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George NEAMTU

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The Specific of Professional Education in Social Work Adjusted to Labour Marketplace

George NEAMTU¹

Abstract

The domain of the social work occupations is a quite recent one for Romania and this fact leads to a series of difficulties in correlating and harmonizing the university professional education with the labour market. In the context of the European integration, and the globalization of certain regulative social processes, a viable solution to diminish the dysfunctions generated by this non-correlation is the occupational standardization and the curricular homogenization. And so, it appears a series of questions, like: What is the social worker in Romania? Who trains the social workers? Focus more on theoretical knowledge or practical skills? Does the labour market of social work prise the university education? The present study is a departure point in this direction. The present study is elaborated on two parts: first, it analyses the current situation of the professional education of the social work, while taking as a departure point its main out-put - the higher education graduate – and his level of training for the tasks/duties specific to the connected occupations in comparison with labour market expectations. The theoretical supposition (the background of the present research) is that of the correspondence between the higher education training system and the labour market requests – a fact that is always present in all the official documents. The analyses to confirm it usually focuses on the legislation, the role of the National College of the Social Workers as a professional association that regulates the specific occupations' aspects; but also on two applied researches. The main objectives are approached in the most consistent part that regards the university curricula analyses. On study's second part that of the practical studies there are presented the conclusions of two large studies of national level developed during 2010.

Keywords: professional competences; transversal competences; social worker occupation; occupational standards; National Qualifications Framework; European Qualifications Framework; National College of Social Workers.

¹ Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, ROMANIA. Email: georgelneamtu@yahoo.com.

Introduction

We can speak today of a certain scientific consistency and unity of the social work practice (see Neamtu, 2011). And as a specific of the last period it is ascertained an obvious necessity for the social work as a solution for a range of social and even political issues. The current debates regarding the privatizing of the services part of the domain, standards specialisation, use of the last generation technologies and the multiplication of the sub-specialisations represent evaluative indicators of social work. So that from its denial, ignoring, minimization (during the 2000 it was ironically called “the dog that never barked”), the attempts of getting subordinated to sociology, psychology, special psycho-pedagogy etc., social work became an acknowledged domain, a complicated and complex space, in a permanent alteration and adjustment to the new issues of the communities and individuals, with its own values, principles, practices and standards (Neamtu, 2012; Neamtu, 2010).

If we approach it from the perspective of the social practice and for its use in society – that is in its quality of essential part of the social politics together with its other component, social protection (Cojocaru, 2010; Cojocaru, 2009) – the operational definition of social work is that taken from the specialised legislation (Mainly, *Law n^o 272 from 2011*), as follows: social work, component of the social protection system, represents the assembly of institutions and measures through which the state by its public and national administrative authorities, local collectivises and civil society intervene to prevent, limit or remove the permanent or temporary effects of certain situations that could generate social marginalisation or exclusion of a person, family, groups or communities. Our observation to this definition, without entering in an argument for the moment, consists in the very fact that no strict delimitation between social work and social protection as *autonomous parts* within the social policies is established.

Due to its practical orientation, the social work was systematically reground, repositioned, diminished, criticised, “subordinated” – being constantly placed in vulnerable systems as part of the social policies, so that the theorists as well as the practitioners had to temporarily accept compromises (Cojocaru, 2006). These were imposed or calibrated as well through the general characteristics of the social systems – like, the deep crises of the social systems manifested in the past decades with its central feature, incertitude – and through contamination it were attached elements that did not belong to it. These vulnerabilities were inevitably attached to the specialist who was generically called as „social worker” (Goian, et. al., 2012). Yet, on a formal level the programme is structured and mostly incontestably applied to correlate the social work domain in its main components (the professional and occupational training) to the international rules and practices as they are theorised and presented in the specialised literature (Vishanthie & Jones, 2004; Allen-Meares & Garvin, 2000; Engelbert, et al., 2012; Moriarty,

2012). And for a quite few years the graduates of social work higher education from Romania are part of the international labour market mobility and with the recognition of their specific competences in concordance with the tendencies and agreed procedures (White, 2006). But for the moment we approach only the human resources and the way this is trained and professionalised to exercise specific roles in its domain. More recently, the issue of the correlation of the Professional Standards with the Occupational ones was regulated in The Order of Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport no 5703 from October 18th 2011, regarding the implementation of National Qualifications Framework from higher education. This final regulatory action provides the implementation of National Qualifications Framework from Higher Education (CNCIS) as unique instrument, which establishes the structure of qualifications and ensures the national acknowledgment, as well as the international compatibility and comparison achieved in higher education system (Taranu & Taranu, 2012). Through this can be acknowledged, measured and related all the knowledge results achieved in higher education system (cycles of studies Licence, Master and Doctorate) and it is ensured the coherence of conferred qualifications and titles. Also, according to Government Decision no 566 from 2011, the National Authority for Qualifications accomplishes following tasks: a) the elaboration of National Qualifications Framework according to European Qualifications Framework and management of National Qualifications Register; b) the monitoring, evaluation and control of National Qualification Framework implementation in institutions from national qualifications system; c) the monitoring, evaluation and control of national system of education and sustained vocational training. In theory, we can assert that the correlation of primary professional training and the results of learning are regulated with work market and occupational exigencies.

What is the social work profession in Romania?

In 2012, the profession of social worker is a liberal profession, regulated by law, organised on a national level and approved by the National College of Social Workers (www.cnasr.ro), being certified through the achievement of the approval of exercising the profession or of the certificate of free practice.

Within the specialised literature it is generally considered that the supportive (social work) activity has two main dimensions: the economic dimension and the psycho-social dimension. “The performances in the economic and psycho-social domains suppose the commitment of public institutions’, NGO’s and volunteers’ human and material efforts” (Bocancea & Neamtu, 1999: 72). The economic dimension envisages the provision with material and financial resources to the persons – destitute, orphan or abandoned children, persons with disabilities, elders without family support or retirement allowance, persons that suffered from natural

calamities etc. – that do not have enough income resulted from their own activities or from the aids provided by the insurance system. The psycho-social dimension holds among other components that of the professional education / training. In this context, the social worker can be defined as the professional who is specialised during university education (Neamtu, 2007) that insures the social intervention within the social work domain, meaning that it insures the provision of social services and the coordination / guidance of the multi-disciplinary teams who activates in the domain. During this approach, the social worker takes into practice a set or a system of professional training consists of knowledge, rules and welfare values – a system absolutely necessary for efficient intervention and according professional assistance people or communities, when they require it or every time it is need it. As specialist, one is involved and participates at elaboration and application of social politics in the area, strategies and action plans on local, district, national and international level, promoting social welfare (Cojocaru, 2010). The deployment of these activities is regulated by *Law 466 from 2004 regarding the status of social worker*. In this normative deed, *Art.2. Paragraph 2*. establishes: „The title of social worker can be hold by: a) a person who obtained the license degree within a institution of higher education with major in this area, long standing form, 4 years, accredited according to the law; b) a person who has the equivalent of a degree as social worker issued according to the law”. Therefore, through this regulation, social worker is the specialist who graduated a institution of higher education performing a social mission that is based on fundamental values and principles of occupation: social justice, dignity and uniqueness of a person, integrity, self-determination, confidentiality, the importance of interpersonal relations, services input with competence and customers benefiting. A professional association, of national representation, in this case the College of Romanian Social Workers, approves free practicing and professional independence.

The description of occupations from case working in Classification of Occupations in Romania

As *professional* specialized in case working domain, the social worker exerts his professional competences during and within some occupations, defined and some of them standardized in Classification of Occupations in Romania (COR) (www.mmuncii.ro/old). In COR we find included occupations of case working in two major groups: Major Group 2 – *Experts with intellectual and scientific occupations*, and Major Group 3 – *Technicians and their assimilated* are graduates of secondary education, post-secondary and vocational. In Major Group 2 there is a section named Social Workers (code 2446), which is defined as follows: „Social

workers offer advices concerning social and related problems, with the aim of a better capitalization of resources and overcoming private or social difficulties; they gather needed information to provide advices regarding rights and obligations of people assisted; they analyse the situation of people assisted and persons with impairments and they suggest measures for helping and reclaiming them” (www.rubinian.com/COR2012). As constituent occupations, the following are specified: 244601 social worker high levels, 244604 councillors in addictions field, 244605 control doping officer, 244606 art-therapists, 244607 social worker with mental health competence, 244608 experts in vocational evaluation of people with disabilities, and 244609 experts in assisted employment.

In Major Group 3 is section *Social Workers (code 346)*, defined with competences: „Social workers confer help to people and families with personal and social issues; they initiate actions to prevent delinquency or to rehabilitate delinquents; they confer help to physically and mentally ill, to improve their social integration capability.” In Basic Groups components are included: 3460 – Workers in Social Work (“workers in social work confer advices about social issue; they initiate actions to prevent delinquency or to rehabilitate delinquents; they confer help to physically and mentally ill, to improve their social integration capability; they perform activities which are usually addressing to people from target group for improving their integration capability, initiate actions for rehabilitation of addicted people, confer advices to prevent and decrease the addiction effects”). Also in “Component Occupations” category are also specified: 346001 – social worker medium level; 346002 – social trainer; 346003 – social worker for people with addiction issues; 346004 – facilitator of community development.

On the other hand, in the same databases are found regulated and standardized, according to occupational analysis methodology accepted by CNFPA (www.cnfpa.ro/standardeocupationale), four occupations from Major Group 2 and two occupations from Major Group 3. After a simple comparison, we can observe that are differences in nomenclature and serious inconsistency with Law 466 from 2004 regarding the status of social worker. We shell comment these hereinafter. For the moment, we take note of these regulations, necessary and useful in any professional system. Occupations of “Social worker” and “Social mediator” are part of Major Group 3 – which are occupations exerted by graduates of high school and vocational education, categories which will be redefined and streamlined in COR as a tendency of new regulatory actions which define social worker occupation by graduation of certain study programmes at academic level.

The description of occupation from the perspective of Romanian National College of Social Workers

In the professional practice from a majority of countries, like USA, UK, and Canada, professional associations have a visible role and for times, a decisive one in the defining and exerting of the social work occupations. According to the *Law 466 from 2004 regarding the Status of social workers, National College of Social Workers* function as legal person, professional organization, non-governmental, of public interest, non-profit, with legal figure, self-contained and independent, with the role of representing and defending on local, county, national and international level the interests of social worker occupation, control and surveillance of exertion of social worker occupation, application of laws and regulations which regulate the occupation exercising. In capacity of professional organization, National College of Social Workers represents, defends and promotes rights and interests of members on local, national and international level, defends the honour, freedom and professional independence of social worker in exercitation of occupation, ensures abidance of obligations that social workers have towards beneficiaries, institutions and society, according to ethical rules of their profession (Neamtu, 2011: 1303). From this point of view, College defines, reiterating the law provisions, occupations from social work domain, which tries to correlate with COR, but without any success in tuning and homogenizing because of novelty of occupational domain in Romania and the dynamic of job market, including on European level.

More than the law states, but as well as a completion to it, the College, by its mission, should provide the mediation between the professional education system – mainly insured by the national university network (which has quite a congruent attitude in reaching its own objectives) – and the occupational system that is characterised by different values then those stipulated in the academic environment. The key concept in this mediation is that of *Professional Competence*. Besides, in its Statute, the College holds in the centre of its conceptual network the expression of professional competence. But this concept operationalisation is deficient: a social worker competence's proof is made only on a formal level that is given by the presence of its university/bachelor diploma/certificate, and the university transcript that should present certain disciplines names. But the appropriated contents of the knowledge / university curricula are envisaged and mentioned nowhere along with the recommended structures on the 3 components. The same formal criteria is used on the expertise level: the classification by entry, specialist and main social worker in regard with one's professional seniority. Here, is shortly, its description (www.cnasr.ro). The social worker mainly concerns with psychosocial and professional recovery and (re) integration of people with special issues: psychical and/ or physical deficiencies, anti-social behaviour (delinquency), various social issues. He displays a complex and diversified activity:

analyses the influence of social agents on the estate of mental and human behaviour health, provides advices regarding assisted people's rights and obligations, cooperates with institutions and organisations that have similar objectives, participates at elaboration of working methods and techniques, suggest measures to help and recover the needed. The work of a social worker is to help people in sorting issues they have about their social situation or private life. Practicing the profession of social worker is approved by Romanian College of Social Workers and authorised by Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The social worker executes a social mission which is based on values and basic principles of occupation: social justice, person dignity and uniqueness, person integrity, self-determination, confidentiality, the importance of interpersonal relations, supplying services with competence and in favour of customers. Free practicing of the profession and professional independence give the social worker the right to act and take decisions in favour of his clients and their full responsibility. The profession of social worker can be practice by any person that fulfils following conditions: is Romanian citizen, with residence in Romania; is bachelor or graduated of a specialized education institution, accredited by state under law conditions; detains the notification of Romanian College of Social Workers for free practice of social worker profession; it is not found in any incompatibility or non dignity cases foresee by present status.

Practicing of social worker profession is incompatible to: person which has no full capacity to practice; promotion or membership of an outlaw group; using fully aware the professional knowledge against the customer; deployment of certain activities in order to harm professional dignity of social worker or good manners. We also must mention that by law provisions the College has important tasks in the field of professional training harmonization, of which we recall: *a) elaborates and legitimates the Ethical code of social worker, as well as the guides of good practice in the domain, for abidance by ethical principles; b) submits to Spring department rules and regulations in social work field; c) prepares the sustained training programmes in social work field.* We can conclude that, in its capacity, the National College of Social Workers is a partner that must have visibility in its domain of activity and, therefore, a social partner of academic trainers.

Who trains social workers?

The central term in the process of vocational training, although too often this subject is transformed into a battlefield for any administrative authority in spring domain, is the one of *proficiency* (Neamtu, 2007). *Proficiency* represents *the capacity to apply, transfer and combine the knowledge and skills in various work situations and environments, in order to achieve activities required in work place,*

on quality level mentioned in occupational standard (Strategy and programmes, CSOA, 1998). The most usual situation in the primary professional training, developed in academic studies, is considered and explained on three landings or levels, concurrent, complementary, imperative and difficult. These three directions relate to exigencies of knowledge and organisations in a professional training system of: scientifically detailed knowledge from multiple human social disciplines (theoretical and applied) – *epistemological component* (Drury Hudson, 1997); knowledge and absolute compliance of a batch of values, principles and rules essential for social life and professional relations (most frequently expressed in codes) – *axiological component*; and a batch of skills/ habits (the ones that allow operationalisation of previous components) – *praxeological component*. If one of these conditions is obviated, then the entire professional training is distorted, and the integration or harmonization of the graduated on job market is degraded.

For the moment, we need to observe that Romanian higher education, including the social work one, crosses a route of structural changes (changes named by mass media *retrofits*) that have as aim standardization of vocational training on national level, correlation with European practices and demands (*Law no 1 from 2011, National Education Law*). This process considers competences homogenisation for international recognition of diplomas, and also harmonization between academic curriculum and units of vocational capacity. We must specify that this process started with adoption of Bologna pattern regarding the organization of higher education². Though it is too soon to issue value judgments regarding the success or failure of this pattern in Romania, recent studies highlight especially the adverse reactions and the pervert effects generated by this type of training. It still persists the conviction that the Bologna System could be converted in order to create the context to accentuate the strength of the professional training and insure the homogenisation and recognition of the social work programmes from the European space as it is acknowledged in the specialised papers (Engelberg, 2012).

In Romania, for social work the primary professional training and afterwards the major on strict domains is done through license studies and master studies in higher education, public or private, cutting out step by step previous forms of pre-academic training (most often, technical studies or post-secondary education). It is true that in national network of social work and protection is still employees, which for the moment don't have academic specialized diplomas (most often in structures from local public administration from rural communities), but there are strict recommendations from the authorities for an alignment at legal regulations and community standards. From here, for a period of time, the acceptance of

² We will not elaborate here the layout of Bologna System of universities operation based on structure „licence 3 years – master 2 years – doctorate 3 years”, this being already operational. See Neamtu, G. - 2007.

some training types as „open distance learning” which – in our opinion – represents more an administrative solution rather than one of constructing true competences according to expert standards (Roth-Szamoskozi, 2003).

But, although is in a process – continuing – of reformation and innovation, like any educational system, *specialized higher education* from today’s Romania can be described and marked using terms of two sets of main features: *in-put indicators* (opportunities of education, offers, resources, networks, access, politics, etc.); *out-put indicators* (innovative character, programme correlation with social issues, curriculum homogenisation, harmonizing contains with job market, partnership with beneficiaries, adaptability at a society based on knowledge). So, the analysis of academic training system in social work domain becomes extremely complicated. Therefore, we shell approach only few of the aspects from this list.

National network of professional training in social work domain

The right to organise programmes of vocational training through licence studies and master studies is given by the Ministry of Education and Research as a result of Reports of academic evaluation made by ARACIS³. The situation to date of programmes that are authorised and accredited to function in Social work domain is available on Ministry web page www.edu.ro. After a first evaluation, in Romania exists the offer in social work from approximately 20 universities from national network (that includes a total of 96 similar institutions), which offer programmes of license studies authorised or accredited to function according to law. As remarks regarding this network we point out:

- a. Organizational universities are „of state” (or public), with seats financed by state budget (but with number of these seats almost insignificant, preponderant being seats that are paid for, „with tax”), as well as „particular” universities (private) which are schooling only with charge, „education with tuition fee”; so we can say that there is a academic competition in which the public education has some advantages that should lead to a training process with better performances. That has to be proved.
- b. The geographical distribution of tendered institutions is a disproportional one, using logic of development of academic centres, and not one of necessary or the demand from the job market. In that direction, to be seen the case of centre and west country areas, with a higher level of academic education offer (with eight universities offering programmes of social work), and a demand for social workers lower; comparative, in eastern area

³ Quality Insurance Romanian Agency of Higher Education functions based on many legislative acts starting with Emergency Decree no 75 from 2005 and ARACIS Methodology approved by Ministry Order no 1418 from 2006.

only two universities have social work programmes and in south four academic centres with social work offer, each one being marked by indicators of the need of social work above national average. In other words, academic offer is not according to the request from job market, not attainable using geographic criteria.

c. The existence of a structure of governmental, inter-ministerial rank – such as ARACIS – which evaluates using same of organisational and deployment of licence programmes activity is in fact a agent of curriculum homogenisation. Within ARACIS, the Specialized Committee has a set of standards which they apply uniform (www.aracis.ro). The issue is that these training standards to be correlated with what is required on job market and with society based on knowledge, and not to be congruent with some internal criteria occupational irrelevant, sectarian type. It is possible that Grid 1 and Grid 2, as they are requested by the Ministry Order 5703 from 2011 to be attained at academic level without making studies and researches of work market, therefore to be also some internal mechanisms, dictated by interests and politics of personnel of some universities, whether prestigious at national level.

For the offer of master studies in the social work domain there are some remarks to make. First of all, we can talk about a public offer quite generous, at level of year 2011 existing approximately 60 such programmes. But the methodology for accreditation was not respected everywhere, so that some of them didn't have at that point ARACIS evaluation, therefore the Ministry of Spring approval. At present, as a result of application of Article 193 stipulations from *Law of national education* it took place a process of evaluation and ranking of Romanian universities. In an indeterminate future an effect of this process will be the one that offers the right to organise master studies only to the universities that accomplish a series of conditions that place them in category/ class „universities of education and scientific research”. Although the grid and calculation modality of institutional score are not known/ made public, it is certain that NOT all the 88 universities that participated, according to law, fulfil the criteria, which allow organisation of master studies. For the moment, for social work domain, this evaluation – although classified universities – did not have any effects: still the master programmes are organised without taking into account this ranking. Of all evaluations will be classified in this category. Remains to be seen – at the date announced by Ministry – which ones will be included in category (b) and (c), classes, which will allow organisation of master studies.

Professional competences promoted by present academic training

With certainty, the vocational training through higher education in a society based on knowledge converts in central figure and remains the main primary vocational training form. Academic studies are becoming a necessity. The university reveals its growing importance in vocational training because the training for a profession implies a *system of scientifically knowledge, more and more formalized*. This system implies the purchase of three components: epistemological components, praxiological component and axiological component. Timely society keeps the classical road of vocational training before entering in occupational career: a primary training, short term, coherent, scientifically, with the construction of some general competences and self contained peculiarities. It is valid the thesis according to which the primary vocational expertise, for a debutante, is acquired after an didactic process, educational, achieved in a organised system that gives the subject a theoretical base without he cannot practice (Sandu et al., 2010). As an occupation is marked and defined in social space through a vocational status approved and regulated, must be correlated a formal training very well structured.

But are necessary a series of remarks and distinctions to which will refer the remodelling and relocation of contains in curriculum area. It is necessary that the purchase of a theoretical system – as a system of abstract sentences which describe in general terms classes of phenomena and basic processes for the occupation – to represent more a *secondary objective* because here it is built only the support and not the modality of exertion of occupational competences. The professional theoretic system, as it is designed today, implies the achievement of a professional competence after going through some subjects content in curriculum area (classified in particular, basic and speciality subjects). Going through this curriculum – in its three components – is extremely important for any major – such is the one of social work – because it builds the vocational competence. The issue appears in the moment when subjects that build the vocational competence are evaluated⁴.

For a consolidation of the contents, we shell present on short the peculiarity and role of each of three components in vocational training, so we can after make a technical presentation the six vocational specialized competences and three transverse competences, in the way they are schemed in licence academic programmes. In the training specific to social work, as in most of academic programmes, *epistemological component* has the role of systematizing and encoding the remarks and knowledge of that domain, analysing and finding solutions for

⁴ We can recount an example to highlight the importance of weighting in building the speciality curricula: at some universities, the licence programmes for social work function inside some Theology faculties. As an effect of internal organisation, based on academic autonomy, educational program (operational curriculum) of social work includes disciplines with theological character in the share of 40-60%!

the issues of scientific interest, legitimating the professional status, accrediting the formalities and qualities of practitioners, standardizing practice models and offering social prestige. As regards to the skills system – or *praxeological component* – its aims endorse identification and delimitation of skills system and professional talents, trains and develops natural skills which it transforms into vocational instruments, offers support for transmitting and developing the habits on beneficiary level. *Axiological component* implies knowledge and application, behavioural incorporation of a value, principles, strict professional guidelines and rules, mostly designated through normative acts, internal regulations and professional codes (Cojocaru, D., 2011). This axiological system subordinates the professional relations with beneficiaries / customers, with the exterior of occupation, as well as in professional relations between organisations and colleagues. This component represents the controller of this profession because social work occupations are *ab initio*, from the beginning, human interactions and inter-human relations, which are subordinated to some formal and familiar codes.

These imperatives of professional training are transposed in politics of academic programmes based on several variables, of which it is marked out the one named „academic self sufficiency”. From the curricular analysis of scholar documentation of public nature, we can make the „curricular map” and projected competences. Detailed presentation of these we shall attain in a different study. At the present moment we shall point out that, through curricular politics of universities, the professional competences and the transverse ones are distributed in the credit system as follows:

Table 1: Professional Competences and allocated credits in Romania

Crt. n°	Competence	N° of allocated credits
1	Professional Competence n° 1. Identification, analysis, evaluation and specific interventions to reduce social risks at community level	60 credits
2	Professional Competence n° 2. Elaboration, implementation and evaluation of politics, programmes and social services intended for vulnerable people and groups	60 credits

3	Professional Competence n° 3. Designing and development inside Public Service of Social Work of institutions, services and prevention activities, also support activities granted to beneficiaries from social work system	57 credits
4	Professional Competence n° 4. Advising in accessing the commentary resources for people and social groups excluded or at risk of social exclusion (institutions, services, performances)	56 credits
5	Professional Competence n° 5. Advising and therapy single and in groups given in familiar or institutional environment (schools, hospitals, penitentiaries, drug centres, social work institutions)	56 credits
6	Professional competences n° 6. Social reinstatement of convicted people and under surveillance of taking of evidence services, and also conferring post criminal assistance to people that have executed serving punishments	62 credits
7	Transversal competence 1. Learning values, precepts and principles held in ethical code of social worker, also development of vocational skills which ensures autonomy and professional	4 credits
8	Transversal competence 2. Ability to work in multitask team, also assimilation of bonding techniques inside work group. Capability to empathize, also exertion of occupational roles: counsellor, mediator, consultant, trainer, case manger, social politics planner, community skills trainer etc.	3 credits
9	Transversal competence 3. Participation at sustained training programmes, also learning modern methods and techniques of sustained learning.	4 credits

Recent studies (Neamtu, 2010) highlights the fact that the phenomenon of over sizing the epistemological component is more often required and challenged for professional occupations. Practical exercises and the system of values and rules of activity are perceived as being more necessary for building a vocational competence appropriate for a competitive professional career in social work field (Howe, 1997; Lymbery, 2003). The proper professional culture, while equilibrated structured on its three axes, represents the strength / power of the social worker profession (Fargion, 2006) and on the same time it is the necessary support for the graduate / specialist's wellness state, an individual state on which the professional performance sustains (Graham & Shier, 2010). On the same time, a solid and proper professional training reduces the number of professional burnout and tiredness' factors and effects, which proves itself even more important since the specific researches held out the complex character of the social worker activity within different organisations (Thaden, *et al.*, 2010; Loue, 2010). In this context, the training models from social work raise some questions regarding competences applicability and correlation to occupations from social work domain.

Theoretical knowledge *or* practical skills? Critics about academic professional training

Regarding the approached issue, we remind and use, even just a bit, two specialized studies developed in 2010 on significant population and with conclusions that are valid also for the vocational training system in social work. First, we shell refer at a national study, representative for graduates of higher education from Romania and certain categories of employers. The study is called *Recent graduates of higher education and their integration on labour market* and it is part of project implemented by Administrative Unit of National Council of Qualifications and Vocational Training of Adults – UECNFPA, through POSDRU Project *Development of an operational system of qualifications from higher education in Romania – DOCIS* (www.docis.acpart.ro). From *Summary of Research Report* (report authors: Bogdan Voicu, Claudiu Tufiş, Mălina Voicu, consultants: Mircea Miclea, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Sorin Eugen Zaharia, Maria Apostol), we extract few elements peculiar and useful to our theme. The starting point was the wider context of higher education development, especially in its horizontal components, the ones that lead to an extension closer to mass extension of higher education. In this context reappear the debate about relevance of academic degrees reappears. This extent of higher education is often labelled as beneficial for society. It would lead to a population vocationally competent, with a higher productivity, which would have value orientations towards self-sufficiency and creativity, capable to contribute at a technological and social speeding progress. On the other hand, there are many controversies regarding the major quality, and implicitly the

efficiency in using financial resources allocated to higher education. Besides, this theme is not new in specialized literature.

The primary questions were numerous, but the theme was synthesized by followings:

- *What is the route of graduates after study finalization?*
- *In what degree the vocational competence achieved during study is useful and operational?*
- *Costs of the training are retrieved by using graduates as innovative human resource, which will start a quality economy?*

The Study that was developed between 2009-2010, used a national sample and mixed sampling methods. During the stage of the field data gathering there were contacted approximately 26000 respondents, with a 55% response rate from the following categories: “employed higher education graduates”, “public and private employers and managers, “students in their graduation year”. In the preliminary data processing there were developed analyses groups that I was part of in order to elaborate the final conclusions. Further, the analyses groups acted as results dissemination vectors. Below there are presented some of the interpretation axes generated by the field data analyses.

Results

The integration of graduates on labour market takes place in first months after graduation, the average necessary time to find a first job is four months. There are fields in which graduates find a job faster, such as architecture or economics. The slowest integration on labour market is for the ones that graduated law, exact sciences, agricultural sciences or natural sciences.

The importance of competences at working place. The competences that are proved to be most useful for first employment are the ones of transverse type, the graduates as well as the people who recruits highlight their importance for entering labour market. Only in the case of medical sciences the graduates consider the specific competences more important than the transverse ones for employment. The *graduates* from last five years consider that *the presentation for job interview and personality* are agents with greatest importance in getting first job, these being followed by major and study object. *The employees* place the transverse competences such as *knowledge of a foreign language and computer skills* to be almost as important as the presentation for interview and personality type. The overall image, which results from data, indicates the fact that *in finding the first job the transverse competences are more important than the specific ones. For graduates and well as for recruiters the specific competences achieved during study programmes are important, but they occupy a secondary place then the*

transverse ones. Including group discussions with recruiters, these seem to place transverse competences and personality type on higher level than abilities achieved during study programmes.

The source of knowledge and necessary skills at working place. On the level of the entire sample, 55% of graduates consider in a great or very great extent that they achieved the necessary skills to carry out the charges from the working place. Half of graduates consider that internships developed during college were useful after graduation. Most of the graduates (86%) consider that they learned more about their job at the working place and not in college. Related to the field of their licence graduation, the ones from economics domain are pointed out, because are more unsatisfied than the rest of graduates with quality of training received during college. The graduates from art, architecture and town-planning and medicine fields are, in this case also, more satisfied than the rest of the way their academic training prepared them for the requirements which they must fulfil at the actual working place. The graduates were asked to indicate in what to what extent their knowledge and skills, which are needed at working place, were obtained at working place, in college or other circumstances. At the entire test specimen level, the graduates believe that more than half (55%) of their knowledge and skills which are needed at working place were learned at the very working place, approximately one third (32%) was learned in college, and 14% were learned in other circumstances. Compared with the rest of graduates, the ones working in private area, ones that work in large companies and ones that have major degree in economics consider that they have learned more knowledge and skills at the working place. Among the ones considering that a bigger percentage of knowledge and skills needed at working place were learned during college are the graduates that work in public domain/ budgetary and the ones that have major degree in fields like exact science, arts, architecture and town-planning, physical education and sports, veterinary state medicine or health.

Theoretical knowledge versus practical skills. At the entire test specimen level, the graduates consider that two thirds of practical skills that they possess were obtained or learned through the followed study programme. Those data confirm the image presented previous, which is the one of a higher education system that trains the students' rather theoretical than practical. Both employers and graduates believe that, at the moment, higher education system succeeds to offer the graduates the theoretical knowledge that they need, but fails in offering the practical skills. The graduates' representations are relevant: almost all of them consider that theoretical system does not meet what is required on job market. To all intents and purposes, for most of 18 elements indicated to be the components of vocational training, the graduates estimate a need/ demand bigger than their degree of training. If we ask the question: „Who is responsible for ensuring the merge between students training and the requirements from working place?”, three quarters of responders consider that responsibility is split between universities

and students; a slightly bigger percentage (especially in the case of employees/recruiters) assigns the universities with the responsibility of merging and harmonizing the students' training with requirements from working place. Finally, we shall remind some results of the study "The vocational training analysis and occupational units of competency in social work area", done within the project *Qualifications and European standardization in social work – EURAS*, POSDRU/18/1.2/G/11966, implemented in partnership by Universities from Bacau, Baia Mare and from Pitesti. The study was organised in two stages: on stage 1, 3 focus groups developed in 3 different (Bacau, Baia Mare, Pitesti) cities from 3 different development regions, which identified the main issues of the initial professional training correlation to the social work labour market. The second stage consisted in the data gathering from 2 questioners self applied and an interview with relevant subjects. This stage was developed during 18 counties from 5 Romanian development regions from the total of 8 development regions, during February to June 2010. There were applied two questioners to 600 subjects: one with 50 items – "Units of training acknowledged during university education studies" and the second with 50 items - "Necessary competences in occupation". There were registered 17 refuses. The respondents belonged to the categories "specialist employed in the social work system". Based on their studies /qualification they were classified as follows: 31% "having complementary high education studies", 69% "with specialised high education studies". The second method used was the interview and envisaged the quality data gathered from persons that were relevant for the public and non-governmental social work system and was developed with 9 specialised domain leaders, 6 county protection services directors and 3 specialised foundations directors.

Conclusions

Regarding the initial professional training vocational training system from social work area, after processing data collected from a number of 583 experts' employees of the social work system, we can synthesize some major critics:

- *Initial professional training*, within three components accepted in international theory and practice (epistemological component, praxeological component and axiological component) is strongly unbalanced in the favour of epistemological component (criticised and non-validated in the domain practice), respectively an over sizing of disciplines with explanatory character, theoretical and methodological. Respectively, the disciplines from this category total 160 credits from a minimal of 180! Which means that 88,88% from professional training has a theoretical character.
- *Praxeological component* is deficiently attended by running over a single discipline, which repeats itself in denomination, but without any particular

objectives. Discipline „Practice” has allocated 16 credits from a possible of 180, which is approximately 8%.

- *Axiological component* of vocational training by curriculum structure is often transferred in the area of transverse competences, fact that transforms it into a secondary component. And as the number of hours is situated below the level of requisite and expectations from the occupation domain. In education plans, the discipline „Professional ethics” has allocated 4 credits out of 180.
- Frequently, in *Vocational training plans*, transverse competences are substituted to vocational ones. By *Minister Order no 4 430/ 29 June 2009*, it is stipulated that in category of transverse competences to be included the acquisitions referring at autonomy and responsibility, social interaction and personal and occupational development. In the area of social work, through occupational peculiarity. But, at least in social work domain, these elements must be integrated in the system of customs and vocational skills. For the cases in which this distinction is made, still these skills are integrated and approached from epistemological perspective, therefore also a curriculum error.

Shortly, a renovation or an adaptation of academic curriculum is a necessity that comes from many points of view - the development of scientific knowledge, the dynamic of occupations, the intricacy of professions, the complexity of labour market etc. (Neamtu, 2011). And may be the model towards which we should convey could be one like “International social worker” while avoiding the localization, indigenization and ethnics tendencies (Gray & Fook, 2004). The final conclusion of the two field studies points out the fact that the initial hypothesis of the current approach is infirmed: the university professional education in the social work domain – but not exclusively in this specialisation – is heavily unbalanced in the detriment of the practical abilities and depictions component. The theoretical component is hyper developed, and the axiological one – professional values, the ethics of the professional practice – is almost absent. That is why the labour market does not represent the main objective of the university formation as it is presented as a goal within the strategic documents and as part of the authorities’ position of the matter. In order to accelerate the correlation and harmonization process of the national system of the qualifications with labour market’s expectances – regarding the social work domain as far as we are concerned – including as well the internalization of the specific international standards (www.ifsw.org, Hessle, 2001), our recommendations envisage the activation of two sets of measures. First, the component of professional training should assimilate the models for which the depictions and professional values’ acquisition and exercise is on foreground, the way they are structured and even formulated at the high level social work academic schools. Then, on an occupational level, it

would be of great use the institutionalisation of the diversity representation principle through a minimum three professional association of national representation, equally acknowledged by the law, which to mediate the occupational statute and to visible influence the continuous and initial professional formation process.

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