Toward Active Welfare. The Development of Social Work and Community Work in Poland and Europe

edited by
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Marek Rymsza

Activation services. Poland and Europe

The trend towards activation in European social policy. Two waves of reforms

For about two decades now, the activation approach has been a key trend in the reconstruction of welfare states in Europe. The late 1990s marked the first wave of interest in the problem of social exclusion (see Littlewood et al. eds. 2000) and in the concept of active social policy, perceived as a way of solving this problem (Van Berkel, Møller eds. 2002). Activation programmes developed under The European Employment Strategy (see Pascual ed. 2004) brought a renaissance of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) and social entrepreneurship (primarily in the WISE format, i.e. as work integration social enterprises). At the same time, the principle of empowerment, with its emphasis on the agency of the client (arising out of the practical experiences of social work), gained importance in social policy. The concept of conditional support also rose to prominence, adopted – somewhat reluctantly – from the American notion of *workfare* (Lødemel, Trickey eds. 2000; Handler 2004).

A decade later, the second generation of activation programmes took the stage. Their implementation continues today. These second-wave programmes are more technocratic in nature. They tend to marginalise the principle of empowerment in favour of techniques designed to mobilise clients to work ('activate' them). In sociological terms, these efforts constitute a form of social control (a modern approach to managing the 'underclass') rather than social assistance. Activation services promote an individualised approach, advocating 'tailor-made services' (Van Berkel, Valkenburg

eds. 2007). Yet in practice, this is usually reflected in profiling services for specific categories of clients (youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, lone mothers, etc.) rather than specific persons. Programmes of this type are currently predominant in activation policies of numerous states, despite the historical differences in their social policy models. They are present in Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, and even France (though the similarities are fewer in the case of the latter).[1]

[1] For an analysis of the first and second wave of activation policies in Europe, see: Moreira, Lødemel 2012, and also Moreira 2008.

Compared to Western Europe, Poland's experience is quite unique. In the 1990s, while the 15 'old' EU member states implemented activation programmes of the first wave, Poland was undergoing a shock therapy, rapidly steering away from a centrally-managed economy with its protective social policies. The omnipresent regulations of the socialist state (with regulated prices, wages, and production levels) were being replaced by redistributive social programmes which not only failed to activate the target clients, but actually served to de-activate them. These redistributive programmes were designed as instruments of conversion. The idea behind them was to convert the hidden unemployment that had pervaded the centrally-managed economy, where productivity was hardly a concern, into overt unemployment. The conversion was perceived as a prerequisite for a deep restructuring of the business sector (Rymsza 2013a). After the transformation, the modernized economy was supposed to absorb the labour surplus. Yet the belief that the 'invisible hand' of the free market would work to promote employment was naïve. Unemployment skyrocketed, even after the economy was declared 'healthy'. It became evident that the people who had suffered as a result of the reforms would face immense problems returning to the labour market without the support of social services. This was the thinking behind the activation approach, which gained favour in Poland just before the EU accession. The legal and institutional framework of activation policies was created in 2003-2006 (Rymsza 2013a)[2], on the basis of Western experiences with the first wave of activation programmes.

[2] For a more detailed review of the 2003-2006 reform, see: M. Rymsza 2013b, Chapter 6.

A comparison of Polish and Western solutions is quite educational. A comparative analysis demonstrates that Poland is one stage behind, which corresponds to approximately a decade. Poland implemented

first-wave activation policies at roughly the same time as the 15 'old' EU states started working with second-wave programmes. For Poland, this is not necessarily a weakness and a delay. The situation brings opportunities to learn from Western experiences and to avoid the pitfalls of today's integration programmes (especially with regard to professional integration) in Germany, the Netherlands, and France (Karwacki, Kaźmierczak, Rymsza 2013).

Toward Active Welfare. The Development of Social Work and Community Work in Poland and Europe is founded on precisely this idea. However, before I address the structure and content of the book, a short introduction outlining the Polish path to active social policy is in order.

Activation services in Poland. A decade of systemic change

Generally, Poland's system of activation services was established in 2003-2006, yet one element of the system had at that time already been in existence for a decade: namely, social and vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. In 1991, in order to lay a foundation for the restructuring of work cooperatives employing such persons (*spółdzielnie inwalidzkie*) and to ensure continued existence of workplaces designated for them, a special fund was established. It was named State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych – PFRON). The money in the fund was collected via mandatory contributions from employers who were active on the general labour market[3]. PFRON funded a network of occupational therapy workshops and of supported employment institutions, both new and converted from the previously operating cooperatives for persons with disabilities. Ten years later, the system was expanded to also include vocational rehabilitation facilities. These institutions comprise the sector of occupational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. Its underlying principle is that employment takes place under protective conditions, where vocational activation is

[3] For an overview of how the PFRON system operates, see: Golinowska 2004.

supplemented with elements of medical and (to a lesser degree) social rehabilitation.

In the period 2003-2006, a new sector was created, running somewhat parallel to the PFRON system: a sector of social employment. It is comprised of social integration centres (*centra integracji społecznej* – CIS), social integration clubs (*kluby integracji społecznej* – KIS), and social cooperatives. These institutions offer support to a broader range of clients whose backgrounds place them at risk of social exclusion. This group includes persons with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, former inmates, and persons with mental health problems (Piątek 2003). While social cooperatives fit squarely into the WISE paradigm, and operate on the market as such, the institutional position of CIS and KIS is unclear. They are located at the crossroads of the social welfare system and the labour market, with the clubs aligned closer to the social welfare end of the spectrum, and the centres closer to the labour market.

Three types of institutions appear to be central to the Polish system of social and vocational integration: social integration centres, social integration clubs, and vocational rehabilitation facilities (*zakłady aktywności zawodowej* – ZAZ). The Polish system of activation services is characterised by its elements being spread over quite a broad spectrum. The key task, therefore, consists in the integration of reintegration (Rymsza 2013b, Chapter 7). Perhaps surprisingly, the position of public employment services is rather marginal in this system. These services have not yet been professionalised, and they operate along similar lines as their equivalents did in Germany and in Great Britain before the activation reforms, i.e. as employment offices that routinely serve the unemployed, and not as job centres with a focus on activation services. However, the Polish model of reintegration has strong points too. For example, professional staff representing a variety of helping professions work together in the social integration centres, and their cooperation, while less prominent, is also in effect in social integration clubs and vocational rehabilitation facilities.

In 2004, as a new statute on social services was enacted, social services were redirected towards a conditional support approach, and towards activation services. The key tool in social work of this

type is an activation contract concluded with the individual to whom social services are offered. Unfortunately, no regulatory instruments have been provided to animate and activate the marginalized local communities. Social work with local communities is only undertaken in very few social services centres. An attempt to change this situation by means of promoting community work was the core component of the project within which this book has been written.

Polish solutions, European experiences. Contents of this book

This book comprises expert analyses compiled as part of the project entitled 'Creation and development of standards in social services and social integration'. The project was carried out by analysts affiliated with two NGOs: Centre for Supporting Local Activity CAL Association (*Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL* – CAL Association) and the Institute of Public Affairs Foundation (*Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych* – FISP). CAL Association has been promoting community work in Poland since 1992, while FISP is a think-tank, focused on research and analysis. Experts from both these institutions cooperated closely for a period of almost 5 years (2010-2014), jointly creating the Laboratory of Social Innovation (*Laboratorium Innowacji Społecznej* – LIS). The project's objective was to develop a model of local community organizing, relying on the experiences gathered in other states, but also taking into account Polish traditions of community work, as well as the contemporary Polish realities. This model served as a foundation for an educational program for social workers employed by social welfare centres (*ośrodki pomocy społecznej* – OPS) at the level of municipality (*gmina*), i.e. the lowest level of administrative division of Poland. Currently (middle of 2014), an effort is underway to draft new legal regulations on the functioning of social services, based on model testing and the results of the educational program.

It was the intention of the experts at LIS to study and present in a broad perspective the institutional changes in the Polish welfare state, particularly in the area of social services. Therefore, we

considered it of the utmost importance to study and understand the evolution of social policy issues in Poland, and to reconstruct the European social model. We decided to base our implementation efforts on the general concept of activation services, which in the social services discourse tends to be labelled 'active integration'. Our approach is an attempt to combine two directions of changes: (1) moving from 'passive' social protection towards activation, and (2) moving from casework with individuals towards actively supporting families and local communities.

This approach is reflected in the structure and content of this book. The book opens with an introduction, followed by three key parts, with a separate final paper. The structure of the book follows a narrow-down approach. It begins with general European considerations, with a focus on the concepts underpinning the European active social policy reforms in the last two decades, and an emphasis on social welfare and social services. The second level of analysis comprises considerations on the construction of the social services system in post-1989 Poland, and an evaluation of the functioning of Polish social services in the active social policy perspective. The third level of analysis is a review of the accomplishments of LIS with regard to promotion of community work. The projects carried out by LIS are presented against a broader background of social policy reforms in Europe and in Poland. It is our hope that this structure makes the book more accessible and more attractive to a reader from outside of Poland. The first part focuses on the development of activation services in selected EU countries: the Netherlands, France, and Germany. In each of these states, major reforms had been introduced in the area of social services. Their focus was on redirecting social assistance clients, including the long-term unemployed, towards self-sufficiency. In these three papers, the activation services are discussed with a strong focus on welfare, social services, and social work.

Rik van Berkel (*Activation in the context of social policy, governance, and frontline work reforms. A case study of Dutch Social Assistance*) demonstrates the evolution of the social services system in the Netherlands, with emphasis on the establishment,

organization, and management of activation services. The analysis focuses on the decentralisation of the public system of social services and contracting out, with its resulting commercialization of service providers (the contracted-out services were generally taken over by private for-profit agencies).

Rik van Berkel's paper outlines the limits of commercialization of social services. The author notes that the negative side effects of commercialization in the Netherlands resulted in re-instatement of the option for public service institutions to offer their own activation services. The significance of this is immense and raises a fundamental question: can programmes based on free-market principles be effective in eliminating what is, essentially, a side effect of the implementation of those very same free-market principles? Or should such programmes maybe, for this reason, operate (at least in part) under other principles? If the traditional principles of public administration are not suitable, maybe not-for-profit NGOs can offer a good model.

An observant reader will notice in van Berkel's text yet another aspect of the fundamental problem. Van Berkel explains that the reforms of social services in the Netherlands were rooted in the concept of new public management. In its essence, this concept applies the commercial management models to operation of public programmes. If we look beyond the Dutch context, it is important to note that the new public management approach is at odds, to a certain extent, with the concept of governance. Within the governance paradigm, the focus is on democratization of public sphere management, social participation, and partnership working, and the idea is based on lateral ties rather than on hierarchical subordination (see *New social demands* 2002). Can governance be promoted if new public management principles are applied in activation services?[4]

Ewa Bacia (*Mediation in social work in France*) provides a review of the French model of social services organization (see also Bacia 2013). A unique feature of the French system is the prominence of mediation, interpreted very broadly and not just in the context of professional support for conflict resolution. Understanding mediation as a crucial element of social work, and essentially as a 'helping profession', is necessary to properly

[4] It should be noted that this is exactly how the programs that absorb the funding provided by the European Social Fund operate: declaratively, they promote inter-sectoral partnerships and public participation, but when it comes to the formal requirements related to project management and reporting, they rely on the new public management mindset. Changing this situation is, I believe, the crucial challenge of the new EU financial framework 2014-2020.

grasp the French approach to activation (literally referred to as 'insertion'). Occupational activation is perceived in France as an element of social inclusion (insertion – see Barbier 2004), while in the Netherlands and in Germany, social reintegration is perceived as a component of restoring employability. It is thus treated more instrumentally. The French solutions have had a strong impact on our team at LIS, because in the local community organization model we attach great importance to networking, i.e. to the idea of forming strong lateral networks of communication and cooperation. Understood within these parameters, this approach is close to the concept of 'deep' mediation.

Wioletta Szymczak (*Active social policy approach in German social services after Peter Hartz's reforms*) discusses the German experiences with activation of the long-term unemployed by both social service institutions and labour market institutions. The text stands out among other comparative analyses of Hartz's four reforms in that it gives strong consideration to the issues of social work (where most papers focus on employment services – see for example: Jacobi, Mohr 2007). Szymczak's text also provides a critique, with a discussion of both strengths and weaknesses of the reforms. Notably, the reforms had been pursued by the public administration and supported by a broad alliance of various political actors, but public opinion in Germany perceived them as controversial, and social organizations were reluctant to embrace them.

The Dutch, French, and German solutions provide a good springboard for a discussion of similarly oriented but differently structured Polish post-1989 solutions, which are the analysed in the second part of the book.

The second part (*Social welfare and social work in Poland after 1989*) is comprised of texts that map the development of welfare services and social services in post-1989 Poland. The following issues are reviewed: the underlying assumptions of the first (1990) and second (2004) statutes regulating the delivery of welfare and social work; the notions governing the development of social services; and the construction of a decentralised safety net system. The shift from a protective approach to an activation approach, which is characteristic for the second decade of Poland's

political transformation, has been presented, along with its operationalization – in terms of implementation of active social policy – in the area of welfare and social integration.

Marta Kozak (*Development of the social services in Poland after 1989. A practical perspective*) reconstructs and analyses the process of the establishment of a welfare system in post-1989 Poland, along with the concept of the professionalization of social services that had guided that process. Kozak points to the tensions resulting from the divergence between state policies in terms of institutional solutions and the solutions implemented in the system of education. The paper offers a good insight into the circumstances that accompanied the changes in the functioning of the welfare system that have been implemented since 2003, rooted in the activation approach.

The two texts that follow discuss the results of the research project conducted by Instytut Spraw Publicznych in 2010 on a representative sample of Polish social workers. **Marek Rymsza** (*Social work in the Polish welfare system: between bureaucratization and professionalization*) offers an overview of the concepts that informed the project, and of its results (Rymsza ed. 2011; Rymsza ed. 2012). The paper analyses the approach of social workers to their profession, with a particular emphasis on social work. The focus is on the professional identity of social workers, spanning the spectrum from (1) a clerk in the welfare system, to (2) a social worker, i.e. a representative of a key helping profession. The sample is divided into three: social workers employed in welfare centres (OPS) at the level of *gmina*; social workers employed in family assistance centres (PCPR) at the level of *powiat* (the middle level of Poland's administrative division) – that is, the core personnel of Polish social services; and social workers from the staff of a variety of specialist facilities (specialist assistance institutions) located at the fringes of the public welfare system. These include homeless shelters, community-based self-help centres (daytime care facilities which support persons with mental or intellectual disability), and social integration centres (CIS), which operate activation programmes (called in Poland as social and vocational reintegration). Welfare centres are found to

be dominated by the clerk-like mindset, and the specialist facilities dominated by the social work orientation. The family assistance centres fall in between the two. The specialist facilities at the fringes of the public welfare system are the most development-oriented component of Polish social services.

Tomasz Kaźmierczak (*Activation practice in social welfare centres*) discusses, on the basis of the same research results, the praxis of social work in OPS, i.e. the most ubiquitous types of institution in the Polish system of social services. The paper studies whether (and if so, how) social workers at that level employ the concept of social contracts with their clients, and how they cooperate with employment offices and social integration centres and clubs in terms of client activation. Kaźmierczak analyses the level of acceptance among the personnel of social welfare institutions for the notion of conditional support. That level turns out to be relatively high.

The third part of the book, entitled 'Laboratory of Social Innovation – practical experiences', contains four texts on promoting community work in Poland. The opening paper of this part discusses the axiological and theoretical approaches to community work. These approaches constitute an important element of implementation of activation services in Poland. **Maria Mendel** and **Marek Rymsza** (*Why do we need social workers – community organizers? Solidarity, partnerships, and alliances in community work*) reflect on the assumptions underpinning these approaches, making references to British, German and French models as well as Polish experiences. The emphasis is on relationships as a component of community work, and on partnerships and alliances between the community worker and the community that prevent the occurrence of controlling and directive (top-down) patterns. At the core of local community organizing, there is systemic change that goes in two directions simultaneously: (1) from protection towards activation, and (2) from support granted to individuals (casework) towards supporting families and local communities.

The next three texts rely directly on the experience and expertise of the Laboratory of Social Innovation (LIS). They summarise the experiences related to training and implementation regarding the

methods of local community organizing, and present the model of community work and community organizing developed within the project. **Magdalena Dudkiewicz** (*Community work for social change: a summary of qualitative research*) relates context-based qualitative research results pertaining to municipality social welfare centres, and demonstrates the outcomes of operations carried out by social workers who participated in the training organized by Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL (CAL Association), implementing the newly acquired knowledge in their places of work. Dudkiewicz discusses how actions oriented towards effecting intentional change to improve local community situations clash with limitations resulting both from the inflexibility of the local *status quo* (maintained by local authorities and institutions), and from the social worker's position within the welfare centre's system.

Barbara Bąbska (*Community organizing. Social work methodology perspective on the practical experiences*) reviews the training documentation compiled within the educational project conducted by CAL Association. The author offers a comprehensive overview of the assumptions underlying the project. She also presents the opinions of social workers who attended the training sessions as to the challenges and opportunities of community organizing. The paper offers a better understanding of the methodology of community-based social interventions, and also of the practical aspects of the community organizing model.

The next text has been co-written by a team of nine experts. *Model of social work with local community / community organizing* (*Model środowiskowej pracy socjalnej / organizowania społeczności lokalnej)* is an executive summary of the key accomplishments of the Laboratory of Social Intervention. It is both a basis and a record of our experiences in promoting community work based on community organizing in Poland (Bąbska at all 2013).

A thorough reflexive analysis of the accomplishments and shortcomings of the Laboratory of Social Intervention follows. It was complited by **Bohdan Skrzypczak**, its manager. *Laboratory of Social Innovation. The power of dialogue and co-decision-making* presents the actions undertaken in the four-year period of the

Laboratory's activity, and their outcomes. Moreover, it recapitulates the philosophy of LIS, encapsulated in its very name: laboratory.

Finally, the paper by Bohdan Skrzypczak moves beyond information towards opinions and recommendations. This book presents just a selection of research and analyses generated within the framework of LIS. It is my hope that the readers will find this selection interesting and informative.

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Activation services, social welfare and social work in Europe

chapter

02

Rik van Berkel

Activation in the context of social policy, governance, and frontline work reforms. A case study of Dutch Social Assistance[1]

Activation in the context of social policy, governance and frontline work reforms

The central argument developed in this paper is that the activation of unemployed people, as it takes place in the daily practices of public and private agencies, should not be understood as mere policy implementation, but as a complex service production process (Brodkin; Brodkin Marston eds. 2013; Van Berkel 2009). This approach to activation implies that a focus on social policy characteristics only in the study of activation – or, from a policymaker perspective, the design of it – is too narrow to gain reliable insight into how activation takes shape in concrete service practices. For although social policies provide important guidelines for the actions taking place at the frontlines of the agencies involved in activation processes, they are not the single determinant of these actions. In other words, insight into activation *policies* is insufficient to predict what activation *practices* will look like. In order to understand what activation means in practice (and, from a policymaker perspective, in order to understand how policy and policy changes will affect practice), we need to combine a social policy perspective with two other perspectives: a governance perspective and an organizational/ frontline work perspective.

Governance

Firstly, activation practices are produced in specific governance contexts where we can define governance as ' ... the whole of public as well as private interactions taken to solve societal problems and create social opportunities. It includes the formulation and application of principles guiding those interactions and care for institutions that enable them" (Kooiman, Bavinck 2005, p. 17). The governance perspective focuses our attention on the public and private actors involved in policymaking and policy delivery in the area of activation and the structure of their relationships in the policy process.

As is well known from the welfare state literature in general, and the activation literature specifically (Newman 2001; Gilbert 2002; Henman, Fenger eds. 2006; Borghi, Van Berkel 2007), policymaking and policy delivery involve a variety of actors. It may include public agencies, private for-profit organizations (for example, temping agencies and organizations specializing in human resources services), and private not-for-profit organizations (such as voluntary organizations and trade unions). The ways in which the interactions between these actors are structured may take different forms. They may involve rules and regulations (where an agent is expected to implement the rules and regulations issued by a principal); new public management principles (where a principal creates a system of incentives that are expected to steer the actions of agents); forms of competition (where providers of welfare state services compete in quasi-markets for service contracts); or forms of co-operation (where a variety of actors and agencies engage in joint action to realize commonly agreed aims) (cf. Considine 2001; Van Berkel 2010).

These governance structures for making and delivering policy programs have an impact on the daily practices in the agencies and organizations involved in the eventual delivery of these programs. As a matter of fact, governance reforms – like reforms of social policy – often explicitly *intend* to change these daily practices. For example, agencies that are expected to implement and apply rules and regulations will act according to a different logic than agencies that are – contractually or otherwise

– obliged to realize specific performance targets in an efficient and effective way. Service providers operating in a quasi-market are expected to develop a stronger focus on price and quality than service providers that are not confronted with competition.

Frontline work and its organizational context

The second perspective that will help us to gain more insight into the practical meaning of activation concerns the organizational and frontline work perspective. It is well known from studies of street-level bureaucracies (e.g. Lipsky 1980) that the organizational context in which frontline workers – who are the actual 'agents of the welfare state' (Jewell 2007) – implement social policies is a very important factor in shaping the conditions under which official policies are transferred into policy practices. Implementation studies have emphasized again and again that the actual enactment of policies and policy reforms is not self-evident, and that policies in practice may differ significantly from official policies, partly as a consequence of the organizational conditions for implementation and the ways in which these conditions structure frontline work. Nevertheless, in Europe, research into the practical delivery of activation policies is scarce (e.g. Wright 2006; Jewell 2007; Thorén 2008; Van Berkel, Van der Aa, Van Gestel 2010). Most social policy research focuses on official social policies, paying little attention to policy practices and the governance and organizational contexts in which these are produced. The usual social policy research provides us with insights into official policy programs but, as we argued in the above, this is not necessarily a good predictor of what these programs look like when actually delivered to citizens.

An analytical framework

Summarizing our argument thus far, we know that gaining insight into official activation policies is not sufficient to understand how activation takes shape in day-to-day policy delivery practices.

Activation, as produced at the frontlines of the agencies involved in policy delivery, takes shape in the context of social policy programs, governance structures, and organizational conditions (see Scheme 1, below).

Scheme 1: An analytical framework for analyzing the practical production of activation

SOCIAL POLICY
PROGRAMS

ACTIVATION
PRACTICES

GOVERNANCE
STRUCTURES

FRONTILNE WORK
& ITS ORGANIZATIONAL
CONTEXT

Source: the author.

This analytical framework for the analysis of activation practices will be further illustrated in this paper using Dutch Social Assistance as a case study.

The case of Dutch Social Assistance

Dutch Social Assistance is a national income safety-net provision for people with insufficient income from work, other benefits or property,[2] and is administered by local welfare agencies which operate under the authority of local government. Currently, about 400,000 Dutch households depend on Social Assistance as their main or only source of income. Dutch Social Assistance is a useful case for illustrating the interplay of, and interrelationships between, social policy, governance and organizational/frontline work reforms in the production of daily activation practices. The reasons are as follows.

[2]   In the process of testing Social Assistance eligibility, both an income test and a property test take place. People whose property (for examples, savings or real estate) exceeds a certain value will not be entitled to Social Assistance.

First of all, the Netherlands started introducing activation reforms in Dutch social security systems relatively early, i.e. by the late 1980s. Since then, significant social policy reforms took place which were also in the area of Social Assistance. In 1996 and in 2004, new Social Assistance Acts were introduced and their main purpose was to strengthen the 'activating' function of Social Assistance. In addition, from a European perspective the Netherlands invest relatively large sums of money in activation services and measures (1.1% of GDP in 2007, a year in which the European average was 0.66% of GDP; source: Eurostat). So, generally speaking, activating Dutch Social Assistance recipients is an important policy objective in which significant financial resources are invested, although the crisis resulted in significant budget cuts.

Secondly, parallel to social policy reforms, the Netherlands has witnessed considerable governance reforms in the areas of income protection, and activation or labour-market services targeted at unemployed people in general (and Social Assistance recipients in particular). Governance reforms are not a typical characteristic of these policy areas; the Netherlands have a reputation for being 'modernizers' (Pollitt, G. Bouckaert 2000) when it comes to reforming the public sector and the provision of public services. In this paper, our focus will be on two governance reforms. The first one is well-known internationally; it is the introduction of a quasi-market for the provision of activation services in the early 2000s (Struyven, Steurs 2005; Van Berkel, Van der Aa 2005). This governance reform affected the activation of all unemployed people – that is, both the recipients of Unemployment Benefits and the recipients of Social Assistance. Less well known, but not less far-reaching as we shall see below, was the process of decentralization and deregulation that the new Social Assistance Act of 2004 (the Act on Work and Assistance, WWB) introduced (Berkel 2006). One of the core characteristics of this Act is the almost complete abolishment of national regulation concerning the content of activation services for Social Assistance recipients, as well as its organization. To a large extent these are *local* decisions nowadays.

Thirdly, frontline work in local welfare agencies is experiencing gradual change as well, which is part of a process of transforming

these agencies from administrative into service organizations. This reflects a shift in these agencies' 'core business' from benefit administration towards activation. One of the consequences of this is that the autonomy of frontline workers in making decisions concerning activation in individual cases is increasing, at least in some agencies. Their impact on activation practices is becoming more important.

Not all countries have witnessed social policy, governance, and organizational reforms to a similar extent and in similar ways as the Netherlands (Van Berkel, de Graaf, Sirovátka eds. 2011). This also means that the question about what impact social policy, governance and organizational reforms have on activation practices is an empirical question, and that the answers will differ from country to country as well as over time. We will explore this issue in more detail in the next section. In the sections that follow, the focus will be on Dutch Social Assistance and the impact of the various kinds of reforms on activation practices. In the final section of this paper, some conclusions are drawn.

Activation policies, governance structures and frontline work

Social policy reforms aimed at promoting 'activating' welfare state arrangements can take a variety of forms, as the literature on activation strategies and activation 'regimes' has shown (e.g., Handler 2004, Barbier 2005, Serrano Pascual, Magnusson eds. 2007). It seems likely to expect that the nature of activation reforms on the one hand, and governance structures and the nature of frontline work on the other, are interdependent. This does not mean that policy characteristics are the only factors of relevance in designing governance structures and frontline work in policy delivery agencies. For example, the rise and dissemination of new public management ideas during the 1980s made certain governance structures and governance reforms more likely, fashionable and 'politically acceptable' than others, irrespective of the precise characteristics of the policies to be implemented through these structures.

Something similar goes for the nature of frontline work. Organizational and management considerations and concerns (available resources, the capacities of frontline workers, the need to manage discretion and autonomy of workers) are of importance in designing frontline work. Nevertheless, depending on the nature of activation policies, some options in designing governance structures and frontline work will be more likely than others. And for similar reasons, some policy reforms will create a greater urgency for governance and frontline work reforms than others.

The nature of activation policies: three activation strategies

To illustrate these points, we can distinguish several activation strategies. All of them are aimed at promoting labour market participation, but they do so in different ways. In the following section, three activation strategies will be distinguished:
1) A strategy focused on reforms of income protection schemes
2) A strategy focused on strengthening work obligations
3) A strategy focused on providing activation services.
         The first activation strategy involves reforms of income protection schemes such as making access to benefits more difficult, or benefit dependency less attractive, by changing rules and regulations concerning eligibility criteria, wage replacement rates, benefit duration etc. Advocates of these reforms expect that they will provide incentives to unemployed people to look for and accept paid work. Compared to previous 'passive' income protection schemes, this type of activation strategy will raise relatively minor governance and frontline work issues, as it does not fundamentally alter the nature of policy delivery processes. Rules and regulations may be different from how they used to be, but the focus in the policy delivery process on benefit administration and on testing whether or not the unemployed meet benefit eligibility criteria will remain unchanged.
     In the second type of activation strategy that we can distinguish, the focus is on strengthening the work obligations of people dependent on income protection schemes, or on stricter enforcement

of existing work obligations. Here, more serious issues concerning governance structures and frontline work may be at stake, as it may involve a shift from mere administrative tasks (the application of rules and regulations in individual cases) towards scrutinizing, monitoring, evaluating and sanctioning or rewarding the behaviour of benefit recipients, and puts a stronger emphasis on moral judgments (Hasenfeld 2000). In terms of governance this could imply, for example, strengthening co-operation and co-ordination between various agencies that may be able to provide data and information relevant for monitoring people's behaviour. For frontline workers these changes may have considerable consequences too, irrespective of whether their work used to be concentrated on benefit administration or whether it involved social work tasks as well. Compared to their 'traditional' work, the emphasis on controlling benefit recipients and on disciplining and sanctioning non-compliant behaviour will strengthen. This will require different ways of approaching the unemployed, resulting in different relationships with them.

The third type of activation strategy involves the provision of activation services, i.e. services aimed at promoting the employability and labour market participation of benefit recipients (through job mediation, job clubs, work experience projects, subsidized jobs, soft skills training, qualification programs, etc.). When service provision becomes part of the activation strategy, the way in which activation policies, governance structures and frontline work characteristics are related becomes more complex. Three governance issues seem to be of particular importance in this context, each of which has its consequences for the organization of frontline work. We will have a closer look at these issues now.

The governance of activation services

The three governance issues in the context of the provision of activation services referred to above are the following:
   1) The national regulation and standardization of activation services
   2) Service provision models and the role of the market
   3) Integrated activation services.

The degree to which activation programs and procedures for allocating unemployed people to activation programs are nationally regulated and standardized differs from country to country. If national regulation and standardization are strong, the role of local welfare agencies and frontline workers in activation may be limited, as it will be focused on deciding which people meet the participation criteria for which program. When target group criteria of programs are easy to define (by age or duration of unemployment, for example), frontline work may be a rather administrative process. However, researchers as well as policy makers have argued that individualized and tailor-made activation services might be more effective than standardized programs. In order to realize this, processes of deregulation and decentralization take place (e.g. Mosley 2009) that delegate the authority for decision-making about activation to, for example, municipalities, local welfare agencies and even frontline workers.

The second governance issue specifically arising in the context of service provision is the nature of the service provision models that are used to organize these services. The introduction of quasi-markets has become increasingly popular as a model for service provision in developed welfare states, including the area of activation services. Many countries now make use of the activation services of providers that operate in a context of market competition. Such countries sometimes contract market actors for specific activation services, sometimes they subject Public Employment Services agencies to processes of competition, and sometimes they almost completely abolish the public provision of activation services.

The consequences of marketized services for frontline work are not unequivocal, partly because public and marketized service provision are not diametrically opposed – a large variety of 'hybrid' service provision models exist. Marketized activation provision can reduce the role of frontline workers to those of referral agents (Jewell 2007), where public frontline workers merely send the unemployed to contracted agencies who have been given responsibility for activation. But marketized services can be used in other ways as well – for example, contracting market parties for specialized services only. In other words, the presence

of quasi-markets for the provision of activation still tells us little about the tasks of frontline workers in activation.

The third governance issue we want to mention arises when activation services are not just targeted at the unemployed, who are relatively easy to reintegrate into the labour market, but also the most vulnerable people who are confronted with a variety of social problems and vulnerabilities besides unemployment – debts, health problems, addiction, problems with children, housing problems etc. Promoting the activation of these groups of vulnerable unemployed people often asks for a larger range of services and interventions than those primarily aimed at labour-market reintegration (c.f. Perkins 2007). This often implies that other service providers besides those who are specialized in activation services become involved in activation processes. In terms of governance this means that a variety of agencies, agents and professionals will have to co-operate in service provision processes, and will have to co-ordinate their activities. In terms of frontline work, the activation of the most vulnerable groups of unemployed people will often take place in a setting of inter-organizational and inter-professional collaboration.

The following sections will analyze how social policy, governance and frontline work reforms have influenced the practical production of activation services and processes in the case of Dutch Social Assistance.

The activation of Dutch Social Assistance recipients

As was mentioned before, the Dutch welfare state entered a process of activating welfare arrangements relatively early compared to many other EU countries. In a way this is surprising, as the shift towards welfare-to-work reforms implied quite a path-breaking change from the labour-reduction approach to high unemployment. The latter was practised during much of the 1980s and resulted in the massive exit of mainly older workers from the labour market, through early retirement and disability schemes.

Since the activation reforms started, numerous reforms have been introduced to make the Dutch welfare state more activating. In the context of Social Assistance, two new social assistance acts were introduced, various smaller changes in social assistance took place, and several acts regulating the activation of social assistance (and other social benefit) recipients were introduced.

The three activation strategies and reforms of Dutch Social Assistance

In terms of the types of activation measures distinguished in the previous section, Dutch activation reforms reflect a mix of activation strategies. For example, the gap between income from Social Assistance and wages increased. This does not automatically imply that Social Assistance recipients receive less income, but it does mean that the average wealth of Social Assistance recipients may stay behind the average wealth of wage earners.

Reforms also took place as far as the second type of activation measures, described above, is concerned: strengthening work obligations and their enforcement. In the period before the activation reforms, local welfare agencies were relatively mild in enforcing work obligations (which always existed, even in times of passive welfare state arrangements). This has changed significantly during the last decades. In addition, it has become more usual to apply sanctions when Social Assistance recipients do not comply with their obligations, and the obligations themselves have become stricter. For example, voluntary unemployment will result in full exclusion from Social Assistance entitlements for several months. Furthermore, Social Assistance recipients' autonomy in accepting job offers was reduced. Initially, they had to accept job offers matching their qualifications and work experience only ('suitable work'). During the 1990s, this started to change. Long-term Social Assistance recipients were obliged to accept any job offer that was made to them. Nowadays, all Social Assistance recipients are obliged to accept any job offer made to them ('generally accepted work'); the concept of 'suitable work' is no longer relevant. This

implies that the obligation to accept job offers is no longer limited to jobs that match the qualifications and work experience of Social Assistance recipients.

The third type of activation measures concerns the introduction of activation programs and services. Through the years, this area has seen many developments. Focusing on the national regulation of activation, some of the main reforms and developments can be summarized as follows. Firstly, ever larger proportions of the people dependent on Social Assistance have officially become subjected to the work obligation, and to obligatory activation. This especially affects the older unemployed, single parents with young children and unemployed people with a large distance from the labour market (i.e., the hard to employ). Municipalities are no longer allowed to exempt groups of Social Assistance recipients from the work and activation obligation categorically; this can only be done in individual cases.

Secondly, activation used to be regulated in national programs that involved standardized programs for broadly defined target groups, especially the young unemployed and the long-term unemployed. Gradually, reforms were introduced aimed at decentralizing, diversifying and individualizing activation services. On the one hand, the number of activation instruments increased, while on the other, target group definitions became less strictly defined. National regulation also gave municipalities more room to develop programs for the most vulnerable groups of unemployed. The 1996 Social Assistance Act created the option for local experiments with so-called Social Activation programs that should promote the social inclusion of these groups, without necessarily being aimed at labour-market promotion. Currently, no nationally-regulated activation programs exist: legislation regulates the obligation to participate in activation for Social Assistance recipients, but leaves it to municipalities and their local welfare agencies to design activation services, and to define target groups for these services.

Thirdly, procedures for profiling and assessing Social Assistance recipients in order to support the process of making decisions regarding activation offers, have been decentralized as well. As a consequence, these procedures and the instruments that are used

to determine the activation needs of Social Assistance recipients are now subject to local decision making. Municipalities are free to decide how to organize assessment procedures and which instruments they want to use.

Thus, in as far as national regulation is concerned, Dutch activation has become a relatively 'regulation thin' policy area. National regulation mainly concerns the obligation of unemployed people to participate in activation (and, for the young unemployed, the obligation of municipalities to make an activation or education offer – this obligation was introduced in 2009).

Reforming governance structures

Already in the early 1990s, a few years after the 'kick-off' of activation reforms, Dutch parliament started several inquiries into the organizations involved in activation and in the administration of social assistance and social insurance. Regarding Social Assistance, two committees revealed serious problems with the implementation of national policies, as well as failing accountability and inspection. These inquiries marked the starting point for a wave of governance reforms, which continue to this day and are aimed at creating benefit administration and service provision structures that should support the active welfare state objectives outlined in the previous section.

In other words, governance reforms should be conducive to the objectives of social policy reforms. For example, they should contribute to the actual implementation and enforcement of rules and regulations concerning the work obligation, the individual responsibilities of benefit recipients, and the use of sanctions in cases of non-compliance. They should contribute to developing more effective activation services in which increasing numbers of able-to-work unemployed people participate, and they should contribute to promoting tailor-made activation services. Such contributions, among others, will prevent deadweight effects and the exclusion from activation of the most difficult to employ groups of unemployed people.

The objectives of the largest reform process, the Act 'Structure for the administrative organization for Work and Income' (SUWI, see below), were summarized as (1) promoting work before income support, (2) improving effectiveness, and (3) strengthening customer orientation in service provision processes.

Introducing the `incentive paradigm' in governance reforms

An interesting aspect of these reforms is that they not only changed governance structures but also the underlying 'mode of governance'. Whereas a bureaucratic and hierarchical mode of governance dominated the reforms initially, which relied on promulgating new rules and regulations as a way of changing implementation practices, elements of new styles of public governance were gradually introduced, especially governance strategies inspired by 'new public management'. This shift in modes of governance has been characterized as the gradual introduction of an 'incentive paradigm' (Van der Veen, Trommel 1999). The traditional bureaucratic mode of governance was still dominant during the 1990s, when a range of new rules and regulations was introduced – to strengthen the activating function of the Dutch social security systems for people of working age, and to ensure their implementation. In the area of Social Assistance, clear signs of the emergence of new modes of governance came to the surface when national government started to conclude performance agreements with the municipalities in the early 2000s. Among others, these agreements contained performance targets regarding the numbers of Social Assistance recipients that should participate in an activation program, and the proportion of participants that should find a job. Funds that were made available by national government for activation depended on whether or not municipalities managed to realize their targets. In the case of the thirty largest municipalities, government negotiated the performance contracts individually. The smaller municipalities had to work with more standardized contracts.

Evaluations revealed considerable differences between municipalities concerning the degree to which they were successful in realizing their targets. For example, the best performer in 2003 – as far as the agreed number of participants in activation programs was concerned –realized 121% of the target, whereas the worst performer realized only 31%. Differences were even larger where the proportion of participants that found a job were concerned. The best performer realized 91% of the target, the worst performer 0%. (Van Berkel 2006). It seems plausible that these differences should, at least partly, be attributed to differences in the local capacities to successfully implement and organize the provision of activation services and, probably, to differences in local policy priorities as well – for example, concerning the target groups of activation. But irrespective of the explanation of these differences, the figures clearly show that similar national policies and policy objectives may result in highly diverse local outcomes.

The marketization of the provision of activation services

During the period that these performance agreements were functioning (2002), the introduction of one of the most remarkable governance reforms took place: the privatization and marketization of the provision of activation services, in combination with a full split between the roles of purchasers and providers of these services (Struyven, Streus 2005). Marketization was part of the SUWI Act mentioned before. The full outsourcing of service provision (local welfare agencies, as well as the unemployment benefit agency, were obliged to outsource most of the activation services for their clients), the outsourcing of services to private for-profit companies mainly, and the almost complete termination of publicly-provided activation (which, of course, had severe consequences for the Public Employment Services) made the Dutch case quite exceptional in the European context.

Activation, marketization and the Public Employment Services (PES)

Before the marketization of activation, Dutch Public Employment Services played a key role in activating unemployed people and in implementing national activation programs. In the early years of activation, the PES was responsible for the activation of the registered unemployed (unemployed people had to register with the PES in order to be entitled to Unemployment Benefits or Social Assistance). During the 1990s, the primary responsibility for activation was transferred from the PES to the agencies responsible for benefit administration (the benefit agency) and the administration of Social Assistance (the local welfare agencies). This introduced a principal-agent relationship between the benefit/social assistance agencies on the one hand, and the PES on the other. Further changes in the role and tasks of the PES took place when marketization was introduced. Marketization put an end to the role and tasks of the PES in activation (with some exceptions, see below), and the department of the PES which was, until then, responsible for activation was privatized, becoming one of the many private providers on the service market.

The remaining parts of the PES after marketization were transformed into so-called Centres for Work and Income (CWI). These Centres were supposed to act as a one-stop shop, especially for new unemployed people, irrespective of the type of benefit they are entitled to. By law, the Centres were given three tasks:

- to collect information from new unemployed people, forming a basis from which the benefit agency or local welfare agencies should be able to reach decisions on income protection entitlements
- to determine new unemployed people's labour-market distance, which should support the benefit agency and local welfare agencies in making decisions about activation offers
- to offer easy-to-reintegrate unemployed people some basic employment and activation services during the first six

months of unemployment.[3] After six months, the benefit and local welfare agencies became responsible for activation.

CWI found itself in a complex position. On the one hand, it had to cooperate with the nationally-managed benefit agency; on the other, it had to cooperate with the Dutch municipalities (over 400) and their local welfare agencies. In the cooperation process, the local welfare agencies demanded flexibility from the CWI to establish decentralized, tailor-made forms of collaboration which, for the CWI agencies, turned out to be difficult to realise. Not surprisingly against this background, the municipalities were unsatisfied with the quality of services provided by the CWI.

In 2009, the Centres for Work and Income merged with the national agency responsible for the administration of Unemployment Benefits (UWV). However, this merger had little impact on the need to establish forms of cooperation between the new UWV/CWI agencies and local welfare agencies.

Results of marketization

The initial results of marketization were not wholly positive. Marketization did result in an increased number of unemployed people participating in activation processes, but at the same time evaluation studies show that the outcomes of activation have not improved as a consequence of marketization. In other words, marketization resulted in a situation in which increasing numbers of unemployed were activated using instruments with similar effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) as before marketization. In addition, externally-provided services were often highly standardized. Furthermore, the most difficult-to-employ unemployed profited least from the marketization reform, as the providers focused their efforts on the more easy-to-reintegrate. In other words, the marketization objectives of increased effectiveness, tailor-made services and a stronger focus on more vulnerable groups of unemployed were not realized. Against this background, it is not surprising that municipalities were not very

satisfied with the performance of the private providers. In 2005, two thirds of local welfare agencies considered the privatization of activation services as unsuccessful (Divosa 2005).

However, municipalities themselves also played a role in the disappointing results of the market. For example, private providers complained that competition focused more on price than on quality, so that the emphasis in service provision was on cheap services, rather than high-quality and innovative services. This was strengthened by the fact that many providers were contracted for relatively short contract periods which made them less willing to invest in quality. In addition, De Koning pointed at the lack of expertise and professionalism among purchasers in organizing the tender procedures (DeKoning 2009).

Decentralization and deregulation in activating Social Assistance recipients

Following the SUWI Act, an even more influential reform – from the perspective of local welfare agencies – was introduced with the Social Assistance Act of 2004. The introduction of this act implied a twofold decentralization process: it combined increased local policy autonomy with increased financial responsibilities for Social Assistance expenses.

Municipalities and their local welfare agencies have considerable room nowadays to decide about the content of activation services. Furthermore, they also have considerable room to decide on the organization of service provision; soon after the new act was introduced, the obligation to outsource the provision of activation services to private providers was abolished. In addition, the new act involved a decentralization of financial responsibilities – municipalities nowadays receive a block grant ('income budget') for funding Social Assistance payments from national government. Yearly, government decides on the nationally available Social Assistance budget. It is then distributed among the municipalities according to a distribution model that contains several variables which

cannot be influenced by local policies, and which relate to demographic and labour market characteristics mainly.

This 'budgeting' of funding Social Assistance is intended to incentivize municipalities to invest in measures that reduce the volume of Social Assistance recipients. For if municipalities spend less on Social Assistance payments than the grant they receive from national government, they are free to spend the surplus in whatever way they like. However, if the budget is insufficient to fund Social Assistance payments, municipalities will have to draw on their own resources to cover the deficit. Besides this 'income budget', each municipality also receives a so-called 'work budget' (nowadays called 'participation budget') from national government, which is used to fund activation services. Again, the nationally available work budget is determined yearly. In distributing the work budget among the municipalities, local numbers of Social Assistance recipients as well as local labour market characteristics are taken into account.

Decentralization, deregulation and local activation practices

In understanding how the increased room in local policy making has had an impact on local activation practices, the consequences of the new financial regime should not be underestimated. The proportion of municipalities that experienced deficits because Social Assistance payments exceeded budgets was high initially, decreased somewhat in 2006, and then increased again in 2008 (see Table 1), when about half of all municipalities were confronted with a deficit on their income budget. This clearly illustrates the urgency that municipalities will feel to reduce Social Assistance expenses. Interestingly, a majority of municipalities did not spend the full work budget. Between 2004 and 2006, the proportion of municipalities with a work budget surplus increased from 77% to 81%, though it had decreased sharply by 2008 (50%).

Table 1. Proportion of municipalities with budget deficits and surpluses: income budget (I) and work budget (W)

	2004	2006	2008
Deficit I & W	11	9	25
Deficit I, surplus W	35	26	24
Surplus I, deficit W	11	10	25
Surplus I & W	42	55	26

Source: *Divosa monitor 2007. Verschil maken. Drie jaar Wet Werk en Bijstand*. Divosa, Utrecht 2007; *Divosa monitor 2009. Meer dan ooit. Sociale diensten en participatiebevordering*, Divosa, Utrecht 2009.

In 2008, national government announced retrenchments in expenditures for activation and the current economic crisis is resulting in even higher cutbacks. This will increase the urgency for municipalities to focus on budgetary concerns even more, which will not remain without consequences for local activation practices. In 2008, 71% of the municipalities indicated that they will pay less attention to the activation of Social Assistance recipients with a large labour market distance (i.e., the most vulnerable groups of recipients) in case of budget cutbacks (Divosa 2008). Already in the first years of the new Social Assistance Act, it became apparent that many municipalities tended to focus on groups of unemployed that were considered easy to reintegrate. In 2005, 63% of the municipalities reported that they prioritized the activation of new Social Assistance recipients and the easiest to reintegrate; this percentage had decreased to 46% one year later (Divosa 2005; 2006).

In a research project in which we studied the consequences of the introduction of the 2004 Social Assistance Act in four local welfare agencies (Van Berkel 2009), similar trends could be observed. Initially, the agencies' first concern was to reduce the numbers of Social Assistance recipients and they expected to get the most results from a strategy that focused on stricter gate-keeping and on activating the easiest to employ. Only more recently did they start to develop projects for the most vulnerable groups because large parts of the groups closer to the labour market found a job, or were participating in activation programs already. It seems very

likely that this will not be a sustainable development. The economic crisis will increase the inflow into Social Assistance and one does not have to be a cynic to expect that this will shift priorities back to gate-keeping and other policy instruments targeted at new claimants.

Common trends in local policies and priorities

In principle, the decentralization and deregulation process that the 2004 Social Assistance Act introduced could be expected to increase the differences between local activation policies and programs. For as was mentioned before, the Act gave municipalities and their local welfare agencies considerable freedom in this respect. Nevertheless, some common trends can be observed in how the new governance arrangements have influenced local activation. It seems likely that the new financial regime has encouraged a process of what could be called 'implicit centralization', in the sense that it has created convergence in local policies and priorities. This convergence especially concerns the treatment of three target groups: (1) the hard to employ, (2) new Social Assistance claimants, and (3) the people already depending on Social Assistance who are considered employable.

In as far as activation services for more difficult to reintegrate Social Assistance recipients are provided, the nature of these services seems to be changing and to be focused increasingly on labour-market participation rather than broader forms of social participation. As was discussed before, the 1996 Social Assistance Act gave municipalities the option to develop so-called Social Activation programs aimed at broader forms of social inclusion. Whereas in 2006 social activation and personal coaching were the most popular activation programs for the more vulnerable groups of Social Assistance recipients, the three most frequently used programs in 2007 were wage subsidies, combined learning and job experience projects, and guidance (Divosa 2008) – programs that focus on labour-market integration. Apparently, the new funding regime contributed to creating a situation in which activation

services aimed at promoting forms of social inclusion other than labour-market participation are no longer considered 'efficient' and 'effective'. More seriously, it is likely that a phasing out of programs aimed at broader forms of social inclusion will have consequences for those groups of unemployed for whom short-term labour-market reintegration is not feasible or realistic.

A second trend that can be observed considers the treatment of new Social Assistance recipients. New Social Assistance claimants seem to be confronted with a homogenization rather than diversification of activation offers. This can be derived from the use of Work First projects.[4] In 2006, 46% of the municipalities used Work First projects for new claimants, and another 12% had developed Work First for young claimants (many of whom will be new claimants). The number of municipalities that does not make use of Work First decreased: 33% in 2005, 15% in 2006 (Table 2). Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that under the heading of Work First projects, a considerable diversity of projects can be found.

[4] The general idea underlying Work First projects is that social assistance recipients are placed in an activation program as soon as possible, in return for which they receive income support. These projects can be used as an instrument to prevent social assistance dependency.

Table 2. Target groups of Work First: percentage of municipalities focusing Work First on named target groups

	2005	2006
Young recipients	17	12
New recipients	31	46
Other	20	27
None	33	15

Source: *WWB monitor 2006: Meer perspectief voor mensen. Twee jaar Wet Werk en Bijstand*, Divosa, Utrecht 2006.

Finally, there are indications that the diversity of services available for those already dependent on Social Assistance is increasing, even though it is impossible to find national information about this. The four local welfare agencies in our research project indicated that the diversity of available activation programs has gradually increased during the years following the introduction of the 2004 Social Assistance Act.

Governance reforms and the local organization of the provision of activation services

Governance reforms not only had an impact on the content of activation services, but also on the organization of service provision at the local level. Soon after the introduction of the 2004 Social Assistance Act, the obligation to purchase activation services from private providers was abolished for local welfare agencies. Against the background of the dissatisfaction of municipalities with the services provided by private providers, this reform has resulted in a 'de-marketization' and 'de-privatization' of the provision of activation services – the roles of both in-house service provision and of public providers have increased. The following figures illustrate the decreasing role of private providers. In 2005, 56% of the funds spent on activation services went to private providers (Divosa 2006); in 2007, this was 40% (Divosa 2008). Of course, these are average figures. Some municipalities hardly involve private providers in service provision, whereas others continue to outsource most services to these providers.

However, strategic choices of local welfare agencies regarding the organization of the provision of activation services not only involve decisions concerning whether or not service provision should be outsourced to external providers. They also involve decisions regarding the ways in which the agencies make use of and shape relationships with external providers.

Our research project in four welfare agencies showed several developments in this respect. Initially, these agencies tended to refer clients to external providers enormously, delegating most decision making concerning individual activation services to providers. This gave private providers considerable autonomy in deciding on what activation looked like. Of course, the fact that outsourcing was obligatory played a role here, but so did other considerations. Local welfare agencies and their frontline workers had little tradition in activating clients: they were trained to apply Social Assistance rules and regulations in individual cases and to collect the information needed to decide about eligibility. They were not trained to change

people's motivation and behavior, to develop insight into the labor market and to support unemployed people's labour market entry. By referring clients to private providers, the urgency of organizational and frontline work changes in welfare agencies was reduced. However, welfare agencies soon discovered that this strategy had disadvantages as well: they had little control over what private providers were doing with clients. This became increasingly problematic with the new financial regime which made 'effective activation' a number one priority for the agencies. Since then, various changes took place, facilitated by the abolishment of obligatory outsourcing. The number of private providers contracted by the agencies increased. In addition, local welfare agencies purchase services in different ways: instead of full activation services, services are bought nowadays in a more modular way. Also, the progress of clients is monitored more closely than in the past, and contracts contain more detailed regulations about the requirements private providers have to satisfy.

This seems to have had the consequence of increasing bureaucratization for the providers, who are obliged to meet specified deadlines and to deliver progress reports to local welfare agencies regularly (Van Berkel 2014). A similar trend was observed in a study of tender documents in 20 municipalities (Corra, Plantiga 2009), which revealed a strong emphasis on process-related requirements (rather than on outcomes), as well as indications that local welfare agencies want to maintain control of the management of service provision and of activation processes through their frontline workers.

So whereas the first period of marketization of activation services could be characterized as a period of exporting the discretion of frontline workers (Brodkin 2007), when decision making concerning the details of activation services was left to the providers, we now see that discretion is re-imported whilst bureaucracy is exported in an attempt to strengthen control over service provision and services provision processes.

Organizational and frontline work reforms

Unfortunately, very little systematic and robust data is available concerning the ways in which local welfare agencies reform the organization and management of frontline work against the background of social policy and governance reforms, and the consequences for activation practices. The Divosa studies (mentioned previously) do show, however, that a process of re-orientation is going on and that local welfare agencies seem to be looking for a new 'identity' (c.f. Divosa 2008). They are transforming from agencies focused on income provision, where the core value was rightfulness of decisions, towards agencies focused on activation, where effectiveness is the main value. In this context, it should be emphasized that since the 1980s the social work function of frontline workers in local welfare agencies has been eroded gradually, which was also reflected in the qualification profile of frontline workers. Given the ambition of local welfare agencies to strengthen their role in activation (both by in-house service provision and by new ways of dealing with external providers – see previous section), a new type of frontline worker is needed – workers who are not (or not only) benefit administrators but able to promote the employability and (labour-market) participation of Social Assistance recipients.

This shows that local welfare agencies have to be able to combine various types of primary processes: on the one hand benefit administration, on the other activation. About half of Dutch local welfare agencies have integrated these tasks into one frontline work function, whereas the others separated both tasks (Divosa 2007). Caseloads of the various types of frontline workers differ considerably. In 2006, frontline workers who combined work and income tasks had an average caseload of 60. The average caseload of specialized frontline workers varied between 91 for those responsible for activation to 130 for those responsible for care, which refers to the services provided for the most difficult to employ Social Assistance recipients (Divosa 2007).

The high caseload of the latter group of frontline workers could reveal something of the low priority given to this group of

unemployed, but may also be related to the fact that many services for these unemployed are outsourced. Thus, caseload figures do not automatically tell us something about the time and attention available for individual clients. Nevertheless, frontline workers in the four welfare agencies in our study did report problems of excessive caseloads that hindered them in paying sufficient attention to individual clients. Caseloads not only differ between various types of frontline workers, but also between municipalities. Care frontline workers, for example, have an average caseload of 167 in municipalities with more than 60,000 inhabitants, and an average caseload of only 52 in municipalities with 40-60,000 inhabitants Divosa 2007).

Frontline work is being professionalized...

The attempts that the agencies are undertaking to strengthen their control over activation and over external providers, the option to provide activation services in-house, and the diversification of services (at least for people already dependent on Social Assistance) unavoidably raise issues concerning the qualifications, skills and discretion of frontline workers in welfare agencies. Theoretically, several options are available: (1) a bureaucratic and hierarchical way of managing frontline work, (2) professionalization of frontline work, and (3) a managerial management style which focuses on the outcomes and performance of frontline workers (Hasenfeld 1983; Mitzberg 1983).

In the four welfare agencies in our study we observed a mix of these strategies to organize and manage frontline work, rather than a shift from one dominant management strategy towards another. All four agencies explicitly indicated that rules, regulations and hierarchy have become less important, and that a professionalization of frontline work is needed.[5] They want frontline workers to have an active role in the various decisions involved in activation processes, such as the assessment and profiling of the unemployed, decisions about the content of activation processes and about the organization of service provision,

[5] The national association of directors of local welfare agencies (Divosa) is developing several initiatives to promote the professionalization of frontline work. In 2012, a professional association of frontline workers involved in activation was established.

monitoring the progress of people in activation, etc. This should encourage individualized and tailor-made service provision. All four agencies have introduced reforms that point in this direction. The traditional hierarchical way of decision making in local welfare agencies – frontline workers prepared advice, officers higher in the hierarchy who were not in direct contact with individual Social Assistance recipients took the actual decision – is no longer used in the domain of activation. Frontline workers now have the responsibility to take decisions in individual cases themselves. In addition, fraternal consultation and discussions about individual cases are introduced as means to promote a culture of professional problem solving. Some agencies introduced the function of quality officials to support the professionalization process and act as consultants. Training and education programs are organized for frontline workers in activation.

... but bureaucratic management is still there ...

At the same time, bureaucratic procedures and management instruments still exist. One of the most notorious forms of bureaucratic practice still in use is what is referred to as list work. For example, contracts with private providers often – though not always – contain agreements about the number of clients local welfare agencies should refer to private providers. When 'spontaneous' referrals remain behind targets, frontline workers are ordered to select a certain number of clients from their caseload for referral to private providers. This is experienced by several frontline workers as a curtailment of their ability to provide tailor-made activation: activation placements have to be realized, irrespective of the needs and situation of clients. Similar procedures may be used when local welfare agencies take the initiative – or are ordered to do so by local authorities – to develop programs to deal with emergencies, e.g. a rise in the number of Social Assistance recipients. Referring sufficient clients to specific programs, rather than providing adequate services for clients, then becomes the main objective of frontline work.

... and performance management is being introduced as well

In our research, we also found indications that managerial management styles are gaining importance. Although performance indicators are not a completely new phenomenon for welfare agencies, a shift from output to outcome indicators is taking place. In the evaluation interviews that activation frontline workers have with their managers, more emphasis is put on the proportion of their caseloads that have exited Social Assistance.

Two agencies in our study specified performance targets in detail: one agency introduced a performance system according to which frontline workers have to select 40 clients, from their caseload of 125, whom they want to make independent from Social Assistance in a year's time. This agency is discussing further steps on the road towards a more managerial approach: it wants to make the wage increases of frontline workers dependent on their exit results. This would involve a considerable if not revolutionary break with traditional wage systems for civil servants, which used to be based on function and seniority rather than performance.

The other agency started introducing performance targets for activation frontline workers as well, although several frontline workers whom we interviewed in this agency did not seem to take these targets very seriously. They did not consider the targets to be realistic (some did not even know what their targets were), and complained that they had not been involved in setting these targets. Some frontline workers denounced what they experienced as a narrow focus of these targets on numbers of Social Assistance exits, without consideration for qualitative aspects of activation and of job placements.

We may conclude that agencies that started using the managerial approach in managing activation frontline work seem to do so as part of a strategy to increase the responsibilities of frontline workers. Performance management is still in an early stage of development, which makes it hard at the moment to reach empirically-founded conclusions on how this approach affects activation practices. Nevertheless, it is not unlikely to

expect that it will have an impact – for example, on the selection of clients frontline workers will focus their time and energy on, on the nature of programs they will use, or on the objectives they will try to realize with activation.

All in all, these developments show a shift from bureaucratic management of frontline work towards professionalization, mixed with elements of managerialism in some of the local welfare agencies. The professionalization trend may be in line with the attempts to provide more tailor-made activation services, but it also involves certain risks. The increasing autonomy of frontline workers in decision making regarding the content and organization of activation raises the issue of how frontline workers use this autonomy. In an ideal professional context, frontline workers will use their professional knowledge, experience and skills in decision-making processes. However, at least in the Dutch context, activation has not yet developed into an 'ideal' profession, which is why we elsewhere called frontline workers involved in activation 'professionals without a profession' (Van Berkel, Van der Aa, Van Gestel 2010). Giving frontline workers more autonomy may throw them back upon their own insights, views etc., which is exactly what seemed to happen in the local welfare agencies in our study. Against this background, individualization of activation not only provides opportunities for tailor-made services; it also makes Social Assistance recipients dependent on their frontline workers, decreases transparency of client treatment and service provision processes, and may make the activation process unpredictable.

Conclusion

In this paper the argument was developed that activation practices are not merely a matter of implementing social policies, but are produced in the context of – and are shaped by – social policy programs, governance structures, and organizational conditions. This means that if we want to find out what activation processes and services look like in practice, and how they intervene in the lives of unemployed people, we need to move beyond the study

of 'official' (national) activation policies, and shift the focus of study to the frontlines of the agencies and organizations that are involved in the provision of activation services.

In this paper, the case of Dutch Social Assistance was analyzed to illustrate how activation practices are the result of social policy, governance and organizational/frontline work characteristics and reforms. In a way, the Dutch case is atypical when seen from an international perspective. The strong shift towards decentralization and deregulation in the Netherlands evidently reduces the role of national social policies in determining the nature of activation, and increases the impact of local conditions and policy decisions on activation practices. Seen from this perspective, the relative importance of governance structures and organizational conditions is by definition significant in the Dutch activation case. Other countries may (and some certainly do) rely more strongly on the national regulation of activation – as was the case in the Netherlands in the 1990s. However, this does not make the central argument of this paper less valid. It merely illustrates that the pursued role of national social policies in shaping activation practices is itself subject to governance decisions and reforms.

The Dutch case also showed that the ways in which social policy, governance structures and organizational conditions influence activation practices do not necessarily match and may sometimes be contradictory. Although the introduction of marketization seems to have increased the number of unemployed people in activation programs, which was in line with social policy objectives, it promoted service standardization rather than individualization, which was what social policies intended to realize. Various governance reforms also seem to counteract the social policy objective to target activation services on the most difficult-to-employ Social Assistance recipients.

From a research perspective, it is therefore interesting to study how policy reforms, governance reforms and organizational/frontline practices strengthen or counteract each other. Interactions between policies, governance structures and organizational conditions also make evaluation research more complex, as it becomes more difficult to interpret the success or failure of activation programs in terms of program characteristics only. From a policy-making perspective,

these interactions point to the need to take into consideration how governance structures and organizational conditions influence the realization of policy objectives, positively or negatively. When national governments blame municipalities, or when local welfare agencies blame contracted providers, for not paying attention to the provision of services for the most vulnerable unemployed while, at the same time, introducing incentives that steer the actions of municipalities and contracted providers towards the promotion of labour-market entry, these national governments and local welfare agencies are in fact acting like the injured innocent. For if they merely reward Social Assistance exit, it is understandable that municipalities and providers are hesitant to invest in services for vulnerable people whose employability or social inclusion may be improved, but whose integration into the labour-market is not very likely, certainly not in the short term.

A similar argument can be made concerning the emphasis on individualized and tailor-made services as an important policy objective. If this policy objective is not accompanied by investments aimed at strengthening the professional base of activation frontline work – for example, by supporting evidence or practice-based insight into successful activation interventions and by promoting (re-) qualification – it is difficult to imagine how the organizations and frontline workers involved in activation should realize this objective. As the Dutch case showed, making local welfare organizations and their frontline workers responsible for professional services in a context where an established profession barely exists may result in a situation in which national policymakers shirk their responsibilities instead of invest in more successful and effective services.

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Ewa Bacia

Mediation in social work in France[1]

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to present the importance of mediation across a variety of aspects of the public, social, and professional relations in France and the French-speaking countries, with a focus on mediation in social work.

The paper has several dimensions. Firstly, it explores the cultural, legal, social, and institutional contexts that create conditions conducive to the work of mediators. However, it is not a description of solutions applicable solely to the Francophone countries. The French case has been selected for analysis due to France's long and rich experience in employing mediation, but also – connectedly – due to the abundance of theoretical literature on the subject. A review of that literature gives the paper its second dimension. The basic models of mediation developed in the French tradition are presented against a background of information derived from relevant specialist literature. Thirdly, the paper summarizes the conclusions drawn from the studies evaluating mediation carried out in France in recent years. Since the late 1990s, new roles have been assigned to both mediation (particularly in the area of social work) and mediators. The innovative character of these changes and the social and political context in which they were implemented called for a thorough evaluation of the implementation efforts and the effects of that implementation. The paper recapitulates the key findings in this respect.

At the heart of this paper is an analysis of the French specialist literature on mediation: some monographs and journal articles, with relevant references to legal regulations. A special edition of *Ésprit critique* has been particularly helpful. *Ésprit critique* is an

international review of sociology and social sciences. The 2004 summer issue of this review was fully devoted to social mediation as a method of alternative dispute resolution and reconstruction of social ties (*La médiation sociale* 2004). The issue contains 17 papers and presents a variety of perspectives on mediation, from theoretical approaches through case studies to analyses and evaluations of the evolution of mediation in France. The book entitled *Les médiations du travail social* by Marie-France Freynet (Freynet 1999), which describes the experiences of social mediators as well as the theoretical models that underpin specific approaches to mediation, was also an invaluable source of information.

The tradition and importance of mediation in France

Mediation is employed as an instrument of conflict resolution in many aspects of public life in France. The three main areas in which mediation is applied are criminal law, social work, and family law.

Since 1993, the French Code of Criminal Proceedings has listed procedures involving mediation. In the case of petty offences, the public prosecutor may recommend mediation as a method of amicable dispute resolution. It offers an opportunity to reconcile the offender and the victim without the need for a court to render a sentence that will stigmatize the offender.

In terms of social work, mediation is applied in the case of conflict in various areas of everyday life – neighbourhood disputes, damage caused by pets and household animals, etc. The success of mediation depends on a true willingness of all the parties to the conflict to find a solution.

Family mediation occurs mainly in relation to divorce cases. Mediation may be employed both while the case is pending and after it is closed, in order to finalise arrangements regarding property and future organization of family life (residence, custody, childcare, etc.).

Mediation – a role or a profession?[2]

Mediation is a practice applied across a broad spectrum of contexts and with a variety of clients. So far, however, no job description featuring a specific list of tasks and responsibilities required of the mediator has yet been devised.

Mediation as a professional activity has emerged as a consequence, on the one hand, of the crisis of social ties (exclusion, poverty, changes in family structure, loneliness), and on the other hand of the disappearance of certain intermediary structures, which used to provide a mechanism for mitigating and solving potential conflicts. Moreover, in the recent decades certain social and family-related problems have morphed into new forms, and now require new types of interventions.

In social work, mediation may be either more or less institutionalized. In the former case, as a result of evolving social needs, social workers begin to serve as mediators under certain circumstances, even if it is not their key role. If the need for mediation grows, mediators are introduced as persons whose professional role is to assist the parties to a conflict in searching for a solution.

Historically, the development of mediation is linked to the justice system. However, as social transformations continued, mediation began to enter into other spheres. The law of 2 January 2002[3] introduced quasi-mediation to the area of medicine, in the form of the patient's right to use the services of 'a qualified person selected from a list maintained jointly by a representative of the State in the department and the President of the General Council' in order to obtain assistance in exercising one's rights. While it is debatable whether the law indeed introduces the role of a mediator (or whether a spokesperson for patients' rights is a more accurate description), this legal change certainly points to the new approach, in which relationship-building between a citizen and the public institutions is encouraged.

[2] http://www.cleirppa. asso.fr/SPIP-v1-8/imprimer. php3?id_article=112

[3] *La loi Nº2002-2 du 2 janvier 2002 renovant l'action sociale et medico-sociale, reformant la loi Nº75-535 du 30 juin 1975 relative aux institutions sociales et medico-sociales*, http:// www.initiatives.asso.fr/pdf/ insertion/loi_2002.pdf.

Family mediation

France has a long tradition of family mediation, but the concept itself originated in the United States, where mediation – initially only used to supplement the court procedure – took hold in a broader social context. The practices developed in the United States were later adopted in Canada, from which they moved to France, where they gradually became popular across the country.[4]

The services of family mediators are attractive to persons who are willing to openly discuss personal issues in front of an outsider acting as a neutral mediator. The support of such a neutral mediator tends to be less traumatizing than contact with a court, and it allows for a faster and more flexible resolution. Mediation is also cheaper than proceedings involving the court system, and often relieves the burden of the courts to a certain extent (many cases successfully handled by mediators never end up in court).

Mediation is by no means a replacement for the courts; it merely supplements the court system. Approaching a mediator is also not completely stigma-free. It does, after all, require an official admission that there is a conflict in the family. Many persons, in particular the elderly, blame themselves for the conflict. A mediator's success depends on a range of factors, including cooperation with members of other professions who engage in interventions in a given community. In this sense, a family mediator never acts entirely on their own, and may be asked to become involved, e.g. by a judge or a social worker, who is often also present during the initial meeting between the mediator and the parties to the conflict.

Mediation for seniors

Mediators may specialize in working with a specific group, such as seniors. However, their work always contains an element of social relations and thus cannot be limited to one age group only. Mediation involving seniors requires cooperation with partners in the social and medical services sectors, and is therefore interdisciplinary in nature. Work with persons with medical issues that limit their cognitive abilities (such as Alzheimer's disease) requires special skills. A mediator

working with such persons must be able to assess to what extent the person is able to make informed decisions. If the decisions on behalf of the senior are to be made by family members or care professionals, should the person themselves participate in mediation? If so, then on what conditions? The key principle of mediation is that all parties should be heard. Even if one of the parties has difficulty in expressing their thoughts and needs, they are nonetheless able to understand some elements of the process, and should participate in it. The mediator plays an immensely important role here. It is the mediator who must ensure that the person with dementia has an opportunity to express their needs as far as it is possible, to avoid making decisions in their stead. The elderly person must be treated as a party to the mediation and not as an external party, severed from the social and family-related context, who is decided-about rather than making their own decisions. Meditation is likely to gain importance in gerontology as societies age, and family structure changes.

The role of the mediator is to provide the parties to a conflict with the tools to manage that conflict.

Social mediation

In this chapter, I am going to describe social mediation as a model in the French-speaking countries, pointing to the social and cultural factors that contribute to its unique character. I am going to include elements such as the scope of social mediation, practices involved in it, critical evaluation, professionalization, and legal aspects of relevance. I will end the chapter by posing a number of hypotheses as to how social mediation might develop in terms of areas of application and standards of practice.

Social mediation is a method of resolving conflicts as well as an instrument of regulation and peaceful organization of social life. Models of social mediation differ in different countries, as there is a variety of traditions and experiences of mediation. The models of social mediation developed in the United States have strongly influenced Great Britain while France, in this respect, was under the influence of French-speaking Canada. Spain has strong ties to the

mediation models originating in Argentina and other countries of Latin America, and Italy has followed yet another course, combining elements of a variety of models (Luison, Valastro 2004).

Social mediation requires, as a starting point, a situation where two or more parties to a conflict are interested in finding a resolution. Effectiveness of mediation depends on re-organizing the scene of the conflict with the assistance of a person perceived by all the parties as neutral. This person – the mediator – first ensures that all the parties abide by the same set of rules and then supports the parties in the process of seeking a solution. Mediation is particularly recommended if the parties to the conflict intend to cooperate and coexist in the long term, after the mediation is over – residents in a housing complex, for example.

From the initial general definition, interventions under the label of social mediation evolved in a number of directions, both with regard to the subject matter and the types of actions. Examples of new developments in social mediation include prevention of social exclusion and promotion of urban safety. The increasing complexity of social life requires new concepts, and along with them new, more flexible instruments. The experience of social mediation, as it plays out across various countries, is carefully observed by EU member states. There are plans for numerous applications of interventions built around the general concept of social mediation.

The issue of social mediation may be discussed in many perspectives and in terms of many approaches:

- the theoretical approach (theories of social development, of social exclusion, of conflict, etc.)
- the historical approach (models of development and evolution of mediation in different countries)
- the political and economic approach (creating new work places and establishing the profession of a mediator)
- the participatory-democratic approach (mediation as a transformation of the local political order towards increased participation)
- the cultural approach (intercultural mediation based on joint action and respect for diversity)

- the educational approach (work in schools with persons at risk of social exclusion)
- the geographical approach (the work of social mediators in deprived neighbourhoods).

Evaluation of the effects of social mediators' interventions in social relations points to the need to continue the pursuit of this new model of approaching social conflicts.

According to Lucio Luison and Orazio Maria Valastro, Italian experts on mediation (Luison, Valastro 2004), the future of social mediation lies in the following areas:

- the cultural aspect of communication, including in particular cultural mediation, migrants, and multicultural and multiethnic societies
- mediation in schools, focused on encouraging socialization which builds a social identity, creates new spaces for socialization, and offers alternative models of managing social relations
- mediation as a form of both social communication and social control in the process of learning how to live as a community – reconstruction of structures of intermediation between individuals and the state
- mediation in the prevention of social conflict – management of problematic issues as an opportunity to improve the quality of social relations
- institutional mediation and centres of mediation, providing legitimacy to the new profession of a social mediator; confrontation of members of the traditional profession in this area with the new professionals who deal with social life and conflict management
- the implementation of modern policies which favour cooperation and rely on new mediation techniques to find alternative solutions
- the professionalization of social mediation and the development of its various models in an interdisciplinary context.

Models of mediation

The role of a mediator. Differentiating between models of mediation is most easily achieved by defining the role of the mediator. When the mediator is employed by a business or an institution to solve a conflict for the benefit of the employer, mediation may be treated as a service. This type of mediation is most typical in urban settings. For example, Diapason Association offers mediation services of this type. It works with RATP and SNCF, French railway and motor transport companies. L'Union Sociale pour l'Habitat engages in mediation among residents in subsidised housing. Mediators employed by such organizations focus on conflict prevention, and only very rarely respond to requests from the general public.

In another model, the parties are in conflict while the mediator remains neutral. In this model, the mediator does not work to promote the interest of any party, but rather listens to all parties and assists them in finding the true source of the conflict and a solution that benefits everybody involved. A mediator should assist the parties in clearly articulating their positions and arguments, without imposing any specific solutions. The mediator's task is to re-build the relationship between the parties, which has been damaged or broken. This is only possible if both parties are genuinely willing to cooperate. Effective mediation that leads to permanent change is a process, not a one-time event.

Social and community mediation. Another perspective in which to view the differences between models of mediation is the differentiation between social mediation and community mediation. The key difference is that social mediation focuses on reconstructing social ties between the parties to the conflict, while the purpose of community mediation is to lead the community to a positive redefinition of the situation that was at the root of the conflict. Yet despite the difference in purposes, the logic that underpins these two models is the same.

Both kinds of mediation are governed by the same four principles. The first principle is promotion of autonomy, which pertains to developing the individuality of each party in relations with others

as well as to ensuring that the community remains autonomous of the mechanisms of regulation. The second principle refers to mutual respect between the parties to the conflict and between community members. The third principle is that the decision-making process must stay close to the parties, the conflict and the forum, and must be controlled by the community. The final principle is that conflicts are to be prevented by reconstructing social ties and by increasing community coherence. These four principles determine the character of mediation as a method based on mutual understanding and on effecting social change by acting as an intermediary.

Importantly, not all mediation is governed by the same logic that is paramount in social and community mediation. For example, when an organization employs mediation as a simple measure, e.g. to solve conflicts more effectively (thereby lowering the associated costs), and is not driven by the wish to restore social ties, this is neither social nor community mediation (Lemaire, Poitras 2004).

The political and economic approach

In late 1997, Martine Aubry, French Minister of Employment and Solidarity, introduced a new method of combating the skyrocketing rates of unemployment among youth. The solution she proposed was based on the assumption that offering potential workplaces was not sufficiently helpful to a large number of the young unemployed who, for a variety of reasons (family situation, living conditions, long-term unemployment, conflict with the law, addictions etc.), were either victims of social exclusion or at risk of such exclusion. These persons were therefore offered jobs for which anyone within a certain age bracket, regardless of their qualifications, was eligible. The only condition was that the person had to be available to work full time. The young persons who agreed to these conditions were employed under a special program (*Nouveaux services, nouveaux emplois*), under which the state undertook to finance, for a period of five years, work in new service sectors. The new sectors were created where it was determined that there were unmet needs. This long-term investment was designed to lead to the creation of new

occupations and professions. For this reason, the program was targeted at persons who could reasonably be assumed to uphold long-term continuity and professionalization of work at the new positions. At the outset of the program, the government planned that after five years, the new occupations and professions would be absorbed by the market. The program was targeted at 18-25 year olds, with the dual purposes of reducing unemployment among youth and utilizing the fast pace of skill absorption in young people who are generally fast learners and thus likely to be successful in the process of professionalization.

The profession of social mediators developed in France within the framework of this program. The idea was that young people with the type of background that placed them at the risk of social exclusion would be the best candidates for engaging with other young people with similar problems and experiences. It was assumed that no specific qualifications were needed to work as a social mediator, and that the process of professional socialization would occur naturally, eventually generating full professional competence in the new social mediators.

This is how, in France, in a dozen years a number of sub-professions developed to which the umbrella term 'social mediator' is applied. These sub-professions were generally established by local authorities who had a certain degree of autonomy to determine, in line with their specific needs, the kind of work to which the newly-appointed mediators were dispatched. A sociological analysis of the recruitment process points to certain factors that may have hindered the effectiveness of the new mediators. For example, candidates were often selected on the basis of their ethnic background. The reasoning was that being a member of a certain ethnic minority may make it easier to work with other members of this minority in the future. However, research has demonstrated that ethnicity was instrumentalized mostly in order to improve the public image of the authorities. Experts argue that, in fact, a conflict occurred. The conflict was that the profession of the social mediator was established in the public sphere as a political action, yet the conditions under which the new mediators were to start their work were full of unspoken (and often inaccurate) assumptions that eventually may be the

profession's downfall. For example, young persons with ethnic minority backgrounds were hired allegedly to improve the social reception of the profession – yet as a consequence, the profession was perceived as unimportant and marginalized (Biotteau 2004). The experiences of the first social mediators employed under the public program should in time lead to an established position of this profession (and support social inclusion), but social mediation as a profession needs a much stronger structure.

The program *Nouveaux services, nouveaux emplois* was thoroughly researched in France. Sociological research on social mediators was also carried out. Below I present selected analyses of field research data collected in 2000 in the Paris metropolitan region and in Normandy.

The paper by Sophie Divay (Divay 2003) presents analyses based on field research conducted between September and December 2000. Two groups of mediators, working in the Paris metropolitan region and in Normandy, were respondents in the study. Research was conducted by observation. Over several weeks, researchers accompanied mediators in their day-to-day work. Unexpected and difficult situations occurred occasionally, but for the most part, work was not too demanding, which gave the researchers the opportunity to engage in interviews about work organization, motivations, and the work itself. Observation and unstructured interviews were supplemented by semi-structured interviews focusing on specific events observed by the researchers.

The mediators work in public places, e.g. on public transport, in train stations, at bus terminals and bus stops, and at metro stations, particularly in the areas where the intensity of social problems is high.

The mediators work with the age group from 10 to ca. 30–35 years of age. In the 10-12 age group, the mediators' role is mostly to educate. With the teenagers, it is more complex. "You can say to the younger ones, '*You can't do this, you have to do that.*' They accept that. The teenagers will not accept that. It is a different type of pedagogical work. To them, you have to say, '*Look, you are a classy guy, your parents are happy with you. Do you want this to change?*'"(Divay 2003, p. 3). A young mediator may become an authority to a teenager. On the other hand, teenagers sometimes try to provoke the mediators. There is also another category of young persons who have already left the school system, regardless of their age. In terms of employment, they cover the entire spectrum: some work, some are unemployed, while others remain completely outside the labour market. Typically, these persons are the easiest for the mediators to work with, because

they are of a very similar age and in fact they sometimes were even schoolmates. Persons from this group usually cause no problems in public spaces, because they generally are already past the phase of rebellion. The next age group is adults, i.e. persons around 30 years of age. Relations with them can be sometimes problematic for the mediators. There is a problem with addressing them, since the familiar second-person 'you' cannot be used, and therefore a certain distance is inherent in the contact. The mediators found that it was easier to establish contact with a younger person they had not met before than with an older person they saw every day at the same place, e.g. a bus driver. Finally, the last group, in terms of age, is the elderly. The mediators declared a generally positive attitude to this group, even though some of the older persons tended to be distrustful towards the mediators (who were younger than themselves).

Interestingly, the mediators identified with the group that just left school, not with adults, which certainly had an impact on their work.

Mediators usually establish contact with younger persons. This results in part from their own choices and in part from the places where they work (near schools, local meeting places, etc.), where young people tend to congregate. Moreover, in public transport, this is the groups that tends to cause problems, e.g. by smoking or putting up their feet on the seats. If such situations occur, mediators take on the role of 'older brothers' towards the children and teenagers – since they are older, they have the authority and are able to dominate (Galland 1997).

The fact that the mediators identify with the group that has just left school is indicative of their style of work. It is generally amateurish, chaotic, and tends towards having fun. There are mainly two reasons for this. Firstly, the mediators often work among their own peers, people they know or know about. They have difficulties maintaining distance. Secondly, a relaxed attitude helps them accept their role as guardians of public order. Presenting oneself as a 'mate' tends to be more effective than attempts to subdue someone in mitigating conflict and correcting deviant behaviours.

An analysis of the age-based classification of clients gives a glimpse into how the mediators perceive themselves. The impact of age on social behaviours is never independent from the social assignment to a given age group (Attias-Donfut 1988). However, it appears that their employment in this role gives the mediators a sense of being in a phase of transition, a phase that precedes adulthood. They tend not to treat their jobs as real work, but rather as a phase of adaptation to the working world. It contributes to their socialization, because their conduct gradually changes over time.

Mediators were recruited from culturally and economically deprived communities. As a consequence, there is among them an overrepresentation of young migrants and persons with poor education, no work experience, family problems, health

problems, and conflict with the law. Research demonstrated that in many situations, the lack of rudimentary professional skills and communication skills prevented them from fulfilling their tasks as mediators. For example, they tended to perceive tardiness for work as something unimportant that required no explanation; in communicating with their supervisors (who were tasked with the mediators' professional development), they often acted like defiant schoolchildren. The decision to work as mediators gave them 'a space for experimenting with work', and in that space the process of professional socialization took place (Nicole-Drancourt, Roulleau-Berger 2001). The essence of this process is that they internalize the behaviours that are typical for the middle class to which their supervisors belong. On the other hand, it is important that they should make use of behaviour patterns and models which are 'natural' for them, in the sense that they are typical of the social group from which they originally come and in which they operate. Such operation is in fact difficult, because the mediators have no formal power and no ability to impose sanctions. The success rate of their interventions depends solely on the trust they are able to generate, and their intelligent reactions in stressful circumstances. Yet relying on the 'natural' models is fraught with the risk of over-familiarity. A certain distance must be maintained between the mediator and the person they work with; without that distance, mediation is not possible.

Being employed as mediator gives these young people an opportunity to acquire valuable transferable skills: punctuality, familiarity with administrative procedures, and the ability to function within a professional hierarchy where disobedience is met with unfavourable consequences, and everyday life is a lesson in the art of negotiating.

The mediation role requires mediators to intervene if they observe inappropriate or aggressive conduct, and this relies on the mediator's own moral code. It is in some cases difficult, e.g. when the mediator is to chastise a marijuana user (where the mediator is not personally opposed to the practice). In such a situation, acting in their capacity as a mediator, they may approach the person smoking and request that they should not smoke in a public place; yet the mediator may not be expected to try to convince the smoker of the perils of smoking marijuana.

When establishing the program, which aimed to create the new profession of mediator, no precise guidelines were developed to address the difficult situations that often arise in professional situations that are typical for mediators' work. In the two groups of respondents in the study, many noted that their education had proceeded in a somewhat chaotic manner, by trial and error.

As the mediators had no formal education to lend them prestige, they typically could not count on social recognition. On the contrary, their work was sometimes stigmatized due to the very nature of their activities and also due

to the background of the mediators. Mediators were a common topic of jokes; stories circulated that belittled their work. The work is actually easy to dismiss, because the mediators are – as they should be – relatively invisible, which results from the idea that merging with their environment makes them more effective. Moreover, a large proportion of their working time is essentially spent on observing the life of the neighbourhood. Interventions are not necessarily frequent, and they are rarely spectacular. The mediators themselves preferred not to be perceived as connected to the program under which they were employed. They viewed the program as stigmatizing, and the employment of youth under the program as fake and artificial (Divay 2003, p. 10).

However, in a general perspective, they viewed the decisions to apply for the program and become mediators in a positive light. They valued the human contact involved in their work, even if the work itself was not very well paid and sometimes just boring. They perceived working as a mediator as a transitory stage between unemployment and work. The mediators hoped the profession would become more socially recognized as valuable social prevention. Realistically speaking, it is difficult to ensure social recognition of a profession that was never formally established; the qualifications required of candidates were never specified. In 1997, when the program commenced, eligibility criteria consisted only of the age and social background requirement.

In the opinion of Bertrand Schwartz, an expert on social mediators, being a mediator was neither a job nor a profession, but rather a mission that one helped to realize. In order to reinforce this mission (and such reinforcement seems necessary), more people must work to accomplish it, and they cannot all be young. Yet Schwartz noted also that he did not believe a young person would become a mediator and then remain one even for five years, let alone longer (Schwartz, Gautier-Etié 2000, pp. 19–25).

The participatory–democratic approach

Mediation is an attempt to seek the resolution of a conflict by means of a relational approach, and thus has a participatory-democratic basis. In this sense, mediation may only be successful if all parties to it are authentically engaged, and ready and willing to accept the outcome of the mediation. If the solution comes from the outside, i.e. from the mediator, the likelihood of long-term

positive effects is low. The responsibility of the mediator is not to offer solutions but rather to support the parties in finding a solution that is beneficial for everyone involved, and to remain as neutral as possible in doing so. Mediation is thus founded on the philosophy of participation and on the belief in the value of the debate and civic action.

The problem with the new model, in which young people with no professional background or education are hired as social mediators, is that they enter into a professional group with a relatively strong tradition, and with its own set of practices developed within a closed sector of the labour market. The question is, therefore: to what extent can the practical skills of the new mediators contribute to their integration and recognition in the local communities? (Barthelemy 2004). Fabienne Barthelemy points to two criteria that must be met in order for the profession of social mediator to gain social legitimacy. Firstly, the mediator must acquire the right type of clients, and ensure the clients' loyalty. Secondly, the mediator must be able to negotiate for themselves a space within the labour market. Negotiations are necessary with the social workers who have an acknowledged position within the same area which the social mediators are now entering. While the state may be promoting the profession of social mediator as rooted in the 'natural' competences, these competences themselves are insufficient to ensure the mediators a position alongside professionals with a well-established status. The mediators must therefore negotiate on two fronts – with other professionals in their sector, and with their clients – to gain legitimacy.

At the outset, the position of the mediators is rather weak. They are assigned tasks and responsibilities in the areas where social workers lack the willingness and resources. They are something of an experiment, designed to offer services 'in response to unmet needs'.[5] Is this a sufficient basis for a new profession?

Under these circumstances, social mediators must prove the uniqueness of their profession within the community of professionals who engage in social interventions on a given territory – social workers, outreach workers, culture animators, etc. The boundaries of the new profession are flexible, and defined in

[5]   *DGEFP (Direction générale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle), 97/25 du 24 octobre 1997 relative au développment d'activitée pour l'emploi des jeunes, programme "Nouveaux services, nouveaux emplois".*

relation to other professions. A young mediator operates in a very sensitive social environment, both in direct contact (accompanying clients and home visits) and in more formal contexts (engaging in debates, resolving conflicts, and conducting observations in selected neighbourhoods). The nature of the work changes depending on the local context. Consequently, in separation from an analysis of the local conditions, the work cannot be defined.

It is often difficult for mediators to enter into a new local environment, which sometimes is not open to this type of intervention. The mediator is not legitimised by the title of social worker (likely known to residents of deprived areas), which carries with it the authority of a certain educational achievement and of verifiable professional skills. Mediators are required to demonstrate practical skills, such as knowledge of a community and its problems, as well as context-based soft skills such as the ability to listen and engage in dialogue. They are not required to have formalized knowledge, to formulate methodically sound procedures, and to implement relevant theoretical models (Dubar 1996). Thus a new category of workers is introduced into the milieu of social workers. These new workers have no formal qualifications, yet are assigned the responsibilities reserved previously for social workers. This may cause social workers to feel threatened and uncertain. Lilian Mathieu notes this in her analyses. She observes that the initial hostility of social workers may be interpreted as anxiety towards a transformation that diminishes the importance of the professional knowledge and skills of teachers and social assistants (Mathieu 2000). Under such circumstances, social workers mobilize to defend their area of expertise, while mediators attempt to highlight the unique aspects of their work.

The cultural approach

France is a multicultural country. Therefore, mediators hold another important role: they are employed by businesses with multicultural crews (with a range of ethnicities and religious backgrounds) and which therefore have the potential for cross-cultural conflicts. In order to resolve such conflicts, understanding each of the

individual cultures does not suffice. A mediator must be able to read cultural codes, to observe, analyse, and explain the processes in which meanings are created (Pierre, Delange 2004). Traditional sociological knowledge falls short of success here. It is necessary to understand how cultures are established and how they evolve. It is a multidisciplinary field, involving philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, ethnography, ethnomethodology, and a range of other areas of humanities that study the social creation of identities.

The educational approach
(a Mauritius case study)

Social mediation may also be used to combat social exclusion. In order to do so, mediators work in the schools where children are at risk of such exclusion. Ibrahim Koodoruth of University of Mauritius studies the methods employed by social mediators to prevent social exclusion in schools on Mauritius, where the population is multiethnic with waves of migration from France, Africa, China, and India.[6] Political and socio-economic factors have shaped a clear hierarchy of the ethnic groups. Since the 1990s, the Creoles have been suffering discrimination. In February 1999, riots erupted because of these tensions. As a consequence, social exclusion processes targeted at the Creole population have intensified. Ibrahim Koodoruth argues that this exclusion is rooted in the relatively high rates of school-related failure in students from Creole families (Koodoruth 2004).

   To combat social exclusion, the authorities of Mauritius have founded Priority Education Zones. Since a school is both the place where socialization occurs and where meanings are produced, it should naturally also be the place where the ties between the child and that child's educational environment are re-established in the fight against exclusion. The state-organized program was further supported by the Catholic Church, which opened additional educational centres. Two groups of persons served as mediators: outreach workers, employed by the state, and volunteer parents, who decided to tackle these pioneer interventions. The official positions of the mediators varied, depending on their qualifications and on the

[6]   Mauritius was discovered by the Portugese in 1505. In the 17th century, it was colonized by the Dutch; in the 18th century – by the French; in 1810, it came under British rule. It became independent in 1968.

type of intervention in which they were involved. The responsibilities of conducting mediation under difficult conditions were vested in persons without any professional training, forcing the new mediators to handle problematic situations where decisions had to be made quickly, despite conflicting emotions. The interventions are driven by a large range of factors that are rooted on the one hand in the social composition of the given communities, and on the other hand the specific situation in a given school. The parents are aware of the situation in the community and understand it, while outreach workers should be familiar with effective methods of working with youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. A synergy effect is expected, which should make it easier to reach the common goal.

The geographical approach (mediation in smaller communities)

The French model introduced the novel approach of having residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods take up the job of mediators. In contrast to other methods of resolving conflicts, mediation is based on active participation of the parties in the search for solutions. In the process, they are assisted by a mediator, who compiles a social and professional profile of the parties (Bonafé-Schmidt 2004). Evaluation of mediation carried out in deprived areas, conducted by researchers from the University of Lyon, demonstrated that this process becomes a ritual, constructed on the basis of verbal interaction among a number of actors (agents). In the majority, the issues in which mediators intervene focus on everyday problems, such as conflicts between neighbours. The research pointed to the significance of the mediator's experience, which allowed the mediator to create and implement the rules of a new social order in the area where the mediator works.

Social mediators carry out many interventions, but very few precise analyses of the effects of their work have been attempted. Therefore it seems crucial that a reliable policy of evaluation should be implemented. Long-term evaluation procedures with regard to the effectiveness of mediation would make it possible to

determine whether this new form of social regulation actually fits with the principles of de-centralization, de-professionalization and delegation of conflict-solving in today's communities.

Four models of mediation in social work

The theory of social work in the tradition of French-speaking countries distinguishes between four main concepts of social work. Each of these concepts corresponds to a different understanding of social mediation (Riverin-Simard, Pineau 1993, pp. 1–6). Each of these concepts is also based on an analysis of the relationships between a person (P) and their environment (E), suggesting a specific type of intervention and proposing the methods thereof. Furthermore, each such concept of social work corresponds to a certain perception of the role of the social worker, yet in each scenario, the social worker plays the part of the social mediator (even though in each case this part is understood somewhat differently).

The first model is referred to as *analogy-based*, because it relies on seeking out analogies (similarities) between person (P) and the environment (E). In this model, for each problem, there is one solution. Social workers specialize in completing tasks following an established scheme, and they serve the clients by following set procedures. The interventions are of an *ad hoc* one-off nature, and are external to the problem.

The second model is referred to as *relations-based*. The relations between the person and the environment are denoted by the following formula: P <---> E. The social worker specializes in relationships. The worker remains external to the problem, with the worker's position being balanced between the institutional and the personal field.

The third model is referred to as *organic*. The model captures the process of continuous mutual interactions that occur over time. It is denoted by the following formula: $P(p^1, p^2)$ <---> $E(e^1, e^2)$, where p^1, e^1 denote the current situation, and p^2, e^2 refer to projected future circumstances. In this model, the social worker systematically

monitors the situation and intervenes within groups, attempting to strengthen and reinforce social ties.

The fourth model is referred to as *transaction-based*. It supplements the third model by placing the analyses in a broader context, whereby two new aspects may be considered and understood: firstly, the limitations arising out of the changeable nature of the system, and secondly, the opportunities arising out of the potential for creative transformation and production of the self. The formula for this model is P-E-C-T, where C is context, and T is time. The essence of this model is that it creates a space to act within the environment where intervention occurs. There is acceptance for the absence of complete control, which leaves room for change. In this model, the social worker is not external to the problem, but tries to interpret it in relation to multiple elements and to engage in participatory evaluation, involving – if possible – all the parties.

Corresponding to these four models are four types of relations:

(1)   analogy-based model: binary relations, often driven by institutions
(2)   relations-based model: networks of relations
(3)   organic model: complex relations that evolve over time
(4)   transaction-based model: relations based on system-wide synergies, able to generate progress.

Table 1 below compares these four models, including an illustration of how the social worker acts in line with the type of interaction that prevails in a given model.

The objective of social work is to understand, counteract, and combat the effects of social problems, which in extreme cases may lead to social exclusion. Contemporary theory of social work in France assumes that exclusion cannot be treated as an individual adaptation-related problem of a specific person (Freynet 1999, p 295). The excluded persons and groups continue to have a relationship with the society. When they lose their autonomy, it has both a reason and a result in disrupted social relations. The social worker is unable to understand the situation of a socially excluded person without knowing and understanding that person's background and environment. In seeking to improve the situation, the social worker must rely on the social relations and seek to reinforce them.[7]

[7]   Freyner proposes the following example of the connection between being excluded from the labour market and from social life: purely work-related skills are insufficient to find a job. Social and cultural skills are also needed. A person who has no support in their community may have problems developing the skills to find necessary employment. Social exclusion and labour market exclusion feed into the same vicious cycle.

Table 1. Social work as a function of the relations between the person (P) and the environment (E)

	Analogy-based model	Relations-based model	Organic model	Transaction-based model
Formula	P & E	P <--> E	P (p¹, p²) <--> E (e¹, e²)	P-E-C-T
Concept of social interventions	1 problem --> 1 solution Combining elements in a stable situation	A simple interaction process Work on the relationship within a given case	A complex interaction process Group animation	Context / Time Process of synergy-based creation
Aims	Respond to requirements and needs Act in accordance with procedures	Develop interpersonal skills	Develop the skills to anticipate future events and seek connections	Develop analytical skills involving broad contexts and creativity
Requisites for success	Analysis of the problem Knowing the solution Matching the problem to the solution Constant monitoring	Analysis of the interactions and relationships Ability to diagnose a situation Ability to negotiate and intervene	Finding connections between the past (history and culture) and the future (individual plans)	Accepting the limitations imposed by the context Sensitivity to changes within the system Tolerance of uncertainty, a creative transformation of the uncertain towards a desirable direction
Actions of the social worker	Identification of the fixed elements of the personal and institutional field	Identification of the significant variables in terms of relations	Identification of the interactions between the person (current situation and projected developments) and the environment (current situation and potential developments)	Identification of the unique configuration of conditions and events, and their multidimensional analysis
Methods of intervention	Ad hoc, one-off (performance of services)	Conversations with the client in need of assistance	Methodology of group social work	Development of local community Methodology of forecasting
Social work in relation to the problem	External	External	External	Internal

Source: author's own research.

Table 2. Four forms of mediation and the tasks of the social worker (SW)

Analogy-based model	Relations-based model
• The recipient is experiencing deprivation • The social worker assesses the situation and provides the goods and services required to improve it Focus of the exchange = monetary, legal Result = dependency, stigmatization	• The recipient is a party to a set of relations • The social workers facilitate the exchange and regulate the relations Topic of the exchange = a relationship Result = tying the person to the closest environment
Organic model	**Transaction-based model**
• The recipient is a person whose situation is changing and whose needs are evolving • The social worker assesses the ability to plan, and offers support in the collective process of creating and organizing Topic of the exchange = control over one's life Result = a shift for the individual and for the group	• The recipient is aware of social connections • The social worker engages the abilities and interests of the recipient, and encourages self-reflection and self-organization in the social, economic, and political aspect Topic of the exchange = the person as a social actor (agent) Result = civic-mindedness

Source: *author's work based on M.-F. Freynet, Les médiations du travail social,* Publisher Chronique sociale, Lyon 1999, p. 289.

Exclusion is hardly a new social problem. It is a symptom of the weakness of a society where the economic processes increase the gaps between social groups, and where solidarity is lacking. Exclusion also reveals two types of problems. Firstly, it reveals problems in communication between the persons in difficult situations who do not have strong social connections and who wish to remain independent. It also demonstrates the weaknesses of the institutions that intervene in these situations. Their focus tends to be on strengthening the ties between the institution and the individual, yet this approach may unbalance the (already weak) social identities of the persons at risk of social exclusion, and those who have already suffered because of it.

Social work now consists in seeking a new compromise between the state and the civic society, and between the economic and social factors. It constitutes a strategic component in the handling of contradictions. It is crucial in creating connections where the social fabric is torn, and in re-building it where it is damaged due to conflicts. In a world that has problems communicating, the importance of mediation is on the rise.

The objective of mediation in social work is to re-create identities, to connect to social networks, and to integrate communities.

Mediation, if done well, allows a person suffering because of social exclusion to find their place within the community once again. In order for mediation to be successful, the mediator must have a thorough understanding of the circumstances of the persons with whom they work. Furthermore, the mediator must assess their ability and willingness to re-build social ties, and the dynamics of what makes a given community respond. The latter may be studied by analyzing the networks in the community, and by seeing how each group, organization, and person is positioned within these structures. Social structures evolve, and the boundaries of social groups are blurry, but the position of a person in a social structure is still what determines this person's ability to re-integrate, and the potential for conflicts to be resolved. A mediator should always perceive the persons with whom they work as elements of a broader social structure. Resolving the conflict is possible by means of constructing new social dynamics (Freynet 1999, p. 296).

The task of the mediator in social work is to engage in a complex analysis of the twofold relations of a person at risk of social exclusion: with their community, and with the institutions. The mediator should promote in their clients an attitude where they identify with the community in which they live. This also means the opening up of a space for negotiations, pointing to new potential partnerships that build new connections. A community is not a simple self-regulating network of exchanges. It is also a product of thoughts, intentions, rules, and power relations – all the elements of the living fabric of the society. In order to be successful, mediation must position itself at the crossroads of these elements, while maintaining a certain equal distance from them all. It is exactly at these crossroads that the next generation of communication may be born.

Mediation in social work benefits not only individuals and institutions. It can work well among local residents and the authorities, coming together around issues they all share. Mediation provides an axis along which the community can come together. Each party remains visible to all the others, and they are all stakeholders in the same process.

This understanding of social mediation and its role in reconstructing social ties fits well with the actor-network theory,

which was introduced into the realm of social sciences by the French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher, Bruno Latour (Latour 2005). Latour analyses the social world, but his focus in not on any of the reality's specific aspect. Instead, he observes the emergence and fluctuations of the relationship that bring about a certain social order. In Latour's theory, the social reality arises out of networks of connections between people, objects, and ideas. The networks gain permanence by means of standardization and formalization. In relation to social work, this translates into the emergence of certain institutions, methods, and procedures, which come to be applied automatically. With time, this may hinder effective reactions to difficult situations that may befall the clients of the social welfare system. The mediators, with their new approach to mediation in social work, have a greater ability to respond to the changing circumstances.

Social mediation becomes an instrument of creation of the social reality by building networks and by bringing together the interests of individuals, institutions, and communities. Mediation allows social work to overcome the paradox of limitless support, where assistance means dependence. Instead, the objective is to rebuild autonomy. The work of a social mediator is focused on a citizen, with the assumption that the relations with a community are dictated not only by the legal and administrative solutions which regulate the person's access to assistance coming from that community, but by other factors too. This work is also about a revival of crucial social connections, a reconstruction of social solidarity. In a divided society at risk of atomization, mediation in social work may promote the reconstruction of social ties.

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Wioletta Szymczak

Active social policy in practice in German social services after Peter Hartz's reforms[1]

Social market economy has a long tradition in Germany. For years, it has ensured a balance between free market and state interventionism. It has provided the basis for wide-ranging welfare policies, based on mandatory labour insurance and integrated with labour market resources. Yet the times of prosperity were disrupted when a number of processes overlapped: economic crisis, decreasing growth rates, increasing rates of unemployment, employability issues, and – last but not least – weakening state public institutions. Under these circumstances, activation ideas gained recognition and began to be touted as a good basis for a reconstruction of the welfare state. The reconstruction was informed and driven by the concept of 'an activating welfare state' (*aktivierende Sozialstaat*; see Galuske 2005, p. 196).

The reforms focused on the labour market and the welfare system. They targeted both the recipients (the unemployed and the welfare clients), and the providers (the personnel of the social and employment services). Implementing the concept of the activating welfare state meant new paradigms for both of these groups, including an institutional reorganization and a shift in how the system operates and how it is funded. The new regulations offer new fundamental principles and a new program, but they also require the social and employment services to attempt a redefinition under comprehensively changing conditions, while retaining the key elements of the 'old' identity.

'To require and to support': principles and areas of reform

The idea of far-reaching economic reforms was born after the reunification of Germany. The rapid transformation of the structure of production, the release of a surplus labour force by the obsolete industries, the need to find good use for the labour force in the eastern part of Germany, and the fact that the local residents there were unprepared to compete on the labour market led to a steep increase in unemployment, and to a dependency on government assistance. In the western part of the country, unemployment was caused by excessive regulation of the labour market, inflexible wage systems, excessive wages, excessive ancillary costs of labour, and layoff restrictions. Unemployment benefits were sizeable and available for long periods, while there was little monitoring of who received them. The financial support system was not designed to motivate its clients to look for work, which caused an increase in long-term unemployment and loss of qualifications in persons who were able but unwilling to work. In light of the impending economic problems, the federal government of the SPD-Green coalition appointed a committee of experts, headed by Peter Hartz (at the time, Head of Human Resources at Volkswagen). The work of this committee led to the implementation of the package of four legislative acts (statutes), regulating the issues of modern services on the labour market (see: Zawadzki 2006, p. 22; Moszyński 2009, pp. 155–157).

Table 1. Peter Hartz's statutes

Statute	Date of coming into force	Areas of change
Hartz I	1 January 2003	more restrictive criteria of eligibility for benefits, introduction of a system of sanctions, establishment of Staff Services Agencies (*APS*), training vouchers
Hartz II	1 January 2003	*Mini-* and *Midijobs*, self-employment
Hartz III	1 January 2004	reform of public employment services
Hartz IV	1 January 2005	reform of unemployment benefits and of the welfare system

Source: K. Zawadzki (2006), *Niemiecki model Flexicurity* [The German Flexicurity model], "Polityka Społeczna", vol. 389, no 8, p. 22.

Support – require – activate

The impact of Hartz's reforms was mainly to the labour market (lowering the ancillary costs of work and the taxes, making investments easier), public employment services (elimination of excessive red tape), creating new employment options, systematically limiting the scope of protection granted by public institutions, moving from a three-tier social security system to a two-tier one, and facilitating workers' re-integration into the labour market. These objectives were to be achieved by means of a structural shift in the employment services, a change in the principles of eligibility for assistance and unemployment benefits, and by de-regulating the market (Płóciennik 2007; Płóciennik, p. 271-272; *Problemy niemieckiego rynku pracy...*, p. 230).

The key paradigm that informed the changes was **activation**. The concept gained prominence in response to the shortcomings of the previous system. The three main areas of application of the activation policies may be distinguished by asking who, how, and by what means is to be 'activated'. These three areas are: (1) activation of the labour markets; (2) activation of the public administration, particularly the sectors offering social services; (3) activation of the citizens (Galuske 2005, p. 197–201).

In terms of **activation of the labour markets**, the key idea was to improve the market's absorption rates by eliminating obstacles to employment. The focus of the reforms was on deregulation and on increasing the flexibility of the market. Businesses were supposed to be able to 'breathe', to match the market trends and the fluctuations of supply and demand. The suggested changes included: removal of employee protection rights (a change in how working time is calculated), extension of the options for flexible, fixed-time, atypical forms of employment (temporary work), weakening of multi-enterprise collective labour agreements, and support for part-time employment. As a consequence of these changes, full-time employment with full legal protection and wages set under agreements between trade unions and employers' associations (*Tarifverträge*), once believed to be the basic employment model, is now slowly disappearing.

As for the **activation of the public administration**, particularly the sectors offering social services, the key concept is competition. Modernization of this sector of the administration is to fit within the 'new management' paradigm. It is to proceed by means of contract-based management, budgeting, bottom-up responsibility for resources, and ensuring top quality while still being centrally controlled. The idea is to transform the administration in the following ways: to shift its mindset from a clerical one to that of a service provider; to decentralize the administration and create lower-level structures with the support of the contract-based method; to replace the yearly assignment of funds (typical for institutions) with management on the basis of strategic objectives; to implement new reporting standards; to activate the staff by encouraging internal competition.

Activation pertains also to the **citizens**. The welfare state offered them safety and protection, but it was never geared towards providing them with skills that in the future could help them solve their own problems using their own resources. The activating state rests on the idea of **self-help**, understood as setting requirements and supporting labour market integration. This concept reflects the often-cited explanation of Gerhard Schröder and Tony Blair that part-time work and work at a low wage is better than no work at all, because it eases the transition from unemployment to employment (Galuske 2005, p. 199). The underlying notion of '**requiring and supporting**' (*fordern und fördern*) is a strong orientation towards individual initiative and the responsibility of individual clients (rationally-acting agents with an ability to calculate the costs and profits). In the opinion of many experts, this concept of *homo economicus* pervades the relevant German statutes. In microeconomic terms, a policy of activation assumes that the labour market offers vacancies to job seekers at any time, which implies that it is the jobseeker's duty to accept any job that is available (see Enggruber 2005, pp. 67–68).

The government justified the 'require and support' reforms by referencing the Anglo-American concept of workfare. **Support** was understood as increasing the efficiency of employment services and improving employability, while **requirements** pertained to the greater initiative to be demonstrated by the unemployed in their efforts to find jobs. Other objectives of the reform included:

preventing and alleviating poverty; simplifying and de-stigmatizing welfare regulations; increasing the autonomy of welfare clients; and lowering the numbers of unreported poverty cases (where eligible persons failed to apply for benefits). At the same time, the objective was to tie the amounts, duration etc. of benefits to accepting employment. The new system of benefits was designed to provide the stimuli to work (Bäcker 2008, p. 22).

Activation ideas in the organization and practice of social work

Welfare administration in Germany is vested in local government institutions at the level of regions, cities, and states (*Land*). Locally, legal regulations provided by the social statutes are implemented either by welfare offices (*Sozialamt*) or by special local government mandated institutions that integrate welfare services with, for example, assistance to the youth (Schuldt 2008, p. 69). Social work is located at the crossroads of welfare and labour market support, and is practiced by a variety of institutions. It may be offered by three types of entities: public entities, NGOs, and private commercial entities (Table 2). NGOs typically focus on assistance and caregiving. Support and activation of the unemployed, as well as child and youth services, typically fall within the remit of various public administration bodies (although welfare offices, when applying the new activation measures, often also work independently with the unemployed). The intersection of priorities of social and welfare services and employment services is also visible in the example of social workers, with their highly differentiated powers, duties and institutional positions across a variety of institutions. In terms of legal regulations, particularly with regard to the unemployed, the employment services are in the foreground in the sense that the system of assistance is dominated by the regulations issued by the federal employment office (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*; Michel-Schwartze 2010b, p. 324). This orientation of the system determines how social work is perceived in the labour market context, and impacts the integration of actions aimed at assisting the unemployed.

Table 2. Entities engaged in social work in Germany

Public entities	NGOs	Private commercial entities
Regional level • youth office • health office • welfare office **Above-regional level** • youth office (*Land* level) • above-regional welfare institutions	• welfare organizations • youth organizations • self-help groups • specific organizations and foundations	• entities whose main object is social work • entities that operate social institutions

Source: J. Merchel (2008), *Trägerstrukturen in der Sozialen Arbeit. Eine Einführung*, Juventa Verlag, Weinheim–München, p. 12.

Public entities work at the level of regions and above. At the level of regions they serve a twofold purpose: they play the part of intermediary in providing social services (i.e. they act as service leaders), in charge of ensuring that services are offered and of general planning for their delivery, but they are also the direct contact for clients who can approach them for services. At the level above the regions, the focus is on advisory services, political and industry-based initiatives, and administration. The leadership and intermediation are only necessary with regard to specific needs that are territorially spread beyond one region. **NGOs** are usually part of the larger organizational structures they represent. This pertains to churches, for example. When churches organize kindergartens or youth centres, they usually do so within the organizational structures of an umbrella organization. It is very rare for small organizations to act on their own. The German system of entities engaged in social work is closely tied with the welfare infrastructure (*Wohlfartsverbände*) and youth organizations (*Jugendverbände*), and is adjusted so that they all fit together. Self-help groups are listed as a separate category of entities because they have a different origin and history. Yet Joachim Merchel notes that many of these groups have now become incorporated into larger structural units. **Commercial entities** have been gaining significance recently. They operate in two forms: as businesses that specialize in offering social services, and as businesses that run social institutions for their employees

and their families, on top of regular production and business activity (Merchel 2008, pp. 11–14).

The general organizational basis for social work is provided by **general social services** (*Allgemeiner Sozialer Dienst, ASD*), which are referred to as the municipal platform of social services administration. They are in charge of providing assistance to individuals via youth offices, welfare offices, and health offices. General social services have neither the responsibilities nor structures that reach beyond the regional level. They are attached in a variety of ways to the local structures and circumstances. They may be formally placed alongside youth offices or welfare offices, they may provide a link between the two, or they may be organized as a separate organizational unit. In terms of personnel, they are dominated by social workers and social pedagogues. In a majority of municipalities (91%), general social services are attached to youth offices (Merchel 2008, p. 46–47).

Many authors believe that contemporary understanding of social work (and the reforms thereof), including the professional and methodological aspect, is influenced by globalization and by neo-liberal trends in thinking. Brigitte Michel-Schwartze argues that modernization of the methods of social work means that the work is adjusted to the 'spirit of the times', which is revealed through the economic and political system. Both of these systems leave their mark on the social reality (Michel-Schwartze 2010a, p. 8). According to Michel-Schwartze (Michel-Schwartze 2010a, pp. 10–14), social policy and social work are particularly strongly affected by the labour market and by the education market, by the political decisions, and by the mechanisms that shape reality by using market-derived terms. Dorothea Roer (Roer 2010, pp. 34–35) presents a similar argument. She refers to the findings of other critics of the current changes in social work, and she points to the difficult consequences of the efforts to make social work fit with the expectations of the policy makers (both at state and at local level) and of the units that provide funding for social services. According to Roer, the consequences include: for the clients – less attractive offers, both qualitatively and quantitatively; for the personnel – lower earnings, deregulation of working time and of the conditions of work, and lower evaluation of work; for

the profession – application of market criteria to the entire sector, gradual subordination to market principles, and forced elimination of the pedagogical aspects of work (*Ent-pädagogisierung*) along with an erosion of tried and tested academic foundations, the danger of self-liquidation; for social pedagogy – the risk that social work may contribute to the dismantling of the welfare state (in its positive aspects.

The concept of the activating welfare state is inherently connected with encouraging individual responsibility, which implies that risk is transferred on the individual: the idea that safety nets are a matter of private arrangements becomes a program, a policy. Ronald Lutz notes that this tendency may be perceived critically as reinforcing individualism and weakening social solidarity. Yet he also argues that it matches the concept of a modern person, with the expectations of greater autonomy and individual responsibility that are attached to this concept. It is not without its consequences in terms of social work, which should rely more heavily on economic criteria and – instead of working on weaknesses – support the strengths and offer and encourage (activate) individual responsibility for shaping one's life. Thus Lutz arrives at the central notion of the new social policy: to support individuals, but also to require certain behaviours from them (Lutz 2008).

In this understanding of social work, offering the client safety and protection is no longer an objective. It is merely a means to an end, where the end is ensuring economic success. In social work, this translates into new models of management and support (*Kontextsteuerung, Kontraktmanagement,* and *Case-Management*). These processes have two elements at their centre: independent services, and the client's co-responsibility (Lutz 2008).

The challenges to social work that result from social changes and from the reforms are reflected in the following terms: activation (*Aktivierung*), market orientation (*Marktorientierung*), value-for-money (*Wirtschaftlichkeit*), efficiency (*Effizienz*), and effectiveness (*Effektivitat*) (Otto 2006, p. 284). Efficiency and cost-effectiveness are decisive in determining whether social assistance is professionally organized and administered. Implicitly, this also means focusing on standardization and quality assurance (Vorlaufer 2010, p. 107).

New model of management in social services

The above-listed concepts point to a general tendency towards modernization of social services in line with the ideas of New Public Management. The German version of this model was first implemented in youth offices. While the market-driven, economic orientation was met with criticism, the elements of the modernization project nonetheless continue to be implemented. In terms of social practice and of conduct of social workers, the new model of management places two issues at the centre: focus on the client, and cost effectiveness. In the new model, how the tasks of the social services are defined and how they are carried out should be more strongly connected with the client. Given that resources – financial, human, and material – are limited, methods must be developed that would guarantee effectiveness (focus on the objective and on the quality) and efficiency (in how the resources are managed). These methods are reflected in actions, and illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Elements of the new management model

OBJECTIVES:		
Focus on the client	Cost-effectiveness	
Key strategic concept: PRODUCT (+ quality)		
Strategic components		

Special-purpose contracts
Contract-based management
Budgeting
Controlling:
information and reporting
(operationalized in terms of indices
and indicators)
	Organization
	De-centralized structures:
	• combination of specialist
	  responsibility with responsibility
	  for resources
	• integration of decision-making
	  powers with responsibility
		Human resources
		Development of personnel

Source: Author's own work based on: J. Merchel (2008), *Trägerstrukturen in der Sozialen Arbeit. Eine Einführung*, Juventa Verlag, Weinheim–München, p. 54.

The changes in the system generated by the new model in turn generate changes in how the nature and purpose of social work is defined and interpreted. **Focus on the client**, according to Michel-Schwartze, means that reasons for the client's circumstances are individually assessed (which leads to individual assignment of responsibility), and support is also given on an individually-defined basis. **Cost-effectiveness** means that with increasing frequency, the language of social work and its methods rely on concepts derived from economics, which in turn produces new models of thinking about social policy. The need to consider cost-effectiveness means that social work is styled as a **service**, with benefits being the end result ('products') of this service. Yet this process of 'production', argues Michel-Schwartze, is not functional without the cooperation of the recipients of the benefits, defined as **clients** or **co-producers**. At the same time, the tasks of the social workers are standardized, channelled into administrative procedures, and are subject to strict reporting requirements (Michel-Schwartze 2010a, p. 19).

Two elements are particularly interesting in the new management model: the regulations stipulating **conditional financing of social services**, and the expectations towards social workers. Financing in de-centralized structures is to be regulated by contracts, which are understood as goal-oriented (support for self-help, activation) instruments of cooperation. The contracts provide a basis for budgeting, i.e. to determine how funding is distributed in order to achieve the goals. However, budgeting responsibilities (however closely related to the goals) may only be assigned where the organizational structure allows for it, and where specialist responsibility, responsibility for the resources, and decision-making powers are all guaranteed both structurally and organizationally.

The notion of social workers' responsibility is closely connected with the need to put more efforts into personnel management. Yet social workers may not limit themselves to following and implementing guidelines; they are expected to be actively **ready to adjust their methods** and to accept greater responsibility for how resources are used, which means that their powers in terms of connecting these two areas must be increased. In this context, the idea of quality becomes particularly important. The result-oriented

paradigm (*Outputorientierung*) requires the entities that provide social work to be oriented towards transparent and understandable quality criteria, and to practice in line with replicable methods which may be subject to evaluation, and which may sustain the high quality of services. In practice, this approach favours entities that offer the highest quality for the lowest price. This quality requirement is, according to Joachim Merchel, important both professionally and economically. The professional impulse towards focusing on the client is connected with the economic impulse to economically manage resources in a competitive environment (Merchel 2008, pp. 56–57).

Michael Buestrich and Norbert Wohlfart (Buestrich, Wohlfart 2008) explore the impact of this economization of social work with regard to the provision of services in the social sector. The quality of social services – interpersonal services by their very nature – depends on the willing attitude, relationship, and mutual cooperation between the service provider, the person implementing the service, and the client. When focusing on the person becomes an economic consideration, a certain ambivalence arises with regard to the **role of social workers**: they become an **economic factor** in the cost-success equation. Reorganization of the social sector is driven by the search for efficiency of services, a change in the manner in which work is carried out, a new division of responsibilities, monitoring and reporting that fit with the new paradigms, and relying on volunteer efforts to support paid workers or substitute for them where it is possible and advisable.

In light of this, is it possible to maintain the personal nature of the services, and to protect the relationship between the social worker and the client? Is it possible to combine the culture of effectiveness with orientation towards efficiency? The idea of social work is that the relationship with the client is supposed to be based on trust, and this trust-based relationship may then lead to labour market connections, as well as learning and development.[2] M. Galuske explores the significance of flexibility and efficiency in social work, and concludes that building trust-based relationships is very different from manufacturing a product. Interpersonal relations which form the basis of successful social and pedagogical work are not forged in 'effective' time units: they require openness and flexibility (Galuske 2005, p. 205).

[2] On the fundamental importance of establishing this relationship using Polish examples see e.g. Kaźmierczak, 2006, p. 102.

With regard to the types of social services that are focused on a person or on a household, an inherent element of employment is 24/7 availability. The drive towards efficiency in the use of human resources leads to flexible, time-unit based employment. There is a lot of interest in the concept of a 'breathing factory', where the crew are on stand-by to switch to a piecework arrangement if the economic conditions are poor or if there are heavy burdens on the business. In the social sector, this leads to more flexible working time management, including working time accounts, the introduction of so-called discretionary activity, and a consequent deregulation of the working conditions. Michael Buestrich and Norbert Wohlfart believe that this may result in non-linear, fragmented (and thus unreliable) connections to work, e.g. due to constant fluctuations in the composition of teams. They find this problematic mainly because of the need to maintain strict professional standards in face-to-face work (Buestrich, Wohlfart 2008).

Case Management: activation, normalization, and control

One of the fundamental components of Hartz IV (the reform that was intended to activate the unemployed and to normalize their life circumstances by re-integrating them into the labour market) was social work with an individual client, conducted in the paradigm of case management (ALG II – *Fallmanagement*). Case management was the central method oriented towards achieving two priorities: meeting the economic criteria, and providing services which would rationalize the social and pedagogical work. The direct objective of case management is to cover the recipients of the ALG II benefit and to re-integrate them with the labour market (Lutz 2008). The statute SGB II imposes the obligation to apply *Fallmanagement* on the municipalities, and within them on the 'work communities' (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft ARGE*) which are active alongside (or as a part of) job centres (Merchel 2008, pp. 39–40). Case management is also the mandatory approach in the welfare offices. Previously,

their staff followed highly standardized procedures. As a result, very few pedagogues and social workers are employed there. The reforms implemented by Peter Hartz clearly signal a trend towards expanding the remit of those offices, and pushing them towards an activation-based approach. The clients now have the right to an individually assigned caretaker (partner), who is responsible for implementing the case management (Merchel 2008, p. 42) principles – competently and comprehensively, in line with Hartz IV, including components of counselling that is focused on the client's specific personal experiences. Case management involved **early counselling** procedures, followed by **signing a contract** which specifies the objectives, measures, and timelines for the fulfilment of the contract. The contract lists what the caretaker proposes to do and what the client undertakes to do. It presumes long-term monitoring of the progress of their cooperation (Lutz 2008).

The concept of *Fallmanagement* reflects the professionalization of social work. According to Wolf R. Wendt, it corresponds to the changing condition of the welfare state, which needs to be better managed and more economically effective. It also needs to be less ad-hoc and fragmented in the assistance it provides, which implies a need for a comprehensive and orderly approach to social work. Social services should be goal-oriented and prove that they are efficient and transparent (Wendt 2010, p. 114). Case management as a method of operating at the micro level, in direct interaction with the client, makes the ideas behind the reform – and the concept of activating social policy – come true (Wendt 2010, p. 121).

In consequence, it means that actions that fall within the scope of social work must be redefined and re-organized according to a new model of how social work is to be carried out. The process of social work in this context is not a simple sum of individual actions of individual specialists with regard to individual clients. Rather, success is achieved by means of the entirety of the process, with all of its elements and with the interaction of all of the persons and entities involved in it (Löcherbach 2004, p. 3). Case management, by definition, focuses on a 'case', understood as a conglomerate of all the person's relationships and all of their activity: their household,

the options they have on the market, their participation in informal support networks, exchange networks, social and cultural environment. As a method of operation of social workers, case management combines professional responsibility with economic responsibility (Wendt 2010, p. 122).

Wolf R. Wendt notes that case management requires the practice to be interdisciplinary. It is not a new profession, and it falls to an extent within the scope of modern social work, but it exceeds this scope. A case manager does not have to be a therapist, advisor, caretaker, or a social pedagogue. In 'managing the case', the social worker acts indirectly, as a manager and administrator of the process of offering assistance. To a certain degree, the social worker acts as a networking agent (*Netzwerker)* that organizes cooperation between specialist units.

B. Michel-Schwartze notes that case management is not strictly a method of social work. Rather, it is a concept of contemporary German labour market policy, which consists in an activating intervention under the conditions of long-term unemployment. This is not strictly a task designed for social work, even if protection of employment historically became more prominent in the practice of social workers. Currently, case management is a responsibility of the new local institutions (*Arbeitsgemeinschaften*). In this interpretation, social work is either complementary (Michel-Schwartze 2010b, p. 325) or to an extent overlapping with work carried out under the label of case management.

The acceptance and implementation of concept in the area of social work in Germany is illustrated by the fact that in 2004, the Case Management Section of the German Society of Social Work, in cooperation with the German Trade Union of Social Workers and the German Trade Union of Care Professionals, created a certification to become a Case Manager. It is a set of standards and fundamental principles of education required to qualify for work as a Case Manager. These guidelines were later also adopted by the German Society of Care and Case Management, with extra stipulations as to social and professional education at university level, and a curriculum for a one-year professional degree with a focus on case management practice (Wendt 2010, pp. 131–132).

Standardization and questions of professional autonomy

Another issue that is discussed in the context of the shift in the social work paradigm (and of establishing priority in monitoring and controlling the support it offers) is the professionalism and autonomy of social work. Certain authors argue that paternalistic programs limit the freedom of action of the professionals involved in social work. Elements that used to be crucial in case work (*Fallarbeit*), such as a search for reasons, a hermeneutic approach, and an environmental orientation, now lose significance in favour of standardized actions that form the bulk of activation programs. They inevitably limit the freedom in how work with clients proceeds, which measures are applied, and what is the style of the contact with the client. These processes put social work under pressure from two directions: through the economy-driven approach, and through paternalism. Eventually, this may erase the profession's autonomy. This is contrary to the idea of focusing on the client. B. Michel-Schwartze, however, disagrees: she claims that social work, even if it has become an instrument of social policy, can still maintain its own paradigm and self-awareness, along with its own methods, ethics, and strategies. Thomas Bahle argues that the actors in the area of social work (*Sozialhilfe*) have very limited room for manoeuvre, due to the overabundance of legal regulations. According to Bahle, it means that in the case of Germany, there is no market of social services. In practice, the client is only free to make choices regarding irrelevant or insignificant aspects of what the various institutions have on offer. T. Bahle notes, however, that the system has positives such as a high level of safety of the client, in legal terms, and the individual claim to services (Bahle 2007, p. 301).

Activation of local communities and 'civic social work'

The re-formulation of the objectives of social work is closely connected to the above-mentioned shift in the social context from a collective approach towards individual responsibility, including

individual risk management. In this new situation, argues R. Lutz, the purpose of social work is to activate individuals, but also to initiate activation and support efforts in local communities. In response to the changes and to the new needs (increased individual responsibility), social work strategies are re-orientated to focus on local communities and urban neighbourhoods. The idea is to jump-start the processes of local residents self-organizing to offer support to community members, **replacing professional assistance**. This, R. Lutz explains, is how social work moves away from its classic models and turns into **management** of independent processes (Lutz 2008).

Peter Georg Albrecht offers a different explanation of this tendency. The civic-mindedness of social work requires a redefinition of strategies and methods of (co)operation. He points to two processes that are characteristic of the current phase of social work entering into communities. On the one hand, the recipients of assistance turn into clients with a good awareness of their rights and objectives; they want to participate in the decision-making processes and want (and are obliged) to contribute to finding solutions to their problems. On the other hand there is the new category of third parties, driven by the notion of civic engagement, who wish to become involved in working together in the local community. This means an increase in the scope and complexity of needs and interests, and requires the social workers to delegate and seek new models of cooperation. A number of questions arise in this context: what opportunities arise with the involvement of new actors? What are the limits of this involvement? What is the quality of this involvement, and how should this involvement be interpreted? Albrecht contemplates whether these third parties themselves should be viewed as receiving support, or whether they should be viewed as colleagues of sort – partners of the social workers – shouldering the responsibility alongside them (Albrecht 2010, pp. 194–195).

In light of the ideas of active civic society (popularised by Hartz's reforms and promoted by Schröder's government), the presence of multiple actors in the sphere of activity of social workers is a positive development. Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and Norbert Wohlfart recall the origins of this concept and explain the social and political

context of promoting civic activity, and the relationship between civic action and social work. In the perspective of the new trends, civic engagement is considered a part of a social 'awakening', whereby citizens take into their own hands the matters of care and social protection. Activating social policy requires the citizens to focus on the social reality (Dahme, Wohlfahrt 2010, p. 40). In the eyes of the activating state, communities must be revitalized, and citizens who generate **social capital** must be utilized. In this sense, the state turns to the **citizens as business people**, who make the lifelong effort of investing in their competencies; when they retire, they should continue their engagement by means of civic initiatives. It would be best if these initiatives were of a socially-oriented type, and would take some of this burden off the state's shoulders. Dahme and Wohlfart claim that in the discourse on the civic society, the focus is not on the democratic aspects (emancipation, empowerment, pursuit of interest, active agency), but on the notion of **utility**, which posits that social capital cannot go to waste. The objective of the new social policy is to develop a new policy model, managed by the state, which would reduce the 'activity' aspect of life to 'productivity'. Local communities have a very important role to play here, because it is at their level that partnerships are forged between the administration, the civic society institutions, and the citizens. Local communities create the space of the active unemployed persons, seniors, unemployed women, and all the other inactive and unproductive groups. In this perspective, social work is expected to move away from assisting individuals, and towards an **activating and mobilizing role** in local communities. Social workers should engage volunteers, foster local networks, promote trust, be leaders in socially-oriented projects, and reinforce the idea (induced by the state) of citizens' responsibility ((Dahme, Wohlfahrt 2010, pp. 52–54).

Education of social workers

The changes in how social work is interpreted, and the new focus on activation, mean that there is new content and new methods in the education of future social workers. They are reflected in the

curriculum designed in 2005 as part of the so-called *Kerncurriculum Soziale Arbeit/Sozialarbeitwissenschaft für Bachelor- und Masterstudiengänge in Sozialer Arbeit* (*Kerncurriculum Soziale Arbeit* 2005), which contains carefully outlined educational modules along with a timeline, and which showcases the new concepts of social work. The standards included in the curriculum are reflected and reproduced in the specific curricula of a variety of educational institutions in Germany (public and private universities as well as vocational training institutions).

The document, presented by a group of researchers at a meeting of the German Association for Social Work, stipulates that the education and training of social workers should include the following components: (1) general introduction to social work (including elements of social pedagogy, philosophy, and social work as an academic discipline; fundamental concepts, social issues, theories of social work, professionalization of help); (2) related sciences (elements of biology, psychology, sociology, social psychology, social pedagogy, and cultural studies); (3) value theories, ethics/morals theories, and legal frameworks of social work; (4) how the social frameworks of social work are established, how they change, and how they can be actively modified (including: human rights, philosophy of social work, social policy, social law); (5) general specialist action theory – the major focus of study (including: legitimization of social work, methods of analyzing problems and resources with regard to individuals, families, communities and organizations; theories and methods of action with regard to specific challenges and in specific problem areas; methods of engaging in direct work with individuals, groups, and communities; methods of direct intervention such as supervision, coaching, project assistance, aesthetics, media communication and media relations, methodology of social research); (6) areas of social work (such as: seniors, illness and disability, gender equality, poverty, marginalization, deprivation, healthcare, education, welfare, and social landscapes such as neighbourhoods, local communities, nations, Europe, the world, cultural diversity); (7) research on social work (*Kerncurriculum Soziale Arbeit* 2005, pp. 5–7). The *Kerncurriculum*, based on the 2004 Global Standards for

Social Work Education and Training, proposes (*Kerncurriculum Soziale Arbeit* 2005, p. 5) that the students should be equipped with the following skills and abilities:

- the ability to analyze and clarify social problems to determine the methods and measures to use in seeking to solve or mitigate the problems
- the ability to facilitate integration of persons who are marginalized, excluded, socially at risk, etc.
- the ability to work in a broader context (individual, family, community) and to empower people to develop their coping skills
- the ability to seek structural improvements of services and of social conditions under which social services are rendered
- the ability to protect and represent groups that need such protection and representation
- the ability to explain the norms of justice and human rights in everyday life and to ensure that these rights are observed
- the skills necessary to participate in public discourse on social issues
- the skills necessary to conduct academically sound research.

Friedhelm Vaksen and Gudrun Mana, authors of the 2010 book *Gesellschaftliche Umbrüche und Soziale Arbeit* (*Social breakthroughs and social work*), discuss the ambivalent consequences of the paradigm shift and of the implementation of this shift in training future social workers. The concepts that are used to label the components seem to be very far from an understanding of social work as acting for the benefit of a person in need of assistance, and acting together with that person. The authors believe that the students are right in their reservations when confronted with the curriculum: who is a social worker of the future? When they chose this educational path, did they not simply wish to help people (Vaksen, Mana 2010, p. 9) (and not plan, contract, and sell services and report on the process)?

An analysis of the curriculum designed to train social workers indicates that the scope of knowledge to be transmitted to the students has changed, and these changes correspond to processes that occur across the entire society. In order to propose adequate theories and models of social work, these processes must be carefully studied (Vaksen, Mana 2010, p. 11).

Public benefit organizations on the market of social services

The establishment and development of big umbrella organizations in Germany was closely connected to the notion of subsidiarity which became popular in the 19th century (Leś 2005). The idea is "a combination of the idea of limiting state interventionism and of the organizational principle dividing responsibilities between the public sector and the third sector with regard to social services" (Leś 2005, p. 39 –40). It was in the spirit of subsidiarity that, in the late 19th century in Germany, two federations were founded, bringing together local religious organizations with a social focus. One was the protestant social organization, *Diakonisches Werk*, and the other one was a Catholic charity *Deutsche Caritasverband*. They in turn provided the impulse for the establishment of other organizations: the German Red Cross (*das Deutsche Rote Kreuz*), the Jewish charity named *Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der deutsche Juden*, the workers' charity named *Hauptausschuss für Arbeitswohlfart*, as well as the Parity Social Association (*der Paritätische Gesamtverband*).

Small public benefit organizations, united in larger umbrella organizations, are an inherent element of the German welfare state. They supplement the services offered by public institutions, and they are ready to assist when a difficult social situation arises. They run kindergartens, youth centres, advice and counselling centres, employment schemes, care institutions and shelters. With the large variety of services they provide, they are partners in providing social and welfare services, and they represent social groups which suffer from discrimination. Small organizations with strong local roots are able to efficiently assist those in need, thanks

to their good understanding of local conditions. They contribute to the development of social policy and of the civic society, and they make an important contribution to the GNP, because they employ numerous staff. However, the economic and social changes of recent years have forced the public benefit organizations to rely on state-provided financing and to search for other funding, which in turn means stricter efficiency and effectiveness requirements (Pletzer 2005, pp. 312–313; Balon 2006, pp. 3–6).

In line with the concept of **subsidiarity**, the NGOs with a social focus (*freie Wohlfahrtsverbände*) used to have priority (under certain conditions) over public institutions in providing social services (Dahme, Kühnlein, Wohlfahrt 2008), while the local level had priority over higher levels. For many years, the principle of subsidiarity provided the basis for the social work carried out by the NGOs, and governed their relationship with the state and its institutions (Boe enecker 2005, pp. 25–27). However, legislation after Hartz's reforms tends to **eliminate the privileged position** of NGOs offering social services, and to place them at an equal position in competing on the market of social services. The change, modelled on the constitutional principle of equality of private businesses and public benefit organization, is aimed at pluralising this market and encouraging competition in it. At the micro level, it is a reflection of the cost-awareness strategy (Merchel 2008, p. 23). The general change results from the pan-European de-regulatory trend, and from the drive to implement (across a variety of levels) active social policy. Another contributing factor is that umbrella organizations have been receiving information on financial negligence, inefficiency in financial management, excessive bureaucracy, lacking flexibility, problems with effective management, and overblown organizational structures, combined with less efficiency in actually serving the designated social purposes (Pletzer 2005, p. 314).

Implementation of the activation policies after Hartz's reforms caused changes in how charities and NGOs operate too. These changes included, most importantly: (1) a transformation of institutional relations both at the local level and above; (2) new ways in which funding is raised and how spending must be accounted for and reported; (3) a shift in the social role played by the organizations.

Institutional relations at local level

The implementation of the SGB II law (*Sozialgesetzbuch Zweites Buch*) and the new formula of publicly protected employment changed the position of the organizations among the entities that offer social services at a local level (Kotlenga 2008, p. 102). Instruments of employment protection had – in the pre-reform times – served as the sources of primary founding for many organizations, such as organizations that operated cinemas, children's theatres, health centres, women's counselling centres, environmental centres, etc (Kotlenga 2008, pp. 102–103). Subsidized jobs were often the basis for the organization's establishment. The founders started the organizations, thus creating jobs for themselves, and then creatively used the support that was available for them to apply for funding from other institutions and projects. In contrast to subsidized jobs, which were formally based on contracts between the organization and the employee, the new instrument of the labour market policy (the so-called *1-Euro-Jobs*) is a form of additional employment, regulated by the provisions of social law and limited to 30 hours per week for 6 months. Under SGB II, the unemployed are often sent by the public administration to perform specific work, instead of being able to choose the organization and type of employment themselves. The principle of 'transfer' has a dampening effect on the motivations of the beneficiaries (i.e. potential employees of the organizations), and the sanctions that follow a refusal to accept an offer have a similar effect (Kotlenga 2008, pp. 104–105). This is why, initially, NGOs avoided using this instrument. Yet in the face of their general dependency on instruments of employment support, and with limited and further decreasing public support, they were forced to start using it.

The organizations faced a choice: either give up their civic identity in order to improve their position on the market, or declare insolvency. A joint declaration issued in 2004 by the umbrella organizations and the federal employment agency stipulated that additional work may be offered by private and public entities as well as NGOs, as long as the clients volunteer to be reintegrated into the labour market. Socially useful work

was intended to overcome the social isolation of the unemployed and to help them acquire new skills.[3] However, practice has demonstrated that this measure fails to serve its purpose, and its application causes problems for the third sector.

The necessity to make use of the new instruments (which are tied to the public entities) weakened the position of NGOs. The regulations stipulate that the NGOs should receive support, but offer no precise guidelines as to how the local agencies and NGOs are supposed to work together, given that the public entities are exclusively in charge of all social services, and are ultimately responsible for their provisions (Pletzer 2005, p. 314–315). For the NGOs, what complicates the situation even further is that the competition has become more fierce, securing funds has become more demanding, and the structural potential for additional employment has become more difficult. Financing is often determined on the basis of financial competitiveness (price-volume ratio) rather than according to quality. This works to the disadvantage of smaller organizations, for whom labour policy-oriented actions are not a top priority (Kotlenga 2008, pp. 105–106). Activation policy renders cooperation between NGOs and the public administration fraught with problems. Locally, social policy is primarily shaped by the 'active labour market policy regime' (Kotlenga 2008, p. 106).

The transformation was also not without effect on the *mezzo* level organizations, i.e. the umbrella organization. Their relationship to the public institutions is being restructured with an economic focus. Small individual organizations with a social focus disappear, while certain sectors of services gain strength, e.g. by merging and forming large networks. Large entities are in a more favourable position to win attractive contracts and grants, and to ensure high efficiency (defined under SGB II as a large proportion of successful interventions) (Merchel 2008, pp. 140–141).

Changes in financing and fundraising

At present, funds may be obtained in tenders and competitions. Organizations strive for low costs, and for standardization and comparability of actions. As a result, earnings of employees of the

[3] *Erklärung von Spitzenverbänden und Bundesagentur. Ziel: Arbeitslose mit Ein-Euro-Jobs wieder ins Erwerbsleben eingliedern*, http://www.diakonie.de/diakonie-news-188-erklaerung-von-spitzenverbaen-den-und-bundesagentur-465.htm (28 October 2010).

NGOs have gone down. The earnings have also been tied to the number of documented cases of labour market re-integration. Lower grants, along with the transfer of risk onto the NGOs, means that fixed-term contracts and independent contractor arrangements (where remuneration is on the basis of specific tasks) are gaining popularity as the risk of long-term planning increases (Kotlenga 2008, p. 107). Ronald Lutz notes (Lutz 2008) that this is consistent with the evolution of how funding is acquired in Europe nowadays. On their way to social economy, NGOs lose their primary identity, confronted with the high economic risk. This process is also not without effect on municipalities: it is their task to ensure that welfare and social services are provided, yet they must meet the challenge of the rising costs of these services considering that the old partners (NGOs) have been pushed out of the market by transnational corporations specializing in social services.

In the new management model, the key instrument which serves to acquire funding on the competitive market is the **contracts** between the financing entities and service providers. The contracts determine the services to be offered and the prices to be paid, as well as quality assurance measures. These measures focus on: planning, service specifications, accreditation procedures, development of standards, documentation, inspection, and monitoring. In effect, resources are used in a more competitive and economical manner, cost are lowered, the market becomes more transparent, and the availability of services to clients increases (Lutz 2008; Pletzer 2005, p. 316). Winfried Pletzer notes (Pletzer 2005) that contract-based management is also intended to improve responsiveness to clients' needs – by making these needs acknowledged and addressed faster – yet argues that it is debatable whether this indeed works in practice.

Merchel discusses the two dimensions of this economization of NGOs' work: the external dimension (their relations with other entities and with the society as such) and the internal dimension (the structures and relations within the organization). Externally, economization is reflected in the limited application of the principle of subsidiarity, in the need to compete with businesses, in modelling the NGOs increasingly as businesses, in

the tendency to emphasize the service-provider role and to de-emphasize the aspect of social integration, and representing the underprivileged social groups. These latter aspects do not fit well with thinking in the categories of products and contracts. Yet another external reflection of economization is the increasing burden on the NGOs with contract management responsibilities. This also applies to contracting services from smaller member organizations of the large umbrella organizations. Internally, economization drives the competition between members of the large organization (federations), leading to domination of the largest units which bring together a large number of smaller organizations. It also creates tensions between competition and cooperation. The atmosphere evolves towards a corporate one, e.g. due to the popularity of various measures of controlling and of cost-based evaluations. The focus is shifting towards efficiency and effectiveness, which may generate conflicts (also among the staff). The relationship between the umbrella organization and its member organizations drifts towards commercialization. The NGOs operate as large businesses who sell their services. These processes, with their market orientation, breed tensions between the organizations' traditional roles (*Anwaltsfunkzionen*) and their new role of a service provider (*Dienstleister*) (Merchel 2008, pp. 138–143). Karl-Heinz Boeencker invokes the NGOs' own definitions and lists the following roles as their traditional roles that are now, inevitably, undergoing a transformation: representing the common good (*Gemeinwohlagentur*), lobbying for the persons and groups in need, and providing social services ((Boeenecker 2006, p. 66).

In terms of social work carried out by the NGOs, the tendency is towards increasingly varied conditions of employment. The increasing number of fixed-term contracts, the competition, and the quality assurance requirements also cause increased uncertainty. Deregulation, pluralization and fragmentation of the conditions of employment are all good descriptors of the situation. For the staff of the NGOs, these processes are stressful, burdensome, and de-motivating. This is a problem, given that the skills and quality of work of the staff are crucial for the delivery of top quality competitive services (Merchel 2008, pp. 142–143; Zimmer, Priller, Hallmann 2003, p. 50).

Contract-based management, new rules of financing, and the need to compete with businesses all bring social work into the area of **social economy** (Vaksen, Mana 2010, p. 11, 234). As Tomasz Kaźmierczak and Marek Rymsza note (Kaźmierczak Rymsza 2005, pp. 4–5), the general objective of social economy is to create effective jobs for persons who are unattractive on the 'normal' labour market. In Germany, the institutions that provide these jobs often take the form of social enterprises (Boe enecker 2006, p. 67). They are market-oriented and use limited-time public aid. Their purpose is to "create jobs and support economic development, while at the same time promoting social and occupational integration of the long-term unemployed. These jobs are created either in already existing private businesses, or in newly-established enterprises" (Grewiński 2009, p. 8, 15).

The changing role of public benefit organizations

Competition, coupled with standardization of services and the orientation towards measurable success (re-integrating the client into the labour market), has often had the consequence that persons who ask for assistance are ignored or even actively excluded from the scope of services. In such cases, employment agencies delegate the responsibility to the NGOs with which they compete. The discriminated clients then become a burden for the organizations, because no funding is available to meet their needs. Thus the NGOs have to face the dilemma: should they choose to focus on effectiveness, or should they pursue the goal of social integration?

Interpreting particularly difficult cases in the categories of *Fallmanagement* has also proved problematic. In practice, this means that 'a difficult situation' (*Notlage*) is interpreted solely as a problem in re-integrating with the labour market, and thus all the services offered as assistance address this particular aspect of the situation. The opinions of experts as to this all-encompassing requirement to comply with Hartz's reforms are critical. Sandra Kotlenga notes that at present, any type of service offered, whether care-related or counselling-related, is expected to lead to

re-integration into the labour market. This is in contradiction with the right to social assistance and welfare services, which asserts that a person in need has the right to obtain **need-based** support. The new approach to financing reflects a paradigm change where persons with no chance of labour market re-integration are in a very difficult position: they lose the right to assistance and benefits, because no funding is available for such services (Kotlenga 2008, pp. 110–111).

Hartz's reforms brought the notion of sanctions into the area of social services, which means that these services lost their unconditional character. The combination of sanctions with mandatory activation is considered contradictory to the fundamental principles and ethics of social work: trust, voluntary character, openness to the results of the process, and counselling. The combination of contradictory approaches, criticized with regard to *Fallmamagement* (holistic support *versus* activation and sanctions), is even more clearly visible in the new style of NGO operations (Kotlenga 2008, pp. 111–114).

The general assessment of Hartz's reforms among the public benefit organizations is mixed at best. The experiences of the states with regard to implementation of the reforms have been the subject of much academic debate, often held at events hosted by NGOs. The protestant *Diakonia* (see Gern, Segbers eds. 2009, p. 7) has been very critical of Hartz IV. Holger Luft of *Diakonisches Werk Wiesbaden* said that Hartz IV managed unemployment rather than creating new jobs. Luft proposes other options which would integrate the measures that manage unemployment with creative approaches to supporting local and regional economy. Such regulations should be implemented at the level of states. An example is the merging of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Economics in Berlin (Luft 2005, p. 7). The current social campaign by the workers' charity *Hauptausschuss für Arbeitswohlfart*, against the tearing down of the system of social security, demonstrates the organization's negative assessment of the reduction of social support and the austerity measures.[4] However, Karl-Heinz Boe enecker points out a certain ambivalence of the NGOs' position: on the one hand, the NGOs (as part of their interest representation efforts) speak against

[4]   More information is available at the website of the organization at http://www.awo-dasletztehemd.org/kam-pagne.html .

the principles and practice of Hartz IV, but on the other hand they freely engage in the debate on equal access to benefits under ALG II, and use the measures that ALG II provides (Boe enecker 2006, p. 68).

Poverty management versus activation: social work at a crossroads

Both among NGOs and beyond, a new interesting trend has emerged: a grassroots mass-scale effort to collect and distribute necessities such as food and everyday items among the poor. This is indeed considered one of the largest contemporary social movements. Fabian Kessl and Holger Schoneville argue (Kessl, Schoneville 2010, pp. 1–11) that this process is rooted in how issues of overcoming poverty and unemployment are problematized after Hartz IV. Firstly, the life of recipients of assistance under Hartz IV is a life lived in poverty; secondly, poverty has gained visibility in the public sphere (message boards, associations, initiatives) and is no longer confined to the corridors of welfare offices; thirdly, the historical division into the 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' poor has returned (where 'legitimate' comprises persons who used to work or are ready to work, even for very little money, or who receive very low benefits, and 'illegitimate' is the 'spoiled poor', who rely on public assistance and charity handouts); fourthly, the new 'alms economy' (*almosenökonomischen Strukturen*), e.g. handing out everyday items, is being legitimized as a bottom-up civic initiative in support of those who are not eligible for public assistance. These are four aspects that demonstrate how much the context of social and pedagogical work has changed. The social care and security system is increasingly dispersed and fragmented. There is a tendency to perceive the recipients of Hartz IV assistance as the poor. Poverty is losing its power to scandalize. At the same time, a heavy burden of responsibilities is placed on the shoulders of the recipients of the assistance: they are expected to leave poverty behind, or at least make an effort in this direction. They run the risk of being considered 'the spoiled poor', social parasites. The questions of 'alms economy' and new philanthropy are therefore

more valid than ever. Another issue that must be carefully considered is the relationship between professional social work, which is a domain of NGOs and is activation-oriented, and initiatives that are perceived as grassroots efforts and legitimized as an institution of the civic society.

These initiatives started out as grassroots, independent, local, and civic-minded. However, higher-level structures emerged relatively fast. The key umbrella organization is *Bundesverband Deutsche Tafel e.V.,* which offers guidance on the types of work in which to engage and on the principles of development. It also coordinates the actions at a national level and acts as a representative and a partner in the public sphere. Similar forms of action have also occurred in areas previously dominated by more traditional entities including *Deutsche Paritatische Wohlfartsverband* (DPWV) and *Caritas*. For example, in early 2010 there were 220 actions where food and basic items were distributed (*Lebensmittelausgaben*).

What is problematic here is the one-sided approach to alleviating poverty. The recipients get *ad hoc* assistance which mitigates the immediate consequences of poverty, but they are not motivated to be active and to take responsibility. Even large organizations such as *Caritas* and *Diakonia* have participated in actions of this type. They have both initiated such giveaway actions and welcomed other smaller grassroots efforts under their banners.[5]

This new approach points to a certain professional polarization in social work. Friedhelm Vaksen and Gudrun Mana use the phrase 'professional crossroads' and note that two 'classes' of social work seem to be emerging (*Zwei-Klassen-Sozialarbeit*).[6] One class is 'hard' social work, associated with soup kitchens and represented by the actions referred to above; the other class is 'soft' social work, based in individual care and counselling, with socio-economic fundaments. 'Soft' social work supports self-improvement, while 'hard' social work is focused on clients who are marginalized. The former offers services, and motivates and activates the client's individual resources. The latter serves the poverty management function in the framework of supervision and control. 'Hard' social work emerged as a type of work focused

[5]   Absorption of smaller initiatives into the operations of larger organizations is not a new trend. What the authors find surprising is that this modus operandi has been adopted by large organizations with a social focus, even if the approach is somewhat modified. These organizations chose to expand the range of services they offer. What remains debatable is whether this is real help: while easing the burden of the poor is certainly laudable, solidifying this poverty and alleviating it only temporarily is problematic.

[6]   Also Ronald Lutz writes about it – see Lutz 2008.

on people living in poverty, but what it offers fails to activate them and only reinforces the poverty.

Friedhelm Vaksen and Gudrun Mana posit that social work, by implementing activation policies, might be able to free itself from the tasks concerning the poor. This would lead to a larger disparity in earnings within the profession. Social work in the soup kitchens would have a very limited budget, and would be based on charitable collections and volunteer staff. The experience so far suggests that in the future, social work will oscillate between activation and case management on the one hand, and agency and intense care on the other – activation in the cases where the chances of success are good; care, administration and control for those who are unwilling or unable to be 'activated'. Vaksen and Mana note that in the future, professional and effective assistance may likely be offered solely to the persons who are demonstrably able and willing to commit (Vaksen, Mana 2010, p. 236).

Fabian Kessl and Holger Schoneville suggest that monitoring and empirical research are necessary to study the impact of the new charitable initiatives. They stress, however, that the explosion of these initiatives is symptomatic of a fundamental shift in how poverty is approached, and signals an urgent need for a new policy in this respect (Kessl, Schoneville 2010, pp. 6–8).

Summary and conclusions

The implementation of the model of the activating welfare state has resulted in multiple changes in how social problems are interpreted, and in how the roles of social services and employment services are perceived. These changes include: deregulation of the labour market; creating atypical forms of employment; fine-tuning the system of vocational and professional education; tying the eligibility for benefits with mandatory searching for jobs and accepting available job opportunities; introduction of monitoring measures and of sanctions; re-focusing of social services on re-integration with the labour market; adjusting the social services on offer to the documented needs of the

clients and their households; re-structuring the administration to match the new assignment of powers and responsibilities between the federal and municipal levels (new management model); implementing market principles in the social services sector; replacing subsidiarity with competitiveness; eliminating the dominance of public benefit organizations; contract-based management; standardization of services offered by social workers; and applying case management as a comprehensive activation measure to support the unemployed. Another important component of the transformation is the new division of responsibilities and the new model of cooperation between social services and employment services as regards the active labour market policy. The legal regulations on the labour market policy (*Arbeitsmarktpolitik*) are key here; they determine the strategies and procedures. This dominant role of the regulations is a consequence of the main objective of Hartz's reforms, which is to lower the rate of unemployment and to alleviate poverty. Activating social policy strategies have also made headway into institutions in charge of social work where problems other than unemployment and poverty are handled. This latter development is not always perceived in a positive light.

Doing social work in the changing socio-economic context means greater focus on professionalization of services and ensuring they meet very high standards. It also means a strong focus on the client, well-defined goals, and the use of instruments and methods of active social policy. The contemporary context generates changes in managing and financing social work, in turn raising questions of the limits of standardization and economization; of trying to balance the drive to effectiveness and efficiency with the significance of interpersonal relationships; and of how activation can be combined with providing care to persons with low potential for labour market integration. These questions address the changes in the professional identity of social workers.

Activation measures introduced in Hartz's reforms are evaluated and amended on an as-needed basis (as was the case, for example, with self-employment under *Ich-AG*, temporary work agencies, and *1-Euro-Jobs*). Certain solutions proposed under the reform were

originally designed as purely instrumental, which is clear given the time limits on their applicability. When they prove effective, the regulations that govern them are extended; when they fail, the legislation is allowed to expire.

Analyses of the reform so far give an ambivalent assessment. There are disproportions within the statutes themselves (one chapter on *support* and several chapters on *requirements*); the legislation is restrictive; and subsistence-level benefits are conditional on demonstrable and successful job search efforts. Other often-listed misgivings are as follows: the focus on individual responsibility is too strong; the role of the unemployed is changed so that they become clients of new public institutions; an atmosphere of oppression is created, with mistrust and a negative image of the persons in need of assistance; these persons are blamed for the imperfections of the labour market; economization of employment services and social services means that they are too narrowly focused on ensuring efficiency and effectiveness.

The third sector has also expressed its criticism of the reforms, noting the following aspects: weakening the socio-political position of NGOs; changes in financing mechanisms; increasing employment uncertainty; standardization that limits the options of offering assistance; new paradigms with too much focus on requirements towards the clients; market-oriented approach to services and forced competition with other entities, which implies a departure from traditional tasks and from the notion of voluntary and (economically) unconditional assistance.

Karl Brenke, in the report of the German Institute for Economic Research *Five Years of Hartz IV – Work Ethic is not the Problem* (Brenke 2010)*,* offers a tentative assessment of the reforms. Sociological research and statistical data compiled by the Federal Office of Employment in Nuremberg suggest that the majority of job seekers are willing to accept job offers, and the problem of unemployment is not a consequence of insufficient motivation but rather of complex large-scale structural issues, e.g. the skills shortage among the unemployed. The number of recipients of the Hartz IV benefit is currently 6.7 million; compared to 2006, it is lower by 700,000. As Brenke notes, for the first time since the 1990s

the proportion of unemployed persons in the group of welfare recipients has decreased. The proportion of persons willing to accept temporary work has increased (however, it was relatively high even before the reform). On the other hand, the number of persons actively looking for work has not gone up. Karl Brenke concludes that the data means that it is too early to declare the reforms a political success (Brenke 2010 pp. 2–14).

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Social welfare
and social work
in Poland after 1989

chapter

05

Marta Kozak

Development of social services in Poland after 1989: a practical perspective[1]

An analysis of how social services developed in Poland must include a review of their history. For centuries, the forms of social assistance were evolving, moving from general philanthropy and charity to organized efforts with a well-defined purpose.

The official beginning of professional social services in Poland is usually dated to 1925, when the Institute of Social and Educational Work (Studium Pracy Społeczno-Oświatowej) opened its doors at the Free Polish University (Wolna Wszechnica Polska) in Warsaw. Another milestone was the enactment on 26 August 1923 of a statute on social welfare.[2] Compared to other countries' laws at the time, the statute was considered progressive and novel. The responsibilities of welfare workers were more precisely outlined in the regulation of the minister of labour and social welfare of 1929.[3] A new professional role was also created: that of social instructors, designed to act as 'animators' of welfare at the local level.

The statute was adopted after its second parliamentary reading on 26 August 1923 (Oleszczyńska 1978, p. 4). Its Article 1 defined welfare as follows: "the purpose of social welfare is to use public funds to satisfy the basic needs of the persons who either permanently or temporarily are unable to do so with their own material resources or their own work, and also to prevent the occurrence of the above described circumstances".[4] This type of services extended in particular to infants, children and youth, pregnant women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, war victims, and former inmates, as long as they were residents of the municipality. The statute also stipulated that begging, vagrancy, alcoholism, and prostitution were to be eradicated.

The state was to support private charitable institutions and cooperate with them (Article 2). Welfare services were to consist in the provision of food, underclothes, and shoes; ensuring accommodation with heating and light; assistance in obtaining the tools necessary to work; assistance in re-gaining the ability to work; and organizing a funeral.

Article 3 stipulated that religious, moral, mental and physical education and care of children, and preparing youth for gainful employment, were considered essential needs. Financial resources to fund the assistance provided under the statute were to come from the budgets of municipal structures, donations, special funds (fines etc.) and additional funding provided by the state (Article 16). The statute suggested that in order to increase efficiency, municipalities should work together by forming municipal associations at the level of *powiat*, i.e. at one level higher in the administrative division. Nonetheless, the municipality was the key organizational unit in charge of welfare services, with the exception of institutional care, which was provided at the level of *powiat*. Associations of local authorities at the voivodship level were to supplement the services offered by the municipalities and at the *powiat* level. The ultimate supervisory power rested with the minister of labour and social services (Article 22).

The statute stipulated that welfare workers would be appointed (Article 23); in 1928, this provision was brought to life when the President issued a regulation on the appointment of welfare workers.[5] Article 1 of the regulation read: "in order to properly exercise the function of social welfare, special municipal welfare authorities shall be established. These authorities shall be welfare workers and welfare committees".[6] The responsibilities of the welfare workers were outlined in the previously-mentioned 1929 regulation of the minister of labour and social welfare.[7]

A regulation of the minister of internal affairs, issued together with the minister of labour and social welfare, dated 2 May 1929, imposed on the police the duty to cooperate with the welfare workers.[8] Section 1 of the regulation stipulated that the police were obliged to immediately report to a welfare worker any case requiring immediate care.

[5]   Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 6 marca 1928 roku o opiekunach społecznych i o komisjach opieki społecznej (regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 6 March 1928 on welfare workers and welfare committees) (Dz.U. 1928, nr 29, poz. 267).

[6]   Ibidem.

[7]   Ustawa z dnia 26 sierpnia 1923 roku o opiece społecznej (statute on social welfare of 26 August 1923), op. cit.

[8]   Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych, w porozumieniu z Ministrem Pracy i Opieki Społecznej, z dnia 2 maja 1929 roku o współdziałaniu organów policji państwowej z opiekunami społecznymi (regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs issued jointly with the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of 2 May 1929 on the cooperation between the police and welfare workers) (Dz.U. 1929, nr 43, poz. 358).

[9]   Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 27 października 1932 roku – Prawo o stowarzyszeniach (Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 27 October 1932 – Law on Associations) (Dz.U. 1932, nr 94, poz. 808).

As for voluntary organizations (e.g. associations), their operations were regulated by a regulation of the President dated 27 October 1932.[9] Public authorities retained ultimate rights of supervision over institutional care, mainly with regard to the finances of such institutions.

In the 1960s the first public schools for social workers opened their doors to students: in 1966 in Warsaw and Poznań, and in 1967 in Łódź (Oleszczyńska 1979, p. 57). Over time, their graduates – certified social workers – took over the responsibilities of welfare workers, who retained mostly an advisory capacity. The welfare system was tied together with the system of health care.[10] In 1969–1973, welfare units were added to regional healthcare centres.[11] These units employed social workers and also specialist consultants: lawyers, pedagogues, psychologists, and sociologists. These welfare units were designed to provide methodological and organizational support to welfare workers, both those office-based and those working in the field (Karczewski 1979, p. 515).[12]

In 1975, healthcare centres (*zespoły opieki zdrowotnej*) were expanded to include welfare divisions. These divisions were granted supervisory powers over social workers employed by the various types of local healthcare centres (Karczewski 1979). At the level of voivodship, the responsibility for welfare services rested on the voivodship's chief medical officer and the department at the officer's disposal, i.e. healthcare and welfare department (*wydział zdrowia i opieki społecznej*), as well as the voivodship welfare unit (*wojewódzki ośrodek opiekuna społecznego*). There were also other institutions in charge of providing assistance: care homes, children's homes, day care centres for adults, etc. Numerous instructions issued by the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Welfare offered guidelines as to the scope of services these institutions were to provide.[13] This organizational model proved ineffective. The main shortcomings included centralized funding mechanisms, poor organization, disregard for the principle of subsidiarity, and the absence of activation options (both at individual and at community level). Riddled as it was with these problems, the system nonetheless remained in force until 1990.

[10] Ustawa z dnia 13 kwietnia 1960 roku o utworzeniu Komitetu Pracy i Płac oraz o zmianach właściwości w dziedzinie ubezpieczeń społecznych, rent, zaopatrzeń i opieki społecznej (statute of 12 April 1960 on the establishment of the Work and Pay Committee, and on the change of remit with regard to social security, disability pensions, benefits, and welfare) (Dz.U. 1960, nr 20, poz. 119).

[11] The welfare units were established by means of instruction no 1/69 of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Welfare of 31 January 1969 (Dz.Urz. MZiOS 1969, nr 4, poz. 12).

[12] In 1974, the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Welfare adopted a program for 1975–1990 to develop professional social services. The plan proposed that a network of social workers be created by employing one social worker in each municipal healthcare centre or each healthcare centre in larger cities.

[13] See for example the following instructions of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Welfare: instrukcja nr 16/76 MZiOS z dnia 26 października 1976 roku w sprawie wywiadów społecznych (Dz.Urz. MZiOS 1976, nr 21, poz. 75); instrukcja nr 5/76 MZiOS z dnia 29 lutego 1976 roku w sprawie pomocy społecznej w formie świadczeń pieniężnych (Dz.Urz. 1976, nr 6, poz. 33); instrukcja nr 20/73 MZiOS z dnia 9 sierpnia 1973 roku w sprawie opieki nad chorym w domu (Dz.Urz. 1973, nr 16, poz. 86).

Social services reform after 1989 was closely connected to the Round Table arrangements and the local government reform. The first step was the statute of 6 April 1990 on the transfer to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the responsibilities related to welfare previously allocated to the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Welfare.[14] The next step was the statute of 29 November 1990 on social welfare.[15]

Now that the new system has been in operation for twenty years, reflection on the development of social services in Poland is in order. Has the welfare system implemented in 1990 proved itself in practice? What positives and negatives have the practitioners noticed? Has it indeed been a time of development of Polish social services? Research results and expert opinions published in topic-relevant journals may offer some answers to these questions (See also: Rybka 2006; Golinowska 2010; Krzyszkowski 2008; Blok 2006; Rymsza 2002; Niesporek, Wódz eds. 1999.

Social welfare, just like many other social policy institutions, is influenced by a multitude of factors. In terms of operations of social services in the last two decades, the key factors included the legal regulations, the institutional infrastructure, human resources, and the methods, techniques and instruments of social work.

Since each of these factors is multifaceted and complex in nature, I am going to selectively address only those that are the most crucial in my opinion as a practitioner.

Legal regulations

The key milestone for Polish social services after the political transformation came in November 1990 with the new statute on social welfare.[16] Subsequent amendments to that statute were designed to improve the system for which it had laid the foundation.

The statute was relatively precise with regard to the organization and operation of the system of social welfare. It also specified the objectives of welfare, and outlined the qualifications and responsibilities of social workers. It was the first legal act which defined the term 'social work'. The statute was very well received by

[14] Ustawa z dnia 6 kwietnia 1990 roku o przekazaniu ministrowi pracy i polityki socjalnej z zakresu działania ministra zdrowia i opieki społecznej zadań dotyczących pomocy społecznej (statute of 6 April 1990 transferring to the Minister of Labour and Social Policy the responsibilities of the Minister of Healthcare and Social Welfare with regard to social welfare) (Dz.U. 1990, nr 29, poz. 172).

[15] Ustawa z dnia 29 listopada 1990 roku o pomocy społecznej (statute of 29 November 1990 on social welfare) (Dz.U. 1990, nr 87, poz. 506).

[16] See footnote 14.

practitioners, because it created the conditions that allowed social welfare centres (*ośrodki pomocy społecznej* – OPS) to be important, independent, specialized institutions of the local government.

While it was overall a very well designed legislative act, it soon turned out that in practice it was not entirely unproblematic. Its shortcoming had consequences, and they became apparent when efforts were made to comply with the responsibilities imposed by the statute.

One issue that consistently caused problems was the division of responsibilities into the institution's 'own' responsibilities and 'delegated' responsibilities. The mindset of the previous political system, where all funds were allocated to municipalities from the central budget, was still prevalent. The municipalities had problems coping with the new reality. Article 10(2)(6) of the 1990 statute stipulated that "municipalities' own mandatory responsibilities include ensuring that funds are available for the remuneration of employees and for securing proper conditions for the fulfilment of tasks listed in points 1–5 and in section 1".[17] Article 11(6) stipulated that the responsibilities 'delegated' to the municipality, i.e. financed by the central budget and not the local government, included "establishing and maintaining OPS and ensuring that funds are available for the remuneration of employees who carry out the tasks specified in points 1–5 and 7".[18] The statute did not determine the proportion in which the local governments were to participate in the costs of operating the social welfare centres, and in paying the employees, which gave the municipalities a lot of room for manoeuvre. There were municipalities that required the social welfare centres to provide calculations of how much time the employees spent on 'own' versus 'delegated' responsibilities. There were cases where two separate remuneration lists were made for employees of the centres.[19] Securing funds for the municipalities' 'own' responsibilities was also a problem, because budget planning was based on misguided attempts at saving, rather than on meeting any actual needs.

Another problem under the statute was the lack of regulations as to personnel qualifications. In the early days of the welfare centres, the access to social worker positions was too easy, the repercussions of which are still felt today. Under Article 49(1) of the

[17] Article 10(2)(6) of the statute of 29 November 1990 on social welfare.

[18] Article 11(6) of the statute of 29 November 1990 on social welfare.

[19] For instance, that was the case (as reflected in the financial documentation) in the welfare centre in Końskowola, of which I was the manager.

statute, a person who "has the relevant professional qualification, which means is a graduate of a school for social workers or has a degree in the following: social work, social policy, social rehabilitation, sociology, pedagogy, psychology, or another related field" could become a social worker.[20] As a result of this wording, persons who found employment in welfare centres included graduates of a very wide range of specializations, many of whom had absolutely nothing to do with social work, and who definitely had gaping holes in their understanding of theories, methods, and techniques of social work. The same problem extended to the managers of these centres: for these positions, the statute listed no requirements at all. There were attempts to rectify the situation in the years following the enactment of the statute, e.g. by means of introducing further requirements into the statute itself, by offering specialized degrees, by allowing employees to raise their qualifications by pursuing first and second degree professional specialization, etc. Nonetheless, even now welfare centres employ persons with no formal educational background in social work.

A presentation of the development of Polish social services post-1989 would be incomplete without a mention of the man who played a pivotal role in establishing the new structures: Jacek Kuroń, then the minister of labour and social policy. Beyond his work in bringing the new system to life, he contributed enormously to creating a positive image of social workers. He was a regular presence on TV, where he often discussed the work of social workers and the difficulties it involved, such as the effort of visiting local residents and making sure that those in need received assistance. The media appearances of Jacek Kuroń promoted the new profession of social workers and educated the public about the new roles of the social and welfare services.[21] Piotr Osęka wrote in *Polityka*: "The Solidarity government had the face of Jacek Kuroń. [...] His weekly speeches were televised and had audiences of over 12 million, a result matching the numbers drawn to the TVs by football games played by the Polish national team" ("Polityka" 2009).[22]

Under Article 48 of the statute, welfare-related responsibilities at the voivodship level were assigned to new units created for this very purpose: voivodship social welfare units (*wojewódzkie zespoły*

[20] Article 49(1) of the statute of 29 November 1990 on social welfare.

[21] Jacek Kuroń participated in the Round Table talks in 1989. In the period 1989–1990 and 1992–1993, he served as the minister of labour and social policy in the cabinets of Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Hanna Suchocka.

[22] "Polityka" no 43, 24 October 2009. See also http://www.tvnwarszawa.pl/archiwum/0,1678281,wiadomosc.html [accessed on: 8 September 2011].

pomocy społecznej).[23] The units were in charge of education and professional development of the staff providing welfare services. Cooperation between the teams and the welfare centres has generally been assessed very well. Social workers were offered support, as well as resources to assist them with work-related and legal queries.

Over the years, the 1990 statute was continually amended and the system was fine-tuned. It is impossible to analyze all the amendments here. However, I would like to focus on the two that in my opinion were of particular significance. The first of these amendments was connected to the administrative reform of 1999 and the establishment of a new level (tier) of local government, namely the level of *powiat*.[24] At this level, a new type of organizational unit was created, called 'family assistance centre' (*powiatowe centrum pomocy rodzinie – PCPR*). At the level of voivodship, yet another local government institution was created, namely 'regional social policy centre' (*regionalny ośrodek polityki społecznej – ROPS*).[25] For practitioners, the purpose and the logic behind the new *powiat*-level institutions were always somewhat unclear. In theory, they were supposed to take over selected tasks previously handled at the level of voivodships, and also offer holistic services to families, working together with the relevant municipal institutions. Yet ultimately, the family assistance centres have not increased the efficiency of the welfare centres. The ties between the family assistance centres and the social welfare centres are very weak, and no model of cooperation between them has emerged. The *powiat*-level institutions are not engaged in field work, and they do not work together with the social welfare centres with regard to offering assistance to families, including foster families. Some of these institutions also neglect some of their responsibilities, such as offering education and professional development of social workers employed in the *powiat*, and providing consultancy services with regard to methodological issues for managers and employees of the welfare units in the *powiat* (see also: Krzyszkowski 2008; Rymsza 2002).

Another mistake was removing the payment of incapacity benefits (*renta socjalna*) from the remit of welfare services.[26] Incapacity benefits are usually offered to persons with disabilities,

particularly in the cases where the disability appeared before the age of 16. Regardless of the reasons for the disability, such persons require various forms of non-financial assistance, as well as continuing rehabilitation (including in-community rehabilitation), and most importantly, social work. However, these clients were transferred from the welfare administration system into the social security administration system. As a consequence, social workers lost contact with them and lost the option of monitoring these persons and their circumstances. This likely means that the opportunity for these persons to be integrated with their communities is lost, and they may now be at risk of social exclusion.

Further legislative changes imposed new duties on the social welfare centres. They were assigned the responsibility for processing the payments of family and child benefits (*świadczenia rodzinne*),[27] which changed their role to that of a 'cashier's office'. Quite often, especially in rural areas, the processing of these payments disrupts the work of social workers to the extent where they have to neglect their core responsibilities and their other tasks (see also Golinowska 2010).

The statute of 12 March 2004 on welfare services[28] replaced the much-amended statute of 29 November 1990. The new statute was designed to be interrelated with other relevant legislation: the statute on social employment, the statute on incapacity benefits, the bill on family and child benefits, and legislation on financing of local government units. The objective of the 2004 statute was to adapt the social welfare system to the socio-economic conditions and to the financial capabilities of both the central budget and local government budgets. The statute was also designed around the notion of guaranteed income at the so-called threshold of social intervention, set on the basis of indices determined by the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, a research institute serving the government administration. The new regulations were skewed towards the notion of social pathology and re-integration into 'normal life' of persons who, for a variety of reasons, found themselves at the margins of the society. Already at the drafting stage, the bill gave rise to many controversies and was heavily criticized by many experts (see also Kaźmierczak 2003).

[27] Ustawa z dnia 28 listopada 2003 roku o świadczeniach rodzinnych (statue of 28 November 2003 on family benefits) (Dz.U. 2003, nr 228, poz. 2255 ze zm.).

[28] Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 roku o pomocy społecznej (statute of 12 March 2004 on social welfare) (Dz.U. 2004, nr 64, poz. 593).

Jacek Lang, an expert on legislative issues, and Jolanta Szymańczyk wrote: "As a result, no significant changes were made as to the nature of the system. However, the tangle of legal provisions made the system's structure and the powers and responsibilities of its actors unclear. Moreover, the changes were made chaotically and carelessly; the bill includes provisions whose wording is so confusing that it is difficult to determine whether it reflects the legislator's actual intentions or whether is just a technical error. Another weakness of the bill is the statement of grounds that accompanies it. For example, it lacks a comparison of the proposed solutions with the current legislation. There is also no critique of the current solutions, and no explanation why new regulations are being implemented. Consequently, it is difficult to review the bill and assess whether it is likely to prove useful" (Lang, Szymańczyk 2004).

As expected, the new law failed to significantly change the way the system operated, and many of its regulations proved unsuccessful in practice. The statute made it mandatory for each social welfare centre to devise a strategy of handling social problems. The result was an abundance of 'dead' papers, often drafted by specialist businesses or copied from ready-made samples available online. The strategies were very rarely preceded by a thorough diagnosis of social issues, or a social consultation. The documents were therefore useless, and the municipal authorities did not hold the welfare centres accountable for their implementation (see also: 2006 research results in: Szarfenberg 2009).

The strategies were supposed to be appended with relevant programs. In practice, these were typically represented by a municipal program of prevention and elimination of alcohol-related problems and by a municipal program of prevention of drug addiction. The municipalities are obliged to draft these two programs (it is a mandatory task resulting from the provisions of other laws). In fact, the programs must be re-drafted every year and published; they are the legal basis for spending the funds allocated to the so-called alcohol budget. Article 17 of the new statute on social welfare stipulates that "mandatory 'own' responsibilities of a municipality include: 1) drafting and implementation of a municipal strategy of handling social problems, including

in particular welfare programs, prevention and elimination of alcohol-related problems, as well as other programs which have the objective of integrating persons and families from groups of special risk".[29] Both this provision and the statute on child rearing in sobriety stipulate that these programs should be coordinated by the welfare centres. Yet in practice, the centres make little to no contribution to efforts in this area; they have no staff with qualifications to engage in relevant community work.

Effective social work requires relative stability of legal regulations. The constant amendments to the statute on social welfare and its related executive regulations force welfare workers to focus on the formal aspects of their work, rather than on its essence.

Staff, education, professionalization[30]

The 1990 statute on social welfare was also a milestone in that it formally recognized the status of social workers, thus establishing the foundation for the development of professional social services. Another paper in this volume focuses on the issues of education (see also: Szmagalski 2012), and so I would like only to relay a few comments and suggestions that were originally made by practising social workers.

The post-1990 attempts to improve the system of education of social services staff have been relatively successful, but they have also served to uncover the imperfections. As a lecturer at the specialization courses for social workers (both first and second specialization level), I notice massive differences in the knowledge and skills levels of my students. These differences reflect the disparities in standards of education across various schools and universities. In the evaluation questionnaires they completed after their training sessions,[31] social workers noted that the curricula place too little importance on the practical aspects of education (practical classes, workshops). The questionnaire included, for example, the following question: "What changes would you like to see in future training sessions?" The respondents suggested that more workshops would be useful, the courses should be longer,

[29] Article 17(1) of the statute of 12 March 2004 on social welfare.

[30] The analysis did not cover quantitative changes in social services after 1989. For more information of this topic, see M. Łuczyńska 2012.

[31] Data from evaluation questionnaires filled out by students of first and second level specialization courses for social workers (three editions have taken place so far) at the Academy of Special Education (Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej) in Warsaw, project: "Raising professional qualifications of welfare workers and social integration workers", Human Capital Operational Programme.

there should be a new module on social work in other institutions offering welfare services, and the proportion of theoretical classes should be reduced in favour of practical training.

The students also reported that the curriculum lacked classes that would be helpful in dealing with difficult cases, and lacked highly specialized classes too (e.g. with a focus on solving specific types of problems, on working with difficult families or communities, on methodological and legal issues). In the day-to-day work with families, the social worker has no opportunities to consult specialists; the only available option is discussing the issues with colleagues. My observations in this regard were also confirmed by practitioners who participated in a debate on an online message board. They suggested that "the process of education should prepare the graduates better for their professional futures, and equip them with a sound understanding of the techniques, methods and stages of proceeding in social work. Currently, the knowledge that is offered is perceived as abstract, and does not translate into concrete situations which social workers encounter in their day-to-day work. When the social workers lack the ability to effectively leverage this knowledge, stereotypes prevail, and cases are dealt with short-sightedly, without taking the long term perspective into account" (Skuza, Żukowska 2010, p. 39).

Financial incentives would also be useful in improving the qualifications of social workers; practitioners tend to believe that their educational achievements should be tied to promotions and automatic raises.

As far as professional development is concerned, trainings delivered by regional social policy centres (or at least the centre in Lubelskie voivodship) are of good quality. The sessions these centres organize – a number of which I have participated in – are very popular and truly useful. Attractive training options are also available in many projects financed by the European Social Fund, among which many offer valuable learning opportunities for social workers. They are generally popular and well received among welfare services staff.

The current welfare system is highly bureaucratic. The focus of a social worker is on collecting documentation, because documents are a basis for all decisions. Exact compliance with the legal

regulations on awarding benefits and other financial assistance is treated as key, in place of social work, which becomes secondary in working with the client. As a result, the social workers are perceived mainly as gatekeepers to financial assistance (Rybka 2006).[32]

The development of social services is connected with the professional status of social workers. Compared to other similar professions, such as psychologists, pedagogues, court probation officers etc., social workers enjoy little prestige (see also Szarfenberg 2009). Institutions such as courts or healthcare centres tend to under-appreciate social workers, and often fail to engage with them as partners. Models of good relations in this aspect can be found in some European countries (Sweden, Norway, Germany) and the United States, where social workers have considerable power (Frysztacki 2005; Kantowicz 2008).

The perception of low prestige attached to the profession is sometimes reinforced by social workers themselves. They are on occasion unable to promote their profession in relevant professional circles, they typically neglect to initiate cooperation, and their efforts at organizing and integrating the profession are weak at best. These are the weaknesses of this professional group.

Social welfare infrastructure

The transformation of 1989 was followed by a boom in social welfare institutions. The first breakthrough came in 1990, with the establishment of OPS in each municipality. Interestingly, the centres were established in a very unconventional manner. It is often believed that they were created by the 1990 statute on social welfare. This, however, is not true: they were gradually being brought into existence starting in July 1990, i.e. before the statute was adopted in November. In fact, they were created by means of resolutions of national councils (*rady narodowe*) after the prime minister at the time, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, sent a letter to voivodship authorities, and then also to city mayors and heads of municipalities. The wording of the letter is well remembered and treated as an inside joke today: "[...] with regard to the above, I hereby ask you

[32] See also the data collected during the months of debate at the independent message board ops.pl in 2009 and 2010.

and order you to: 1/ present to the national councils, at their next session, a draft resolution establishing a public administration unit Social Welfare Centre".

Sadly, the facilities the welfare institutions operate from (and their general working conditions) remain very poor. As far as I know, in most centres multiple occupancy of offices is the norm. It hinders the ability of social workers to engage in unrestricted conversations with clients, and offends the clients' dignity (see also Szarfenberg 2009). A client usually comes to the welfare centre with very personal concerns and with a full right to privacy. The presence of third parties puts the client ill at ease and is an obstacle to honesty and openness.

On a positive note, the number of various support centres has increased.[33] A type of institution that has been gaining particular popularity is community-based self-help centres (*środowiskowe domy samopomocy*) for persons with mental health issues. Originally, they were intended as half-way houses, where persons previously hospitalized for mental health issues could get ready to face life in their communities again. Yet practise has modified this approach to better fit the existing needs. The majority of residents in these centres are persons with intellectual disabilities who are unlikely to become socially self-sufficient and thus graduate beyond these institutions.

Despite these positive developments, there is still a shortage of certain types of institutions. This applies, for example, to institutions which would focus on the rehabilitation of violent offenders. Recently, the focus has been on creating hostels for the victims of violence. Yet providing safe housing for the victims is by definition a temporary measure, and in practice, sooner or later the victim returns home, while the perpetrator of the violence undergoes neither therapy nor rehabilitation. Furthermore, the system of women's hostels has been completely unsuccessful in rural areas. This institutional pathology makes social workers helpless towards the problems they should be helping solve.

I believe that the situation is also unsatisfactory when it comes to residential care homes (*dom pomocy społecznej*). Such homes should be available in each *powiat*. As a staff member of OPS, I often had to

[33] See also the welfare statistics compiled by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy: http://www.mpips.gov.pl/index.php.

place my clients in homes in very far away locations, which isolated the clients from their extended families and friends, and moved them to completely unfamiliar circumstances.

On the plus side again, NGOs have grown in numbers and in strength. They support local authorities in meeting their responsibilities related to social welfare.[34] The position of NGOs as service providers in the welfare system is consistently getting stronger (see also *Społeczny kontekst rozwoju ekonomii społecznej w Polsce* 2008; Rybka 2006*)*. The statute on social welfare is a contributing factor here[35] because it gives the public administration (at all levels) the option to contract out certain tasks to third sector organizations. However, not all local authorities use this opportunity; NGOs are sometimes perceived as competition rather than partners with regard to social welfare.

Methods of social work

Professional social work has a three-fold foundation: knowledge, values, and skills (Wódz 1999, p. 138). Social workers should apply proper methods, i.e. work with the individual case, work with the group, and work with the community. For obvious reasons, the primary method used by social workers is working with the individual case (the individual method). The classic group method is rarely practised in social welfare centres; likely reasons include inadequate preparation of the staff for working with groups, as well as the shortage of available time and lacking organizational capacity (the working time is taken up by work with individual clients). From time to time there are initiatives regarding group work, e.g. with the unemployed, victims of violence, and children from problem families. However, these are generally exceptions, and usually only attempted within larger social projects. The situation is similar in terms of community work. Yet in my opinion, the community method is the most promising method for the future, and a method that should be promoted by practitioners.

Community work has been gaining some interest lately. What has definitely proved motivational here is the opportunity to use EU

[34] See the following report on NGOs compiled by Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor: http://civicpedia.ngo.pl/files/civicpedia.pl/public/raport [accessed on: 8 September 2011]. The report demonstrated that in the first quarter of 2008, the REGON register (maintained by the Central Statistical Office) had entries on 58,237 associations (not including volunteer fire-fighters' associations) and 9,106 foundations. As of 1 September 2009, REGON had 64,500 associations and 10,100 foundations. In 2006, there were 55,016 associations and 8,212 foundations.

[35] Article 25 of the statute of 12 March 2004 on social welfare.

funding to complete projects of this kind. More frequent application of this method by social welfare centres not only offers tangible benefits to the local community, but also has a positive impact on the image of social services in the community and of the prestige the staff enjoy.

Based on my observations and on conversations with students at specialized training courses, I have to conclude that social workers lack proper understanding of the nature of the individual method, which is reflected in their failure to observe its methodology. Social work with a family should prepare the family to solve the problem using the family's own resources. The most common 'sins' of social workers include: the absence of clearly defined objectives, no attempts at prevention, no evaluation, financial over-protectiveness, unwillingness to contract services out, disregard for the principle of subsidiarity, and making no requirements of the client (doing things for the client, rather than assisting the client in doing them on their own).

Social workers are unable to successfully handle difficult cases because they are alone and isolated in the attempts to work out a solution. The social welfare system lacks centres which would offer methodological assistance, and offers no access to consultants and specialists who could provide advice and support in approaching particularly difficult issues.

Social work would also be more effective with more supervision, i.e. practical and professional assistance to practitioners in the helping professions. The supervision should serve two purposes: it should be educational (acquisition of knowledge, better problem-solving skills) and it should offer emotional support to social workers (safeguarding against excessive stress that may lead to burnout).

Summary and conclusions

I have provided above a review of selected factors which influence the work of social workers. On this basis, I am going to attempt to answer the question asked at the beginning of this paper: can we indeed talk about a development of social services in Poland?

The answer is not clear-cut and simple. Undoubtedly, the period following the 1989 transformation has brought an abundance of changes in how social services operate. The key change was the establishment of specialized local government units, which employed staff that, at the time, had to be considered well-qualified. Certain mistakes were made. Yet, nonetheless, social welfare centres became a part of the local municipal landscape.

The research I carried out in 2002 in Lubelskie voivodship confirms this conclusion. The results demonstrated that welfare centres had the best recognisability among all institutions that provide assistance. More than half of the residents (50.7%) had a positive attitude to them, 8.3% had a neutral attitude, and 23.8% had a negative attitude (17.2% respondents declared that they had no opinion on the matter) (Kozak 2005). Staff of the institutions that provide assistance are well known locally. Given that there is a tendency to equate 'staff' in this context with social workers, this means that the social workers are quite popular. Research has also demonstrated that institutions which provide assistance get quite a good rating. For the purposes of the research, I had divided all municipal institutions into six categories: culture, education, healthcare, assistance, administration, and economy. Institutions that provide assistance ranked second (with healthcare ranking at the top).

Year 1998 marks another success. The general assembly of the Polish Association of Social Workers that year adopted a Code of Ethics for the profession (Kodeks Etyczny 1998). The preamble of the Code reads: "The Code of Ethics is a set of guidelines for professional conduct in day-to-day work. Its purpose is to serve all those who have decided to bind their futures to the profession of social worker. It sets out ethical standards which social workers must observe in carrying out their work. These standards pertain to the profession itself, and to the relations with colleagues, clients, employers, and the society at large. It provides a basis for solving ethical dilemmas if there are doubts whether a social worker's conduct meets the requirements set by the Code or resulting from it. The Code is an attempt to provide ethical regulations covering the essential spheres of activity of a social worker" (Kodeks Etyczny 1998). Some social workers were critical of the wording of some

parts of the Code, arguing that it was too general, used terms that were incomprehensible to social workers (for example, the Code lists 'reliable tutelage' – *spolegliwa opiekuńczość* – as a guiding principle of interactions with the client), and was at odds with legal regulations (see also: Chludzińska, Grodzka 2000; for example, division 2.9 read that a social worker "with the client's consent, may withhold further assistance, if all benefits and services stipulated under the law are exhausted, or when such benefits or services are no longer necessary" – Kodeks Etyczny 1998). Moreover, it was noted that the Code lists what the workers must and mustn't do, but offers no mention of what they can and may do. Nonetheless, adopting the Code was an important step towards the professionalization of social work in Poland and towards raising the prestige of the profession. Sadly, it remains largely 'dead', in that most social workers are not familiar with the Code.

Another very important event in the development of social services in Poland was the marking of each 21 November as Social Workers' Day (by an amendment to the statute on social welfare in 1996; Article 51(4)).[36] There is a rationale behind the date: on 21 November 1989, in the village of Charzykowy in Bory Tucholskie, a meeting was organized between voivodship-level social workers, Jacek Kuroń, and Joanna Staręga-Piasek. The conclusion of the meeting was that given the new social reality, in the period of transformation, social welfare should consist not only in supporting the vulnerable, the elderly, and the disabled, but also the poor, unemployed, and homeless. For this reason, the practitioners at the meeting suggested that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy[37] should take over the issues of social welfare and draft a new welfare bill, creating a new type of specialized units, i.e. the welfare centres. For those present at that meeting, its date took on a symbolic significance. The Polish Association of Social Workers played an important part in marking that date as Social Workers' Day (Kozak 2004).

A crucial element of any discussion of the development of social services must be the efforts of the professional community to ensure the adoption of a statute on the profession of social

[36] Ustawa z dnia 14 czerwca 1996 roku o zmianie ustawy o pomocy społecznej oraz ustawy o zatrudnieniu i przeciwdziałaniu bezrobociu (statute of 14 June 1996 amending the statute on social welfare and the statute on employment and counteracting unemployment) (Dz.U. 1996, Nr 100, poz. 459).

[37] During transformation period the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs changed its official name (editor's note).

worker. Work on the bill has been in progress for over a decade. The first attempts to have such a law passed were made soon after the parliament adopted the 1990 statute on social welfare (see also: opinion of Anna Wiśniewska-Mucha in "Gazeta Informacyjna Pomocy Społecznej" 1991, p. 98). The issue was later raised at each general assembly of the Polish Association of Social Workers (including the third national assembly in 1998). In 2002, the Association actually had a bill drafted; the bill was then amended in 2003. In the subsequent years, legislative work on the bill was suspended and resumed several times. The bill went through a process of consultation and amendment. The heart of the controversies is the potential establishment of professional self-government of social workers. Eventually, the bill was submitted for legislative consideration. A secretary of state from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in his speech in parliament on 10 July 2008, declared that the bill would be submitted to members of the Council of Ministers (the cabinet) in 2009. Unfortunately, it is unclear at what stage of the proceedings the bill is now. In a letter dated 8 September 2012, the minister of labour and social policy, in response to Senator Czesław Ryszka's statement discussing the need to enact a statute on the profession of social worker and the relevant self-government, explained that the ministry had put the bill on hold. However, there was an interest on the part of MPs, who had a plan to re-launch the bill using their right to propose bills for parliamentary consideration. Further progress on the bill may also be forced by the professional community of social workers themselves, by proceeding in the 'citizens' legislative initiative' mode, which requires that 100,000 signatures be collected for the bill to be submitted for parliamentary consideration. The letter signed by Jarosław Duda, a secretary of state at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, explained that "the Ministry is working on a brand new bill on social welfare, which will include more regulations on the profession of social worker than previous regulations of this kind".[38] I think this really deserves no comment.

The development of social services is also reflected in the emergence of new institutions that provide assistance: residential care homes, specialist counselling centres (including family

38 As cited in: http://ops.pl/ news [news dated 1 October 2010].

counselling centres), children's homes of various types, foster care and adoption centres, support centres, crisis intervention centres, social integration centres, and social cooperatives.

To recapitulate: despite numerous mistakes and shortcomings, there has indeed been a development of social services in Poland. The pace of development is not steady. There are dysfunctions and imperfections which affect the progress that is being made. The reasons lie in the current system of social welfare, the socio-economic situation, and the social workers themselves. Efforts should be made immediately to rectify the problems. In my opinion, the following steps are crucial in remedying the situation:

- the quality of education should be higher
- efforts should be made to increase the prestige of social workers
- the Polish Association of Social Workers[39] should be more active
- efforts should be made to emphasize the importance of social work as professional work
- bureaucratic procedures should be limited
- continued professional education at in-depth specialized courses should be encouraged
- options should be created for social workers to receive support on methodological issues, and supervision should be promoted
- the role of *powiat*-level family assistance centres should be reviewed
- effectiveness of social work should be improved by implementing forms of assistance that focus on the concept of activation
- prevention should become more important in social work
- community work should be promoted and more widely used (i.e. welfare centres should engage in work that benefits the local communities)
- institutions that provide assistance should be cooperating more closely with NGOs.

[39] In fact the association is currently unactive (editor's note).

The organizational model of social welfare constructed in 1989 now requires an overhaul. If no efforts are made to remedy the situation, negative social consequences will likely follow, and the process of professionalization of social services in Poland will suffer.

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chapter
06

Marek Rymsza

Social work in the Polish welfare system: between bureaucratization and professionalization[1]

Social work as a helping profession

Social workers in Poland are typically employed by various institutions of the social welfare system. They tend to be perceived as clerks affiliated with these institutions, responsible mainly for the administration and processing of cash benefits. There is very little understanding of what actual social work consists in, despite the name of the profession. The overall perception is that social work comprises everything else that social workers do beyond the cash benefits-related issues. A typical Polish social worker directly engaged in working with the clients – a frontline worker[2] – combines working in the field with deskwork. The 'desk' at which this work is done is usually located in a public institution, eventually in an NGO or a Church-related organization.[3] Specific practical solutions vary. In municipal social welfare centres, where the greatest proportion of social workers find employment, some frontline workers divide each day into working with the documents in the office and working with the people in the field, while others prefer to divide the days of the week into 'desk' days and 'field' days.

In understanding the unique challenges of social workers, it is instructive to compare their situation with members of another helping profession – medical practitioners, i.e. doctors. Fieldwork consumes much more of social workers' time than doctors spend on home visits. In the case of social workers, their professional image is a reflection of the image of the institutions that employ them, whereas the opposite is true with doctors. In the general

[1] This paper summarizes the author's other texts, originally written in Polish, that open and close two books on the topic of the study conducted on a representative sample of Polish social workers: Rymsza ed. 2011; Rymsza ed. 2012. See also: Rymsza 2013.

[2] A frontline worker is a social worker directly engaged in social work.

[3] In Poland, the desk is usually literally just that; a separate office is a rare luxury among social workers.

social perception, doctors are the people who treat (and heal) others. Where they work matters very little – a doctor with an independent practice who is not permanently attached to any institution is still a doctor in the eyes of the general public, as long as they have a medical degree and the relevant experience. The health care system in Poland nowadays is underfunded, badly organized, and poorly managed. While it is perceived very critically for these reasons, this criticism only marginally (if at all) applies to doctors. And yet, all of the negative generalizations concerning welfare institutions are projected on social workers. Moreover, a social worker placed outside the context of their place of employment loses their professional image and instead turns, in the general public's perception, into a specialist in nobody-really-knows-what.

What do social workers think of themselves and their profession? How do they perceive social work? How do they practise it? To what extent do they internalize (and thus confirm) the social perceptions of their profession? Do they feel they are clerks of the welfare system, or rather professionals in a specialist helping profession that enjoys public trust? To what extent does social work determine their professional identity? In other words, is the professional identity of social workers determined by their place of employment (i.e. clerks responsible for social issues in a welfare institution), or by the actual work they do (i.e. specialists in the area of social work)?

These questions outline the fundamental issues related to self-awareness (identity) of social workers (see also Granosik 2012). As such, they were the starting point for a study conducted on a representative sample of Polish social workers. The study was carried out in The Institute of Public Affairs in 2010, as part of the project entitled Laboratory of Social Innovation (LIS). The results of the research were presented in two publications: in 2011, we published the research report (Rymsza ed. 2011), and in 2012 we published a book (Rymsza ed. 2012). The book compared the research results with earlier studies and related them to selected theories and expert analyses.

Two decades of building the social welfare system

To a large extent, the development of social work – or the lack of development, in the case of Poland – is determined by the institutional setup of the social welfare system (Krzyszkowski 2005). Thus, before presenting the above-mentioned research results pertaining to the status of social work, a few sentences on how this system operates. In the two decades (and counting) after the political transformation, social welfare itself was transformed too. The nature of this process is best described as 'institutionalization'. The institutional framework for the system's crucial municipal level was created in 1990, with the reform that restored in Poland the basic level of local self-government: the municipality (*gmina*). It was the beginning of the end of an omnipotent centralized socialist state with an administration that knows and controls everything (Wróbel 1994).

Once restored, the municipalities were given the responsibility for social welfare: they were supposed to look after their most vulnerable members (Hrynkiewicz 2004, pp. 89-90). Specifically, the responsibility was placed on the shoulders of municipal social welfare centres (*gminne ośrodki pomocy społecznej* – OPS).[4] In a broader countrywide perspective, these centres were supposed to create "a social safety net which replaces the 'guarantees' of communism" (Księżopolski 2013, p. 40), and mitigate the results of the economic shock therapy of the initial post-transformation years (Kozak 2012). The shock therapy revealed the massive scale of unemployment, previously masked by hundreds of thousands of unproductive jobs. It also drastically reduced the social welfare function of employers (Morecka ed. 1999), the financial transfers resulting from the state's involvement in the economy (Kryńska 1999), and the scale of redistribution in universal social protection programs (Rymsza 1998, Chapter 3).

The protective function was at the time divided between the social welfare centres and district employment offices. Both types of agencies operated 'close to the people', to ensure that assistance was readily available. The colloquial term 'kuroniówka', derived from the name of the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Jacek

[4] See also the analysis of the operations of the welfare centres in the late 1990s in: Żukiewicz 2002.

Kuroń, was used to denote the unemployment benefits and the social welfare benefits alike. Nonetheless, the general principle of social policy reforms was to replace universal programs based on entitlements (where each citizen could claim benefits) with selective, means-tested, purpose-oriented assistance.

The district employment offices and the municipal social welfare centres had a similar protective role, but their institutional set-up was different. The district employment offices were part of the state administration. This institutional solution continued until 2000, when the second reform of territorial division of the country created *powiat*, the second tier of the Polish structure of local government. At that time, the district employment offices were transformed into *powiat*-level employment offices (*powiatowe urzędy pracy* – PUP), and merged into the local government structure at the level of *powiat* (Szylko-Skoczny 2004). In this sense, they differed from the OPS which, from their very beginning, functioned within the institutional framework of local government. Also, in contrast to the employment offices, the welfare centres had not been created from scratch. They were founded upon the social welfare structure of the previous political system (Wódz 1998, pp. 43-57). While the People's Republic of Poland officially had neither unemployment nor poverty (Rybka 1998, p. 253), the approach to these two issues was different. Unemployment was masked by subsidizing unproductive jobs, which was one of the causes of the structural crisis of the socialist economy. Poverty was masked as well, but not as completely: social welfare services were in place, although for ideological reasons their existence was never advertised. Welfare services operated formally as part of the healthcare system, officially legitimized and dynamically developed during that time (Golinowska 2013, p. 15). The dual function of the healthcare system in the People's Republic of Poland was reflected in the official name of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Welfare. While it was kept out of the limelight, social welfare did have an infrastructure and staff.

In 1990, social welfare became institutionally independent from the healthcare system. It was transformed into a separate system and moved under the supervision of the Minister of Labour and Social

Affairs. This tendency was further ascertained when, in the autumn of 1990, the statute on social welfare was adopted,[5] making social welfare an important element of the state's social policy and recognizing social workers as members of a helping profession. Under the statute, voivodship social welfare teams (*wojewódzkie zespoły pomocy społecznej*) were established to supplement the network of municipal social welfare centres. There were 49 voivodships at the time.

In the early 1990s, the social welfare system coped well with its responsibilities in the area of protection. In the later 1990s, as the list of responsibilities grew and new groups of potential clients were added, the social welfare centres became increasingly bureaucratic, and the staff succumbed to routine. As a side effect of focusing on the administration and processing of benefits, work that was intended to promote self-sufficiency of clients – including social work – was marginalized (Kaźmierczak, Rymsza eds. 2003).

The second local government reform (carried out in 1999–2000) was intended as an impulse for the institutions in charge of social services to grow and develop. The reform brought self-government authority to two new levels: lower (the *powiat* level) and higher (the new voivodships established at the regional level[6]). It also reduced the number of the largest units of administrative division, i.e. voivodships, from 49 to 16. The reform resulted in the establishment of family assistance centres at *powiat* level (*powiatowe centrum pomocy rodzinie* – PCPR) as well as regional social policy centres (*regionalny ośrodek polityki społecznej* – ROPS) at regional level. The family assistance centres are in charge of organizing foster care and providing services to persons with disabilities. At present, they collectively rank second in terms of the numbers of social workers they employ (Rymsza 2002). The regional social policy centres took over the tasks that had previously been vested in voivodship-level social services authorities, which the reform had abolished. The centres' focus is on planning and training; they carry out no frontline work and employ no social workers.

The reform provided an opportunity to professionalize and develop social services, but that opportunity was largely lost. The focus of the reform was on creating and reinforcing the two new levels of local government, and on dividing powers and

[5] The statute (Dz.U. 1990, Nr 87, poz. 506 ze zm.) was amended on numerous occasions; it remained in force until 2004, when it was replaced with a new statute bearing the same name – see the note No 6.

[6] New voivodships combine self-governed and state administration

responsibilities between them. The division pertained to social services too. The concept of assigning child and family services to the lower institutional level is, essentially, sensible, even if the general notion of placing these services within the social services framework is disputable. However, no 'tools' were provided for the institutions in charge of child and family services to support their new tasks. The reform significantly broadened the powers of social service institutions, but failed to encourage the professionalization of social service personnel. An evaluation of the specialist personnel of the family assistance centres provides a varied picture, with both positive and negative aspects (Bieńko 2012). However, the overall assessment of the personnel situation – in terms of prospective development of social services offered by the relevant institutions – provides very little reason to be optimistic.

Beyond OPS and PCPR, social workers are also employed by various other institutions that offer assistance. These institutions are operated by local authorities, NGOs (Golczyńska-Grondas 2012/2013), and Church-related social welfare entities (Kamiński 2012). In the perspective adopted during the political transformation, these social workers operate at the periphery. The approach adopted in Poland with regard to the professionalization of social services differs radically from the concept that prevails in the USA, where social workers are employed across a wide range of institutions (including, for example, schools), and where the professional identity of social workers is constructed around the notion of social work (see DuBois, Miley 1999). In Poland, professionalization of social services was fundamentally tied to build competent human resources for OPS and PCPR. The staff of these two types of public institutions comprise the core of Polish social services, while other social workers operate at the periphery. Interestingly, these peripheral workers tend to practise social work more often and (it appears) achieve better results; I will discuss this in more detail further in this paper.

As well as the importance of peripheral workers being on the rise, so are their numbers. This is a very positive development. Social workers are present in essentially all new types of institutions that offer assistance, especially those that focus on activation and integration issues. There are social workers in care

homes, homeless shelters, lone mothers' homes, hostels for victims of domestic violence, hospices, social integration centres, and community-based self help centres (daytime care facilities which support persons with mental or intellectual disability). Yet these social workers are rather isolated from their colleagues from OPS and PCPR. Their professional experience is not used to promote the image and prestige of social service, and is only related to the education of prospective social workers to an insufficient degree.

Education of prospective social workers and professional practice

In post-1989 Poland, the establishment of the social welfare infrastructure was supplemented with efforts in the realm of education. Longer and shorter professional courses in social work were organized, and at the same time the formal eligibility requirements for employment in social welfare institutions were gradually raised (Szmagalski 2012a). The vocational schools for social workers established in the People's Republic of Poland were modernized and transformed into colleges of continuing education, and then gradually incorporated into higher education institutions in the area. New laws were adopted that required newly-hired social workers in social welfare institutions to work towards a degree in one of the specified social science disciplines. Later, at the university level, a new degree path was created with the specific purpose of training prospective social workers.

A set of formal qualifications for social workers was also developed. The qualifications are called 'vocational specializations' – social workers have the option of completing first- and second-level specialization courses, and of choosing a separate specialization in organizing social welfare (management of welfare institutions). Further education is possible in a variety of formats ranging from short training courses to post-degree courses co-financed by the European Social Fund, though it is usually project-based.

Marta Łuczyńska notes that in the early post-transformation years, the staff of the social welfare centres – overburdened as they were with the responsibilities regarding the processing of benefits – demonstrated great commitment to learning and growing professionally. Moreover, workers in the OPS believed that relevant education was crucial for competent practice (Łuczyńska 2012). This trend, conducive to the professionalization of social work, was a result of the changes in education discussed above. It also reflected the personal engagement of the social workers in their profession, and their faith in the success of the project of constructing a modern system of social welfare. Łuczyńska observes that from mid-1990s onwards, there has been a regress in social service development in terms of quality, and this negative tendency continues.

The policy of professionalization of social services, adopted at the outset of the political transformation and upheld for the next two decades, was founded on the belief that social workers (in particular those employed in the social welfare centres) should combine social work with administering financial and in-kind assistance. The combination was intended to raise the prestige of social workers by giving them the power over material resources, and to promote effective social work. The social workers were to use their discretion in granting the assistance to mobilize their clients and consequently to steer them towards self-sufficiency.

Yet the post-transformation reality soon modified this approach. As it turned out, the primary focus of social welfare was social protection. As a result, not only was self-sufficiency demoted as an objective, but the clients were actually disincentivized towards activation. The protective mindset of the welfare system was not to mobilize the persons laid off from the restructured businesses to 'take matters into their own hands'. Instead, the focus was on making it easier for them to passively survive the difficulties while waiting for the better times that would supposedly come after the transformation was complete (Rymsza 2004). In this manner, benefit-centric orientation won and displaced the work being done on promoting clients' self-sufficiency; accordingly, social work has become marginalized and is often completely perfunctory. As

a result, social workers employed by the OPS waste the social work skills they acquired in the process of education.

For this reason, social workers now tend to prefer the concept in which social work is organizationally separate from administration and benefits processing – and yet, OPS have been reluctant to implement changes to this effect. The role of a distributor of financial resources legitimizes the social welfare centres in the local power structures, and gives the social services certain prestige (such as it is). Many local government officials, council members, etc. treat social work as a superfluous complication to what they perceive as the core task of the centres, i.e. programs of redistribution. In this view, social workers are just clerks whose responsibility is to deal with the administration of benefits.

It is ironic that the local government officials are now in favour of the protective role of social services, while the central government and the parliament have, from 2003 onwards,[7] increasingly come to the belief that the protective approach has run its course, and that the welfare system should be reoriented towards activation and integration. The changes are much more pronounced in the legislation than they are in the actual practice (Rymsza 2007). Nonetheless, the increasing interest in activation is conducive to promoting the concept of social work (Kaźmierczak, Rymsza eds. 2003; Karwacki 2010). This was, in fact, one of our hypotheses at the outset of our research project, and the results have fully confirmed it.

[7]   The debate on activation policy was triggered in Poland in part by the publication Kaźmierczak, Rymsza eds. 2003, where the activation policy was tied to the development and reorganization of social services. In 2003, the statute on social employment was also enacted (Dz.U. 2003, nr 122, poz.1143 ze zm.), linking social workers with activation services.

Research methods and sampling

The study was conducted on a representative stratified random sample of social workers. The research instrument and the sampling procedure were compiled jointly by the experts from Instytut Spraw Publicznych: Mariola Bieńko, Marta Łuczyńska, Tomasz Kaźmierczak, and Marek Rymsza (research-team leader), with methodological consultation and assistance from Marek Dudkiewicz. Fieldwork and statistical calculations were performed by Quality Watch.

The sample comprised 1210 professionally active social workers who work in direct contact with clients and who have no management role in the institutions that employ them. Thus all the respondents fall into the category of frontline social workers. The sample had three strata, each with a number of respondents that allows for statistical analyses that would be valid not only across the whole sample but also for each stratum. The research results were weighted so that the results for the strata could be both compared to one another and extrapolated to the whole population of professionally active social workers in Poland (detailed methodological information on the study, see Rymsza ed. 2011).

The first subgroup in the sample consisted of social workers from social welfare centres. It was the basic stratum, given that OPS employ a great majority of professionally active social workers in Poland. In this stratum, 600 respondents were surveyed. The second subgroup consisted of 360 social workers employed in *powiat*-level family assistance centres (PCPR). This is the supplementary subgroup; employees of the family assistance centres are the second biggest, and also the younger, subset of the social workers in public social welfare institutions. The third subgroup consisted of 250 social workers employed in specialist institutions that remain on the fringes of the public social welfare system. Taking this subgroup into account gave the research project a unique dimension and provided another avenue for verifying the main hypothesis. A few words on the structure of this sample stratum are therefore in order.

The respondents from the third subgroup are employed in institutions that we labelled as 'specialist assistance institutions'. Our thinking behind it was as follows. OPS serve a purpose similar to that of walk-in clinics in the healthcare system, which employ general practitioners. Like GPs, social workers in the OPS provide whatever basic support is necessary, and they are also usually the first to launch a social intervention. Practically anybody can find themselves in a situation where assistance is required: adverse circumstances or a person's dysfunctions and limitations can cause hardship that requires a helping hand. In contrast, institutions

that offer assistance for specific groups of clients are 'specialist institutions'.

Specialist assistance institutions are formally located either outside the public system of social welfare, or on the fringes of this system. In both cases, in contrast to OPS and PCPR, they may be (and often are) operated by NGOs and equivalent organizations.[8] These institutions often only employ one social worker, often on a part-time basis. Our initial assessment was that 'specialist assistance institutions' include:

- institutions that offer support to the homeless and to persons at risk of homelessness (shelters and hostels of various types)
- institutions that operate within the local system of support for children and families (adoption centres, foster care centres, socialization centres, children's homes, day care and emergency care institutions, crisis intervention centres, etc.)
- institutions located within the system of social and vocational reintegration (social integration centres and clubs) and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (vocational rehabilitation facilities, occupational therapy workshops)
- institutions where persons may live permanently or periodically, or where they may regularly spend daytime hours (care homes, group homes, day care centres, hospices, self-help homes, hospitals, psychiatric institutions, institutions of social rehabilitation, institutions that offer assistance to former inmates).

Due to organizational and financial constraints, the sample included social workers employed in three types of institutions: hostels and shelters for the homeless, community-based self-help centres (*środowiskowe domy samopomocy* – ŚDS), and social integration centres (*centra integracji społecznej* – CIS).

8 'Equivalent organizations', in the nomenclature of Polish legislation, means first of all Church-related organizations in the third sector that offer public benefit services. The regulations on equal treatment of those entities and NGOs are located in the 2003 statute on public benefit activity and volunteering (Dz.U. 2003, nr 96, poz. 873 ze zm.).

Specialist institutions: social work on the fringes of the social welfare system

The study was conducted in 2010 on a representative sample of professionally active social workers. It was largely exploratory in nature, with the following areas of focus:

- a contemporary portrait of social workers
- professional identity of social workers
- professionalization of social work
- professional roles and the potential for modernization with regard to social workers.

In analysing the research results, we investigated where and how the responses of social workers differ between the strata. The stratified construction of the sample allowed us to verify our main hypothesis pertaining to the impact of institutionalization of social welfare on the professionalization of social workers. The design of the study (Rymsza 2010) postulated that social workers who are located, in terms of their places of employment, at the fringes of the social welfare system (the third subgroup) would be more open to activation, integration, and promoting self-sufficiency than social workers located at the core of the system (mainly the first subgroup, but also the second one). The reasoning behind the hypothesis was that the 'fringe' social workers have, to a lesser degree, already been subject to the efforts to collectively identify social workers as clerks. As a result, their professional identity is derived to a greater extent from qualifications that are connected to direct and personal interactions with the clients.

The empirical data collected in the project confirm this hypothesis in a number of ways. The study demonstrated how vital the staff of the specialist assistance institutions (the third subgroup) are for the development of professional social work in Poland; this appears to be the group with the most pro-developmental attitude. Social workers employed in the specialist institutions have a higher self-esteem (particularly in comparison to the staff of welfare centres) and find work more rewarding. They

have a stronger sense of agency and are more open to the idea of practising social work on a daily basis. They more frequently claimed to have selected their profession purposefully, whereas social workers employed in the social welfare centres more often declared that their occupational choices were largely a product of chance. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the social workers from the third subgroup claimed – much more often – that they would make the same professional choice again, compared to the respondents employed in OPS and PCPR.

Respondents from all three subgroups noted the low prestige of their profession, but the social workers employed in OPS were the most pessimistic in this respect. They were also least satisfied with their earnings, while at the same time reporting the highest earnings from all three subgroups. Social workers employed in specialist assistance institutions reported the lowest earnings (on average 300 PLN lower per month than OPS staff, and 200 PLN lower per month than staff of family assistance centres), yet they were the least frustrated with their earnings. They also indicated the lowest stress levels. The highest stress levels were reported by the social workers employed in OPS. As noted by Mariola Bieńko (Bieńko 2012), the stress that the staff of specialist institutions reported was associated with behaviours and attitudes of clients, the majority of whom fall into the 'difficult client' category. For the social workers employed in family assistance centres (PCPR, and also, but to a lesser degree, in the OPS), typical clerical issues were the major stressor. These issues arose not in the relations between the social workers and the clients, but rather between the social workers and the institution that employs them. They included, for example, assigning excessive responsibilities to the social worker, and the previously mentioned unsatisfactory earnings. Burnout symptoms were reported by the third subgroup of respondents less often than the first and second subgroups. These are very clear indications that the respondents employed in specialist institutions have a stronger sense of self-fulfilment.

The social workers employed in specialist institutions also appear to be generally more satisfied with their lives than social workers employed in the social welfare centres. They indicated,

for example, a stronger general sense of safety (not just with regard to their professional situation). Somewhat surprisingly, the highest level of overall satisfaction with life was reported by social workers employed in the family assistance centres. Yet with regard to satisfaction with the professional situation, the third subgroup of respondents ranked at the top.

To recapitulate: it appears that social workers from the periphery of the system, i.e. those who work as qualified personnel in various specialist assistance institutions where they constitute supportive and not core personnel, are most open to social work. Isolated as they are from other social workers, we might expect them to find it more difficult to do social work, yet the opposite appears to be true. It is these non-core social workers who are expected to engage in client-focused work and to offer professional assistance, rather than to collect documents and information necessary for the processing of benefits claims (for more information see: Rymsza 2012). The results of the research show that social workers at the periphery try to rise to these expectations. Because a significant part of specialist assistance institutions are run by the civic-sector entities their rising up role in delivering social work services can be seen and interpreted as a shift form a welfare state to a welfare society (see Rodger 2000).

Towards activation and community work

The study provided important information as to the acceptance among social workers of the activation approach and its instruments, such as conditional assistance, activation contracts, and activation services (broadly defined in Poland as social and vocational reintegration). Social workers want to use (and to a certain extent, do use) these instruments in their day-to-day work. What is more, respondents from all three subgroups indicated that in their day-to-day work they more often engage in actions that promote self-sufficiency of clients than in actions that are purely protective in character (respondents from specialist assistance institutions – much more often; respondents from PCPR – more often; respondents from OPS – somewhat more often).

Social workers employed in municipal social welfare centres, as demonstrated by the study, generally accept activation contracts as an instrument of conditional assistance, especially in relation to clients who are unemployed but able to work. This is important in that the legislator intends them to be primarily responsible for applying the contract. The respondents emphasized the need to build mechanisms of effective cooperation between the social services and the employment services, which are currently not in place in Poland.

Respondents from all three subgroups accepted the values and postulates of activation policy. Generally, the respondents objected to reducing social welfare to the status of 'handout welfare', which eliminates the social work and other techniques that promote self-sufficiency. Even if the respondent's answers reflected wishful thinking rather than reality, the situation is conducive to promoting professional methods of client activation.

The views of the respondents with regard to the institutional division of social work and processing of benefits are very telling. This is probably the most controversial issue in the professional community, and the relevant question revealed the strongest divisions. More than 40% of the total number of respondents support the division; a third of the respondents were against the division; another third said they had no opinion on the matter. Given the intensity of the debates raging in the professional community, the high proportion of 'no opinion' responses probably suggests not indifference, but rather an awareness of the pluses and minuses of both solutions (combination and division). Various interpretations are possible.[9] In my opinion, the results provide a strong argument in favour of an organizational division between social work and the processing of cash-benefits. There certainly are risks attached to this solution. Yet after over twenty years of combination, the solution is preferred by only a third of social workers. Clearly, the usefulness of combination has run its course.

There are definitely changes underway in the professional awareness of social workers. They realize that the protective approach, while necessary in the period of political transformation of the 1990s, is no longer valid. Nowadays the main responsibility

[9]   For a somewhat different interpretation see: Kaźmierczak 2011.

of social services is (or at least should be) to support the clients towards self-sufficiency. This explains the higher levels of professional satisfaction, identification, and openness to new concepts of social work in the social workers who are younger and have shorter work experience. On the other hand, the most burnt-out, resigned, frustrated group is not the oldest social workers with the longest work experience, but those aged 41–50. These are the social workers who came to the profession and began working in the social welfare centres after the political transformation, and who have operated within the welfare system for twenty years. Sadly, their frustration is the best proof that the organization of the system must be changed. On the other hand, the enthusiasm in the younger personnel is noticeable (even though it is associated with a certain naivety and shortcomings in both education and practical experience). There is also the wealth of experience and the potential of social workers employed in specialist institutions. Together, they constitute the potential for change.

Efforts should be made to capitalize upon this shift in awareness. Social workers should have real opportunities for engaging in activating social work. The system of social welfare must be expanded to include various specialist services, including social work. Activation policy should also lead to the establishment of effective mechanisms of cooperation between social services and employment services. Such mechanisms should also cover institutions of social and professional reintegration, including NGOs and Church-related organizations active in this area, as well as social enterprises, occupational therapy workshops, occupational rehabilitation centres, and other similar institutions engaged in occupational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

The study demonstrated that Polish social workers support a variety of activation methods, but perceive activation mainly in relation to community work. It is therefore worthwhile to invest in the development of community work, reminding both the social services and the Polish society at large of the rich traditions Poland has in this respect. Working with local communities, as opposed to clinical social work (typical for the American approach derived from psychotherapy and psychoanalysis – see Payne 2005, Chapter 4),

appears to have the greatest potential in Poland. There has been no interest among social workers to strike out on their own and open private social work practices, even though this model is typically pursued by therapists and clinical psychologists. Social workers prefer to remain employed by larger institutions, but they want to work in the field, with the people, and not be locked up in their offices. They are therefore open to new professional roles, and this is particularly true with regard to the younger social workers with shorter employment history.

Promoting community work is neither a challenge nor competition for other methods of social work (i.e. case work and group work).[10] On the contrary, promoting local development, it encourages the development of social work in its entire broad variety (Twelvetrees 2008). Community work, if implemented with consistency, should be of interest to those local politicians who support the notion of decentralization, and who see the benefits of strengthening independent local communities (in contrast to the accumulation of power in the hands of local authorities). Community-oriented social work should also be of interest to all supporters of the notion of empowerment, which postulates that all citizens and communities should have agency, and in particular that agency and sense of control over their own life should be restored to persons who are marginalized. Finally, proponents of social cohesion should promote community work, given that the ties that are crucial in achieving cohesion are built on the local level (Kaźmierczak 2007). The community-oriented approach in particular appears to offer an alternative to the tendencies towards marketization and managerialization (in practice a new 'mode' of bureaucratization) within social work (see more about that trends in Harris 2003).

[10] See analysis of common basement of all main social work approaches and methods in: DuBois, Miley 1999.

Social work and the other helping professions

The clerical mindset is strong in the Polish social services, particularly among the 'core' social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) and family assistance centres (PCPR). Yet this mindset was not so much chosen by the social workers as

it was imposed on them by the institutional constraints and the social policy of the years immediately following the political transformation. Now, the bureaucratic *status quo* is upheld by local authorities. They view social workers purely through the lens of their institutional affiliation with the social welfare system, and of the system itself as a mechanism for redistribution. Even if the central government's reorientation towards social work is promising, the odds of successful change at the local level are low.

It therefore bears considering which strategy is better for social workers, if the objective is to create a professional identity of social work as a separate helping profession. Should they pursue it alone, or should they join forces with members of other helping professions? This is the issue of positioning social workers in relation to the other helping professions. Another question follows: should services located at the crossroads of traditional social work and other forms of support be incorporated into the concept of social work, or should they become the foundation of new, 'neighbouring' helping professions?[11]

[11] See also an analysis of the relations between social work and the 'neighbouring' helping professions in: Olech 2012.

The strategy of developing various subtypes of social work and bringing new types of social services under its label resembles the strategy of expansion of the 1990s. At that time, the strategy was designed to strengthen the social welfare institutions by vesting in them the responsibilities previously assigned to other institutions. This 'quantitative' boom may, however, lead to overabundance. If some of the approaches fail to win the general support of social workers, their professional identity – built on professional competence rather than institutional affiliation – may suffer. On the other hand, the gradual emergence of new helping professions (such as streetwork or community work) which may be perceived as complementary to social work, but also as its competition. Two strategies may be distinguished in the general approach of 'competent professionals working together in order to help'. The first strategy posits a loose coalition of the helping professions; some of the individual professions are more recognizable, while others are less so, but they are all treated as equal. The second strategy posits cooperation within the social services system with the position of social workers best described as *primus inter pares*.

Yet another strategy posits that no positioning of social work in relation to the other helping professions is necessary – social workers should just carry on doing their work, regardless of the other helping professions. Yet this strategy was already used in Poland and it failed, as is best reflected in the unsuccessful attempt to enact a statute on social workers. Similar strategies of exclusion of other helping professions have ended in failure in other countries too: in Australia, Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and the Nordic countries (Szmagalski 2012b). This is why the efforts to uphold the status of social work as a helping profession are now associated in those countries with "creating coalitions and trade unions for members of all social services, in order to be more visible and more effective in promoting the role of social services, their complementarity towards one another, and their shared interests" (Szmagalski 2012b, p. 256).

Yet before a choice of strategy is made with regard to the status of social work as a specialist kind of assistance, other efforts are necessary. Namely, the professional identity of social workers must be developed with a focus on providing specialist assistance, not the bureaucratic, clerical work. In doing so, the experiences of the social workers who operate at the periphery of the system may prove invaluable. This is a development I hope to see soon. As soon as this reorientation is complete, the question of the relations between social work and the other helping professions will return full force. We will have to be ready to find an answer then.

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chapter

07

Tomasz Kaźmierczak

Activation practice in social welfare centres[1]

Criticism of the Polish social welfare system for being too protective appears valid (Kaźmierczak, Rymsza eds. 2003)[2], yet there have been attempts to reorient the system. These attempts are reflected first of all in legislation, e.g. the statute on social employment and social cooperatives. The change is also apparent in the special-purpose programs designed by the government, chiefly those in Priority VII (Promotion of social integration) of the Human Capital Operational Programme. Activation has also been one of the key issues – if not *the* key issue – in the discourse about social welfare, and in debates among social welfare practitioners.

For these reasons, activation became the focal point of exploration in the research on social workers. This paper reports the results of the study[3]. The main objective of the study was to collect opinions of social workers on a number of essential principles on which the philosophy of activation is founded. The study was also designed to give insight into how activation is practised and how the instruments that promote activation (and that exist in the system) are used. All respondents were interviewed on the topic of principles. However, questions pertaining to the instruments were asked only to social workers employed by social welfare centres (*ośrodki pomocy społecznej*), because activation instruments and procedures are at present only available at that institutional level.

Activation versus protection: acceptance of the principle of conditional welfare

We asked all respondents two questions. In the first question, we asked them to indicate the type of actions they typically take with regard to their clients: are the actions protective in nature (i.e. the objective is to prevent the deterioration of the client's social and economic situation), or activating in nature (i.e. the objective is to help the client become independent)? Results demonstrate that in the entire population of social workers, there are more proponents of activation (54.8%) than protection (43.3%). The proportion is similar in the narrower group of the social workers employed in social welfare centres. For obvious reasons (clients assigned by statutory regulations, statutorily regulated services) the activation option has stronger support in the family assistance centres at the level of *powiat*, and the support is even stronger in specialized social services centres[4] (almost 70%). These differences, while statistically significant, are fully in line with expectations.

4   In the paper by Marek Rymsza (chapter 6 in this volume) these centres were called as "specialist institutions operating on the fringes of the social welfare system" [editor's note].

Table 1. Activation versus protection in actions taken by social workers (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		All social workers	Social workers employed by:		
			social welfare centres (OPS)	family assistance centres (PCPR)	specialized social services centres
Type of action towards the client taken more frequently	Actions that are protective in nature and that prevent the deterioration of the client's social and economic situation	43.3%	44.7%	34.0%	27.8%
	Actions that are activating in nature and that help the client become independent	54.7%	53.5%	62.0%	69.6%
	No response	2.0%	1.8%	4.0%	2.6%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) 2010.

Table 2. Activation versus protection in actions taken by social workers in specialized social services centres (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed by:		
		social integration centres (activation centres)	hostels and shelters for homeless persons	community-based self-help centres* (środowiskowe domy samopomocy)
Type of action towards the client taken more frequently	Actions that are protective in nature and that prevent the deterioration of the client's social and economic situation	9.8%	33.0%	28.3%
	Actions that are activating in nature and that help the client become independent	80.4%	65.0%	70.7%
	No response	9.8%	2.0%	1.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

* community based centres for people with mental or intellectual disability
Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

While the proportions of respondents with activating and protecting approaches in the welfare centres and family assistance centres are not different to a significant degree, the differences within specialized social services centres are significant. However, they are also natural. The proportion of activation is biggest in social integration centres, where the one cause for concern could be whether 80.4% is not in fact too low a number. The proportion is lowest in hostels and shelters for homeless persons, where a number even exceeding the declared 33% of protective actions would not be out of place.

In terms of socio-demographic data under analysis (sex, age, marital status, place of residence), three factors are significant with regard to the distribution of activation versus protection:

- women choose activation much more frequently (55.4%) than men (45%)
- activation is most frequently chosen by persons aged 26–30 (63.7%), while protection is favoured by respondents aged 51+ (54.7%)

- activation is clearly preferred by residents of cities with populations of 50,000–100,000 (65.1%), while residents of towns with fewer than 10,000 residents choose either of the approaches equally often.

In terms of data pertaining to the professional situation of the respondents (education, number of years of experience, level of specialization, position held), two factors have had a statistically significant impact:

- social workers with secondary education are most pro-activation (61.9%), while those with post-secondary (*pomaturalne*) education tend to prefer protection (49.6% to 47.8%)
- activation is preferred by social workers with shorter professional experience, in the 3-5 years bracket (63.9%), while respondents with the longest experience choose the protective approach most frequently (48.5%).

The second question pertained to the acceptance of the principle stipulating that a person who is able to work but does not work should be eligible for welfare in the form of financial support only for as long as it takes to obtain the qualifications necessary to find a job, and on condition that they take steps in this direction. The respondents had the option of either not agreeing with this principle, or agreeing with it; the latter either with the reservation that it should be applied in the manner that will put the client on the job market as soon as possible, or with the reservation that it should be applied in a highly individualized manner.

Results demonstrate that the principle as such meets with general acceptance among social workers. There are, however, differences in how the social workers believe the principle should be applied (fast integration with the labour market versus an individualized approach). The former option was favoured (60.3%) in the whole group of respondents and also, to a similar extent, among social workers in the welfare centres (61%). The lowest degree of support for this option was found in social workers employed by specialized social services centres (51.9%). The differences are statistically significant.

Table 3. Social workers and the principle of conditional financial assistance (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		All social workers	Social workers employed by:		
			social welfare centres (OPS)	family assistance centres (PCPR)	specialized social services centres
Opinion about the principle of condition-al financial assistance	I believe the principle should be applied in such a manner that will put the client on the job market as soon as possible	60.3%	61.0%	57.2%	51.9%
	I believe the principle should be applied in a highly individu-alized manner	39.3%	38.8%	41.3%	45.7%
	I do not agree with this principle	0.4%	0.2%	1.5%	2.4%
	Another opinion	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

Table 4. Social workers in social welfare centres (OPS) and the principle of conditional financial assistance (%) (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed by:			
		municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres *
Opinion about the principle of conditional financial assistance	I believe the principle should be applied in such a manner that will put the client on the job market as soon as possible	50.2%	64.0%	62.7%	69.2%
	I believe the principle should be applied in a highly individualized manner	49.3%	36.0%	37.3%	30.8%
	I do not agree with this principle	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Another opinion	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

* In selected towns and cities which administratively are ranked as *powiat*, family assistance centres are established with a geographical reach limited to that town/city. Their responsibilities combine the responsibilities of *powiat*-level family assistance centres and social welfare centres. The table presents data which includes social workers that are allocated responsibilities otherwise assigned to social welfare centres.
Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

Table 5. Social workers in *powiat*-level family assistance centres (PCPR) and the principle of conditional financial assistance (%), (*sign* ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed by:	
		city-level family assistance centres *	*powiat*-level family assistance centres
Opinion about the principle of conditional financial assistance	I believe the principle should be applied in such a manner that will put the client on the job market as soon as possible	71.6%	54.3%
	I believe the principle should be applied in a highly individualized manner	26.2%	44.3%
	I do not agree with this principle	2.2%	1.4%
	Another opinion	0.0%	0.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%

* In selected towns and cities which administratively are ranked as *powiat*, family assistance centres are established with a geographical reach limited to that town/city. Their responsibilities combine the responsibilities of *powiat*-level family assistance centres and welfare centres. The table presents data which includes social workers that are allocated responsibilities otherwise assigned to *powiat*-level family assistance centres.
Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

Statistically significant differences in the distribution of proponents of a fast reintegration of clients with the labour market and the proponents of individualization occur among social workers employed in the OPS and in *powiat*-level family assistance centres. In the social welfare centres, workers from the municipal ones stand apart: both options are almost equally represented, while in city-level social welfare centres, proponents of fast reintegration outnumber the proponents of individualization almost two to one. Among the respondents from *powiat*-level family assistance centres, there are more proponents of individualization than in the city-level centres. The differences in the group of social workers in specialized social services centres are not statistically significant.

Socio-demographic variables have greater impact on the respondents' opinions than those pertaining to their professional situation:

- the labour market orientation is more frequent in widows and widowers (78.9%) and persons who have never been

married (67.9%), although among divorced persons there are just slightly fewer proponents of individualization (48.6%) than of fast labour market integration (51.4%)

- proponents of individualization tend to live in rural areas (45.1%) and towns of 11,000–50,000 residents (43.3%); both those who live in smaller towns of up to 10,000 residents and those in the biggest cities (100,000+) are almost twice as likely to choose fast labour market integration over individualization (69.5% for small towns, 67.8% for big cities).

In terms of variables pertaining to professional situation, only the number of years of experience is statistically significant. The preference for fast labour market integration is most frequent in persons with 6-10 years of experience (62.2%) and 11–15 years of experience (62.3%), while it is least frequent in persons with 21+ years of experience (51%).

These results demonstrate that, declaratively at least, social workers favour the activating approach over a protective one. They generally accept that persons who are able to work should be eligible for welfare in the form of financial support only for as long as it takes to obtain qualifications necessary to find a job. They prefer the 'hard' option on how this principle should be applied over the 'soft', individualized approach. It seems, therefore, that there is a relatively good foundation for the practice of activation based on conditional rights to financial assistance.

Below, I discuss the set of questions that were asked (with a single exception) only to respondents who work in social welfare centres, and that pertained to actions taken in order to activate the clients who receive financial assistance as well as the tools of activation that were used in the process.

Activation in social welfare centres

The first question pertained to the general frequency of applying activation strategies to clients who received financial assistance in the social welfare centres where the given respondent was

employed. Nearly 30% of respondents declared that in their centres, activation was applied always; almost 45% declared that it happened often; 14.4% choose the option 'quite often'; only 2.8% of respondents admitted that activation strategies were deployed rather rarely, rarely, or never. If these declarations gave an accurate portrayal of the situation, we would have to assume that activation of clients who receive financial assistance is common practice in social welfare centres. The differences in distribution between the various types of OPS are not statistically significant.

We also asked the workers from *powiat*-level family assistance centres and specialized social services centres about their opinion on this issue, in order to find out if they perceive the situation with regard to activation steps in social welfare centres similarly to the

Table 6. Social workers on attempts to activate clients who receive financial assistance in the social welfare centres (OPS) in which these workers are employed (%)

		Social workers employed by social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed by:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Attempts to activate clients who receive financial assistance	always	29.6%	22.6%	27.1%	32.4%	37.5%
	often	43.9%	46.3%	45.8%	48.2%	37.0%
	quite often	14.4%	17.8%	16.8%	11.9%	10.3%
	sometimes yes, sometimes not	7.5%	9.1%	5.8%	4.6%	9.1%
	rather rarely	1.8%	1.9%	3.3%	0.0%	1.3%
	rarely	0.7%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
	never	0.4%	0.5%	0.0%	1.0%	0.3%
	I don't know / It is difficult to say	1.7%	0.6%	1.2%	1.9%	3.2%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

OPS staff themselves, or if there are discrepancies in this respect. As many as 30% of respondents were unable to form an opinion (answer: 'I don't know / It is difficult to say'). It demonstrates that the ties between the elements of the same system are often rather weak. Those who were able to form an opinion generally confirmed the assessment of the respondents from social welfare centres (even if with a bit less conviction). Centres' staff selected 'always' and 'often' relatively more frequently, while staff of *powiat*-level family assistance centres and specialized social services centres tended to choose lower points on the scale, but there were no statistically significant differences between the respondents from the two groups (*powiat*-level family assistance centres and specialized social services centres).

Table 7. Social workers on attempts to activate clients who receive financial assistance in the *powiat*-level family assistance centres (PCPR) and specialized social services centres in which these workers are employed (%)

		Social workers employed by *powiat*-level family assistance centres and specialized social services centres in total	Social workers employed by:	
			powiat-level family assistance centres	specialized social services centres
Attempts to activate clients who receive financial assistance	always	5.4%	4.9%	6.0%
	often	26.2%	26.4%	26.0%
	quite often	18.2%	18.9%	17.0%
	sometimes yes, sometimes not	14.2%	12.7%	16.6%
	rather rarely	3.9%	3.2%	4.9%
	rarely	2.6%	3.6%	1.1%
	never	0.9%	0.3%	1.7%
	I don't know / It is difficult to say	28.6%	30.0%	26.7%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

We also asked the respondents how often they choose activation services. For the entire group of respondents (staff of all social welfare centres), the results were as follows: very often – 33.9%; often – 55.2%; rarely – 9.1%; very rarely – 0.7%; never – 1.0%. The differences in distribution of the results between staff of different types of welfare centres were statistically significant. Social workers employed in municipal welfare centres used activation relatively less often (21.4% chose the response 'very often'), while social workers employed in city-level welfare centres were most likely to use it (45.7% chose the response 'very often'). Activation attempts were reported more often by social workers in larger towns and cities, and less often by workers in rural and mixed urban-rural areas.

Table 8. Attempts by social workers in social welfare centres (OPS) to activate clients on temporary benefits (zasiłek okresowy) and/or targeted benefits (zasiłek celowy) (%), (sign ≤ 0.05),

		Social workers employed by social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed by:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Attempts to activate clients on temporary benefits and/or targeted benefits	very often	33.9%	21.4%	31.9%	45.7%	41.6%
	often	55.2%	63.8%	59.1%	45.8%	48.6%
	rarely	9.2%	12.7%	9.0%	5.3%	7.8%
	very rarely	0.7%	0.5%	0.0%	2.3%	0.6%
	never	1.0%	1.6%	0.0%	0.9%	1.4%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers. IPA 2010.

Variables pertaining to the professional situation of the respondents have greater impact on the respondents' opinions than socio-demographic variables:

• there is a linear tendency (albeit not a very strong one) for the frequency of activation attempts to increase with the increase in education (respondents with higher education: very often – 37.3%; often – 55%; rarely / very rarely / never

– 7.7%. Respondents with secondary education: very often – 37.5%; often – 45.4%; rarely / very rarely / never – 17.1%)

- activation attempts are clearly more often made by respondents with the job title of senior specialist (*starszy specjalista pracy socjalnej*) (very often – 50.5%; rarely / very rarely / never – 2.9%), and they are least often made by those with the job title of senior social worker (*starszy pracownik socjalny*) (very often – 30.6%; rarely / very rarely / never – 14.6%)

- the impact of the number of years of experience is unclear, but it appears that persons with 3–5 years of experience make activation attempts relatively more often, and social workers with less than two years of experience do so less often that any of the other groups.

- In terms of socio-demographic data, age and place of residence are statistically significant:

- the impact of age (just like that of the number of years of experience) is unclear, but it appears that the likelihood of engaging in activation attempts rises until the age of 30, and then stabilizes

- resident of towns with populations 51,000–100,000 engage in activation attempts more often (very often – 50.9%; rarely / very rarely / never – 4.6%), while residents of towns with populations below 10,000 do so least often (very often – 13.9%; rarely / very rarely / never – 16.6%).

The activation contract (*kontrakt socjalny*)

In the general framework of activation, great importance is attached to the notion of an activation contract (*kontrakt socjalny*). The statute on social welfare of 2003 implements the notion of the activation contract into the Polish welfare system. We were interested in the opinions and basic facts related to this solution.

We asked the social workers what they thought about the activation contracts. We asked them either to select an opinion ('it is a good

instrument and its use should be a standard procedure (it should be used universally)'; 'it is a good instrument, but only for certain clients'; 'it is not a useful instrument of social work') or declare that they had a different opinion. As many as 56.8% respondents declared that the activation contract was a good instrument, but only for certain clients. 21.4% respondents declared that its use should be a standard procedure (it should be used universally). 16.9% respondents said it was not a useful instrument of social work. Those who approved of activation contracts but only for certain clients typically proposed that the contracts should be used with the following categories of clients: the unemployed (70%), persons with alcohol addictions (31.2%), families with child-rearing issues (11.3%), persons with drug addictions (10.2%), former inmates (9.6%), and families with many children (6.9%).[5]

Table 9. Opinions of social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) on the application of the activation contract (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Opinions on the applica-tion of the activation contract	It is a good instru-ment and its use should be a stan-dard procedure (it should be used universally)	21.4%	15.3%	17.9%	25.1%	28.3%
	It is a good instru-ment, but only for certain clients	56.7%	57.2%	56.5%	59.7%	54.7%
	It is not a useful instrument of social work	16.9%	23.6%	16.5%	12.7%	12.5%
	I have a different opinion	2.3%	1.7%	4.5%	1.5%	1.6%
	I don't know / it is difficult to say	2.7%	2.2%	4.6%	1.0%	2.9%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

The attitudes to the activation contract differ (statistically significantly) between the types of social welfare centres. On the one hand, the proportion of social workers who accept the activation contract as an instrument to be used selectively is almost the same across all types of centres. On the other hand, the largest proportion of social workers who dismiss this instrument (almost a quarter of responses) is found in municipal centres, while its standard (universal) application is most favoured (over a quarter of responses) in city-level social welfare centres and in city-level family assistance centres.

Both socio-demographic variables and variables pertaining to the professional situation of the respondents have an impact on the attitudes to activation contracts:

- almost two thirds of respondents aged 26–40 accept the activation contract as an instrument to be used selectively; respondents aged 51+ are most likely to dismiss it completely (31%), while the youngest respondents (below 25 years of age) are most likely to favour its universal application (40.7%)

- widows and widowers are most likely to dismiss activation contracts (34.1%), while divorced persons are most likely to accept it (only 4.4% dismissals and 31.3% responses in favour of universal application)

- residents of towns with populations below 10,000 are most likely to dismiss the contracts (27.3%), while respondents of towns with populations of 51,000–100,000 have the highest proportion (30.2%) of responses favouring their universal application

- persons with higher education are most likely to favour universal application of the activation contract (over a quarter of responses), while persons with post-secondary education tend to dismiss it most often (63% with bachelor's degrees and 71% with secondary education see the contracts as an instrument to be used selectively)

- the likelihood of negative attitudes to the activation contracts increases in an almost linear fashion with the position held

(5.7% of junior social workers and 20.6% senior specialists); among specialists, there is the lowest proportion of respondents who propose that the contract should be applied universally (10.6%), while social workers are more likely than respondents from any other group to choose this option (24.2%)

- the lowest acceptance of activation contracts is found in respondents with 21+ years of experience (26.5%), while the highest acceptance of the contracts is found in the groups with the shortest experience, where only 3.7% dismissed the contracts.

Almost all social workers reported having a personal experience of applying the activation contract: only approx. 10% of respondents had never even made an attempt to do so. Over 80% of respondents had made full use of the contract. Staff of all types of social welfare centres are equally likely to use activation contracts (the differences are not statistically significant).

Table 10. Use of the activation contract in the social worker's own practice (%)

| | | Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total | Social workers employed in: | | | |
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Application of the activation contract in social workers' own practice	Yes	81.9%	79.7%	79.2%	87.8%	82.8%
	No, but I made an attempt	8.2%	9.1%	8.6%	2.9%	10.1%
	No	9.9%	11.2%	12.2%	9.3%	7.1%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

Given how popular activation contracts appear to be, it is important to determine how many clients have entered into such contracts. We asked the respondents about the number of contracts they made in the years of the study (2010). The average was 7.5. Almost 60% had made fewer than 8 contracts, while the most frequent response (approx. 40%) was the 1–4 bracket.

Table 11. Number of activation contracts made by the social workers in the year of the study (2010) (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Number of activation contracts made in the year of the study (2010)	0	7.1%	7.5%	3.6%	5.1%	10.7%
	1–4	39.2%	39.0%	50.2%	39.6%	30.7%
	5–8	24.1%	30.0%	24.5%	23.1%	18.3%
	9–12	13.3%	13.1%	12.6%	12.5%	14.7%
	13–16	5.7%	3.5%	4.0%	5.8%	9.2%
	17–20	4.4%	0.9%	3.5%	6.4%	7.3%
	21+	4.0%	4.0%	0.8%	4.6%	5.9%
	refused to answer	2.2%	2.0%	0.8%	2.9%	3.2%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Average	7.50	6.54	5.68	8.21	9.46

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

There are statistically significant differences between the social workers employed in the different types of OPS. In all of them, the 1–4 and 5–8 brackets prevail, but the proportion is greatest in combined city-level / municipal social welfare centres (almost three quarters of responses), and smallest in city-level family assistance centres (49%). The proportion of social workers who made more than 8 activation contracts is similar across all types of centres.

All variables, both socio-demographic and pertaining to the professional situation of the respondents, have an impact on the number of activation contracts:

- more than half of contracts made by men fell into the 1–4 bracket, while women tended to make contracts with larger numbers of clients (38.4% responses indicated the 1–4 bracket and 24.5% responses the 5–8 bracket)

- as the age of respondents goes down, the proportion of respondents with 1-4 contracts goes down as well (below 25 years – 53.3%; 51+ years – 32.5%) while the proportion of respondents with 5-8 and 9-12 contracts goes up (from 10.2% to 36.8% and from 9.0% to 17.9% respectively)
- persons who were never married and persons married at the time of the study were most likely to have made 1–4 contracts (44.4% and 39.0% respectively); widows and widowers and persons who were divorced were most likely to have made 5–8 contracts (47.9% and 35.2% respectively)
- respondents from towns with populations of 51,000–100,000 stand out in that in this group there is a relatively high proportion of 17–20 and 21+ responses (11.4% and 13.5% respectively)
- respondents with higher education and with secondary education stand out in that the former have the lowest proportion of 1–4 responses (34.6%) while the latter have a relatively high proportion of 9–12 responses (30.2%)
- social workers with a higher professional qualification (so-called specialization) made slightly more contracts (4-20) than those without this qualification
- senior specialists and junior social workers are two categories that stand out, in that 16.7% of senior specialists had made no contract (furthermore, the proportion of 1–4 responses in this group was relatively low too) and over a quarter of junior social workers had made no contract (yet the proportion of 1–4 responses is highest in this group at 48.5%)
- the impact of the number of years of experiences is unclear.

Cooperation between social workers employed in social welfare centres, social integration clubs, and *powiat*–level employment offices

Social integration centres (activation centres) and social integration clubs (activation clubs) are two institutions established by the 2003 statute on social employment. They are

the primary institutions that offer key services designed to help eliminate the deficits that prevent unemployed persons from entering the labour market. Cooperation with these institutions therefore appears crucial in terms of social workers' activation efforts. We asked the social workers whether they were involved in such cooperation.

The responses indicated that 56.4% of respondents had never cooperated with a social integration centre, and only less than a fifth of them had cooperated with a social integration centre often or very often. The differences between social workers from different types of social welfare centres are very large: while 72.4% of social workers employed in municipal welfare centres had never engaged in such cooperation, the corresponding proportion of city-level welfare centres is only 30.5%. In municipal centres, approx. every tenth social worker cooperates with a social integration centre often or very often; in combined city-level / municipal welfare centres, every fifth social worker does so; in city-level welfare centres, every fourth; and in city-level family assistance centres, two out of five social workers do so.

Table 12. Cooperation between social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) with social integration centres (CIS) (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Cooperation with a social integration centre	very often	5.7%	1.6%	8.2%	9.1%	6.0%
	often	19.3%	11.0%	11.2%	18.7%	35.0%
	rarely	13.6%	10.3%	11.0%	8.5%	22.8%
	very rarely	5.0%	4.7%	5.1%	4.3%	5.7%
	never	56.4%	72.4%	64.5%	59.4%	30.5%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

Table 13. Reasons for limited cooperation between social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) with social integration centres (CIS) (%) (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Reasons for limited cooperation with social integration centres	It is not an option, but I would like to	77.6%	82.8%	75.3%	77.8%	69.0%
	It is not an option, but also I feel no need	18.9%	14.1%	22.9%	18.6%	24.2%
	It is an option, but I feel no need	3.5%	3.1%	1.8%	3.6%	6.8%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

Table 14. Cooperation between social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) with social integration clubs (KIS) (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Cooperation with a social integration club	very often	8.6%	1.8%	12.8%	11.5%	11.0%
	often	14.2%	10.6%	8.6%	11.5%	24.2%
	rarely	13.7%	6.6%	14.0%	13.3%	21.8%
	very rarely	5.2%	3.2%	5.7%	2.6%	8.5%
	never	58.3%	77.8%	58.9%	61.1%	34.5%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

When respondents declared that they engaged in such cooperation rarely, very rarely or never, we asked about the reasons. More than three quarters of these respondents said that they wished they could engage in such cooperation, but the option was not available (there are too few social integration centres). The differences across the different types of welfare centres were not statistically significant.

The next question pertained to cooperation with social integration clubs. The situation is bad in this respect too. Nearly 60% of respondents had never cooperated with a social integration club, and 22.8% of respondents declared that they cooperated with a social integration club often or very often.

The differences between social workers employed in the different types of social welfare centres are again very clear (and statistically significant). The proportion of social workers who have never cooperated with a social integration club is 77.8% with regard to municipal welfare centres, approx. 60% with regard to combined city-level and municipal welfare centres as well as city-level welfare centres, and over 30% with regard to city-level family assistance centres. In municipal welfare centres, approx. every tenth social worker cooperates with a social integration club often or very often; in combined city-level and municipal welfare centres and in city-level welfare centres, every fifth; and in city-level family assistance centres, every third. Again, when respondents declared that they engaged in such cooperation rarely, very rarely or never, we asked about the reasons.

The explanation is the same as in the case of social integration centres: more than three quarters of these respondents said that they wished they could engage in such cooperation, but the option was not available. There are also too few social integration clubs. The differences across the different types of OPS were not statistically significant.

We also asked the social workers employed in social welfare centres who they cooperated with in the process of activating their clients (other than social integration centres and/or clubs). Only one other type of partner institution was listed regularly: the powiat-level employment office (*urząd pracy*). Over 80% of

Table 15. Reasons for limited cooperation between social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) with social integration clubs (KIS) (%)

		Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Reasons for limited cooperation with social integration clubs	It is not an option, but I would like to	76.4%	78.4%	81.4%	75.9%	67.0%
	It is not an option, but also I feel no need	18.6%	19.7%	15.2%	19.0%	19.7%
	It is an option, but I feel no need	5.0%	1.9%	3.4%	5.1%	13.3%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

Table 16. Institutions that cooperate with social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) in the process of activating the clients (%), (sign ≤ 0.05)

		Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
			municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Institutions with which cooperation occurs in the process of activating the clients (CIS and KIS)	powiat-level employment office	80.4%	83.9%	78.3%	84.2%	76.0%
	other institution(s)	7.0%	4.1%	11.9%	6.5%	6.5%
	no institution(s)	4.2%	6.5%	2.0%	1.7%	5.0%
	powiat-level employment office and other institution(s)	8.4%	5.5%	7.8%	7.6%	12.5%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

respondents declared that they cooperated with *powiat*-level employment offices. Beyond social integration centres and clubs, and other than employment offices, just over 15% of social workers declared that they cooperated with other institutions. The greatest proportion (relatively) of social workers who cooperate with institutions other than those three types was found in combined city-level / municipal welfare centres (19.7%) and city-level welfare centres (19%), while the smallest proportion was found in municipal welfare centres (9.6%). The differences across the different types of social welfare centres were statistically significant in this case.

Instruments of activation used by social workers in social welfare centres

In our study, social workers in social welfare centres were also asked about the use of instruments of activation in their place of employment. The above-discussed activation contracts and cooperation with social integration centres and clubs were taken into account. Also considered were the following instruments: public works (*roboty publiczne*), community interest works (*prace społecznie użyteczne*), and *prace interwencyjne,* i.e. a form of employment where the employer and the employment office enter into an agreement to create jobs for a specific category of persons in a precarious labour market situation.

The results can be summarized as follows:

- with regard to activation contracts: 32.9% of social workers work in OPS where the frequency of use of activation contracts is described as less frequent than 'often' (with the situation being the worst in combined city-level / municipal welfare centres, where this proportion is 46,2%, and the best in city-level family assistance centres, where the proportion is 21.5%)
- with regard to public works: 50.7% of social workers work in OPS where the frequency of use of public works is described

Table 17. Application of instruments of activation by social workers employed in social welfare centres (OPS) (%)

	Social workers employed in social welfare centres in total	Social workers employed in:			
		municipal welfare centres	combined city-level / municipal welfare centres	city-level welfare centres	city-level family assistance centres
Use of the activation contract*					
always	7.5	3.1	9.6	9.8	9.3
often and quite often	59.4	56.6	44.2	67.9	69.2
sometimes yes, sometimes no	17.1	19.8	20.6	16.6	11.7
rather rarely and rarely	13.9	14.9	24.4	5.7	9.8
never	1.9	5.1	1.2	0.0	0.0
Public works (roboty publiczne)					
always	5.5	6.6	7.7	7.7	1.1
often and quite often	39.9	41.3	42.9	32.3	40.7
sometimes yes, sometimes no	11.1	11.2	4.3	14.8	14.2
rather rarely and rarely	18.1	16.6	21.3	15.8	18.7
never	21.5	18.9	22.0	25.0	21.6
Prace interwencyjne					
always	6.3	10.4	6.7	5.7	1.7
often and quite often	38.2	42.0	43.0	33.9	32.9
sometimes yes, sometimes no	13.3	13.5	5.5	16.2	17.4
rather rarely and rarely	17.6	13.7	18.3	18.5	20.9
never	21.0	17.1	23.3	20.6	23.6
Community interest works (prace społecznie użyteczne)*					
always	12.3	13.7	15.5	11.9	8.2
often and quite often	50.1	40.8	48.6	52.1	60.4
sometimes yes, sometimes no	8.9	6.4	3.0	10.2	15.9
rather rarely and rarely	12.6	17.2	12.0	11.5	9.0
never	13.8	18.9	18.0	12.2	5.5

Directing the client to a social integration centre (CIS)*					
always	3.3	1.8	1.9	6.5	3.9
often and quite often	22.2	11.4	12.7	19.1	44.0
sometimes yes, sometimes no	7.8	5.8	7.6	6.9	11.0
rather rarely and rarely	15.2	15.2	17.5	10.9	16.2
never	43.8	57.7	54.3	44.9	18.9
Directing the client to a social integration club (KIS)*					
always	3.6	1.2	3.8	6.9	3.9
often and quite often	24.1	13.4	18.6	19.7	43.4
sometimes yes, sometimes no	8.1	4.0	6.5	10.7	12.4
rather rarely and rarely	14.1	11.3	15.4	11.1	18.1
never	42.8	62.1	48.7	43.8	15.7

* Statistically significant differences (sign ≤ 0.05).
Source: Study on social workers, IPA 2010.

as less frequent than 'often' (the situation is similar across the types of centres; it is worst in city-level welfare centres, where the proportion is 55.6%, and best in municipal welfare centres, where the proportion is 46.7%)

- with regard to subsidized employment: 51,9% of social workers work in OPS where the frequency of use of subsidized employment is described as less frequent than 'often' (the situation is similar across the types of centres: it is worst in city-level family assistance centres, where the proportion is 61.9%, and best in municipal welfare centres, where the proportion is 44.3%)

- with regard to publicly funded employment: 35.3% of social workers work in OPS where the frequency of use of publicly funded employment is described as less frequent than 'often' (the situation is worst in municipal welfare centres, where the proportion is 42.5%, and best in city-level family assistance centres, where the proportion is 30.4%); the differences are statistically significant

- with regard to directing the clients to social integration centres: 66.8% of social workers work in social welfare centres where activation clients are directed to social integration centres with a frequency described as less than 'often' (there are large differences between the types of centres: the situation is worst in municipal welfare centres, where the proportion is 78.7%, and best in city-level family assistance centres, where the proportion is 46.1%)

- with regard to directing the clients to social integration clubs: 65.0% of social workers work in social welfare centres where activation clients are directed to social integration clubs with a frequency described as less than 'often' (there are large differences between the types of centres: the situation is worst in municipal welfare centres, where the proportion is 77.4%, and best in city-level family assistance centres, where the proportion is 46.2%).

Summary and conclusions

The research results presented above suggest the following conclusions:

- In all strata of social workers in the study, there is a preference for activation. This preference is the strongest among social workers in specialized social services centres, and least strong among workers in social welfare centres. Yet the social workers in specialized social services centres are most likely to favour an individualized approach to the principle of conditional financial assistance, while the social workers in OPS tend to be least likely to favour this solution.

- Activation as an approach towards clients provided with financial assistance appears (at least at the level of declarations) to be well grounded in both the opinions expressed by social workers and in their assessment of practice (both their own and of their places of employment).

Both the underlying principle, i.e. that of conditional financial assistance, and the key instrument of its implementation, i.e. the activation contract, appear to be well accepted.

- The model of activation currently under implementation in the Polish welfare system relies primarily on activation contracts and on the services of the social integration centres and clubs. Public works, subsidized employment and publicly funded employment serve merely to supplement them. Research results demonstrate that the extent to which the key components of the model are being applied and used is limited. Assuming that there are on average 25 recipients of temporary benefits (*zasiłek okresowy*) per one social worker in a welfare centre,[6] and the most often indicated number of contracts is 1–4, the conclusion is that a contract is applied only in one case in five. Almost three quarters of the persons to whom, in principle, all activation measures should be addressed had no access to the institutions (social integration centres and clubs) which were designed to provide such specialized services. Access to other instruments is better, but those are instruments of much lesser significance. Easy access to *powiat*-level employment offices has little impact on the situation, because the services these offices offer are designed to fit the needs of other types of clients than the unemployed welfare clients. These facts and estimates must be taken into account in the interpretation of the optimism with regard to activation expressed by the respondents.

- The research demonstrates that there is a clear difference between social workers who work in rural (and mixed urban-rural) areas and those who work in urban areas. The difference is visible in the attitudes to activation, in the assessment of practice, and in the accessibility of instruments. In the rural (and mixed urban-rural) areas, the protective approach is strong, the need for individualized approach more keenly felt, the activation contract is less

[6] The index is calculated as quotient of the number of recipients of temporary hardship benefits in 2008 (444,683; newer data are not yet available) and the population of front line social workers employed in welfare centres (18,359); the latter number was also the basis for calculating the size of the sample in the study.

accepted, and the activation infrastructure is decidedly poorer. Possibly, it is the issue of poor infrastructure that affects (at least to a degree) the attitudes to activation: if no instruments and measures are available, protection is the only method that is left.

- Variables that pertain to the respondents' professional situation appear to have a greater impact on the attitudes to activation than socio-demographic variables. Therefore, the attitudes appear to be a reflection of the social workers' professional experience rather than of their overall life experience.

Laboratory of Social Innovation – practical expiriences

chapter

08

Maria Mendel, Marek Rymsza

Why do we need community organizers? Solidarity, partnership, and alliance in community work[1]

In Anglo-Saxon countries, professionalization of community organizing or, more broadly speaking, of community development has generated a new profession: that of a community worker. Andrzej Niesporek and Kazimiera Wódz (Niesporek, Wódz 2003, p. 134), in their discussion of the formal agreement between American organizations representing community workers and social workers, note that the notion of community organizing is much broader than just community work. Yet community work, one of the three central methods of social work (which we will shortly discuss in more detail), is definitely a form of community organizing. Consequently in practice social workers may become community organizers, whether community organizing in the country where they work has evolved into a separate profession, as it has in the United States or Great Britain for example, or not yet, as is the case in Poland.

This coexistence of community organizing and social work in their various areas of overlap has quite a long tradition and is functionally sensible. Allan Twelvetrees notes that the broad notion of community organizing – which today covers the spectrum from infrastructure planning for local social and human resources (community care – see also Bytheway et all 2002), engendering social change and enhancing social cohesion, to promoting economic development of local communities – has evolved from the tradition of neighbourhood community development (Twelvetrees 2008).[2] This tradition, in turn, may be traced back to the settlements movement of the 19th century, which in Anglo-Saxon countries provided the impulse for social work in marginalized communities, especially in poor urban areas (see Leś

[1] The paper is a translation into English of: M. Mendel, M. Rymsza, *Po co nam pracownicy socjalni – organizatorzy społeczności? Solidarność, partnerstwo, przymierze w środowiskowej pracy socjalnej*, [in:] M. Rymsza (2012) (ed.), *Pracownicy socjalni i praca socjalna w Polsce. Pomiędzy służbą a urzędem* [Social workers and social work in Poland. Between the role of servants of the society and the role of clerks in a bureaucracy], Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warsaw, pp. 313-330.

[2] In Poland, the tradition of activating small local communities is under-appreciated. There has been certain interest in this regard initiated by Stowarzyszenie Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL; see: *Aktywni mieszkańcy* 2014.

2000). Social workers have been dealing in community organizing essentially ever since the beginnings of the profession. As social work professionalized, three separate types – also referred to as methods (see Wódz 1998, pp. 130-160) – emerged:

- social work with an individual as a 'case' (case work), which, especially in the United States, has built on the foundation of psychoanalysis, and thus in a sense removed itself from its community roots
- social work with groups (group work), which has a strong component of community involvement (e.g. organizing support and self-help groups)
- social work with communities, i.e. community work, which is the focus of this paper.

Academic reflection on community organizing is not limited to the theory of social work. It draws – as does social work itself – on a variety of other academic disciplines: social pedagogy (see Marynowicz-Hetka 2006), sociology (see Pinker 1971), social policy (see Bulmer, Lewis, Piachaud eds. 1989, part 4: *Social Policy and Community*), and even political philosophy (see Reamer 1995).

The approach to community organizing, almost identical across the theory of social work, pedagogy, sociology, and social policy, has for years been a stabilizing and universalizing factor in a multidimensional understanding of social work.[3] Local community organizing (referred to by a variety of terms) has always been an inherent element of social work.

Community organizers, regardless of their formal professional self-identification, are one of the core helping professions,[4] and community organizing is an important component of social welfare, even though it reaches far beyond the institutional boundaries of the welfare system (see Fleras 2008). This extended reach is not in any sense a function of the modernization of the helping profession and of social services. On the contrary, it is a return to the origins of these professions and services. The settlements movement and social work grew out of the desire to overcome the division (chiefly a class division at the time) between 'us' – i.e. those providing help – and 'them', i.e.

[3] This position has been expressed by many pedagogues and social workers who mourn the consequences of professionalization which needlessly destroys this multidimensional structure and generates a great number of limitations both in terms of practice and in terms of reflection. See also: Smolińska-Theiss 2010.

[4] For an analysis of the relationship between social work and other helping professions, see also Olech 2012.

those receiving help. It was a desire to challenge the paternalism of the helping classes: the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.[5] Community organizing means work for the community (as was the charitable work of the 18th and 19th centuries), work with the community, and work in the community. This last element, i.e. work in the community, is the heritage of the above-mentioned settlements movement.

In contemporary Europe, class divisions are no longer as powerful. Yet the division between those receiving help and those who (professionally) offer help persists, and is reinforced by the institutionalization of welfare. This division is reflected in the 'work for the community' approach. While community organizing does involve the element of a professional community organizer working 'for the community' (Twelvetrees 2008), it cannot be limited to this element: working with and in the community are also essential. It means that social workers who represent institutional welfare (which in Poland means all social workers employed in social welfare centres operating at the municipality level) who engage in community organizing both do social work within the welfare system and exceed the system at the same time. The former is reflected, for example, by establishing a separate relevant position or division within the structure of the unit that employs the organizer (see Bąbska at all 2011). It bears repeating that community organizing may not be restricted to institutional welfare. The local community itself is a *de facto* co-creator of the process of community organizing, which is intended to result in community development. In other words, there is no community organizing without community empowerment.[6] It is important to note that community organizing continues to have power and legitimacy even after the key welfare goals for the community are achieved.

In this paper, we attempt to demonstrate what the notions of 'working with the community' and 'working in the community' mean and how they translate into action. These two notions form the theoretical framework of community organizing and are the foundation of the professional identity of community organizers.

Academic descriptions of the prerequisites of a professional community organizer (see Marynowicz-Hetka 2006) argue for specific skills and competences, including the following:

[5] In Poland in the late 1800s and in the early 1900s (or, more precisely speaking, on the Polish territories administered at that time by the states that had partitioned Poland), Adam Chmielowski was a symbol of overcoming class divisions. He intentionally gave up participating in bourgeoisie-led charitable actions and decided to live, under the name of Brother Albert (founder of the order of the Albertian order), with the homeless of the city of Krakow in a homeless shelter. The manner in which the shelter was run provided inspiration for other similar initiatives in the area of (using today's nomenclature) social and occupational reintegration of the homeless. See also: Radwan-Pragłowski, Frysztacki 1998, p. 253.

[6] In social work, the issue of agency is discussed also in the perspective of empowerment; see also: Payne 2005, Chapter 14: *Empowerment and Advocacy.*

- they should have a sound understanding of the processes within the community (in particular, they should have a practical knowledge arising out of the lived experience of the community)
- they should have an ability to assess the potential for change, arising out of the observation of the powers that are at work to animate and educate the community (including individual and social powers as well as overt and covert ones)
- they should have the skills necessary to work with individuals, groups and communities effectively, in a manner that has a positive (ameliorating) effect
- they should have a pro-social attitude and be willing to promote the common good of the community.

The above list reflects the approach taken by pedagogy, and the language it uses originates with Helena Radlińska, who in the 1920s argued for the transformation of the individual and social agents *in potentia* into agents *in actu* (Radlińska 1961). In a more sociological perspective, the necessary skills include the abilities to: diagnose social problems and needs; assess the resources of a local community; undertake a strategic analysis; draft programs and action plans; organize cooperation between groups, institutions and organizations; work together as part of a team of specialists; cooperate with the local authorities (Niesporek, Wódz 2003, p. 135).

This understanding of social work in reference to community work is not always self-evident in specific legal and institutional contexts. Such contexts for example may determine the routines and standard modes of operation of the staff of welfare centres (whether municipal, combined city-level and municipal, or city-level welfare centres).[7] In Poland right now, these routines tend to gravitate towards the first and second method of social work, i.e. case work and group work, where the latter is understood primarily as working with families.[8] The third method, i.e. community work, even though it is important and even though it is legally recognized by the 2004 statute on social welfare (Dz.U. 2004, Nr 64, poz. 593 ze zm) as a method to be applied by social workers, is nevertheless

[7]   For a critical analysis of routine practices in social work, see also Granosik 2006.

[8]   Social work with families had been neglected in the Polish social welfare system. The problem was recognized after the foster care system became a part of the welfare system, and as a consequence, the institution of family assistants was developed. See also Krasiejko 2010.

clearly neglected.[9] We are going to leave aside the theoretical issue noted above (whether community work is a method of social work, its essence, or a separate profession). Instead, we are going to focus on the values that guide the practical steps of community organizing, and on the potential directions in which community organizing could develop in contemporary Poland. However, before we do so, it is necessary to articulate the causes of the above-mentioned neglect of community work.

There are many reasons why community work is marginalized in Poland. When they are debated in the academic writing on the topic, the authors tend to invoke primarily the political and social transformation. The prevalent attitude in Poland is that of 'coping with a problem', a relic of the past system of 'mandatory happiness'. The logic of welfare continues to be heavily influenced by the past system that assumed that assistance is to be provided on an *ad-hoc*, incidental basis, and to specific individuals in need. The communist welfare system was rooted in the assumption that sometimes, some individuals need assistance; there was no reason to organize local communities (see also Księżopolski 1999; Szpunar ed. 2010). It appears that Poland is now in a period of transition, where one logic has not yet been replaced by another, and the institutional solutions in the welfare system are an expression of random efforts rather than of a careful attempt to build and legitimize a new social and institutional order.[10] There are obviously downsides to this situation, but it is not without its upsides too. This liminality means that the old version of social welfare and the 'social worker to the rescue' model are a thing of the past now, but a new reality has not set in yet, which means that it is not yet too late to have a say in how it is going to look. The title of our paper is a reference to this opportunity.

In the search for an answer to the question we ask in the title, we are going to attempt a reconstruction of social work as a form of local community organizing. In theory, such a reconstruction may be universal in nature. In practice, however, it is going to focus on the Polish reality and its specific ramifications. We are going to contextualize the issue, and in doing so contribute – we hope – to the promotion in Poland of the community dimension of social work, as well as its benefits.

[9] The statute stipulates that assistance should be rendered professionally within the framework of social work and provided to individuals, families (where the primary objective of the social intervention is to enable these individuals and families to function independently) and local communities (where the primary objective of the social intervention is to ensure cooperation and institutional coordination for the benefit of individuals and families that are dysfunctional and/or in crisis).

[10] See also the analysis of welfare system transformation with an emphasis on the community ties of local welfare units in: Krzyszkowski 2005.

In Poland (and beyond), why do we need community organizers? Any sensible attempt to answer this question must be preceded by a reflection on the realities in which the need for social work with a community focus arises. We hypothesise (and plan to argue) that social workers who work as community organizers are necessary in Poland in order to:

- support ongoing reconstruction of solidarity which is now disappearing
- build communities of allies where social ties are inherently based on solidarity
- build and strengthen at the local level a type of partnership that reflects the agency of a partnership-based community and of each of its members, so that both the community and its members retain their autonomy and all of their rights.

These hypotheses form a set of interconnected conditions, the satisfaction of which is the basis for meaningful social work consisting in true community organizing.

Solidarity

The crucial observation about Poland is that the transformation appears to have cost us the impetus towards solidarity. By 'transformation' we mean not only the Eastern and Central European political transformation after the years of communism, but also the transformation brought about by globalization, with its attendant neoliberal ideology of attitudes and behaviours intended to maximize the measurable (and preferably tangible) benefits at an individual level. Wiktor Osiatyński notes the paradox: a transformation originated by the Solidarity movement and predicated upon the solidarity-based ideals of that movement soon turned against these ideals. As a result of the economic shock therapy, with its underlying presumptions of monetary economy, "competition displaced solidarity" (Osiatyński 2004, p. 31).

This observation is confirmed by contemporary studies and analyses. Their authors perceive a connection between the loss of the impulse towards solidarity and the process of social production of 'redundant people,' which the Polish sociologist Stefan Czarnowski already described in the first half of the 20th century (Czarnowski 2006, pp. 95–105). Neoliberal thinking means that the principle of competition becomes the driving force not only on the market but also in almost all spheres of social life. In these conditions, the absence of solidarity is brutally exposed in the growing numbers of the 'redundant people'. Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman 2004) writes about 'wasted lives', with a heavy emphasis on the indifference towards the fate of others and the absence of rudimentary solidarity with them, which results in a permanent displacement of entire masses of people to the margins of the society. This is not a paradox; the proportions are being reversed, with the huge margin becoming a hallmark of the times.

Piotr Sałustowicz describes the process of solidification of the category of 'redundant people' in the Polish reality of the 1990s. He notes that this category is strongly co-created by the victims of the economic restructuring (Sałustowicz 2006, pp. 169–176), often referred to the as 'the losers of the reforms'. Research on homeless persons confirmed these conclusions too (Mendel 2007a). Piotr Sałustowicz (Sałustowicz 2006) asks whether it is possible today to stand in solidarity with somebody who is 'redundant', and presents the mechanisms that are used to de-solidarize with the 'redundant people' . Firstly, he notes (invoking Zygmunt Bauman), the problems of the 'redundant people' are usually contemplated in purely financial terms, and in connection with tax burdens, which precludes a discourse of solidarity. Secondly, the abundant rhetoric of alleged danger to public order that the 'redundant people' generate makes it difficult to feel solidarity with the public enemy, and conversely makes it easy to isolate those placed in this category (as demonstrated, for instance, by the Zero Tolerance program). Thirdly, the 'redundant people' are placed beyond the standards of civilization, and solidarity with them is rendered impossible by designating them as today's 'savages'. Yet another approach that undermines solidarity (described by Bauman 2006, p. 69) is placing

the 'redundant people' in a catch-22 situation: if they are actively fighting for equality, they are accused of being arrogant; if they are passive, they are said to be no better than what they were always thought to be, cancer on the society's healthy tissue.

Let us consider for a moment the dimensions in which we perceive the poor today. Piotr Sałustowicz lists three categories, which correspond to three broader notions of a citizen, a supplicant, and a consumer.[11] He notes that a solution to most social problems is connected to a shift from the role of a supplicant to the role of a consumer of social services (Sałustowicz 2003). In relation to these categories and the social mechanisms they trigger, social work conducted by means of community work eliminates the consequences of the social permission to treat people as redundant, and helps counteract it. It consists primarily in working together, where entire deprived communities and all their members become involved (and it is these deprived communities that are the primary, if not the sole, target of community work). It is education and animation combined as the two inherently interconnected dimensions of community work, two sides of the same coin: empowerment of persons and communities that are socially and economically marginalized (see also Theiss, Skrzypczak eds. 2006).

One of the lecturers at the University of Gdańsk, who worked as an animator, told the students a story that illustrates this point[12] She spoke about the construction of a children's playground, which was a result of walking the backyards of Gdańsk, about adapting – by the united forces of the whole neighbourhood – a neglected room for a neighbourhood cafe-club, and about a joint effort to re-paint stairwells in a number of buildings in one of Gdynia's poorest areas. It all started with a joint decision to organize a training session where experienced interior painters taught the group the tricks of the trade. The lecturer ended her speech by saying: "Yes, it did take a lot of time, but the most important thing is that they did it all by themselves; we just taught them how it is possible".

This dimension of community organizing is explicitly educational. It animates the community and promotes the integration of people who live in the same neighbourhood. It empowers both individuals and communities, and improves the

[11] It must be noted that Piotr Sałustowicz refers to these three categories as 'models'. Nonetheless they may be considered various dimensions of defining the social roles of the poor.

[12] The classes were taught by Maria Mendel, a co-author of this paper, at the Department of Social Science of the University of Gdańsk.

living conditions locally in the area that is closest to the everyday lives of the members of the community.

Social work based on community work may, under these conditions, turn into self-help and self-organization, a function of empowered individuals and groups that are able to fight back against marginalization and avoid the fate of 'redundancy'. With community work, social support may turn into what Stanisław Kawula terms 'the spiral of kindness', with a person at its centre. The person may lose their independence on occasion, but they gain it back, metaphorically lifted up by the power of ties between others who work together in the spirit of kindness (Kawula 2002).

A community of allies

The dimensions of education and animation of community work are particularly well reflected in the position of an ally.[13] We are proponents of the notion of allies. An ally works in alliance with others. When a social worker (in their role of community organizer) approaches the work from the position of an ally, it creates a sound foundation for effective work. A social worker who is an ally and who maintains an alliance with the community in which, and through which, they attain their objectives must clearly and expressly support the community and be on its side. They must be a steady presence; not doing anything instead of the members of the community, but always available to support them.

Christine Sleeter's concept of an ally in intercultural communication is very inspiring in this context. Christine Sleeter (Sleeter 1996) explains that the position of such an ally can be explained by a comparison to a social movement, which is defined by its bottom-up character and contestation of certain elements of the *status quo*.[14] An ally is to work towards a situation where the desire for change is not imposed from the top, and the challenge to the *status quo* results in constructive action and cooperation.

Community organizing in social work, when conducted by a person who fits this definition of an ally, consists first of all in identifying the obstacles to overcoming the marginalization, the

[13] In this paper, the concept developed by Maria Mendel (the roles of allies, work in alliances, the society of allies) is directly tied to the work of social workers. Its earlier incarnations were addressed to animators, teachers, students and their parents, and social leaders – see: Mendel 2010; Mendel 2001; Mendel 2007b.

[14] For an analysis of this approach in the perspective of partnership between the family, the school, and the local community, see also Mendel 2001.

crisis, and the absence of autonomy. This is not achieved by merely listing the reasons; their structural origins must be acknowledged. The ally's work thus becomes political (or *quasi*-political) in nature, and its objective becomes to override these structures (see also Smith 2008). The ally uses a number of instruments. A social worker who is a community organizer may use their words, both written in their reports and spoken in their various meetings. The words of a social worker may translate into power, into institutional solutions, legal decisions, and public action. They may organize social life both at the local level and at higher levels (which is important, since the structures that prevent the marginalized groups from joining the *demos*, i.e. people whose vote counts, often extend far beyond a single community).

The ally's work – to overthrow the structures which generate the obstacles that keep marginalized people on the social margin – is political in nature, but occurs in the area of the aesthetic. It 'shakes' the structures; by showing the w r o n g people, focusing on the w r o n g issues, and being in the w r o n g spaces, it ruins the aesthetic order and creates a dissonance. Literally and metaphorically, it m a k e s   a   s h o w that has an impact on the aesthetic impressions of the audience. Techniques of socially-engaged art may be used, such as a happening, a performance or a visual art action in an urban space. Other options include giving public speeches, engaging in socially-oriented journalism, blogging, book-writing, playing an instrument and singing, dancing, and doing circus arts – all the while engaging both the ally and others into the artistic or para-artistic forms of expression. These are just a few of the many methods of re-instating the lost impulse towards solidarity in community members. By making others visible, by showing their needs, situations, and the ramifications of their position, an ally is able to raise the curtain and expose the conspiracy of silence. Using aesthetics, the ally may shake even the most cemented structure of social inequality.

Jacques Rancière writes about challenging the social contract in his book under the suggestive title *Disagreement* (Rancière 1998). These practices disrupt the order that is maintained by the apparatus of power (the institutions of politics that are *de facto* the

police, a force of social control) and the routine of social perception that translate, in aesthetic terms, into harmony. For Jacques Rancière, these practices are what he calls p o l i t i c a l . Politics as realized by a community organizer (an ally) may actively create a social order in opposition to politics understood as a *quasi*-police system of c o n t r o l .[15] This is the politics to which Socrates encouraged his disciples – politics understood as action defined by the category of truth – and which drove him to oppose everything that in Athens was done in the name of politics (see also Rancière 1998, pp. viii–ix). According to Jacques Rancière, the politics of opposition in a democracy, i.e. in a system characterized by endless articulation of claims, takes the form of d e m o n s t r a t i o n , v i s i b l e existence, expression of people who can be seen, and those whose vote counts (in terms of the *demos* in Athens).

This is not the rhetoric (popular today) of social inclusion which is, in fact, based on inclusion by stigmatization and which only reinforces social divisions, creating just a facade of democracy and empowerment. This rhetoric is abundant in social welfare programs, where under the label of social inclusion procedures of stigmatization are practised instead. The social entrepreneurship projects implemented in Poland under the aegis of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme are a good example. The entities in charge of the projects, mainly NGOs, attempted to create jobs for persons marginalized on the labour market, and to make the jobs profitable, at least to some extent. Unfortunately, regardless of the intended permanence of the jobs offered and regardless of the financial results of the social enterprises that were formed, the public administration forced (by means of its reporting requirements) the description of the recipients of support as excluded persons, even when in reality their status actually changed: they went from being unemployed or overall economically inactive to being employees. Marek Rymsza, one of the authors of this paper, witnessed on a number of occasions the astonishment of public administration clerks who could not understand why the participants of these programs avoided attending any events designed to promote various good practices – and yet, those events

[15] This approach fits within the theory of social work which reconstructs the ideology, the models and the functions of social work which place an emphasis on the need to challenge the *status quo* (the model of radical social work, contestation). See also: E. Marynowicz-Hetka 2006, p. 389 *et seq.*; Winkler 2009; Winkler 2010, pp. 14, 23.

centred around constant official talk about the former exclusion of these persons and about its alleged permanence.[16]

The danger here is not only the formalized, soulless bureaucracy, which – despite its 'investing in human capital' rhetoric – involves no human factor at all. Similarly counterproductive is the thoughtlessness that pervades many programs of interaction; it produces what Raymond Boudon (Boudon 1993) refers to as the perverse effect (*effets pervers*). Let us again recount an experience witnessed by one of the authors of this paper, Maria Mendel. She was visiting a classroom where student trainees were teaching. The children were scattered around the room, but a few of them clearly gravitated together. The teacher was asked what these children had in common. Her response was: "The backpacks." The welfare centre bought children's backpacks in bulk, and 'labelled' its clients with them. Sadly, the same logic often guides the programs of 'inclusion' where intended beneficiaries (those to be 'included') are a group that is described in detail and that meets specific criteria. As such it is hermetically locked in a specific category, the confines of which its members cannot leave, not even after their 'inclusion' (whether or not it is in any degree successful). It is sometimes difficult to tell whether the practice of effective exclusion by inclusion is a result of formal procedures, or just of thoughtlessness. For example, in one of the EU-funded actions to combat malnutrition, schools distributed milk in packages bearing information that the product was not store-bough and that it was only available as a free handout to the poor. Fortunately, someone has now noted the absurdity of the procedure and changed it.

The essence of such practices, in which people are, in Jacques Rancièr's terms (Rancière 2006, p. 119)[17] 'included as excluded' at any institutional level, is that the inclusion occurs by means of stigmatization. Therefore, the 'included' in fact remain 'excluded', because the process of 'inclusion' made them into a precisely labelled and located element of a life full of divisions. A community organizer must therefore remain very critical towards the reality in which they may, unwittingly, contribute to the reinforcements of such divisions. Michael Winkler notes that this is a risk that is now present in social work in general, because its focus tends to be economic stabilization, where people are oriented towards jobs

[16] Due to the extensive reporting procedures associated with spending EU funds, the participants of effective pro-employment actions that took place in the period 2004–2007 were officially labelled as 'excluded' until 2012, when the European Commission finally accepted the reports. It is difficult to imagine a more spectacular disparity between the official ideology of empowerment and the real practice of stigmatization. For a more detailed analysis of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme in Poland, taking into account also its unquestionable successes, see also Rymsza 2009.

[17] For more information see also: J. Rancière 2003, p. 30.

that are not available to them. Social work "with bitter honesty offers to people a social services inclusion. It is an inclusion into institutions where there is no cooperation and participation, but only subordination – not to an authoritarian power, but to monitoring procedures executed by experts, among whom the social workers themselves also rank" (Winkler 2010, p. 23).

A community organizer who is an ally works in a shared common space, and encourages, activates and stimulates the members of the community. Yet at the same time, they educate, constantly teaching the community members how to be effective in political action, and how to wisely design such action with a long-term perspective in mind. They speak with the voice of the community until the community is able to do so on its own. This attitude predisposes both the organizer and the community to constantly deconstruct and reconstruct the meaning of 'solidarity'. The process reduces the indifference and makes it possible to reduce the production of the 'redundant people', which is (sadly) characteristic of the Polish society post-transformation where the social gaps are growing drastically.

By being an ally, the social worker is in a positive sense 'contagious': they teach by example and thus unlock the potential of individuals and groups.[18] An alliance becomes a platform of social capital generated through the solidarity. This platform holds a new and growing network of interrelations and of shared values and norms. Trust and reciprocity bind the social agents together. In a cohesive community, there is less room for practices of exclusion, both intentional and unintentional. Instead, there is room for effective self-help and agency. Both of these increase as people have increasing real impact on the place where they live, and as they are increasingly empowered. This in turn helps to shape their identity, both as individuals and as groups.

Partnership

We argue here for social solidarity and for the role of allies. In this context, partnership appears to be the model relationship for communities where social work is carried out for the purpose

[18] For an analysis of the adaptation resources of persons from marginalized backgrounds, see also: Kalinowski, Niewiadomska eds. 2010.

of organizing. Why? Studies on the partnership as a model of relations (see Mendel 2000; Mendel 2001; Mendel ed. 2003; Mendel ed. 2005) demonstrate that local partnerships resemble business partnerships. When they are founded, no entry is made in any official registers, and they are only rarely active on the market. Nonetheless, they are always a relationship between people who work t o g e t h e r to achieve a shared objective. We list here the qualities and principles of this relationship, hoping to trigger a cascade of associations leading to a holistic understanding of the role of a community worker (defined in Poland as a social worker who organizes a community with the intention of achieving the objectives of social welfare):

- Everybody contributes to a partnership. The contributions and their relative values may differ; the partners negotiate and decide what constitutes an acceptable contribution.

- Everybody benefits. A partnership is based on give and take, the scope and form of which are also negotiated.

- The partners share a common goal and perceive their working together as a value.

- Each partner that enters this relationship of reciprocity (exchange) retains their full autonomy and full scope of rights.

- Each partner therefore must remain open to compromise. In retaining their autonomy they understand that the same must be offered to all the other partners.

On this basis, we could imagine social work governed by these principles of cooperation with the local community (community work). When the experienced animators speak as guest lecturers at the above-mentioned courses at the University of Gdańsk, or when they speak at conferences etc., they usually mention the need to introduce clear principles, such as those similar to a business partnership. These principles do not necessarily have to be explicitly articulated; they may continue as implicit and informal elements of the organizational culture shaped by the practice of cooperation. The animators also discuss

the preparatory stages and the methods of division of work, typically presented during meetings of variously structured neighbourhood groups. Somebody brings buckets, somebody is willing to mix paint; in the final calculation of contributions and benefits, everything counts. The person who just mixes the paint is no worse that somebody who wields a paintbrush all day long. All the actions add up to a larger picture that is not based on the principle of identical contributions.

It is similar to the logic of a common space shared in a manner that is just, but not equal (as noted by Rancière 2007, p. 69). The analogy is that of sharing a studio flat, where justice is not understood as absolute equality. In any given moment, only one person may use the bathroom, work at the computer, or read a book in the armchair. The two flatmates are not able to do the same thing at the same time, yet they do manage to live together. How? They take turns using the furniture, they wait a moment for the bathroom to be free. Where the articulation of needs and satisfaction of needs are intertwined, the flatmates change locations, jointly managing the space which, by working together and by maintaining this relationship, they make their own.

The essence is in the movement, in the constant negotiations inside a space that we feel is o u r s . These are the conditions of partnership, harmony, and the social order which we establish when we s h a r e the world (the way the flatmates share the flat) which each of us understands as o u r s . For a number of reasons, this is the ideal order – but it can be realized in practice, at least to a certain extent. It is only when people will be able to share this (by definition, common) reality – when they will share it in a manner that they will perceive and accept as reasonable; when they will see that it respects their dignity; when no one is left or lost – that we will be able to talk about a true democracy among us.

Partnership is the relationship for which a community worker strives. It produces a community of equals where there are different needs that are articulated differently, but where the actors are all empowered and where their voices are all equal. Thus understood, partnership is a community version of the empowerment approach in social work.

Conclusions: towards education

In the final part of the paper, we would like to emphasise the educational aspects of the arguments in favour of promoting community work in Poland as a method of social work. Community organizing fits well within the type of social work that originated from the work of Helena Radlińska, the founder of Polish social pedagogy. Helena Radlińska introduced the notion of 'life environments' (*środowiska życia*). She defined social pedagogy as centred around the interrelations between individuals and – always – their 'life environments'. By focusing on the dynamic nature of these relations, she saw the opportunities to "transform the environments with human hands in pursuit of the ideal" (Radlińska 1961, p. 361).

   Community work understood in terms of social work comes close to community education and social education, which is only able to flourish if the institutions of local government work well. "In a local community with strong institutions of local government, various forms of education coexist: formal and informal, institutional and non-institutional. They supplement each other and support each other, and the borders between them get increasingly blurry" (Winiarski 2000, p. 157). Mikołaj Winiarski refers to this situation of various mutually permeating forms of education as community education (*edukacja środowiskowa*). It is a reference to the tradition of such education that may take place both inside a school and outside of it, and is very integration-focused in nature.

   The concept of community education is also associated with the following notions: the community method (*metoda środowiskowa*), as created by Helena Radlińska and developed today mostly by Tadeusz Pilch (Pilch 1974), community child-rearing (*wychowanie środowiskowe*), backyard pedagogy (*pedagogika podwórkowa*), integrated education (*wychowanie zintegrowane*), and community systems (*system środowiskowy*). All of these notions are present in the work of other students and followers of Helena Radlińska, including Ryszard Wroczyński, Aleksander Kamiński, Irena Lepalczyk, Helena Izdebska, Edmund Trempała, and Wiesław Theiss. Stanisław Kawula, who developed the concept of the 'spiral of kindness' (popular among the proponents of community work),

writes about education in the local community in connection with social support networks, social work, and socialization and child-rearing in a family (Kawula ed. 2001).

Wiesław Theiss added to the concept of community education twofold. Firstly, he connected its significance to the concept of 'little homelands' (*małe ojczyzny*), a notion he introduced into Polish social pedagogy, thus developing the work of Stanisław Ossowski. Secondly, he emphasized its informal nature. Wiesław Theiss wrote: "In most general terms, 'community education' (*edukacja środowiskowa*) refers to informal education of children, youth and adults, which is connected to the satisfaction of needs, desires and ideals of a given group or local community. These needs may be related to individuals, groups, or communities, and may be economic, cultural, political, or educational in nature. In this sense, community education means, first of all, education that is agency-focused and pragmatically founded on the resources and capabilities of that community, on its powers and its abilities to change the *status quo* with the support of a broader social context, including the local government and the state. Secondly, the essential measure and form of this education is agreement and cooperation, not coaching or lecturing. Thirdly, the spectrum of this education runs from the individual and private to the shared and public. On the other hand, it is also the area between the natural (environmental), cultural, and social (related to the local government and the civic society) dimensions of the community. It may therefore relate to ecology, culture, and tradition; it may run the gamut from socialization and education in families and in schools, to social engagement, civic participation, and involvement in local government" (Theiss 2003, pp. 24–25).

In this approach, Wiesław Theiss combines thinking about community education with the concept of 'little homelands', which – he argues – are small, familiar and safe structures, and which make people feel at home. Yet they are also a challenge because they generate certain goals to achieve, e.g. they require someone to serve as a caretaker. For Wiesław Theiss, a 'little homeland' (*mała ojczyzna*) is "at the same time the goal, the area, and the instrument of broadly understood social education in the local community" (Theiss 2003, p. 20), i.e. community education.

Another observation made by Wiesław Theiss is particularly interesting in the context of this paper. He notes that 'little homelands' and community education may also have their own risks: "Yet this little homeland, whether in the sense that I propose here or in other senses, is not and may not be perceived as a social organism that is culturally and educationally self-sufficient. It appears that its development potential decreases in proportion to the scale of social problems, including primarily poverty. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the state and the local government to support and reinforce the development that occurs in the community, and to provide this support mainly to families and to schools" (Theiss 2003, p. 25). Wiesław Theiss thus correctly points to the systemic interconnectedness and inherent intertwining of social work, community education, and the authorities at the local level and above.

This approach reflects the notion of partnership in organizing social welfare. Much lip service is paid to it, but it is very rarely implemented in practice. The statute on social welfare of 2004 stipulates that social welfare is "an i n s t i t u t i o n [emphasis by the authors] of the state's social policy, the objective of which is to enable the persons and families to overcome difficult life situations which they are unable to overcome using their own positions, resources and capabilities. Social welfare is organized by the public and local administration authorities, which in this respect cooperate under the principles' p a r t n e r s h i p [emphasis by the authors] with social and non-governmental organizations, the Catholic Church, other churches and denominational organizations, and natural and legal persons."[19]

Community work (as an incarnation of social work) is also represented in and reinforced by the theory of adult education and various approaches to the notion of l i f e - l o n g   l e a r n i n g. Particularly important in this context is the concept of education in small groups integrated into the local space, discussed by Ewa Kurantowicz. She writes about 'small communities that learn', and about 'biographies of places', which offers a further dimension to community work (Kurantowicz 2007). The observations of Ewa Kurantowicz are an example – of which, fortunately, there are increasing numbers in Poland – of a trend in thinking about the cohesion of local educational efforts and their outcomes, which

[19] Article 1 of the statute of 12 March 2004 on social welfare. In this respect (as in many others), the 2004 statute repeats the wording of the previous 1990 statute on social welfare that it replaced. It is worth noting that the legislator, with the support of the government (that proposed the bill) disagreed to the wording proposed by NGOs postulating full partnership, i.e. a wording to the effect that social welfare is not an institution of the state's social policy but rather an area of shared responsibility of the state and the civic society.

translates relatively easily into increased social self-awareness and increased sense of responsibility for all of the members of the community, whether at a given moment they are or are not independent. This is the basis for a collective identity of a local community predicated upon the notion of agency (see also Mendel, Zbierzchowska eds. 2010).

This is, most briefly put, the essence of social work where the community is the collective recipient, but also a collective agent and a co-creator of the social change that is the intended outcome of the work. This is when social work conducted as community work makes sense and becomes socially productive – when it activates and integrates the member of the community, and when it does so by means of solidarity, partnership, and alliance, thus rendering the community members capable of positively transforming the community in which they live, and of which they are a part.

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Magdalena Dudkiewicz

Community work for social change: a summary of qualitative research[1]

In most general terms, the objective of a community organizer's work is to engender social change, or at least to create the preconditions for future change. It is therefore inevitable that the organizer's work takes place in a concrete social environment, which at the same time is the resource at the organizer's disposal. Unfortunately, this same social environment is a potential source of problems and obstacles. The metaphor of sowing seeds is a good illustration. In this metaphor, the community organizer is a gardener who begins their work by sowing – this is the start of the project. The seeds are sown into the soil, which represents the local community (more accurately, in the initial stages, often just a small neighbourhood or a group). In the process, the organizer uses a variety of gardening tools, i.e. instruments and methods of project implementation. All of this happens in a given climate, i.e. in a specific social and institutional environment.[2]

Let us consider the 'climate' first. The success of the organizer depends largely on the attitudes of the actors involved, and on identifying and challenging prejudice and stereotypes. Naturally, the organizer must recognize these attitudes both in their own thinking and in the people they intend to work with. However, the most complex challenge consists in a thorough diagnosis of the broadly understood social environment in which these processes occur.

The diagnosis is a crucial prerequisite. Yet the organizer's next task, which is just as important, is to develop a relationship with this environment that is firmly rooted in the principle of partnership. If the organizer fails to do so, their work in the future will be difficult. Real partnership is more difficult to achieve than it might seem, but two elements tend to universally promote it. The first is for the

parties to get to know and to understand each other, taking into account their deficits and limitations, but also their potential and their positive attributes. The second is to initiate exchanges. An exchange is defined through the benefits that may be attained by both parties. These benefits often also contribute to the common good, understood here as the development of the entire community.

The organizer 'on their own': grappling with one's own habits and prejudice

The first, closest circle in which the organizer's actions take place is the organizer's own place of work, i.e. the social welfare centre. This is where the organizer encounters various obstacles. Some of them are internal, while others are associated with the organizer's colleagues, managers, or possibly even the broader organizational culture. The obstacles are often connected with the poor spirits of the social workers who feel that their public image is very negative, and that they are perceived as those who help freeloaders, wasting public money in the process. Very few social workers believe that people appreciate the work they do to assist those in need and to solve social problems. Social workers are frustrated with constantly 'getting a bad rap', with being constantly portrayed in a negative light, with the silence that surrounds the topic of the assistance they provide, and with the consequences of the above, i.e. the fact that the public knows very little about the complexities of their work. Interestingly, while they see the 'sins' of the media, social workers also blame the *status quo* on the absence of professional efforts to remedy the situation on the part of social workers and of the institutions of the social welfare system.[3]

[3]   For more information about the public image of social workers and of the social welfare system, see: Dudkiewicz 2012.

This mindset is, of course, unhelpful in engaging with local communities. It is therefore hardly surprising that social workers (as research has demonstrated) tend to think of their local environment narrowly; in terms of the institution that employs them, their own professional surroundings, and their clients. Yet the latter are perceived as separate individuals or as families at most, and not as members of a wider group or community. This

approach is very far from the theoretical framework of community work. That framework relies on concepts such as local development, community-based problem solving, activation and integration of those in need of support, building relationships and networks, and even social planning. For a community organizer, serious stumbling blocks emerge where the wider social context is disregarded (whether intentionally or not), and where social workers remain blind to the significance of community work (even such work that is limited in scope to closer and more distant family, selected public institutions, or a single neighbourhood). Even if the community organizer is ready to expand their thinking and consequently their actions, the absence of similarly-minded colleagues will always hinder effective work in the local community.

Another obstacle to community work is perception of the 'target audience', i.e. of the clients of social services among the social workers. Research demonstrates that social workers see themselves as 'better' than those with whom and for whom they work. They build their identity in opposition to their clients, founded on the belief that they have better education and better cultural resources, and thus rank higher in the social structure. Yet effective community work requires shedding this attitude. This imbalance – which often is smaller and less significant than it may appear at first sight – hinders or even renders impossible the establishment of a partnership. The system of social welfare discourages thinking in terms of partnership by its very nature, dominated as it is by relationships with clients that are built around the axis of assistance and realized as a relationship either between a caregiver and their charge, or between a professional (service provider) and a client (service recipient). These two approaches are contrary in theory (which is reflected in the important – at least in theoretical terms – paradigm shift from 'care' to 'assistance'), but intertwined in practice. Nonetheless, if partnership is the goal, they are both counterproductive. The former is more emotional while the latter is more formal, but they are both predicated upon the notion of a stronger party (who has better resources and has decision-making power) acting for the benefit of the weaker party (who is experiencing a deficit and who is in a position of subordination).

The organizer 'on their turf': the immediate professional surroundings

The experience of community organizers who worked on organizing projects in Poland demonstrates how difficult it may be for the organizers to shake off these 'restraints' of their own profession and of the welfare centre. Dobroniega Trawkowska and Karolina Wojtasik wrote about "the conditions in which the process of creating a role occurs". They argue that this process is "one of the key factors in bringing about social change". They note that the organizer, who is not a 'lone ranger' but rather a person with an institutional mindset, is subject to many limitations in the self-creation of a role (Trawkowska, Wojtasik 2013, p. 75). The consequence – argue the authors – is that the person is torn between the newly-adopted role of a community organizer and the continuing role of a field worker, with all the administration and reporting duties that it entails. The problem is compounded by the fact that most social welfare centres treat community organizing as optional, as an experiment, as opposed to the mandatory work stipulated by the statute on social welfare. This, of course, hinders community organizing taking root in the institutional structures. Marek Rymsza notes that "in order to fully engage in community work, the social worker must 'leave' the institution and 'enter' the community. Not all social workers succeed; not all of them are in the position to do so. 'Leaving' the institution is undoubtedly easier where the social worker is a member of a recognized helping profession, and the worker's professional status and the options at their disposal are not simply a function of the bargaining power of the institution by which they are employed. If, however, the worker is dependent on the institutions' clout to a significant degree, as it tends to be the case in Poland, it is a strong barrier to the implementation of the community work model" (Rymsza 2013, p. 16).

Community organizing as such, and the worker who engages in it, may thus be perceived in the welfare centre as an intrusion. The social worker and their work no longer fit with the organizational structure, and present a challenge to their colleagues' mentality, because they contest the *status quo*. This is one of the greatest challenges

associated with the implementation of community organizing into the social welfare system in Poland. It is about understanding and truly accepting the essence of community work, not just pretending to do so out of political correctness or for whatever other reasons. To begin with, it requires the organizer and their professional environment to change their attitude to community work. While at the level of declarations social workers find it useful and necessary, and see it as a potential source of professional success, in practice it is usually misplaced: it is believed to occur solely among the clients of the welfare system and the social services staff. This view disregards all non-public institutions, all self-help initiatives, and also the broader context of democracy and of the civic society, or simply of the 'common cause'.

Furthermore, community work in general and community organizing in particular is difficult to initiate and implement, and social workers are well aware of that. Many of these 'operational' difficulties arise because community organizing requires a change in how a social worker is evaluated. The community organizer's work is no longer measurable by the number of files, interviews or contracts. Moreover, results – any results, not just the significant ones – can only be expected after a long time. The community organizer's work inherently requires constant investments (of time, attention, ideas, and sometimes also financial resources) into the community where they work. These investments are often made 'blind', in the sense that it is very difficult to predict what will be at all successful and if so, when and how this success will manifest. Trawkowska and Wojtasik note that social workers who become involved in community organizing spend a lot of time on purely organizational issues, and change in this respect proves exceptionally difficult. As a result, community organizers "'switch gears' carefully", and "they make up with personal involvement and after-hours work for the shortcomings and downsides of the existing organizational solutions" (Trawkowska, Wojtasik 2013, p. 46). Trawkowska and Wojtasik point out a potential side effect of this situation: a perception of community organizers within their institutions as "hyperactive, overworked, running from one responsibility to another" (Trawkowska, Wojtasik 2013, p. 79). This image would hardly serve to promote community work in the

social welfare system: potential proponents of the method are then likely to have more fear than enthusiasm and hope of interesting and useful work. In this way, organizational shortcomings in the welfare centres may become an impassable barrier to the development of the method, making it appear unattractive and conducive to rapid professional burnout.

Unfortunately, this is not the only image-related risk for a community organizer in the social welfare centre that employs them. The community organizer may also be suspected of trying to 'weasel out' of hard work if the organizational change means that the worker is no longer in charge of certain fieldwork related tasks (such as conducting interviews) or bureaucratic tasks (processing of payments of benefits). If no good explanation is provided to other social workers of the character of the community organizer's work, others may also have problems grasping the potential benefits this work can generate for them. Success in community organizing is notoriously difficult to measure, because it is not oriented towards a specific result but rather towards a process (e.g. engagement, discovery, awakening). This ostensibly simple process-orientation requires a willingness to wait for effects for a very long time, and acceptance of the fact that the effects may come across in unexpected places and contexts. Even worse, a failure to ensure that field workers support the community organizer's ideas in 'their' community may trigger a situation when these field workers justifiably feel that the community organizer is invading their territory, undermining their authority as rightful caretakers in the eyes of their clients and damaging the cooperation between them.

These risks mean that social workers who wish to effectively organize a local community must first establish a partnership with their colleagues in the same institution. Finding a *modus operandi* where the community organizer and the field workers are all able to do their own work, but at the same coordinate as far as possible, may be the key prerequisite for success. It is a challenge in that it requires a departure from thinking in the categories of 'my clients' and 'my area'. Community organizing, by its very nature, transcends these boundaries because its purpose is to join, not to divide (or to reinforce the divisions), the community. Community organizing

means not only that the boundaries of specific areas are crossed, but so is the much more crucial boundary between the clients and non-clients of social welfare. It is a great challenge to field workers too.

What these observations suggest is that for community work to be implemented by a social welfare centre, the institution (i.e. the social welfare centre) must offer real support in this respect. The support must come from the community organizer's colleagues and from management. Without it, the community organizer will have no outside credibility, and their work will be ineffective and easy to undermine. The same effect is to be expected if the support is just lip service. Granted, such superficial support is better than no support, but it may easily lead to failure if it causes decision-making problems or if the community is let down. Two factors are required for success. Firstly, organizational change within the institution is necessary. It is always a challenge, whether it means – in a small centre – creating a new responsibility and formally assigning it to a worker, or – in a large centre – establishing an entire community work division. Secondly (but no less importantly), the management must firmly but gently engage in a public relations effort to promote the change; this type of work is sometimes referred to as 'internal relations'.[4] The work of the community organizer must be effectively presented using the language of benefits. It is necessary to demonstrate to the staff that the community organizer's work may appear vague and surprising, and it may seem an intrusion into their areas, but that it is neither a bid for the good graces of the residents nor a competition for the assistance offered by the line worker. On the contrary, if they are planned together and coordinated, they may be a big help in the more routine welfare work.

For the community method to take hold in a social welfare centre, the position of the management is crucial. It is not enough if the management give it the green light just so they will not be pestered with requests, or because community work comes becomes popular, or because it is the politically correct thing to do. A basic tenet of good public relations is that it is difficult to sell something you do not believe in. Absence of a true commitment on the part of the management may have damaging consequences for the perception of community work among the staff, and severely hinder its adoption.

[4]   For more information about 'internal relations' with regard to community work, see also: Dudkiewicz 2014.

Lip service in place of genuine support undercuts community work in the eyes of the general public too, and thus delays and complicates the process of convincing the local community and local authorities of the benefits associated with it. Trawkowska and Wojtasik note: "the commitment of the community organizer was so great that the project started to be identified with her rather than with her institution, thus becoming – in our opinion – her 'personal project'. We believe that the following factors contributed to this perception: the community organizer was overworked and overstretched; the management showed interest in the project only occasionally; the project was not included in the PR efforts of the social welfare centre" (Trawowska, Wojtasik 2013, p. 73).

The organizer in the field: local community organizing

When the community organizer gets settled in their new professional role, and the community method gains recognition in the welfare centre, the battle is still only half won. The next potential obstacle is the location of the welfare centre in the legally-mandated structure of the social welfare system. The responsibilities imposed on the welfare centre hinder (and sometimes severely limit) the applicability of the community methods in social welfare centres. Marcjanna Nóżka and Konrad Stępnik explain that the problem is in the "statutorily mandated responsibilities of the social welfare centres, whose role is to assist individuals, families and communities who face the greatest hardship. Therefore, the centres' role – as stipulated in the statute – is not to encourage civic activism of all citizens, but solely of those specific groups of clients" (Nóżka, Stępnik 2013, p. 92). At the cost of oversimplifying the matter, one might say that the Polish welfare system is inherently founded on the division into those who need welfare assistance and those who do not, while community organizing is founded on erasing such divisions and on promoting social integration – understood as constant exchanges between community members – with full acceptance that their

potentials are very different. Nóżka and Stępnik further note: "this undermines what the welfare centres are able to do, because their responsibility is to assist those at risk of social exclusion or those already suffering from exclusion, and if the target audience is narrowed down in this manner, the community method may only be applied in a limited degree" (Nóżka, Stępnik 2013, p. 92).

The fact that the institutional environment is unprepared for the community method makes it an even bigger challenge for a community organizer to argue in its favour. The support of the welfare centre that employs the community organizer is invaluable. This is directly related to the previously discussed issue of the negative image of social workers, and the uneasy awareness of it on the part of the social workers. Community work, when it is done well and when it enjoys institutional support, offers an opportunity to eliminate these stereotypes and to "promote the value of social work in general and community work in particular, but also to change the image of the welfare centre from that of an institution which provides assistance (mainly financial) to the poor, to that of an institution that engages in community activism which benefits a much broader category of community members" (Rymsza 2013, p. 20). Community work has the potential to demonstrate that social welfare is not just the institution of the last resort in the kind of dire circumstances most people prefer not to think about. It is able to convey to the public the message that the social welfare system is also about education and culture, and that it is willing and able to engage in social integration by means of dialogue, by recognizing and using a range of social resources, and by bringing about a variety of exchanges between the members of the community.

This process must be considered beneficial (both in terms of public relations and otherwise) not just for the community organizer but also for the welfare centre, and even for the social welfare system at large. Yet in this line of thinking, the causes and effects are mixed. On the one hand, if the professional environment supports the community organizer, it gives the organizer a better grounding. On the other hand, it is the hard work of the community organizer – searching for allies, making them see the benefits that the community method may bring to many actors in the community

– that helps build the position of the social welfare centre. It is a somewhat oversimplified view, but the local environment may be divided into three spheres, each of them necessary for the success of community organizing. This division is arbitrary, in that the spheres overlap and intertwine constantly.

The organizer in the community in which they intend to work

The attitude of people who have for years received traditional assistance from the welfare system is often that of entitlement. Shifting these people's expectations towards activation, cooperation and partnership is a long and arduous process. It is also an endless balancing act between being gentle and being firm. The social worker must examine their own mental and cultural baggage, their habits of thought, their years of life experience, and the notions that have wedged themselves into the subconscious so deeply that they cause knee-jerk reactions. Another issue is coaching people towards a healthy attitude to inter-group relationships: while they are immensely helpful in everyday life, they may also be an obstacle to building proper relations with the outside world. Thus one of the big challenges that a community organizer faces is bringing the target community and its members into contact with other environments, places and realities. It is necessary to build relations that reach beyond the closest environment (which may have been a destructive influence for years, if not generations), in order to find in these relations a stimulus towards development both at the individual level and at the level of the community. Yet another challenge is coaching towards an accurate perception of one's strengths: it boosts self-esteem and self-confidence, and helps develop a willingness to face life's challenges and embrace change. In the most practical terms, it also helps identify the potentially available occupational paths.

Bringing about these changes requires working together with the line worker in the area, and having a good working relationship with those who provide direct assistance to the welfare clients in the community. Also necessary is a consensus within the

community itself. Mariola Racław and Magdalena Rosochacka-Gmitrzak describe the destructive consequences of a conflict in the community organizer's immediate environment: "some of these issues in the municipality have been going on for 30 years, encompassing the new generations"; at present, the conflict is centred around the gender aspect, as a result of "the activity of women which violates the traditional division of social roles, including family roles" (Racław, Rosochacka-Gmitrzak 2013, p. 51). This example shows how important it is for the organizer's success to acknowledge (and to approach in a rational manner) the cultural barriers which often are rooted deep in tradition. As Racław and Rosochacka-Gmitrzak note, "the conflict that the organizer encountered exposed the limitations in creating the fundamental role of a community organizer in the community under study" (Racław, Rosochacka-Gmitrzak 2013, p. 48).

The organizer in the social context

A change of attitudes of the persons with a long-term history of reliance on welfare is also made difficult by the attitudes of those around them. These attitudes are often built on prejudice and stereotypes. There may also be reservations (often caused by previous experience) as to whether it makes sense to try to work with these difficult and often troublesome persons. Paradoxically, these situations hold the greatest potential for change of the beliefs about welfare clients. Firstly, the closest neighbours are likely to be the first to notice even the slightest improvements (e.g. that someone has cleaned up their yard). Secondly, the neighbours' opinion and possible support for the organizer's work will have credibility in the eyes of the wider community, including the local institutions and authorities.

When the community organizer works at the level of small neighbourhoods, the objective of this work is first of all to rebuild good interpersonal relations. Given the widespread stereotypes and prejudice about the so-called 'difficult types', it is not a simple task. No propaganda will help; only direct experience will be of use. The community organizer must succeed in convincing the neighbours that it is these unwanted persons who are responsible for the

positive change, and not, for example, social workers or city cleaning services. The potential is there in the everyday work, i.e. in chipping at the social barriers, in fostering even the tiniest threads of contact, and in establishing communication. The experiences of Magdalena Dudkiewicz and Katarzyna Górniak suggest that even years of prejudice may be overcome, because "community organizing does not posit the reconstruction of a micro-community as an oasis surrounded by the outside world, but focuses on including this micro-community in a wider local community" (Górniak, Dudkiewicz 2013, p. 117) As a result of consistently working in accordance with this principle, "local residents started to appreciate the efforts of the group involved in the project, and began to invite the group's members to join them, which the group was happy to accept (...). The relationship is based on cooperation and mutual arrangements. It is not unilateral and it does not reinforce the division into 'us' and 'them'" (Górniak, Dudkiewicz 2013, p. 118).

The first step in working with the closest neighbours is convincing them that cooperation with the persons whom they used to treat as a necessary evil and whom they often tried to force out of the community (e.g. by having them placed in municipal housing at the outskirts of the city) may be beneficial for them too. Research has demonstrated that the general public does not share the belief that effectively helping those in need, and those in difficult economic circumstances (and particularly helping them in a way that enables them to achieve an enduring change, rather than simply satisfying the current pressing needs), is advantageous to the society at large.

The organizer in confrontation with the institutional context

Let us now move on to the wider social context, often of an institutional nature. This includes the local government and the municipal institutions such as the police, the housing board, schools, religious institutions, and NGOs. The relations between the organizer and these institutions create a natural opportunity to build a partnership, the objective of which is a positive change in the community: for obvious reasons, the institutions may be

interested in the process. Yet it requires an understanding of the unique nature of welfare work which – by means of the community method – moves beyond *ad-hoc* assistance. The changes must be presented in the language of benefits which each specific institution may count on. For the police, it is the potential for a lower number of interventions; for the schools, it is fewer conflicts between the children who tend to form cliques to exclude the 'welfare kids'; for the housing authority, it is the lower cost and effort associated with maintenance if the residents contribute to taking care of the buildings. Thinking in terms of partnership is not about artificial or abstract notions such as the 'common good'. It is much more about everybody finding a specific reason to support the community organizer's work, a specific individual benefit (even such as a promotion at work) and a benefit for their institution. The cooperation of NGOs may potentially be the easiest to ensure, because NGOs tend to have a similar paradigm and thus come closer to this model of work than the ultra-formal public institutions. Yet even the NGOs are not prejudice-free. Research shows that NGO activists often have a very poor opinion of social welfare institutions, and believe them to be – in contrast to their own organizations – bureaucratic and prone to perfunctory gestures intended to handle a problem formally without actually trying to solve it (see also Dudkiewicz 2009, p. 55).

The local government may well be the most difficult potential partner, but it is also the strategic one. There is the issue of financing the support provided to the community where the organizer is working. There is still no general awareness that assistance offered to those who need it is not a burden for the public budget, but an expense necessary for development; an investment, like healthcare, education, security, or environmental protection. Local decision-makers are often not convinced that counteracting marginalization is their responsibility, that welfare institutions are an important partner in fulfilling this obligation, and that cooperation in this respect is part of a pro-developmental stance. Ignorance of the fact that the local authorities really should see the welfare institutions as a competent partner in planning and executing development strategies is a major stumbling block.

The reason for this is that social work is often unpredictable in terms of results, and very complex. Compared to typical investments designed to improve the quality of life, such as sanitation, roads, street lighting etc., the difference is evident. The effects of working with people are much more difficult to calculate, management and supervision are complex, and the objectives not always easy to articulate. Moreover, counteracting poverty and exclusion is not as spectacular an endeavour as the construction of a new bridge, for example. The bad news is that the community method does nothing to alleviate the unpredictability and complexity of social work – on the contrary, it actually magnifies the unpredictability compared to the standard type of welfare services. Yet it is an opportunity too: compared to the traditional services, it is much more attractive for the media, because it can draw attention, has the novelty value, and offers an element of surprise. Positive media attention is invaluable to authorities of any kind.

Community organizing is therefore a unique opportunity to change the attitudes and build a climate of acceptance at least, and maybe even involvement, around the work of the helping professions. The first steps should always take place in the closest neighbourhood, but gradually widening the range may eventually influence public opinion. The media (particularly local media) have an important role to play here. Now, the media often present the welfare services in a negative light and reinforce prejudicial stereotypes. The work of community organizers may break the vicious circle of 'good news is bad news': in contrast to traditional welfare services, no matter how well executed, community work may prove media-friendly by providing an attractive media topic.

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Research shows that the following social attitudes prevail: the poor are at fault for their own position; their poverty is a problem of their own doing, resulting not from external circumstances but from their unwillingness to work or from alcoholism (see Report of CBOS 2007). A change of social attitudes – first at the local level and then beyond – is a necessary precondition for the emergence of

a true partnership between the disadvantaged groups and those who want to help them effectively.

The research completed during the project 'Tworzenie i rozwijanie standardów pomocy i integracji społecznej' allows us to pinpoint the greatest challenges in this respect. It also demonstrates that the social process at hand is very complex, but that the community method, if practised by the right persons, definitely has a future. It offers an excellent opportunity to break the vicious circle of *ad-hoc* financial support, which is usually insufficient to generate enduring social change in the communities to which it is addressed.

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Barbara Bąbska

Community organizing: training social workers

Introduction

The model of social work with a local community (local community organizing model – LCO model[1]) was designed as a part of the project 'Creating and developing standards of social welfare and social integration services' (*Tworzenie i rozwijanie standardów usług pomocy i integracji społecznej*). It was then tested in a pilot project in March 2011– November 2012. The pilot project consisted in training a group of social workers employed in municipal-level social welfare centres of different types, and in monitoring the community work they undertook on the basis of the model. The training and implementation of the model were intended to bring about three types of change:

- **personal change**, achieved through the formal and practical preparation of the social workers to become community organisers
- **change in the local community**, achieved through initiating the community's self-help and self-organization process
- **change at the institutional level**, achieved through creating favourable formal and organizational conditions for the effective implementation of the local community organizing (LCO) model.

Participating in the pilot project were 61 social workers from 35 social welfare centres from all over Poland. The eligibility criteria they had to meet included a willingness to face new challenges in

[1] For a brief description of the key characteristics of the LCO model see the previous text in this volume *[editor's comment]*.

community work, and the willingness of their employers (the social welfare centres) to implement the LCO model. The social workers signed contracts in which they undertook to actively participate in the training, complete their homework assignments, and work with their assigned coach and mentor. The social workers' supervisors, i.e. managers of the social welfare centres, signed contracts confirming that they were referring their employees to the training program, and undertaking to make it possible for the social workers to implement the LCO model as part of their work in the welfare centre.

The social workers were divided into three groups according to the population of the city, town, or village in which they worked:

- villages and towns with 25,000 residents or fewer: 20 persons
- towns and cities with populations between 25,000 and 100,000: 20 persons
- cities with populations above 100,000: 21 persons.

The training program was conducted by Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL (CWAL), with the support of experts from the Laboratory of Social Innovation (LIS)[2] who had designed the LCO model and who provided insight as the program progressed, and offered assistance and consultations to the trainers. All the elements of the training were documented with diligence; they included lesson plans, reports, evaluation surveys, accounts of the work carried out in the communities, etc. Drawing on this documentation, a final report was drafted, which in turn served as a basis for this paper.

[2]   See the description of the work of the Laboratory of Social Innovation in the final paper of this volume *[editor's comment]*.

The training process

The curriculum was based on the notion of education in action. The team at CWAL created an environment that was conducive to learning and to developing new skills and attitudes, and that consequently had an impact on both the personal and the professional growth of the students who were acquiring knowledge for the specific purpose of testing it in action. The participants were

therefore perceived in the light of the change they were undergoing. The underlying premise of the process was that, thanks to their creativity and their potential, they were able to change, and then in turn become instruments of change themselves.

The program was built in such a way that the trainers and the participants progressed together through the stages of community work and discussed the instruments that can be used at these stages. The participants then applied this knowledge in their day-to-day practice. The preparation of the participants for the role of community organizers was based on three key elements: education, action, and support. They were accompanied by reflection that focused on the practice, so as to create a platform for continued learning.

The training process was supervised by a training leader, with assistance from the experts from the Laboratory of Social Innovation. It consisted of three modules:

- 10 training sessions, each 20 hours long
- a study visit to Great Britain
- Social Animators' Forum.

Training sessions

The objective of the training was to prepare the students to work with local communities who are at risk of social exclusion. The sessions' topics reflected a logical progression through the process of community organizing (see Table 1). The training was designed to combine theory with practice. By completing their homework assignments, the students immediately implemented what they had learned in the classroom in their local communities. Additionally, they kept a reflective practitioner's diary in which they jotted down their comments and reflections on the changes in themselves, their institutions, and their communities. The diaries were personal and were shared only with group leaders who were in charge of supervising the participants personal and professional development, and who offered support in this regard.

Table 1: Topics of training sessions, their scope, and homework assignments

	Topic	Homework assignment
1.	Local community organizing. The development of a local community to combat social exclusion.	To draft a general map of the environment in which the welfare centre operates.
2.	A diagnosis of the local community in terms of territory and classification into relevant categories.	To complete background research and draft a map of resources and needs of the community or of a selected problem area or subgroup.
3.	Building a network with the objective of community organizing. Building local partnerships.	To draft a list of potential partners and analyze the partners' potential. To propose a schedule of work towards building the partnerships. To arrange and conduct the first partnership-related meeting.
4.	Activation, integration, education. Working in difficult deprived environments.	To prepare and organize a community meeting.
5.	Instruments of working in a local community.	To draft a plan to establish a self-help group or education-focused group, or to draft a plan to establish a volunteering club in the welfare centre.
6.	Integration, information, and communication.	To draft a plan of a social campaign or a community debate.
7.	Practical approaches to working in a local community.	To design a project to be implemented in a local community.
8.	A social worker as a local community organizer, an animator, a mediator, and a local political in an environment of change.	To list and describe the situations in which the student plays the role of an animator, a mediator (i.e. a networker), and a politician.
9.	Public relations. The welfare centre and its new role in organizing the local community.	To design a promotion strategy or to describe the promotion tools (as presented during the training) which will be used in the everyday work of the local community organizer. To draft a final report on community work and an action plan for 2013.
10.	Active social policy: from strategy to action.	n/a (final session of the program)

Source: author's own compilation based on the documentation of the project.

During the training sessions, three lead trainers provided oversight, each of them accompanying one group of students throughout the process. The lead trainers provided support as the group process progressed, supported the participants in

their learning, built platforms of communication, encouraged integration between the participants, taught segments of the sessions, and provided assistance with homework assignments. The sessions were generally taught by experts on a given topic with experience in community work.

In line with the methodology of working with adult participants, the sessions were taught with a focus on activation (individual work, group work, moderated and non-moderated debates, brainstorming, role-playing, drama, case studies, mind mapping, mini lectures, and presentations). The participants received a bundle of training materials at each session.

A study visit to Great Britain

A 7-day study visit to Great Britain was an important element of the program. In turns, each group was given the opportunity to learn more about the history and tradition of community work, its underlying values, and its unique nature. The visit also illustrated the various roles played by professional community organizers. The participants were also able to see first-hand how work with local communities and communities of need was conducted.

Social Animators' Forum (SAF)

The last component of the training process was participation, on two occasions, in the Social Animators' Forum (SAF). The SAF was an event focused on animation and education. It consisted of the following elements: debates on the development of local communities; workshops on the tools that can be applied in the process of local community organizing; fairs to promote the accomplishments of the participants; study visits with a focus on local community activism. The participants appreciated the SAF very much. They noted that the SAF gave them an opportunity to study examples of good practices, to share experiences with local community activists, and to make new contacts. The SAF became instrumental in bringing together the local community organizers. In methodological terms, the SAF were beneficial both educationally and emotionally.

Evaluation of the training process

In their comments at the end of the program and in the evaluation surveys, the participants pointed to three aspects they had found crucial:

- the educational aspect (noted by over 53% of participants): the opportunity to gain, expand and organize knowledge on community organizing and on the instruments used in the process; the opportunity to gain experience, to increase awareness, and to engage in reflection on community work
- the practical aspect (noted by over 50% of participants): the combination of theory and practice; the opportunity to test the new knowledge and skills by means of the homework assignments (specific projects in the local communities)
- the organizational aspect (noted by approx. 20% of participants): the design and planning behind the training, the methodical organization of learning, the professionalism of the trainers.

In terms of training design, the process carried out in the pilot project successfully prepared the students for their role as local community organizers. The students left the training with the awareness that local community organizing is a long-term process rather than a single event, and that it consists in working with the people rather than working for the people.

Throughout the entire program, participants engaged in community work. Their projects were implemented in stages, using subject-oriented instruments (work with local communities and with communities of need) and object-oriented instruments (local partnerships, volunteer work, campaigns and events, advocacy, advice centres) as appropriate. The process was thoroughly documented.

Work in local communities
– a test of the LCO model

Local community organizing efforts were made in 44 communities; 28 participants worked alone while in 16 cases the participants

worked in pairs. Marginalized communities were mainly selected for the projects. They were characterized by large proportions of residents with serious problems (poverty, unemployment, alcohol addiction, etc.) – often poor, with an attitude of entitlement, and often reliant on social welfare for years. They also tended to have very limited institutional resources. The buildings were dilapidated, and the places had an overall neglected look. The communities were deprived and the conditions there were difficult. Both urban and rural communities were represented, but all of them were rather small, comprising, for example: residents of one street or several streets; a neighbour; one or several council housing tower blocks; one or several buildings. Almost two thirds of the 'project communities' (as they were referred to by the students) had populations below 1,000, with very few communities having a population larger than 11,000.

There were differences between the communities in terms of institutional resources. Half of them only had very limited institutions: a corner shop, a small business, a school, a church, a local women's club etc. Other essential institutions were located in other parts of the town or of the municipality, which made access to them difficult. In a quarter of the communities, there were no institutional resources at all, while in another quarter, access to resources was easy due to the community's location in the vicinity of the centre of the town or municipality.

Problems and needs of the project communities

The participants had to complete a diagnosis of the problems and needs of the residents of the project communities. The relevant research was carried out by means of observations, document analyses, questionnaire surveys, and unstructured interviews (of which there were decidedly few). The data was mainly quantitative in nature. Actual opinions of the residents were missing from the diagnoses; there was no information on how the residents felt about the communities in which they lived. Generally, the research touched upon on three areas: perception of the community compared to other parts of the same town or

municipality; problems the residents have; attitude to becoming involved in solving these problems. It focused on the problems of the community rather than on its potential. The list of problems reported by the community members was long and varied. It was made up mainly of issues that made day-to-day life difficult. Most typically, the residents reported the following issues:

- no places where children and youth could spend their free time
- many persons with alcohol addiction
- lacking cleanliness, and buildings and surroundings looking neglected
- absence, or poor condition, of roads and walkways
- poor condition of the buildings
- poor housing conditions
- lack of the feeling of safety
- vandalism
- no free-time options for seniors.

The diagnoses completed by the students also revealed the following qualities of the project communities:

- no activism and no engagement, or very low levels of both
- low level of social integration
- no faith in the possibility of change and no sense of agency
- little sense of responsibility
- an attitude of entitlement and the belief that 'somebody else' should solve the problems
- low self-esteem and low level of trust.

It is unsurprising that the overall situation is difficult: by design, the work was to be carried out in deprived areas and in communities at risk of exclusion. Yet it appears that the attitude of the students was also biased towards problems and deficits, at the expense of opportunities and resources. It demonstrated how very necessary it is to train social workers in the empowerment paradigm, which is a crucial component of the LCO model.

Work in the project communities

In the local communities, the participants engaged in projects that had a focus on diagnosing, activating, integrating, and educating. The projects consisted in direct work with the local residents, in initiating local partnerships, groups and volunteer efforts, in organizing campaigns and events, and in providing access to information. Table 2 provides a brief description of the projects.

The projects were carried out largely as a part of the homework assignments. Their purpose was not only to put to the test the knowledge and skills acquired during the training sessions, but also to lay a foundation for systematic work towards securing social change. Yet the final reports compiled by the students demonstrated that not all of them approached working with the local community in quite this way. Some participants treated the assignments as one-off, individual tasks. Some carried out only selected assignments. Others failed to complete any assignments at all. The documentation suggests that the students could be divided into four groups based on their approach to community work:

- **Group 1**: systematic work with the community members and local partners: arranging community meetings, establishing groups to address specific problems, cooperating with partners, initiating local events and promoting the establishment of new groups, promoting volunteer work, setting up advice centres, organizing social campaigns (13 communities)
- **Group 2**: initiating fairly regular community meetings and meetings with groups, incidental actions and local events, occasionally promoting volunteer work, occasionally establishing new groups (13 communities)
- **Group 3**: incidental actions such as organizing a class for children or seniors, holding local events, or in some cases work with a single group with around a dozen members, claiming that the group was intended for members of a community of needs (14 communities)
- **Group 4**: no action at all or very limited incidental actions (4 communities).

Table 2. Projects in the local communities

Type of project	Description
Direct work with members of the community	Direct work with members of the community was carried out in 33 communities. It consisted in organizing community meetings and involving the members of the community in actions designed to address the problems prevalent in the community. 　　Overall, more than 110 meetings were arranged (data is incomplete because not all organizers reported the number of meetings). As a result of the meetings, groups were established that engaged in actions designed to address the problems prevalent in the community. The most popular issues were organization of places where children and youth could spend their free time (in 15 communities) and improving the looks of the neighbourhoods by, for example, cleaning and planting trees, bushes and decorative plants (in 12 communities). In 6 communities, maintenance work was done, such as repainting hallways or doing small repairs in common areas. Besides completing specific tasks, in 5 communities the members engaged in actions designed to lobby the authorities on specific issues. This was achieved by means of petitions on issues such as installation of traffic signs or speed bumps. The community members were also involved in organizing local events.
Building networks and partnerships	From the outset of the projects, efforts were made to establish networks of contacts with representatives of local institutions and organizations. In 32 communities efforts were made to establish partnerships, in 9 communities cooperation was successfully established only with individual entities, and in 3 cases cooperation continued because partnerships had already been built earlier. 　　Overall, more than 80 partnership meetings were held (data is incomplete because not all organizers reported the number of meetings). Cooperation was achieved with representatives of more than 220 local institutions and organizations (the data could be underestimated because in many reports, the partners were not listed), mainly schools, building administration bodies, the police and municipal police, the Catholic Church, NGOs, small businesses, local authorities, and local leaders. 　　The cooperation was informal in nature. In the pilot project, not a single partnership agreement was made, but in several cases declarations of partnership were signed.
Groups	The community organizers provided the impulse for the establishment of 13 groups: • 8 groups for seniors: self-help groups and groups with a focus on either leisure or education (some of them labelled 'seniors' clubs') • 2 groups for parents, with a focus on education and support to help the parents improve their parenting skills • 2 groups for youth, with a focus on promoting new skills (no information was provided as to which skills) and alternative ways of spending free time • 1 self-help group for women with a focus on sharing and support.
Volunteer work	Volunteering took place in 13 communities: • in 3 communities, work with volunteers and work done by volunteers was continued (it had started earlier) • in 4 communities, volunteer clubs were established during the pilot project • in 4 cases, efforts were made to promote volunteering but no club was established • in 2 cases, the organizer secured the cooperation of volunteers but no formal club was established. Volunteering was promoted mainly among the youth, and it was mainly the young people who actually volunteered. They offered assistance, with homework for example, and supported the organizers in organizing local events.

Social campaigns	Reports indicated that 13 campaigns took place, yet in 4 cases the actions consisted in planting trees and similar work; in the remaining 9 cases, actual campaigns took place: • 2 anti-violence campaigns: (1) Open your eyes – react against violence and (2) Towards the truth about domestic violence: STEP ONE • Building a better world campaign to promote intergenerational integration, the importance of social ties, and neighbourhood initiatives • a campaign to promote volunteering among adults • a campaign with a focus on depression, designed to combat the stereotypes associated with mental health issues • This is what family is like campaign to promote healthy relationships in the family and improve parenting skills • a campaign to improve the sense of security • a campaign to promote recycling • Open your eyes to loneliness, don't be indifferent campaign to raise awareness of the problems of persons who suffer from loneliness and to encourage neighbourly relations.
Information	In 6 communities the projects focused on improving access to information and advice. For this purpose, 6 advice centres were set up to offer assistance in handling matters in various institutions and on coping with other problems.
Local events	A variety of local events were organized with a focus on integration, education, or recreation. Overall, 101 such events were held. They included festivals, picnics, holiday celebrations, bonfires, rallies, sports tournaments, trips, dances, and charity balls. Local partners, volunteers and community members were involved in the organization. Representatives of local authorities as well as media often participated in these events, giving the organizers an opportunity to promote the LCO model and draw attention to the potential of the local communities.
Other types of projects	Community organizers also provided an impulse for and/or organized: • sports, dance and art classes (10 organizers) • workshops in issues such as preventing addictions, arts and crafts, cooking, garden and garden design (8 organizers). These projects were carried out mainly in the communities where official local activity programs (programy aktywności lokalnej) were in place, because they provided a source of financing.

Source: author's own description based on the documentation of the project.

The participants described their work in the local communities and noted the difficulties they encountered. The difficulties can be divided into two types. The first type includes the attitude of the community members and local partners, their passivity or limited activity, resistance to change, tendency towards empty promises, lack of faith in the possibility of change, and mistrust towards social workers. The following excerpts from the evaluation surveys illustrate this issue well: *"A lot of passivity. The sort of attitude 'we'd like that, but somebody else should do it for us'; no willingness to take responsibility for potential action"; "Resistance, passivity, the*

character of that place. It is difficult to connect with the people who have had no alternatives, who feel forgotten and excluded."

The second type of difficulties arose in connection to work organization (reconciling community work with other responsibilities) and to the attitudes of colleagues and supervisors, who were often unsupportive of the efforts to organize the community. One of the participants wrote: *"For me all the time the greatest barrier was the unstable situation regarding the systematic implementation of LCO in our centre. There was no team, no meetings, and it sapped my energy and made me reluctant to do anything at all."*

In the course of their work with the communities, the students made no grave mistakes. The data shows that there were only two cases of relatively major shortcomings. In the first case, a local councillor was invited to a meeting, but he was not briefed beforehand on the idea of LCO and on the purpose of the meeting. The meeting ended in a row, and as a result the community members were discouraged and the councillor became a staunch opponent of LCO. In the second case, the organizer worked successfully to win supporters, encouraged the residents to act, and drafted an action plan – after which, without any good reason, she suddenly disappeared from the community. As a result, she lost the trust she had accumulated, and the people withdrew their support. Fixing such mistakes is very costly in terms of social resources. Some other efforts of the organizers were somewhat dubious: for example, they claimed to be working with communities of need (for example, seniors or youth) but in fact only ever worked with a very limited number of persons.

Support system for the local community organizers (the participants)

The training program included a three-tier support system consisting of (1) the assistance of coaches, (2) mentoring, and (3) supervision. While (1) and (2) were available directly to the participants, and were intended to support their personal and

professional development and their work in the communities, (3) was offered to the social welfare centres in order to support their management in implementing the LCO model at the institutional level. The forms of support were interconnected and complementary, jointly creating a system that provided students with a safe environment in which to become a community organizer and start working in the community.

Assistance of coaches

Each of the three groups had a coach who accompanied it throughout the program. The coach was present during each training session and, together with the lead trainer, oversaw the group process and provided individual support to the participants. Between the sessions, the coach stayed in touch with the participants via email and telephone. The coaches discussed with the participants the steps they took in the local communities, including the difficulties they encountered (in order to help find solutions) and the successes (in order to boost motivation and engagement). The coaches kept individual files on each student, making a note of what motivated them, how engaged they were, what kinds of projects they had implemented in the communities, and what needs they had in terms of education and support. This information was then useful to trainers, mentors, and supervisors. The files were compiled on the basis of observation, conversations, information from the trainers, and the diaries kept by the participants.

Mentoring

Mentoring consisted in offering the participants support with regard to their work in the communities. Each student was assigned a mentor – a teacher, a master, an expert – who provided the participant with assistance and support throughout the project. Each participant received an average of 40 hours of mentoring divided into a number of meetings. On average, 10 meetings with a mentor were held, usually in the place of employment of the participant. The student and the mentor were also in touch by phone or by email, as needed.

The scope of support was designed to meet the needs of the participants. The reports drafted by the mentors distinguish between three main areas in which such needs were noted:

- work in the community – participants were offered support in implementing the projects, both indirect (discussion, consultations, advice on how to conduct interviews, how to establish groups, or how to document the work) and direct (mentor's participation, for example by co-leading a community meeting or a meeting with partners)

- the local community organizer as a person – participants were offered support in their personal and professional development by means of identifying and analysing their strengths and weaknesses, uncovering their potential, stimulating creativity, developing personal and social skills, boosting their motivation etc.

- the social welfare centre – support was offered with regard to developing the principles and mechanisms of internal cooperation and building a support system for the community organizers. This was achieved by meetings attended by entire staff of the social welfare centre, and by mini training sessions explaining the concept of LCO and the importance of internal cooperation for the development of LCO.

Each meeting between a student and a mentor was documented in a post-meeting report, including a description of the meeting, conclusions, and recommendations for the participant, the coach, the lead trainers, and the supervisors.

Supervision

Supervision was carried out at the level of the institution (the social welfare centre). It had effects in two different areas: (1) administration and management, (2) education and support. Its purpose was to support the social welfare centre in implementing the LCO model by working together with its management

(top level and middle level) and with representatives of local institutions, organizations, and authorities. The supervisors focused on supporting the institutional change intended to create structures conducive to engaging in community work. They also worked to win the favour of the local authorities, and to ensure that local community organizing was incorporated in the policy of the municipality.

Each social welfare centre in the pilot program was assigned a supervisor who worked with the management on average for 23.5 hours, amounting on average to 8 visits in the centre. A report was compiled after each visit, describing the visit and listing conclusions and recommendations for the social welfare centre.

Difficulties regarding the support system and methods of coping with these difficulties

The persons responsible for offering support encountered numerous difficulties. The difficulties pertained in particular to the following issues:

- poor understanding of the rules of participation in the pilot project, especially with regard to the necessity of undertaking community work or adjusting the institutional structures to the implementation of the LCO model
- poor internal cooperation within the centres, overt and covert conflicts, and lack of authority of the centres' managers in both the centres and in the municipality
- reluctance of the welfare centres' staff towards changes and challenges
- poor understanding of the notion of community work, in particular with regard to shifting the approach from 'working for a community' to 'working with a community', and moving from one-off projects to a systematic approach
- lack of time for community work due to the excessive number of other responsibilities, leading to poor engagement and motivation.

The coaches, mentors, and supervisors tried to ameliorate the difficulties by invoking the contracts signed by the social welfare centres and the participants, offering explanations, presenting good practices, and boosting motivations.

In methodological terms, reinforcing the training process by adding the support system turned out to be fully justified. The variety of support options, with a focus on both emotional support and work-related support, made it easier for the participants to complete the training and safely implement their newly acquired knowledge in practice. They were not left alone, and they were able at any time to count on the assistance of the coaches, mentors, and supervisors.

The pilot project demonstrated that implementing new approaches to social work (and in Poland, local community organizing is a new approach) requires not only education but also a support system. The support system should consist in empowering the persons who will be doing the work and supporting them in the projects they carry out. The support should be both indirect (discussions, consultations, advice) and direct (participation in the research, community meetings, and meetings with partners). The support system should cover not just the student but also the institution that employs the participant, in order to create an environment that is conducive to the growth of the community organizers and of community organizing as a method. Without the support of the institution that employs them, not even the best community organizer will be able to engage in professional community work and stimulate processes geared towards achieving sustainable change.

Changes resulting from the training program

The training program was designed to trigger change at three levels: (1) in the participants participating in the program, (2) in the communities where the organizing efforts took place, and (3) in the institutions that employ the participants.

Change in the participants

The program – both in its educational aspect and in terms of the support it provides – was geared towards giving the participants knowledge and skills in the area of local community organizing. It was also designed to promote the values and attitudes that drive community work. The program was intended to cause change in three complementary areas:

- knowledge and skills necessary to initiate and foster the process of change in local communities
- self-esteem and motivation to increase the sense of agency and self-confidence
- identification with the new role of a social worker who is a local community organizer.

A review of the documentation compiled during the pilot project (evaluation surveys, individual students' files, reports of the coaches, mentors and supervisors, as well as transcripts of the interviews) supports the conclusion that the training program – extending over a period of a year and a half – and its support component has indeed led to significant change in the participants across all three of these dimensions.

Both the participants and the coaches and mentors noted the increase in the knowledge and skills connected with local community organizing. The coaches in particular emphasized these changes (reflected in the participants' files as they occurred). This increase resulted not only from the formal educational processes reinforced by the support system, but also from the openness and involvement of the participants for whom the program was often the first opportunity to explore the notion of community organizing. The majority of the participants could be described as 'clean slates'. By the shared process of learning and completing the projects, the 'clean slates' were filled with information on the LCO model, both theoretical and practical. One of the participants noted: *"When I signed up for the program, I knew nothing about local community organizing. Everything was new. I received*

the tools I need, and a lot of knowledge on how to build certain things from scratch." The participants who had prior experience with community work saw quite large changes too, as illustrated by these notes in the evaluation surveys: *"I got a big boost in the form of knowledge and skills, I like what I do and I believe in LCO!";* *"Learning about LCO and implementing it won with the routine of my work and I changed my attitude and approach to people."*

The program boosted the **self-esteem** and **motivation** of the participants. Practically all participants declared that their self-esteem and motivation were greater. The program also resulted in an increase of their self-confidence and self-worth (as indicated by over 40% of students). Combined with the new knowledge and skills, this led to professional and personal growth. Other indicators of growth included greater openness and faith in people, discovering strengths and talents, greater assertiveness, creativity, flexibility, perseverance, diligence, patience, and consistency. The following excerpts are taken from the evaluation surveys: *"So far no form of education made me grow as much as this program. I see people differently now, I am more understanding, I see past stereotypes";* *"I have more faith in myself, I now know my strong and weak points";* *"I used to think that I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. But I have changed and now I feel wiser, I have more knowledge and experience, I am more confident in my strength and my abilities".*

Greater self-esteem, self-worth, and motivation of the participants undoubtedly resulted from the fact that formal training sessions were followed up immediately with an opportunity to test the new knowledge in practice. Already during the pilot project, the project communities showed signs of change. This was very rewarding for the participants and gave them satisfaction. Additionally, it also boosted their sense of agency and their faith in their own abilities, increasing their motivation to initiate new projects.

As the program progressed, the participants increasingly began to **identify with the role of local community organizers**. It was another important component of the program. Since the participants worked with the local communities from the very outset of the project, it gave them an opportunity to test the theory in practice, and also to see for themselves whether they found this

type of work a good fit. They could decide if they identified with the role of a local community organizer. Based on the evaluation surveys, 4/5 of the participants felt good or very good in their role of local community organizers, while 1/5 indicated that they felt uncertain or insecure. In the opinion of the mentors and the coaches, despite constant complaints of excessive burdens of other responsibilities, the participants were involved and strongly motivated, open to new experience, and willing to learn more about LCO. There was an observable steady increase in the identification with the concepts of local community organizing. This was in part a result of the shift in perceptions among the local residents and local partners. The social workers were no longer perceived as 'clerks that handed out money'. Instead, they gained a reputation for their openness to people, their willingness to offer support, their advocacy of the marginalized groups, and their role as intermediaries between the local residents and the institutions and authorities.

Change in the local communities

The participants were engaged in community work in 44 local communities at risk of social exclusion. Once they completed the diagnosis, they initiated various projects to address the problems uncovered by the diagnoses, or to satisfy the unmet needs of the deprived communities. They were able to apply in practice the instruments and tools of community work. In total, between March 2011 and November 2012, the following projects were carried out:

- over 110 community meetings were held, leading to the establishment of local groups to address specific local problems
- over 80 meetings were held with representatives of local institutions and organizations, leading to cooperation with a focus on supporting local communities with as many as 220 entities
- 13 groups were established, mainly with a focus on education and/or self-help

- in 13 social welfare centres, volunteer work was either promoted or organized
- 9 social campaigns were carried out
- 6 advice centres were established
- over 100 local events took place.

Other projects included sports, dance, and art classes (10 organizers), and workshops in arts and crafts, cooking, garden design, preventing addictions, etc. (8 organizers).

Work in the local communities led to concrete changes in 33 communities. With regard to 10 communities, no information was provided as to the possible changes. The following hard outcomes resulted from the work conducted with the community members:

- in 13 communities, places where free time could be spent were either created or renovated, with a particular focus on children and youth (playgrounds, clubs, etc.)
- in 10 communities, the neighbourhood was cleaned, maintenance work was done, trees and decorative plants were planted, etc.
- in 7 communities, small repairs were made in hallways and shared areas of the buildings
- in 1 community a pond was fenced to make the area safer for children
- in 1 community an information board was installed
- in 1 community a building was insulated to improve heat retention.

In terms of soft outcomes connected with empowerment:

- in 17 communities the level of residents' activity increased
- in 12 communities the level of the residents' engagement in working for the common good increased
- in 6 communities social ties became stronger
- in 5 communities the trust level increased
- in 5 communities the sense of agency increased.

The following results were reported for one community each: increased sense of community, of responsibility, of agency, of cooperation, of self-esteem, and of self-worth.

The documentation suggests that symptoms of social change were observed in three quarters of the project communities. In the remaining quarter of project communities, either change did not occur or its symptoms went unobserved.

The descriptions of change provided in the final reports are not exhaustive. More precise descriptions have been provided for the hard outcomes, which are easy to see and put into words. Changes related to empowerment generate the same problems as the diagnosis of the situation in this respect. Some participants indicated that change did occur, but provided no specifics and listed no symptoms. This is likely a consequence of poor diagnostic skills in the empowerment approach: it is difficult, if not impossible, to properly demonstrate change if no precise description of the starting point exists. The documentation prepared by the students in the pilot project makes it difficult to unequivocally state whether the project resulted in genuine change in the project communities. Some of the participants claimed that their work led to significant changes, in particular with regard to levels of activism and engagement. Unfortunately, some of these participants also reported that their efforts were only incidental in nature, or that they worked with very few community members. However, other participants had been working with the communities systematically, applying a variety of instruments – and some of these students claimed that it was too early to speak of change. In their opinion (which is hard to argue with), the work completed during the pilot project is the beginning of a long journey. Completing the journey will require substantial time and effort.

Of course, we should not underappreciate the achievements of some of the project communities. The process of change was triggered, which is illustrated by the fact that persons who had previously not got involved in community issues actually participated in efforts to clean the neighbourhood, or to build spaces for children and youth to spend free time. The hard outcomes are a tangible effect of the community members' work.

These outcomes were just a means to an end, which is the increased empowerment of the community members. Yet they are important in and of themselves too. Working together is a way of bringing people together, integrating them, and showing them their own potential, which they can use to improve their situation. The following quotations from the students illustrate the importance of these efforts, and the first symptoms of change:

- "One local resident (…) went to the mayor herself, arranged a meeting, I was so proud of her. And she said to the mayor that there was an ugly patch of land in front of the building and that she wanted to change it. The mayor was aware which street she meant, and so she said: 'OK, we'll take care of that'. And the woman said, no, she wanted to do it herself, she was just asking for her to set up a meeting with the person who could help her get it done. (…) and then I got a phone call from her: 'You know what? The municipality gave me 1000 PLN, they just told me to take good care of the land.' And she actually takes good care of it."

- "And it turned out that the people who seemed to be the worst bets at the beginning, they were actually creating groups and solving a problem and bringing it up for discussion at a community meeting. And they are persons with very colourful pasts, prison, all kinds of trouble. And they used to be in conflict of sorts with our welfare centre, with the social workers. They have fit in marvellously, and this immediately shows the effects of the LCO method. The kind of benefits it can offer, the change in these people. And people see the changes too and speak about it. This is so precious and very surprising to me."

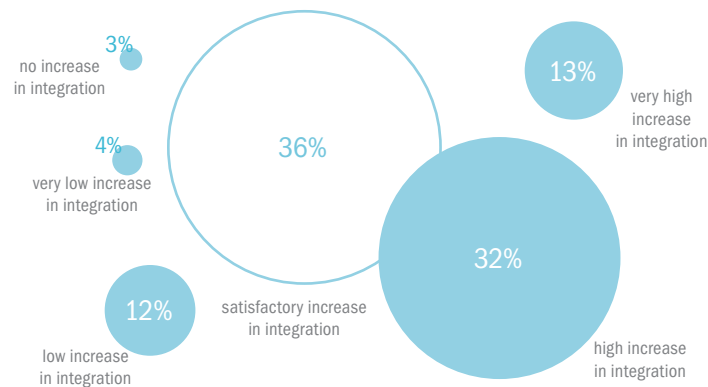## Change in the institutions (in the social welfare centres and municipalities)

In the pilot project, the process of incorporating community organizing into the municipal policy was initiated in 50 institutions, which is 96% of all the social welfare centres in the pilot projects

(no such steps were taken in 2 cases). In these 50 institutions, steps were taken to implement organizational changes that would make it possible to professionally engage in community work. These organizational changes were twofold. Firstly, they consisted in establishing separate structures with a responsibility for community organizing. Either specialist teams were established, or selected social workers were formally assigned this responsibility. Secondly, relevant provisions were added to the documentation of the social welfare centres (founding documents, bylaws, job descriptions, etc.). In consequence, all the institutions created structures dedicated to community work, appropriate for the overall organizational structure of the centre. Moreover, a third of the social welfare centres added relevant provisions to their founding documents, and two thirds – to their bylaws.

Winning the acceptance and support of local authorities with regard to LCO was another important element of the pilot project. The documentation compiled in the project suggests that more than half, but less than two thirds of the local authorities in the municipalities involved in the project took an interest in the work being done within the project, demonstrated a positive attitude, and accepted community work as a method of social work.

Almost all social welfare centres in the project initiated or expanded cooperation with local institutions and organizations in the public, NGO, and business sectors, as well as the media. This is important, because the centres were very reluctant to engage in any kind of cooperation before, or limited the cooperation to very specific tasks. Implementation of the LCO model resulted in a greater number of partners and in improved quality of the cooperation. It caused a shift from a hierarchical relationship (in which one party commissions services and another party provides them) to a true partnership (where the parties work together to achieve shared goals). The cooperation led to greater integration among the local organizations and institutions, as illustrated by Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. Increase in integration among local organizations and institutions

no increase
in integration — 3%

very low increase
in integration — 4%

36%

satisfactory increase
in integration

13%

very high
increase
in integration

32%

high increase
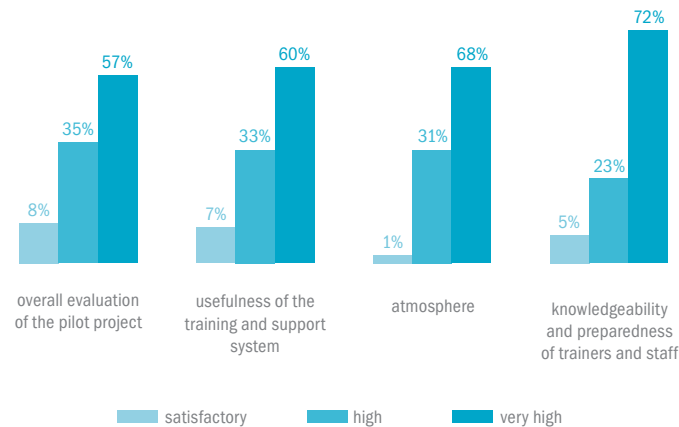in integration

12%

low increase
in integration

Source: author's own compilation based on the documentation of the project.

Summary and conclusions

The pilot project and the change it triggered in the participants, the communities, the institutions, and the municipalities was a success. It was very well evaluated by the participants, who gave it overwhelmingly positive notes.

Diagram 2. Evaluation of the pilot project by the participants

	overall evaluation of the pilot project	usefulness of the training and support system	atmosphere	knowledgeability and preparedness of trainers and staff
satisfactory	8%	7%	1%	5%
high	35%	33%	31%	23%
very high	57%	60%	68%	72%

satisfactory   high   very high

Source: author's own compilation based on the documentation of the project.

Methodologically, the process of preparing the participants for the new role of community organizers was designed and executed very well. The training had a logical core structure, taking the participants through all the stages of local community organizing, and demonstrating the instruments used in the process. The trainers were themselves practitioners, which gave them credibility. The formal training was directly tied with practical assignments, giving the participants and opportunity to rise to the challenges of LCO. By working in specific communities, the participants were able to test their new knowledge and skills, and to launch the process of social change. At the same time, they tested themselves and experienced their first successes as community organizers. Also important was the support system, fostering the students' professional and personal growth and helping them in moments of self-doubt and low motivation. The support of coaches and mentors prevented crises and boosted the students' faith in their efforts. Last but not least, the pilot project provided a platform for shared reflection and reciprocal learning.

The training program was well executed and resulted in measurable positive change. Nonetheless, it was not free from shortcomings, including the following weaknesses:

- the diagnoses of needs and problems were based mainly on quantitative research, which is not adequate for the purpose of understanding a community
- the participants tended to focus on the problems rather than on the potential of the communities, even though community organizing relies on this potential to a great extent
- the participants were unable to focus on the issue of empowerment: they had difficulties capturing it in their diagnoses and in accounting for the changes in this respect; it may suggest that adequate training was not provided
- when indicating that they had worked with communities of need, participants in fact referred to their work with small groups (not in line with the LCO model); it may suggest that adequate explanation of the concept of communities of need was not provided.

These elements must be amended to ensure that the training program is even more effective in the future. It is also essential that the participants should view the entire process of working in the community as education. This was generally not the case in the pilot project, where the students believed that the classes and workshops they organized in the communities constituted education, but did not have this perception with regard to other elements of their work.

To recapitulate: the pilot program experience should be taken into account in designing training curricula for local community organizers. The process of preparing social workers for the role of local community organizers should last long enough to take the students through all the stages of community work and to present to them all applicable instruments. This cannot be achieved during a weekend training session, for example. Moreover, the system should be based on the concept of education in action, combining the theory with practice and offering a support system to ensure that the budding community organizers feel safe as they try to learn and act.

It is also important to build a community of community organizers, offering the practitioners support, inspiration, and reinforcement. It would also create an opportunity to educate the management of social welfare centres and local officials, with a view to ensuring their backing of the organizers' work and their participation in the processes of change in local communities, especially those at risk of exclusion or already suffering from exclusion.

chapter
11

Expert team of Laboratory of Social Innovation

Model of social work with a local community (local community organizing)[1]

Premises

Model of social work with a local community / local community organizing (*Model pracy socjalnej ze społecznością lokalną / organizowania społeczności lokalnej,* further referred to as the LCO model; the Polish acronym is the OSL model) is a systematic solution, based on carefully designed methodology, adjusted to the Polish realities, and tried and tested in practice. Its purpose is to promote the community work approach to social work. The LCO model was designed in Laboratory of Social Innovation, which was established as a part of the project 'Creating and developing standards to social welfare and social integration services' (*Tworzenie i rozwijanie standardów usług pomocy i integracji społecznej*) and which gathers the experts from Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL (Centre for Supporting Local Activity Association CAL – further referred to as the CAL Association) and Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych (Institute of Public Affairs Foundation, English official acronym – IPA). The project was commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The community as the target in the LCO model

The model focuses on local community organizing in communities that are at risk of social exclusion, including in particular communities selected on the basis of two types of factors: location and category. In terms of location, the model is particularly well suited to work

with the residents of council housing estates, post-industrial areas, and areas formerly used for collective farming (kolkhoz-style). In terms of categories of persons, it is well suited to work with seniors, persons with disabilities, children, and youth. However, it is crucial to remember that the very idea of local community organizing is that the community must be perceived as a whole. Consequently, even if the change begins with micro-communities (residents of just a few streets or buildings, or a seniors' group), from the outset the impact must be designed with the broader structure in mind (the neighbourhood, the borough, the village, the municipality, or other categories of persons). It means that in each and every case, the entire local environment must be treated as both the target and the agent of all action. It is only in this approach that the opportunity arises to merge the elements of community work into a coherent whole, and to achieve sustainable social change geared towards improvement of the community members' lives and towards social development.

LCO as a community–oriented social service

Local community organizing, as the term is used in this paper, is a form of professional action designed to cause long-term positive social change. LCO is a community-oriented **integrated specialist social service**. It consists of a series of sequential pro-social steps, each of which is characterized by specific measurable parameters, but is also adjusted to the specific local conditions. As a service, LCO is targeted first of all at the communities in the most difficult position, i.e. those that are marginalized and are at risk of social exclusion. However, LCO may be applied in other communities too. Beyond the application at local level, which is to solve specific social problems and to ameliorate deficiencies, LCO may be used to trigger and reinforce processes of development. This is done with a view to improving the quality of life of local residents.

LCO is community-oriented, which means that the **target group of the service is also the co-producer of this service**. The community method relies on the community members' own activity in working towards the social change. What is more, in line with the notion of **empowerment**, the community members

not only execute plans made by the organizer, but they contribute to the planning process. This means that the LCO model makes no attempt to standardize the community work, focusing instead on developing a strong procedure for objective-oriented action and on providing a precise description of the instruments of community intervention. Standardization of community work would mean forcing grassroots social efforts into a rigid formal structure, thus derailing the empowerment approach and losing sight of the community-oriented nature of LCO.

Widespread application of LCO in Poland would require certain changes in the law. However, the provisions of strategies currently in force, as well as the current legislation, make it possible even now to implement LCO as a specialist social service (strategies: National Development Strategy 2007–2015, Social Policy Strategy 2007–2013, Poland 2030 Development Challenges, Human Capital Operating Programme; statutes: on social welfare, on public benefit activity and volunteering, on promotion of employment and institutions of the labour market, on social employment, on social cooperatives, on public finance, and on municipal local government).

Operationalization of the principle of the state's subsidiarity

The LCO model references and *de facto* **operationalizes the constitutional principle of subsidiarity** of the state (and its agencies).[2] This principle stipulates that structures of the lowest or most immediate level should have priority in meeting social needs and solving social problems. After the 1997 Constitution was enacted, with a Preamble that references the principle of subsidiarity, this principle legitimized the second local government reform. The reform reinstated the institution of *powiat* (second tier of local administration) and established local government institutions at the regional level. Then, the 2003 statute on public benefit activity and volunteering created the mechanisms for functional cooperation (on public benefit issues) between the public administration and not-for-profit non-public entities, such as associations, foundations, and Church-related organizations.

[2]   The principle of subsidiarity is included in the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, encated in 1997 after the first part of transition from communism to democracy *[editor's comment]*.

One of these mechanisms is that the public administration is allowed to contract out some of the public tasks to these entities.

The intent behind LCO is to significantly expand **inter-sectoral cooperation,** both in terms of whom it involves (cooperating partners) and in terms of the scope of the cooperation (range and type of solutions). Contracting out the public tasks generally creates vertical relationships, where the contractor who performs the work is subordinated to the entity contracting it out. LCO, on the other hand, relies on creating and strengthening **horizontal ties**. It encourages self-organization, reciprocity, and local partnerships. It incorporates not only the formal third sector organizations but also the engagement of citizens (members of the communities in question). In other words, it makes use of the potential of all the local institutions and organizations, and of the activity of local community members.

Incorporation of Polish traditions and contemporary international research on community work

The LCO model relies on the **Polish traditions of community work**, developed in the framework of social pedagogy. This includes the approach popularized by Helena Radlińska in the interwar period which is based on the concept of 'transforming an environment by the power of that environment'. The LCO model also incorporates accomplishments of researchers and thinkers from other European countries. It is connected to the French community approach (*l'approche communautaire*), to the German concept of *Gemeinwesenarbeit*, and to the British notions of community organizing and community development. The model also incorporates the practical expertise of Instytut Spraw Publicznych – and in particular of Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej – with regard to community animation, and to supporting public institutions (social welfare centres, community cultural centres, schools, etc.) and NGOs in working towards local community development. At the same time, the LCO model is not an attempt to impose a single rigid concept of community work. Instead, it creates a framework in which a variety of community actions may occur,

even if they rely on differing concepts and approaches to social work. One of the premises of the model is that there is sufficient space in the social interactions to accommodate a range of concepts with a shared objective: engendering social change.

LCO as a set of procedures

Community organizing follows a set of procedures. The LCO model relies on the premise that supporting, animating, integrating and activating individuals, families and groups in a local community is impossible without **a methodical transformation of the social environment** and consistent efforts to **increase the potential of the local community**. It is also assumed that social change in local communities cannot be achieved by incidental ad-hoc interventions. Significant and sustainable change is only possible as a result of a long-term process of empowerment of people and communities, in which the circumstances improve thanks to the active engagement of the community members. This process includes the construction of networks of cooperation as well as other local structures that encourage the development of the community.

In the LCO model, community organizing means working with the people and through the people, not just for the people. The focus is on the potential of each community member, regardless of the problems and dysfunctions that this person might have (in Radlińska's terms, everybody exists *in potentia*, and the point is to change their status into existence *in actu*).[3] Thus the notions of self-help, partnership, and participation are crucial. The objective is not to 'fix' a situation, but also to prevent it from becoming worse and to prevent other adverse circumstances from emerging.

Community organizing, as a set of procedures defined within the framework of the helping professions, should be subject to supervision. The purpose of the supervision is to improve the practical skills of community work and to engage in reflection. In the LCO model, supervision is a process of reciprocal education, achieved by creating a platform for analysis of the issues that arise in the community, and of the personal issues of the community organizers. In a team setting with a focus on reflection, these issues may be overcome.

[3]   Helena Radlińska presented her concept of social pedagogy in: H. Radlińska (1935), *Stosunek wychowawcy do środowiska społecznego. Szkice z pedagogiki społecznej* [The attitude of the educator to the social environment. Essays in social pedagogy], Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa *[editor's comment]*. For the fully developed version of her concept, see H. Radlińska (1961), *Pedagogika społeczna* [Social Pedagogy], Ossolineum, Wrocław.

Axiology of local community organizing

In normative and axiological terms, the LCO model is based on **communitarianism**. Consequently, it values local communities and community movements, as well as NGOs and other less formalized active agents of the civic society. Furthermore, the model is built around the respect for the dignity of each person and for the right of all members of the community to self-determination. It relies on values such as equality (both of rights and of duties), solidarity (shared responsibility), and social justice. These values are closely connected with working to eliminate discrimination and to creating conditions where all citizens are fully able to participate in social life (the principle of inclusion). Another idea incorporated into the LCO model is that of participation, which brings to life a democracy that is participatory in nature and thus builds the foundation of the civic society. Finally, LCO invokes the idea of collective cooperation based on reciprocity and on voluntary work *pro publico bono*. This has the objective of achieving a better quality of life, which is not possible without improving the quality of life of the marginalized local communities.

Three professional roles of a community organizer in the local community

The process of change is triggered by a local community organizer who engages in direct action in the community until structures emerge which could take over this role, thus bringing to life the notion of self-determination. An empowered and self-organizing community is the ultimate goal of LCO; this is the benchmark of LCO's success. In the LCO model, the organizer serves a professional function comprised of three key professional roles in the community: (1) local animator, (2) networker, and (3) local planner. This bundle of three roles determines the scope and character of the organizer's work. If this work is carried out consistently, then over a longer period it leads to sustainable social change in the community.

Animation, understood as work designed to breathe life into the community and to activate the local residents, is the fundamental

type of community work. As such, it often paves the way for network-building and social planning. A local community organizer – as an **animator** – stimulates people, groups and the entire community to become involved. The animator also initiates and supports initiatives that will lead to the emergence of structures necessary to solve the problems that are present in the community, or to satisfy local needs. The animator does not take the position of the leader, neither formally nor informally: the animator's role is to support, not to direct.

The role of **networker** consists in building networks of cooperation and communication between individuals, groups, institutions and organizations, and in initiating local partnerships. The organizer acts as an intermediary, easing the first steps in the contacts between various social actors, and helping them to develop platforms for maintaining their relations and cooperation. Self-organizing remains the ultimate goal. Networking, therefore, primarily encourages the development of horizontal relations. Networking tends to be successful only in communities that are already 'on the move', so animation should precede the network-building efforts. However, animation and network-building should continue even after the networks are established. All three roles that comprise the above-mentioned bundle are intertwined; in some stages of LCO, one role may (and should) simply take priority over the others.

The organizer as a **local planner** is an active participant of the process of designing and implementing social policy at the local level (with a focus on meeting local needs). Here, it is essential for the organizer to be involved in the drafting of local strategies for handling social problems, activation programs, and infrastructure (as related to social needs). The organizer should also initiate social campaigns. Yet this role should not be connected to politics in the sense of supporting particular interests of certain groups. The local community organizer is 'political' in that they favour long-term thinking, as well as actions geared towards achieving the goals that have been adopted for the community in a joint decision-making process. When participating in the broader processes of social planning, the local planner advocates for the community and for

those whose interests tend to be marginalized; the planner is an ally who, in the planning processes, always takes their side.

Professional community organizing requires certain skills and knowledge. These are both the skills generally required in community work, and extra skills required due to the organizer's three above-mentioned roles. **Interpersonal skills** are central here. Local community organizing is founded primarily on contacts with other people – that is, local residents and representatives of local institutions, organizations, and authorities.

The relations between the three professional roles in organizing the local community

The three roles that together comprise the work of a local community organizer are intertwined; they complement each other. Practised together, they lay the foundation for sustainable change not only in the marginalized community, but also in the greater structure of which that community is a part. Experience suggests that the process of local community organizing requires the organizer to put the greatest effort in becoming an animator first. It is only in the later stages that the role of a networker and later a planner comes to the foreground. Nonetheless, in all stages of the process, the organizer remains in their professional capacity, which is always comprised of all three roles. The organizer must not forget that animation itself is, of course, going to bring about a certain change, but without the networks to cement the elements into a whole, this change will be ephemeral; it will not result in any significant inclusion of the marginalized persons or groups. Maintaining the improvements is also likely to fail if the development of the community remains outside the primary scope of interest of the municipality. Here, advocacy is crucial. It must be focused on the interest of the most deprived groups and communities, and must be accomplished by participating in the planning processes with a specific objective in mind. The objective is that local community organizing, as a community-oriented service, must be included in the programs and strategies devised by the municipality, and in this way must become a fixed element of the social policy at the local level. As the process of

community organizing progresses, the organizer switches focus from one role to another within the bundle. Yet even when the organizer becomes primarily a networker, for example, they never stop being an animator, and neither of these two roles ends when they become a local planner. At each stage, a different role may be crucial, but it is the combination of all three of them in the professional capacity of the community organizer that makes this process successful.

Local community organizer as a professional

In the LCO model, the professional community organizer may either be a social worker employed by the social welfare centre, or a person attached to other institutions of social welfare and social integration, including NGOs. Other persons with the relevant background may also serve as local community organizers, provided that they have experience in working with local communities – obtained, for example, in local activation programs. The model anticipates that in the future, local community organizing may become a new **professional specialization** or even a separate new **helping profession**. In order to facilitate this development, efforts must be made to create a community of local community organizers. This process was already started by the social workers who hold the function of organizers and educators in the social welfare centres where they are employed, and who participated in the pilot project mentioned at the start of this paper.

Local community organizer in the institutional structures

Another premise of the LCO model is that there are two options with regard to community organizing seen as a service provided by the municipality. Firstly, it may be delegated to public institutions, particularly **social welfare centres –** because they already have responsibilities in preventing the marginalization of persons, families, groups, and communities. Secondly, it may be contracted out to the **third sector**, to organizations that are active in the area of social welfare, reintegration, activation, and local development. If

the public institutions are tasked with community organizing, they should cooperate closely with the third sector in carrying out these duties, and should contract out selected elements of the service to the NGOs. Attempts to engage in 'community organizing' solely via public institutions may very quickly lose the 'community' element.

If social welfare centres are to implement the community work approach under the methodology postulated by the LCO model, they must establish within their structures specific units that would be in charge of engaging in professional work in local communities. The LCO model proposes a variety of solutions for how this can be accomplished, depending on the size of the social welfare centres and their financial and staffing capabilities. In large centres, the best solution is to establish **divisions or teams of community organizers** alongside the divisions that work with families. These new divisions would be in charge of coordinating all community-oriented efforts undertaken by the social welfare centre. In mid-sized social welfare centres, where establishing a separate division is not feasible, a separate position of a local community organizer should be created. In small centres with a very small number of staff, the solution is to formally outline the **responsibilities** in the area of local community organizing, and assign these responsibilities to one or several social workers.

The persons who serve as community organizers must have clearly defined responsibilities (specified in line with the methodology of the LCO model and built around the three roles of animator, networker, and local planner). Good candidates for community organizers can be found in social workers who see this type of work as an opportunity for personal and professional development, and who see it as a chance to break away from the inefficient routines that contribute to professional burnout (one of the biggest problems in this profession). Other persons with appropriate background may also serve as community organizers. The formation of a separate unit and the inclusion of local community organizing into the policy of the social welfare centre must be reflected in the core documentation of the centre (its charter and bylaws); only in this manner can community organizing become an inalienable component of the welfare centre's policy and operations.

Methods and instruments of local community organizing

The following elements comprise the framework of local community organizing: strategies of activation; subject-oriented and object-oriented instruments; a set of methods (based largely on the methodology of social work); and the elements on which actual work in the local communities is based.

Activating and mobilizing the people and the institutions

Activation strategies have two tiers: **(1) mobilizing the people**, which is connected with direct work with the local residents (at the level of a street, a neighbourhood, a town, a municipality, etc.) and the essence of which is the transformation of the people into a community by building relations, including everyone in the process of change, and bringing together the person and groups to turn them into a cohesive unit; and **(2) mobilizing the institutions** by promoting a new approach to challenges in the area of stimulating social activism, and bringing those who are marginalized back in to mainstream social life.

Subject–oriented and object–oriented instruments

The **instruments** of local community organizing fall into two categories: (1) **subject-oriented** (main tools – *narzędzia osiowe)* and (2) **object-oriented** (support tools – *narzędzia wspierające).* Subject-oriented instruments include working with local communities and with communities of need, i.e. categories of people with the same need. With regard to local communities, this work covers the entire spectrum of initiatives that pertain to the following: solving social problems, satisfying the needs of the entire community (or of its large parts), and creating the networks of cooperation. With regard to the communities of need, it must first be noted that working with them should not be

confused with group work. Work with the communities of need is focused on three things: solving the problems and satisfying the needs that are specific to certain marginalized groups; advocacy; and building networks of support. Regardless of the type of community, the actions cannot reach the micro-level only – they must extend beyond it and towards the overarching structures (the community organizer works not just with the marginalized communities but with the entire local community). The object-oriented instruments include local partnerships, groups, volunteers, social campaigns and events, advocacy, and ensuring access to information (operating advice centres).

Local partnerships

Local partnerships are an object-oriented instrument. They are a key element of building the networks of cooperation in the local community. Building local partnerships is a method of including the representatives of local institutions and organizations in the process of change. It is important to extend the offers of partnership to representatives of all sectors, including the local government. Participation of local government officials strengthens and legitimizes local partnerships. By definition, partnerships of this type are designed with a long-term perspective in mind, and their purpose is to secure sustainable positive social change. The partnerships may be strategic in nature, in which case their objective is the development of the wider community (with due attention to its specific components or problems). They may also be focused on specific issues, in which case their focus is on supporting the community in handling specific issues or satisfying specific needs.

Groups as micro–level territorial communities and micro–communities of interests

Establishing and supporting **groups** (by means of animation, self-organization and self-help microstructures) may be useful both in relation to local communities and communities of

need. Groups are an inherent component of every person's life. Membership is beneficial to group members on a variety of levels: psychologically, socially, and even materially (social capital). When working with a local community, even a micro-community, it is impossible to engage with every single resident. At least initially, it is easier to interact with a smaller number of persons who have similar problems. It is therefore the responsibility of the organizer to provide the starting impulse for the establishment of groups. The focus of the groups may change at the individual, group, and community level. Local community organizing involves primarily small social groups (self-help groups, professional support groups, civic groups, educational groups) as well as larger groups for members of communities of need (seniors, mothers, etc.). An organizer should work to promote the creation of new groups and offer support to existing ones, and use their potential in the process of change. The organizer should also attempt to integrate all of the groups that are active across the community.

Volunteers

The work of **volunteers** is considered an instrument of local community organizing because volunteering is a significant form of activation, of bringing out people's potential, and of making people aware of the needs of others (individuals, groups, communities). It is beneficial both for those who offer help and for those to whom it is offered. In community organizing, volunteer work may be included either by involving people who are already volunteering in the process of change, or by encouraging others to volunteer. In the LCO model, the focus is on organizing the work of the volunteers. This can be achieved, for example, by establishing volunteer clubs or groups. In the process, the volunteers receive professional support from the institutions and organizations that benefit from their unpaid work, which is in line with the provisions of the statute on public benefit activity and volunteering.

Local social campaigns and events

Social campaigns and events are listed as object-oriented instruments of local community organizing because of their power to facilitate a change of attitudes, beliefs, and habits. They are an important component of generating change, not just in a specific marginalized community but also in the overarching structures surrounding this community. Social campaigns have the power to educate, to raise awareness, and to encourage a change of attitudes, beliefs, and habits. This is because they demonstrate the importance of a given issue, and in doing so, they influence attitudes towards both the issue and the persons affected by it. Social campaigns may also be able to reinforce new patters of behaviour. As a component of social campaigns, local events may be held; such events may also be used as stand-alone instruments to reinforce the process of change in the community. The purpose of local events is to integrate and educate the residents, and to activate them too – by including them in the preparation, production, and evaluation of the event.

Advocacy and advice

Advocacy and advice have a significant impact on the process of social change. The objective of advocacy is to draw attention to the problems and needs of the marginalized community, and to articulate and promote the interests of this community. This is crucially important; many issues are beyond the power of community members and are decided at the level of local institutions, organizations or authorities, including the local lawmakers. The second instrument (e.g. operating advice centres) facilitates and organizes local communication, and provides access to information and advice. This generates trust and builds a foundation for accumulating social capital. For marginalized communities, access to information is vital. Inability to access information increases the helplessness of community members. It not only aggravates the existing difficulties but may also lead to new problems too.

The structure of the process of local community organizing

The following **components** outline the framework of local community organizing: (1) diagnosis, (2) activation, (3) integration, and (4) education. The **diagnosis** is the study and analysis of the community in terms of its potential, needs, and problems, including their reasons, symptoms, and effects.[4] This component provides both a starting point and a benchmark for monitoring progress and evaluating effectiveness and efficiency. The process of diagnosis is qualitative in nature; the organizer is both a researcher and an instrument of social changes. **Activation** is connected with building and developing a network, and with involving community members so they act together. It centres on the notion of mobilization towards resourcefulness (both individual and collective), and on exposing and strengthening the potential for development. Activation leads to empowerment and independence of local residents. Its objective is the satisfaction of the collective needs of the community. **Integration** focuses on bringing together the elements of a community and merging them into a coherent whole. The process involves creating shared values and models of behaviour, negotiating shared beliefs, finding shared interests, and establishing new institutions together. The fourth component is **education**, in particular non-formal and informal education. It is geared towards increasing the knowledge and skills of the community members, towards increasing their engagement, and encouraging creativity and independent thought. It also works towards promoting responsibility and – most importantly – agency of individuals, groups, and the community as a whole.

These four components form the structure of local community organizing. They are interconnected and intertwined. They complement one another, together creating a platform for generating social change. A community organizer should ensure that all initiatives in the local community take all four dimensions into account: diagnostic, activating, integrating, and educational.

[4]   The study and analysis are based first of all on the action research methods and techniques that are described in the full version of the volume on LCO model (editor's note).

The methods of local community organizing (the procedure)

Professional implementation of the LCO model requires that the community work follows a clear **procedure** that (i) is the same for local communities and communities of need, and (ii) outlines a cycle which is repeated until structures emerge that can take over the work towards the development of the community. The cycle comprises six stages. Community members and local institutions should be included in the implementation of all of these stages.

(1) **Environmental diagnosis** is connected with the identification and analysis of the situation of the local community, taking into account the following factors: landscape and geography, social and cultural circumstances, potential of community members, needs and problems of community members, and potential of the entire environment. The last element is particularly important: it points to the strengths and abilities for action and improvement. In the diagnostic process, it is vital to focus on the empowerment of the community. Consequently, cohesion, agency, influence, engagement, participation, and cooperation must be studied and analysed. The diagnosis concludes with a report (a map of resources and needs), which should be updated and amended as needed.

(2) **Choice of the subject and identification of the subject's need and potential** is connected with deciding which persons, groups or entities will first become the subject of the community work, or what type of issues will first become the focus. Once the decision is made, it is necessary to learn as much as possible about this person, group, or entity, as well the needs, problems, and potential. The more knowledge that is accumulated, the easier it will be to reach these persons and include them in the efforts.

(3) **Getting to know the people, institutions, and organizations – finding allies** is connected (as the name

suggests) with meeting people – both residents and representatives of organizations, and institutions, including the local authorities. The organizer should not work alone. The organizer's responsibility is to (i) meet people, develop relationships with them, and build trust, and (ii) find allies who will actively participate in the community work.

(4) **Creating a plan and a structure of action/change** is connected with initiating meetings with community members in order to include them in discussing and planning action geared towards achieving change. The plans should address the following issues: what should be done, when, and how; what resources and funds are necessary; how will they be acquired; who is going to be responsible for the entire project and for each of its parts. Meetings with community members must be a constant element of the community organizer's work.

(5) **Executing the plan** is connected with carrying out the steps necessary to complete the actions contemplated in the plan. At this stage, the organizer is responsible for supporting and motivating the persons or groups who are involved in accomplishing the planned objective. It is also very important to celebrate successes together and to express appreciation for even the smallest achievements; it increases motivation for further work.

(6) **Monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness** is connected with systematic collection and analysis of data relevant to the projects, in order to study the changes that take place in the community.

Measuring the effectiveness of local community organizing

The main objective of local community organizing is the improvement of disadvantageous conditions in those communities at risk of social exclusion. If the change is to be sustainable and offer a true improvement, it must arise out of three interlinked

sources. The first source is the results of actions taken together, which solve or mitigate specific problems or satisfy a specific need (such as, for example, building a football pitch for young people which gives them something to do in their free time). The second source is the personal development of community members, i.e. the increase in their individual skills and competencies. The third and most important source is empowerment. This, in turn, is linked to five interconnected dimensions that impact the power of a community:

- coherence (respect, sensitivity, identity, and ensuring equality of opportunity)
- agency (self-confidence, self-image, willingness to change)
- influence (feeling of being in control and having an influence on decision-making)
- engagement (thinking in terms of the community, trust, relations, motivation)
- cooperation (networks, openness, willingness to cooperate).[5]

5   In Polish, the first letters add up to the acronym SUWAK (*Spójność* - cohesion, *Upodmiotowienie* – agency, *Wpływ* – influence, *Angażowanie* - engagement, *Kooperacja* – cooperation), which means 'zip'. The metaphor is that local community organizing works like a zip: on the one hand, it brings the various elements into one whole; on the other hand, it opens the social group to the wider community.

These dimensions have a twofold effect: on the one hand, they bring the various elements together to create one whole. On the other hand, they open the subject (individuals, groups, communities) to the wider social context.

Benefits of local community organizing

When local community organizing is implemented as a community-oriented service provided by the welfare system, the benefits are fourfold.

Benefits for the members of the community

First of all, the **members of the community** in which organizing efforts are underway stand to benefit from them. These benefits range from improved quality of life (as a result of solving or

mitigating problems and satisfying needs) through empowerment, greater self-confidence and active engagement in common issues, to the power and agency connected with having influence on decision-making for issues of immediate relevance to the community members. Moreover, by participating in the process of change, local residents acquire social and practical skills in the area of problem solving and coping with difficulties, both individually and collectively. Finally, participation increases the feeling of connectedness to the place where the community members live. This increases their attachment to it, in effect creating a clearer collective local identity.

Benefits for the social services

Local community organizing is also beneficial in terms of **development of public social services** in general, and municipality social welfare centres in particular. It enables the social welfare centres to shed the role of an agency that deals mainly with financial assistance, and take on a new role of a social agent of increasing importance. Local community organizing means that the social welfare centre becomes a learning institution, sensitive to the changing local conditions and constantly on the lookout for professional opportunities for effective action. Moreover, local community organizing expands the scope of services. In terms of social work, LCO is also an opportunity for growth. Social work should be (and, sadly, today is not) the main instrument wielded by social workers. Social work should not be limited to working with individuals and families; it is not an affective mode of operations. Instead, it should take into account the whole environment in which these individuals and families live. Without changing this environment, sustainable change in the lives of these individuals and families is practically impossible.

LCO offers the opportunity to use all the methods and techniques of social work specified by the current statute on social welfare. It is thus an opportunity to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the welfare system, including the work focused on individuals and families. An active and energetic local community

is the social worker's best ally, because it can provide invaluable support to persons in unfavourable circumstances. By making LCO a permanent component of local policies of social welfare centres, it changes the perception of these institutions and garners trust in the local community.

For the social workers, local community organizing is an opportunity to be more than a clerk. It prevents professional burnout – working in the community is much more rewarding than the bureaucratic process of formal interviews and handing out payouts. When both the community members and the local institutions and organizations are included in the joint efforts, the social worker is no longer isolated; the responsibility is shared. Consequently, the role is less burdensome. LCO offers the social workers the option of multifaceted professional development. It is also a way to build a professional identity that is strong and resilient (e.g. against burnout), and that opens new avenues for social workers – for example, working for a variety of social welfare and social integration institutions, both public and third sector based.

Benefits for the third sector (development of the civic society)

LCO understood as a social service –contracted out in whole (or in part) to third sector organizations, or managed in such way to ensure they have a part in the process (when the responsibility remains on the part of the public institutions) – is an opportunity to strengthen the role of the **civic society** in creating and implementing social policy at the local level. It is also conducive to the emergence of new NGOs. Boosting the third sector translates into increased civic activity, stronger connections, greater social capital, and increased social participation. Research on Poland's (re-born) democracy recommends that all of these outcomes should be treated as vital.

Benefits for the municipality

Local community organizing generates **benefits for the municipality** too. In particular these include: increased engagement of the local residents in issues of the municipality; a sense of responsibility on the part of the residents for their own lives and the life of their immediate community and municipality; increased attachment to their immediate community and the municipality of which it is a part. If the municipality is understood as being the people who live there (and who exercise their power of self-government via the elected local authorities), LCO directly improves the condition of the municipality by having a positive impact on the quality of life of its residents. LCO decreases social exclusion and promotes the equal opportunities approach by including the marginalized groups in the social mainstream. It taps the potential of persons, groups, and local communities, and of the local institutional resources (public, NGO, and business), thus increasing the potential of the civic society. By establishing partnerships, it limits duplication of actions and promotes a coherent social policy that is pro-development in nature. It is sustainable because dialogue, partnerships and other instruments of local community organizing tend to cause the harmonization both of needs and of how they are satisfied. LCO encourages the accumulation of social capital and generates trust towards local authorities and public institutions.

Considered together, these factors have a tremendous impact on the social, cultural and ecological development of a municipality. Increased activism, greater engagement, and a greater sense of responsibility also have a great impact on the local economy. Active community members stand a far better chance of entering the labour market and safely remaining there, compared to community members who are passive, isolated, and marginalized. Finally the development of social services, including local community organizing, tends to translate into the creation of new jobs.

chapter

12

Bohdan Skrzypczak

Laboratory of Social Innovation. The power of dialogue and co–decision–making

The paper presents the social and academic assumptions behind the project 'Creating and developing standards of social welfare and social integration services – the community social work standard'. The analytical part of the project was completed within the framework of the Laboratory of Social Innovation (*Laboratorium Innowacji Społecznej* - LIS). The paper explains the multidimensionality of the Laboratory with regard to its underlying concepts and its practice.

An active community: theory and practice as inspiration

The Laboratory of Social Innovation was established to design and test solutions that would incorporate community work into institutional social welfare and social integration.

The diagnoses[1] clearly demonstrate that so far in Poland no comprehensive approach to community-based social services has been implemented consistently by public and non-public institutions. Recently a number of large projects co-financed by the European Union and the World Bank[2] have ventured into community work, but no long-term strategy has been developed as to its permanent incorporation into the social welfare and social integration system (Grewiński, Skrzypczak eds. 2010). Moreover, these attempts at community work have often been methodologically unsound. This has been particularly evident with regard to public welfare institutions that have had no adequate preparation to offer

[1]   All the opinions drafted by and for LIS are published online at www.osl.org.pl; they key texts were also published in the numerous volumes of the editorial series bearing the title *Prace LIS*.

[2]   In particular the Post-Accession Program of Support for Rural Areas (*Poakcesyjny Program Wsparcia Obszarów Wiejskich*) carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

community-based social services. The social welfare centres and family assistance centres are constantly understaffed with social workers skilled in the area of community work.

The practice of community work shows that social animation is the key methodological perspective in this type of social work; this is confirmed by socio-educational experiments (see Rybka, Łuszczyńska 2011, pp. 16–35). Social animation in turn is founded on education – in particular informal education – in the course of which people (by means of interaction and dialogue) identify their needs, decide on an action plan, execute the plan, and then share their reflections. This approach is similar to community education, a concept derived from social pedagogy, which values reciprocal learning in a local community.

In methodological terms, the vital issue is that socio-educational activity must prevail over passivity (drifting, submitting to the historical and social processes). A person is active when they are in control of certain processes, and they are passive if they simply submit to them – as stated by Amitai Etzioni in the 1960s. In his *Active Society* (Etzioni 1968), Amitai Etzioni noted that activity is powered by community-centric social mechanisms. Today, many symptoms indicate that there is a need for a 'communitarian correction' to the dominant neoliberal perspective (McWilliams ed. 2006). To an extent, it explains why the work (both theoretical and public) of the main proponent of the communitarian approach[3] provided important inspirations for the Laboratory of Social Innovation. Etzioni's concepts were mediated by the notion of 'active communities' (see Jordan, Skrzypczak eds. 2010–2013), which the team used as a backbone of their socio-pedagogical reflection.

In both cases, there is an unbreakable connection between the components of an active orientation: awareness and knowledge, goals, moral obligations, and the ability to change social relations (i.e. power). Not just individuals, but also communities and organizations are perceived as agents. Their agency is demonstrated in their mediating role in activating social ties. The emergence of the ties may be catalyzed by an animator (in our concept, this is where the social worker plays a role). The animator

[3] See www.communitariannetwork.org.

is a reflective practitioner who consistently monitors their own mindset and actions and accepts moral obligations.

The project that provided the framework for our research was systematic in nature, in the sense that its key focus was a modification of the entire system. As such, it forced us to prioritize solutions with good practical applicability. This in turn means that we had to examine the connection between the theory of agency and the systems theory. Etzioni suggests that a potential for such a connection can be found in the knowledge that is socially constructed, as long as we perceive it as a factor of change and as practical wisdom (phronesis) (see Joas 1998/1999), pp. 23-31, p. 18). Activity is then perceived as integration of the subject and the system, and thus is able to have a direct impact. This is achieved by giving appropriate structure to the social aspect (institutionalization). In this way, activation is tied to the responsibility for creating communities and institutions, i.e. the notion of responsiveness.

Awareness of (and sensitivity to) the needs of the community was the main challenge that we faced in designing the method of community work. In the spirit of communitarianism, we insisted that a person be always perceived as a member of communities (and organizations or institutions). These collective entities have the power to liberate. This mechanism offers the option of gaining control. Thus the road to autonomy leads through an active search for relationships with others (Nowak 2011, p. 164; Nowak 2007, pp. 49–58), which are then consciously shaped as areas of consensus. Communities make it possible to set goals, to determine norms and values, and to express the requirements of each person.[4] Socially mediated knowledge is a vital element of the consciousness of social actors both collective and individual. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the mechanisms of knowledge production, with particular emphasis on the self-knowledge of the social actors. This brings us to the idea of pedagogy of a social laboratory (*per analogiam* to anthropology of a laboratory), in which an 'active community' is projected as institutionalized 'movement' leading to the production of new social knowledge (with a potential to remodel the elements of the structure).

[4]   Etzioni discusses these issues in the following chapters of his book: *Societal Knowledge and Collective Reality-Testing, Knowledge and Power, Societal Knowledge Its Distribution and Reallocation, Societal Consciousness and Societal Action* (Etzioni 1968).

Premises and organizational structure of the laboratory

The Laboratory of Social Innovation (LIS) was created as the central instrument that would organize the work of the partnership founded to design a standard (a model) of social work in the community (community work). It was to provide a quasi-institutional space for the duration of the project, focusing on integrating the various parts of the design and ensuring that it was consistent. The potential of LIS was mainly rooted in its staff, composed of members of two organizations:

- Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL: an animation-focused organization that has years of experience in participatory local development and that specializes in community education and action research
- Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych: an expert think-tank that specializes in translating academic and expert knowledge into practice and social policy, with expertise in active social policy.

The establishment of LIS and ensuring that its work progressed smoothly was the responsibility of Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL (Center for Local Activity Support CAL Association – CAL Association); Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych (Institute of Public Affairs Foundation – IPA) provided partnership and cooperation. As specified in the project's documentation, the focus of LIS was on persons and actions that combine theory (e.g. participation of scholars and academic experts) with practice (e.g. participation of welfare and integration institutions). LIS was designed to operate simultaneously in several directions:

- **Design of a model of local community organizing (LCO).**
  The efforts in this area were led by an interdisciplinary team. The team's key experts (who were also involved in the entire project) were: Maria Mendel, Barbara Bąbska, Magdalena Popłońska-Kowalska, Magdalena Dudkiewicz, Tomasz

Kaźmierczak, Paweł Jordan, and Marek Rymsza.[5] The team was led by Bohdan Skrzypczak, who also coordinated the work of the partnership. The team included, on an as-needed basis, researchers, experts, and practitioners from CAL Association and from IPA, as well as (by invitation) experts from Poland and abroad, e.g. from Great Britain and Germany. As an extension of the core team, research teams were established to carry out fieldwork. Other experts provided analyses of various aspects of community work. The team also systematically cooperated with the project leader (Centrum Rozwoju Zasobów Ludzkich – CRZL) and the commissioning institution (Department of Social Welfare and Social Integration at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy).[6]

- **Integrated educational outreach.** A team of 25 educators, led by Paweł Jordan, was responsible for providing training- and education-related support, in particular by serving as trainers (lead trainers and specialist trainers), coaches, mentors, supervisors, researchers, and social pedagogues. The team was responsible for stimulating and monitoring the process of testing the LCO model in local communities. The dialogue within the team was important in mediating between the design team (experts and scholars) and the testing that took place in the municipalities and social welfare centres (social workers as community organizers).

- **Testing the LCO model in practice.** Testing took place in 48 local communities. Indirectly, it also occurred in social welfare centres. At the heart of the testing effort was a group of 82 social workers, divided into four groups: big cities (21 persons), mid-sized towns (20 persons), rural areas (20 persons), and educators (21 persons). The team members maintained a reflexive practice model in a 2-year process of 'action education' (*per analogiam* to 'action research', but with a focus on acquisition of new professional skills).

- **Active identification and stimulation of community practices** that do not arise out of professional social

[5]   The core team of 7 researchers was supplemented on an as-needed basis by researchers, experts, and practitioners (from within the project and externally), so that each session had approx. 15 expert participants.

[6]   See also the English version of the executive summary of the report on the model, also in this volume *[editor's comment]*.

work (community work) but that also produce 'active communities.' In this part of the project, 16 regional animators sought out and (with the assistance of the members of the relevant communities) prepared methodological profiles of three or more good community practices in each voivodship.

- Management and coordination. The coordinating team (split between CAL Association and IPA) was led by Magda Ramos-Smul. It provided administrative, logistical, and monitoring support to the operation, and was in charge of evaluations. Due to the scale of the project and its attendant massive documentation requirements (research processes, training processes, project reporting), the team was crucial. Its responsibilities also included commissioning expert opinions on matters of law and economy from external experts. The coordinating team created a space for broad participation by including at various stages many social workers as well as social welfare and social integration organizations and institutions (several dozen seminars and conferences, including national conferences; animators' forum; training sessions to promote LCO – over 5 000 participants in total). The team was also responsible for the publications, the newsletter, and the online portal.

Scientific concept

Laboratory of Social Innovation as a scientific partnership facilitated by Professor Maria Mendel operated within the paradigm of a social laboratory. The model consists in systematically designing social change, perceived in terms of education, by arranging and modelling a social space for confrontation. The teleological and praxeological perspectives (adaptive rationality) are combined with a critical pedagogical reflection (emancipatory communicative rationality).

Founded on the notion of a social laboratory (Skrzypczak 2013), the Laboratory of Social Innovation allows for a reconceptualization of 'knowledge' in the sense proposed by anthropology of the

laboratory. It shifts emphasis from asking about knowledge to asking about know knowledge is socially produced (Fleck 1986) and applied. It studies the controversies and conflicts within science and analyzes 'incomplete' knowledge, i.e. the knowledge in the process of production (Knorr-Cetina 1995, p. 140). Laboratory practices geared towards producing knowledge are not descriptive. They do more than merely reflect reality. They produce specific practically applicable results by means of a process of negotiation, which is social by nature (Knorr-Cetina 1995, p. 141). A laboratory is thus not a physical space of scientific research, but rather a space of transformation of relations between the institutional (political) order and the social world; between social actors and their environments (Knorr-Cetina 1995, p. 145). It is a method of generating new tentative social arrangements and incorporating them into the social reality (i.e. institutionalizing them – Radziewicz-Winnicki 2010, pp. 83–90). Its underlying principles stipulate that community education, founded on emancipation and on awakening the power latent in the people, should be accompanied by profound critical intellectual reflection. It should also be implemented in an education-driven manner (for example, as a social or public service) and play out across several types of spaces, which are discussed below.

The space of social production of knowledge

A knowledge-based society appreciates wisdom as a quality than cannot be reduced to knowledge. It appreciates the ability to process information (knowledge), the ability to apply it (wisdom), and the effectiveness of the application (phronesis). Consequently, science and politics become interested in the mechanisms of its social (co)production. As a result, a macroscopic approach is adopted (Hejnicka-Bezwińska 2008, pp. 30; 34). In a laboratory, this leads to the necessity of rising above the various partial methods and strategies of education (pedagogies) and the various pedagogical viewpoints (paradigms) in order to bring together various empirical research results and various worldviews. Also taken into account is the need to locate information across a variety of contexts, structures, and social networks, as well as social policy solutions.

In this approach, every person is an agent who learns and processes information into knowledge. The process of social production of knowledge modifies the structures of learning and thus also the rationality (*modus operandi*). Important processes govern the production of knowledge, its self-production, and its social legitimization. In practice, this translates into accepting cooperation as the fundamental organizing principle of planning and executing projects intended to trigger social change (Krajewski 2012). The laboratory becomes a platform of interdisciplinary international cooperation between various actors who in different areas of life deal with the social and community dimension of various processes. The persons who create the platform are only needed to moderate and map the network of contexts that comprise the entirety of the issue at hand.

The space of institutionalizing the community

How to help people, in a systematic manner (as stipulated by the project), to reduce the uncertainty of living in the world? Neo-institutionalism provides one answer. It proposes the responsibility should be transferred onto social institutions. In consequence, individuals incur lower transactional costs than they would incur if they had to interact with one another without the mediator (Pawlak 1993, p. 70). Institutionalization (in the sociological sense) is a process of emergence, articulation, and solidification of normative structures such as social rules, models, norms, and values (Sztompka 2002, p. 432). Social institutions ensure safety of human endeavours. There are many definitions of social institutions. Following Piotr Chmielewski, we may use the theory of social capital as the common denominator, particularly as explored by James Coleman (see Chmielowski 1991). In this theory, as people act and solve the dilemmas inherent to their interactions, capital is generated that these people need to function socially. This capital consists of material and symbolic resources that are conductive to the institutionalization of collective life (Pawlak 1993, p. 66). In this approach, the emergence of social institutions is a conscious choice and a social construct derived from social agreement on the matter.

Chmielewski notes that the institutionalization approach should be considered together with critiques, such as those offered by Michel Foucault, Michel Crozier, and Erving Goffman. These critiques draw the attention to the objectification of people by institutions. The institutions are portrayed as totalitarian, coercive, disciplinarian, and dehumanized. In response, neo-institutionalism proposes an institution that transforms the people but is transformed by them in turn (Chmielowski 1991, p. 219). In the Laboratory of Social Innovation, this is the approach that was used.

A space of action and agency

Social sciences and humanities recently have been experiencing a shift that is sometimes labelled the 'performative turn' (see Domańska 2007) or performative methodology. There appears to be a broad interdisciplinary trend towards a new appreciation of the social actors' role (and their agency) in transforming the social reality. Performativity, as well as many other concepts of social learning (crucial for community work), fits into the larger framework of constructivism. Constructivism relies on the premise that social and cultural phenomena exist and change as a result of social actions. They are produced and reproduced by means of symbolic practices, and then repeated and interpreted by interacting social actors. These practices (such as for example festivals, campaigns, social activism, NGO involvement, or involvement in groups) are therefore analysed in terms of agency, i.e. the ability to transform the social reality. In performance, the emphasis is on being the subject – and not the object – of change. Activity as such is no longer sufficient to trigger change. Effective change requires that a force be applied to the very construct (structure) in order to breach its integrity. Short-term goals are not enough. The focus is on change (perceived as positive) and on the agent (the performing actor) who is a product of change but who also produces change. The image of a performer, an artist, comes to mind. The society is the stage. There is no division between the actors and the audience. The performer arranges the space to meet the needs of the spectacle of social change.

Following this line of thought, the Laboratory was organized in a three-tier model, accounting for all categories of actors: people, institutions, procedures, the law, and the locations. The following 'collectives' were established:

- a 'micro-collective' of researchers (7–15 persons) whose goal was to proceed towards creating and developing standards of social welfare and social integration services

- a 'mezzo-collective' of educators (25) and social workers (82) who work as community organizers, testing various options; together, they produce community narrations which serve as a foundation of a new identity: that of a community organizer

- a 'macro-collective' of persons and institutions who participate in experiments (52 local experiments), consultations, meetings, and conferences in the dissemination phase (over 5000 persons), indirectly influencing the new systematic solutions. The macro-collective included the micro- and mezzo-collectives.

The Laboratory as a micro–collective

The relations between the Laboratory's members and the type of knowledge generated during the discussions and debates turned LIS into an inter-professional inquisitive community. The members, despite sharing a common goal, were far from unanimous in their approaches to problems, assessments of situations, and plans for future actions. In the course of the debates, on the basis of their different experiences as social workers, scholars, and experts, they worked towards a shared position. They operated in the relational space of 'between': the space that arises in interpersonal relations, erected directly on the interpersonal ties that grow stronger through the exchange. This is how the knowledge (the project's crucial resource and potential) was produced: in the process of social education, using the synergy of the micro-collective of representatives of various professions and differing viewpoints.[7] The

7   See also similarly defined terms: professional community *(profesjonalna wspólnota)* and interprofessional education *(interprofesjonalna edukacja)* in: Mendel 2001.

knowledge was dynamic in nature. It was not indifferent to the new challenges and new problems. It had an impact on their resolution.

The format and climate of the discussions and debates among the members of LIS were close to what Matthew Lipman described as 'shared inquisitiveness', which can only occur in an 'inquisitive community' (see Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan 1997). An inquisitive community strives to understand itself by means of dialogue and logic, and to understand the problems it analyses. It self-corrects, and it takes the context into account. This is a very accurate description of the discussions in the Laboratory, the members of which were bound together, morphing into a community. This is why we believe that the Laboratory of Social Innovation was in fact an inter-professional inquisitive community.

In this spirit of inter-professional community, the Laboratory conducted systematic research in the period 2009–2013. It constantly made efforts to compare the practices it analyzed with the relevant theoretical constructs, and to take a broad social and political context into account. These confrontations were always future-oriented, in line with the premises of the pedagogy of the laboratory. They were always geared towards the change that was the goal of the project. After four years, the Laboratory produced an explanatory contextualized description of the social welfare reality. This in turn led to the design of the LCO model, of its instruments, and of its legislative framework. LCO is a model of innovative social work which is [emphasis by BS] local community organizing.

The Laboratory as an educational mezzo–collective

Before the above-listed scientific ideas and approaches could be implemented into social practice, they required operationalization. In the Laboratory, ideas and realities were processed in the framework of action research. In most general terms, action research originates with the concept developed by Kurt Lewin in the interwar period. It is a space in which the researcher is able to experience the power of reflection and debate. The researcher
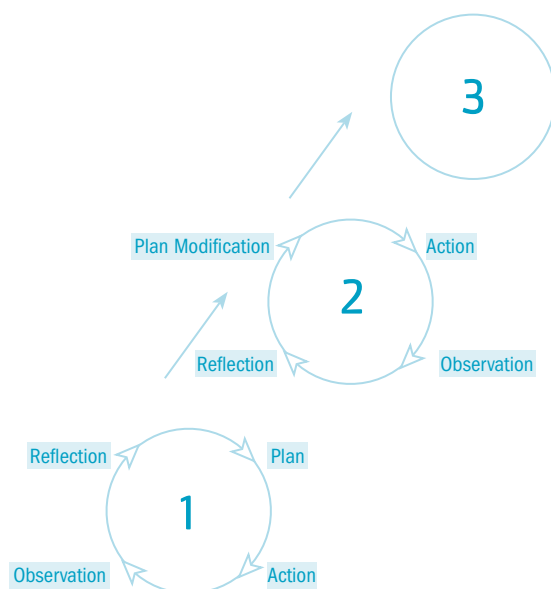
gains a sense of making a decision leading to specific actions. It is a sequence of steps, an evolution of participation in an action research team Adelman 1993). The micro and mezzo levels of the Laboratory of Social Innovation may be described as an education-oriented adaptation of participatory action research as posited by Kurt Lewin (while remaining a form of pedagogy of the laboratory). The composition of the teams was promising in terms of combining the scientific, practical, and expert discourses. The objectives focused on continual education: reflection and discussion of the actions and their (re)organization as needed. In this sense, action research may be perceived as "participatory and collaborative process of self-reflection", in the course of which both individual and collective patterns of though and action are modified. Essentially, an action research team constitutes a self-critical community with a focus on change. John Elliott notes that the main point of action research is not to scientifically test the truth, but rather to provide practical opinions in specific situation (Elliott 1991, p. 69).

In our project, implementation of the action research approach led to a 2-year process based on the 'education and action' formula, as illustrated in Chart 1.

The stages of action research were executed in the form of two loops, of which the first was processual in nature and the second was connected to creating a social service:

- action consisted of five training sessions (in the first cycle they focused on the process of local community organizing; in the second cycle, on the instruments of implementing a social service)
- observation was conducted by supervisors and mentors
- reflection was the responsibility of coaches, lead trainers, and supervisors
- planning was carried out by the local teams with the support of mentors and supervisors.

The entire 'action education' process was accompanied by pedagogical research designed to stimulate reflection on the professional identity of local community organizers.

Chart 1. Education and action – helix formula

Source: Author's own based on literature to the subject (especially Zuber-Skerriitt 2001, p. 15) and practical experiences in implementing the LCO model.

The participants learned, then acted, shared insights, produced knowledge, and with this new knowledge, acted again. They became a community of support and learning, with the moderation of the educator. This type of education ('engaged education') is conducive to developing an active attitude and promotes responsibility in interpersonal relations. Its underlying values are: the dignity of a person, respect, and social fairness.

The training program in the pilot project was based on the action research / action education paradigm on two levels. The first level was the training sessions; the second level was the community work that followed the sessions, as well as the process of reflection that was the basis of the LCO model. Over a period of almost 2 years, the participants went through two loops of 'action education'. They studied during the sessions, then used the knowledge in their homework assignments, and finally returned for

their next sessions, where they discussed their work individually and collectively. Their diaries provided the stimulus for reflection, and they had the constant support of the coaches and mentors. In a parallel section of the project, the supervisors ensured that the community work approach took hold in the welfare centres.

Pedagogical focus group research provided another pathway of learning and reflection. Three sessions were held: at the beginning, middle, and end of the pilot project. The focus group research provided an external stimulus for (self-)reflection on the process of entering into a new professional role (acquiring an autonomous professional identity). It also served as an opportunity to monitor the progress of the social workers along the spectrum of change. The local community organizers also participated in a study visit to Great Britain and in three national animators' forum events.

The process of action education conducted in 52 local communities was supported by a team of 25 educators with the following roles:

- lead trainer – worked with one group for the duration of the project, ensured that the training proceeded logically, monitored the atmosphere in the group, consulted on homework assignments (a report after each session)
- specialist trainer – specialised in a specific topic and acted as lead trainer with regard to that topic
- coach – monitored the progress of the group and of its individual members, encouraged diary-keeping, provided excerpts from the diaries for the use of other specialists
- mentor – provided individual direct (on site) support to the participants, assisted with homework assignments (a report after each visits)
- supervisor– offered direct support in the implementation of the LCO model in the social welfare centres (a report after each visits).

Chart 2 offers an overview of the process of 'action education'.

The Laboratory as a macro–collective of systematic modelling

The Laboratory was established in order to create a model of community work that would be systematically applicable, i.e. that could be incorporated into the social welfare and social integration system. In their work, the team at the Laboratory relied on pragmatic epistemology (Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Maria and Stanisław Ossowscy, Adam Podgórecki, Tadeusz Pasiebiński) and on the neo-humanist paradigm (Kubinowski 2010), taking into account also certain post-humanist inspirations (see e.g. Markowska, Jewdokimow 2010).

In a most general sense, developing a model consists first of all in an exploration of the process or phenomenon (of which local community organizing is both). Then, it consists in proposing a simplified version of it. This version reflects only selected aspects of the process or phenomenon. Developing a model is also a mechanism of social education. In contrast to mimicry, it "goes beyond outwards similarities, because it incorporates conduct that is symbolically equivalent to what takes place in the original process/phenomenon" (Duraj-Nowakowa 1997, p. 123). It may mediate between theory and reality. A model of a system makes it possible to test its effectiveness before attempting a real-life version. A systematic approach treats an organization as a purposeful system of interconnected parts (see Chart 2). It shows the organization as a whole but also as a part of a broader context. Systems theory posits that each part of the organization influences all of its other parts. Creating a model of a system is a method of examining complex intentional pedagogical interactions. A model offers the possibility of data collection (observation, experiments). It also makes it possible to examine how the system operates (analysis, classification, comparison, analogy, generalisation – Duraj-Nowakowa 1997, p. 124).)
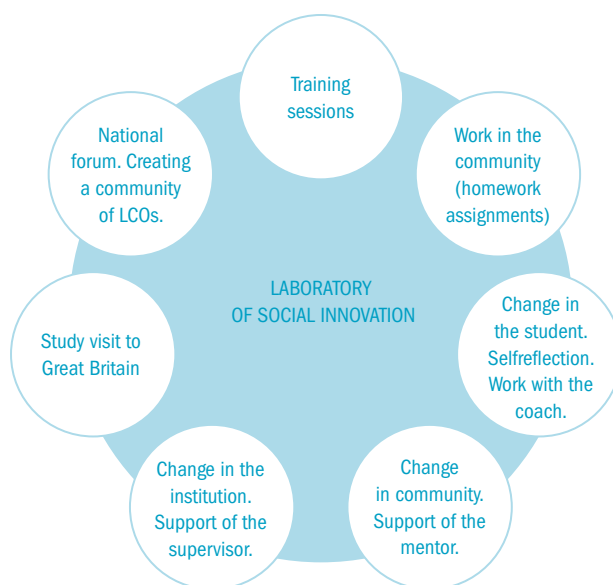
In order to develop systematic solutions, it was necessary to activate and combine a number of 'streams' at the same time:

- analytical research (studies, expert opinions, seminars)
- evaluative research (case studies, evaluation, monitoring)

- action and testing (work in the local communities, operation of the support system)
- reflection and dialogue (seminars, conferences, supervision, pedagogical focus groups)
- organization and integration of information (internet portal)
- publishing (publishing series, volumes in series entitled *Prace LIS*, translation of foreign literature on the subject)
- logistics and documentation.

All the streams came together during the sessions and in other endeavours of the micro-collective. The task of the micro-collective was to gather all the knowledge and turn it into a model. The team also had a mediating role between the realm of theory and expertise on the one hand, and the realm of practice and social and public policy on the other hand. The table below briefly presents the key elements that contributed to the systematic (model-producing) solutions with regard to community work.

Chart 2. Laboratory of Social Innovation – overview

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Table 1. Dimensions of work of the Laboratory of Social Innovation

STRATEGIC DIMENSION	COMPONENTS

RESEARCH (a bundle of research streams, each preserving its internal autonomy, together allowing for triangulation)	Diagnostic
	1. Research in the diagnosis stage
	  • Quantitative (Rymsza ed. 2011)
	  • Qualitative (Dudkiewicz 2011)
	2. Pedagogical research in the diagnosis stage (focus groups)*
	Stimulation and studies that accompanied the testing process
	3. Case studies of project-related cases (Dudkiewicz ed. 2013)
	4. Pedagogical studies – self-reflection in action (a summary of findings will be published in: Skrzypczak, Wieczorek eds. 2014)
	Contextual
	5. Studies based on reports, completed by animators (Jordan, Skrzypczak eds. 2010–2013)
	6. History studies**
	7. Case studies of cases external to the project (Rymsza ed. 2013)

TESTING	1. Implementation of the LCO model in local communities • Action research (action education) • Support and monitoring of the work completed locally

DIALOGUE	1. Dialogue within the micro-collective of the Laboratory***
	  • Laboratory sessions (8 per year)
	  • Meetings in sub-groups
	2. Educational dialogue of the mezzo-collective
	  • 6 meetings of the team of educators (10 during training sessions, 4 additional)
	  • monitoring sessions for students in the pilot project during training sessions (10)
	3. Communication in the macro-collective (regional and national conferences, seminars, national forum meetings, dissemination training sessions)
	  • Series of 4 national conferences entitled Active Social Welfare
	  • Series of meetings of the Polish Social Animators' Forum (3) transformed into Forum of Local Community Organizers (2)
	  • 130 training sessions for social workers

KNOWLEDGE POOLING****	1. Expert opinions commissioned from external experts (20) 2. Expert opinions compiled by internal experts 3. Book translations (10) 4. Publications on methodology (OSL - Multimedialny pakiet edukacyjny 2013) 5. Scientific publications and publications by experts (Rymsza ed. 2012; Łuczyńska 2013) 6. Creation of a specialist library 7. Production of educational films and creation of a specialist media library 8. Internet portal www.osl.org.pl
CREATING A MODEL / A STANDARD OF THE SERVICE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZING	Integration of the knowledge generated at the mezzo and macro levels by the micro-collective 1. Design of the LCO model 2. Drafting a LCO implementation manual 3. Drafting the relevant legal regulations and statutory amendments.

*Pedagogical research conducted in the form of focus groups (on a group with experience in community work and a group with no such experience) in order to ascertain the educational potential of the social workers and design an affective process of education in action.
** Work on the publication is now in progress.
*** The following three volumes have been published so far in the series entitled *Prace Laboratorium Innowacji Społecznej* (*Prace LIS*): B. Skrzypczak ed. 2011 (vol. 1), Kaźmierczak, Rymsza 2012 (es.) (vol. 2); Mendel, Skrzypczak 2013 (eds.) (vol. 3); Kaźmierczak ed. 2014 (vol. 4). They offer in-depth insight into the research and testing stages. In the first quarter of 2014, the fifth volume will be published as Mendel, Skrzypczak 2014 (eds.) (work in progress).
All resources are available at www.osl.org.pl .
Source: Authors' own compilation.

Implementation of the project
– designing the future

The Laboratory was in charge of all six substantive stages of the project (five stages of execution plus the dissemination stage). Consequently, the Laboratory was in charge of the form, content, and analysis of the results in the following stages:

1. Diagnosis. This stage consisted mostly in empirical field research. It resulted in a good understanding of the competencies and attitudes of social workers with regard to community work in the broadest sense of the concept (to facilitate the design of the LCO model and the education and participation efforts targeted at the social welfare and social integration personnel). It also provided a map of favourable and unfavourable pedagogical conditions to be used in designing the 'action education'.

2. Model design. This stage ended in the design of a preliminary version a standard of community work that included a profile of professional competencies, a methodological outline to be followed in community work, a set of principles to be applied in professionalization of community work, and a career path for social workers serving the role of local community organizers.

3. Education and information. This stage brought the concept of community work to social workers all across Poland. The focus was on three types of communities: rural areas and small towns; mid-sized towns; big cities. Training sessions, workshops, and conferences disseminated knowledge on modern community work. In this stage social workers were recruited for the pilot implementation stage.

4. Pilot implementation. In the pilot stage, the model was tested, and the process of education was combined with work in the communities.

5. Conclusions and recommendations. This stage produced proposals of legal and economic solutions that will lay the foundation for legislative changes necessary to implement the LCO model in Poland.

6. Dissemination. In this stage, more that 3 000 persons were offered training and education opportunities. A multi-media package of information (designed for educational and self-study use) was distributed.

In progressing through the project, the Laboratory systematically worked on developing a standard of community work (social work in a community), the methodology of community work, and the instruments to be applied by social workers working as local community organizers. This professional role combines three distinct roles, namely those of an animator, a mediator, and a local politician. The work of the Laboratory also produced a basis for standardisation of community work as a specialist type of social service.

A lot has been achieved, yet the process of promoting community work is far from over. A solid foundation has been created both in terms of theory, methodology, and practice and in terms of developing a community of professionals. It may serve as a starting point for further promotion of community-oriented social work strategies. There are two clear options of possible further development. The first option consists in giving a strong boost to community work and shifting it towards local community organizing. In this option, the social worker would chiefly focus on the role of animator, with less emphasis on the roles of mediator (networker) and planner. This strategy would be driven from the inside, and likely limited to the community of social workers. The second option is to see LCO as groundwork for local community development perceived strategically, for example in social regeneration programs. Possibly, it could be incorporated into strategies of sustainable local development. This option would require an institutional shift: the community organizing – and consequently, the community organizers – would have to be moved outside the structures of social welfare and social integration. Yet regardless of the option, LCO may be treated as a specialist social service. The application of this specialist social service either may be restricted to the welfare centres, or may be viewed as an instrument of local management. In the latter approach, it may be used in creating public policies by the local

authorities in such a way that NGOs (i.e. non-welfare system institutions) would be able to participate in their implementation.

At present, the system of community work and local community organizing is a work in progress. It requires fostering and support. There are three entities that can play a vital role in learning from the project and in taking it further:

- Department of Social Welfare and Social Integration at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Department pilots new formal and regulatory solutions, and will be in charge of systematic efforts with regard to standardization, new competencies of social workers, the new model of providing social services, and the organizational and substantive shift in the local institutions of social welfare and social integration. Importantly, new regional structures, represented by the regional social policy centres (*Regionalne Ośrodki Polityki Społecznej*), will be involved in the work on creating the new system.

- Polish Forum of Local Community Organizers. The Forum is a social space of cooperation for members of the emerging new profession. The Forum and the professional community movement behind it (which are a direct result of the developments in local communities) are free to follow a different logic than the Department's systematic approach. They may choose the logic of a self-propagating network (a rhizome). It may be free of external influence, and thus be able to strengthen the professional identity of local community organizers so that both social workers and other local animators might fin.

- Laboratory of Social Innovation. According to the arrangements made at the outset of the project, the Laboratory will continue even after the project formally ends. It will serve as an active custodian of the accomplishments of the projects, and will continue to advance its work. In contrast to typical fixed-term projects, it will preserve the structure and institutional memory of the knowledge produced in the project. The Laboratory

will also continue its efforts to develop a methodology of the social laboratory, i.e. a model of action research in a systematic framework. The focus will also be on action research in relation to co-production of social services. It may well open a new era in the practice of social services. Another important component of the Laboratory's mission will be its cooperation with the academic community, with the objective of promoting the new competencies and skills in the system of formal education of social workers.

Local community organizing is thus entering a new stage. It moves beyond the pilot project and begins to take root in the day-to-day practice of the social welfare and social integration institutions. This development comes at the start of the new EU financial framework (2015-2020), in which the focus is on active integration policy. An inherent part of this policy is, in turn, the power and empowerment of active communities.

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The main objective of the project *Development of standards for social and activation services* is to increase the professionalization and effectiveness of social and activation services in solving problems of social exclusion through setting, testing and implementing standards in the service providing agencies.

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