

The Confusion of the Position, Institutionalization and Perspectives of Social Work and Self Definition Social Workers in the Czech Republic

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Abstract— In the Czech Republic a law on social services has been in force since 2007. This law changes the value point of view, away from paternalistic concept of services from the era of communism and to the forefront puts the quality of life of their users. In practice, the quality of social services is perceived only as an administrative burden that distracts attention from the direct work with clients. This led to misunderstanding of the meaning of SQSS that endeavor to guarantee the optimal adjustment of the service for the users, to maintain the dignity of clients, and keep and strengthen their social inclusion. Social workers act in contradiction with the ideals of social work, which is trying to maintain or develop the social functioning that works on the value of every human being and of human rights.

Causes of this situation are found in education, in way of processing of the conceptual apparatus of social work for practice, and the attitude to the profession of social work, as well as in the confusion of the position, institutionalization and perspectives of social work. Theory of social work does not exceed the scope of industrial modernity and still lingers in the schema - the social problems are caused by companies/individuals. Then there is a problem with a fact that the threats and risks in the postindustrial modern are produced socially, while the need to cope with them is strictly individualized. Social work is becoming a service in the market of services.

Keywords- *quality of social services; identity; social work; modernity;*

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

On January 1, 2007 Act 108/2006 Coll. on social services came into force in the Czech Republic (which brought the definition of social worker, social services, types of services, a new way of funding - the service is "purchased" by client from his/her care allowance, and also the requirements for service provider), which by changing the value basis meant a departure from a paternalistic conception of social services [1] (the residues of former communist regime, when the state was an exclusive provider and donor of social care [2]), when the life quality of care receivers gets under the spotlight as an overall indicator of adequate social service [3].

The Act introduced previously known, now reformulated quality standards of social services (SQSS) as a norm, whose implementation is also a precondition for the provision of social services [4].

In social work practice, the quality of social services has become a 'redoubtable norm' and is perceived only as more paperwork hindering social workers' performance and distracting them from direct work with clients [5, 6]. This leads to misunderstanding of the sense of SQSS that are the product of the quality policy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which tries to guarantee optimal setting of social services towards the user, maintaining their dignity and keeping and strengthening their social inclusion [7].

With regard to the ambiguity in meaning of SQSS, the fulfillment of certain criteria and sub-criteria of SQSS by service providers is complicated [8]. Social workers are not able to take advantage of freedom given to them through a high degree of generality of the definition of SQSS criteria [9] and often produce written materials (requirement of many SQSS criteria for written methodologies) that are not effective, e.i. do not correspond with theoretical bases used in daily practice of an organization, but social workers understand them as a way how to fulfill SQSS. There are also many cases when some organizations copy methodologies of other organizations that have passed inspection without adapting them to their own specifics.

Social workers behave contrary to the ideals of social work as a discipline that seeks to maintain or develop social functioning of individuals, families, groups, communities and society while building on the value of each human being and human rights [10, 11, 12]. Yet SQSS focusing on personal goals of service users enable providers to concretize these abstract ideals such as human dignity, autonomy, etc. [13]. Furthermore, university education in social work in CR is largely determined by experts in social work (Accreditation requirements of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports are based on the Minimum Standard of Education in Social Work passed by the Association of Educators in Social Work [14, 15]) who require minimum knowledge and skills in accordance with the above given definition of social work. On the other hand Musil states that the Minimum

Standard does include the idea of complexity that meets current post-industrial modern discourse, however, it does not tell the students how to synthesize all the specific disciplines [16].

II. THE QUESTION

This leads to a question whether the reasons for this situation can be found on the side of social workers in their own way of processing conceptual apparatus for social work practice and their attitude to social work profession or in a broader context which then affects the work of social workers - specifically, I mean the ambiguity of social work position, institutionalization and perspectives of social work.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONCEPT AMBIGUITY OF SOCIAL WORK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Musil defines the consequences of the concept ambiguity of social work in the Czech Republic as follows:

- reducing the quality of social work due to workers who lack professional qualification to help in dealing with problems in the interactions between them and their social environment,
- reducing the availability and quality of professional help of social workers due to the policy of contracting authorities (legislators or employers) when they neglect difficulties of citizens struggling with social environment and delegate this task to help those struggling citizens exclusively or unwittingly to the hands of other helping professionals who are not well qualified to provide professional social work,
- reducing the availability of professional help of social workers to citizens whose living difficulties result from problematic interactions between them and their social environment [17].

The ambiguity of the social work concept does not just bring the above mentioned barriers of good practice, they themselves produce other problems. We can identify other following consequences that limit the quality and availability of professional help of social workers to citizens with problems in interactions with the social environment – e.g. manifestations of social tension, publicly declared disagreements of representatives of disabled people with public authorities, violence against the homeless, illegitimate course of some distrains and other less-publicized manifestations of tension between members of the major society and people at risk of social exclusion.

IV. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKER AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOCIAL WORK CONCEPT ON THE PUBLIC IN TERMS OF GOOD PRACTICE

Let's return back to the role of social worker and the influence of the social work concept on the public in terms of good practice. In case of social worker it is the work with theories and interpretation of the role of social worker's profession. Musil based on his research of social workers in

the Czech Republic defined four categories of the social work concept: administrative, professional, philanthropic and activist [18, 19]. Within these types one can interpret the quality of social work as well done paperwork, the other one as a good relationship with a client, etc. Hantová and Elichová, however, found out that not only the public but also social workers view the social work profession only as an administrative work [20], which is confirmed by Musil when he says that it is one of two common confusions of social work for the administration of state-funded or subsidized compensations (benefits and services) of personal deficits of citizens that prevent them from meeting their needs [21].

The second common approach to social work in Czech society is social work confused with widely understood social services performed by helping workers of various professions with differentiated levels of qualification (e.g. psychologists, various profiles educators, doctors, nurses, caregivers, personal assistants, physiotherapists, so called art therapists, leisure time managers, etc.) or volunteers. This evokes in relevant subjects (the public, legislators, clients, workers of various helping professions, etc.) an impression that social work wrongly identified with social services can be performed by workers of the above mentioned fields. This results in commonly occurring belief, which is hard to prove, that professionally trained social workers who would provide people in distress with specialized assistance when dealing with problematic interactions (among others also with problematic interactions with the providers of social services and benefits) are not required [21]. No wonder the reputation of social worker's profession according to the investigation conducted by Hantová and Elichová was bad and social worker was often leveled with an official.

V. THE STATE OF SOCIAL WORK IN POST-INDUSTRIAL MODERNITY

Furthermore, social work as a discipline due to its fundamental linking with the development of modernism faces a relative crisis. As described by Chytil social work was established as a 'working tool' of institutions of secondary sociability, whose task is to solve the problems of modern society generated by the process of modernization, which deprived people of traditional social pillars, but in the current second phase of modernity (or the post-industrial modernity, reflective or liquid modernity) modernization requires the reduction of secondary sociability institutions and organization of social work on the principles of market economy, because economics acts like a paradigm common to all humanities and social sciences. As a result of mutual competition for funding, other subsystems behave towards social field competitively [22]. In addition, the delimitation of the field towards other helping professions is blurred [23]. This is due to the broad range of social work (just look at the list of typical roles of social worker: counsellor, services provider, case manager, agent of social changes and others [24]), because it is the discipline having multidisciplinary bases and typical of synthesizing features [25], the position of workers in multidisciplinary teams and the classical feature of social work, which is the

theoretical make-up based on the large amount of findings of other sciences [26], which are used within the social work and also modified for the benefit of clients of social work [27], but also by the fact that social work in the Czech Republic under Act 108/2006 Coll. can be performed in addition to social workers trained in social work also by special educators, lawyers, etc. [28].

According to Chytil, however, the theoretical bases of social work do not go beyond industrial modernism and still linger in its scheme - social problems come from society/individuals [29] (these words are confirmed by Matoušek when he notes that 'big theories' of social work, which are reductive in terms of the complexity of the phenomena and outdated, they were created in the late 1960s [30]). He does not know how to deal with the fact that the threats and risks in the post-industrial modernism are produced socially, while the need to deal with them is strictly individualized. Some authors (e.g. Lorenz) speak about the resignation of the theoretical development of social work, some (e.g. Stoesze) even predict the end of social work. According to Chytil modernization does not lead to the end of social work, but social work becomes a service on the market of services and like other services it is profit-oriented [31]. So we can view the law categorizing social services as the action in accordance with the above. Another element of the economic discourse can be seen just at the required quality of social services, when the client becomes a 'customer' who buys the services and requires their appropriate quality.

VI. THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK IN POST-INDUSTRIAL MODERNITY

In relation to education in social work it is then stated that it also does not reflect modernizing tendencies [29]. The question is whether social workers are educated adequately and ready to compete in the current practice and respond to rapidly changing conditions in society. Musil states that the current method of teaching social work does not allow social workers to get social recognition, as it is not paying enough attention to problems in the interaction (the only exclusive competence of social work) and therefore the concept of the identity and role of social work is wrong [16].

VII. RESEARCH TOPIC

Social worker is the one that determines the final form of social work. As stated by Elichová, generally speaking, helping organization is shaped by workers who give it a form, both by formulating its mission and other establishing and methodical documents and also by performing their helping job. The rest is in the hands of the state which forms organizations by means of social policy, as well as donors and indirectly also in the hands of the citizens who elect politicians, and indirectly shape the awareness of social problems [32]. Therefore, it is necessary to find out how social work, now when facing identity crisis, is viewed in its live form by social workers themselves, who according to Musil just in liquid modernity have to define 'their role in the network' themselves [16], and how it affects the quality of social work. This topic is now in the centre of research project implemented by the University of

South Bohemia in České Budějovice called The Concept of Quality of Social Work in Relation to Selfdefinition of Social Worker and Helping Profession.

VIII. SPECIFIC SOCIAL WORK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

I would like to note there is a specific form of social work in the Czech Republic and in accordance with the concept of Payne I believe that social work is a socially constructed activity which can only be understood in relation to the social and cultural context it arose in. Its theory and practice are in fact reactions to how real people perceive in a certain time period and in a specific location (region, country) social problems [33]. Practical bases of social workers are also a product of the context they occurred in.

During the 20th century social work established in stable market democracies as a specific type of professional help with problems in the interactions between people and their social environment. In Czech society, however, the development after 1950 did not lead to a wider application of this approach to social work and social work here began to be confused both for social services, which should be provided by social workers, and for the administration of state-funded or subsidized compensations (benefits and services) of personal deficits of citizens [21]. The change came up with the Velvet Revolution in 1989, when the non-profit sector began to develop, there occurred new social problems such as homelessness or unconcealed prostitution and higher education in social work was reestablished [2].

IX. EFFORTS TO CHANGE: THE REASONS FOR SUPPORTING THE LAW REGULATING SOCIAL WORK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

At the macro level, the ambiguity of of social work concept, which according to Musil prevails in the Czech society and which has serious consequences for those Czech citizens who face difficult life situations and can not cope with them on their own [21], is now being solved by the Scientific Council of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for Social Work. This council tries to support passing and implementation of the principle of the law on social workers and self-governing professional organization of social workers which was unfortunately removed from the legislative agenda of the government. According to the Scientific Council the indistinct identity of the social work concept will be reduced.

The purpose of the law is to support and regulate the professional quality of social work profession. The Council supports this law for reasons that relate to exercising professional help of social workers in Czech society, such as the need to clarify social work concept in Czech society in order to secure availability of professional help of social workers, to secure the conditions for negotiation between social workers, employers and educators, to secure the recognition of the legal regulations of social work by all resorts and sectors of public administration and economy including civil, non-governmental/non-profit sector, further the need to secure legal regulation of the cooperation between

social work and public administration on the development of the field, etc.

Other reasons are related to the quality of the performance social work profession: the need to support the potential of social workers to negotiate in the interest of clients, the need to ensure control of respecting professionally justified rules for the performance of social work profession, including ethical rules for the performance of the social work profession, the need to ensure the regulation of discussing contentious issues and support of social work in disputes related to the performance social work profession and the need to encourage the motivation of social workers to lifelong learning in the field, etc. [34].

X. CONCLUSION

Not only the Scientific Council should be aware of the fact, as Ševčíková notes, that the beginning of changes at the macro-level of social work does not mean success because the changes will not automatically trigger changes at meso and micro-levels, although these levels are inseparably linked, therefore in social workers who perform their profession at these levels, submitting authorities, public etc. [35].

An interesting idea in the end could be a reflection on the statement of Gray and Webb, who point out that social work is very delicate work that is focused not only on individuals, groups or communities, but also affects the whole culture [35]. When social work itself is not sure about its own identity, what impact it may have in the context of culture?

This idea is describes in more detail in Navrátil: In society there is a circular process under way, which on one hand includes individuals as the creators of social meanings, and on the other hand through this participation of individuals in the structures of the society creates conventions which people follow. It is a spiral process, during which the structures are constantly being created and reshaped. These changes affect the conventions and people live their lives according these conventions [36]. If such processes take place in society in general, we can assume that they occur also in social work. It is sure that social and cultural factors determine the content and form of social work.

Let's hope, however, that some change will come, because the investigation outputs of Hantová and Elichová show that the indistinct professional identity has a negative impact on the profession and also, of course, on the clients themselves. However, according to the respondents the major consequence is the unprofessionalism of social workers and a reluctance to work [20]. We see therefore unprofessionalism, unwillingness to act and comment changes in social situations [37, 38], particularly in those who, as mentioned above, are a decisive element in forming social work. Good practice under these mentioned conditions cannot therefore exist.

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