Social work and the welfare system in some European countries: commonalities and differences between Germany, Portugal and Spain

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1 - Introduction to the question

This paper aims at reflecting upon social work and the welfare system in different European countries, thus drawing a comparison of the differences and similarities between social work's modalities of knowledge and action and the type of welfare system in countries such as Germany, Portugal and Spain. This analytical reflection is based on a constructivist theoretical perspective. The idea of social construction means that knowledge governs our behaviour, of which we all have different views (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1987). Despite that heterogeneity, it is possible to reach common points of view and some shared and socially accepted goals that may be achieved through the institutionalization and legitimating of common knowledge patterns, which implies certain conventions by which people behave in society.

This process is not static but rather dynamic and it is associated to a swirl of creation and recreation of structures and social conventions deriving from social interaction. It is also associated to the socio-historic process of the modernization of societies (cf. Flora and Heidenheimer, 1995; Mozzicafreddo, 2000). It also integrates economic, political and life world dimensions and it may imply a communicative action. Social changes revolve around two fundamental systems: the production system – work – from which two subsystems derive - economics and politics; and the second system – the life world - is associated to the family subsystem and civil society (cf. Habermas, 1987; Veenkamp, 2006). These systems and subsystems determine how societies interact, modernize and build themselves and they also

influence and determine acceptable knowledge patterns and social work actions that are shared in those societies.

In this analytical sense, social work is regarded as a social construct (cf Fook, 2003; Payne, 1995) and some factors that determine its knowledge and professional action may be identified, such as: the type of scientific knowledge and the dominant and/or alternative theoretical paradigms; the type of economic and state intervention with regards to how objective and subjective citizen rights are achieved and how that intervention responds to existing and emerging social problems; the existing and emerging elites and pressure groups, as well as their principles, values and cultures. The way these factors interact and are interrelated within the socio-historic process of development of societies legitimate and institutionalize the academic and practical development of the profession, its field of action and its operation modes, as well as its autonomy and professional recognition. One equally assumes the welfare system to be a product of the modernization of society and a process of social and political mobilization of the life world, which, together, have rendered possible the universalization of civic and political rights and the organization of an institutional matrix that rules social relations and social rights (cf. Cousins, 2005; Flora and Heidenheimer, 1995; Mozzicafreddo, 2000).

Social work occupies a hinge position between the different systems and subsystems, between the economic/political (rational) and the life world (subjective). However, social work is more explicitly linked to the political subsystem of welfare and to the life world, and implicitly to the economic subsystem, since many actions of the state and the life world may or not produce well being and they also influence how the market produces wealth and vice versa. That is even one of the fundamental equations in the implementation of the European social cohesion implicit in the strategies of Lisbon and Nice (European Commission, 2000;2001), which imply economic and technological development, training, production, mobility, increase in wealth and consequently the creation of well being according to the cultural patterns in each society.

1.1 - Targets and methodologies adopted

The theoretical analysis shown here underlies this comparison. From a socio-historic, economic and social perspective, the main objectives are:

a) Understanding how the central and local powers coordinate and administrate resources in the areas of the traditional social protection, with regards to pensions and supplements and to the social services that promote the autonomy of the most vulnerable groups;

b) Analysing the field of social work within social protection systems – or welfare systems - and identifying areas, organizations and problems;

c) Reflecting on the orientations of social policies and how they influence social work action, as well as its professional status in each country.

This paper assumes an exploratory stance and it is mainly centred on the qualitative and comparative methodology, oriented by a process of reflective interpretation (Kantowicz, 2005). In a first stage, I have conducted a series of literature research activities and a documental analysis of the researched texts about social work, methodologies and government configurations. Next, I designed a category analysis table for the previously defined categories, which integrated the dimension of the socio-historic and political evolution of the social work over the last thirty years in the societies of the studied countries. After designing this table, I proceeded to the data collection process with regards to the studied dimensions together with my course colleagues from the countries object of the study. Two major dimensions were selected for this study: the first refers to the social, economic and political context of each country and the second to the configuration of social work. The first dimension integrates two sub-dimensions: one is centred on global questions related to socio-economics and politics such as population and localization, the income and the poverty rate, the type of political system, specially focusing on its model of administrative organization and the democratic values pursued. And the other focused on how the welfare system contributes to the achievement of well being with regards to the first pillar (contributive pensions and supplements); the second pillar (non contributive system of pensions and supplements) and the third, which is related to the existing services, the modalities of access and the country's expenditure on social areas. The second dimension refers to the social work and it also integrates two sub-dimensions of analysis: one focus on the social work as a field of knowledge and specific action, with reference to its meaning and to the theories it uses and its position within social and human sciences; to the issues it covers; to the type of training, its duration and its integration in universities, the existence of investigation centres, as well as scientific and academic production, journal and reference works. And the other centred on social work as a profession, and identifies the areas and institutions of intervention; the professional status and careers in the public administration and other organizations; the organizations that protect the interests of social workers and their relationship with other professions.

We analyse the commonalities and differences of social work and the profession of the social worker in relation to the welfare system of each country and its evolution. The above mentioned table has allowed identifying certain evolution patterns of social work in relation to the welfare system. The first pattern corresponds to the emergence of the firsts schools, from the thirties to the mid-seventies - I call it " social work and welfare development"; the second took

place from the end of the seventies until the nineties - I call it "social work and welfare consolidation" and, finally, these last 15 years, from the nineties until now, which I call "social work and welfare reflection".

2 – Development, Consolidation and Reflection of Social Work and Welfare system in Germany, Portugal and Spain: commonalities and differences

The countries analyzed in this study are located in Europe and belong to the European Union[1]. Germany[2] (west and east) has a population of near 82 million people; Spain has a population of 41.000 million and Portugal has 10.500 million habitants. The current poverty ratio in Germany[3] is near 13% (it has increased in the last years), in Portugal and Spain it is 20% and in these two countries 15% of people live in extreme poverty, although this number has fallen in recent years[4]. Today these countries have a democratic political system based on human rights and they are committed to the social agenda (Comissão Europeia, 2000; 2001) to improve life quality and promote social inclusion, but that has not always been the case.

2.1 – The period of development of Social Work and Welfare

The development of social work and welfare is situated in the thirties and seventies of the 20th century. During this time, Portugal (1933-1975), Spain (1938-1976) and Germany (1933-1946) were under a dictatorial political project. During this period there weren't any individual rights, but there was a certain paternalism consubstantiated through the philosophy of the creation of a superior human being and the religious doctrine (catholic or otherwise), associated to the idea of God, Nation and Family both in Portugal and Spain.

In Germany, in the aftermath of the Second World War, major changes occurred in terms of the territorial space and the political, economic and social systems. Germany was divided into two countries: East and West Germany. The first "adopted" the political regime associated to socialism and collective values; in the latter, one has founded a liberal economic system and a multiparty political system, dominated by the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) from 1949 until 1990 (date of the reunification). This system followed democratic principles and values based on human rights (civic, political and social) and solidarity[5].

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[1] Portugal and Spain are located in south and Germany in central Europe
[2] The reunification of these countries occurred in 1990
[3] Corporative Model (Esping-Andersen, 1990)
[4] These countries are associated to the south European model (Andreotti et al., 2001).
[5] In this essay, we compare Portugal, Spain and West Germany until 1990. With regards to the period after 1990, we will refer to the reunified Germany.

Despite having different values, these countries (West Germany, Portugal and Spain) assumed a similar system of well being, based on corporative protection and associated to social insurances. In Germany (1961), a law was passed to protect some of the most vulnerable groups, like the disabled, and to guarantee a minimum of dignity to every person. In Portugal, protection was consubstantiating by the welfare funds (*Caixas de Previdência*) (Law 1884 of 1935) directed at commerce, industry and services workers and civil servants.

In Spain, the early forms of social security appeared in the sixties (cf. Jauregi, 2004). These measures were based on the principle of subsidiarity[6]. Protection was a responsibility assumed by working individuals and employers, and the responsibility for social supports, associated to goods and services that were essential to maintaining the well being was assumed by civil society organizations. During this period, these organizations had to be religious and/or associated to the regime's ideology (Portugal and Spain) (cf. Jauregi, 2004; Sousa and Figueiredo, 2004). In Germany, there were secular and religious organizations that rendered care, especially aimed at those who didn't benefit from social insurances (Meyer, 2004). Apart from their form and type, these organizations materialised the paternalist and charitable conception of social assistance, aimed preferably at individuals and families who were considered to be "poor" and/or with inappropriate behaviours with regards to the norms of the bourgeois class. The answers that were given during this period were mainly the institutionalization and/or domiciliary visits centred on the family group and children.

In these countries, the first schools of social work were opened in 1908 in Germany, 1932 in Spain and 1935 in Portugal. Their creation is associated to the nationalist project and religious values: "doing the good and moralizing the poor" (Marques and Mouro 2004). During the Spanish civil war and the Second World War in Germany, the training in social work stopped being developed.

In Germany and Spain, training in social work was developed with greater emphasis since 1950 (Friesenbabn and Eblert, 2004; Tello, 2004) associated, in the first case, to a social pedagogy line of thinking and, in the second case, to the Franquist feminine movement[7]. In the three countries studied, from 1930 to 1960 the theoretical basis of the profession was the church's social doctrine and social education was associated to the case work. In the subsequent decades, other forms of intervention were adopted, which were associated to group and community work.

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[6] It means that the state only intervened when the inferior instances, such as the market, civil society and families, weren't able to respond to the existing problems.
[7] Franco recognized training in social work in 1960

During this period (1930-1970), the profession played a minor role in relation to other social professions - it was an intermediary training and not superior, developed mainly by technical or specialized schools. The duration of the training was 2 and 3 years, it was organized into a theoretical component and a practical component. In 1969 in Germany, training was integrated in the faculties of applied, social and pedagogical sciences and incorporated in universities and social work started to be called as "Sozialpädagogie" (Tello, 2004), and in Portugal and Spain named "social assistant". In this period in Portugal, schools increased the years of training from 3 to 4 years.

In the development of social welfare, the social assistant should be a "model", "the universal mother" and their action was mainly charitable and voluntary and performed by women (cf Garnier, 1999). In countries like Portugal and Spain this has helped to promote the emancipation of these women[8], who belonged to a high social class. Their action mirrored the social policies in force at that time: it focused mainly on the poor, "vicious" individuals, "beggars", prostitutes and alcoholics.

Their action aimed at modifying individual behaviour and it intended to correct the faults in socialization, thus attributing to social work a corrective role and, both in Portugal and Spain, that role was equally repressive. This work was associated to secretariat; there wasn't a career in it and it was badly paid, performed in charitable organizations, both state and private organizations, with a religious tone and associated to a voluntary action.

2.2 – The period of consolidation of Social Work and Welfare

The consolidation of social work and welfare is situated between the seventies and the nineties of the 20th century. In this period, countries like Portugal (1974) and Spain (1976) assumed a democratic system that integrated principles and values associated to human rights. However, these values are connected to collective autonomy (family group) rather than individual autonomy.

Portugal has adopted a parliamentary democracy and a centralised state administration[9] and Spain has adopted a monarchic parliamentary democracy and a decentralised state administration. Spain has 17 regions with legislative and executive power. Germany is a parliamentary federal state, represented by a chancellor and power is centralised. In 1990, this

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[8] However, in Portugal, married women who studied quit their job to become housewives. Therefore, many social assistants were single. If married women wanted to work they needed their husband's authorization.
[9] In Portugal, there are two autonomous regions: The Azores and Madeira

country has also been subject to a revolution which led to the reunification and integration process of two very different cultures (east and west).

The welfare model pursued during this period is based on universal rights, such as health, education, justice, housing, work and social protection, especially in Portugal and Spain[10]. The State has assumed the responsibility for the social well-being in articulation with other systems: the market, civil society and families (Hespanha et al., 2000). However, in Portugal there are some laws which rule the right to health, education, justice and social protection as universal rights and other laws that are centred on specific areas and groups. There are, therefore, a multiplicity of laws and regulations, programs and projects (Sousa and Figueiredo, 2004).

Since administration is centralized, there is a weak coordination of social resources, which results in inequalities in terms of access opportunities. In Spain, there is a diversity of legislative measures to the same problem, depending on the regions – this is the case in social protection (Tello, 2004). Also in Germany there are several types of insurances, like health and social protection insurances. The state action is regulatory and not executive and it is only oriented towards individuals and families without this type of protection[11]. The municipalities are responsible for the materialization of these laws in articulation with non profit organizations that perform intervention and are financed for it (Meyer, 2004). In this period, social welfare is focused on some groups that are related to poverty and social exclusion. This is understood as an interactive and multidimensional phenomenon, whose causes aren't only individual, but also structural and social.

Social work went though a substantial change during this time, especially in Portugal and Spain. The profession of the social worker was called "social assistant" or "social technician" in Portugal; "social worker" and also "social pedagogue" in Spain and Germany[12]. In Spain, the duration of the training was 3 years, in Portugal 4 years and in Germany 3 years, but it wasn't integrated in universities[13].

From this period on, social work was permeated by ideas and theories associated to collectivism and Marxism. These theories maintained that social change and development should focus on the society's structure. That change should be performed through expanding the

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[10] From this date on, a system of social protection associated to social security was created in Portugal.

[11] Principle of subsidiarity

[12] In the two first countries, the introduction of a new denomination – "social technician" or "social pedagogue" – was also a way of drawing a distance between the profession and the action of social assistants of the dictatorial system.

[13] Except if the course is lectured in the faculties of applied social sciences, but this type of training is called Social Pedagogy and has a 4-year duration.

awareness of groups and individuals that are subject to any form of oppression and discrimination. One of the most important predecessors of this methodology was Paulo Freire[14].

In Portugal, besides this theoretical perspective, social and human sciences were institutionalised and there was an emergence of professions related to sociology, psychology, anthropology, among others. This differentiation between theoretical knowledge's allowed for a new understating of poverty, regarded as a multidimensional phenomenon and the development of new intervention methods (Friesenbabn and Eblert 2004; Marques and Mouro, 2004; Tello, 2004), namely the integrated method (conception, planning, intervention and evaluation) and alternative methodologies put into practice simultaneously with other existing methods already used by social work.

During this period, the profession started to acquire a different status in relation to the previous period and it was associated to the phenomenon of poverty, low income, disability, housing and social development in Portugal; health, housing, schools, children and other social services in Germany; and social services management in Spain. The social worker has become a specialist technician in the area of inclusion, social integration and promotion of the subjective rights of the individuals and groups with specific needs.

From the end of the sixties on, the profession receives the first men trained in social work schools and it begins a "collective" work eliciting multiprofessional and multidisciplinary teamwork and being integrated into the new orientations of the state policy[15]. This new form of conceptualization of training and action allowed for the creation of professional associations, especially in Portugal, where this process started in 1976 and ended in 1989 with the creation of the licentiate and master's degrees and PhD programmes.

2.2 –Period of reflection of Social Work and Welfare

We may situate the period of reflection of social work and welfare between the nineties until now, in which the studied countries are governed by principles based on human rights. Social welfare in these countries has been subject to specialization and it focuses on certain groups, positively discriminating in their favour, such as monoparental families, gays and lesbians, civil union couples, immigrants, among others, thus intensifying individual and family responsibility for social protection. During this period, the state attributes the responsibility for

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[14] This Brazilian pedagogue maintained that in order to improve society, one should start from people's knowledge through the reflective method and make them aware of themselves in the life, social, political and economical worlds and from there on develop competences of change and social emancipation (Freire, 1975).

social protection to the civil society, family and the market (Andreotti et al. 2001) and makes budget cuts, thus reducing social protection.

The majority of social supports, especially those related to care, are rendered by profit and non profit organizations in the three studied countries. With regards to pensions and supplements, these are mainly under the responsibility of the state[16], especially in Spain and Portugal (Jauregi, 2004; Sousa and Figueiredo, 2004). In Germany, this responsibility is attributed to other entities that administrate social, health and dependency insurances (Evert, A., 2001; Meyer, 2004). However, while in Spain and Germany social supports are under the responsibility of regional governments (health) and local municipalities (social supports), in Portugal the administrative power is centralised and social supports are managed by the social security system[17] together with non profit organizations.

In this period, social work has suffered substantial changes in these countries. In Portugal[18] and Spain[19], other private and/or state schools were created, connected to polytechnic institutes and state and private universities. In Germany, reunification has allowed for an increase in the number of schools[20], but the number is still below other university courses[21]. In these countries, social work is regarded as a multidisciplinary field of knowledge, supported by sociology, psychology, pedagogy, law, economics and other sciences. Its knowledge is dominated by an ecological and systemic perspective, as well as dynamic and interactive approaches that include the analysis and intervention simultaneously on the micro, meso and macro levels (Payne, 1998) associated to constructivism, but also to structuralism[22].

One has also introduced post graduation training and specializations in certain areas in order to address the multiplicity of problems, the evolution of scientific knowledge and the intervention of the state, especially in Portugal and Spain, where social work initiated a process of reflection so as to build knowledge based on its practice.

In these countries, social work is still a feminine job and it is integrated into certain programmatic measures associated to political action and consubstantiates in neo-liberal

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[15] From a voluntarist, the social assistant has become a technicist

[16] In these countries, but with more acuity in Portugal, there is still a multiplicity of protection subsystems according to professional status, such as civil servants, bankers, post officers, among others.

[17] The National Health Service is managed by the Ministry of Health and it is also centralised. Although there are regional health directions, they put into action central policies.

[18] Currently, there are about 21 courses: 5 licentiate degrees, three bachelor's degrees plus licentiate degree and thirteen adapted to the Bologna Process.

[19] There are currently 34 social work schools.

[20] In the former federal republic, schools are more focused on the pedagogical area whereas in the democratic they are focused on social medicine.

[21] This increase in the number of schools and universities has also increased the number of social assistants in each country.

[22] This approach prevails in Portugal in the training of social assistants, associated to the influence of Brazilian authors. However, since most answers to the problems are integrated into programmatic measures associated to neo-liberal social policies, the action of social assistants becomes sometimes contradictory, since in practice those perspectives are not put into action.

programmes and projects. Its action shows a tendency to specialize in the areas of childhood, family, discriminated and oppressed groups, victims and offenders and other problem situations, such as the minimum income, alcohol abuse and drug addiction, and also to the construction of knowledge associated to those problems[23]. Social work is predominantly integrated in public, private and non profit organizations and its action is developed by multidisciplinary teams, trough networking and partnership work (mainly in Portugal and Spain).

Conclusions

Today the welfare system must respond to a multiplicity of problems and social work has a key role in that task. Social work must use its knowledge to define strategies (Faleiros, 1997; Fook, 2003) of action to handle the challenges posed by today's societies. Social work's action takes place within profit and non profit organizations and also public organisms, which provide care in problem areas and promote (or not promote) individual and family autonomy (Escobedo and others, 2002). Social work's action is influenced by how each country is able to administrate and coordinate its welfare policies and it has a major importance in the promotion of social inclusion and the development of society.

Based on this reflection, we may conclude that social work and welfare is a product of the process of social modernization. Their development and consolidation results from the action of several systems in society and how they interact and communicate, thus allowing for the existence of certain sub-patterns of welfare and social work in the studied countries – it is, therefore, possible to identify some differences and commonalities.

The differences are mainly related to the principles, values and cultures of the studied societies, which determine sub-patterns of welfare - some are more centralised (Portugal) and others are decentralised (Spain and Germany) - and sub-patterns of social work – some are oriented towards a general and specific training with the recognition of the academic levels of licentiate, master and PhD in Portugal and less recognized in other countries (Spain and Germany).

Within those sub-specificities, there are some commonalities with regards to social work: it is an area of the social and human sciences, which uses knowledge from sociology, psychology, psychiatry, social policy and pedagogy. The latter is more emphasised in Germany than in the other studied countries. Its principles and values are associated to human rights, democracy, social justice, humanism and self determination (IFSW, 2004) more than to the

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[23] Social work has changed from voluntary action to technical and currently it is regarded as a specialised technical action.

moral values of the social doctrine of the church and the philosophy of the "superior race", in which social work started to develop. However, still today it is associated to a plaything of power and to certain "immediatist pragmatism" (Negreiros, 1995).

Social work is regarded as a social practice or a practical science, developed in society with autonomy of criteria and simultaneously with a social responsibility. It uses theories and methodologies to intervene in the processes of poverty, exclusion, oppression, discrimination, violence, violation of human rights and to promote the empowerment and citizenship of individuals, communities and societies (cf. IFSW, 2002). Its main goal is to promote social development and welfare and to include and re-educate excluded people, according to the principles of social justice, self determination and citizenship.

Its action is also performed within the welfare system and it is centered on specific sectors, such as the social security area, health, justice, education, housing and others. Social institutions, where social work is developed, are the result of the type of welfare and may be public, non profit and profit, with intervention programs in the areas of family, children, young people, disabled people, the elderly, refugees, immigrants and other groups. The intervention of social workers with these groups is oriented towards protection and empowerment – in terms of social and/or psychosocial or pedagogical development – and they work together with other professionals in multidisciplinary teams. The interventions may focus on shelter, accompaniment, guidance, service management, designing programmes and projects, mobilizing resources and conception, planning and evaluation of the intervention process.

To sum up, social work must be consolidated both academically and professionally, based on the international definition of social work. Social workers must reflect about the social and political context, society's values, theories and processes of intervention within social problems in order to produce a global knowledge about the profession and about the social issues they have to address (Payne, 1995). In a global society, social work has to build its knowledge based on the reflection about the profession and the existing problems in each society and how that society responds or not responds to them (Payne, 1998).

In order to be able to achieve those new skills, social workers must demand a theoretical and practical training that allows them to build cognitive, analytical, operational, relational and communicative competences, regulated by theoretical and deontological patterns of association between theory and practice, with a continued and reflexive self-confrontation, that allows, on the one hand, to build a specific and coherent knowledge and, on the other hand, to improve the existing practices. In this way, they will be able to share the same recognition of other social and human sciences professionals and contribute to the construction of a fairer society.

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