 2000, p. 113). The social work proposes a very different ideology, as Maureen Willson shows in Healey (2008, p. 20). If the neoliberalism sustains: free market economy, survival of the fittest, globalism, privatization, competition, corporatization, modernization, economics of supply and demand, targeted social programs, power over, capitalistic base, English as language of business, private, globalism, economics driven, promotes elite power, individualism („i”), development, blaming the victim, oppressive, the social work promotes another kind of values: people-centred, inclusiveness, self-determination, cooperation, compassion, antioppressive, participation, empowerment, universal social programs, power with, empathy, reciprocity, public, environmental sustainability, social justice, grassroots organizing, collectivism („we”), education, awareness, cross-border organizing, socially driven, human rights, egalitarian, recognition of culture/language, minority rights and gender awareness. This conglomeration of contrasts seems to be the defining aspect of the globalization: macro-political economy vs. micro-cultural policies, universalism – diversity, international – local, efficient economy – welfare etc.

Starting from the considerations of Giddens, who identify three key political actors and their sets of values: (1) social democracy (*Old Labour/Old Left*); (2) *neo-liberalism (New Right)*; and (3) *the Third Way (centre-left/ New Labour)*, Williams extract three major political values and orientations that influence modern conception of the welfare state: New Labour, New Right and the new social movements, these at last putting on the agenda „the needs to do with personhood and well-being which have expanded the moral repertoire for understanding people's engagement with welfare, and have widened the meanings of redistribution, equality, universalism and justice” (Williams, 1999, 682-683). This results from the growing of the significance of the NGOs role as political actors and mediators. In our opinion this new social movements is encouraged and accompanied by the action of the superstate organization, the most evident being the organisms of the European Union. The globalization is manifested by the establishment and operation of a wider range of international organizations and the organization of international conferences on various topics related to the vulnerable or oppressed groups, problems generated by contemporary society. The most important and influent organization is the United Nations Organization and its subordinated organization as Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) etc., all of these having an essential influence on the politics and actions in the area of the welfare and social work and communicate and work together with civil society and its representatives as global level. Founded in 1945 by 51 countries, it includes today 193 state members and declares the mission to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. (<http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/index.shtml>) In the same time exist many international NGO's, as World Vision, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes that are involved and in Romania.

Social work profession

One of the main welfare mechanisms is the social work. It addresses to those people that haven't the resources or the skills to meet their needs and to function adequate in society. The social work practice develops activity in public institutions, non-governmental organization, but also in private settings, as liberal profession. This activity may occurs at micro-, mezzo and or macro level, including clinical social work, but also community development, social policy and planning, and social development (Hare, 2009, 410)

The social work practice and education must be adapted to fit to the local economic, social and cultural realities, because, as Malcolm Payne argued, it is a socially constructed profession (Payne, 2005). At the same time, we can talk about a profession with a unique identity, with many faces and continuously evolving. What is essential? What is the core of the profession? What is universally valid in this profession? Which are the contextual aspects? Increasingly more is felt the need to identify the social work values, theories and methodologies that are most appropriate internationally and to develop a clarity about which teaching methods are most effective in communicating social work knowledge, ethics and skills internationally (Taylor, 1999, p. 309).

The International Federation of Social Workers tried to respond to this challenge by developing with great difficulty, after long debates, in 1982, an internationally accepted definition of the social work profession. Recognizing that social work in the 21st century is dynamic and evolving, and therefore no definition should be regarded as exhaustive, this definition was amended in 2000, by IFSW General Meeting in Montréal, Canada: *“The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.”* (<http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/>) This definition has in centre the core values of the social work profession, its social function and reason of existence: the well-being of people. The mission of the social work is to enhance well-being by promoting social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people and its area of intervention are the point where the people interact with their environments. The social workers help people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. They are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve. As every profession, the social work has its own theories, practice and ethical values. Its theoretical core derives from research and practice evaluation, and including complex knowledge about human beings, their

environment and the interactions between them. The people are influenced by a series of factors by different nature: biological, social, cultural, but influence in their turn their environment and other people. A social work must know “theories of human development and behaviour and social systems to analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual, organisational, social and cultural changes” (IFSW, 2000).

The main values of social work are the human rights and social justice. “In solidarity with those who are dis-advantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion.” The ethical principle and values of the social work are submitted in the profession’s national and international codes of ethics. A central issue for social work educators internationally is, therefore, to ensure that social workers are involved in ‘activating’ this moral autonomy in a collective sense. We need a morality based on social consciousness and collective responsibility as against individualism. (Taylor, 1999)

The effects of the globalization on social work

Effects of the globalization on the social work profession and the responses on social work on these are discussed in many studies (Barner&Okech, 2012; Dominelli, 2010, Giarchi&Lankshear, 1998, Healey, 2008, Khan &Dominelli, 2000, Midgley, 2001, Ng &Sim, 2006, Pugh & Gould, 2000, Taylor, 1999, Trevillion, 1997, Webb, 2003). At theoretical level is not a consensus about the relationship between social work and globalization. Some of them are sceptics or pessimistic (Webb, 2003; Pugh and Gould, 2000): “Any notion of a global social work is little more than a vanity,” says Webb, and tries to show „that social work is best done by paying attention to particular persons in particular locally situated reflexive situations” (Webb, 2003, p. 17).

Went (2004) resume the effects of the globalization which affect the quality of life, and create the premises for a greater social work need: „globalization (...) has increased income and welfare, but the gap between richer and poorer countries and between richer and poorer segments of the population within countries ‘has probably widened’. There also remains a group of, mostly very poor, countries that are less integrated into the global economy and that continue to be largely excluded from benefits of the globalization process. To improve living standards and the economic situation in these countries is one of the main challenges for the global economy. In addition, there are other challenges to globalization, such as communicable diseases, climate change, loss of biodiversity and lack of international security, for which it is necessary to provide the world with ‘global public goods’ that benefit developing and industrial countries alike.” (p. 980)

Pugh and Gould (2000) identified six themes in literature about social work and globalization: omnipotence of global forces; historical uniqueness of globalization; erosion of the power of nation-states; fragmentation of old arrangements; damaging effects upon general living standards and economic security; pressure to reduce expenditure upon welfare in order to be competitive. Often, the globalization is perceived as having harmful consequences for the organization, funding, and legitimation of welfare services (Dominelli 2010; Trevillion 1997). Gould is very radical when says “the logic of the global economy with the primacy of free-market values as its organizing principle destroys the humanistic value-base of social work, making traditional conceptualizations of professional social work unsustainable,

particularly in relation to the protection of human rights and social inclusion.” (Gould, 1996, apud Pugh and Gould, 2000, p. 126)

In our opinion are five major challenges for social work: 1. The new needs and problems in a globalized world. 2. The social work as international profession. 3. Indigenization in social work. 4. The difference between countries in the level of the social and economic development, understanding the problems and the status of the social work profession. 5. Keeping the identity of the social work profession as cultural sensitive.

1. First is the apparition of new needs and problems in a globalized world, as homelessness, growing aging population, unemployment, and underemployment, international migration of the labour force or other kind of migration and immigration, international traffic of human beings and drugs, the victimization of the children through the Internet, war, economic crisis, social exclusion, human rights, global civil society, disaster relief, and global warming. All of these issues come over the problems of the existing context, as the demographic and social changes. The greying of the world population, especially in the developed countries, associated with a greater hope of life and very low rates of the birth rate, leads to pressure on the pension systems and long-term care services. The changes in the family structure and in the social status of the woman have as consequences the occurrence of some supplementary difficulties such those of the single-parent families, reconstituted families, children affected by parental divorce, and the lack of informal carers. The number of the migrants became a reality in many western countries. Despite this fact, as shows an increasing contribution of those people to the economies of the receiving state, they don't have the same rights as the natives. Many welfare systems still retain nationality as a criterion for to social rights, making it appear a true racialization of the welfare politics (Faist, 1995). Some of these are not so new, but they have a great scale today. A part of them, as social exclusion for example, are caused not only by economic difficulties, but also has important cultural dimensions which have been highlighted by a set of micro cultural politics that is being played out in many national contexts. (Penna, 2000)

2. The social work as international profession Changes in the social work as a consequence of globalization (theory, practice, legislation, role, education and training). The adoption of other social work practices and policies can be both positive and negative. The model of good practice from other countries, applied with discernment may exempt many efforts and expenses. But only borrowed mechanic, they put additional pressure.

Healy further describes four dimensions of international social work. First is internationally related domestic practice and advocacy. This involves working with problems that have some type of international dimension, such as work with international adoptions or work in border areas. In these situations, two or more countries are involved in a case or policy issue. While some social workers may specialize in these areas, all social workers may encounter international issues in everyday professional practice. The second dimension is professional exchange. This entails the ability to exchange professional information and experiences internationally and to use knowledge and experience to improve social work practice and social welfare policy in one's home country. Activities that are seen in this dimension could be reading foreign journals and books in the social worker's field of practice, and identifying and adapting other countries' practice innovations to one's own setting, corresponding with professionals in other countries, serving as hosts for foreign visitors, and

participating in professional exchanges at international meetings. The third dimension is international practice. This dimension brings together international knowledge and social work skills. It can involve preparing professional social workers to contribute directly to international development through employment or volunteer work in international development agencies. Lastly, international social work encompasses international policy development and advocacy. The social work profession must act as a unified entity in order to make a meaningful contribution to the resolution of important social issues and global problems. International social work is “value-driven action aimed at promoting human rights and human well-being globally” (Healy, 2008, pp. 10-16).

The training of the students and social workers in the area of the globalization and international social work is not only desirable but necessary. (Barner & Okech, 2012, Sewpaul and Jones, 2004, Taylor, 1999, Martone & Muñoz, 2009, Estes, 2010)

Aiming to achieve the main goal, which is “to enhance social work education, training and practice on a global level, by facilitating dialogue within and across nations and regions,” (Sewpaul and Jones, 2004, p. 507) the International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work adopted in October 2004, By General Assemble in Adelaide, Australia, *The Global standards for social work education and training*. As explained Vishanthie Sewpaul (IASSW Chair) and David Jones (IFSW Co-Chair) at that moment, “the document reflects global standards that schools of social work should consistently aspire towards, which (collectively and if met) would actually provide for quite sophisticated levels of social work education and training. This is, as it ought to be, the provision of the best possible education and training for social work students who, after qualifying, bear enormous responsibilities in their communities. The extent to which schools of social work meet the global standards will depend on the developmental needs of any given country/region and the developmental status of the profession in any given context, as determined by unique historical, socio-political, economic and cultural contexts(...). Quality assurance and accreditation criteria and procedures will have to be determined at national and/or regional levels.” (Sewpaul and Jones, 2004, p. 507)

A future social worker must study social policy development, team-building, networking, conflict resolution and organizational development, must prepare for direct practice with individuals, families, groups and communities. At this moment is needed to develop skills to promote self-help and mutual aid, skills to use of informal and indigenous helping networks.

3. Indigenization in social work. Certainly, the Western roots of the social work profession have left their mark on its theories, methods and values, but they do not fit with the diversity of the cultures, beliefs existing in all of these countries. So, it seems naturally the apparition of the indigenization, as a process whereby incongruous components of the Western model are adjusted or modified in order to improve the model’s fit to the local country and culture (Walton & Abo El Nasr, cited in Ferguson, 2005). The indigenization turned out insufficient in time, so that authentization was developed, first in Latin America in the late 1960s, afterwards in Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa and the rest of the developing countries, as new models of social work, more fitted to the national, ethnical, cultural and religious realities (Ferguson, 2005, p. 521). Ng and Sim (2006) saw the internalization of the social work as an influence of the Western welfare philosophy,

synonymous with the “Americanization”. The antidote by this seems to be in their opinion the indigenization or authentization. This may be the answer to the question if and how it is possible „to combine a commitment to *universalism* in policies whilst respecting a *diversity* of identities, practices and beliefs.” (Williams, 1999, 669)

Both indigenization as well as internationalization creates the need of an adequate social work education. Two graduate American social workers spend a summer working as interns in Mexico, to develop a better understanding of the Mexican migrants. Their personal reflections underlined the importance of some kind of necessary knowledge in the area of the international social work and have concluded that the social work education must directly address to globalization: „We learned first-hand that the only way to be an effective social worker in an international setting is to understand the culture, history, and contemporary social context of communities in which we work. We also have a greater appreciation for the importance of understanding the migratory experience, the transnational nature of networks and families, and the history, culture, and contemporary situation of the communities of origin when we work with immigrant populations in the United States. We learned through experience that when the time is taken to really understand a group of people and their individual and collective experiences the relationships are stronger and our work together is more effective.” (Martone & Muñoz, 2009, p. 363)

4. The social work is a socially constructed phenomenon, as Malcolm Payne argues, so the social work has different aspects from a country to other, from an era to other. There are differences neither between countries nor in the level of the social and economic development, but in understanding the problems and the status of the social work. There are differences between East and West, between Christianity and Islamic world or other kind of beliefs and religions that shape the cultural values. So, “in third-world countries social work’s concern is with those disadvantaged in and often by the economic and social system in terms of income, shelter, food and other basic needs. In Western industrialized countries, social work’s preoccupation with pathology, treatment and adjustment, although slowly undergoing a shift towards an emphasis on help to self-help and mutual aid, still predominates”. (Taylor, 1999, p. 310)

Speaking about the transnational aspect of the social work profession, a variety of practice are in the European context contributes to a lack of consensus and a problem of identity at the international level which is preventing the development of the status of the profession (Penna, 2000, p. 119) (see Giarchi and Lankshear 1998).

5. Keeping the identity of the social work profession. The voices are opposite. Some are not agreeing with global standards in social work profession or social work training and education: “The ‘global standards’ process is itself a political process of formalization in which international social work seeks to dominate social workers in local, cultural contexts who are unable to build practice from the ground. (...) This move by IASSW and IFSW is not about ethics, effectiveness or raising standards for social work, put plainly, it is about power. (Gray and Webb, 2007) The social work is shaped, as we underlined earlier, by the new contexts. It’s observing two tendencies: to shift the role of the social worker towards behaviour control and regulation and to develop and promote the anti-discriminatory practice and the concept of empowerment, as responses to the social exclusion and insecurity generated by globalization (Penna, 2000, p. 110, 120).

The first focus of the social work is the person in his environment, with his problems and needs, with his view on own life and situation. Beyond the subjective aspects, people's perception is strongly influenced by cultural and ethnic factors, and the social worker must be culturally sensitive, if he wants to be helpful and start from where his client stands. But we cannot ignore that a large part of people's difficulties are generated today by the global environment and that certain actions of empowerment and advocacy are often needed.

The identity of the profession is strongly threatened if it will be subordinated to neoliberalism. In essence, the existence of this profession is due to ethical options, it is derived from the meaning of Christian love of the neighbour, from compassion and from the good deeds, as well as from the modern concept of social responsibility.

It is becoming increasingly evident that, as Zigmunt Bauman says in his essay "Am I my brother's keeper?", "the future of social work and, more generally, of the welfare state, does not depend on classifications, on procedures, nor on reducing the variety and complexity of human needs and problems. It depends, instead, on the ethical standards of the society we all inhabit. It is those ethical standards which, much more than the rationality and diligence of social workers, are today in crisis and under threat the future of the welfare state, one of the greatest gains of humanity and the foremost achievement of civilized society, lies on the frontline of an ethical crusade" (Bauman, 2000, p. 11). Before taking any policy decision, it is necessary to differentiate our ethical choices, because the decision to take responsibility for our responsibility means, in the end, "the decision to measure the quality of society by the quality of its ethical standards" (Bauman, 2000, p. 11). These ethical choices are taken now at global level and the entire social work practice, as I said earlier, is setting on clearly defined ethical choices.

The social work as agent of globalization

From the same point of the ethics starts and the globalizing influence of the social work. The principles of the fundamental human rights and the social justice, without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age or social class are promoted by the social work in the most countries. It forms a circular reaction: the social workers become more aware of their professional identity, accede to global information about social assistance and, in their turn, promote its principles.

The social work empowers people to enhance their welfare, protect the rights of the children, of the women, elderly or other group which could be vulnerable, discriminate or at risk at a moment, and this kind of action can either get into conflict or even change at some point the attitude of a state or of a society towards these people or issues. The welfare standards tend to be universal and the social work, alongside other agents, has its contribution in this regard.

Conclusions

A complex profession as social work was analysed through the light of other complex reality: the globalization. A profession being in a continuous redefinition and searching of its own identity is looking in the context of a not yet well understood societal phenomenon. It results a picture of a bidirectional relation with many ramifications and many coexisting opposites.

The globalization involves radical changes by economic, social, political, demographic and cultural level, and the welfare state is certainly affected. The social expenditure must be low, in the context of the rising needs and problems. The dominant neo-liberal ideology dilutes the concept of social responsibility, which is the key of the social work. The social work itself is the subject of many changes, in order to respond by the new needs and problems, to improve its theory and practice, to adapt by multicultural, transnational and international environments.

Both internalization and authentication of the social work continue to develop, and, in my opinion, these are not necessarily opposites, not excluded as long as we do not understand them absolutely. The globalization at any cost of the profession means actually promoting a cultural imperialism, ideological side of the social work being the main factor.

“Social work is one of the few professions in a position to promote and engage in a sustained way with relationships at the level of local cultural practice”, says Webb, relying mainly on the ethical principles of the profession (Webb, 2003, p. 17). This is quite true, but is not the entire story. We cannot be blind and ignore the new problems emerging in a globalized world and requiring specific approaches, which remain ineffective if it does not take account of strategically, politically and instrumentally options existing at global level. At the same time, the ethical foundation of social work has an aspect of a global ideology trying to interfere with the indigenous values and to influence or even subordinate them. As a profession based on complex skills to work with people, as a profession in the service of people, the social work must keep this quality over the time.

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