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EDITOR

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

REFLECTIONS AND DEBATE IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

TOSK

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION. REFLECTIONS AND DEBATE IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Editor
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Teaching and learning social work in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Albania: a self-reflection exercise

All over the world, the current pandemic is showing the crucial role of structured and efficient social services in contemporary societies. Unfortunately, this statement does not always go along with successful stories. Efficient welfare systems are an exception and not the rule in contemporary democracies (Hemerijck 2017, Hemerijck, Huguenot-Noel 2020), not to mention non-democratic regimes. As stated by the International Federation of Social Workers, "change in the delivery of social services normally takes years. There are exceptions, where political direction coincides with the aspirations of the communities and social services workforce, but these are rare" (Truel and Crompton 2020, 11).

The precondition for efficient social services lies in the education of well-trained, professional and ethically responsible social workers. It is in this framework that the book "Social Work Education. Reflections and debate in the European context" offers a unique insight into different – yet converging on some aspects – models of social work education in four countries: Portugal, Spain, Italy and Albania. The Higher Education Institutions of these four countries have been sharing theoretical and empirical views regarding the teaching of social work over the past three years in the frame of the Erasmus+ Project T@sk – Towards increased Awareness, responsibility and shared quality in Social Work (2017-2020)[1].

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[1]   Project N. 585626-EPP-1-2017-1-IT-EPPKA2- CBHE-JP – Erasmus+ KA2 – Capacity Building in Higher Education. The T@sk consortium includes: the Department of Political and Social Sciences, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Florence, Italy; the Faculty of social work and social services, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, Spain; the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon, Portugal; the Department of Social work and Social Policy of the University of Tirana; the Department of Psychology and social work of the University of Shkoder *Luigj Gurakuqi*; the Department of social sciences of the *Aleksander Xhuvani* University of Elbasan, the Professional Order of social workers of the Tuscany Region.

The initial aim of the project consisted in the modernization and professionalization of the teaching and learning of social work in Albania under the assumption that the process of European integration could play a key role for the improvement of social services in Albania, a candidate country since 2014.[2] However, since the first meetings of the members of the consortium in Albania, the focus on Albania as a "beneficiary country" was soon replaced by a more appropriate self-reflection on the teaching and learning process of social work developed in the participating countries.

Starting from a comparative analysis of the organization of the Bachelor and Master's degrees in social work at the Universities of Lisbon, Madrid, Florence, Tirana, Shkoder and Elbasan, remarkable differences emerged. The homogeneity of patterns that should have characterized the Portuguese, Spanish and Italian academic programs revealed an unexpected level of intra-country variation. The Mediterranean model of social service delivery (De Lucas 2020; Campanini, Frost 2004) did not serve as a unifying point of reference. The exploration of the Albanian academic teaching program in social work also evidenced a high level of differentiation amongst the three Albanian universities involved. These initial findings opened up the terrain for further elaborations that can be summarized into the following questions: *What are the main reasons for such a differentiation in terms of institutional approach to the teaching of social work? Do different approaches result in different practices of social work and social service delivery?*

Starting from these two main questions, the representatives of the six universities and the professional order of Social Workers of the Tuscany region carried out an intensive investigation of the background, the principles and the practices of social work teaching in the four countries.

The reconstruction of the background is a key issue, when one considers that all the countries involved have experienced a long phase of authoritarian regimes and a difficult transition to democracy. The book considers the influence of the background from three main points of view: the *historical background*; the *institutional background*; the *cultural and economic background*.

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2   In March 2020, the European Union decided to open accession negotiations with Albania.

Regarding the historical background, the chapters refer to the features of the non-democratic regimes, their approach to the delivery of some forms of social protection and the events of the democratic transition influenced the later implementation of social services. An investigation into the background must also reflect on the institutional settings that allowed the development of faculties of Social Sciences and Social Work. Under what circumstances did the first development in this direction take place? Is it possible to identify a social or political initiator? Where pre-existing models applied? Finally, the description of the current background to the professional activities of social work must take into account the profile of the country in terms of social, economic and cultural profile. There is no doubt that these features influence both the delivery and the reception of social work in the respective countries and municipalities.

Social work practice rests on a deep understanding of applicable models. During the three years of this project, the principles of social work adopted by the involved institutions were also subject to a deep analysis that evidenced the importance of *intervention models*, *territorial implementation* and *epistemological approaches*. The chapters show how community-based approaches coexist with approaches based on the individual or on small groups, both at the level of the teaching programs and at the level of social work practice. The adoption of one specific model is often the result of territorial constraints. Are the principles of social work applied following a national or rather a subnational framework? How deep does the delivery of social work depend on the resources available at the different territorial level, and how does the teaching programs reflect this distribution? Finally, all the chapters reflect on the epistemological nature of social work teaching in the involved institutions. The relationship between social work intervention and social change, as well as between theory and practice shapes the philosophy of learning and teaching at the Higher Institution level, and in the professional practices of the university traineeship, when students first make experience of these challenges.

The last level of reflection of the chapters of the book evidences how the variables selected above combine into the universities' formative profiles in social work at the Bachelor and Masters level. Apart from the intra-country and intra-institution variations, the teaching of social work has to face environmental and situational challenges that range from the

digitalization of learning and social work practice to the response to the current pandemic. From this point of view, coexisting pushes towards internationalization and indigenization (Campanini 2018) in social work practice can also be identified in social work teaching. Following the experience of the T@sk project, a joint reflection on models of social work teaching can help to successfully face the effects of these national and international developments.

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CHAPTER I

"Social Work Education: ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon/Portugal"

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1. Presentation of the ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon

ISCTE-IUL[6] is a public university established in 1972 pursuing teaching, research and community service activities. With more than 9000 students enrolled in undergraduate (46%) and postgraduate (54%) programs, 450 teachers and 240 non-teaching staff, the University is proud to be one of the most dynamic and innovative universities in the country producing, transmitting and transferring knowledge to society according to the highest international standards. It is a research-oriented university with a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach, that includes eight research units, six laboratories, as well as the Departments and Schools that are the main organizational structures of the Institute (see www.iscte-iul.pt). The research units have high quality and national merit and with significant contributions of international relevance in their research areas.

CIES-IUL is one of these research units and has as main scientific domain sociology, developing also relevant activity in the fields of public policy, political science, communication, education, modern and contemporary history and social work.

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CIES-IUL's activity is characterized by a demanding articulation between basic research, applied research mainly directed at the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies in various sectors and areas of intervention and advanced training. The Centre develops a wide range of activities with scientific and social impact that contributes to its national and international recognition.

The scientific structure of CIES-IUL is based on 6 Research Groups: I – Inequalities, Migrations and Territories; II – Knowledge Society, Competences and Communication; III – Family, Generations and Health; IV – Politics and Citizenship; V – Work, Innovation and Social Structures of the Economy; VI – Modern and Contemporary History.

Advanced training is another fundamental pillar of CIES-IUL, closely combined with research activities. The center is responsible for the scientific and administrative coordination 4 PhD programmes – Sociology, Public Policies, Communication Sciences and Social Work – and is associated with 5 others.

2. Characterization of the cycles of studies in Social Work

2.1. First cycle of studies in Social Work (undergraduate)

The degree course in Social Work, at ISCTE-IUL, began in 2010, and from this date onwards, the three cycles of studies in Social Work will be taught at ISCTE-IUL.

The degree in Social Work is based on the need to address societal changes (labour and employment system, sociability and culture, State/Society relations, demographic dynamics) as well as the emergence of new social issues, namely new forms of poverty and exclusion, unemployment and economic insertion mechanisms, migration and multiculturalism, associated social problems, the increased importance of the territorial dimension and of partnership and contractualisation mechanisms of social policies, requirements for rationalisation and effectiveness of social programmes and projects. In this sense, the degree in Social Work at

ISCTE-IUL allows students to acquire skills for professional exercise by responding to the current demands of study and professional practice related to the conception and resolution of contemporary social problems, with respect for the realization of human rights and social justice.

The study plan aims at the training of social workers oriented towards participation in the construction of a new knowledge-based society, focusing on the development of study, research and intervention skills, placed at the service of social, cultural and technological development, essential values to the strengthening of the essential pillars to life in society: citizenship, culture, science and innovation. It has a structure of 6 semesters in a total of 180 ects, 162 of which are compulsory and 18 optional, distributed among the scientific areas of Social Work, Sociology, Psychology, Public Policies, Law, Social Research Methods, Statistics and Data Analysis and Demography.

Formation includes the Human and Ethical dimensions, which make it possible to establish mediations with and between the subject, institutions and the value of social justice, theoretical formation, for training in the knowledge of society, social problems and social structures. This structure allows for an interdisciplinary approach and discourse that facilitates the understanding and the definition of the meaning of the action of Social Work towards the citizen and social problems; a training that aims at the use of appropriate and effective methodologies in response to the problem of the person, the group, the community, committed to citizenship and promoters of training and empowerment.

The cycle of studies, within the framework of skills for the exercise of the profession, seeks to form the following professional profile:

- Design, analysis, diagnosis, synthesis and problem solving;
- Application of knowledge, adaptation to new situations and quality of intervention;
- Understanding of information;
- Training to work autonomously and as a team;
- Organisation, planning and evaluation.

To this end, it integrates contents that structure the professional profile, namely in the following areas:

- Fundamentals of Social Work;
- Public policies and social protection system;
- Models of Intervention in Social Work and contemporary social problems;
- Technical tools of the Social Work;
- Supervised practices and experiential training in Social Work.

Social Work Training has a component in the field of social practices and their professional and theoretical understanding, a very strong orientation in the practical training present in the study plan of the degree. The relevance of the Curricular Internships, in effective articulation with the social organisations of the civil society, (Public and Private) in the different areas of Social Action, is a specific patrimony of the Social Work that has been adjusted and optimised, with a view to a better adequacy and response to the demands of the professional practices, preparing the professionals for the conception, diagnosis, intervention, evaluation and investigation of the new social issues in contemporary society.

The internship is a training unit in a working context, i.e., it is the learning instance that enables the student to experiment/apply his/her knowledge/knowledge in a context of a specific service/organisation.

2.2. Second cycle of studies in Social Work (Masters)

The masters in Social Work develop scientific, technical and relational skills in contemporary, national and international social issues and problems. This cycle of studies promotes, specifically, the following competences:

- To apply specific Social Work theories and methodologies (in the construction of the theoretical object in the research process and intervention in Social Work);
- To develop technical tools to support the diagnosis, intervention, research and evaluation of social problems;
- To substantiate and argue the ethical-political, theoretical--methodological and instrumental nature of Social Work;

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- To analyse the Social Work and its practices at national and international level, in terms of its approaches, its privileged relationship with vulnerable or socially disadvantaged groups and multidisciplinary work;
- To evaluate, in a critical and systematic way, professional practice, its results, contexts and determinations.
- Skills to enable them to continue lifelong learning with a high degree of autonomy.

The predominant scientific area is that of Social Work. The training plan is oriented to the study of Human Rights and Social Work, Ethics of Social Work, Foundations of Social Work and International Social Work. In the framework of Social Work Intervention, knowledge about Contemporary Social Inequalities, Crime and Society and Design, Management and Evaluation of Public Policies are deepened.

On the basis of the analysis of the dissertations and project work we identified two profiles: a) dissertations built around the action of the practice, based on social diagnosis and oriented to the conceptualization of the particularity of the social problem and support an intervention design with a view to its elimination; b) works built on the research process based on methods and techniques of practice analysis, with the aim of producing general knowledge with an impact on training, public policy and society.

At the level of applied research methodology in Social Work, emphasis is given to the deepening of Data Analysis and the learning of research methods and techniques oriented to the production of knowledge in the scientific field of Social Work.

The optional training also offers the possibility of deepening in specific areas of intervention such as Ageing, Health, Disability, Child Mediation and Protection and Superdiversity.

The master in Social Work has as objectives:
- To deepen knowledge in Social Work in the theoretical field and research methodology;
- To apply theories and tools that facilitate the understanding and resolution of contemporary social problems by the Social Work;

- To elaborate a project work based on a research process in Social Work, that innovates the professional practice and produces scientific knowledge that integrates the conception of public/social policies;
- To experience scientific and theoretical-methodological skills in order to promote studies and research in Social Work;
- To provide the development of critical, reflexive and analytical thinking of the intervention, in a framework of research and production of knowledge in Social Work.

ISCTE-IUL's 2nd cycle training in Social Work has consistently been in demand above supply at all stages of application and by students from different schools and initial training areas.

This is one of the 10 Master's degrees in Social Work operating in Portugal and one of the 7 operating in the city of Lisbon, thus presenting itself in a highly competitive environment.

2.3. Third Cycle of Studies in Social Work (PhD)

The programme is part of the public university system as a field of science which aims at the production of knowledge applied to innovation and development in this field and as a consequence of the profession, stimulating and deepening the academic debate on its foundation(s) as a science in the context of social sciences.

The cycle of studies leading to the degree of PhD in Social Work presents an organisational structure and scientific orientation essentially based on the teaching-learning model based on R&D practice. The PhD course (2 semesters) integrates Curricular Units of methods (qualitative and quantitative) improving the learning of mixed methods. Curricular units of theory for the exercise of knowledge production, being that the area of Social Work has 150 ECTS and the area of methods with 6ECTS and the remaining areas, namely Public Policies and transversal subjects have 84 ECTS, making a total of 240 ECTS. The set of curricular units of the PhD course is based on a research methodology and/or the development of complementary skills, responding to the acquisition of research skills

integrated in an environment of intensive production of national or international knowledge, in higher education institutions and other public research institutions as well as entities integrated in the Public Administration.

This cycle of studies provides the acquisition of original scientific research skills in the area of knowledge in Social Work, promoting, among others, the capacity for systematic understanding in a specific field; the competence and method of research; the ability to design, design and carry out research, respecting standards of quality and academic integrity.

It is presented as a systematic process of advanced study in the specific domain of the Social Work promoting theoretical and methodological construction and consolidation of scientific knowledge in this area at the level of analysis and interpretation, reducing its descriptive level. It produces this construction in a dialectic relationship between theory and practice through a process of research (Research based practice). It is constituted as a field of science that aims at the production of knowledge, innovation and development of this scientific area and as a consequence of the profession, stimulating the academic debate on its foundation(s) as a science in the context of social sciences.

It produces the theoretical construction in Social Work in a dialectic relationship between theory and practice through the method of reflexivity.

The doctorate is recognized as a field of science that aims to produce knowledge that produces innovation and development in a scientific area and consequently in the profession.

The Programme aims to train Social Work researchers in order to produce systematic knowledge in the scientific field of this area of knowledge; to develop critical thinking; to identify social problems; to update and develop professional and research skills in Social Work. It promotes the following research skills:

- Systematisation promoting its theoretical construction;
- Development of research projects;
- Dissemination of the scientific knowledge produced;
- Valuing communication skills;
- Creation of an identity for the nuclear scientific area and, in particular, on its subject.

The course deepens the knowledge and gain of scientific skills of methodologies that promote reflexivity in the field of Social Work, in a research process that produces predictive information for its qualification. It aligns the theoretical treatment of the programmatic contents associated to a participative dimension of the student in order to understand and assimilate the theoretical contents.

Table 1. "On-line Training in Social Work – ISCTE"

	1st cycle[7]	2nd cycle[8]	3rd cycle[9]
Objectives	– To provide knowledge about the Social Work, its genesis, evolution, theory, field and areas of intervention, within the framework of social protection systems and social policy; – To stimulate a learning that supports an intervening, critical and reflexive professional practice, allied to continuous and regular study and research; – To train skills in Social Work, namely: understanding social problems, social policies, methodologies of professional intervention and the different organisational/institutional contexts; – To study the methodologies of intervention with subjects, families, groups and communities; – To train social workers for qualified professional exercise, in different units and levels of action, oriented to the improvement of the living conditions of groups of the population in a more vulnerable situation, promoting their well-being and social citizenship.	– To develop knowledge in SocialWork in the theoretical field and research methodology; – To apply theories and tools that facilitate the understanding and the resolution of contemporary social problems by the Social Work; – To elaborate a research project in Social Work, that innovates the professional practice and produces scientific knowledge that integrates the conception of public/social policies; – To experience scientific and theoretical-methodological skills in order to promote studies and research in Social Work; – To provide the development of critical, reflexive and analytical thinking of the intervention, in a framework of research and production of knowledge in Social Work.	– To produce systematic knowledge in the scientific field of this area of knowledge; – To develop critical thinking based on advanced Social Work theories and methodologies on emerging social issues and their complexity; – To identify social problems; – To evaluate and develop new social practices and disseminate their knowledge through professional practice, teaching and publication in academic journals with scientific impact. The Programme also aims to update and develop professional and research skills in Social Work by holders of a Master's degree, preferably in Social Work or holders of an appropriate professional and scientific curriculum, and also to promote a research career in Social Work/Social Sciences or academic career.

7   https://www.iscte-iul.pt/curso/55/licenciatura-servico-social.

8   https://www.iscte-iul.pt/curso/50/mestrado-servico-social.

9   https://www.iscte-iul.pt/curso/72/doutoramento-servico-social.

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Skills	The cycle of studies, within the framework of skills for the exercise of the profession, seeks to form the following professional profile: – Granting; analysis; diagnosis, synthesis and problem solving; – Application of knowledge; adaptation to new situations and quality of intervention; – Understanding of information; – Training to work autonomously and as a team; – Organisation, planning and evaluation. – To analyse and know how to situate the intervention of the Social Work in the context of public social policies, inequality and national and international social problems, within the framework of modern social institutions; – To apply and make operational the theoretical and methodological knowledge in Social Work, based on its principles, values and aims in the professional intervention and in the contemporary debate of this area of knowledge; – To dominate and operationalise the subject, family, community, organisation-centred approach as well as empowering, social advocacy, networking and partnership intervention; – To diagnose, programme, execute and evaluate the intervention in Social Work, through the use of theoretical, technical and methodological references fundamental to a qualified and qualifying professional practice; – To enable the student to solve social problems within the framework of the diversity of social and family contexts; – To manage the complexity of problem situations in order to formulate information and responses based on the principles of social and ethical responsibilities; – Skills to enable them to continue lifelong learning with a high degree of autonomy.	– Apply specific Social Work theories and methodologies (in the construction of the theoretical object in the research process and intervention in Social Work); – To develop technical tools to support the diagnosis, intervention, research and evaluation of social problems; – To substantiate and argue the ethical-political, theoretical-methodological and instrumental nature of Social Work; – To analyse the Social Work and its practices at national and international level, in terms of its approaches, its privileged relationship with vulnerable or socially disadvantaged groups and multidisciplinary work; – To evaluate, in a critical and systematic way, professional practice, its results, contexts and determinations. – To develop skills to enable them to continue lifelong learning with a high degree of autonomy.	– To investigate social problems, professional practice and to know how to distinguish/use the different methods and techniques of investigation; – To systematize knowledge in Social Work promoting its theoretical construction; – To elaborate research projects and perform original work, contributing to the innovation of knowledge and practices in Social Work; – To disseminate the scientific knowledge produced through publication and editing; – To improve communication skills with peers, the scientific community and society at large; – To create an identity of the scientific area of Social Work and, in particular, on its object of study, making clear the foundations, procedures and conclusions of its research-based analyses.

3. Epistemology of Social Work Training

The analysis of the trajectory of Social Work in Portugal, based on the research presented by Alcina Martins (1999) shows that Social Work was not recognised and identified for contributing to the production of specific knowledge, but for the way it intervened in social situations. The author justifies these arguments by stating that in the 60s and 70s schools transmitted the results of the production and dissemination of science. The social worker was not trained to master the very process of knowledge construction in the social sciences and, in the institutions, the function of research was that of other professionals, placing social workers in a subordinate position (Martins, 1999, pp. 49-51). The continuation of the same historical analysis reveals that, in Portugal, after the 25th of April, schools showed interest in developing research in Social Work, as a result of the transformations that took place in Portuguese society and also as a result of new influences at the level of currents of thought and theoretical matrices, such as those coming from Marxism and from the trends of the reconceptualization movement. In the same vein Ferreira (2014) argues that the 1980s and 1990s of the 20th century were important milestones for Portuguese Social Work, with the recognition of the degree of licenciatura (1989) and the start of post-graduate training (1987) in partnership with Brazil, as well as the first PhD programme in Social Work (1997). While, on the one hand, we witnessed a qualification of training for professional practice, there was also the development of Social Work as a scientific area, the strengthening of Social Work's identity as an area of knowledge in the field of social and human sciences (Ferreira, 2014). Both authors analyse that post-graduate training has created conditions for the development of scientific production in Social Work, insofar as it is with the Social Work master's courses that research into social work in Portugal has truly begun (Martins, 1999, p.53), research which, conducted by appropriate research design, as well as methods of data collection and analysis, seeks answers to relevant Social Work questions for which there is disagreement, uncertainty or lack of knowledge, contributing to the reduction of social problems and the promotion of well-being (Wilson, 2008, p. 238).

Research in Social Work opens the way to the theoretical affirmation of Social Work in a permanent dialogue with the reality in which it will

intervene, as Karsch (1988) states, the social worker can start from the analysis of his daily life, moving away from the immediate relationship with his object of work and trying to establish a new relationship with this object, based on theoretical references, which allow him to evolve towards the conceptualization or critical reconceptualization of this object (Karsch, 1988). The consolidation of Social Work then involves an articulation between theory and practice in which research as a source of knowledge and the basic axis of professional reconfiguration must be able to affect the processes of action, producing understandings and interpretations that act as keys to elucidate the complexity of social dynamics (Restrepo, 2003). In Social Work, research has the clear purpose of focusing the knowledge produced on its practice (Baptista, 2001), in a dialogue between theory and practice that sustains itself as the source of the epistemological framework of Social Work. For Parton (2000) the nature of Social Work is closely related to theory and practice, which we can justify, among other arguments, by the fact that Social Work has as its object of study human beings in their dimension as subjects of rights and in their Human Dignity in society, requiring the professional (social worker) to have the competence to know and understand a complex reality that presents multiple dimensions, endowed with a plurality of relationships and interactions and characterised by continuous change (Ferreira, 2011, p. 71) and whose intervention is demanding of the combination of an action model that is intellectually constituted and a critical model formally imbued in the field of reality and responsibility (Mouro, s/d, p. 7)

Amaro (2018, p. 126) states that, in the Social Work, theoretical knowledge alone is not sufficient for professional performance. The starting assumptions can and should be changed, abandoned or enriched with the elements that the practice itself brings, in line with the perspective presented by Granja and Queirós (2011, p. 244) that the constitution of Social Work as a scientific discipline has much to gain if we invest in an epistemology of practice as the driving force behind research focused on overcoming problems and social transformation.

Practice as a source of theory is also addressed by Almeida (2001, p. 14) when he states that knowledge is renewed in everyday life and in the context of the relationship between social actors. Social actors must be

aware of this fact and cannot ignore or neglect the enormous source of knowledge that constitutes professional practice, an idea that Bouquet (2005, p. 58) puts into practice when he states that research in social work translates into operations that allow for the construction of objects of knowledge based on concrete practices, which take into account daily experience in order to formalise and enrich professional knowledge through a discursive activity of conceptualisation.

In this sense, the social worker interprets the situation in a dialectic process of constructing reality in a particular way according to the knowledge he possesses and constructs, materializing it in concrete actions (Almeida, 2006, p. 14), which reminds us of the need for a reflexive practice, in its analytical and critical dimensions and as a condition of theoretical construction. From the perspective of Coulshead and Orme (2006) the theory emerges from the social worker's evaluation of his intervention, from the register of his experiences that are shared, but this does not mean that they are indisputable. The construction of theory from practice will require a reflexive practice, which includes the contributions of the users of the services, in the analysis of the interactions in presence and the understanding of the situations. (Coulshead, 2006). Amaro (2018) highlights the analytical and critical dimensions in reflexivity, arguing that professionals are undoing the data acquired by common sense, the instituted powers of institutional routines and the dogmatic explanations of the ideologies present in their practices. This exercise of permanent questioning and reflection and confrontation of different sources of knowledge also works as a defence of the professional against the growing bureaucratisation of practices, since it prevents him from automating procedures in an a-critical way (Amaro, 2018, p. 129). The requirement of critical thinking suggests that the social worker should be opened to analyse his use of theory and intervention strategies (Walsh, 2015), critical thinking being indispensable in social workers in order to be able to think the theory and intervention strategies from a perspective of adequacy to each concrete situation. It is this condition that prevents the social worker from talking about the experience resulting from his professional practices, placing more emphasis on his individual vision of situations and problems than on developing an in-depth analysis of the origin and reasons behind the respective problem. This way of looking at

the world does not distance itself from common knowledge, leading us to question the scientific activity of the social worker in the elaboration of scientific thought (Ferreira, 2011, p. 70).

The need to respond to social problems in contemporary society is increasingly leading to the questioning of the effectiveness of professional practice and the demand for knowledge production that is based on participatory research, involving the contributions of service users. Only approaches of proximity and participation make it possible to give internal coherence to the knowledge produced and to drive the development of projects and the implementation of changes that are fairer, more efficient and more effective, because they are more appropriate to the reality studied (Albuquerque *et al.*, 2013, p. 48). Participatory action-research is based on dialogue and partnership, on a collaborative construction of well-being in which all actors are co-executors in the research and changes are continuously evaluated, with an impact on practice and knowledge (Coutinho, 2015) and in which the participatory dimension is operationalised in the role that participants have in the conception and implementation of research, manifesting itself equally as an instrument of individual and collective empowerment. This is a reflexive research process in which theory and reality influence each other (Ander-Egg 2000 cited by Picornell-Lucas *et al.* 2018, p. 93) combining research and intervention. These ideas offer social work – discipline and profession – a different space to reflect and build new knowledge on human development (Picornell-Lucas *et al.*, 2018).

4. Socio-economic, political and cultural context

A reflexive look at the macro-economic-political-social and cultural system of contemporary society seeks to systematize fields of action of the social worker in a correlation with the matrix of social and human development.

In terms of the national portrait of Portugal, we can organise some Clusters of attention for the Social Work, namely:

Cluster 1. Demography:

Portugal is a southern European country which is part of the Iberian Peninsula with a small geographical area and a low population scale compared to other European countries.

According to data from Pordata[10] (2018), the resident population/million was 10,283.8, of which 4.7% were foreign nationals (483,330.0).

The data allow us to organise the following population groups in this cluster:

Table 2. "Cluster 1: Demography"

Young people under 15	1 415 731
Working age population (15 - 64 years)	6 639 342
Older people (65 and over)	2 228 750
Ageing index (elderly per 100 young people)	157,4

Tabela 3. "Cluster 2: Family"

Non-Catholic Marriages (%) (7)	67,5
Divorces for 100 marriages	58,7
Average age of mother at birth of 1st child	30,4
Births	87 020
Births out of wedlock (%)	55,9
Synthetic fertility index/average number of children per woman of childbearing age	1,41

Table 4. "Cluster 3: Quality of life"

Life expectancy at birth of the male sex	78,0
Life expectancy at birth of women	83,5
Infant mortality rate (‰) /obits of children under 1 year of age per 1000 live births	3,3

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10 Pordata 2018 Sources INE, BP, CGA/MEF, DGEEC/MEC, DGAI/MAI, DGEG/MAOTE, DGO/MEF, DGPJ/MJ, DGS/MS, GFSS/MSESS, ICA/SEC, IGFSS/MSESS, II/MSESS, ISS/MSESS, SEF/MAI, SIBS©

Table 5. "Cluster 4: Qualification of the resident population"

Students enrolled in primary school/ 1st to 9th year of schooling	987 704
Students enrolled in secondary school/ 10th to 12th year of schooling	401 050
Students enrolled in higher education	372 753
Resident population aged 15 and over, with tertiary education (%)	18,7
Early school leavers in education and training (%)	11,8

Table 6. "Cluster 5: Access to Justice"

Cases pending before the courts	861 237
Congestion rate in the courts (%) cases pending for 100 ended	148,6
Effective occupation of prisons (%) / (inmates / prison capacity) *100	99,5
Convicted by 100 defendants	66,3

Table 7. "Cluster 6: Employment"

Employment rate (%) /employment per 100 individuals aged 15 and over	54,9
Population employed in the primary sector (%)	6,0
Population employed in the secondary sector (%)	24,8
Population employed in the tertiary sector (%)	69,1
Employees (%)	83,4
Self-employed (%)	16,2
Unemployment rate (%) / unemployed per 100 active people	7,0

Table 8. "Cluster 7: Social action and protection"

Social security pensions	2 927 393
Pensioners, retirees and pensioners of the Caixa Geral de Aposentações (General Retirement Fund)	642 300
Social Security and CGA pensions as a % of resident population/ aged 15 and over	40,2
Recipients of unemployment benefits	171 407
Beneficiaries of social income insertion	

Portugal is a developed country, integrated in the European Union and with a high Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.897.

According to ECB staff, macroeconomic projections for the euro area/ September 2020 – European Central Bank. The coronavirus pandemic (VOCID-19) has dramatically affected the world and economic activity in the euro area since March 2020. Eurozone GDP fell by 11.8% in the second quarter, although this was lower than expected in the June 2020 Eurosystem projections

In this context, we note that the main assumptions and policy measures presented focus on monetary, fiscal and labour market policy, based on income support, reducing job losses and bankruptcies, and other sectors of activity.

As predictions for economic recovery, a concentration on manufacturing and some service sectors is initially indicated, while other sectors, e.g. arts, entertainment, housing and culture, continued to be particularly hampered.

The new recovery is expected to slow down the impact of containment and prevention measures, uncertainty will gradually decrease, external demand will recover and policies will have to assume a mixed matrix of development, investment and assistance.

Economic forecasts point to a sharp contraction in housing investment in 2020, with adverse impacts on access to housing for lower income households.

We are witnessing a global change in society now and in the post-COVID-19 pandemic, with disruptions in production chains and rising trade costs.

The pandemic – COVID-19 has exposed countries to heavy dependence on external suppliers, this can result in policies to diversify suppliers to avoid mono-dependence or reproduction on land, thus negatively affecting complex global value chains. (ECB staff macroeconomic/2020).

The Eurosystem's projections (2020) are for an increase in the unemployment rate and a very sharp fall in the labour force, partly reflecting the fact that some workers who lost their jobs have been classified as "inactive", given the reduced opportunities to seek work during the contingency period. Associated with this is the reduction in hiring opportunities that will have impacts on the Person in terms of

mental health consequences and other social behaviours inappropriate to community life.

According to Rodrigues and Silva (016): "The constitutional text is organised in four parts. It is at the end of part I, "Fundamental rights and duties", from article 63 to 79, that the constitutional principles enshrining the state's obligation to promote public policies to ensure and guarantee the construction of the social state and the access of all, under equal conditions, i.e., regardless of their economic or social condition, race or gender, to social protection services are found (article 63, paragraph 2, of the Constitution).(Articles 65 and 66), health (Article 64) and education (Articles 74 to 76), as well as the duties of the state in the field of housing and land-use planning (Articles 65 and 66). (*Maria de Lurdes Rodrigues and Pedro Adão e Silva – 2016).* "The constitutional foundations of justice policies are more dispersed. On the one hand, they derive from the consecration of the rights, freedoms and guarantees that ensure the inclusion of all as citizens, without exclusion (article 12, on universality), and formal equality before the law (article 13, on equality), as well as the protection of the life, freedom, choices and property of individuals, preventing interference, abuse and arbitrary power of the state, that is, imposing limits and conditions on acts of the state that may restrict or limit civil rights, freedoms and personal guarantees (articles 27 to 35). It is the constitutional order that protects the life and freedom of every citizen. On the other hand, it is also found in part III of the constitutional text, where the model of political organisation is established according to the principles of separation or division of powers (articles 108 to 119), where the organisation of the judiciary is defined, i.e. the courts, the statute of judges, the public prosecutor and the constitutional court (articles 202 to 224)". (*Idem*).

Culture represents the development index of citizenship, the character and personality of a people. Portuguese culture is characterized by a diversity of cultural manifestations and expressions. It includes the popular (music, gastronomy, wine, pilgrimages, etc...) and the erudite (theatre, cinema, art, literature...). This sector is most vulnerable when societies at risk enter, whether they are economic, pandemic and/or armed conflict.

In Portugal we do not have the organisational logic of Social Work, but rather the Social Protection System integrated in the Social Action

subsystem, characterised by a bureaucratic system led by the public authorities and whose planned actions are carried out by technicians framed in institutions.

Social Action is the organisational form of the social protection system at the level of public policies, social policies and social solidarity. Social Action is a system that seeks to ensure the protection of the most disadvantaged people and groups in society, through the allocation of various types of benefits aimed at improving their quality of life. It aims to energize, promote and concretize a set of actions in order to favour social insertion and improve the quality of life of individuals, families and groups, autonomously or within the framework of partnerships between public and private institutions that contribute to the construction of a more cohesive and solidary society.

Social action is recognized as an instrument of social policy and as a reference of the social development model in response to social problems, which require rapid responses, as well as collective actions through a medium-term strategy, in new areas and through new intervention methodologies. The social development plan (SDP) seeks to formulate global challenges from a prospective social development perspective based on challenges of innovation, transformation and qualification.

In Portugal the Social Work (social worker) is integrated in the social action, in disciplinary teams; multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. The social worker in his professional activity is guided by objectives that not only aim at solving situations of poverty or deprivation, but also aim at acting at the level of the causes of vulnerability that can be economic, educational, health, housing and work, seeking the full integration of citizens.

According to the Portuguese Social Security[11] measures, the social action subsystem was created to prevent and repair situations of deprivation and economic and financial inequality, and which achieves its objectives, among other means, through the network of social equipment and services. Thus, social action services have as their mission to perform a fundamental function of social and territorial cohesion, meet vital needs and represent a guarantee of the application of fundamental rights. They

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11   https://eportugal.gov.pt/covid-19/seguranca-social.

integrate activities: inclusion; integration in the labour market; social protection; health; gender equality and quality of life.

The Social Worker develops his professional activity in teams of all Ministries that integrate the State organisation; Municipalities; Companies (Public and Private); Non-Governmental Organisations; Private Institutions of Social Solidarity; Study and Research Centres and Liberal Activity.

Today, the social work profession faces a number of constraints and threats resulting from the risky society and the economic and financial framework that global economies face. Like all professions, the social worker operates within a framework of neoliberal (sometimes liberal) public and social policies, reorienting his professional intervention towards practices of control and supervision that are less emancipatory and promote a full social citizenship of every citizen in a democratic society.

Like the Anglo-Saxon Social Work, the Portuguese Social Work in the new work organisation matrix (polyvalence and interdisciplinarity) suffered weaknesses in terms of the fundamental values of the profession, transforming it into a technical activity, decaraterized from its principles and ethical values. (Fergunson, 2012).

The context of prolonged austerity in the countries of Southern Europe is associated in the case of Portugal with the progressive trend towards the privatisation of social welfare services, namely: the subcontracting of public sector services to private social solidarity and voluntary organisations, removing the identity necessary for the profession to fulfil its scientific, theoretical and methodological principles and foundations.

The social worker develops his action according to a matrix of performance evaluation and fulfillment of objectives and with greater recourse to the use of new information and communication technologies, approaching the technocratic model. Issues that identify the profession as an evidence-based practice and question the ethical political project of Social Work in promoting social welfare and improving the quality of life of people, recognized as fundamental values of the social worker's action.

5. Formative profile

The notion of the profile of training in Social Work is neither homogeneous nor consensual from an international point of view. Although there are distinctive characteristics in most countries, perspectives change according to territorial, economic, temporal and political contexts (Ferreira, Álvarez-Pérez, & Pena, 2018). There is a global agreement that this profession arose with a practical intention in a context that required an organised and technical intervention resulting from the social issue (Pierson, 2011).

Despite this practical intention, Social Work has been framed in the Social and Human Sciences from the earliest stages of its institutionalisation, from an action-research perspective (Ferreira, 2015). The production of knowledge for the common and social good has been a distinctive mark of this profession since its inception, understanding knowledge as the systematisation of professional practice, innovation in methods and techniques and even through conceptualisation and theorisation (Álvarez-Pérez & Ferreira, 2020).

The exercise of the profession by social workers involves, in *fact,* a research exercise, understood as the process of obtaining some knowledge that informs the practice. In fact, Viscarret (2014), quoting Stepney, recognises as *theoretical* practice the process of reflection in which *practical* knowledge*,* derived from experience and personal knowledge of what works in a particular situation, and *empirical*, qualitative and quantitative *research*, concerned with the analysis of problems and the search for implications on the effectiveness of intervention, are added to the theoretical foundations of the various sciences for *practical application through the* models and methods of Social Work.

The Social Work's interpretation throughout history of what it considers *sufficient evidence* of *good* practice has led to several positions on this subject, of which we highlight *evidence-based practice* and *evidence-based knowledge*. The first, based on positivist postulates where there is a hierarchy and standardization of evidence (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). The second, known as knowledge-driven practice, in which all knowledge is at the same hierarchical level, including professional experience itself (Gray, Plath, & Webb, 2009), similar to what is referred to as theoretical practice.

In any case, it underlines once again the importance of knowledge for intervention. In fact, over *the* years, the notion of *practice-based research* in Social Work has also emerged, understood as research carried out by practitioners for practical purposes, i.e. to inform practice and practitioners through the research process (Dodd & Epstein, 2012).

This relationship between theory and practice is historical evidence, and the basis for the construction of science for this discipline is based on the *broad concept of the* social sciences (Pourtois & Desmet, 1992), in which the subjectivity of people and their experiences, the participation of the social worker in what he or she investigates, the meaning of what is lived and the interpretation that subjects make of it, as well as subjective time, that is, the time of what is lived (Vázquez Aguado, 1998), are recognized, so that the formative profile in Social Work is a reflection of this relationship.

At the level of the university structure, the reform submitted with the Bologna Process in 1999 also played an important role for the educational profile we propose, as it gave the student a leading role in his own teaching-learning process. Unfortunately, and after more than 20 years, it has not been a fully consolidated goal for all signatory countries (EHEA, 2015).

In addition to the above, one of the future lines of work for the European Higher Education Area is to contribute to scientific research (EHEA, 2015). Among the recommendations made by the EHEA, we find "strengthening the links between education and research, and promoting research-based learning in all cycles and all disciplinary areas" (2015, p. 8), so that one way to innovate and keep pace with international university policy concerns is precisely to include research as a knowledge base in the different study cycles, including the bachelor's degree.

Despite all that has been mentioned, little or no research appears in the curricula of the first cycle of Social Work, much less in the interventionist/researcher profile (Ferreira *et al.*, 2018).

The Social Work area of the Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Portugal) aims to unite these two arguments: a) the *professional,* which urges the inclusion of research for intervention from the bottom up; and b) the *university structure,* following the current and future demands of university training.

Thus, online training is presented in accordance with the Bologna principles, offering Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degrees in Social Work. Each cycle of studies has a different training profile, although they are coordinated with each other. Thus, we have an *auditor-researcher for the* bachelor's degree, an *auditor-researcher-inventor for the master's degree,* and another *researcher-inventor for* the doctorate.

These profiles respond to the demands of the area itself and for the first cycle it is necessary to focus on knowledge-based intervention practice. We must remember that it is this basic training that qualifies professionals to work as social workers. In the master's degree, we welcome graduates from different areas, so the contribution of this cycle is to deepen the methods, techniques and knowledge in the area of Social Work for social intervention without this being the only objective, since research skills are also developed to train students in this field. Finally, the PhD promotes research which will be applied in practice, and this is one of the objectives of knowledge in the Social Work (Ferreira, 2015) and which has been verified through various investigations into the production of knowledge in the area (Álvarez-Pérez, Amaro, Ferreira, & Pena, 2018; Álvarez-Pérez & Ferreira, 2020).

6. Innovation and future perspective for Social Work Education

The Portuguese Social Work integrated in the initial training plan the area of social research methods in the 1985-1990 study plan, with the duration of five years to obtain the degree in this area of knowledge. Since the 90's, the Portuguese Social Work has developed and deepened research both in the academic field (master and doctorate) and in the field of applied social research projects and in European projects for the transfer of academic knowledge to the profession and social intervention practices, namely: capacity building within the Erasmus+ programme, Marie Currie, and in joint European master education programmes.

In the case of ISCTE in the period from 2010 to 2020, we have registered the production of 34 doctoral theses in Social Work, which allow us to systematise the production of knowledge in five sub-categories:

Table 9. "Knowledge categories and its subjects of study"

Category	The subject of study
Ontology, Ethics and Deontology	– The process of promotion or transformation of the individual subject by the social worker – The daily challenges of being a social worker and the discussion of professional identity and project
Theoretical Foundations of Social Work	– The professional relationship between the social worker and the user – The ideological foundations of anti-trafficking policies
Social Work Intervention Models	– Strategies and models of intervention in **social housing** – Studies of communities in socially vulnerable contexts through an integrated intervention model – Action of social workers in protection systems with biological and foster **families** with an emphasis on the protection and welfare of children – Friction in the flow of responsibility for the crime of intra-family sexual abuse of children in Lisbon district – Practices of social workers in accredited and non-accredited **hospitals**
Social work, territories and municipalities	– Professional action of the social worker in the Portuguese municipalities of the continent, between the Revolution of 25 April 1974 and the present day – Local/municipal social action
Organisations and Social Work	– Business practices with older workers – The conditions of production of social work practice in organisations to prevent and/or correct deprivation, dependency, vulnerability and social exclusion

Source: Álvarez-Pérez, P. *et al.* 2018:116

As part of the Master's Degree in Social Work, we have completed around 120 Master's dissertations in Social Work. Below we present a systematization of the ten most repeated keywords of the total number of dissertations between the years 2009-2019, which reflects the most common objects of study in this second cycle of studies.

Figure 1. "Summation by year of the ten main key words with the highest count over the total"
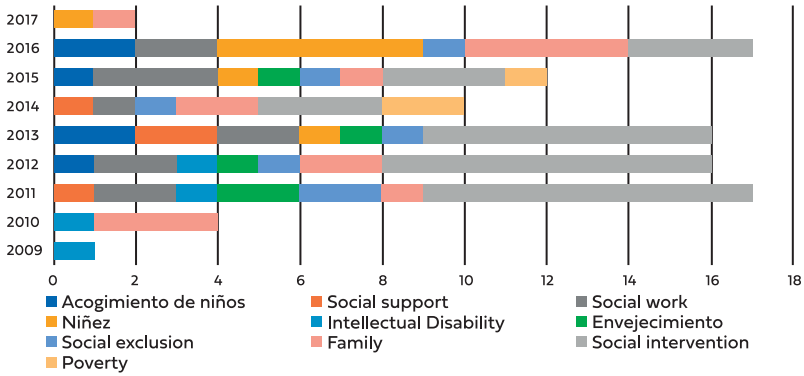
Source: Álvarez-Pérez, P. and Ferreira, J. (2020: 188)

Social Work in the context of contemporary society presents itself as an area of knowledge and fundamental intervention for social and human development in a humanized and sustained way in Human Rights.

Within this frame of reference, we envisage a Social Work:

- Based on the knowledge produced by research and not just on everyday professional practice;
- Capable of building its theoretical framework in the social sciences and humanities enabled with arguments of scientific debate;
- Deepening its technical, practical, theoretical and methodological literacy in order to improve and integrate the dialogue with other areas of knowledge, contributing to an effective interprofessionality;
- Knowing how to respect its scientific field in its relationship with the different fields of action;
- Accepting the change and innovation of society, invested in the transformation, change and transition of societies;
- More proactive, combining intervention with thought and thinking with intervention;
- Invested in respect for diversity, but secure in its principles and values, guided by Human Rights, the promotion of self-determination and Human Dignity of every citizen in society;
- Capable of establishing and building bridges of social cohesion both within the professional class and with the academy responsible

for the training and qualification of this area of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities.

A Social Work that, according to the guidelines established by the Bologna Plan, develops a true integration of research as a knowledge base within and between the different study cycles.

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CHAPTER II

History, routes and new challenges of Social Work education in the University of Florence

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1.   Presentation of the university

The year of the first social services conference, held in Paris and coordinated by René Sand (Borca 2006), as it is known, was 1928;[12] it was also the year of the establishment in Rome of the first School for Social Workers, founded by Paolina Tarugi. That year saw a more official organization of the commitment for the international promotion of the social sector, with agreements made over goals to "facilitate the establishment of personal relations, contribute to the circulation of information, enable exchanges of opinion between social workers and social service institutions all over the world" (Première Conférence International du Service Social, 1929, Proceedings: 25).

The history of the Italian social services had, however, already begun at the start of the 1920s with the first (accelerated) professional training courses promoted by the Italian Institute of Social Assistance in 1921 (Musso 1961).[13]

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[12]   This conference – called the "Social Fortnight" owing to its two-week duration – attended by 2,500 workers from 42 countries and the most diverse professional profiles saw the formation of the first international associations: the ICSW (International Council of Social Welfare) and the IASSW (International Association of School Workers), which became the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) in 1956.

[13]   The term "assistance" was introduced with Royal Decree no. 214/1923 (and the renaming of IPB as IPAB). In addition, from a stance that was and continued to be

Looking at the present day, in particular at the local context of Florence, the degree courses to prepare future social workers are based at the University of Florence Department of Political and Social Sciences. The department, founded in 1875 by the Piedmontese marquis Carlo Alfieri di Sostegno as the "Cesare Alfieri" School of Social and Political Sciences, was officially recognized as providing university courses in 1888 when it became a Royal Institution. Only with the Royal Decrees of June 1935 and 1 October 1936 was it transformed once and for all into a Faculty of Political Sciences (in the 1938-39 academic year) with the adaptation to the ministerial plan which abolished the separate final-year courses,[14] despite keeping the name and the multidisciplinary set-up. After World War II, at the national level, new study curricula were put together and the practice of internships was introduced, also thanks to figures such as Don Paolo Liggeri and new international partnerships, above all with the French social worker Odile Vallin (Dellavalle 2008). At the end of the 1940s, 12 schools had been set up, linked in various ways to lay or religious associations: six ENSISS schools (National Institution of Italian Social Service Schools); three UNSAS schools (National Union for Social Work Schools); one ONARMO school (National Institution for Religious and Moral Assistance to the Working Class) and two independent schools. ASSNAS (the Italian Association of Social Workers) was also established in 1947.

The Florence Social Service School was re-established in January 1947 upon the initiative of a group – today we would say multidisciplinary – of university teachers in the fields of social and psycho-pedagogical sciences, social medicine, economics and statistics.

Located at the University of Florence, the school was recognized and authorized by the Ministry of Public Education in October 1947 under the Italian Social Services Committee with headquarters in Rome.

The study course – whose first goal was to offer solid training to those with a high-school leaving certificate who wanted to embark upon the career of social worker – consisted of a two-year methodological and

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markedly authoritative, the decree emphasized the state's responsibility to support the individual and "preserve the community" (see Dal Pra Ponticelli 1987).

14 However, the different courses of study were restored with the allied government in 1944-45. These soon took on recognizable form as dealing with four distinct sectors: administrative, economic, international, and social and historical-political.

professional preparatory course which split into two separate arms after the first joint year of study: one issuing an "employment consultant" diploma and the other a "social worker" certificate. The final exam – consisting of an essay on the topics of the case study, documentation and social studies – could only be taken after a practical internship of at least 300 hours. A diploma was issued at the end of the course of study. In step with the national trend, which counted as many as 1,100 trained social workers at the start of the 1950s, the school saw a rapid growth in enrolments, passing from 45 in the 1946-47 school year to 136 in 1949-50, with a peak of enrolments by women, who quickly overtook half of the total: from 12 in the first year to 182 in 1955-56.

Nevertheless, in terms of ratings, the set-up of the Florentine school was accused of being "too academic" and it was the opinion of important observers that "the whole part of practical social work" could have been "better organized".[15] Furthermore, the school and the city were the arena of contestation between the Church and the Italian Communist Party for primacy both in the field of social policies and in culture and political administration (Cambi, 2018).

With regard to the financial situation, despite receiving contributions from ENSISS and other institutions, the school had many difficulties in meeting expenses and guaranteeing classrooms for all its students,[16] whose numbers, like the interest in the profession, were constantly on the rise.

In the meantime, UN experts (amongst whom Anna King) performed some consultancy work which led to the affirmation of the individualized "case work" approach in Italy too (1952). In the period 1948-66, however, the tendency, inherited from the fascist regime, to centralize interventions and classify citizens following "official standards" became increasingly evident and led to the establishment of new national welfare institutions. Hence, despite being prompted by the necessity to guarantee an all-round response to the population's needs (Colombini, 2017), in the period 1945-66 the institutional set-up was decidedly centralized and bureaucratized. In the following period 1962-68, a process of political ideologization began

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15 Giorgio Molino for Lodovico Montini, October 1952, ACS MI AAI envelope 55, now in Badolati (2016).

16 See: https://www.aspi.unimib.it/collections/object/detail/12661/.

concerning the category of social workers. This also rocked Florence's university circles and also saw students from some social services schools take up strategies to fight the dominating culture and claim some independence for themselves within the school institutions (Samory and Massaro, 2009).

It is in those years (1969) that the President of the Republic, Giuseppe Saragat (exponent of the Italian Democratic Socialist Party) signed the law in which "upon the joint initiative of the Law and Political Sciences Faculties, the Social Services School is established at the University of Florence": a school "for special purposes" which provided "basic theoretical teaching" and "teaching on professional disciplines together with practical lessons and seminars" held by a mixed group of teachers comprising academics and expert social workers. It also laid down a "maximum number of enrolments" in the eventuality of applications for admission in excess of capacity.[17]

At both the national and local level, the end of the 1980s and start of the 90s marked further steps forwards towards the definition of the formative profiles at the Social Service Schools (see Table 1). The presidential decree of 15 January 1987 – preceded by the ministerial decree of 30 April 1985 on the organization of the schools which defined what shape social work education should take – legally recognized the professional qualification and began the process to standardize the training schools. In 1990, a state exam was established for qualification as a professional social worker (Villa, 1993; Fargion, 2002). In the same year, the "University Teaching Organizational Reform" contained in law no. 341/90 gave rise to the University Diploma in Social Services: on one hand, this institution represented the full inclusion of the social work course of study in the university system; however, on the other hand, it (only) placed social work at the very lowest level (Monica, 2003). It was only in 2000 that all three levels of university education were made available in the social service sciences. Since 2004 these have been classified as: class L39 bachelor's degree, LM 87 master's degree and doctorate (Dente, 2001).

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17   Decree of the President of the Republic no. 1325 of 10 March 1969, "Amendments to the Statute of the University of Florence", Official Gazette General Series no. 149 of 17 June 1970 (https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/).

However, in Florence provision was only made for two of the three levels. Today there continues to be no doctorate level, an absence that over time has consolidated the social services' inferior position compared to other academic disciplines.

Table 1. "Summary of the most recent achievements and reforms at national level"

1987	Legal recognition of the title of social worker and of the social worker diploma
1993	Organization of the profession of social worker and establishment of the *Professional Register* (Law no. 84/1993)
1996	Establishment of the first *National Council of the Order of Social Workers*
1998	Issue of the *code of ethics*; establishment of the experimental degree courses in social services at the University of Trieste and LUMSA University of Rome
2000	Establishment of the degree course – bachelor's (L39) + master's (LM87) – in Social Service Sciences with the subsequent establishment of the Specialist Social Workers and Social Workers sections in the Professional Register (2001)

Reworked from Borca, 2006

Therefore, the 30-year period from the 1970s to the 1990s was a phase of far-reaching administrative and organizational transformations (see box 1). In 2011, following the university reform known as the *Gelmini Law* (Law no. 240/2010) and the new governance criteria and structuring of the Italian universities, it became necessary to newly adapt the regulations with amendments to the general principles of the 1995 version of the University of Florence statute. As on 1 January 2013 the faculties were abolished, the task of coordinating the teaching activities and managing the relative services passed to the schools.[18]

Therefore, in the 2000s, the regionalization of the social and health sectors and the "autonomization" of the universities led towards a "regional" management which influenced and remodelled the social work university courses.

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18   For the text of the statute of the University of Florence (regional decree no. 329 of 6 April 2012), see Official Gazette, General Series no. 95 of 23 April 23 2012 (https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/); for the university regulation on the constitution of departments, see instead Regional Decree no. 890 of 21 September 2011, prot. 57557 "Regolamento recante Disposizioni in materia di costituzione dei Dipartimenti".

2. Characteristics of the Social Work studies cycle

In light of the historical excursus just presented, and again with particular attention to local events – albeit within the framework of the national context – let us go on to make a point-by-point presentation and analysis, however brief, of the social work studies cycle.

Qualification requirements and method of access – Since the end of ww2, a high-school leaving certificate has been required for access to the Italian Social Service Schools, even though the selection methods varied from place to place (D'Amico, 2015). In order to overcome the widespread funding difficulties of the single schools, entry-level selection was gradually substituted by an evaluation to confirm initial enrolment after a month of attendance.

Course length – The duration of the Social Service Schools became three years in 1953, with the last year entirely dedicated to internship, with work placements in partner social welfare institutions in Italy or abroad. In 1955 the duration of the course in Florence also officially became three years, with the third year, which had originally been optional and dedicated to new methodologies, obligatory for all.

Gender past and present – In Italy after the First and Second World Wars – as it has always been the tradition in social professions and in line with the rest of Europe – men were a minority presence both among the students and workers: with the exception of Florence where the "employment consultant" curriculum also attracted men. The trend is still confirmed today: in 2014, the National Council of the Order of Social Assistants estimated that men on the professional social service register made up around 7% of the total. Despite the important reforms of the 1990s (see box 1) which, with the new structuring of the training courses for social workers within universities, made it possible for greater professional recognition, better wages and more certain career prospects, the number of male social workers has gone up very little. The all-female image of the various levels of social welfare is still very deep-rooted (Sicora, 2009).

Study programmes – As early as the 1950s, beyond a block of subjects that were common to all the schools (history of welfare, professional

ethics, "sector" welfare and services),[19] the study programme varied from school to school: "the psychological aspect was most important in Rome, the legal aspect in Florence and the medical and social aspect in Milan" (Bernocchi Nisi, 1984). In particular, in Florence, when the school became part of the university in 1969, the study programme distinguished between "base subjects" (dedicating a great deal of room to psychology and law) and "professional subjects". In those same years, the attempt to put the school's non-teaching staff on permanent contracts with the university was not successful.

Characteristics of the course of study – In Tuscany, the recognition of the profession of social worker experienced a turnaround in 1954 when, thanks to collaboration between the professor Maria Dal Pra Ponticelli (educated at the Florence School) and the University of Siena rector Mario Bracci, the first study course on Social Service Sciences in Italy was formed in the University of Siena Law Faculty (1956): for around twenty years, however, Dal Pra Ponticelli remained the only official lecturer in social services in Italy.

The numerous and often rapid changes recalled above brought about challenges and organizational shake-ups of no little significance. One example was the reform relating to the training of supervisors to monitor social work in institutions: "The schools therefore found themselves faced with a dilemma: whether to leave the apprentice students under the guidance of the institutions' social workers while tackling alongside them the complex but not always strongly felt problem of supervisor training, or to ask the institutions to allow the school to directly guide the pupils in that period, but with the danger of slowing down the technical evolution of the institutions themselves and creating a perhaps irreparable break between the schools and the profession" (Marselli, 1961: 34). The problem was then resolved by following the *AAI*[20] *Convention* (1958) indications to train the supervisors directly in the social welfare institutions.

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19   Alongside the division of the discipline of the service "by sectors", more recently it would also be organized "by methods". See Bartolomei and Passera (2011) and Cervone (2014).

20   Amministrazione per le Attività Assistenziali Italiane ed Internazionali.

Managerialization, promotion of the freelance profession and specific space for the sociological and biographical approach[21] were the changes promoted by the sociologist Bechelloni to make the Florentine study programme "a real university" course.[22] In order to upgrade and give the course further visibility, in 2006 a convention was signed between the municipality and university to sponsor student and graduate work experience and internships with the Municipality of Florence social services. But it was above all the Tuscany regional government that thought it useful to promote and standardize the social services internship at regional level.

Since 2016, starting from what was already a consolidated dialogue between professional and sociological subjects, the course of study (primarily in the two-year Design and Management of Social Interventions – 2019 master's course) has invested even more heavily in an interdisciplinary slant. In more recent years, the educational goals have gradually headed more clearly towards reading contemporary social phenomena, principally marginality and exclusion, and towards offering training capable of providing an interdisciplinary conceptual and theoretical baggage and a good mastery of social service methods and techniques.

Looking at the regional situation, bachelor's degrees in Social Services are offered at all three universities in Tuscany – Florence (UNIFI), Siena (UNISI) and Pisa (UNIPI) –, with solid ties between all of the universities and the regional Order of Social Workers. Given that they are all based in the Schools of Political Sciences, the three study courses display numerous similarities, starting from the predominance of sociological subjects; nevertheless, there are also some important differences in terms of the composition of the study programmes.

The University of Florence, as we have seen, sets aside more room for teaching law, directing its attention towards knowledge of the laws that regulate the service activities. Particular space is also reserved for studying languages. Students must gain B2 level certification in one

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21 In the following years, the Florentine master's degree veered off the common path of the degree courses in Social Work offered in Siena and Pisa, also due to the experience of the "Biography, Culture and Social Services" course taught by Prof. Laura Bini (see Bini, 2017), who over the years had repeatedly pointed out the increasing demand for professional supervision.

22 Interview with Professor Silvia Pezzoli (recorded on 30 August 2020).

foreign language, and it is also possible to include more than one foreign language in the programme. The University of Pisa, on the other hand, requires students to gain basic knowledge of one language from a choice of English, French or Spanish.

The exclusive feature of the University of Siena courses is its training in medical disciplines, hygiene and psychiatry, areas which are instead not included in the curricula of the other two universities.

The total number of credits available for internships in the L39 bachelor's degree curriculum is higher in Siena (20 credits) compared to Florence and Pisa (18). Internships are carried out in the second and third years in Florence and Siena, while in Pisa they are carried out in the first and third years.

In all three universities, the course of study can be completed with a two-year master's degree: Pisa offers an LM 87 Social Services and Social Policies course as part of the master's degree in Sociology and Social Services Management. Emphasizing a managerial approach, the learning programme is quite flexible with 15 credits which can be chosen from a wide range of disciplines. The University of Florence offers a master's degree in *Social Intervention Design and Management*, with a very strictly defined curriculum hinging around process analysis. The University of Siena initially offered a master's degree course (57/S) from 2002-2003 to 2008-2009 academic year but then it was suspended; a new master's degree course was launched in the 2020-21 academic year, on *Social Sustainability and Welfare Management*: its objective is to train specialists for public and third-sector institutions, experts both in the provision of services and in planning and designing social work interventions.

As regards internship in the LM 87 master's curriculum, against 12 credits in Pisa and Siena, Florence offers a 7-credit internship for research and planning activities. There is also a final assessment, suggesting greater attention to the results obtained.

3. Epistemology of social work

If it is true, as affirmed by Canguilhem (1968), that epistemology can only be and indeed has always been historical, since it depends on the sciences, and the sciences have a history, let us continue the reflection advanced in the two previous paragraphs with a short investigation of the epistemology of social work. The following considerations, inevitably the result of a selective investigation of the literature (Pawson *et al.*, 2003; Fargion, 2009; Dodd and Epstein, 2012; Davies, 2013; Langer and Litz, 2015), start from two official definitions of social work adopted at the international level by the community of academics and professionals in recent years:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior 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. [23]

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. [24]

3.1. Value-laden and hence dubious knowledge?

A common point emerges from analysis of the two definitions: they are openly teleological, oriented towards achieving ends. Both refer to values, meant both as (possible) states of the world and as characteristics of states of the world to be pursued.

Social work is therefore – considerably – bound by a series of values which find application in ethical principles, organizational rules, regulations

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[23] International definition of social work adopted by the IASSW and IFSW in July 2001.

[24] Global definition of social work adopted by the IASSW and IFSW in July 2014.

and laws that guide and condition its practice. This concerns both the professional figure's tasks and duties, and the social context in which he or she acts. Indeed, social work is much more bound by values than disciplinary/professional practices of a predominantly cognitive or technical kind.

This condition inevitably points us towards the general epistemological debate, which is particularly lively in the social sciences, on the relationship between scientific knowledge and values. The position still prevailing, albeit no longer dominating, in cultured circles is that science must be wholly value neutral. Originating from positivist and neo-positivist views, it is a stance based on the strict logical and linguistic distinction between descriptive affirmations (which are accepted in the scientific sphere) and prescriptive affirmations (which are not). Nonetheless, this position upholds the claim that scientific knowledge is the most suitable for guiding and leading associated human action and governing society. This theoretical paradigm results in reducing the consideration of practical know-how to instrumental logic, that is, to the choice of verified relations of cause and effect in order to create effective connections between means and ends, with no judgement as to the ends themselves. It implies the typical tendency of all bureaucratic and ritualistic attitudes (Merton 1968) to place the means before the ends; therefore, the most "difficult" ends are removed[25] also in consideration of the available means.

Within this conception of science, value ends are only considered acceptable within an "applied" sphere of scientific know-how (such as technology or engineering). In an "applied" sphere, values and practical ends (as "arbitrarily" chosen ends) can only guide the derivation and application (as means) of knowledge obtained in a context considered "pure": pure insofar as it is totally purged of considerations of value, preference and ends and subjected to the sole criterion of empirically and logically controlled truth.[26]

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25 This attitude can be effectively described using the apologue of the drunkard who loses his keys in the dark in front of his door and decides to look for them elsewhere, under a streetlight, because there is more light.

26 It is important to remember and recognize that this vision (which at times is taken for granted) is anything but unanimously accepted in the general epistemological debate. Even Max Weber, considered the classic reference for the affirmation of science's necessary Wertfreiheit (freedom from values), totally rejected the possibility

3.2. Applied and therefore epistemologically and ontologically inferior knowledge?

According to the conception of science outlined above, the epistemological problems of social work may be considered to relate solely to the use of theories and techniques discovered and confirmed in the sphere of the "pure" sciences. Hence, the tendency is to affirm the heteronomy and epistemological and methodological subalternity of social work (as "applied" knowledge).

Nevertheless, it is widely recognized (Fiske and Shweder, 1986; Giddens and Turner, 1987; Goldthorpe, 2000; Hedström, 2005; Seidman, 2012) that to date, in the "pure" social sciences, there is virtually no unanimously agreed knowledge based on strong substantive theories; in its place we find a range of conceptual outlines. These sets of ontological and epistemological commitments form theoretical lexicons which are neither true nor false; they provide the basis for medium-range theories that make generalizations on particular processes and phenomena (e.g., relative deprivation, cognitive dissonance); they support a pile of probabilistic empirical regularities which cannot be convincingly generalized outside mainly small limits of space and time.

If the large part of the "pure" social sciences are characterized by this constitutive condition of pluralism and the lack of a single dominant paradigm, it should come as no surprise that the same situation appears in the sphere of an "applied" professional practice. This makes the possibility

of a science lacking in presuppositions. Indeed, he indicated a relationship to values (Wertbeziehung) – values characteristic of the historical condition in which the social scientists find themselves living of the influences they are subjected to and their positions and active stances on questions of value – as the foundation of the formation of the concepts defining the objects of study and the analytical tools of the "sciences of the spirit" (Weber, 2012). Among the other authors who have criticized the complete removal of the sphere of values from scientific know-how, we find various Anglo-Saxon authors of a pragmatist background, from John Dewey (1939) through Scriven (1995) to Putnam (2002), and women philosophers of science with a feminist approach such as Longino (1990); the most radical position is perhaps that of Swedish economist-sociologist Gunnar Myrdal (1953, 1958, 1969), who considers all aspirations towards value neutrality in the analysis of social phenomena a way of disguising and surreptitiously legitimizing value positions – not only upheld by single authors but characterizing whole disciplinary traditions – and requests an explicit specification of the value orientations that nevertheless guide the investigation.

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of practising social work along the lines of "engineering" as per this model much more problematic.

Despite this, many authors (with particular reference to evidence-based practice: see Sheldon, 1978; Briar, 1979; Gambrill, 2006) continue to indicate conversion to the prescriptive methodological doctrine mentioned above as the road for the social work profession. So, social work should apply knowledge and techniques that "pure research" has indicated as optimal despite, however, not sufficiently taking into account assessments of their heuristic fertility and practical applicability in the specific and complex contexts of intervention. Not only that a basically detached and "experimental" attitude should also be assumed, framed in protocols of controlled intervention, starting from and aiming for a constant "verification of hypotheses" by the social work professionals themselves, who are increasingly scientist-workers.

The problem is that checking hypotheses is prevalently an operation pertaining to "pure" science, not "applied" science. Applied science, on the other hand, should concern the use – for practical purposes and in complex contexts ("life" contexts, not "laboratories") – of already sufficiently confirmed and consolidated cognitive contents. These should be accepted theories and not doubtful hypotheses; it should be knowledge that – precisely because it is consolidated and accepted – can be used with relative confidence as to its efficacy. The positions supporting evidence-based practice therefore come to conceive of social work as a kind of intervention *in corpore vili*,[27] that is, not sufficiently respectful of the dignity and value of subjects who are almost considered guinea pigs. So, it should come as no surprise that the community of workers has resisted these recommendations (see Fargion, 2009: 134-9). In our opinion, this resistance is both epistemically and ethically grounded, and therefore methodologically correct; it is anything but resistance to the "scientific spirit" or expression of a "humanist" prejudice dictated by backwardness and superstition.

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[27] The fact that this expression indicating "risky interventions that nevertheless can result harmful for those subjected to them" refers to "a worthless body" (of no value or social prestige) to us appears particularly dense in implications in the case of interventions in a field such as social work.

3.3. Epistemological autonomy of "applied" know-how

If we go back to the two definitions of the profession presented at the start, while the first still refers to the "use" of the social sciences by social work, the second and most recent one on one hand claims an autonomous existence for the social work theoretical discipline, and on the other considers various branches of knowledge (not just the social sciences) to be at the "basis" of the professional practice. Therefore, the claim for social work's autonomy is not just academic but also epistemological. It is a claim that marks the explicit abandonment of the model of social engineering/applied science assigned to social work by the vision of science inspired by positivism, some of whose limits we have tried to indicate.

Now, it seems interesting to observe that, since the end of the 1980s, this model has also been radically called into question by the epistemological reflection on engineering and technology in the field of the hard sciences (see Meijers, 2009). What they reject is the same reductionism that, at the epistemological level, makes these practices subaltern to the "pure" sciences, and, at the ontological level, makes them subaltern to the composition of the world those "pure sciences" strive to define. We are not mentioning this in order to once again propose a (legitimizing) reference to the natural sciences in a debate on a "social" discipline, but to point out that the most recent epistemological reflection underlines the specificity of "situated" knowledge. Indeed, the debate is now taking into serious consideration those problems relating to the formation and application of knowledge in practical contexts which are highly complex owing to the co-existence of multiple, difficult material and social conditions and as many dimensions of purpose, interest and value. For this very reason, they deserve to be analysed and evaluated in autonomy and without reductionisms or "hierarchical" considerations.

4. Socio-economic, political and cultural context

The following reconstruction of the current Italian demographic, socio-economic, cultural and political scenario helps to more clearly outline the context in which the social workers find themselves operating. It also helps to identify the main trends according to which policies and interventions should ideally be remodulated and to trace the profiles of the <u>average</u> current and future users.

The year 2019, from an economic point of view, confirmed the demographic trends expressed in the most recent years. In more detail, the phenomena whose impact in terms of mid-to long-term transformations in the socio-demographic field, both at the national and regional (Tuscany) level, needs to be remembered are: low fertility levels, a constant increase in life expectancy and continuing dynamic migration trends especially at the international level. The outcome of these processes – to make an extreme simplification – is that Italy appears an increasingly less populated and more elderly nation.

If we are to look at some data (ISTAT 2020), the overall numbers of the population resident in Italy continue to fall: as at 1 January 2020 the residents amounted to 60 million 317 thousand, namely, with an annual drop of 116 thousand. The average number of children per woman (or Total Fertility Rate – TFR) for 2019 remained stable at 1.29; at the same time, the gap between births and deaths increased: for every 100 people who died, 67 were born (ten years ago the ratio was 100 to 96).

Net international migration flows are positive but slowing down: the balance is +143 thousand, 32 thousand fewer than in 2018, the result of 307 thousand entering the country and 164 thousand leaving.

In addition to the drop in absolute numbers, the population's progressive ageing continues to be the most important demographic trend in recent decades. Average life expectancy at birth has reached 85.3 years for women and 81 for men. This is accompanied by a further increase in the average age: 45.7 years as on 1 January 2020, 2 years more than the findings in January 2012.

In terms of the labour market and levels of economic wellbeing, the extremely recent report from the Regional Institute for Economic Planning of Tuscany (IRPET) on the *Situazione economica, lavoro e disuguaglianze*

(Economic Situation, Work and Inequalities) clearly highlights how we have gone from a phase of long recession starting in 2008, which saw a relaunch of the economy as a prime necessity, to the current phase in which the first investigations on the effects produced by the Covid-19 epidemic are leading to talk of the urgent need for *reconstruction* (IRPET, 2020: 75).

The macroeconomic picture prior to the onset of the pandemic already displayed weaknesses and issues. The whole country – and Tuscany in particular – was still a long way off the goal of an appreciable and stable growth course; so much so that the experts were talking of a real "risk of decline". In particular, "after a phase of moderate expansion, a clear slowdown was seen in economic activity due to the stagnation of consumption and investments" (IRPET, 2020: 75). The data on productivity and potential growth revealed a situation of extreme weakness too.

In the very first months of 2020, the labour market trend was growing, but not evenly, however, with wide regional and local variations; and with far-reaching differences by age, in particular among the over 55s and the under 30s. In addition to this were the high levels of youth unemployment and long-term unemployment, and the phenomenon of underemployment, that is, the large average reduction in hours per active worker. At the end of 2019, the quarterly report by the National Institutes for Statistics (ISTAT) showed a national unemployment rate (age 15-64) of 9.8%, that is, more than two and a half million residents in Italy were looking for work; breaking down the figure by age range, the cohort of youths and young adults (aged 15-34) presents an unemployment rate of 17.8%; the *youth unemployment* figures as a whole are even worse, affecting 25.7% of youngsters aged between 15 and 24.

"Immediately before the arrival of Covid-19, the estimates for 2020 indicated a weakening of the economic picture for Italy, with very feeble growth, above all feebler than was needed, seeing as the prediction was for an increase in GDP of just over 0.5%, at both the national and regional levels. Everything changed with Covid-19. What appeared a modest result, became unachievable? Suddenly, the spread of the epidemic drove us towards a severe crisis, as never seen before, which is introducing new behaviours and changing our expectations" (IRPET, 2020: 7).

As it is known, it is the combination between individual and local resources that make prevention policies and social intervention more

or less effective. As remembered by a lot of the literature (in particular, Titmuss, 1958 and Paci, 1989), differences in the success of measures adopted and proposed can be traced to the conditions of the target individuals and social groups. Wider social interventions, as well as social and health prevention and care interventions, must pay particular attention to the diversity of resources in terms of the individuals and families' not just economic, but also cultural and relational capital, and to no lesser extent the social configurations created in the local area, because it is through these that information and relationships, possibilities and limits, rules and resources travel. The dynamics we are referring to, whether positive with growth or negative with impoverishment, condition greatly; this can be in terms of sharing unhealthy and unsafe behaviours; exposure to physical, chemical and mechanical risks in the living and/or working environment; and exposure to psycho-social dynamics with a negative impact. A policy which has lost sight of its epicentre, that is, the individual in his or her reality and with his or her experience, and which has "forgotten" that less fortunate situations, weakness and diversity also exist, itself becomes an element that boosts social inequality and aggravates its effects, for both the old and the young generations.

The current situation is therefore highly complex: traditional social needs are amplified by the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic and the lockdown measures adopted in our country. This situation is compounded by the fragility of life careers caused by growing precarization and intervention methods that are often part of a changing and uncertain framework as a result of ongoing reviews and reforms of the national and local welfare system (Facchini and Ruggeri, 2012).

In order to aim to boost the attention towards the social professions – first of all social workers – and at the same time provide them with up-to-date and competitive education, the bases need to be consolidated and/or laid for new interplay between the actors involved in the social sphere. First of all, this requires the promotion of new analysis work together with the local institutions and subjects in the private social sphere (Various Authors, 2019: 7). This would be a concrete way to strengthen cooperation in the implementation of inclusion policies, and to (also) improve "bottom-up" knowledge of the needs of people/users in order to program wholly adequate and effective policies.

5. The formative profile

The first 40 years of experience of social services education in Italy were marked by the above epistemological background, and therefore a situation of perennial conflict between the *positivist vision*, aimed at finding universal laws and methods to frame and operationalize the social services, and the *romantic vision* which instead underlines the unpredictability and originality of every situation by adopting and tailoring the practices to each case (Fargion, 2009). The course of study, as we have seen (see par.1), is the legacy of a long history of typically Italian Catholicism and statism. However, as of the 1950s, other approaches began to be taken into consideration. Indeed, the very language of the first models displays a change in tack: terms borrowed from US literature, such as *case work*, *group work* and *community work* – remaining in English – were welcomed into the sector jargon, the signal of a "process of indigenization", which, although weak, was nevertheless there. In the 1970s, on the other hand, an aversion was taken towards the Americanization of the social services, in particular with regard to the focus of the social workers' attention and engagement on the hardships of single individuals, to the detriment of analysis of and interventions on the contexts producing the hardships (Fargion, 2002).

In 1999, the Bologna process ratified the birth of the European Higher Education Area, in view of a sort of harmonization between the European curricula (Castro, 2014). The Italian response to this has led – thus far – to the activation of 31 class L39 bachelor's degree courses. The great majority of these are affiliated to the Schools of Political Sciences (9), followed by the Schools of Educational Sciences (6), Law (4), Sociology (3), and last, schools that group together various social disciplines. In addition, two courses are provided by Schools of the Arts and Philosophy and one by Medicine and Psychology. There are 30 LM87 master's degrees in Social Services and Social Policies. Most of these are affiliated to the same schools as the bachelor's degrees, but they are given specific names that reveal more differentiation in terms of approaches and goals. This is because the profession of social worker is not the master's students' most desired career choice as they often entertain the idea of working in policy and

service management, promotion and communication, or research.[28] In this connection, it is useful to remember that access to the master's degree does not only require a bachelor's degree in Social Services but it is also open to graduates from other disciplines.

Standing out among the educational goals of the LM87[29] degrees are: "design, planning, organization and management skills in the field of policies for the social and health services in the public and private social sector; analysis and evaluation of the service and performance quality"; possession of communication skills and information management abilities; possession of significant experience with relation to the specific areas of intervention and educational goals of the master's degree; and ability to use at least one European Union language in addition to Italian, including sector jargon.

The different schools of affiliation leave their mark on both the composition of the curricula and the academic profiles of the tenured course lecturers who usually are not qualified social workers as they come from other study courses. Now that the bachelor's and master's study courses have been almost totally institutionalized in academia, there is little chance of co-opting the social service professionals into academia. If, as Evetts (2006) reminds us while quoting Hughes, the differences between occupations and professions are differences in standing rather than type, and each of them has the capacity and the function to bring collective attention and intervention to problems pertaining to its own sphere of competence, in Italy the role of social workers is still undervalued both in the educational activities and above all in research. An "easy" answer, which, nevertheless does not sit quite as easily, seems to have been found to the lack of teaching staff in possession of a specific education in social work with the inclusion of sector professionals on yearly contracts in the training curricula.

Consequently, the reflection on and innovation in the educational programmes is insufficient and fragmentary and Italy is struggling in the

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28 Please note that access to the master's degree is not only open to those with a bachelor's degree in Social Work. Any degree with at least 70 credits acquired in sociological, political, psychological, economic or legal subjects, or in foreign languages, gives access to the course.

29 See https://www.miur.gov.it/lauree-e-lauree-magistrali.

attempt to create domestic (and European) harmonization of the teaching curricula. The challenge concerns at least two distinct dimensions: on one hand, making more professionalizing formative profiles, and on the other, promoting programmes aimed at affirming a managerial approach to the profession. So, the challenge is to push towards professionalization and managerialization, which is where many teaching programmes trip up.

While the project to recognize the value of university education as an essential engine to transform the "job" of social worker into a "profession" still needs to be brought to completion in more or less all Italian universities, the managerial approach to the profession relates more directly to the master's degrees, which deal with it in an uneven manner. In a European scenario rich in initiatives for the promotion of an EU-wide managerial approach (Olgiati, 2008) as the way to activate partnership networks and improve life contexts, only some Italian universities offer programmes linked to managerial-type answers to these issues. Others, instead, tend to concentrate on reflection and process analysis.

Despite the far-reaching historical, political and social changes that have happened since the 1970s, our country has remained true to the case work model, that is, the individual support approach. In addition, it has maintained and increased the network of relations with the organizations, which are mainly municipal institutions and local health authorities, probably also due to the delayed demonstration of faith in the third sector of associations, volunteers, organized groups and anything else that the local area "produces".

Instead, the 1999 Bologna process calling for the activation/organization of internships did not catch us unawares. Indeed, practical experience aimed at getting students closer to the professional world (Dal Pra Ponticelli and Pieroni, 2011) was already included in the educational curricula in the first half of the twentieth century. Today, the number of credits for the internship varies between 18 and 20 for the bachelor's degrees, while it is optional on the master's courses, even though most have included it in their programmes.

During the bachelor's degrees it is frequent for the internship to consist of a number of initial credits for career guidance, involving strictly classroom activities as well as visits to the services and direct meetings with professional social workers. A second part, comprising more credits,

is destined to the actual internship itself, with the possibility of shadowing the social services workers. At bachelor level, the hosting institutions usually belong to the public sector, that is, the complex system of services involved in the local health authorities, municipalities, regional governments and Ministry of Justice.

The range of internships available in the master's degrees is even wider. Especially for those that prefer a managerial approach to the profession, the practical experience can be gained in NGOs, political organizations, cooperatives or private organizations, etc. It is not rare for the internship to become a moment for reflection, analysis and research on the services on offer and, in some cases, the opportunity to present redesign proposals. Hence, it becomes possible for an internship experience to go beyond the idea of "learning to learn". To the "retrospective" baggage of theoretical knowledge, the apprentice adds "situational" learning in the context of action, to then go on to "lean forward" in order to implement improvements (Dellavalle, 2011) to the service under research.

6. Innovation and future perspectives for Social Work education

As far as the Italian context is concerned, the social services have observed, participated in and dealt with many historical and political, economic and social transformations since they were first established [30] and subsequently structured and institutionalized. The Covid-19 pandemic, which spread during winter 2020, first of all in eastern Asia, then in Europe and thereafter in the rest of the world, and is still one of the most important health threats recorded in recent decades, at least in the field of infective diseases, both at the global and the local Italian level, is no exception. [31] On our way to conclude this research, we need to make

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[30]   The reference is to the publication (in 1917) of the volume *Social Diagnosis* by Mary Ellen Richmond which can be considered the founding element of the social services, the basis for the development of her theory, and the starting point for reflection on the – speciously dichotomous – vision of social work as a science or as an art.

[31]   At the time when this chapter was being concluded (September 2020), infections from Covid-19 in Italy had exceeded the threshold of 300,000 and deaths 35,000 (see https://lab.gedidigital.it/, last consultation 30 September 2020).

numerous considerations in terms of innovation and future perspectives for social work education.

The first that we propose is closely linked to recent events and leads us to reflect on two great problems. The analysis presented here has briefly reconstructed the history of the institution and the main features of the cycle of studies in social work, at the national level and in particular in Tuscany and the University of Florence, then dwelling on the epistemology of the training and formative profile. What it clearly shows is how the profession of social worker is closely linked to the present day. Hence, social work education has to constantly be brought up-to-date in terms of theoretical approaches, intervention methods and partnership networks so that the future social workers can gain the most suitable skills and tools to deal with the effects that social changes, crises and urgencies place before the public.

Two main problems have been identified in the current functioning of the social services. These have been further amplified by the present emergency, with its immediate-term health implications and the prospect of a severe socio-economic impact in the mid-and long-term.

The first problem is linked to the necessity to activate support rapidly which somehow produces stress in the traditional organization of the social services. Indeed, the intervention procedure is not immediate and uses fundamentally face-to-face methods focused more on the need than on the process. In most cases, the services are activated in the form of targeted procedures and contingent provisions when users themselves turn to them with a precise need or request. But since "single situations are a warning light for a wider phenomenon" (Fargion, 2009: 54), it is hoped that the service can make increasingly complete reconstructions of the route that led to the problem, finding the resources and the continuity to go through the user's life story and focus on the turning points causing the downward slide. This would lead to develop a truly multidimensional view of intervention (Acocella, 2009), beyond the material and more strictly and negatively welfarist aspects.

The second problem concerns the continuing lack of a "social gaze" towards complex situations, for a start the health emergency. In Italy social service interventions are essential and strategic, and yet unfortunately still today the service's tools are fragile, and it is not given full recognition.

This weakness emerges from those same interventions made in emergency contexts, the scale of values and the manners of activation. Let us make just two examples. In the case of compulsory treatment (Trattamenti Sanitari Obbligatori – TSO), the procedure is prompted by a direct call from the police: hence, security comes before community. Again, in cases of domestic violence it is more frequently following the most serious episodes that the victims seek help, and usually this happens in the spaces (and with the human resources) of the emergency units in hospitals.

That their presence is marginal or peripheral in these immediate interventions touches on social workers' very identity, condemning them to the role of professional figure with no defined position. Going back to the health sector, despite the recent regional reforms,[32] when compared, social sector professions are still placed in a lower position in the hierarchy than the health sector professions and perceived as marginal figures (Perino and Lezzer, 2014). Hence, a lot is left to the single person's charisma and creativity and the social workers' abilities to create a space for themselves in the gaps left by the regulations and by the missing indicators that should clearly regulate the personnel's inclusion in the organigram.

Whereas a while ago the profession seemed to be suspended between professionalization and managerialization (Allegri, 2006), today the most recent debate seems to be tending more towards managerial logics and is questioning the impact of this on the profession (Tousjin and Della Valle, 2017). One of the first consequences – the most significant – would be the loss of professional authority; the second concerns the distortion of the mission, owing to the excessive bureaucratization introduced to the field.

The managerial drift in exercising the profession of social worker would restrict and impoverish the practice right from the first hands-on internship experiences (see paragraphs 2 and 5). What is more, it would also be to the detriment of that distinct orientation of the Italian social services: their *tri-focal perspective* (Gui, 2004; Fargion, 2009) based on

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32 We recall that of the Tuscany regional government: the reform of the Tuscan health system – Regional Law no. 84 of 28 December 2015 – which reorganized the Local Health Units (AUSL) with a view to merging them into three macro areas and promoted the establishment of a Department of Social Services, Non-Self-Sufficiency and Disability in each unit, while providing for both health and social care.

the simultaneous evaluation of the single person, the community and the institutions.

And yet, despite these pitfalls, standardization and proceduralization are appealing for the workers. It gives them confidence in the programmes and their clear consequences, comfort and strength, and helps to create an identity. The flipside of the coin – which we cannot ignore – is the risk that it will create a rigidly replicable model. What does it mean in terms of the relationship with the users, and what will be lost? How much does it limit the profession's creativity? What margins does it impose and how strict are they?

The danger – as already theoretically highlighted in paragraph 3 – is that the profession will go backwards towards a mere monitoring service and will no longer provide real accompaniment.

Instead, it must be underlined that it is crucial not to lose the profession's interpretative and creative ability to offer an effective and tailored service that is always fair and in line with its ethical principles.

Two suggestions can be made. The first front is to promote work in the local area and on the service networks: only with the creation of strong interplay between professionals with different skills who are present throughout the area is it possible to guarantee presence and competence, service and support and to perform functional interventions.

The second front is to strengthen the teamwork. It is a way of working that cannot be improvised but must be built starting in the university lecture halls where the obligatory teaching modules can define methodological bases as well as work methods and pace.

To sum up, what clearly emerges is the necessity to keep the two dimensions together: the regulated and replicable procedure, and flexibility, with its room for interpretation and personalization. The solution, which is not easy but needs to be studied and proposed right from the earliest educational and internship experiences, is to combine flexibility and procedure.

Attention to non-standardization and qualitative investigation should be at the centre of the training courses for new social workers, starting in the university lecture halls and continuing in the students' first hands-on experience in the internship programmes.

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CHAPTER III

Context, characteristics and challenges of Social Work education at UCM

David Alonso González
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1. Presentation of the University

Founded in 1499 in Alcalá de Henares by Cardinal Cisneros, advisor to Queen Isabel I, known as Isabel the Catholic, the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM) is now a non-denominational and public entity[33]. UCM is the largest on-site University of Spain. In recent decades, the university has come to have more than 130,000 students, which has been gradually reduced. For the current academic year (2020-21) this figure has been around 70,000. The university currently has 26 faculties and nearly a hundred departments, covering the different sciences and areas of knowledge. It also has 5 university hospitals and a good number of clinics, including psychology, dentistry, optics and optometry, podiatry and a veterinary hospital. To sum up, it can be said that the Complutense has more than 100 buildings, distributed in two large campuses (Moncloa and Somosaguas) and in the centre of the city of Madrid, many of them of incalculable historical value. Its heritage includes, in addition to irreplaceable incunabula, original works by Goya, Soroya and other great masters of painting and sculpture. This heritage is so curious that one of the gates of the city of Madrid, the triumphal arch, belongs to the Complutense.

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[33]   You can consult our webpage for a historical description of the Complutense University of Madrid https://www.ucm.es/english/History.

Due to the crisis and the policies to reduce spending on higher education promoted by conservative governments, the UCM budget has been reduced in recent years. In 2020 it will stand at 566,665,274 euros. In spite of this, over the last few years it has always been ranked among the 4 best universities in Spain and among the 250 best in the world. Due to its prestige and the fact that it is located in the capital, it attracts students from all over Spain and a growing number of foreign students, especially from Latin America and Asia, particularly from China.

One of the newest faculties at the university is the Faculty of Social Work. Founded in 1983 as a university school[34], which in turn inherited the old School of Social Assistance of Madrid (where training had been provided since 1939) (Molina Sánchez, 1994), it raised its status to that of a Faculty after having transformed its undergraduate studies by aligning them with Bologna and accrediting a couple of Masters and a specific PhD programme in social work, the first of its kind in the country.

In recent years, the Faculty of Social Work has stood out for its innovative approach, which has been significantly boosted by its membership of the former European Network of Schools of Social Work. It was the first in Spain among the centres where social work was taught and the first of the 26 faculties of the UCM to graduate to a promotion of the new degrees in the framework set by the Bologna process. A key support in this respect was the so-called White Book of Social Work (Vazquez, 2005), a document that reflected the basic agreements of the different universities about what a degree in social work should include. Our Social Work Faculty was one of the first to opt for purely virtual teaching, being part of the Vircamp consortium from the outset (www.vircamp.net) in the early year of 2005, and for blended learning, with very intensive use of the virtual campus. It has made a firm commitment to bilingual teaching, in an important effort to promote internationalisation.

The faculty is currently an example and participates very actively in general policies that are fundamental to every university: gender equality, functional diversity, sexual diversity, support for refugees, among many other transversal policies. We are also very proud to publish a growing

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34 The former university schools could only offer 3-year university diplomas, but not Bachelor's, Master's or PhD degrees.

number of scientific articles in top journals and to participate in European projects from the former Equal and Daphne, to the present Erasmus+ and Capacity Building initiatives, among many others.

In 2018/19 academic year, the faculty had an enrollment of 1419 students in the Bachelor's degree, 42 in the Master's degrees, 48 active doctoral students, and 52 in other post-graduate courses. In the following section we will describe the study structure available to these students (UCM, 2020).

2. Characterization of the cycle of studies in Social Work

The latest relevant regulatory change in the field of Spanish higher education established a three-cycle university structure with the following academic loads: a first cycle, the Bachelor, of four years and an academic load of 240 ECTS credits. This includes most of the university studies (including social work). A second cycle, The Master, of one year and 60 ECTS credits, for most of the specialities (including social work). And the third cycle, the PhD, of three years of autonomous research, that usually includes some specific seminars and always a dissertation which may be a monograph or a compendium of articles. The dissertation must be publicly defended before an evaluation committee.

This configuration was and still is very controversial. It was due to the pressures, on the one hand, from certain disciplines, which were not willing to offer degrees in three years. On the other hand, there was strong opposition from certain academic sectors and students who understood that they were betting on longer degrees and shorter Masters. They did this by considering that there would be public co-payment on bachelor's degrees but not on Master's degrees, in an attempt to reduce the costs of higher education for students and their families. It was also very controversial that the doctorate was only 3 years long and did not include compulsory courses for all students and that the teaching in the doctorate was not recognized to the faculty.

The bachelor's degree ("Grado") is a level of training that is characterized by its generalist vocation. In other words, the content and skills acquired during the degree will serve for employment in any area of the discipline

studied. People who get the Degree in Social Work (BSW) will be prepared to develop their working life in different areas of this profession (Social Services, care centres for children at social risk, centres for drug addicts, elderly people, families, young people, mental health, inmigration, etc.). In summary, during the degree a high level of specialization will not be achieved (this is reserved for the Master).

Once the BSW is completed, students can choose to enter the job market, or continue their training through an Official Master's Degree. The intention of the master's programmes is professional specialisation, the deepening of knowledge in a specific professional field. For example, and in the case of the Faculty of Social Work, there are at the moment two different Masters, one in Social Service Management and Communitary Work and other in LGBTIQ Studies.

The Bachelor in Social Work is structured on the basis of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, which is commonly known as "ECTS Credits" (an acronym derived from the name in English, "European Credit Transfer System"). Each ECTS credit summarises and programmes around 25 hours of student work, including all the activities necessary for the acquisition of the knowledge and skills set out in the curriculum in general and in each subject in particular.

The teacher in charge of teaching each subject carries out the programming, estimating the hours required for each activity. This programme will be available to students from the first day of teaching activities. In general, the student's personal work represents approximately 50% of the hours allocated to each credit, although this proportion varies according to the type of ECTS we are referring to. In this sense, there are three types of ECTS credits, namely basic, obligatory and optional credits.

Basic credits refer to core content and competences within a knowledge area. The knowledge areas are defined in Royal Decree 1125/2003, which establishes five areas, namely, Arts and Humanities, Sciences, Health Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences, and Engineering and Architecture.

The degree in Social Work falls within the framework of Social and Legal Sciences, along with degrees such as Sociology, Social Education, Business Management, Tourism, Business Administration and Management, Economics, to mention a few examples. The basic credits, therefore, refer

to content and skills that can be considered fundamental in the context of the aforementioned knowledge area.

Each degree includes 60 ECTS of a basic nature, whose recognition for students will be automatic, so that those who have completed these credits in the degree in Social Work will obtain automatic recognition if they decide to start another career that is registered within the same knowledge area, for example Economics or Sociology. In other words, if a student has passed the basic credits in Social Work, he will not have to take them again if he decides to start Sociology, and vice versa. This situation applies to all those degrees that are part of the area of knowledge called social and legal sciences.

The compulsory credits refer to knowledge, content and skills that are fundamental to the specific Bachelor in which the student has enrolled. Thus, for example, the compulsory credits of the Degree in Social Work refer to content that every professional in Social Work should have studied to ensure that they handle concepts, skills and competences that are fundamental to that discipline.

Finally, the optional credits refer to knowledge, content and skills that are relevant to the discipline chosen by the student but are not essential for them to develop their professional work in the chosen area. These are subjects in which students can deepen some of the skills acquired by studying the basic and compulsory subjects. In the case of the Degree in Social Work, these subjects are related, for example, to the care of dependent persons, the study of social exclusion or the gender perspective in social intervention, among others.

As mentioned above, the intention of the bachelor's degree is general, so that the elective represents a relatively lower percentage of the ECTS that the student must pass to graduate. It is important to note here that current legislation allows students to validate a maximum of 6 elective credits through various university activities (cultural, sports, student representation, solidarity and cooperation).

The change in the credit transfer system (the ECTS system) involves a major change in teaching methodology, which can no longer be limited to the so-called "master class", i.e., an activity in which the teacher presents and develops a topic for the group of students, incorporating doubts or questions to clarify the various aspects of the topics presented.

The ECTS system implies a more active role for the student, so teaching methods will have to adapt to this new role. The master class will not disappear, especially in the first years of bachelor's degrees, when the development of theoretical content is clearly necessary. However, the master class will coexist with other types of teaching practices, more active for students. Thus, all subjects that make up the degree will include practical activities (from the first year), either in the classroom or outside the classroom, in tutorials or group supervision meetings or in the development of alternative activities through which students will acquire the skills necessary for the exercise of their profession.

The bachelor's degree in social in social work is structured in three levels, namely, Module, Subject and Course. The Module consists of a coherent set of contents in different subjects. In turn, the subjects are structured through a coherent set of subjects.

As it is said below, to obtain the Degree in Social Work, 240 ECTS must be completed. Of these, 60 ECTS are taken with basic subjects/courses (Basic Subjects Module), 90 ECTS with compulsory subjects (Compulsory Module), 36 ECTS optional subjects, 42 ECTS correspond to the Compulsory Practice and 12 to the Bachelor Thesis (TFG). Each Module "unfolds" into various subjects, which in turn "unfolds" into a set of subjects. All the subjects in the Degree consist of 6 ECTS, and they are offered on a semester basis, from September to January (first semester) or from February to May (second semester).

Image 1. "Time allocation of the courses in the BA of Social Work at UCM"

FIRST YEAR:

10 SUBJECTS = 60 CREDITS: 7 BASIC + 3 COMPULSORY

FIRST SEMESTER:
– GENERAL SOCIOLOGY (BASIC)
– POLITICAL SCIENCE AND (BASIC) ADMINISTRATION FUNDAMENTALS
– LEGAL BASES AND PERSON (BASIC)
– INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY (BASIC)
– THEORETICAL BASES OF SOCIAL WORK (COMPULSORY)

SECOND QUARTER:

– BASIC PSYCHOLOGY (BASIC)

– ECONOMIC FUNDAMENTALS (BASIC)

– STATISTICS APPLIED TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES (BASIC)

– METHODOLOGICAL BASES OF SOCIAL WORK (COMPULSORY)

– INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL SERVICES (COMPULSORY)

SECOND YEAR:

10 SUBJECTS = 60 CREDITS: 3 BASIC + 7 COMPULSORY

FIRST SEMESTER:

– LAW AND ORGANISATION OF THE STATE (BASIC)

– FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN INTERACTION (COMPULSORY)

– SOCIAL WORK WITH INDIVIDUALS (COMPULSORY)

– FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS (COMPULSORY)

– STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN SPAIN AND EUROPE (COMPULSORY)

SECOND SEMESTER:

– METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF SOCIAL RESEARCH (COMPULSORY)

– SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PHILOSOPHY (BASIC)

– INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL PROCESSES (BASIC)

– FAMILY SOCIAL WORK (COMPULSORY)

– METHODOLOGY OF INTERVENTION IN SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS
 (COMPULSORY)

THIRD YEAR:

10 SUBJECTS = 60 CREDITS: 5 COMPULSORY + 5 OPTIONAL

FIRST SEMESTER:

– SOCIAL WORK WITH COMMUNITIES (COMPULSORY)

– ORGANISATION, MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING OF SOCIAL SERVICES
 (COMPULSORY)

– SOCIAL POLICIES AND SOCIAL WORK (COMPULSORY)

– CONDUCT IN THEIR CONTEXTS (COMPULSORY)

– FUNDAMENTALS OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH (COMPULSORY)

SECOND SEMESTER:

− 5 ELECTIVE COURSES

FOURTH YEAR:

INTERNSHIP + SUPERVISION + FINAL DEGREE WORK + 1 ELECTIVE COURSE = 60 CREDITS

The University Master's Degree in Community Social Work, Management and Evaluation of Social Services is a professional master's degree that offers two training itineraries: community development and social services administration. It lasts 1 year (60 ECTS credits). It is a very suitable programme for those who intend to pursue a doctorate later on. It is aimed at people who want to broaden their training in the field of community social work and the management and evaluation of social programmes and projects and obtain an advanced perspective on the profession. The Master's degree includes external internships in social, public and private entities of recognised prestige, so that the knowledge acquired during the training period is reinforced and translated into professional skills.

The general objectives of the official Master's in Community Social Work, Management and Evaluation of Social Services are:

- To broaden theoretical and practical knowledge in Social Work of group and community processes, deepening the development of the organisational capacity of groups and the community;
- To provide social workers with advanced techniques for planning, designing and implementing programmes and projects, as well as public and private management and evaluation models for Social Services.

These general objectives are specified in the following specific objectives:

- To offer a theoretical framework and a substantive methodological development that enables students to address the problems and situations of Community Social Work and Social Services Administration;
- To train in theories, strategies and policy design of social services and community change with special emphasis on methodologies of participation-organization-community action;

- To deepen the knowledge of social needs and indicators of community welfare and social intervention aimed at community integration with special reference to emerging problems (immigration, ethnic minorities, etc.);
- To develop skills for the prevention and diagnosis of social conflicts and to articulate social services with community social work aimed at social promotion, local development and support for the creation of social networks;
- To deepen the planning, strategic management and evaluation of social services, as well as for public and private financial management;
- To provide training for the organization of social services, social policy analysis and evaluation of welfare programmes and policies;
- To initiate in the mastery of quantitative and qualitative research techniques that allow to address specific problems both in the field of community development and in the management, evaluation and quality of social services.

The objectives set out are specified in the description of general and specific skills that are set out below and that students who complete this master will acquire.

The Doctoral Programme in Social Work is the Universidad Complutense's commitment to the highest level of academic training in the discipline. The Programme is regulated by RD99/2011 and, as well as the BA and the MA, it has been verified by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA). The aim of the programme is to prepare doctoral theses that allow the development of research from the specific perspective of Social Work, within the framework of the Social Sciences. In this sense, all the departments and departmental units of the Faculty are involved in it.

The objective of the Doctoral Programme in Social Work is to provide its members with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to autonomously design and develop research work, perferently applied, in the knowledge areas of social work and social services. Research that improves knowledge and critical analysis in the field of social intervention.

It is necessary to underline that one of the fundamental objectives of social work research is to explore how social problems arise, are maintained and expressed, in their individual, family and collective dimensions, in order to try to deal with them in the best possible way. Another objective, which is also essential, is to analyse how and to what extent the different forms of social intervention contribute to the eradication of the problems of citizenship and the improvement of the different dimensions linked to social welfare. Therefore, social work research must be, in addition to being fundamentally applied, necessarily interdisciplinary, and guided by a wide diversity of research methods, depending on the nature and characteristics of the problem under study.

3. Epistemology of Social Work Training

In this section we will be critical of the training we offer our social work students. It is clear that you never get to teach everything you want, or think is necessary, or in the way you think is ideal. Our teachings are conditioned by our traditions, our context (specifically the Spanish Social Welfare System) and our present moment (after the crisis of 2008 and the Covid-Pandemic). We all know that the learning conditions also depend especially on the budgets we have, the professors we have and the ones we can hire. All this does not prevent us from critically exploring the strengths and weaknesses of our teachings.

The pedagogical model developed at a university is determined not only by the decisions of the teaching staff, but by general criteria which, in the Spanish case, are reflected in the white paper on social work (Vázquez, 2005) and a more general series of ministerial guidelines which guided all the Spanish faculties that accredited their degrees from 2008 onwards to join the Bologna convergence process.

In short, at Complutense we not only do what we professors want, but also what we are told to do and what we may do, thus addressing different epistemological positions, which are sometimes contradictory. These contradictions should not necessarily be understood in a negative way, but as a healthy expression of academic freedom. If the university has something to contribute to the students it is, to a greater or lesser extent,

and depending on the primary, secondary or tertiary level of their studies, a critical attitude towards knowledge and professional practice. In this sense, we can say that the Faculty of Social Work at the Complutense University of Madrid is an example. On the one hand, its professors come from many other disciplines in addition to social work. On the other hand, we cannot say that there is homogeneity in terms of the academic traditions from which they come, nor on an ideological level.

In this way, we have professors who are linked to the ancient tradition of the university for the formation of intellectuals and scientists. These professors are more interested in teaching to think and reflect, to produce ideas, than in teaching to do, to develop actions or initiatives. They are far from a model of learning by doing and defend that the time spent in the university must offer contact with great teachers and the opportunity for key readings. They are defenders of the long hours of study and of the hard exams, where the students have to face situations sometimes more difficult to solve, at least from the intellectual point of view, than those that they are going to find later in their life. Without a doubt, this type of teaching staff tends to have an initially difficult fit among the new generations of students, who, on the other hand, end up appreciating their contribution to their training, often long after they have finished their studies.

Next to this first group of professors, which is becoming a minority, is another group with a more practical orientation in their teaching. Lecturers who prefer their students to learn less but to learn well and to be the basics. These are teachers who are committed to learning by doing and who aim to direct their teaching towards the professionalization of students and to help them enter the job market. Logically, this type of teacher is usually among the favorites of students. This happens for various reasons, but logically due to the applied and practical character that social work must have. In our faculty we are fortunate to have a good number of teachers who are active professionals in social work and who hold positions of various responsibilities in the different systems of social protection and social organizations in the community of Madrid. Of course, there are many lecturers who participate in the characteristics of the two groups described.

What perhaps due to our origins has been lacking, at least until recent years, has been that our teaching was if not guided, then at least linked to

our research or that of other colleagues in our and other areas. It is true that during the last years we have been making very important efforts not only to make this happen and to improve our scientific production but also to help our students acquire a research attitude in the way they will face their future profession.

But we do not want to be self-condescending in this chapter. Every day it is more difficult to teach at the university, be it social work or any other specialty. The truth is that the task of academics, in addition to having growing teaching days, is increasingly bureaucratised, becoming difficult and sometimes even impossible, to have time to read and keep up to date, not to mention to develop quality research. We do research, but at least we defend that with improved working conditions it could be of much better quality and, above all, relevant. On the other hand, academic assessment systems often give more importance to the quantity and indicators of research and publications than to the quality of university teaching. Thus, many academics progressively focus their efforts on research and end up neglecting, due to lack of time for preparation, their teaching obligations. Sometimes one has the feeling that the place where our writings are published is more important than their content, that it is more meritorious to comply with certain teaching indicators that are not very relevant (if the program is published on the web, for example) than if one is a good teacher and the students learn.

A last reflection to finish this section, linked to the question if it is possible to teach some fundamental aspects for the development of adequate social work. We are referring to principles and values, which for a good part of our faculty are more important than knowledge and skills. In our case, we have discussions about this, as it could not be otherwise. Some defend that they can be taught, others defend that in addition to being taught, for learning to take place, they must be shown, and this must be done in a coherent manner. Another question is whether this can be done in today's society.

4. Socio-economic, political and cultural context

As in many other European countries, the evolution of SWE in Spain has run parallel, on the one hand, to the changes of social protection systems and institutions, which also reflect the important socio-political changes in the country. On the other hand, its development has also been linked to the vicissitudes and changes that have taken place in the social work profession

Starting from the time when social work education was officially born in our country (1932), we can summarise the context in which both the profession and the training of social workers have developed by saying that from 1931 to 1939 Spain was a Republic. A Republic that was born and maintained with difficulties after very turbulent times that in turn ended with the flight of the Bourbon monarchy out of the country, after reigning, with some interruptions, uprisings and revolutions since 1700.

At the beginning of the 1930s, Spain was a traditional society with well-defined social classes, extremely unequal, great diversity and little use for democracy. The Republic therefore represented a revolution in all areas of life, including social welfare and education at all levels. This time and these airs and graces lasted very little, because after the Spanish Civil War, Franco's dictatorial regime was imposed until the mid-1970s. At the beginning of the dictatorship, in the early 1940s, Spain's standard of living was much worse than at the end of the 19th century (Tussell, 2012).

In the social, political and economic orders, the Franco regime had two major periods, linked to its economic situation, the type of governments it established, as well as its external alliances (Preston, 2002). The first part of the dictatorship was one of great economic hardship, with fascist-type governments and closeness to Nazi Germany. It was a period of regression in the recognition of civil and social rights that the Republic had advanced, with insufficient and graceful systems of charitable social protection. From the 1960s onwards, the second part of Franco's regime was a time of great economic development, although not comparable to the rest of Europe. It was a moment of good relations with the United States and with an incipient system of social protection with the establishment of a social security system only for workers, among other social advances (García Padilla, 1990). However, nothing compares to

the explicit recognition of civil and social rights that would follow the advent of democracy in 1978, after a transitional period of three years after Franco's death (Navarro, 2004).

Democratic Spain tried to build a Welfare State that ended up being extensive but not intensive. A state with coverage in most areas of welfare, but with minimal or very poor coverage. The reason was none other than that Spain was in a position (democracy) to shape a Welfare State when the very concept of the Welfare States had already entered a crisis (de Lucas, 2020).

Like other neighbours in the Mediterranean area, Spain has been a traditional, Catholic country in which the family has had great importance in all areas, including social provision (de Lucas, 2020). This, together with its previous history, has had important implications both for the shaping of social work as a profession and for the teaching of it (de la Fuente y Sotomayor, 2004).

Until well into the 1960s, social work in Spain was fundamentally assistentialist, in the worst sense of the term, guided more by ideological and religious principles than by technical and scientific ones. As time went by, social work ended up becoming completely professional, but always with a secondary status and, sadly, considered, in a derogatory and sexist way, an occupation for women, which, very unfairly, contributed to worsen even more, in a vicious circle, their professional status.

It is in this context that the social work education in Spain is developed. A history that we describe minimally below. We say minimally because from its first institutionalization in the early 1930s to the present day, SWE has gone through many vicissitudes that are impossible to describe in this space. Being very short and simple, we can distinguish five major stages in the history of the Spanish SWE (Arias Astray, 2017).

The first one can be called "education for a charitable practice stage". It was characterized by a non-technical education in which the ideological prevailed over the factual. Professional practice was put at the service of maintaining an authoritarian and hierarchical social order.

A "professional technical practice stage" followed the latter. Learning the technical tools and skills to provide proper and professional social assistance became one of the key concerns of this period, although without deviating from the principles laid down by the Franco regime.

An "achievement of university status stage" for social work came next. It was a golden age for social work and SWE, because it also coincided with the construction of a modern system of social services and the emergence of many employment opportunities for social workers.

The fourth period was the "convergence with Bologna stage". It represented the possibility of offering master's and doctoral programs, with all that this implied. It was a sign that the discipline of social work was close to reaching its academic maturity. Thus, it could be considered a second golden age of the SWE.

The fifth and until now last stage coincides with the current moment. A period of "robust weakness" and "struggle to maintain an independent status" for SWE.

The present is a complex time, in which we can observe both our academic and professional weaknesses, due to our relative youth and traditionally auxiliary position, and our strengths: closeness to people's real problems, critical attitude towards what is happening, pride in the area of knowledge and profession, etc.

Social work, both professional and academic, has taken to the streets to resist the attempt to dismantle the public social service system. (We join the so-called Orange Tide). Social work educators have also allied themselves with those who have fought for public education (Green Tide). And among others, health social workers have joined the White Tide that has fought for public and universal health care.

Within the universities, there has also been suffering and resistance. This has happened because of the attempt by many university rectors to dismantle the Schools and Faculties of Social Work, as well as the specific departments of our discipline, so that they were incorporated into more generic faculties and departments (Arias Astray, 2016). In most universities many battles have already been lost. At the Complutense University, perhaps because of our volume, we are still resisting, but we must seek alliances and draw strength from wherever we can to win the "war".

5. Formative profile

In this new stage of development of the profession, the social, economic, technological and cultural context in which it takes place Social Work presents new characteristics that make greater demands on the training of social workers, some of these are:

a. The growing individualism of our society derived from multiple factors increases situations of instability and coexistence;

b. Economic globalization poses new scenarios in social policy: the economic, social and cultural rupture, and the processes of social cohesion that cause poverty, social exclusion and violence;

c. The progressive aging of the population implies an effort to reactivate and vision of an active, participatory and satisfying old age, accompanied by a integrate care for the elderly into the care system in a context of increasing in the attention and care of the population;

d. The phenomenon of immigration is a political debate on the inclusion and participation of these groups and tests the ability of cohesion of our society. It implies new challenges and opportunities for social policy and social workers;

e. The evolution of social policies in the European context and the emergence of a pluralistic model of the welfare state generates a review of the role of the different sectors factors involved in the provision of welfare services;

f. The review and strengthening of the protection systems to consolidate the recognition of rights as true rights of citizenship. This entails greater involvement by the public authorities so that these rights become a reality and are accompanied by adequate financing.

In these scenarios, social workers are practitioners with the ability to use and apply the diagnosis, prognosis, treatment and resolution of social problems. To do this they must be able to apply a specific intervention methodology, both at the case level and at the individual, family, group and community levels. Likewise, the professional profile requires programming, applying, coordinating and evaluating social services and policies.

Among the basic functions that the social worker must develop professionally are those of informing and orienting the users, as well as

the preventive, assistance, social promotion and integration, supervision, evaluation and management functions. In this way, knowledge of social processes (inequalities, social structure, processes of social change) and human behavior in social contexts are one of the fundamental features of the professional profile, with the objective of intervening in the social and institutional contexts in which individual, family and group life is developed. In addition, the social worker must be able to participate in the formulation and evaluation of social policies and services, as well as to actively contribute to the construction of an active citizenship and to guarantee human and social rights. In summary, therefore, professionals in the area must be able to intervene in individual, group, family and social contexts, adequately analyzing the problems present in these contexts and proposing and implementing, through a specific methodology, programs for improvement and social integration.

Social Work students must be trained for these purposes:
- Should be able to assess the needs and possible options to guide an intervention strategy.
- Advocate for equality between men and women, as well as the attention to disability and diversity, in an attempt to ensure equal opportunities and access to social resources for people who suffer some kind of exclusion;
- Answer to crisis situations by assessing the urgency of the situations, planning and developing actions to address them and reviewing their results;
- Interact with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities to achieve change, promote their development and improve their living conditions;
- Develop support networks to address needs;
- Promote the growth, development and independence of people;
- Work with behaviors that represent a risk for the client system and develop strategies to modify them;
- Analyze and systematize the information provided by the daily work as support to review and improve professional strategies and respond to emerging social situations;
- Design, implement and evaluate social intervention projects;

- Promote the defense of individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities;
- Seek to resolve situations of risk after identifying and defining the nature of the risk;
- Must recognize, minimize and manage the risk to oneself and one's colleagues;
- Produce complete, accurate, accessible and up-to-date social histories and reports as a guarantee for professional decision making and assessment;
- Manage conflicts, dilemmas and complex ethical problems by identifying them, designing strategies to overcome them and reflecting on their results;
- Work in systems, networks and interdisciplinary and multi--organizational teams;
- Participate in the management and direction of social welfare entities;
- Promote and carry out research, analysis, evaluation and use of best practices in Social Work.

6. Innovation and future perspective for Social Work Education

Considering our past, our present situation, but specially our problems, difficulties and challenges, some key aspects for the future in Social Work Education can be considered. We can organize them into five blocks, dedicated to internationalization, innovation, digital training, collaboration with society and research.

6.1. International Perspectives

Social Work Education must be linked into an international environment, problems and challenges are worldwide extended, so more than ever we need to think globally for acting locally. The training in Social Work must face reality with an international perspective, looking around what are

the new ways of dealing with social challenges and how to improve the competences and skills of our social work students. In this sense, Faculties of Social Work must have an active role into European Projects and also at the level of international associations like for example EASSW (European Association of Schools of Social Work https://www.eassw.org/), ESWRA (European Social Work Research Association https://www.eswra.org/).

6.2. Innovation

Innovation has emerged as an "ameba" word. It sounds like everybody is making innovation all the time. Social innovation is relevant to the extent that it is oriented to social values and not only to productivity, business competitiveness, production costs or market rates. Welfare, quality of life or the proper functioning of services are values in themselves (Alonso, 2016)

What barriers to innovation do we face in the case of Social Work Education and social intervention? Some of these may be the following: the absence of resources or their allocation to other purposes, little vision of the future and of the whole ("social myopia"), little tradition in Social Work training about practices in which the dissemination or diffusion of innovative ideas is developed, emphasis on the value of the search for internal validity of social care programs and not on the possibilities of designing programs that adopt new strategies of validity for the development of good practices in organizations, uncertainty and insecurity in the face of the unknown, among others... There are key questions that need to be defined and analyzed. Who innovates in Social Work Education? Who adopts the innovations? Who implements them? What is the innovation about? How is it adopted? How is it implemented (Alonso, 2016)? Universities in general and faculties of Social Work in particular can be transformed into social innovation labs that can analyze, systematize and learn from social innovation.

6.3. Digital transformation and ICT competences training

There is no doubt that societies must be placed in a scenario of digital transformation for which it is necessary to train Social Work Practitioners

in the handling and use of ICT. Issues of uses and perceptions do not only raise the need to include technologies within Social Work Education. The current situation regarding privacy, confidentiality or the limits of the personal and professional spheres are key aspects for the future professional practice (Alonso & D'Antonio, 2018). Therefore, it is not only a matter of incorporating ICT into professional practice, but also of providing the knowledge to participate in the design of the tools to provide students and teachers with adequate solutions to the future challenges that the profession will have to face.

6.4. Collaboration with social organizations and active presence in projects

Social Work training has always been a discipline that has been involved in solving the challenges facing society. It is key to support grassroots movements, to give voice to these realities and that within the educational space that constitutes a Faculty of Social Work, work directly with social agents and entities to serve as a training and research tool in the search for social welfare of the communities in which the Universities are included.

6.5. Development of Research

Last decade in Social Work Education, at least in Spain, has emerged significally in the acquisition of a new role inside the University. The Development of the Bachelor (4 years), the creation of the Official Master and the configuration of the Doctorate Program specifically in Social Work gives the opportunity to develop in a more clear and coherent way a research career into Social Work Education. This will be for sure a boost into the possibilities for the improvement of our profession. There will be new resources and materials to analyze, develop, systematize and make available for the educational community but also for the society in which we are and with the role of research in Social Work, old and new problems and challenges can be faced.

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CHAPTER IV

Social Work education through the lens of University of Tirana/ Albania

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1.   University of Tirana

The University of Tirana was established by the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, in 1957 as the "State University of Tirana". It was composed of six faculties. The beginnings of higher education in Albania go back to 1946 when the first Biennial Higher Pedagogical Institute was opened, followed by the Institute of Science, opened in 1947. In the period from 1946 to 1956, six higher institutes operated in Tirana. These institutes served as foundation for the establishment of "State University of Tirana". This institution was created to meet the increasing needs of the country for qualified specialists. A large number of professors qualified in foreign universities provided their precious contribution in institution's strengthening and consolidation. In its first academic year, 1957-1958, the student population of the university was 3,613. The university received its full form with the construction of its first campus giving it a greater dynamism. In 1977, twenty years after its establishment, the full-time student population amounted to 8,880, about half of whom were females. It should be noted that in these first years 21,368 students graduated, who contributed to all areas of the country's life. At present, the University of Tirana is the largest public university in the country. It consists of six faculties and two institutes and offers 174 programmes in all three cycles of study, with 779 full time academic

staff and around 23,551 students. Thanks to its tradition, the high level of qualification, training and attestation, the University of Tirana remains the most sought-after university in Albania. It is the first choice for the majority of students who finish high schools and the Albanian-speaking lands outside its national borders. In 1997, University of Tirana has been awarded by the President of the Republic with the "Order of Honour of the Nation", with a citation for outstanding contribution to the development of Albanian science, education, culture and economy. Currently one of the goals of UT is its proper recognition. It is an institutional partner in the professional program of the European Commission such Tempus, Erasmus Mundus Action 2, IPA etc.

2. Background of Social Work Program, in University of Tirana

The first program of Social Work in Albania was established in 1992 from University of Tirana in partnership and support of Grand Valley State University of Michigan. In the very beginning it was named Faculty of Social Work, after few years and currently it is the Faculty of Social Science with five departments including department of Social Work and Social Policy. In the early years, although high motivation, engagement and compasion of the founders many challenges were evident especially related with deficency of practicioners, availability of literature in Albania language, lack of information and unclereance about the social work profesional profile, etc. For many years variety of actions was undertaken to address the above concerns as the long term training of a group of professors in USA, mobility of professors from USA to Albania, translation in Albania language of several key literature for students and field practicioners. Another key action was the organization and development of one year post university program aiming to prepare the first professionals until the graduation of the first generation of social workers completing four years program in the period 1992-1996. One decade after the establishment of social work program there were some other developments as the post university studies in social work (in 2001), the first and the only doctoral studies in social work (in 2004) and Centre of Gender studies (in 2006)

followed by Master of Sciences in Gender Studies. Paralel in 2004 another social work program was established in public university of Elbasan and the third program was established in 2005 in public university of Shkoder.

From 2005 to 2018 in Albania there were only three public social work programs, while in 2018 a private university established the fourth social work program in the country.

In 2005 the Albania High Education Institution was made part of the Bologna Declaration and the Department of Social Work adapted the curricula based in Bologna standards. As results the curricula shifted from four to three years, followed by one year master of arts or two years master of sciences. Only the students graduated in master of sciences have the opportunity to study in doctoral program.

From 2008 to 2010 the department was engaged in establishing a wide range of master programs in respond to Bologna system and market demands for qualified social service practicioners.

Actually the Department of Social Work and Social Policy consists of two bachelor programs, two master of arts and five master of sciences and the doctorate program as follow: bachelor program in Social Work (1992) and bachelor program in Administration and Social Policy (2008); Master of arts "Advanced Social Work in Education and Health" (2008) and the second master of arts " Analyst of Social Policies"; Master of Sciences in "Social Work", "Gender Studies", "Administration of Social Services", "Social Services in Criminal Justice" and "Communication for Behavior and Social Change"; Doctoral Program in Social Work (2004) is the only doctorate program in social work in Albania. Currently, the doctoral program is going to be reviewed based on the new Law for High Education in Albania. The students enrolled in each program are from all over the country, in bachelor program there are about 100 students each academic year per program and in master programs the number varies from 25-50 enrolled students.

Despite the above programs, short terms training programs on "Child Protection" and "Alternative Care" are provided from the department to address the needs of practitioners employed as child protection units, establishment in local government. Such programs are implemented in partnership with Ministry of Health and Social Protection and International Organizations as Save the Children and Terre des Hommes, Albania.

The variety of master programs demonstrate the department engagement and the ambition to respond the needs for in service practitioners and graduated bachelor students to follow the master studies, but a constructive analyse on side effects and sustainability is crucial. On a national and international scale, the politic, economic and social environment is ongoing rapidly changing, consequently the need to design sustained and efficient master programs in respond to market demands remain a challenge.

Since 2013 the Department of Social Work and Social Policy became member of the International Association of Schools of Social Work and recently a member of International Academy of Social Work and Society Academy (TissA) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). In 2016 Global Standards for Social Work Education were translated in Albanian language aiming to assure a more inclusive curriculum.

In 2014 the social work profession became part of the regulated professions of the Republic of Albania, according to Law "Order of Social Work" no. 163/2014. Since 2014 the Law has gone under two amendements required from different groups of interests and actually is not yet functioning. The delay of this process, among others, has significantly affected the performance of the professionals, service provision and quality assurance to beneficiaries. The delay is a responsibiliy of all stakeholders, from the level of policy-making, decision-making, civil society organizations, professionals and other relevant group of interest.

3. Epistemology of Social Work Education in Tirana University

An epistemology is a set of rules that distinguish knowledge from belief, prejudice and ideology (Garrow E. Hasenfeld Y, 2015). This is essential for social work practitioners working with marginalized individuals, groups and communities. Before democracy, social welfare, social services and practitioners had different philosophy and approach. Many vulnerable groups were intended to depend on informal structures and were deprived by the necessary services that guarantee their human right and dignity.

The curricula of social work education in Tirana University were based in USA model. They were well-developed, comprehensive, theory and practice blended, but at the same time challenging, compering to the Albanian context. At the beginning social work education in Tirana faced challenges related to deficiency of qualified professionals, lack of consolidated education program and a clear concept of social work, but it was overcome with the necessary and appropriate training (UNICEF, 2020). In early beginning there was a need for competent lecturer that would train the first social work generation, and for literature in Albanian and other foreign language. These obstacles were overcome by appropriate training, and with continuous revision and adaptation of the social work literature.

The history of development of social work education in University of Tirana demonstrates the efforts for progress and in line with local and international developments. Social work education is continuously being shaped by international policies and local factors (Dominielli & Iokimidis, 2017). In response to rapid changes, social work education programme and university strategy should be proactive and at the same time aligned with the new development in different aspects, including theory knowledge. For many years and even currently the discussion on epistemology in social work education is categorized in three levels respectively in defining source for social work knowledge, the methods acquiring knowledge, knowing and assessing social work (M.Gail and Carolin, 2013).

As guided in global standards for education and training of the social work education (2004) knowledge on human being, human rights, micro, mezzo and macro systems, recognition of their interconnectedness as well as capacity building and empowerment of individuals, groups, families and communities are crucial and integrated part of the social work curricula. Which is periodically updated, reviewed and adopted with the new international standards. The resources and the methods used for theory knowledge and relation with practice remains an open discussion. Also, Hothersall emphasize that the issue of knowledge of and for social work and the means and the methods by which this is obtained is an essential debate. (Steve J. Hothersall, 2018)

Following the developments of program, even as a country in transition, in 2005 Albania was an active member of the Bologna Process and adjusted the curricula following Bologna criteria.

This moment presented the need to review the curricula and their organization from 4 to 3 academic years. It was a challenging process and a trend toward skills and practical subjects compare to theoretical ones.

The latest in-depth analyse of curricula in Social Work education in HIE-s in Albania was conducted by Department of Social Work, Tirana University in 2016. Despite others the report aimed to bring conclusions about the curricula related with global standards of education in social work. The report conclusions addressed changes nedded in curricula to reflect standards in social work education related field of social work as proffesion, the methods of social work practice and the paradigms of social work proffesion. Also a need for more collaborative teaching and research projects is verified.

Currently the social work education program during the first three semesters is theory driven with knowledge on human development, theories of social work, social behavior and social environment followed by introductions and novelty of sociology, philosophy and economy. More attention is needed in transferability of theory in several area of social work practice and the methods used the knowledge of the theories.

4. Socio-economic, political and cultural context of Tirana Municipality

Tirana, the capital city of Albania, is the largest municipality in the country with the higher economic and social development (Dumani *et al.,* 2018). Tirana has a population of 906.166 inhabitants, where around 49.4% are male and 50.6% female (INSTAT, 2020). The government institutions are located in Tirana. It has the most qualified labour force and the universities attract around 75 percent of all students from all over the country (Tirana Municipality, 2018). After the 1990, as the capital city and the largest region in the country, Tirana was faced with a diversity and unknown social problems for Albania society. Services and practitioners were lacking and the collapse for addressing them was evident. The role of the local government in such situation was completely missing.

After the fall of communism, the progress toward law enforcement and respect for human right was low (Human Rights Watch, 1991). The

economic situation was characterized by a large percent of external debt, decline in output (Muço, 1997); inflation and high rates of unemployment (Tarifa, 1997). The exodus and massive immigration started and thousands of people left Albania eager for a better life. The inner migration was also problematic as it was characterized by rapid dynamic urbanization (Papathimiu, 2012). Massive illegal constructions of the houses and other settings in the centre, but especially in the suburbs of Tirana, created the large informal areas which were and still are suffering from the deficiency basic social services. The inner migration highlighted the cultural differences. The inhabitants from north and south of Albania faced another mentality in Tirana in terms of social life, organization of family and marital relationship, by following a more conservative norm (Xhaferi & Tase, 2015). The process of rapid urbanization and overcrowding brought its own disadvantages and social problems including high rates of crime, vandalism, prostitution and violence. According to Cava & Nanetti (2000) two issues of vulnerability were real concern: gender abuse and social exclusion.

In 1996 Albania ratified European Convention on Human Rights and gave a green light in the long road of reforms toward respect of human rights. However, things would get another direction in 1997 when Tirana and Albania faced a serious economic and social crisis due to the collapse of pyramids, scheme where people saved their money and received interest's payment. During that period of emergency "the country human rights records deteriorated sharply" (US Department of State, 1998). High levels of criminal rates, sparked by pyramid scheme failure, lead the country in civil war. Compere with some other cities the situation in Tirana was less dramatic, but considerably unprecedented and quite similar in terms of violation of human rights.

The consequences were more serious for vulnerable groups including children, young women and elderly. In 1998 NGO declared a number of 10000 drug abuser in Tirana, including both minors and adults (Cava & Nanetti, 2000). Another social problem that took greater dimensions during this period was also prostitution of young women, especially in Greece and Italy. Many of them were victim of fraud and false marriage. Illegal mass migration was still present and facilitated women exploitation.

Although Tirana and Albania experienced chaos, disorders and suffered one of the most dramatic situations, the process of recovery was quick. Jusufi (2017) noted that *the civil disorder led to a quick recovery and had a transformational impact on Albania's politics, security, economics and development* (p. 84).

One of the main discussions and priority was the decentralization of services at the local level. It started in the early years of democracy, but it truly burst between the years of 1999-2000, with the process of ratification of European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1999; adoption of the National Decentralization Strategy in 2000 and Law no. 7572 of 1992 "On the organization and functioning of local government" that created the necessary environment for the decentralization of social services. These would bring several changes for Tirana municipality, new roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, the early years after the 1990s the socio-economic, political and cultural developments was characterized by major transitions and efforts to fulfill fundamental democratic freedoms and rights. At the municipality level, data related to this period are limited. The municipality role was passive, depended on the central level and did not yet enjoy the privileges of autonomy and decision-making. It is the decentralization process that will strengthen the role of the municipality in the coming decades.

After the 2000s the economic situation of the country started to improve and between the years of 2002-2008 it was estimated a decrease of poverty from 25.4 % to 12.5% (INSTAT, 2013). Specifically, Tirana compared to other cities at the end of the year 2008, had a poverty rate at about 8.1% in comparison to overall poverty rate that was about 18.15 % (Tirana District Council, 2012). However, despite the fact that there had been positive developments in terms of the economy, still problems such as poverty, and unemployment continued to be present, especially women unemployment (Albania Government, 2001). In order to contribute more effectively in poverty reduction; infrastructural and urban development, Albania developed a National Strategy for Social Economic Development 2002-2004 and predicted a number of priorities, some of them dedicated specifically to Tirana municipality including improvement of social and public services, infrastructure, land and poverty arrangement.

The second decade, after the 90s, also brought positive development for the local government. Dhembo (2014) noted that the early years of democracy were more focused in the reforms in central level, rather than in local level. Later the process of decentralization was urged by the European Council that proposed Albanian Government to take the initiatives to transfer many responsibilities in local level Strategic Plan and Action Plan for the Social Service in 2005 put in its priority the decentralization of the social services and transfer of many residential services in the administration of Tirana municipality. These included services like orphanages, nursing homes and development centres. Furthermore, it was planned the development of daily and community services for children, family, elderly and women. The decentralization of services and the development of new social services raised the importance of developing the necessary standards to monitor services quality. Therefore, the standards of social services were approved. These standards would serve all actors that participate in social services including here social service providers both locally and centrally, non-profit organizations and also service user that receive the necessary services.

Alongside the second decade it was addressed the issue of gender equality and gender-based violence. The progress toward gender issues was seen not only as a democratic need, but also as a condition for the integration process. Therefore, the first National Strategy was developed and would have a significant impact also in the development of initiatives at the local level. Those initiatives were more focused in employment of gender specialist in municipality level, increasing local capacity in monitoring gender indicators, and increase of women participation in leadership positions.

Parallel to gender equality developments a significant commitment was evident for addressing the needs of Roma and Egyptian communities, especially with problems in living conditions, freedoms and human rights. Since Tirana municipality has the largest number of Roma and Egyptian families a variety of interventions and services was undertaken, but without a participatory or inclusive approach.

Last ten years can be considered as most important development and challenges in local context. Economic development has been dynamic and characterized by continuous ups and downs, while the political situation has been tensioned and unstable.

The Municipality of Tirana continues to be subject of decentralization reforms and legal improvements. Compare to other municipalities, Tirana is the only municipality that spends a considerable amount from its own financial budget in social services and it has around four multifunctional centre (Tirana Municipality, 2018), but parallel it has the highest number of inhabitants and diversity of vulnerable groups. Currently, Tirana municipality provides social care services for around 9 target groups including: women, children, younger, elderly, Roma and Egyptian community and persons with disability. Despite there have been an increase in funds in Municipality budget, still it is considered not enough to guarantee the improvement of services (Association of Municipality, 2019).

During the last decade a new priority for the municipality of Tirana has been the development of strategic and local care plans that set priorities in a number of areas including inclusion of marginalized groups. Thus, the development Plan of Roma and Egyptian Community in Tirana Municipality 2017-2020 planned improvements in terms of Roma civil registration and access to services. Tirana Municipality has also drafted other local plans in the field of gender equality and social inclusion. The local plans strategic priorities are quite similar to those of respective National Strategies in gender and social inclusion field, but at the same time there are adequate initiatives specifically based on the distinct characteristics of each local context.

Another strategy recently developed is the Strategy of the Sustainable Development of the Tirana Municipality 2018-2022. The strategic objectives envisaged by this strategy include developments related to quality of education, good governance, sustainable development and Tirana as a polycentric city (Tirana Municipality, 2018).

To summarize we could say that in the last decade the decentralization process has significantly improve the initiatives in local level, giving the Municipality of Tirana an active and decisive role. The national strategies guarantee the overall framework, while initiatives in local level adequately address the local needs. The Municipality of Tirana has the opportunity to have a wider impact on the wellbeing of various social groups, and to take initiatives in response to different local needs.

5. Formative profile – a formative model of the social worker in Albania

5.1. A formative model of the Social Worker in Albania

The teaching curriculum of the Social Work and Social Policy Department has a generalist approach. The goal of this curricula is to prepare professionals with the necessarily knowledge and skills to practice social work with individuals, groups and communities, social workers that will advocate for social protection in the country (Dhëmbo, E, Akesson, B, and Cheyne-Hazineh, L, 2019). Another important goal of the curricula is to prepare the future researchers that will conduct research and contribute to theory and evidence-based development as well as the design and the implementation of the social policies.

Our curricula in most of their subjects that are taught both in Bachelor and Master's Degree Programs emphasizes the use of scientific evidence for the future social worker, its accurate understanding, and the criteria to be met by the latter in order to classify as scientific evidence. This is very important for the future social workers that should consult scientific evidence when needed. The selected methodology, the strict abidance to scientific criteria in every step of the research, and the data analysis are key elements that affect the credibility and validity of the scientific evidence. These criteria are strongly pointed in different courses of social work curricula.

Emphasis is put on the methodology of conducting scientific research and evaluation of scientific evidence, particularly in the class of Scientific Research but also in other classes since the students very often are assumed to prepare their homework following the scientific methodology. This is very important to educate the future intervention researchers in the domain of the social work.

The considerations for understanding theoretical perspectives for the selection of research methods/strategies as compared with understanding well what scientific evidence is remain challenges of their own. Students enhance their evaluation skills for difficulties they encounter in the research

process and scientific methodology – even when the latter may not be considered as such – by means of using examples of and improving their capacities in conducting a scientific research. Yet, as will be analyzed below with regard to these classes, curricula should initially provide students with the scientific knowledge and practical skills. It is challenging to know that the scientific evidence in our country is still deficient. In addition, the social science domain and some of its methodology do not accomplish and abide to by scientific standards.

When students are lectured about scientific evidence, emphasis is also placed on its link with the strict and scientific process of evidence collection. Students are familiarized with the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis including experimental and non-experimental studies, surveys, and research in the ground as well as with the use of secondary data. The latter is very important, because it can serve as evidence for students to rely on when developing their studies further in their professional life, they will be able to conduct research, evaluation. Students are also taught about evaluating and analyzing social policies, which are explored in details in the Social Policy class. In addition, special importance in this class is also given to the techniques of data research, analysis and statistics used for the interpretation of the results. This is also important for the future technicians that will supervise and evaluate social programs in their professional experience.

Importance on use of scientific evidence as a manner to justify the application of certain social policies is also given in the classes of Scientific Evidence-Based Social Policy and Social Policy. These classes seek to familiarize the students with the critical role of the international social policies. Likewise, these classes provide students with the skills and capacities required to understand social policy as a discipline and practice and to analyze social problems. For this reason, provision of constant examples of scientific evidence supporting certain social policies is very important during these classes. Students should now understand the undertaking of certain social policies and the necessity of implementing them. Unlike the Scientific Research class where emphasis is placed on better understanding the scientific criteria of evidence, Social Policy class underlines the understanding of social policies, their context and relevance as well as their relationship with the scientific evidence. This

is very important for the future social work that will intervene to solve a social problem based in a planned strategy.

A careful examination of the curricula and the teaching experience of the authors of this chapter have identified the following problems regarding the dimension of the intervention researcher in the curricula of social work:

Lack of Comprehensive Scientific Evidence-Based Researches Conducted in Our Country

This finding has been pointed out by the academic staff in the Social Works and Policy Department. A considerable share of scientific evidence is not relevant to our country, because it comes from researches conducted in other contexts. Consequently, it can be only used for comparative studies, which would also require evidence collected and analyzed in the context of our country. This would help to explain to a certain extent the relatively small number of meta-analysis-based researches.

It is important to mention that in our curricula the Scientific Evidence-Based Social Policies class is provided only to students that attend master program studies in Social Work (Social Policy studies). This class is also provided to students that attend other study programs, such as Gender, Communication for Changing Conduct, Administration of Social Services, and Social Work. In all these study programs, it is important to understand scientific evidence and its role in improving social policies so as the latter will match the context and meet the needs.

The teaching curricula of Research Methods are mainly based on the preparation of students who will collect the data on their own (primary data-based research). To this end, students are taught to become researchers and prepare their own instruments, build research hypothesis, conduct reliability tests, and so on. On the other hand, preparation and prioritization for other researches to be used as their meta-analysis methodology would be similarly useful to students who have deficiencies and difficulties in preparing measuring instruments and conducting relevant tests.

The Research Method curriculum puts emphasis on the concept of experiment as a research methodology/strategy. Yet, this curriculum should provide a more thorough and deeper explanation of the experiment as a means to link research with social policies and like this the role of the researcher social worker is clearer.

The Research Method curriculum put emphasis on the concept of the experiment as a research methodology-strategy thorough and deeper explanation of the experiment as a means to link research with social policies. It is necessary to elaborate more on the social experiment (a research strategy that develops in natural conditions rather than in isolated environments) as a research strategy that combines experiment with the policy or with the impact that certain policies may have on individuals, as measured by means of social experiments, and its relationship with the policymaking with the necessarily steps as: design, planning, managing and evaluation. This is also a current research strategy often used in social work.

A careful examination of the curricula and the teaching experience of one of the authors of this chapter in Research Methods class have identified lack of access to consult scientific evidence-based studies due to scarcity of evidence-based researches conducted in Albania and very often the findings of research projects conducted by the civil society organizations are less reliable than those conducted by state departments (Dauti & Bejko, 2015).

The university education system in Albania is undergoing a radical reform, which seeks to increase the quality of university curricula. To achieve this goal, one of the reform pillars is the scientific research with its two major forms-basic research that aims to enhance knowledge about various problems and applied research that aims to give solutions to problems concerning the society. Both forms of the scientific research rely essentially on the scientific evidence and are important for the formation of the future social workers that will intervene to solve social problems as well as their role to conduct research to better understand the problems (Bejko & Dauti, 2019).

It remains to be seen whether the importance given to scientific research in the reform of university education will lead to strengthening of scientific capacities and cooperation with the aim of accomplishing research projects.

The challenge of the curricula of the Department of Social Work and Social Policy is that it should pay more attention to the role of social work as a discipline that should prepare the future researchers in Social Work as well as the future technicians. More precisely some of the challenges are elaborated below:

- Funding research projects based on the collection and analysis of scientific evidence should implicate issues relative to allocation of the necessary fund to undertake research studies in social work, especially for those young researches that definitely impose work on the ground. The practice to date reveals the university's inability to fund this type of research, particularly those involving students' overnight travels. This makes students spend most of their time on theories of evidence-based research. Even when students work on their diplomas and have more available time, the financial aspect becomes a barrier, notably when results seek representation;

- Create and strengthen the partnerships between the Social Work and Social Policy Department and various institutions; to this end, the academic staff must be focused on the identification of potential actors that work and conduct research and on the creation of networks with partners that may continuously engage students in cooperation with the academic staff in carrying out evidence-based research. Students and academic staff may contribute with expertise and human resources. Initiatives from state institution, academia to identify development interest and design projects to further build capacities among social service workforce need to better coordinate and avoid repetition and overlapping as well as ensure equal opportunities for participants from all over the country;

- Design curricula that pay more attention to explanation of the role of the scientific evidence in social work; this fact is also identified in the curricula of the Social Policy Program, which is based on three theoretical classes and on the Research Method Curricula, including theory and practice coupled with visits to institutions working in the collection and analysis of scientific evidence, such as the Institute of Statistics;

- Increase the number of evidence-based studies in social work; the difficulties to access scientific evidence, particularly raw data required by researchers to process them for their research, hinder the development of secondary evidence-based studies. The same situation applies to academic staff;

- Intensifying the practice courses with a full semester of placement in social service care institutions or organizations in the country.

The practice courses have been severely affected in Albania due to the Bologna process that shifted a four-year bachelor program in a three-year program. The practice courses remain essential and a fundamental way in cultivating skills among students;

- Improving the monitoring and the evaluation of student's practice. Social work practice placement needs to be revised with the goal to improve the quality of practice that students conduct during their studies.

6. Innovation and future perspective for social work education – an outlook from Albania

Social work education in Albania has a relatively short history, but almost three decades of intensive growth of three social work schools in the country (see Dhëmbo, Akeeson and Cheyne-Hazineh, 2019) have delineated vibrant achievements and prospective for social work education in the country. In this section we focus on the latter and briefly discuss core issues concerning future of social work education in Albania.

Social work in Albania is a relatively new profession and social work education was made available in the country only after 1990s. As a result, creating and maintaining a distinct profile of the profession and the related education path have been challenging processes. As elsewhere, other disciplines have played an essential role in setting the foundations of social work education in Albania. The role of other disciplines in Albanian social work education such as sociology, philosophy and later on psychology, need to be well defined, recognized and taught accordingly. Acknowledging the status and contribution of other disciplines would better help students, professionals and the general public to see their overlaps and appreciate the distinct nature and contribution of these professions. Moreover, this comparative approach will also shade more light on the exclusiveness of philosophical and ethical bases of the profession. While this is a relevant discussion in many countries with long social work history, it is even more crucial in settings like Albania, where the history is very recent, and a lot needs yet to fall in its own place.

Future social work education in Albania shall be more proactive in using innovation, technology, and social media. Limited expertise and experience combined with constrains in resources have hindered use their development and use in social work education in Albania. The Covid-19 crisis showed that this was not only necessary (particularly under the new circumstances) but also doable, notwithstanding the difficulties and limitations. Even though a good degree of readiness and versatility was demonstrated during lockdown and the following months, it only helped to highlight the necessity for more incentives, capacity building, and safeguard measures to be developed in encouraging an effective use of innovation, technology and even social media in social work education. Innovation, technology and social media have each special potential, including the potential to serve as tool to educate and also promote social change (Western, 2018). However, cautions must be taken with each of them as concerns on ethical issues are on the rise and yet under exploration, also internationally (Boddy and Dominelli, 2017).

Use of innovation, technology and even social media are tightly intertwined with the issue of online/distant teaching and learning which has been a divisive topic in the recent years (Crisp, 2017). Evidence shows that social work education conducted online can be effective in enabling students to achieve desired learning outcomes that are comparable with the outcomes achieved by students attending on-campus classes, make social work education more inclusive, and create more opportunities to access it, it does require a different approach, different thinking and learning process as compared to what happens on-campus (Vicary, Copperman and Higgs, 2018; Goldingay and Land, 2014). In Albania, online teaching and learning has been little developed. Covid-19 crisis gave a boost to online teaching practices; however, the different thinking, approach and processes need yet to be fully developed and enriched. It is essential for these new developments to accommodate not just online teaching and learning needs but also needs and requirements related to knowledge and skills in online social work practice.

Many of the social problems social work education and social work practice targets, such as poverty, social exclusion, violence, social injustice and else are as old as humanity and most likely will persist. However, most of them are unfold in new shapes and under "new realities". Recent years have shown that the "new realities" are changing at faster rates and situations

such as Covid-19 crisis are calling for rethinking the transformative role of social work profession (Dauti *et al.*, 2020). This means that social work graduates need to prepare with knowledge and skills that would make them versatile to new realities when practicing even several decades from now and approaching their retirements. This calls for social work education to enhance and strengthen critical thinking and innovative/creative thinking as being able to critically reflect on new/unknown situations and respond accordingly are key to future social work practice. In this context, social work students need to build capacities that would help them critically analyze and respond from micro and individual cases (such as gender, age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation etc.) to critically scan and analyze the macro political and economic contexts in which they practice and where their clients are set (see Western, 2018; Beddoe, 2018).

Integrating local knowledge must be another priority for the future of social work education in Albania. Practice of social work in Albania is only few decades long but the diversity of practice and the development pace have created a large body of local knowledge that needs to be further integrated in social work teaching curricula – be it at all university levels or continuous education area (Dhëmbo, 2018). This has the potential to enable a more friendly and eco-social work practice. It is time for social work education in Albania to integrate in its curricula a dedicated attention to Albanian history of social work. Social work students thus far have only limited knowledge and understanding on what has been locally produced and the role and impact of international social work education and practice in Albania.

For this and all the other issues raised as priority issues for future social work education in Albania, there is one sure first step – research. Here we would like to point at the importance of research and call for more research in the area of social work education and practice. This is not to be misunderstood as a claim that social work research has been scarce and social workers have been inactive in the area of research. However more needs to be done not just in conducting new research, following up on existing one but particularly in pushing for more evidence-based planning and policymaking (including in the education sector) (see Bejko and Dauti, 2019). The urge is greater when considering all the priority topics addressed in here and the emerging new ones in times of global and local crisis.

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CHAPTER V

"Social Work education through the lens of University of Shkodra/Albania"

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1. Presentation of the University of Shkodra

The University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" is a public higher education institution in the Republic of Albania. The university's activity is based on Article 57, item 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, pursuant to Law No. 80/2015 "On higher education and research in the Republic of Albania", in his Statute and in the regulations that are approved for their implementation.

As quoted in the Development Strategy 2017 – 2021, and in the Article 4 of Statute *The mission of the University of Shkoder is the creation, development, protection and transmission of knowledge through teaching based on the Bologna Declaration and the research and training of senior specialists and training young scientists* (USH, 2018: 6).

The historical background of University of Shkoder is not a short one. It has created a unique and special culture of its own, compared to other universities in the country.

The University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" (hereinafter USH) has its origin as the High Pedagogical Institute (hereinafter HPISH), established based on the Decision of Council of Ministers N. 150, dated 18.04.1957. The HPISH was open on September 1957, the same academic year the State University of Tirana opened. It was the first higher education institute in an Albanian district outside the capital and, until 1974, the only that

prepared teachers for the compulsory primary education (8-years schools) (Hoti, 2001: 11).

The HPISH was considered one of the most important institutions of the country and the largest teaching and research – scientific centre of northern Albania.

The University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" in its history has experienced significant changes in the structure, content, organization and direction. Hoti (2007) distinguished two great periods of its development:

The first period, 1957-1990, when it functioned as a High Pedagogical Institute, with a 2-year study programs, later extended to 3 and 4 – year study programs. During the first period, the HPISH went through three phases of development:

Higher Pedagogic Institute with 2-years study term (1957-1970). It was the only institution in Albania that offered higher education in pedagogy for teachers of 8-years primary schools;

Higher Pedagogic Institute with 3-years study term (1970-1982). In this phase, the study programs include Albanian Language – Literature, History – Geography, Mathematics – Physics and Biology – Chemistry;

Higher Pedagogic Institute with 4-years study term (1982-1991). Besides four existing programs, the program of Elementary Cycle also opened which prepared teachers for elementary schools (I – IV classes of primary schools).

HPISH, in 1989, took the name of the remarkable scholar, Luigj Gurakuqi.

The second period, 1991 – onwards, the High Pedagogical Institute of Shkoder changed its status to University. HPISH received the legal status "University" with the Decision of Council of Ministers No. 167 date 28.05.1991, a legal status which it enjoys from that day on.

Starting from 1991 to 2000, in frame of the change from HPI to University, USH started the reorganization of existing academic structures and programs. One of the first actions was the constitution of three faculties Faculty of Elementary Cycler, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Faculty of Social Sciences. The status change of the University coincided with major political, economical and social changes in Albania, from a communist regime to a democratic society. The revision of the study programs, overloaded with the Marxist-Leninist ideology, was also a necessity. During these first years the number of students increased significantly

and many new study programs were opened, not only in teaching like Anglistics, Germanistics, Italianistics, and Pre-school teaching, but also in other programs like Law, and Business-Administration. A big step for the University in this phase was the opening, with the Decision of the Minister's Council No. 332, date 13.05.1996, of two faculties: Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Economy.

From 2003, the institutions of Albanian Higher Education (also University of Shkoder) were exposed to a deep reform, which aimed the achievement of "Bologna Process" objectives. In this context, the University of Shkoder continued with the implementation of the plan in the period 2004-2005 with the aim of approximating the Albanian Higher Education system with the European one, according to the requirements of Bologna Declaration. The implementation of this system relied on perennial experience of the academic staff of the University of Shkoder in the field of teaching and research, the exchange of experience with other universities nationally and in gaining experience from universities in the region and Europe (Hoti, 2007: 106-107).

In this phase the increase of the University study offer continued with the opening of new programs such as Marketing-Tourism (2001), Nursing, Informatics (2002), Psychology (2004), Social Work, French (2005), Media and Communication, Physical Education and Sports (2006).

Today, USH is one of the biggest universities in the country, in which students from different cities study, particularly from the north of Albania, but also Albanians from Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.

The University is organized in faculties, departments and research centres in accordance with applicable legal requirements. Management, executive and administrative structures are separated from academic structures and organizational units. The University has a full structure organized in 6 faculties and 21 departments, such as: Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Education Sciences, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Foreign Languages as well as two Research Centers: Shkoder Region Water Study Centre and the Centre for Albanological Studies.

USH currently offers 3 study cycles: first cycle ends with the diploma "Bachelor", second cycle, where the students at the end graduate with "Master of Science", or "Professional Master" and the third cycle, the PhD.

USH offers 61 different study programs in three study cycles. Specifically are included 26 Bachelor degree programs, 14 Master of Science degree programs, 20 Professional Master Degree programs and one doctoral degree program: Doctorate in Language Albanian. The content of the study programs is constructed in accordance with the components of the USH development strategy, research and regional development. USH makes efforts to ensure coherence with similar study programs of other Universities in the country and beyond, in the region. Study programs promote the values and best practices of higher education in order to enhance the quality of social and economic life in the country. The first, second and third cycles of study programs operate in compliance with the USH's Regulation of Studies (2019).

The Statute of the University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" (2018) is the base regulations that determine its organization, the reorganization of internal academic, administrative structuring and study programs. The Statute is compiled based on article 33 in Law No. 80/2015 "On the Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania" and it is a concrete implementation of this law and of the whole legislation in force for Higher Education.

USH has a wealth of research experience and has continuously facilitated its development by prioritizing partnerships with research institutions at home and abroad as well as participating in national and international projects. Based on the Research and Innovation Strategy, USH has as a priority the improvement of the research system, aiming at increasing concrete results in the areas it covers, promoting an approach much better between research and teaching as well as the realization of research qualitative as with the highest quality able to compete on a national and international scale (USH, 2016: 5).

USH has a long experience in the field of scientific research. The professors of the University have given their contribution to various scientific fields by publishing university textbooks, monographs and scientific articles. The University of Shkoder journal "Scientific Bulletin" is a periodical published in continuity from 1964, and known as a Scientific Journal in Albania (re-evaluated as such by Order of the Ministry of Education and Science No. 98, dated 28.03.2000, based on Decision No. 4, dated 17.03.2000, of the Commission of Reconsideration of Scientific Periodicals).

The Scientific Bulletin of the first years had heterogeneous content, which also represented the non-pedagogical sectors that were part of the scientific organization of the institution (Hoti, 2007: 23), but nowadays the periodical is divided into five series (Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Educational Sciences, Economy, and Law).

The University of Shkoder has a central Scientific Library with rich, dynamic and constantly changing literature in help of students to successfully complete their studies.

Currently the University of Shkoder has successfully passed the process of periodic accreditation carried out by the Accreditation Board of the Insurance Agency of High Education Quality (Decision No. 03, date 24.01.2020).

In conclusion, we must state the University of Shkoder is considered one of the most important institutions in the country and as the largest teaching, research and scientific center of Northern Albania. The importance and contribution of the programs offered by the University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" are of particular value in the entire northern area of Albania. USH has graduated students who serve in various fields of knowledge and science, in various institutions at central and local level as well as in the private sector.

2. Characterization of the cycle of studies in Social Work at University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi"

The program of study "bachelor's degree in social work" at the University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" was opened for the first time on the academic year 2005-2006 based on the decision of the Senate of the University No. 11, date 03.02.2005. Opening the program "bachelor's degree in social work" emerged as a need of the Shkoder region, and beyond the entire North Albania, to have genuine specialists in social services.

This was a three years program of study, designed based on Law 8461, date 25.02.1999 "On Higher Education in Republic of Albania" and the Bologna Declaration standards, containing a total of 180 ECTS credits. The Bologna process brought a new reform, initiated in 2005, where the universities in Albania were obligated to implement ECTS system,

adopt "quality assurance" standards at the institution, national and the European levels, and to encourage students' and academic staff' mobility as well as to enhance the collaboration between the universities at a national, regional and European level (Ymeraj, 2018: 34).

Structure responsible for the program was the Department of Pedagogy – Psychology at Faculty of Educational Sciences. The curriculum of study contained more than 40 courses which covered disciplines related to the social work profession, but also other related disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, economy and political sciences. It was drafted considering the 4-year program in Social Work at University of Tirana and the human resources of Department which members had mainly a pedagogical and psychological background.

One of the major challenges in the first years of the program was the lack of qualified lecturers in social work, so the department engaged external professionals and practitioners of social work to lecture the characterized disciplines of the program and gradually recruit new qualified fulltime staff.

The mission of the program "Bachelor's Degree in Social Work" is to provide a comprehensive bachelor level education in both theory and practice of social work. The main purpose of this program is to provide effective training in the field of social work that integrates theory with practice and that contributes to increasing human performance and increasing the well-being of individuals in society.

The program of study in Social Work at the University of Shkoder was deeply reviewed after the approval of the Law 9741, date 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in Republic of Albania". To meet the requirement of the Directive of Minister of Education and Science No.15, date 04.04.2008 "On organization of study in public institutions of Higher Education", the number of courses was reduced in about 25. The new Law and the subsequent directives created a momentum of renewal and improvement of the curriculum of study in Social Work based in the curriculum of similar programs in European universities.

The study program is in function of the mission of the Faculty of Educational Sciences which aims to train students with contemporary knowledge or a quality preparation as specialists in social work.

In the 2009 the Department of Psychology – Social Work, responsible

for the program in Social Work, was created as result of the approval of the new organizational structure of the Faculty of Educational Sciences that sanctioned the division of the Department of Pedagogy – Psychology into two different Departments.

The structure responsible for the Bachelor degree in Social Work at the University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" remained the Department of Psychology – Social Work, composed by a qualified and professional staff in the field of social work, psychology and sociology. Also, for the realization of the study program, part-time pedagogues with expertise in the psycho – social field are engaged.

The current curriculum of study in Social Work at the University of Shkoder "Luigj Gurakuqi" is the result of a revision in accordance with the Law 80/2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Institutions of Higher Education in Republic of Albania" and the Council of Minister's Decree No. 41, date 24.01.2018 "On the elements of study programs offered by the institutions of higher education".

The program of study in Social Work is a university first cycle of three years that reflect the result of a constant review and development of the curriculum based in the standards of education in social work profession, in similar programs in European universities, and in the Albanian higher education regulations.

Students are admitted based on a grade limit that is 6.5 of the high school mean determined by decision of the Council of Ministers no. 295, dated 10.5.2019. The number of quotas is set and closed with 60 students. Applicant students are classified based on two criteria: the high school mean grade weighs 40%; the mean high school grade of the group courses composed by Civic education, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology weighs 60%.

The student finishing successfully the program is awarded with the diploma of first degree "Bachelor in Social Work".

From the opening of the study program onwards, there is a high interest from high school students to attend the social work program. Every new academic year has an enrolment of 50-60 students in the first year. Students of this program come not only from the region of Shkoder but also from other regions of Northern Albania, Tirana and Durres and Albanians from Montenegro.

The program of study Bachelor in Social Work 201-2022, in accordance with the Council of Minister's Decree No. 41, date 24.01.2018, is composed by 26 courses (table no.1), with a total of 180 ECTS' credits (each year has a total of 60 ECTS' credits) grouped by type of formative activities such as: base subjects – methodology and general formation (symbol A); characterized formation subjects – formation in the scientific discipline (symbol B); interdisciplinary/integrative subjects – sub disciplines, profiles and subjects chosen by the student (symbol C) and complementary subjects (Symbol D).

Table 1. "General description of the program of study bachelor in Social Work"[35]

Curriculum of Social Work - Title of courses								
First year	ECTS	Activity type (A-F)	Second year	ECTS	Activity type (A-F)	Third year	ECTS	Activity type (A-F)
Philosophy and sociology	8	A	Social work with children	6	B	Social work with group and communities	9	B
Sociology	4	module	Social psychology	8	B	Practicum	10	E
Philosophy	4	module	Administration in social work	6	B	Social work with individuals	6	B
Informatics knowledge	4	E	Mental health in the practice of social work	8	A	Juridicial formation	8	C
Foreign language	5	E	Scientific research methods	8	A	Family Rights	6	C
Developmental Psychology	8	B	Social work with families	6	B	Elective course 4	3	D
Social problems	8	B	Social policy	8	B	Methods and skills in social work practice	9	B
Intruduction in social work	6	B	Elective course 1	7	D	Elective course 3	3	D

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35 Description of elective courses: subject 1 (Psychological assessment / Ecology / Social Work in schools / European Integration); subject 2 (foreign language); subject 3 (Anthropology / Linguistic culture / Social work in juridical system) and subject 4 (Special education / Gender studies / Inclusive Education).

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First year	ECTS	Activity type (A-F)	Second year	ECTS	Activity type (A-F)	Third year	ECTS	Activity type (A-F)
Psychology	9	A	Elective couse 2	3	D	Diploma thesis / Final Exam	6	F
Statistics	6	C						
Communication skills and techniques	6	A						
TOTAL	**60**			**60**			**60**	

In this context, the program offers a variety of courses in social work curricula, which provide the opportunity for students to know the main directions of Social Work and then choose to specialize in a direction that suits them more.

The academic year has 30 teaching weeks. Academic years are divided into two semesters, the first semester (I) and the second semester (II). Each semester has 15 teaching weeks, while the third year in the second semester has 14 weeks.

The internship in the program "Bachelor's Degree in Social Work" is part of the curriculum and it is realized in the third year for 29 weeks. For its development, the Department cooperates institutionally with all local public institutions, including the private sector. In order to strengthen professional practices cooperation agreements have been concluded with local institutions and non-profit associations.

The department always makes effort to interact with national and international partners. In this context, T@sk project brought different outputs to both staff and students in perspective. The last three years the process of realization of the bachelor's program in social work has benefited directly and indirectly from this project, including training of academic staff regarding the improvement of the teaching curriculum, the role of supervision, the use of new teaching models through technology, the enrichment of the university library with literature in the field of Social Work and related disciplines.

Currently, the department offers only the program of the first cycle of bachelor studies in social work but it is making continuous efforts to complete the second cycle of studies in order to guarantee a further professional qualification in the field of social work.

The program of study "Bachelor's Degree in Social Work" has designed clearly defined objectives regarding the inclusion of knowledge and skills that a student should acquire in order to prepare the most qualified specialists in the field of Social Work. At the end of the program students will have developed a perspective in dealing with complex situations created by various social problems. In the labor market they can provide professional support services. They can also provide services as part of multidisciplinary staff. Services such as interviewing people with various personal or family concerns and problems, assessing cause-and-effect situations in people under treatment, diagnosing and planning treatment, referring to professionals and other treatment agencies, handling interpersonal relationships, education of educators of children and young people, families, groups and communities, they can perform in institutions such as schools, kindergartens, nurseries, hospitals, orphanages, asylum, police, prisons, family homes, rehabilitation centers, court, consulting and clinics, and different social service organizations.

3. Epistemology of Social Work training

The epistemology should be at the heart of any curriculum (Ackerly, 2017). The epistemology of social work is defining knowledge, acquiring knowledge and assessing knowledge. Social work knowledge is an instrument of action includes an understanding of human behavior and reflected both knowledge and evaluation of individuals and family life (Woodroofe, 1962). Social work professionals work with individuals and families from different social contexts, who have their own understanding about the word. This allows social workers different ways of getting to know the diversity of believing, understanding and thinking of the people they interact with. The social work profession has a long history of embracing scientific methods in order to legitimize itself and to compete with other related professions (Abbott, 1988). Social workers need to understand and explore the professional epistemologies, by evaluating the importance of epistemology in their profession, and by exploring what they "know" about social work problems.

The curriculum for social work education at the University of Shkoder has a very good reflection of theory in practice. The core knowledge for social work education offered by our curricula are: public welfare administration; social research and social statistics; the field of law and government in relation to social welfare and social intervention. In the last five years the curricula is very well structured, standardized as per Bologna process.

Actually the social work curriculum in University of Shkoder is a combination of lectures, readings, assignments, practice and opportunity for research, group discussion, videos and documentaries, debated and workshops. Some of the methods to obtain social work knowledge include surveys, interviews, focus group. Knowledge is assimilated inside and outside the classroom through direct and indirect sources.

The common epistemologies of social work education or outcome competences expected from student are:

- Ethic and ethical decision making;
- Human behavior;
- Diversity;
- Assessment, intervention and evaluation;
- Research informed practice and practice informed research.

Even why the University has a very good expertise in education of social work student, social work in Shkoder is struggling for its legitimate identity. Even why the number of students has not decreased in these last 5 years the education is a challenging task due to low professional recognition. The T@sк project implementation offered a great possibility for consolidation social work knowledge and practice innovation in field of social work education.

4. Social-economic, political and cultural context

The socio-economic, political and cultural situation in the Municipality of Shkoder is quite dynamic, especially in the recent years. This is because of a series of legal changes (adopted laws) that have occurred, where among the most important and influential we can single out: Territorial Administrative

Reform (2015) and Law on the Organization and Functioning of Local Government (2015)[36].

But to better understand the dynamics of the current developments, a little retrospective of facts would help us.

If we want to describe the Municipality of Shkoder and the current context of its development today, in social-economic, political and cultural terms, we cannot conceive it without the developments of the past. Referring to historical documents, the Municipality of Shkoder is ranked among the important centers of European antiquity, since the XI century. To prove the great political and economic development of this Municipality during different historical periods, as a reference point we have the legal code of the city "Statutes of Shkoder", dating to the first half of the XIV century. While, in the economic plan, during the XIX century, the city received a great development boom, thanks to the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes the population of this territory, this made the city of Shkoder to play a key role in the political, social and cultural development of the country and the region (Bashkia Shkoder, 2014: 19).

It is precisely these characteristics that have influenced the development of an active citizenship, highly contributing also in the social sphere. The charitable and philanthropic activities of the citizens of Shkoder realized for their community are documented since the 1920s, except for the fact that religious beliefs (there are documents proving charitable and philanthropic activities since 1877) in Shkoder have given a valuable contribution in support of the most vulnerable social classes (Hoxha, 2011: 43, 81).

The most difficult period for the Municipality of Shkoder dates back to the communist regime years (1945-1990). During this dark historical period, Shkoder's commercial families had their properties confiscated under the pretext of creating common socialist property. Any form of religious belief was banned. All spheres of life were put in function of the dominant ideology of the regime of that time; even the cultural sphere was affected. In terms of economic development, the city of Shkoder had developed the industrial market with state-owned enterprises, while the rural areas were engaged in employment through agricultural cooperatives (Shkoder Municipality Profile, 2014, p. 19). Meanwhile, the social service

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36 Finalized the process of territorial and functional decentralization.

sector was completely controlled by the state, which had the right to intervene in the most delicate family matters. The social mobilization was done through party organizations, such as that of women, youth, etc. (propaganda organisms). Among the most important social institutions it was that of Social Security, while during this period poverty and unemployment did not exist as social problems. The way of organizing the state was from top to bottom, expressed in a very significant way with the slogan "what the people want, the party does, what the party says, the people do" (Xhumari, 2018: 61-80).

The post '90s in Albania represent a period of changes in all spheres of life. In political terms, our country was involved in the development phase of political pluralism and democratization. The task of the politicians of that period was the urgent need to create economic development strategies as well as the design of social protection policies and programs. The social actor market received great development during this period. It went from a centralized to a free market economy. While in the social sphere, the transition period brought a host of developments.

Private social services or civil society organizations restarted their functionality in Albania. Meanwhile, the history of NGO evolution during pluralism is developed in these two periods: 50 % of the NGOs were established during years 1990-1996 and 49 % during the period 1997-2001 (Vurmo *et. al.* pp. 8-9). Exactly among the first private services that operated in the Municipality of Shkoder after the fall of communism were those of the Association Madonnina del Grappa[37], Sisters of the Order of Mother Teresa in aid of persons with disabilities or Red Barnet in support of families (Social Plan of the Area, 2018-2021, p. 3). The assistance of private organizations during this period is considered very valuable, referring to the economic and social circumstances of the Municipality of Shkoder in the early 90s. In response to the new social problems that emerged during this period, new social institutions were created, such as: Economic Assistance, the Institute of Health Care, the Labor Offices begin their functioning and a number of laws, strategies and social programs were drafted.

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37   This organization established in the Municipality of Shkoder the first day care center for children with disabilities in Albania and also the first family home in Albania.

The evolution of policies and social service in our country continues over the years, always in adaptation to the dynamics of the development of social problems. Over the years, Municipality of Shkoder has made serious efforts in developing the sector of social service both private and state ones. Through different collaborations with different donors and also through partnerships created with other European municipalities, Municipality of Shkoder has been trying to promote and encourage the best social services practices. Since 2005 in collaboration with World Bank, Municipality of Shkoder, in partnership also with the civil society, started to offer the first community services. Meanwhile, in 2008, Municipality of Shkoder with its partners worked for publishing the Regional Social Plan, an important document that determined local social policy and identified the target groups in risk for social exclusion. Also, the social services tendered in 2010 were another courageous step of Shkoder Municipality towards the development of social sector and about the collaboration of public and private sector. This initiative created the first precedent for tendering of social services (AA.VV, 2020: 52).

While referring to the developments of recent years in our country, we can say that one of the most important and influential process has been the process of decentralization, concretized with the implementation of the Territorial Administrative Reform (2015). Referring to the Municipality of Shkoder, the implementation of this reform, brought many significant changes such as: its area under administration was expanded by 52 times, the population doubled, reaching 204,954 inhabitants. The current area of the Municipality of Shkoder is 872.71 km2 and under its administration are one city and 93 villages. The new municipality based in Shkoder has 11 administrative units (Bashkia Shkoder, 2018: 2).

Accompanying this reform with the adoption and implementation of the Law on Organization and Functioning of Local Government (2015), also affected a number of change processes. Now, through this law it is determined the way of functioning, competencies and obligations of the local government as well as the relations with the central government are well defined.

In the economic sphere, the local offices and their expenditure are covered by the state budget. The sources of local government units' funds are: one revenue (tax on small businesses, fees and fines),

intergovernmental transfers, revenues from shared taxes, local tax on immovable property, and local borrowing. Small businesses' tax is the most import local one revenue. This tax is collected by the central tax administration unit to be then transferred to local budgets. Local fees and collected fines are other constituents of local one revenue structure. However, the main sources of funds are inter-governmental conditional and unconditional transfers from the central government (Dizdari, *et al.*, 2019).

Meanwhile, the current economic potential of the Municipality of Shkoder is considered significant in the domestic GDP, especially in the sectors of electricity production, mineral production as well as customs and tax revenues. While the categories of economic activities are: fishing, agriculture, food and textile industry, construction, trade, transport/communication and financial and insurance activity. Also, it is worth mentioning the economic potential that the industrial area of Shkoder has in which domestic and foreign capital is concentrated as well as the promising tourism sector (Bashkia Shkoder, 2014: 20-21).

It is in this development process that human resources are considered the most essential, despite the fact that data of the studies confirm a serious lack of institutional capacities in local government units. The most qualified staff is mainly concentrated at the central level, while the suburban and rural areas have less qualified staff. The current staffs show limited capacity to design and implement integrated local development strategies, to draft the local medium-term budget program, etc. (MSLI, 2015: 20).

Referring to the Municipality of Shkoder, the challenges in adapting these transformation processes were identified early. In the social sector, one of the top priorities is to build local capacities in providing administrative services throughout the Municipality and their adaptation to the population and local conditions. Some of the sectors in which local capacities will be established are related to: addressing social issues such as gender inequalities, domestic violence, violence against women, children, etc.; The addition of new social structures (multifunctional centers) that provide quality services, improvement of education services, conditions of health centers, access to rural areas in order to reduce inequalities. (Bashkia Shkoder, 2015: 55).

Law 121/2016, "On social care services in the Republic of Albania", in Articles 36 and 37 has clearly defined not only the role of the municipality in terms of social care services, but also the structures that must be established and function as part of it in order to make a local community system of these services operational.

From the point of view of the law, the municipality should have structures set up at two levels:

- The structure responsible for social care services in the municipality;
- The evaluation unit of needs and referral, established at the level of administrative units.

Thus, the law assigns planning and implementation tasks of social services to Local Government Units (Bisha, *et al.*, 2019: 9).

This has led actually the sector of social services in the Municipality of Shkoder to get expanded and empowered. After 2014 for the first time it was created the Directory for Social Services, Housing and Social Care. Now, this new office has its own objectives that does not mean that all activities implemented by this office have in focus social sector. The Municipality of Shkoder, in the framework of the implementation of local social policies, for the establishment of structures for social service in the community, encouraged the establishment of the Community Family Centers. Currently, the Municipality of Shkoder offers community social services in 5 community centers in Shkoder city and also 5 in rural zones, in collaboration with different NGOs. (AA. VV., 2020: 53).

Figure 1. "Map of Community Centers in the Municipality of Shkoder"

Whereas, referring to the problem of the need for housing which is very actual for our country, in the Municipality of Shkoder, this directorate has drafted its action plan. Based on the budget program, the local government plans housing expenditures related to the construction and administration of houses for social housing or the provision of benefits (in kind) and with payment for families in need. The objectives of this office for 2022 are directed to the improvement of housing conditions of the vulnerable social classes, as well as finding opportunities for financing (government or foreign donors) for the construction of new social houses[38]. We recall that more than 60% of the Albanian population does not have the financial means to afford housing in the market and in particular groups which are in disadvantaged positions (pp.38).While the plans related to the sphere of cultural development of Local Government Units (LGUs) provide an increase of government funds for the promotion and creation of conditions that enable tourism and cultural heritage as well as the whole cultural activity that is created and realized at the local level. The priority in LGUs will be given to the establishment of an integrated system of preservation and promotion of historical centers, archaeological areas and parks and cultural heritage objects (Bashkia Shkoder, 2015: 36).

To conclude this chapter, we can conclude that the effects of the decentralization process have already begun to bring changes in the social-economic, political and cultural context in the Municipality of Shkoder, although challenges for the future are not expected to be few.

5.   Formative profile

In the Albanian context, during the years 1945-1990, there could be no talk of the existence of the Social Work profession, since the social sphere was dominated by the communist ideology. During this period activities such as philanthropy and charity were not allowed to be carried out by the community.

As reflected in the study of Hoxha (2011) the communist ideology went so far in this direction that it transformed also the meaning of these two

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38   http://www.bashkiashkoder.gov.al/web/strehimi_social_2901_3178.pdf

words in the dictionary of the Albanian language[39]. The only allowed form of social organization was volunteerism. Even in this case the ideological influence was dominant, since what was called volunteerism at that time, was in fact forced labor (Hoxha, 2011: 98-99).

Referring to the history of the development of Social Work in our country, it has many similarities with that of other former communist countries of Eastern Europe, where this profession was not known and was not practiced for ideological reasons. However, 1989 marked a new beginning in terms of social services throughout Europe, but especially in the former communist countries, where the social structures that had until then provided health services, employment, and housing began to disintegrate. Thus, began a new period of social development based on the concept of self-help and engagement of civil society (Lorenz, 2008).

The year 1990 is known as the year of the birth of the profession of Social Work in our country, because exactly in this year the social protection system was included in the new constitution of our country. During this period, an important contribution to the development of the Social Work profession has been made by civil society and international organizations. Meanwhile, the first university program in Social Work was established in 1992 at the University of Tirana and was based on an American curriculum, while the years 2004 and 2005 coincide with the opening of 2 new programs of Social Work, respectively that at the University of Elbasan and the University of Shkoder. Despite all these developments in the field of social work, there are still difficulties in the recognition of this profession by the community. While the presence and higher engagement of social workers in our country is encountered more in the private sector than in the public one. The adoption of the law on the "Order of Social Workers" in the Albanian Parliament in 2014 is considered as another very positive development that is expected to bring significant changes (Dhembo, *et al.*, 2019).

The steps that have been taken during these years for the progress of the profession of Social Work in our country are reflected quite well in the

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39 Philanthropy: material aid given in bourgeois countries to the poor by the rich; the bourgeois benefactor degrades and humiliates human dignity.
Benefactor: is one who engages in charitable activities in aid of poor people, but is actually intended to reduce their anger and extinguish the class struggle.

legislation of recent years (social laws that have been adopted).Especially in the law "On Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania" (Article 37)[40] as well as in the law "On the rights and protection of the child"[41], (article 49) the necessity of the role of the social worker in the local structures is clearly defined. This has influenced the increase of the presence of social workers in public structures as well as the better recognition of the role of the social worker, as a professional different from the others.

Meanwhile, 2005 coincides with the beginning of the activity of the Social Work branch at the University of Shkoder, through the Bachelor program in Social Work, organized according to all the criteria of the Bologna process. The first generation of social work graduates at the University of Shkoder dates back to 2008.The way of organizing the first program in Social Work was through 37 subjects and the final exam (exam or dissertation preparation) in a total of 180 ECTs, based mainly on the curricula of the social work program of the University of Tirana.

Currently, the Social Work program has undergone some necessary changes to improve it. As stated by the study Tahsini, Duci, and Ajdini (2009) "the curricula of the Social Work program of the University of Shkoder had a high percentage of the presence of psychology and philosophy profile courses" (Dhembo *et al.*, 2019: 3). Thus, the changes in the Social Work program for 2020-2021 have coincided with the increase in the number of specific subjects such as: Social Work with the Individual, Mental Health in Social Work Practices, Social Work in Schools, Social Work in Law.

Through this study program, the University of Shkoder prepares Social Workers with a general profile of knowledge, ready to work in various structures and various social groups targets. In more detail we can add that the current curricula provide future social workers with knowledge about theories in the field of social work, habits and techniques of working with the individual, group and community, the functioning of social policies, social institutions and the network of the assistance they form, the administration of social services, the analysis of social problems. Currently, the social worker as a professional offers services in a number

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40   Law no. 121/2016, dated 24.11.2016.

41   Law no. 18/2017, dated 23.2.2017.

of institutions of the Municipality of Shkoder such as: Regional Hospital, Mental Health Structures and the Directorate of Public Health, Residential Institutions for orphans (public and private), judicial system, social office and multifunctional centers of the Municipality of Shkoder, Labor Office, Regional Social Service and widely in Civil Society Organizations. Meanwhile, there are no active social workers in schools yet.

In recent years, a lot of attention has been paid to professional practices, based on the directive of the Ministry (MASR)[42], where during a school week a student is scheduled to conduct 5 hours of practice over a period of 29 weeks. In the framework of various cooperation agreements signed by the Department of Psychology-Social Work with various social institutions, students have the opportunity to conduct professional practice at social institutions of the Municipality of Shkoder and beyond (Municipality of Vau Dejes, Malësi e Madhe, Lezhë, Laç etc.).In this experience the students are led by the professor who is responsible for practices, who should not have more than 20 students under his patronage. This way of organizing practices has increased the quality of their development, although there are still questions with the way of organizing supervision in social institutions that host internship students.

The involvement of the Psychology-Social Work department in the European Erasmus Project + "Towards increased Awareness, responsibility and shared quality in Social Work" in cooperation with the University of Tirana, Elbasan, Florence in Italy, Complutense in Madrid and ISCTE in Lisbon, has promoted the improvement of the skills of the academic staff of the Social Work program through the development of trainings in the field of Theories of Social Work, ICTs, Supervision. Specifically, this project has directly influenced the increase of the quality of the Social Work program in terms of: enriching the curricula of the Social Work program with issues in the field of theories and supervision of Social Work. The use of the LMS distance learning software greatly facilitated the organization of the learning process during the pandemic period. Also, in the framework of this project, joint studies have been conducted as well as study visits to European social institutions with the participation of USH staff. The impact of this project has been quite positive.

42　Directive no. 29, dated 10.09.2018.

Meanwhile, with the increase of the competencies of the social offices in the local government units, as a result of the decentralization process in the Municipality of Shkoder, the need for cooperation with Social Work specialists (Social Work pedagogues) has increased. Referring to the study "Citizens' perception of service delivery in the Municipality of Shkoder"; the field of social services is identified as one of the three sectors that need improvements. Referring to the study sample, 46.3% of the citizens of the Municipality of Shkoder assess as "not good" the sector of services and social care (Duci, 2016: 24).

Such developments have prompted the Municipality of Shkoder to show an increased attention for cooperation (joint projects) with the Department of Psychology and Social Work in relation to various transformation processes that social services in this Municipality are undergoing in the framework of deinstitutionalization[43] and expansion of services to remote areas (rural and mountainous).

Such findings bring attention to the need that the Municipality of Shkoder has for increasing the capacity of human resources in the field of social services. In this part, a very good contribution in this direction can be brought by the University of Shkoder, through the opening of the professional master program in Social Services, which will train qualified Social Workers to work in the network.

In conclusion, we can say that the path of professional training of social workers in the program offered by the University of Shkoder is in sync with the latest developments of social policies in the country and in continuous efforts to align with the curricula of foreign universities thanks to joint European projects in the field of university education.

Innovation and future perspective for Social Work education

The Vienna Declaration assumes that the most urgent and important innovation of the 21st century will take place in social sphere. The future of this innovation will bring new challenges in the future education of social workers. The rapid growth of the technology demands for social workers to facilitate social change, to contribute in social innovation by

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43   The Community of the future: social and labor inclusion interventions for the orphans of Shkoder"(project number: AID10950), a three-year project promoted by the NGO ACLI IPSIA.

addressing the challenges of new social problems, individual well-being, and community collaboration by respecting the principle of human rights. Thus Social work education programs need to reflect new and innovative models to deliver high quality field education opportunities for social work students.

When we think about innovation we tend to think in technological terms. In fact gender equality, positive thinking, coaches, supported education, employment of vulnerable groups, education for all, may be consider "social" innovations. This century, with the growing use of technology, complexity of client problems, community challenges makes necessities to have a professional development strategy otherwise we cannot "lead" for social justice.

Thinking about the future allows us to explore question and plan in the context of the local reality of our system. In University of Shkoder the use of internet, computers and technology application is rapidly increased during the last 5 years. The online courses offered through the software system management LMS and Google Classroom pushed the pedagogical staff to experiment with technology and preparing online courses. Various media were used to create professional content like video, audio, writing and images.

During the pandemic, the students took the courses online, have access prerecorded lectures posted by lector, participated in online lesson or attending lectures delivered from remote locations, interact with other students enrolled from different location, and took consultation for their assignments or thesis through virtual learning. In this pathway lot of challenges were faced by pedagogical staff and students regarding to ICTs and other digital tools. To be competitive both parties must learn how to be digitally literate, to mindfully use digital tools in professional contexts. Digitally literate social workers understand how ICTs and other digital tools are appropriately used in all types of social work practice (Hitchcock, 2016).

James Herbert Williams says "our society desperately needs our expertise as social worker, but only if our expertise includes how to work in a digital society". Thus the future of the study program in social work at the University of Shkoder, and in Albania in general, is offering the students and the academic staff the possibility to learn how to use digital tools

professionally. Moreover the university has a crucial role of preparing different guidelines for social worker on how to design and deliver services to the public conform to standards for technology in social work practice (NASW, ASWB, CSWE & CSWA Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice).

The future of schooling can be used to inspire, to dream, to transform (Schleicher, 2020). In Albania the system education is facing the tension between virtual learning and face to face relationship. During the pandemic the education system was not ready to offer a good virtual learning. The lack of appropriate tools as PC, Smartphone, and internet connection, impacts directly the quality of virtual learning. Still it is not clear how the education will be continued. Globally, the variety of fields in which social workers operate gives the profession high possibility in the job market. Diversity should be considered a possibility in Albania too, but today the social work profession in Albania is facing lot of challenges. While the profession was established more than two decades ago and a lot has been achieved since then (Dauti, 2020), consolidating the social work profession in Albania requires more organized efforts. The law that gives the green light to the creation of National Order of Social Worker is still waiting to be voted from the parliament since 2014. Without an order and without a National Social Work Agenda it is ambiguous the future of the profession.

In this situation, the role of Albanian Schools of Social Worker is crucial for the future status of the profession, for building coalitions across the profession and continued availability of jobs. The future is not a magical land where all problems disappear. The future will bring new challenges and University of Shkoder must be an active actor on helping students and social work professionals to respond to the social, economic, and environmental local and national challenges.

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CHAPTER VI

"Social Work Education in University of Elbasan Aleksandër Xhuvani"

Skender Topi

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Eda Cela

1. Presentation of the University

University of Elbasan "Aleksandër Xhuvani", founded in 1991, is an important scientific and educational institution in the Republic of Albania. It is one of the best-known universities in the country for the preparation and training of pre-service teachers, new specialists and scholars in various fields of study. Its history, of over 40 decades, has recognized significant achievements in various areas of its activity, especially, that of teaching and scientific research process. This university has its roots in a valuable and rich tradition. Without doubt, this tradition is closely connected with the name of the Normal School, which opened its doors in 1909. The Normal School played for long time the role of a real university. From it came whole generations of teachers for all Albanian territories, which for years were prepared according to the most contemporary knowledge about time (1909-1950) similar to those of many developed European countries, such as Switzerland, France, Austria, etc.

The Normal School clearly outlined its important place in national education and moreover its role in our national history. Values created in the Normal School are clearly reflected in the history of our national education and beyond. In the history of our nation, Elbasan from time to time has to play the protagonist in the field of education, knowledge and science.

The University of Elbasan "Aleksandër Xhuvani" is an institution raised in status University on the Higher Pedagogical Institute "Aleksandër

Xhuvani" (HPI) of Elbasan. This higher education institution, which has prepared teachers for the 8-year school and secondary, was set up in 1971 and operated until 1991. HPI was founded being based on the tradition of teacher training in the Normal School of Elbasan, as well as in experience accumulated in its two predecessors, one of the University of Tirana and the otherof the Higher Pedagogical Institute of Shkodra, as well as the legacy of extensive scientific and educational activity of many scholars and teachers from Elbasan.

Initially, HPI has carried out its teaching activity in four branches of teaching: language-literature, mathematics-physics, history-geography, biology-chemistry, in the system with and without disconnection from work, for a period of three years; in civil engineering, mechanical engineering, accounting economics, plan economics, as subsidiaries of UT. This institution carried out activities, units branches set up in the cities of Korça, Fier and Berat.

In 1981 the preparation branch was opened by teachers for the first four grades of 8-year school, with a study duration of 3 years. There were five cathedrae:

- Department of Albanian language and literature;
- Department of history-geography;
- Department of Mathematics-Physics;
- Department of Biology-Chemistry;
- Department of psycho-didactic subjects and rights.

In 1991, HPI "Aleksandër Xhuvani" gained the status of university institution, becoming named the University of Elbasan "Aleksandër Xhuvani" by the Decision of the Council of Ministers no.414, dated 12.11.1991, proudly preserving the origin of the Higher Pedagogical Institute.

Nowadays University of Elbasan continues its educational tradition not only in the teaching field, but also in other new dynamic fields of scientific research. UE'activity is based on article 57, section 7, of the Constitution and the Law no. 80/2015 date 22.07.2015 "On the higher education and scientific research in the institutions of higher education in the Republic of Albania", in the Statute of UE and regulations approved for the implementation of the law.

The following Faculties operate in UE:

- Faculty of Human Sciences, with Bachelor, Professional Master and Master of Science as well as Doctoral (PhD) study programs in its research work fields: Albanian language and foreign languages (English, German, Italian and French); history, geography, journalism, Albanology and two-year professional study program in specialised and administrative secretary and touristic guide in German language;

- Faculty of Natural Sciences, with Bachelor Professional Master and Master of Science study programmes with its research fields: biology, chemistry, botanic field, zoology, environmental protection, mathematics, physics, information technology, informatics, computer sciences, theoretical and experimental physics and several two-year professional study programs in laboratory technician, environmental technician, mechatronics and logistics;

- Faculty of Educational Sciences, with Bachelor, Professional Master and Master of Science study programmes in its fields of teaching and research: teachers for elementary schools (first five grades of the primary school), kindergarten teacher, psychology, philosophy, sociology, physical and artistic education, as well as a two-year professional study program of nursery governess (0-3 years old infants);

- Faculty of Economics, with Bachelor, Professional Master and Master of Science study programmes in its fields of teaching and research: business administration; finance and accountability, economics and law; judicial sciences in business; judicial sciences in public sector; economy and tourism, business administration and engineering; and economic informatics;

- Faculty of Medical Technical Sciences, with its Bachelor. Professional Master and Master of Science study programmes in its research fields: nursery, midwifery; imagery, laboratory technician, nursery management, physiotherapy and speech therapy.

Since its foundation in 1991, UE has been continuously working for the creation of auxiliary and supporting structures to improve the teaching process and scientific research activity. There have been established some

technical laboratories in each Faculty, which are considered as natural and necessary requirements for restructuring UE and for facilitating the teaching and research process.

The coordination of theoretical with practical classes in laboratories or any other collaborative institutions of UE, in all its programs of study, have created new dimension of the students` space and environment. The institutional policies, having the students in its focus, have created unlimited opportunities for the internationalisation of UE, by offering the students' equal participation possibilities in the mobility programs abroad. Furthermore, these policies are integrated with partnerships in and out of the country, so as to realize different trainings and qualification.

The internationalisation policies have also created the possibility for exchange of UE's personnel with other partner institutions and they have also contributed and encouraged the capacities' growth in the framework of European Union projects. This has resulted in a serous of international activities in UE.

Our concept for the future of University of Elbasan, "Aleksandër Xhuvani", is not only merely based on its closeness to the labour market, transactions and utilitarian spheres; but also, at the same time separated from them; because the mission of the universities is not only to produce workers and specialists in various cultural and production fields, but at the same time to create, form, prepare and provide real defenders of freedom; protecting actively the social and citizen's rights.

2. Characterization of the cycle of studies in Social Work

The study program of the first cycle "Bachelor's Degree in Social Work" was established in 2005 with the approval of the Ministry of Education and Science (Decision, No. 4278, dated 01.07.2005). The study program was offered by the Department of Psychology and Sociology, which was established in 2007 (Decision no. 821, Council of Ministers) during a reorganization of the department at the Faculty of Education Sciences. From February 2012, the Department of Psychology-Sociology and Educational Sciences, was divided to create two departments, that of Social

Sciences, where this study program is part of today and the Department of Psychology. The "Bachelor's Degree in Social Work" program is designed based on the law on higher education (Law no. 8461, dated 25.2.1999) and the standards of the Bologna Charter 7 (La Magna Charta Universitatum, 1998), with a total of 180 credits.

In 2010-2011 the study program was opened, "Professional Master in Social Work with Children and Family", 90 credits, by Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM No. 684, dated 25.08.2010) which continues to operate today in full-time system at this department.

In 2013-2014 (Order No. 369, dated 05.09.2020) "Professional Master in Probation Service" and "Scientific Master in Social Services" were opened. Both of these masters continue today to be part of the study programs offered by the Department of Social Sciences.

During the first years of offering these programs, the curriculum has undergone constant changes to better adapt to the demands of the labor market and the need of the community to receive the highest quality services.

The biggest changes in the curriculum took place in 2015 with the entry into force of the law on education, no. 80/2015, based on Articles 72 and 75 on the organization of study programs (Law No. 80/2015).

The professional masters were reorganized from 90 credits to 60 credits with a time extension of one academic year. This brought about the change of the curriculum, focusing it more towards professional disciplines. Technical disciplines were generally removed from the curriculum to make room for student-centered disciplines.

It is a three-year cycle, the first level of studies DNP 6 (Instruction No. 15, Ministry of Education, 2008) is in line with the standards and requirements of the Bologna 180 ECTS 5 card (ECTS Users' Guide, Luxembourg, 2009) and currently is working this way. The curriculum in the Bachelor is designed keeping in mind the mission of the department. The first cycle of studies is organized as a program aimed at preparing general specialists for the practice of social work, social policy and social administration. The courses that are realized in the programs in the branch of social work focus on the formation of the social worker. Courses realized in the labor market today, training to conduct research and service activities in the framework of teaching and training of qualified specialists aiming to play

the role of social factor in the democratization of Albanian society. In the programs designed at the "Bachelor" level, in addition to the knowledge of the basic subjects that make up a considerable number, students also receive general knowledge through some subjects of general education aiming at full knowledge of national values and culture not only.

In almost every general and characteristic subject/discipline, papers, course assignments and research reports are realized by students which occupy from 10% to 30% of the final grade as well as the tests that occupy 10-20% of the final grade for each course. The students receive instructions regarding the structure, modalities and steps of the work the student receives from the lecturer of the course, who checks in writing and orally the activation and quality of the student's work. Papers can be done in groups or individually according to the preferences of the students themselves and the nature of the paper (eg. in case studies there can be no more than two students).

The curriculum broadly includes the basics of the concepts of social work, recognizing and making the appropriate differences of his position in view of the fairly wide range of this profession. In this context, all existing curricula of the respective courses have been reviewed and improved (they have been reviewed every year) as well as the workloads aiming at improving the ratios between theoretical and practical classes. The same practice has been followed with scientific and professional master directions.

In each course there is an ECTS system (ECTS Users 'Guide, Luxembourg, 2009) which reflects the weight of the course as well as the student engagement inside and outside the auditorium.

The Bachelor curriculum in Social Work is organized in three academic years. In each academic year there are 60 credits distributed across different disciplines.

During the first-year students are introduced to the basic concepts of social work. The first year in total has 10 disciplines. During the first year, the general education disciplines occupy more than 50% of the curriculum and more precisely 32 credits out of 60 that this academic year has.

Of these credits, 12 credits have category (A) subject courses, 20 credits have category (B) subject courses, 10 credits have category (C) interdisciplinary courses and 18 credits have category (D) 9 courses

(Instruction 4, Ministry of Education, 2018) supplementary subjects respecting the established standards and criteria for organizing the study programs of the Instruction 41.

The second year of Bachelor is also organized in 60 credits and a total of 10 disciplines, in this year the disciplines with a completely professional character occupy over 50% or more precisely 41 credits, so about 70% of the plan in the second year. Also in this academic year 9 credits have the courses of category (A) Basic course, 26 credits the courses of category (B) characteristic courses, 9 credits the courses of category (C), interdisciplinary courses and 6 credits courses of category (D), (Instruction 4, Ministry of Education, 2018), supplementary courses respecting the set standards and criteria for organizing study programs.

In the second year, students are introduced to "Social Services, Social Policy the system of organization of services in the Organization of Social Work and "Social Work in Schools".

Students are also introduced to the concept of planning a policy in Gender Roles. Students are introduced to the rules that a social work professional must respect the Code of Ethics and the responsibilities in service delivery.

The third year Bachelor also has 10 disciplines, in total 60 credits of which 44 credits are professional disciplines, almost 80% of the hours. Also in this academic year 5 credits have the courses of category (A) Basic course, 50 credits the courses of category (B) characterization courses, 5 credits the courses of category (C), interdisciplinary courses and 6 credits courses of category (D), (Instruction 4, Ministry of Education, 2018) supplementary courses respecting the set standards and criteria for organizing study programs.

In the third year, students are introduced to social services in Albania in disciplines such as "Social work with the family", "Social work in schools", the organization of social services individual and group processes, management and planning in the administration of social work and project work.

Preparation of social workers at the level of professional master and scientific master.

The academic year 2010-2011 marked the opening of professional master studies in "Social work with children and family", which continues to

operate currently. The academic year 2013-214 marked the opening of the scientific master in "Social Services", the full-time system and the professional master "Probation Service".

– Professional Master in "Social work with children and family" and "Probation Service" with 60 ECTS credits (ECTS Users' Guide, Luxembourg, 2009). The duration of studies in the Professional Master is 2 semesters (1 Year). More specifically, the "Professional Master" program in "Social Work with Children and Family" and the "Probation Service" are designed to help the professional adjustment and employment opportunities of the social worker in a whole and variety of institutions (in pre-university education schools, institutions care for mother and child, re-education institutions at the courts, etc.), through a series of disciplines such as "Paradigms of humane behavior", "Administration and supervision of social service programs for children and family", "Methods of working with convicts", "Community and juvenile justice", etc. In this regard, due importance has been given to their scientific formation with the aim of undertaking theoretical scientific works and applied research work according to the respective fields and to transmit the findings in the Albanian social environment. The curriculum contains a considerable workload of practice development and internships.

– Master of Science in "Social Services", with 120 ECTS credits (ECTS Users' Guide, Luxembourg, 2009). The duration of studies in the Master of Science in "Social Services" is 4 semesters (two years).

The curriculum in the Master of Science "Social Services" is designed to provide the development of scientific-research skills of students, especially through the application of research methods in social sciences, mainly in the field of social work and under relevant specifications.

The content of the curricula at the master level has tried to be in line with the highest scientific-research and professional standards that this level requires within and compliance with international programs such as Erasmus and beyond. During the two years, there have been several revisions of the curricula in professional and science masters, including new subjects "leadership training", advanced concepts of social work with children and family. Social services for victims of trafficking, evaluation of social services, etc. The programs in the second cycle of studies offer respectively a professional and scientific

approach of the research-oriented curriculum in the theoretical and practical plan.

Today, the Department of Social Sciences has 8 full-time lecturers, of which 2 Associate Professors, 4 Doctors of Science, 1 Assistant Lecturer and 1 PhD student.

There are also 7 part-time lecturers of which 3 are Associate Professors, 1 Doctor of Science, 1 PhD student and 2 Assistant Lectures. Part-time academic staff in this department are also two Italian professors who are invited every year to cover certain disciplines respectively 1 Professor and 1 Associate Professor.

Regarding the organization of study programs and the number of students, the department offers 4 study programs with a total number of 211 students organized as follows in the table.

Table 1. "Study programs and the number of relevant students"

Study program	Number of students
Bachelor in Social Work	140
Master of Science in Social Services	38
Professional Master in Probation Service	19
Professional Master Social work with children and family	14

3. Epistemology of Social Work Training

Epistemology is the "study of science", epistemology is the science of cognition, scientific research is the science of finding. According to Fanshel (1980): a good research program is essential for the self-respect of the profession and its ability to maintain positive consideration of external persons whose opinions help to support and legitimize the efforts of the profession.

Research in social work is based on a concrete reality in a certain category of people and special individuals, characterized by the presence of detailed recommendations. Research in social work starts from facts and practice the conclusions of which can lead to success, but also to fatal mistakes. Research in individual systems is seen as a bridge between

scientific research and practice, as a point that connects epistemology with research in social work.

The first step in conducting a research on an individual system is to choose the behavior that will be monitored. Sundel in 1993 cited that social workers can help the client acquire a behavior, increase the frequency of a behavior, maintain a behavior, reduce a behavior, or completely eradicate a behavior. Debates about theory and practice in social work have often avoided detailed discussions about the nature of knowledge and the different ways it can be created. As a result, positivist conceptions of knowledge are still assumed by many to be axiomatic, such that context-dependent and practitioner-oriented approaches to knowledge creation and use are presumed to lack epistemological rigor and credibility. Ethical issues of work social issues summarized by Banks include tensions between individual rights, public welfare, structural oppression, and inequalities; leading to moral dilemmas and the balancing of rights, duties and responsibilities for which there can be no "right answer". An ethical response may conflict with financial responsibility and available resources; they may inform or conflict with financial responsibilities.

Social workers are involved in making complex decisions, often about relative risks, safety, harm and protection. They do so in the context of Developing Good Social Work Practice and Good Service Delivery which is a collective responsibility of all qualified social workers. We need to constantly critically examine and review the practice and delivery of services. We need to identify what the ingredients of a "good practice" are and how they can be applied elsewhere. We need to look at areas in need of improvement, gaps in service delivery, and responses to help users in order to start changing services and providing new ones. Social workers often have to refuse the services of their clients due to lack of resources.

We need to develop and maintain paths to learn from others. How should we be coherent with new developments that can help us a lot during our work?

One problem is the abundant information we receive and the need to select it. Conferences and trainings are specific and very helpful but they are expensive. However, we may be in contact with other employees who have the same experience in the field of social work. We can learn by reading articles about good practice and service development. We can

review literature from which we can select what can improve and develop our current expertise.

We need to modify our internship, for example, through supervision in order to learn from what we do and change and develop our internship. We need to start with the internship that social work students develop in various institutions of the city of Elbasan. Students face various challenges such as lack of cooperation, low involvement in the activities of the institution, in providing capacity and lack of infrastructure. We need to articulate practice from colleagues in different disciplines.

We need to articulate the practice so that other social workers learn from what we do. We can work in the interest of our clients in brilliant new ways, but if we do not articulate it, others can not learn from it, and have to invent. We need to articulate the practice for the political survival of the profession and for our clients, in order to demonstrate to the government, the public and the press what we do well.

We do not need to simply identify good practice, but we should appreciate it. As Ian Shaw has argued, the evaluation of practice has historically been a problematic aspect of social work. However, there are strong reasons why we should not get involved in evaluating practice and delivering services. Evaluation examines our effectiveness, enables us to improve it, identifies gaps and develops knowledge, and helps us develop new practice models and service delivery.

If we are developing new models, projects or services, we need to examine how well they work for customers. The most problematic are the financing of new projects, which are often related to the evaluation of effectiveness, where the definition of effectiveness does not necessarily have to be the same for the financiers, the project and the users. We need to remember that evaluation can be part of the political context and resources. However, we need to get involved: as Ian Shaw has argued, "he keeps his promise to keep honest social workers." Can we conceive of the world without social work?

4. Socio-economic, political and cultural context

The Municipality of Elbasan is the most important demographic, administrative and economic center of the region known with the same name. The Municipality of Elbasan is bordered on the north by the Municipality of Tirana, on the east by the Municipality of Librazhd, on the south-east by the Municipality of Prrenjas, on the south-west by the Municipality of Gramsh and on the west by the Municipality of Peqin and Cerrik. According to the civil status register it has a population of 205,412 inhabitants and a density of 236.11 inhabitants per km2. The Municipality of Elbasan has an area of 872.03 km². This municipality consists of 13 administrative units, as follows: Elbasan, Labinot-Fushë, Labinot-Mal, Gjinar, Shushicë, Gjergjan, Funar, Shirgjan, Tregan, Gracen, Bradashesh, Zavalinë and Papër. All administrative units are currently part of the district of Elbasan and the also part of Elbasan County. The Municipality of Elbasan has under its administration one city and 116 villages. The Municipality of Elbasan is one of the largest in Albania, as well as one of the most complex municipalities to be administered. The city of Elbasan with around 126,810 inhabitants is divided into many administrative units and 60 percent of the population is part of the municipality of Elbasan.

Another important demographic indicator is the age structure of the population and the average age which show that the population of the Municipality of Elbasan is young population. Even the average age of Albanian population as a whole is young.

In the Region of Elbasan there are a considerable number of local organizations and associations which are very active in providing social services to the respective target groups. Currently most of them operate in the Municipality of Elbasan. Their activity focuses mainly on raising awareness in the field of human rights, on providing free specific services through daily or residential centers and supporting beneficiaries to integrate in the community and help them to be autonomous. The contribution of these associations is focused on organizing vocational training courses, according to the requirements of the current labor market.

In Elbasan, there are 11 centers providing social care services, 10 of them are non-public and one is public UNICEF (2013). The services in daily care centers and centers for people with disabilities/elderly are provided by the

Autism Center and Balashe center, which is a daily center for adults with disabilities, which depend directly on the District of Elbasan. Services that address the needs of vulnerable groups, such as victims of domestic violence and victims of trafficking, are provided by two non-profit organizations, the Women's Forum and TjetërVizion, which provide shelter for women and children. TjetërVizion is an association recognized and licensed by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and is known for its contribution to this category. Most of the associations operating in Elbasan focus on services for women and girls. TjetërVizion, for about 14 years, has been providing social care services in the Prefecture of Elbasan and beyond. TjetërVizion has contributed to the design, implementation and training of public social operators on standard operating procedures for victims of trafficking. The model of managing the services that the association "TjetërVizion" has chosen to use and which is supported by CEFA (Italian organization which helped establish TjetërVizion), is that of Welfare-mix (public-private) model, which is based on the partnership between state institutions and nonprofit associations. "TjetërVizion" operates under an open policy in the interest of the community, cooperating closely with public and private institutions, the Municipality of Elbasan, the State Social Service (S.S.Sh), the Directorate of Education, schools, state police, etc., and various local and foreign associations, operating in Elbasan and beyond. Elbasan Women's Forum has been offering concrete services for violated women. The Counselling Center, Law Firm and the Day Care Center (emergency shelter) are the only ones in the Region of Elbasan, while the last service is the only one in all Albania. The services are licensed in full compliance with national standards. A multi-disciplinary team with experience and expertise in the field works to provide these services. Specific services for women/girls with violence problems are realized by: Counselling Center, offers free services to help women/girls with violence and socio-economic problems in the Region of Elbasan, but also from other regions of Albania and abroad.

The services provided through the psychologist/social workers are: • Psychological, social, individual and group support • Mediation with family members and beneficiaries to find alternatives to problem solving • Mediation in the Vocational Training Center, in Local Business • Information, orientation and referral of cases for other necessary

alternative services provided by other local actors (public and non-public). The above services are provided through: • Telephone line, where through the telephone number 05425 45-16 the beneficiaries present their problems while remaining anonymous. • Face-to-face counselling, where girls/women come directly to the Counselling Center and present their problems and concerns. Law Firm is the only one in the Elbasan Region that offers free legal services. The services are: • Legal advice, which is provided in cases where the beneficiary seeks to clarify a legal problem. Drafting legal acts, addressed to the court for initiating court cases (lawsuits, appeals, etc.) or addressed to public institutions to provide the necessary information for the trial (written evidence) • Legal protection with a lawyer for all beneficiaries, who are victims of domestic violence. The Day Care Center (emergency shelter) is the only one in Albania. This center was born out of the need to assist and support abused women, who denounce their abusers and are at risk and seek to be provided with an Immediate Protection Order. Services provided through the social worker are: • Accommodation from a few hours to 5 days, pending the receipt of an Immediate Protection Order, for girls/women and their children under 18 years. • Continuation of psycho-social-legal and medical counselling by the CC (Counselling Center) and the LF (Law Firm) during the days of accommodation. During the stay in the DCC, the woman and the children are offered accommodation, good living condition, food, clothing depending on the needs. The privacy, secrecy and anonymity of each beneficiary as well as the DCC is maintained. By equipping the woman with UMM, the transfer to another shelter with a longer term or return to the apartment is made, depending on the risk that the case presents and the desire of the beneficiary.

Given that most of the needs and social services offered in the Municipality of Elbasan focus on services for women and children, the University of Elbasan established the study program of Professional Master in Social Work "Social Worker for Children and Family". Even that the market of social workers has its problems in 2008 the law No. 10 024 was approved, dated 27.11.2008 on the Probation Service, the University of Elbasan established the study program of Professional Master in Probation Service in 2014, a master who shapes working students social workers with

advanced knowledge in the field of justice. The social work curriculum is thus aligned with market demands.

Development trends in the Municipality of Elbasan have changed a lot after the '90s. The free movement of people caused the population to move towards urban centers affecting the extent of cities and increasing the built-up area. The same phenomenon occurred in Elbasan: the fall of the communist system brought changes in economical, territorial and environmental terms. The main economic trends before the '90s in Elbasan were oriented towards heavy industry (Metallurgical Plant, Wood Processing Plant, etc.) and rural areas, which today are part of the municipality, more oriented towards agriculture. These trends changed, providing new opportunities to the services sector and small and medium enterprises. In this way there was an immediate transition from the public sector to the complete domination of the private sector. Economic development, in addition to demographic change, is conditioned by other factors related to the transition period. Population growth increased the pressure of urban development.

The poverty profile in the urban area of Elbasan district is quite different from that of the rural area. The characteristics of the labor market are also different. Unemployment has a much more direct meaning in the urban area than in the rural area. Therefore, it is called more effective and realistic that the analysis of the poverty level and the ways to alleviate it are divided for each area. For the urban area, the basic condition for poverty alleviation is employment. Consequences of the transition until 1990, the region of Elbasan was considered as an important industrial region, dominated by metallurgical, cement production and mechanical industries in the district of Elbasan, the industry of extraction and enrichment of iron-nickel and chromium in the district of Librazhd and mechanical industry in Gramsh district. The largest enterprises were concentrated in the district of Elbasan, where, for more than two decades, people from all over the country moved to meet the great needs for manpower and industry specialists. This population movement not only significantly increased the number of inhabitants of this district, but especially increased the active population. At the end of 1990, about 24,000 people were employed in the ten main enterprises of this district, which represented about 40% of the number of employees of the district public sector. After

1990, most of the existing industrial enterprises could not survive, due to outdated technologies, quite low effectiveness and high competition of imported products. They stopped working and were involved in the process of restructuring or privatization, but only a small part of them resumed work with very reduced production capacity, while making drastic layoffs. Thus, in the ten main enterprises of 1990, only 9% of the previous number of employees are currently employed, which represent only about 4% of the labor force. The structure of unemployed jobseekers, according to the time they stay registered at the offices of employment, testifies the absolute predominance of the long-term unemployed who are considered those who are registered from the employment office for more than one year. These include about 70% of the total unemployed jobseekers and most of them are unemployed over the age of 45, who present the greatest difficulties in employment, because they do not have the right profession or training to answer new labor market demands.

Labor market adaptation. – The level of labor force adaptation to the labor market is generally low. This is due to the fact that the qualification of the labor force over the age of 35 does not adequately respond to new business requirements, especially for some "new" professions.

5. Formative profile

The first cycle of studies, "Bachelor in Social Work" is organized in 3 years, 6 semesters. In 1 teaching week, on average, 23 teaching hours are realized with activities in the disciplines of general basic education = 74 ECTS (European Communities, ECTS Users' Guide, 2009).

- Activity in the characteristic disciplines of the study program = 56 ECTS
- Elective discipline = 9 ECTS
- Other additional knowledge = 47 ECTS
- Diploma thesis = 3 ECTS

This study program aims to prepare social work specialists, with the necessary and integrating basic knowledge for other study cycles. The program aims to prepare skilled staff who can be engaged or employed according to the demands of the labor market in:

- Educational Institutions;
- Social Care Institutions;
- NGOs that provide social services;
- Social Service Institutions, central and local, etc.

However, their main destination will be to pursue further studies in "Professional Master" (MNP), or "Master of Science" (MSc) programs in the field of social sciences (Bachelor's degree supplement in social work, 2019-2020).

Undergraduate study programs aim to provide students with basic knowledge of general scientific methods and principles as well as specific skills in a wide range of professions and specialties. Social worker is a regulated profession that is practiced in the field of social work, at the macro, meso and micro level, in the service of individuals, families, groups, communities, central and local level institutions in the public and private system (Law no. 163/2014, Article 4, Definition).

In the first year of Bachelor program (Bachelor plan in social work 2019-2022, year 1), students receive general information on social work and most of the credits belong to disciplines of informative nature such as General Psychology, Anthropology, TIC, Conflict Management etc. The disciplines which relate to social work and the organization of social services provide general information on basic concepts of social work, history and social service institutions.

In the first year students receive little knowledge about the above components of this study mainly in disciplines such as Social Policy Institutions, social problem, practice and internships where they get acquainted with social services in general and the system in Albania. The main disciplines in the first year of the bachelor are Human Behavior, Introduction to Social Work, Social Problems, Institutions of Social Policy, The internship and practical hours.

In the second year of Bachelor program (Bachelor plan in social work 2019-2022, year 2) the number of professional disciplines is higher and students are introduced with social policies, social work organization, social work in schools etc.

In the second year, students are better acquainted with social services, their organization in Albania, the role and work of the social worker, their

responsibilities. They acquire this knowledge in disciplines such as: social policy, code of ethics, interviewing habits, social work in schools.

In the third year of Bachelor program (Bachelor plan in social work 2019-2022, year 3) students get to know more about the features of the social work profession such as social work collaboration with families, social work skills, coordination, monitoring of social services, working with other projects, Individual And Group Processes The Coordination And Monitoring Of Social Services Social Work Administration Internships In Institutions.

DNP gives students the opportunity to enter the labor market, civil service and all second cycle programs (Bachelor Degree Supplement in Social Work, 2019-2020).

Second Level Diploma in "Social Worker for Children and Family", Professional Master.

The program aims to prepare skilled staff who can be committed or employed according to the demands of the labor market in:

- Administration;
- School;
- Justice system;
- Adoption institutions;
- NGOs that provide services for children and family members, victims of domestic violence

(Diploma Supplement, Professional Master, Social Work with Children and Family 2019-2020)

- Activity in general education disciplines (basic) = 6 ECTS;
- Activity in the characteristic disciplines of study program = 26 ECTS;
- Activities in similar and/or integrative disciplines related to disciplines = 8 ECTS;
- Elective discipline = 4 ECTS;
- Other additional knowledge = 8 ECTS;
- Diploma thesis = 8 ECTS.

In Professional Master, Social Work with Children and Family (study programe Social Work with Children and Family 2019-2020) the focus is mainly on family and children. Students are familiar with the social policies on these categories, the services and needs they have.

Legal Rights for Family and Children is mainly focused on Albanian legal system related with children and family code. Adoption, cohabitation, etc. are very important concepts that are dealt with in this discipline. Social Work with Traumatized Children, Social Problem Solving Counselling and Deviant Behavior are disciplines that have a clear and defined focus on the category of children and families. These disciplines see both the child and the family as trying to emphasize the need for treatments, counselling, and identifying behaviors that are considered harmful and dangerous to children.

The internship in this study cycle is organized throughout the year structured into internships and practice. Experts of each field are invited, mainly social workers who work with children and families. Students familiarize with the policies that different institutions follow to help these categories. Workshops and round table discussions would be very fruitful for this master's students. Social Services Policy in Master programs deepens the concepts and knowledge gained in Bachelor program.

Second Level Diploma Probation Service, Professional Master

The program aims to prepare skilled staff who can be committed or employed according to the demands of the labor market in:

- Correctional systems, courts, police, etc.;
- Social Workers in the administration;
- Developer of programs, policies for convicts;
- Mediation organizations;
- Local and central offices of the probation service, etc.

(Diploma Supplement, Professional Master, Probation Service 2019-2020)

The study program is organized:

- Activity in general education disciplines (basic) = 6 ECTS;
- Activity in the characteristic disciplines of study program = 26 ECTS;
- Activities in similar and/or integrative disciplines related to disciplines = 8 ECTS;
- Elective discipline = 4 ECTS;
- Other additional knowledge = 8 ECTS;
- Diploma thesis = 8 ECTS.

Professional Master in "Probation Service" (Probation Service Curriculum 2019-2020) is a very specific master with a clearly defined field. It serves students who will work in probation offices as well as those who will work in social justice services in criminal justice. Generally, subjects with legal character are taught, like:

Criminal Etymology, Correctional Systems and Restorative Justice, Community Justice for Minors. These disciplines form a clear framework of the domestic criminal legal framework by introducing the students not only with the legislation of their country but also with the basic concepts of legal definition. The students learn the procedures, criminal offenses, legal separation of age groups.

Theory and Methods of Working with the Offender as well as the Basic Probation Legislation are two disciplines which familiarize students with the concrete work that the probation officer does. The first deals with methods, instruments and best European practices and the second with the basic documentation of these professions.

Master of Science in Social Services, 120 credits

The program aims to prepare skilled staff who can be committed in research or employed according to the demands of the labor market in:

- Counselling centers;
- Educational institutions;
- Health institutions;
- Social Workers in the administration;
- Developer of social programs;
- Mediation organizations;
  National and international public institutions, various domestic or foreign organizations.

(Diploma Supplement, Master of Science in Social Services 2019-2020).

The study program is organized as follows:

- Activity in general education disciplines (basic) = 21 ECT;
- Activity in the characteristic disciplines of prog. study = 41 ECTs;
- Activities in similar and/or integrative disciplines related to disciplines = 12 ECTs;
- Elective discipline = 6 ECTs;

- Professional Practice = 12 ECTS;
- Diploma thesis = 28 ECTS;
- Other additional knowledge = 12 ECTS.

In Professional Master and Master of Science programs, the curriculum focuses more on disciplines that are mainly related to the social work profession. At Master of Science in Social Services students receive knowledge on specific groups in need as disabled people.

On Contemporary Issues and the Social Policy of International Organization The Educational, Processes for Social Inclusion, The Evaluation of Social Services, The internship at Master of Science Programmes.

6. Innovation and future prespective for Social Work Education

Social work is difficult and challenging: it requires maturity and a high level of personal commitment. Social workers need to be open-minded and willing to analyze, perhaps change their attitudes and prejudices. They must have patience and determination. Despite the difficulties, the social work profession is extremely rewarding; offers good career-defined progress as well as interesting and varied work.

The Social Work program contains competencies that are transferable and usable in a range of cases and environments. Graduated students in Social Work (at all levels) can work in local and national administration, social services, psychosocial counselling, design and evaluation of social services, programs and policies, in the press and electronic media, in non-governmental organizations that focus on social and welfare issues, youth NGOs, international institutions in the country, public and private centers that provide services and support for children, women in need, the elderly, people with disabilities, individuals with disabilities mental health problems, with individuals with disabilities, in educational institutions, in health institutions, in justice institutions, in training centers, in human resources sectors, in community services, etc.

The mission of the First Level Diploma program in Social Work is to prepare students as general specialists in the field, with a special focus

on interpersonal practice, working with vulnerable groups, working in the community, working with organizations, drafting and evaluating social policies, through a curriculum that provides the basics of the social work profession. "A vision for social work graduates in 2025 QUALIFIED, valid and responsible to make POSITIVE CHANGE, contributing to the health, joy and well-being of individuals." Social workers help people overcome problems and also help them having control over their lives. They support people to deal with problems such as isolation, poverty, disease, disadvantage and various forms of discrimination. Their role is that of a professional who leads, advocates, and negotiates on behalf of and for service users and people in need. However, they often work with people who are in crisis situations; they have to make difficult decisions and intervene to prevent harm to vulnerable people.

Social workers work with individuals, families, groups and the community. They operate within a legal framework and in accordance with the professional standards that guide the practice of social work.

The groups that use the services most often are usually:

- Children and families in need;
- Individuals with mental health problems;
- Young people dropping out of school;
- Individuals with drug and alcohol problems;
- Individuals with disabilities;
- The elderly with health and social care needs.

Social work involves getting inside the lives of people who are under stress, conflict or trouble. To do this you need not only technical competence, but also quality such as: integrity, authenticity and self-awareness.

The discussion on personal and professional development should be placed in an ambiguous, demanding, complex and changing social work context. Recently the emphasis in vocational training and the achievement of special technical competencies in a culture that promotes market forces, consumerism and marginalization is on spending the fundamental aspects of social work which include:

- Concern about individuals and improving their lives and relationships;
- realization of social justice and eradication of poverty and discrimination;

- an integrative practice approach, where relationships, processes and outcomes are addressed;
- conducting collaborations involving users in the development of services in order to meet their needs;
- conducting the evaluation of the practice as a tool to develop it.

In particular, our motivation for social work, and our capacity to manage complexity, change, and uncertainty, includes both personal and professional development, and each has been discussed as necessary. There are three critical aspects of professional development: the use of supervision, articulation and promotion of good practice along with the development and evaluation of practice models and services.

6.1. Challenges of social work at the University of Elbasan

The Department of Social Sciences at the University of Elbasan has as a priority one of the biggest challenges that is the approximation of the university curriculum with the needs of the labor market. Ensuring the compatibility of education strategies, curricula and programs to respond to the demands of the labor market in social work.

There is a lack of labor market study to identify the needs of the Elbasan region, taking into account the dynamics of social developments, the dialectic of their changes.

Another challenge is the improvement of the university curriculum, a process which was launched within the T@sk project, reflecting on the improvement of references used by lecturers in teaching according to the models of our colleagues in European universities. Updating the curriculum and quality standards, in line with the best European standards.

The Department of Social Sciences aims to increase quality through improving teaching conditions in the coming academic years, applying new teaching methods, as well as increasing the capacity of online teaching technology through the Moodle platform, which was implemented and made accessible through the T@sk project.

In terms of research and innovation, EUROPA 2020 has designed to increase human capacity, improve research infrastructure, develop joint research projects with European universities and participate more

actively in European Union schemes for higher education, research and innovation. The Department of Social Sciences within the T@sk project is realizing this important point of the European vision but the challenge remains the qualification of the academic staff in professional trainings, conferences, scientific publications which are financially supported by university funds.

To hire well-qualified, particularly demanding social workers an important challenge needed is the creation of a program aimed at attracting young people to pursue doctoral studies in Social Work.

Providing a qualified infrastructure and other facilities that respond to the modernization of education and the improvement of student-centered services remains a challenge for the future of Social Work in Elbasan.

The University of Elbasan has been working for more than a year to build a strategy in building volunteer work as a norm among social work students, giving students the opportunity to develop volunteerism through cooperation with various governmental and non-governmental organizations, operating in the social field in the city of Elbasan. Volunteering can create leaders; through volunteering, Social Work students get to know parts of the community that they would not otherwise encounter, often pushing them to change careers to work in a field that serves the common good as well as social services.

6.2. Change management

In our personal and professional development, it is important to pay attention to how we manage change. Extremely, do we become resilient or ashamed of ourselves without thinking about the past? We need to analyze personal reactions because they will affect the way we react to customers who are experiencing changes, for example in relationships, addictions or even physically, the way we react to changes in an organization and the distribution of social work, and how open we are to new ideas, without giving up the knowledge and skills of the past.

Managing complexity, uncertainty and change is stressful, demanding and it is impossible to describe methods and techniques to succeed. What can help us? On a personal level, we need to be aware of our strengths

and weaknesses, the capacity to tolerate, to hold on to irrational feelings and reactions, and a discipline for self-critical reflection.

To do this we need specific courses, discussions with colleagues, looking for other cases and incidence, recording, reflection and evaluation and most importantly supervision.

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CHAPTER VII

"Social Work in Italy: Roots and Socio-cultural Context Ordine degli Assistenti Sociali della Regione Tuscany"

Raffaella Nurchis (1 and 3)
Laura Bini (2)
Eltona Tila (2)
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1.   The international dimension of social work

The history of the profession shows how the international dimension has ever been important to build its foundation.

The First International Conference of Social Work was held in Paris on July 1928; almost 2500 delegates attended from 42 countries took part to it. A significant segment of the Conference under the leadership of Alice Salomon focused on training for social work.

The conference led to the formation of three social work international associations:

- the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW);
- the International Conference on Social Welfare (ICSW);
- the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

The **International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)** initially comprised 51 schools, mostly in Europe, and was known as the International Committee. Revitalized after World War II, the organisation expanded its membership to include a wider range of countries and was renamed the International Association of Schools of Social Work. The association has member schools in all parts of the world: it includes

universities, universities of applied sciences, colleges, that is educational institutions after baccalaureates.

The association supports social work education and social work educators, promotes excellence in teaching, research and learning and develops standards to enhance the quality of social work education; it encourages international exchange and promotes human rights and social development through policy and advocacy activities. Since 1947 IASSW holds consultative status with the United Nations; it participates as an NGO in UN activities in Geneva, Vienna and New York.

The **International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)** includes public and private organisations from more than 70 countries committed to improving human well-being. ICSW operates in a wide range of fields within the general areas of social welfare. Key objectives of ICSW is fighting poverty, inequality and marginalization. It undertakes research and organises consultations to help analyse problems and develop policies.

The **International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)** comprises 141 professional social work associations of five regions representing over 3 million social workers. The organisation's mission is to strive for social justice, human rights and social development through the promotion of social work, best practice models and the facilitation of international cooperation. IFSW has formal consultative status with the United Nations and other global bodies.

In 1983 the member organisations of the International Federation of Social Workers launched the initiative of celebrating a World Social Workday, in order to raise the visibility of social services and to defend social justice and human rights. Later other social work organisations, such as the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), have joined as partners to the event. The World Social Workday is celebrated every third Tuesday of March. Theme of the 2020 World Social Workday was "promoting the Importance of Human Relationships".

IASSW and IFSW have adopted three important documents:

- a revised *Global Definition of Social Work* (adopted on July 2014);
- a Declaration of Ethical Principles for Social Work (the *Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles*, adopted on 5th July 2018 in Dublin, Ireland);
- the *Global Standards for Education and Training of the Social*

Work Profession (adopted in 2004 in Adelaide, Australia). On 18th March 2019 IFSW and IASSW have initiated a joint process of reviewing and updating the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training.

Based on the decisions reached at the Hong Kong conference in 2010, IFSW, ICSW and IASSW developed the 2010 to 2020 Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development to enable social workers to make a stronger contribution to policy development. The Global Agenda gave educators and practitioners an opportunity to reflect on challenges of social work education and the profession global and locally, in their respective countries. The three international bodies committed to working together with the United Nations to address the crucial problems perpetuating poverty, inequality and unsustainable human environments. A consultation process was launched in 2018 to develop the 2020 to 2030 Global Agenda themes.

In 2007 the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) was born. It brings together over 300 different schools, universities and tertiary education institutions supporting social work education. Its goal is to promote social development and high-quality education, training and knowledge for social work practice, social services and social welfare policies in Europe.

2. The relationship between University and profession

The relationship between university and profession gets its foundation in the "Global definition of Social Work" of 2014: "Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people".

In Italy, the new Code of ethics entered in force on 1st June 2020, assuming the international definition, in Title II - General principles of the profession art. 4 states:

"The exercise of the profession is based on ethical and scientific foundations, on academic discipline, on practice, on technical-professional autonomy and on independence of judgment"(Filippini, 2020).

The professions that are characterized by high relational content require the development of personal and situational skills that can only be developed in the relationship between university and profession. This relationship takes several forms and each of them needs to be systematized and strengthened.

Regarding to social service, Dal Pra (1988) summarizes the concept with the well-known equation "theory praxis theory" that indicates the necessary and constant connection between the place of theorizing, the University, and the place of practice, the exercise of the profession.

It is undeniable that the beginnings of social service are characterized by "doing" closely related to voluntary activity essentially declined to women (Dellavalle, 2008). For a long time, the social worker has been defined as a semi-profession because it lacked theoretical-scientific references that could guide the behaviour of the social workers.

The history of social work clarifies the origins of social work in philanthropic activity and traces the path of reaching the status of "profession" which was affirmed by Hughes on 1958 and by Wilensky (1960) for having matured the various phases.

In Italy the birth of the Social Worker profession pursued an inverse course respect to the Anglo-Saxon countries, where first took place the operational practice then the training centres appeared. In our country there were not the institutions that provided welfare interventions to need to qualify their staff, but there were the social service schools, established between 1945 and 1948, that promoted the profession.

In that period the relationship with the universities did not exist. The teaching was centred on documents provided by the International Aid Association that had a strong American influence and above all it was centred on casework. The only element of homogeneity in all schools was the presence of internships contemporary to theoretical training.

For a long time, the relationship between the profession and university was reduced to a minimum, producing in social workers the representation of a clear separation between what they learned during their studies and what was necessary to carry out the profession. (Grisolia, 2014). For

the analysis of this phenomenon it is necessary to refer to the academic marginality, the lack of recognition of the profession of social work, that occurred only in 1993, and the total lack of studies and research in the field of social work capable to provide to social workers a corpus of knowledge suitable to the exercise of the profession.

Currently the relationship has been developing even though, in many situations, it still does not find adequate ways of carrying it out. The establishment of bachelor's degree and master's degree courses and some, unfortunately insufficient, research doctorates have permitted more expertise, research opportunities and access to a university career. However, it is necessary to specify that the Italian context presents some important differences particularly between the universities of north, centre and south. While in the North almost all degree programs have social workers incorporated in the academic staff, in the South and in Centre this is an unusual opportunity.

To complete this first reflection on university training and the presence of social workers in the academic structure, it is necessary to clarify that the social service degree has not obtained, despite the important pressures, the recognition of the disciplinary grouping that is necessary to have social service teachers. Social workers, structured teachers, are framed in the various disciplinary groups of sociology, psychology, etc. creating many difficulties for their specific recognition and allowing teachers of other specialties to access the teaching of social work disciplines.

In many universities the situation is very varied with contracted social workers exclusively for teaching hours to whom are not recognized all other activities such as reception, thesis, etc. strictly related to teaching.

Up to this point, we have examined the importance of the qualification and of the social workers within the academy, as essential elements for the activation and definition of the quality of the relationship covered by this paragraph.

In Italy, a bachelor's and/or master's degree, as for all professions, does not constitute a qualifying title for exercising the profession but it is required to pass the State exams for the enrolment in the Professional Register, mandatory for exercising the profession. The examining commissions are constituted by university professors, nominated by the universities, and social workers indicated by the professional Body

as evidence of the close relationship between university and profession.

At that time, the intertwining between university professors and representatives of social workers is established for the assessment of the suitability of candidates to carry out the profession.

At this moment, however, the relationship between university and profession has its core in the "curricular" internship and begins during the course of study: the internship is compulsory for the achievement of a bachelor's and master's degree in social work according to all university reform laws and the law of the Order establishment. This provision supports an essential relationship, which is furthermore declined contextually in the different realities. There are experiences of intense exchanges in which service institutions and universities maintain conventional relationships of mutual recognition not only for the organization and execution of internships, for the participation in the evaluation commissions of the internships but also in many realities for the realization of research and specialist training.

The internship project preconcerted on the basis of the dialogue between university, supervisor and, not least, the organization of the institution, is one of the most significant phases for mutual knowledge and possible collaboration in other moments of the academic course.

The internship is characterized by the involvement of three systems: the university, the organization and the professional community. All the actors are called to collaborate to ensure the traineeship student an experience that allows them to assume a professional identity and practice themselves in the relationship with people and with the organization.

Regarding the trainee, the most significant process related to the assumption of professional identity is the contextualization of the knowledge acquired in the university environment, combined with the experiential knowledge of the social worker and the skills regarding the functioning of the organization. The internship is defined as situated training (Tognetti, 2015) during which the apprehending of tacit and implicit knowledge, typical of relational professions, is central and it can be tried out only through "practice".

If the university education is not oriented at knowing how to do but at knowing how to read, analyse, understand and evaluate from a theoretical perspective, the professional knowledge is conceived as a complex of

knowledge to be used to make sense and intervene on problems" (Gilardi S. and Kaneklin C., 2006: 61) and not as a reproductive of itself.

The "returning" to the training centre, continuing the reflection started with the supervisor social worker, can increase the ability to analyse contexts and make the internship experience fruitful. The trainee student has a strategic importance in constructing relationships because he moves between two systems that will inevitably be forced to relate. The quality of this relationship, however, is influenced by the representations of one's function both from the academic world and the professional community regarding to the "knowledge" and "skills" required for the exercise of the profession. The professional knowledge appears, in particular in social work, as a complex knowledge, rather than a synthesis one, because its goal is to intervene on processes of social inclusion/exclusion that, by definition, influence in a circular manner multiple dimensions of the person and of the social – cultural and historical context.

The Professional Order represents a further link between the professional community and the academic world. The Professional Order has the purpose of ensuring the exercise of the profession by adequately trained operators and to ensure their continuous training in order to offer people social services according to the best standards of knowledge in the sector.

The collaboration with universities becomes essential to ensure quality training for social workers. At the same time, the relationship with the professional community offers to the degree courses the opportunity to carry out social service research in the professional and organizational fields without which the educational offer of degree courses would be obsolete and largely overcome by social changes.

The concept is clearer when confronted with the healthcare professions: the clinic is closely linked to the research in an essential and fruitful relationship for both. This axiom still seems little acquired due to the self-referential approach of the various actors who do not feel the need to be contaminated by the knowledge and the production of knowledge in the social and socio-welfare fields.

In conclusion, it is significant to point out the two organizations that have succeeded each other over time: A.I.ᴅᴏ.S.S. (Italian Association of Social Service Teachers) and SoC.I. ss. (Italian Society of Social Service)

that are considered as a reference for teaching social workers and oriented to the development of research for social service.

3. Ethics and deontology in Social Work

Ethics is a branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and goals of these actions.

Professional ethics focuses on the conduct and responsibilities of people in professional roles; it "covers topics relating to how professionals should act in relation to service users and others (such as how much autonomy professionals should have or give or how they should distribute their resources of time and money) and what kinds of people professionals ought to be (honest, trustworthy, reliable, compassionate)" (Banks, 2004:11). Professional ethics refers to the principles and values that guide the professional's action. In the current social work literature three clusters of complex values can be identified (Banks, 2012):

- *Respect for the dignity and worth of all human beings* – The obligation to treat all people as equally valuable and as whole persons, with respect for diversity, promoting the right of participation and of self- determination;
- *Promotion of welfare or wellbeing,* with attention to the needs and empowerment of vulnerable people;
- *Promotion of social justice* challenging unjust policies and practices, trying to remove damaging inequalities between people and groups and to promote social change.

In the context of most professions, ethics has been declined in **deontology,** from the Greek *déon-ontos* "what should be done" and *logos* "speech": it is the set of ethically based duties and rules of behaviour that engage a profession and its professionals towards society and the people with whom they enter into a relationship.

Social workers are increasingly faced with problems related to the ethical dimension of professional action. Ethical reflection accompanies and goes through the methodological process. Professionals involved in

working with people and in managing intervention processes often ask themselves, not only with regard to practical issues.

In everyday social work practice arise ethical difficulties. Considering the form of ethical challenges Sarah Banks makes a distinction between ethical issues, problems and dilemmas (Banks, 2012):

- *Ethical issues* – pervade social work which is guided by the principles of respect, dignity, self empowerment, freedom of the person, social justice and public good;
- *Ethical problems* – arise when a social worker must make a difficult ethical decision, but it is clear about the right course of action. For example, the social worker should reject the application of a needy person because this person does not fit the criteria;
- *Ethical dilemmas* – occur when a social worker faces a choice between two equally unwelcome alternatives, which may involve a conflict of ethical values, and it is not clear which choice will be the right one. Ethical complexity lies primarily in having to make a decision "without certainty of the results"; secondly the difficulty lies in the responsibility arising from the professional choice for the social worker and for the person (Pieroni, 2013). For example, in all cases where the institutional mandate conflicts with the professional one. The case of a dependent elderly person who wishes to remain at home despite the request of his daughter (with a disabled son) to place him in a retirement home could be a good illustration of an ethical dilemma.

Ethical issues have a historical-cultural dimension and can change according to cultures and societies. The professionals have to face the inherent ambiguities and ethical problems and dilemmas through reflexive practices and methodologically based processes oriented to ethical results. They could be able to see ethical problems and dilemmas as a resource to improve one's professional competence, avoiding to give simple and linear answers to complex problems. Professionals have also to keep abreast of evolution of the ethical dimension of the profession in relation of social, cultural and political developments.

On the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the following international declarations and conventions and on the basis

of the statement of ethical principles of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (2004, 2018) many countries have developed ethical codes. They are generally written and controlled by professional or regulatory bodies. They identify the core purpose of the profession, its values and ethical principles. Codes of ethics may be used in disciplinary hearings in cases of complaints against social workers. Their aims are:

- to guide professionals' conduct;
- to protect persons (by laying down expectations for ethical conduct and by defining how the professional's power should be correctly used);
- to define professional boundaries and reinforce professional identity and status.

In Italy the first Code of ethics was adopted by the National Council of the Order of Social Workers in 1998 and has been reviewed in 2002, 2009 and in 2020. The Code of Ethics consists of the principles and norms that social workers must know, observe and contribute to spread. As stated in the preamble, the Code defines the limits of the proper professional exercise and is intended to guide professional behaviours towards high standards of ethical practice. Main theme of the Code is the responsibility of the professional that is declined around five areas: towards the person, society, colleagues and other professionals, the organization, the profession. The latest Code no longer uses the term user/customer referring to those who address social workers, both replaced by the word "person".

4. The professional autonomy in the exercise of the profession

To comprehend the meaning that conceptually the expression *professional autonomy* assumes, above all in the exercise of the profession, it is necessary to first consider the actual working configuration of Italian social workers.

These professionals are inserted in a multiplicity of organizational contexts, public and private, but from the data detectable from National Council of the Order of Social Workers' database, it emerges that from

the 43,237 Italian social workers, the most part, 45.7%, is still included in public administrations (State, local authorities and their consortia) or in bodies related to these institutional contexts (associations, foundations ecc), an increasing number of professionals perform tasks within and on behalf of bodies, mainly belonging to the third sector but also operating as private bodies, that however operate for public service bodies. This reality means that the social workers have to work not only according to their deontology, but also according to the rules of the dependent work and, most of them, according to the rules of the public service.

We can therefore argue that the autonomy of the social worker is connected and conditioned by the two mandates that we can recall as a guide for the professional action: *the institutional mandate*, such as goals, functions and methods of intervention towards people with specific difficulties to face, identified and indicated by laws, the national and regional ones, and by regulatory acts of the body/service and *the professional mandate* that derives from the ethical-deontological and methodological contents of the profession.

These two mandates are both governed by rules, that have a different binding power: the professional one is governed by ethical rules that refer only to social workers (known as domestic law), the institutional one is regulated by laws that, being for all citizens, have an enhanced binding power towards the deontological ones.

4.1. The reference legislation

The legal legitimacy of the autonomy of the social worker is based on law no. 84 of 23 March 1993, "*Organization of the profession of social worker and establishment of the professional register*", which in the 1st paragraph of art. 1 states: "*The social worker operates with technical-professional autonomy and judgment during all phases of the intervention for prevention, support and recovery of people, families, groups and communities in situations of need and hardship*". In the 4th paragraph of the same article, moreover, it states that "*In collaboration with the judicial authority, the activity of the social worker has an exclusively technical-professional function*", to underline that can't be any derogation of the principle of autonomy of

the professional practice, even in those institutional contexts where there is a high degree of directivity, such as in cases of collaboration between social service and judicial authority.

The dictation of this article means that the professional *assumes the technical-professional responsibility* regarding to the procedures relating to the persons/clients assigned to him, and that there must be no interference on the procedural aspects and on the operational process of conducting the case, as well as on professional technical evaluation and on project hypothesis (Amadei, 2002: 119-139).

The law of 7 August 1990, n. 241, *New rules on administrative procedure and right of access to administrative documents (coordinated and updated to 2017)*, is another important one for understanding the area of competence and autonomy of the social worker who has to carry out a service process. The operational action of the social worker, as a professional in the Public Administration, takes on the double role of professional and administrative procedure. To realize the space of autonomy of the social worker, particularly explicative is the dictation of article 6 of Law 241/1990, that identifies the duties of the responsible of the administrative procedure who has the responsibility to ascertain the facts and the preliminary accountability, set in examination and consultative phases, during which the decision-maker acquires a technical opinion. In these phases, the mentioned article attributes to the (technical) professional a wide decision-making power, entrusting to the responsible the task of identifying the most suitable means of investigation for ascertaining the facts, such as we talk of the true dominus of the procedural phases (Chieppa, 2013: 969). In this regard, therefore, the social worker as the responsible of the procedure has the responsibility for the decisions regarding the ascertainment phase (how and what to detect, which data and significant sources, etc.) and the evaluation (the arguments that support it) and also for reflecting the views requested by the decision makers responsible for the final decision.

4.2. The limits of the autonomy of the social worker

The autonomy of the social worker is limited by the regulatory and organizational structure and dimension of the service contexts where it is placed, that *have the power to decide* on the aspects of organization, on the allocation of financial and instrumental resources, on the management of human resources, on the identification and assignment of areas of competence and assignment of tasks, on administrative technical control for the purpose of *verifying the correspondence of the interventions of individual operators to the rules, the procedures dictated by law and regulations and, in general, their compliance with the institutional purposes of the entity itself* (Bini, Pieroni and Rollino, 2017: 20). The institution has also the decision-making responsibility, especially regarding the economic charges (for instance for decisions on the allocation of the resources relating to projects with costs that the professionals identify). The decision-making power can also belong to other institutions, for example the judiciary (juvenile court, supervisory court, ordinary court…). Of course, having clarified the space of autonomy of the institutions and services where social workers operate, it must be recognized that *the work of social workers is studded by decisions to be made* (Bertotti, 2016: 15), concerning different areas and issues that *regard to the choices of the adequacy of interventions and their ability to respond effectively to the needs and requirements of the persons, as well as the choices of specific professional actions to be implemented and their chances of success and feasibility* (*ibid*) . Reflecting on another dimension of professional competence related to autonomy, it is also important to highlight that *one of the essential features forming the basis of the autonomy is precisely the ability of the professionals to translate in professional choices/decisions their knowledge and skills, their ability to know contingent situations* (Fargion, 2016: 12).

5. Political, Educational, Cultural and Socio-organizational Recommendations

It is a significant task trying to sum up in a few words all political, educational, cultural and socio-organizational recommendations that should be fulfilled to improve the Italian welfare system. In Italy, the social security system, including pensions and unemployment measures, is strongly based on labour conditions (corporative system). The health system is ruled by a limited universalism; while social policies are residual and discretional, except for the new national minimum income scheme; while household policies are almost absent. Besides internal deficiencies that affect the Italian system, there is a more general path – especially since the Financial Crisis of 2008/2009 – of deep change in all the European welfare systems (Hemerijck 2013, Pavolini and Ranci, 2015). These have attempted to cope with inherent tensions and contradictions by cutting funds (*retrenchment*) and re-thinking needs and supply mix (*recalibration*). In terms of social policies, in Italy reform since 2009 has been principally oriented to retrenchment (Pavolini *et al.*, 2015), with a strong negative impact on local social services. In 2017 there was a partial turnabout by finally introducing and financing a "minimum income" scheme, still insufficient to fully cover basic needs of families. Problems are not limited to lack of funds and staff; in 2000 a significant national social reform was approved that has never been fully implemented, by defining, for example, the minimum set of social services and interventions to be guaranteed all throughout the country. In 2001 a constitutional reform occurred, switching responsibility of social assistance to the regional government, disempowering the general reform of the previous year. Consequently, there is currently a disjointed, unequal and unfair set of regional social systems. This is before we come to the biggest health crisis since the Second World War which, by strongly impacting on social services, will probably deeply change welfare systems.

Starting by adequate funding policies and providing sufficient staff in social services, perhaps the second most important recommendation is clearly defining national social LIVEAS (basic level of assistance to be guaranteed in every region), to set social rights as subjective rights by the force of law all throughout the country. Also required is a strong

organizational reform to integrate and coordinate different sets of public interventions (social, education, work, household, health) in the same families. Despite all guidelines and law, different public services continue to work separately when it comes to the same family, undermining significantly the efficacy of interventions. There are a lot of other suggestions that could be provided, including: changing and financing homeless policies, based on the emergency and ineffective approach instead of on a serious housing policy; improving the system of child protection, affected by numerous breaches, included low specialization of social operators and insufficient help for families; expanding public services for the so called "care leavers[44]" up to their complete independence; tackling the problem of Neet (young people neither in employment, education nor training), a widespread problem not seriously addressed; improving homecare for elder people; developing new models of intervention for new problems, such as "hikikomori"; improving anti-poverty measures, especially helping families with minors – in 2019 1.2 million children were in a condition of absolute poverty (Istat 2020) – and funding zero-to-three-year policies in order to block from the start the chain of disadvantage transmission; developing more structured co-housing policies, especially for the most vulnerable; rethinking migrant policies, definitively abandoning the "emergency approach" of recent years to fully integrate every migrant into the Italian system, not only as labor force but as a person. These are only some of the numerous recommendations that could be provided; but there are three of them it is worth expanding on.

5.1. Developing Partnerships between Universities and Social Services

In terms of the current university system, it is not possible in Italy to carry on a post-doctoral research career while working in social services. This forces social workers to choose between an academic career (research fellowship) and social work, artificially parting two paths that should

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44 Young people who grow up in social services need to be provided with a strong set of public support when they become adults.

instead be mutually beneficial. A recommendation is trying to develop structured formal collaborations between local universities and private and public social services to integrate fieldwork, research and training.

5.2. Building Community Welfare

The last decades have seen a deep change in Western societies, with a strong weakening of familiar and social bonds and consequent isolation of growing parts of the population, and a widespread vulnerability and poverty risk amongst the middle classes (Mazzoli, 2013). Meanwhile, cuts have forced social services to become much more targeted and residual than usual (Gori, 2018) in the opposite direction of changing social needs. Social services need to be reconsidered, abandoning the emergency and residual approach largely adopted in favour of a new role of promotion and empowering local communities, building new social bonds, stimulating internal resources of groups, developing community links: put simply, "leaving the office" to work directly with people and local contexts.

5.3. Spreading an Anti-oppressive Approach

The final recommendation, and perhaps the most important one, concerns the political involvement of social workers and the adoption of a so-called "anti-oppressive approach". Social workers deal with problems that are consequences of the imbalances of neoliberalism; limiting social interventions to the private sphere of families means colluding with this oppressive system that denies growing parts of population the right to a decent life (Baines, 2017). We need to develop a cultural and critical approach that takes into consideration the imbalance of power among people (Dominelli, 2002), aiming to rebuild a fair society free from every kind of oppression: gender, class, race, etc. Adopting an anti-oppressive approach means practicing a set of active instruments such as: advocacy, social movements, political activism, mass-actions, social research, workplace resistance, education and training, increasing colleagues and users' political awareness, adopting care-programs based on a social justice

oriented approach. In Italy this approach has not been widely adopted, meaning that the political organization of social workers is practically absent. Moreover, the last edition (2020) of social workers official "Deontological Code" substantially removes any political duty of social workers towards society, removing the weak recalls of the previous Code.

What is required instead is a movement towards the political involvement of social workers, in the awareness that it is not possible to practice "good social work" in a deeply imbalanced system that shapes social work culture and labour organization practices too in opposition to ethics and deontology. Not only must families be supported but societies changed, removing the causes of social disadvantage at the roots. In Donna Baines' words, "t is not enough to be highly skilled and professional, dealing efficiently with immediate problems, as compelling as they may seem. We should be passionate about the need for social justice and work continuously to provide a full range of caring interventions; continuously develop new, radical, liberatory therapies; draw on alternative knowledge bases that dislodge oppression; and at the same time, advocate, agitate, and organize in order to fundamentally challenge the forces that generate and benefit from the pain and oppression we address every day in social work practice.

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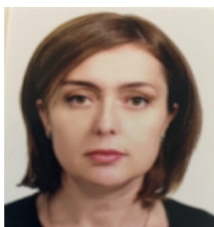
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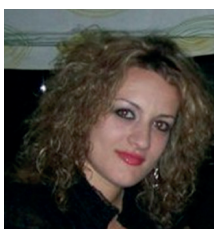
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