



Czech Republic: Is Social Work a Science or Is It Just a Profession?

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The development of social work in the Czech Republic is closely related to the development of education for social workers. In order to answer the question whether social work is a science or a profession, it is important to study the history of, and the present situation in, social work in the Czech Republic.

Social work and social work education in the period between 1918 – 1938

Social work has had a long-time tradition in the Czech Republic. The founding of the independent Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 was in that same year accompanied by the establishing of the first school of social work under the name the Higher school of Social Care in Prague. Its establishing was a reaction to the need for professionally well-prepared social workers who could build modern social work from the then existing public care for the needy, the youth and the voluntary activities of various charitable societies (Socialní 1928: 15-18).

In the period between the two world wars, social workers were active in the areas of community social work (aimed at the needy), care for the youth, in social and pedagogical care (in schools), vocational guidance, institutional care for disabled youth and adults, health care for mothers and infants, antitubercular care and in child health care (Novotná, Schimmerlingová and Šálková 1995: 3-6).

Requirements of social work practice lead to the first efforts to introduce university education in social work. However, this was accomplished much later, in 1945. The Higher School of Social Care was abolished in 1935 and replaced with the Masaryk State School of Health and Social Care where studies consisted of five academic semesters¹. This school provided specialized higher education. (Novotná, Schimmerlingová and Šálková 1995: 3-6)

It is possible to discern two main trends in the development of social work after 1935. The first trend is represented by sociologists and pedagogues who strove to establish an independent profession of a social worker and develop social work into an integral scientific discipline. The other trend was represented by medical doctors who emphasized the necessity to have well-educated social workers in health care, mainly to help doctors in the area of social medicine (Novotná, Schimmerlingová and Šálková 1995: 3-6).

Social work education between 1918 – 1938 is characterized by the efforts to develop social work as a scientific discipline. The author who can be credited most for the development of social work as a scientific discipline is Marie Krakešová who taught at the Higher school of Social Care and later at the Masaryk State School of Health and Social Care. In 1934, this

¹ in the Czech Republic, academic semester means either the September to December or the February to May portion of an academic year

author published her work entitled the Social Case. In Krakešová's opinion, the task of individual social work is to return the client to independent life through the mobilization of resources in the client himself or herself, or in his or her surroundings. The author gives a thorough description of the methods through which a social worker achieves this goal. (Krakeš and Krakešová 1934). Krakešová can be seen as the predecessor of the psychosocial approach in social work. In literature, it is Hamilton who is regarded as the author of the above mentioned approach but she actually published her ideas related to this topic as late as in 1941 (Skidmore and Thackeray, 1998: 14).

Social Work and Social Work Education in the period between 1945 – 1989

In 1945, The University of Political and Social Science, which also included the Faculty of Social Science, was established in Prague and in 1947, The University of Social Science was established in Brno. These two schools provided university education in social work with the studies consisting of eight academic semesters.

The establishing of university education in social work had tremendous significance not only for the development of social work as an academic discipline but primarily for the development of social work as a science. The precondition which makes it possible to develop a scientific discipline is that research results are available. The disciplines which prepared students for scientific work, for instance 'social work science', statistics, sociological research, and the like, were included into the curricula at both of the universities.

Special research establishments, which were called 'Social Clinics', formed an important part of the universities. Let me cite from the professional literature of that period " Science institutes, laboratories and research institutes form the necessary part of every university and enable students to carry out scientific research and training. It is therefore self-evident that establishing the social clinics at the Faculty of Social Science of the University of Political and Social Science came as a necessary step. In this way, we laid the basis for the theoretical and scientific development of social work methods" (Janoušek 1947: 3).

The social clinics at the University of Political and Social Science in Prague were headed by the already mentioned Marie Krakešová. Her research activity at the social clinics translated into two publications, the Psychogenesis of Social Cases (Krakešová 1946) and Introduction to the Practice at Social Clinics (Krakešová 1948). She published her theoretical notions in these works and included a description of the methods of the so-called formative social therapy as the methods of individual social work. However, a more detailed description of formative social therapy can be found in Krakešová's last book called Formative Social Therapy. In formative social therapy, it is necessary to replace family environment and other causal influences having negative impact on a client's socialization development with new facts and events which will instigate new and constructive powers in the client and form his or her new social development. It is therefore of utmost importance to know what defective development the client had gone through as this subsequently determines the choice of formative environment for the client in contact with the social worker as well as the overall formative psychological procedure to be chosen. The main aim is that in the process of re-education, these destructive events and their consequences are replaced with new experience which can help the client create normal relationships and attitudes (Krakešová 1973: 74).

Both of the two universities were abolished in 1953 as a consequence of the communist coup in 1948 on the assumption that there would exist no social problems in socialism and therefore no social workers would be needed. Several types of education for social workers

existed during the period between 1953 and 1989. In the 1950s, there even existed secondary school education for social workers with a school-leaving examination in Prague. Until 1968, the school in Prague had been the only one which had provided education to social workers in a two-year post-secondary-school program of studies. In 1968, a secondary school of social work and legal studies was established in Ostrava, and a year later in Brno (Chytil and Popelková 2002: 68–69).

In the 1950s and at the beginning of 1960s, social workers could only work in the area of social care for children and young people and in institutions for the elderly and the physically handicapped citizens. This is the period of practical liquidation of social work (Chytil and Popelková 2002: 68–69).

The most important impulse for the development of social work in Czechoslovakia came in 1968. One of the outcomes of the Prague Spring of 1968 was admitting the fact that even in socialism, there existed social problems, and this resulted in the forming of a new concept of social work. The Ministry of Work and Social Affairs was reestablished and on the basis of experience gained in Western European countries, programs of social work with children and families, the elderly, the physically handicapped, released prisoners, and homeless people were outlined and drafted. Social work was developed in industrial, schools, the health sector, the penitentiary system and in social care institutions (Chytil and Popelková 2002: 68–69).

After the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet armies and after the political suppression at the beginning of the 1970s, many people with university education were forced to leave their positions. Notably university teachers, psychologists, sociologists and lawyers belonged to this group of people and the surprising thing is that they were allowed to start working as social workers. This fact bore great importance for the development of social work in Czechoslovakia. The skills which these people brought into social work made it possible to outline new social programs, introduce new social work methods and carry out research (Chytil 1996: 1-3).

Abolition of university education in the 1953s should logically have lead to the loss of interest in the development of social work research and in the development of theoretical concepts. Paradoxically, this was not the case in Czechoslovakia. The development of social work as a practical discipline after 1968 led to the requirement for theoretical reflection of practice. The remarkable thing that is characteristic for the Czechoslovak social work of that time is that it was not content with mere pragmatism and looked for answers to the question what methods are to be used when working with clients and which theoretical conceptions of social work are to be used as the underpinning for these methods.

The most widely used theoretical concept in the 1970s and 1980s was Marie Krakešová's formative social therapy. Besides that, other theoretical concepts and corresponding methods were used when working with various target groups.

Social work in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s may be illustrated on the following example of social work with the target group of "released prisoners" in the city of Ostrava (pop. 325 000). Social work with released prisoners was carried out by specialized social workers. Ostrava was the first place in the country where a special center for social work with released prisoners, called the 'post-penitentiary' center, was established as early as in 1973. 8 social workers, 4 external psychologists and 2 external lawyers worked at the center. In 1975, an in-house psychologist joined the team.

Social work was divided into five stages:

1st stage – preparatory work

In this stage, social workers acquired information on their future clients from social workers who worked in prisons and from prisoners themselves either by visiting them in prison or by visiting their families.

2nd stage – establishing and developing a therapeutic relationship

This stage primarily emphasized the task of gaining the clients' confidence. With their words and acts, social workers tried to persuade the client that they were interested in his or her fate and that they understood his or her problems. At the same time, social workers tried to motivate clients to participate in solving their social problems, which included:

- unfavorable interpersonal relationships (disrupted or dysfunctional family relationships),
- problems encountered when searching for a job (insufficient qualifications, disease),
- housing problems,
- health problems,
- financial problems.

3rd stage – determining the anamnesis and diagnosis, creating a socio-therapeutic plan

The aim in this stage was to create a socio-therapeutic plan which focused on finding a solution to the client's basic social problems with the aim to stabilize the client. Another aim was the creation of a strategic plan focusing on the change in the structure of the client's system of values, fixed patterns in his or her interpersonal relationships and reeducation in the area of fixed behavioral patterns.

4th stage – implementation of the socio-therapeutic plan

The method used to fulfill the aims of the socio-therapeutic plan was a modified version of Glasser's reality therapy.

5th stage – conclusion and therapy evaluation

Solving the client's social problems required coordination of the work of a whole number of institutions and committees were therefore appointed which included representatives from prisons, courts, prosecutor's offices, police, health institutions, workers' departments, employers, trade unions and social workers.

This form of work enabled effective solution to the clients' social problems and the fulfillment of aims of the strategic plan regarding the client's re-socialization. A network of voluntary co-operators to social workers was created as part of the system of social work with released prisoners and these co-workers were mainly active at the client's workplaces.

Their network in Ostrava included more than 1 200 volunteers who received regular training and for whom a specialized magazine was published (Chytil 1998: 83-84).

The crucial factor for the development of social work as a scientific discipline and for the development of theories and methods is research. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was the Research Institute of Work and Social Affairs which dealt with research in the area of social work. It

was very important for the development of social work that graduates from The University of Political and Social Science in Prague and The University of Social Science in Brno worked in this research institution. Research was mainly oriented towards the social-needs analysis for the individual target groups, i.e. the elderly, the physically handicapped, families and children, the Roma ethnic group and released prisoners. Besides that, another type of research was carried out which focused on efficiency of the methods of social work with the individual target groups (Dunovský 1974, Schimmerlingová 1977, Junková 1979, Pavlok 1984).

Research of other institutes also dealt with social work, The Research Institute of Criminology may serve as an example here. This institute focused on examining the effectiveness of social work methods from the point of view of crime prevention in young people and adults. Other institutes, for instance The Research Institute of Penology, engaged in the research of social work methods in the penitentiary system.

Besides the research activities carried out in these institutions, research was also organized by specialized social work establishments. For instance, in the period between 1986 – 1989, The Post-penitentiary Center in Ostrava (engaging in social work with released prisoners) carried out research in cooperation with the Dept. of Sociology of the Philosophical Faculty of Palacký University in Olomouc, involving a group of 1200 clients with the aim to reveal the agents, both objective and subjective in character, which influence the relationship “social worker – client” (Chytil 1991).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the lack of social workers with university qualifications in the field of social work was compensated for by graduates from the fields of psychology, sociology and educational sciences. And it was the students of these branches interested in social work who carried out research of various aspects of social work in their theses.

Social Work and Social Work Education in the period after 1989

There has occurred no substantial change in social work practice compared to the period before 1989. Social workers are mostly employees of municipalities and public (civil) servants. As they did before 1989, social workers still work in the health sector (hospitals, institutions for infants, mental homes), in schools (counseling establishments, children’s care homes, reformatories for delinquent children), in the penitentiary system and in social care institutions (old people’s homes, social care homes for physically handicapped people). After 1989, non-governmental entities have also established themselves and provide social services while, at the same time, they provide employment to social workers. Charita (Caritas Czech Republic), Diakonie (Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren) and the Salvation Army belong to the largest non-governmental entities in the Czech Republic and besides them, there are many other, smaller entities.

The number of social workers has grown in connection with the number of social problems in the society. For instance in Ostrava (pop. 325,000), the number of social workers working in the area of social work with children and families has grown from 17 in 1990 to 90 in 1996 (Roční 1996).

Since 1990, social work education has belonged to the fastest growing fields in the Czech Republic. In 1989, there were only three secondary schools of social work and legal studies, located in Prague, Ostrava and Brno, but educational programs for social workers were formed at the philosophical faculties of Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno and Palacký University in Olomouc as early as in 1990. At the same time, secondary

schools of social work and legal studies were transformed into colleges of social work and legal studies.

In the situation when these newly created and gradually completed educational programs for social workers could not have continued in the tradition of an existing and widely regarded institution with a European standard (as there was none), the necessity to determine general quality criteria for social work education became obvious. And it was decided that the so called Minimum Standard for Social Work Education was to become this general quality criterion. The parties that participated in the working out of this standard between 1991 and 1993 were representatives of social workers' employers, The National Association of Social Workers in the Czech Republic, departments providing education to social workers at the philosophical faculties of the above mentioned universities, the then existing higher schools of social work and legal studies as well as representatives of the schools of social work from the Netherlands, Great Britain and the USA. Here, the basic requirements on what qualifications a graduate of social work studies should have are defined on the basis of the principles of studies and a minimum set of the subjects of studies. In 1993, a voluntary organization of universities and those colleges offering at least three years of post-secondary-school education in social work was established, under the name The Association of Social Work Educators of the Czech Republic (ASVSP). ASVSP's long-term goal is to improve the quality of social work education and it considers the Minimum Standard of Social Work Education to be the most important instrument in the effort to attain this goal. Its creation, innovation, the support of ASVSP's members during its implementation and checking whether schools which are ASVSP's members comply with this standard – those are the core activities of the association (Tomeš 1997).

Practice is an essential part of social work studies and according to ASVSP's recommendations, it should amount to at least 25% of the volume of instruction. So a decision was made to complement the practical part of social work studies with a special seminar where students could analyze their practical experience from the perspective of social work theories and methods (Tomeš 1997).

The development in the area of social work education after 1990 has led to the establishing of the present educational system:

- specialized higher schools (three-year post-secondary-school studies),
- Bachelor's degree programs offered by universities (three-year studies),
- Master's degree programs offered by universities (five-year studies, or two-year studies following a Bachelor's degree),
- postgraduate doctoral studies.

During a relatively short time, the Czech Republic was successful in creating an educational system in social work from the level of specialized higher schools to the postgraduate doctoral level. (Chytil and Popelková 1999: 6-7).

The following factors made such a fast development of social work university studies after 1989 possible:

- when justifying the need for professionals and experts with university education in the field of social work, it was possible to rely on support from the practical sector, which had called for the re-installment of university education since the 1970s,
- previous tradition of university education in social work in the period between 1945 – 1953,
- the presence in practice of professionals with university education having experience both in practice and in research in social work who were competent to work at universities,
- the existence of university departments or institutes willing to establish and accredit social work education (departments of sociology, education sciences, pedagogy).

In a relatively short time, the synergistic effect of all of the above mentioned factors made it possible to constitute all the levels of university education in social work.

After the re-installment of university education in social work, it was possible to trace two trends applied in outlining the programs of studies.

The first trend oriented social work education towards education for practical use so it was pragmatically oriented on skills without the requirement for the students to receive thorough theoretical grounding and training for research.

The second trend presumed theoretically grounded education in the social sciences enabling students to reflect their theoretical knowledge in practice as well as to turn to theory when looking for answers to the problems encountered in practice.

The first tendency can be found at the level of higher school education and, in some schools, at the level of Bachelor's degree studies. The second one is characteristic of the greater part of Bachelor's degree programs of studies and of Master's degree and doctoral (Ph.D.) programs.

Education in the Bachelor's and Master's programs of studies puts emphasis on the theory of social work method, theory and methodology of science, research methods, social policy, the theory of sociology and psychology, law, minority issues and problems related to health and disease.

The following is an example of the content of the doctoral program of studies in social work at the Medico-Social Faculty of the University of Ostrava.

Topical Issues in Social Work

Annotation:

The aim of this one-semester course will be the systematic recapitulation of the latest theoretical knowledge from the area of social work at the European level. A synopsis of the latest literature relevant for social work studies will also form part of the subject matter. Emphasis will be given to the ability to use this knowledge primarily in scientific work.

The methodology of the social sciences and social work

Annotation:

This two-term course introduces students in the doctoral program of studies to the principles of scientific work, to the basic scientific approaches used in human and social sciences, and to the possibilities and limits of applying scientific methodology in the field of social work.

Emphasis will be given to the students' ability to apply the acquired knowledge in their own creative and independent professional work in the area of social problems.

Seminar 1: The essentials in scientific methodology – its establishing, development and modernization

Logical rudiments, empirical fundamentals and historical essentials in scientific study, metatheories and the science on science.

Seminar 2:Historically Relevant (Fruitful) Theoretical and Methodological Approaches in human and social sciences

Assembling scientific knowledge (formal systems, general systems, discourses) the hypothetical deductive theorem in human and social sciences, methods and techniques. Problems with objectiveness, veracity and legitimacy of scientific knowledge in human and social sciences.

Seminar 3: Heuristically Fruitful Methodological Disputes in human and social sciences.

Explanation and understanding, everyday and scientific knowledge, veracity and legitimitization, exactness and interpretation, objectiveness and participation, the scientific and the non-scientific, discourse and the system.

Seminar 4:The Possibilities and Limits of Applying the Methodology in human and social sciences in the Field of Social Work

Methodology and the nature of social work objects, the problem of specific methods in social work, theory in social work and hypotheses creation, the choice of research methods, the limits of general and specific applications, research projects.

The Theory of the social sciences and social work

Annotation:

In the form of seminars, this course will acquaint students with selected problems of sociology in relation to the present social tendencies. The focal point of the course will be the consequences of the deepening crisis of the welfare state, namely the issues of marginalization, and the threat of social exclusion. The concept of the world of networks, which in various areas replace the existing fixed and formal organizations, will be used to analyze the impact of the ongoing changes in the social sphere. The latest globalization trends will also be taken into consideration, with regard to both their impact on the traditional social structure as well as their relation to the further development of the welfare state and the nature of social work in the near future.

Seminar 1: Modern Sociology and The Crisis of the Welfare State

The aim of this seminar is the social risks analysis in relation to the so called crisis of the welfare state. Its subject matter will also include the phenomenon of social integrity crisis, as it is depicted by the sociologies of the developed countries. The crisis of the welfare state will be analyzed in light of the ongoing global civilization and economic processes. The concept of civilization risks and the concept of reflexive modernity will also be analyzed in relation to the ongoing social processes.

Seminar 2: Marginalization and Social Exclusion

The problem of social exclusion will be analyzed, primarily on the basis of French source documents. This perspective will be used to analyze some of the indicators of social cohesion once again. The problem of homelessness will also be dealt with, including all of the various

aspects of what homelessness means. All of the present sociological theories dealing with the issue of social cohesion and social exclusion, again namely the French ones, will be critically evaluated.

Seminar 3: Social Work in the World of Networks

The ongoing changes in social institutions from formal and fixed organizations towards changeable and flexible social networks will be evaluated on the basis of a conception by the French sociologist Luc Boltanski. Both the possible benefits and the possible threats of this important form of restructuring occurring in the social sphere will be analyzed. Those social work concepts which reflect these structural changes will be evaluated in the seminar.

Seminar 4: Globalization and Changes in the Social Structure

The subject matter of analysis in this seminar will be the process of globalization. The analysis will focus on the possible or probable consequences of the ongoing changes in the social sphere. Namely the prospects of the middle classes will be examined from the point of view of social integrity. The issue of the middle classes will also be commented on in connection with the efforts to call in question the institution of the welfare state itself. The process of globalization, the process of changes in the social structure and the phenomenon of the welfare state crisis will be examined in common context and in relation to one another.

Research and its application on social work

Annotation:

The aim of this two-semester course is to extend knowledge, skills and competence in the area of research methods and techniques used in research in the sciences on man both at the theoretical level and at the level of their application.

The specific focus on the area of social work necessitates the use of interdisciplinary research procedures which are to be applied on selected problems dealt with by the Ph.D. students themselves in their doctoral theses, or within the framework of various methodological procedures when analyzing the social impacts of various measures in relation to the current social situation.

At least two sessions will be held for each of the seminars.

Seminar 1: Quantitative Research Strategy in Social Work, Survey

The aim of the seminar is to improve the methods of mathematical statistics in order to gain knowledge about the possibilities and limits of data analysis in social work, skills in data processing on available statistical software and competence in adequate analysis and interpretation of results acquired through various statistical program systems on the one hand, and skills in survey solutions on the other hand.

Seminar 2: Qualitative Research Strategy in Social Work

The aim of the seminar is to improve the principles of qualitative methodology in their application in social work. This involves methods of data collection and analysis, both on a theoretical basis and in their application. Systematic cultivation of the students' skills in the use of the basic research methods (observation and interviewing) is required in order to gain knowledge in this area.

Seminar 3: Integrative (Extended, Systemic) Research Strategy in Social Work

The aim of the seminar is to make use of a research strategy which respects the fact that the subject matter of the social sciences are people, i.e. living human beings. This theory is built in interaction between phenomena and notions, activities and ideas, with the interaction understood as a dynamic system. Empirical orientation focuses on the research of behavior.

Seminar 4: Selected Problems of Evaluation in Social Work

The aim of the seminar is the preliminary orientation of evaluation towards the area of research strategies taking into consideration the research target, towards evaluation of the effectiveness of social measures and towards social intervention evaluation. Further issues will be dealt with in the course of the seminars with regard to the current development in social issues.

DOCTORAL THESIS SEMINAR

The doctoral thesis seminar will run in the last three semesters of the studies, in the extent of ten tutorial lessons, either individually or in groups organized according to the topics of the doctoral theses.

Diploma seminars will be lead by the individual instructors assigned for the individual doctoral theses.

Conclusions

In the course of development of social work as a profession and as an academic discipline in the Czech Republic, it is possible to identify efforts to find theoretical grounding for social work. Social work, both in its practice as well as in social work education, tried to copy the logic of scientific work. It looked for theoretical sources to the methods used and verified practical results through research. In the history of social work in the Czech Republic, it is possible to find periods when theoretical preparation and research were realized in schools, i.e. in the period between 1935 - 1953. In the period between 1968 and 1989, it was practice which provided the opportunity for the development of theory and research. After 1989, the theoretical development of social work and of social work research returns back to the universities. The re-installed social work education at universities at the departments of the social sciences (departments of sociology, pedagogy and education sciences) not only enabled the establishing of independent departments of social work at universities, but above all, it had a positive influence on the development of social work as an independent scientific discipline that respects the logic of scientific study in the social sciences. And the existence of doctoral programs of studies in social work is a guarantee of further development of social work as a scientific discipline.

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Roční výkaz o výkonu sociálně právní ochrany dětí a mládeže, službách a dávkách sociální péče pro rodiny s nezaopatřenými dětmi za rok 1995 v okrese Ostrava. 1996. Praha: Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí.

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