



Pitsa (Kalliopi) Pouboura (1916-2006)

Aspasia Caloutsis, President of the Board of IAKE

1



Kalliopi Pouboura - known to all as simply Pitsa - contributed greatly to the establishment of Social Work as a profession in Greece. She was one of a group of people coming from allied disciplines who devoted themselves with enthusiasm to this difficult and complex task.

The profession of Social Work didn't exist in Greece before World War II. Social needs up to that time, as in most countries, were met by the family, local groups, philanthropists, the Church, and some social programs run by the State. However, the need for trained professionals became obvious to government officials, philanthropists, and representatives of war relief agencies trying to face the immense social problems after liberation. Know-how for dealing with individual and group problems had to be "imported" from other countries, and modified so as to be useful in Greece, with its historic and cultural idiosyncrasies.

Thus, Social Work as a professional activity appeared in Greece after the end of World War II. In the late 40s and early 50s the number of trained social workers was extremely limited. Most professional social workers were foreigners, who came to Greece through various UN or USA technical assistance programs, with a very small number of Greeks that had been trained in universities abroad. The need to establish local schools in order to train a greater number of social workers was pressing.

Pitsa, although not a social worker herself, was one of those who became involved in the establishment of Social Work in Greece. She participated in the creation of the YWCA School of Social Work in Athens in 1948, and remained active in the education of social workers till the end of her long life. She firmly believed in the social usefulness of the profession.

Pitsa was born in Athens in 1916, an only child. Her father was a priest. She studied at the University of Athens, and the Teachers College of Columbia University. She did not create a family of her own, forming instead a “family” out of her many students. One could justly name her a born teacher who was, at the same time, a perpetual student. She travelled, and read avidly. Her knowledge of literature, history, culture, and the humanities in general, was vast.

The field of social work education, especially the first generations of locally trained workers, owes her much for quality training. We too, greek social workers who had been trained abroad, owe her much for the help she offered us in the difficult task of “indigenizing” foreign methodologies as regards case-work, group work, and community organization.

Pitsa had a gift for teaching. She used this to the benefit of all, not only students, but also colleagues and friends. This, she did almost invisibly, through person to person or group discussions – and not through writings, which she systematically avoided – using her vast knowledge of psychology, history, and culture. She certainly was a believer in the “Socratic” method of problem-solving and teaching. She shared enthusiastically all new ideas that she discovered through her own studying. All in all, she was a constant source of information, as well as of solutions to the everyday dilemmas of both our personal and professional lives.

As a professor of the YWCA School, she taught a most interesting course on the History of Western Culture, and was one of the first instructors to focus on and teach the topic of “Ecology”, many years before the study of the environment caught the public interest. The educational policy of the School, from the very beginning, placed great emphasis on experiential teaching. She became one of the main supporters of this policy, and actively participated in the formulation of the parts of the curriculum aimed at this form of teaching: field work in various social agencies of the Athens-Piraeus area, supervised field work in remote villages, seminars held within the communities where the students lived and worked for specific periods of time, educational excursions to places of cultural and social interest all over Greece and Cyprus.

Pitsa, before getting involved in the training of social workers, had a long and successful career as a professor in secondary education. She had taught Greek language and literature, history and psychology, at various prestigious schools of secondary education in Athens. Later, after her resignation from the post of Director of the YWCA School of Social Work, she continued her career in education as the Dean of the Orlinda Childs Pierce College in Athens.

Regarding Social Work, Pitsa became Director of the YWCA School of Social Welfare in July 1960, a post she held until September 1968. She was the first fulltime director of that School. After her departure, the state set a condition that future deans had to come from the profession of Social Work –which was the recognition by the Greek State that this new profession had come of age. In spite of her resignation in 1968 she kept, till the end of her life, her connection with Social Work.

She participated in all of the transformations of the YWCA School, from its establishment in 1948, up to 1984 when its operation ceased. It may be of interest to social workers of other countries to mention the name changes that this School went through. These changes reflect the recognition by society and the State of the new profession of Social Work, and the ensuing demands for better and more intensive training of its practitioners and for an ever

increasing scope for the fields of social welfare and social policy. The original name was 'YWCA School of Social Welfare', changed some years later to 'YWCA School of Social Work'. Then, in 1974, the Greek YWCA decided to establish an autonomous, independent new organization it named IAKE (Foundation for the Advancement of Social Work) that was to be the aegis for the School. So, the original School was renamed 'IAKE School of Social Work' and operated as such until 1984.

It was in 1984 that the Greek State decided that all training of social workers, as well as that of various other professions, would be undertaken by the State itself. In 1984 all the Schools of Social Work that operated in Athens, their students and personnel, were transferred to the Department of Social Work, of the School of the Health and Welfare Professions of the Athens Technological Institute, a Department which was created for this purpose.

Pitsa did not follow us at the Athens Technological Institute. She continued her collaboration with the IAKE Foundation, participating in the various educational activities that the Foundation developed after its School was handed over to the State.

Thus, to her last days, she remained actively involved in the field of Social Work. She worked for IAKE in various posts - as a consultant to its Library, participant in the organization of seminars and publications - and by remaining for years as the vice-president of its Executive Board.

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