Running Head: Social Work Developments in Lithuania

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Summary
Following the end of a half-century of Soviet occupation, Lithuania, like other former Soviet republics, has been in socio-economic disorder. Now that Lithuania is free, the system of social welfare is characterized by under-funded health services and pensions, and a large number of institutions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and practitioners focusing on community development, using Lofland's model of social setting analysis.Results indicate that the collaborative efforts successfully produced a revolutionary and successful social service program, a multi-generational living facility offering full-time social services to unwed mothers, infants, and elderly residents.This article is based upon the qualitative study of social work practitioners and social work students and chronicles the successes and difficulties encountered within the process of community development.

Introduction

The profession of social work in Lithuania is newly developed and community practice is a fundamental aspect of the development. Community practice is fundamental to all social work and vital to all social workers, whether generalists, specialists, therapists, advocates, or activists. Although usually associated with community organization, social action, social planning (Rothman/Trotman 1987), and other macro-practice activities, direct service and clinical social workers engage in community practice when they make client referrals, assess community resources, develop client social support systems, and advocate to policy makers for programs to meet clients' needs (Hardcastle et al. 1997). No matter what their position, social workers must reckon with their communities. This can be as enjoyable as discovering their communities while documenting information needed to be more effective with clients or as professional in family agencies.

Fellin (1987) defines communities as social unites with one or more of the following three dimensions: (1) a functional spatial unit meeting sustenance needs, (2) a unit of patterned interaction, and (3) a symbolic unit of collective identification (p.1). One definition of community practice is the use of social work practice skills to change the behavioral patterns of community groups, organizations, and institutions or people's relationships and interactions with these entities is the. (Hardcastle et al., 1997). Community organization and community development often go hand-in-hand. Both are social work strategies which help a community or a sub-community to become a more effective, efficient, and supporting environment for its residents. Ross (1967) a pioneer of bringing community organization and social work together defined community organization as:

"A process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, orders (or ranks) these needs and objectives, develops the confidence and will to work at these needs or objectives, finds the resources (internal and/or external) to deal with these needs or objectives, takes action in respect to them, and in so doing extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community" (p. 28).

Collaboration also must take place in order for community development to advance.
Collaboration has been defined in many way in the literature, however, all focus attention on the synchronization of efforts and systems working together to meet clearly identified goals. For example, Daka-Mulwanga et al. (1995) in defining collaboration note that three styles exist in a hierarchy with interorganizational relationships becoming more sophisticated, complex, and effective for problem solving as one moves from cooperation to collaboration. Collaborative settings have been described as "organizational and interorganizational structures where resources, power, and authority are shared and where people are brought together to achieve common goals that could not be accomplished by a single individual or organization independently" (Kagan 1991, 3).

Historical Background in Community Development and Practice in Lithuania
The road towards a constitutional state in Lithuania began with the struggle for political freedom. The dramatic cause of freedom for the Lithuanian state started as early as 1989 with a signature collecting campaign to support superiority of the Lithuanian law over the USSR law. The main political rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom to impart and receive information, the right to seek positions in government offices regardless of political views, and the right to establish political parties had been gained by March 11, 1990. Afterward the parliament promptly ratified most of the international conventions on the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. Soon, however, an essential problem common to all the states in transition from totalitarianism to democracy emerged: formal endorsement of the constitutional values in legal instruments did not correspond to the level of the development of society. It turned out that people did not have a clear scale of values; they were not capable of understanding the role of legal regulations in business relations and accepting their partners as equals. Fifty years of occupation had a much stronger impact on the people's minds than was expected on the eve of independence. Since then, Lithuanians have realized the damage being done to the establishing of companies and concluding of agreements, to production and trade by ignoring basic ethical and legal rules in formation of businesses and in public relations. The role of a new business "entity" which is not easily understood called "Social Work" is beginning to form in this country. The purpose of this article is to discuss the view of the developing profession from the vantage point of social work students and current practitioners.

Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person by the author over a series of three weeks. Participants were encouraged to discuss topics related to community development throughout the interview and also add any additional topics they deemed pertinent. Informed consent was obtained for all participants. Participants were asked to describe how they became involved in social work, to define community, and how working toward community development had affected them personally and professional, and to comment on future efforts.

The researchers were interested in studying attitudes and behaviors of social workers in their natural settings with a special focus on community development. Prior to the study, the researchers reviewed Lofland's Analysing Social Settings, (1995) in order to better focus the field work. The researchers then formatted interview questions around the following topics: meanings, practices, episodes, encounters, roles, relationships, groups, organizations, and settlements. The use of field work was especially applicable as the researchers wanted to observe subtle communications and other events that would not have been captured through a quantitative study. The interview format was open-ended and information was collected from as many interviews as possible during a selected timeframe. The social work students and practitioners agreed to participate in an in-depth question-answer session designed to elicit from the information pertinent to the above mentioned factors.

Main Themes

Almost all of the participants identified 1) meanings, 2) relationships, and 3) organizations/community development, as major themes of their day-to-day activities. One theme, not identified by Lofland, that emerged was religion or spirituality.

Meanings

One focus of field work is "meanings" as suggested by Lofland (1995) is defined as "linguistic devised such as culture, norms, and worldviews". The participants in this study agreed that culture, world views, and norms were helping to shape the face of social work. One participant explained "our new freedom and the information and resources we have are helping us "learn" new ways to help people. We have to learn a whole new world almost and a new way of thinking (being free and all that is involved). Whereas before we were limited and had no resources, now we are limitless but still have few to no resources. Just because we are free does not make new resources appear" (participant 7, age 50, practitioner).

Another participant explained "Our worldview has not that much changed. We are free but now (this) this brings out many problems that were hidden before. Now we are free to help all the families with pregnant teens and alcoholic family members. Freedom has brought all the family secrets out in the open. We have a brand new culture almost within our existing culture. (participant 8, age 33, practitioner).

"The culture, or how we see the world," is quite different now. It's like we have grown up but don't know how to act in the adult world. We have all this freedom, but to do what with? As social workers, we feel drowning sometimes. We feel as if we don't know how to help the best way-we look at how other countries help but they seem to have just as many problems. We look around for help, (because we are drowning). After talking with other social workers from the US, we now understand better what "burn out" is. Should we be "burned out" this soon? (participant 9, age 19, practitioner).

Relationships

Another repeating theme which emerged in this research was relationships.

Lofland (1995) defines relationships as a vehicle to be used to examine social life in terms of the kinds of behavior appropriate to pairs or sets of roles; co-worker, director-worker, mother-

daughter, friendships. The participants stated that their working relationships were important in providing a supportive network of people with which to interact, that it was important in assisting them to make meaning of being a social worker. It also assisted them in making sense of the social work experience and the day to day challenges associated with the newly developed professions. "Not only are these people my sounding board, my confidants, they are my role models. We are all learning how to work together (some better than others). The relationships that we have formed are good. They are strong. We fight about ideas and how to help, but apparently (this) is good. We try new ways of doing things. We often fall. We laugh and then move on (participant 5, age 28, practitioner).

"These social workers I work with are good. We seem to work well OK together. We count on each other to listen to each other. We talk and ask opinions. We help in this agency where we work with teens who have problems. We do what the administrators tell us to do and we hope we are good. We never know really what goes wrong when we fail. We just start all over again. We have strict protocols that we must adhere to and often we have questions about how to proceed with a certain family or child. Our director helps us to solve these problems. So the relationship we have is one of respect and support. Most of us respect and support each other. What we do is hard work and we need to pat each other (on the back). The relationships with are clients (are) not as good. They are resistant often and this is frustrating. Many think we are still living in the whole society and they don't trust us. They don't want to give us information so that we will report them. They tell us lies so that they protect their families. We work for a long time with certain families and then they won't see us anymore. They think (I guess) that we still can't be trusted. It is in these times that we are the most frustrated. We turn to each other for help often. We asked what the other would do in special situations and we listen to the answers. We spend much time reading and sharing what we read and talking. This is all new to us and we are learning our way. It is good. We are all learning together and we fall down together. But we also help each other get up. It is now a way of life (our profession). We see ourselves as social workers all day-on our way home, on the bus, in our churches. We really do feel that we help" (participant 5, age 32, practitioner).

"As a student, it is an exciting time. To be doing this—this is exciting. We are the leaders in social worker. We are the "firsts". We are seeing how much we can help and through us in classes we are bonding. We are forming supports with social workers here in Vilnius too. We are all learning how to be better. We know we can call each other and ask questions. We often call the social workers to help us with our assignments. It's funny because we usually end up solving the problem together-even though we have the schooling and they don't. It doesn't matter though. We are all supposed to be learning. We have so much to learn about all the problems-mental illness, alcoholism, and teen pregnancy. As a student I know that I will be working with my classmates and so I understand what they are learning. It has been interesting because people in Lithuania look at me when they find out I am studying social work at the University and they say "Wow-that is really interesting." People have a respect for us because we are schooling to learn how to help people be stronger. I feel very close with my classmates and the social workers that I have been able to interact with. I know in the United States they do things so differently than here. But we are just learning how to do everything" (Participant 1, age 22, student).

One participant said "I used to think that solving problems would be easy and that this school would be easy. I have found out though, that without my classmates and the help of social workers already working, that I would have never been able to solve the first problem (Participant 2, age 21, student). Others said that their relationships with clients were positive and that establishing rapport and developing open communication patterns had been easy. "I know how to make my clients feel at ease with me. I can do this with almost all my clients. And that helps me really enjoy working with them. (Participant 10, age 38, social worker).

Religion and Spirituality

A fourth theme, not identified by Lofland, that emerged from the data was that of spiritual/religious influence on daily activities. At present, there are no generally agreed on definitions of spirituality. As Benner (1988) indicates, spirituality is a complex, multidimensional construct. Sometimes the term is used synonymously with religion. In other cases, there is little or no connection to religion or religiosity. For example, Edwards (1980) defines spirituality as a concern with the existential, and Shafranske and Gorsuch (1984) define it as courage to look within. Pate and Bondi (1992) define spirituality as "a view of one's place in the universe" (p.108) and stated that it is a more inclusive term than religion. Gilchrist (1992) differentiates spirituality from religion, saying that although spirituality for some incorporates a religious system, for others it is a highly unstructured orientation. He defines spirituality as "what individuals hold sacred in their lives, what is most important to them at the essence of their being. It is a context for understanding things" (p.12). For purposes of this qualitative research, the participants were asked to provide their own definitions of spirituality or religion in reference to their careers and schooling.

Both religion and spirituality seemed to serve several functions for the social workers in this study in assisting them to cope with problems they were working on of rape, incest, domestic violence and abuse. Participants stated that their religion or church was important in providing a supporting network of people with which to interact, that it was important in them to make meaning of the their working experienced in a manner that helped them to be better social workers or students. One participant said "my religion is helpful in that it helps me have faith that God will provide something better for these families. It helps me realize that God didn't make the abuse happen, that he isn't punishing these children (participant 7, age 50, practitioner).

One participant said, "It was my spiritual belief that we can handle anything that's thrown at us that helps me in my job (participant 5, age 32, practitioner). Others said that their religion helped them believe that they were of worth in spite of what was happening in their jobs when they weren't feeling like they were making any progress. One said, "I know who I am on a very deep, spiritual level, so all I see can not destroy me. The spouse abuse, rapes, incest, -nothing. (participant 8, age 33, practitioner). Others said their religion helped them believe that they were making a difference in the world and that their job had meaning, thus, they had the faith to overcome all the frustrations and tragedies they saw. The participants who worked with sexually abused children, expressed a spiritual empathy with the clients. One participant said "My clients often feel hopeless, the feel like they lack a sense of purpose. They are ambivalent about their friends. It is as if their souls were abused (participant 8, age 33, practitioner). The participants also tried to talk with their clients about spirituality/religion if the topic was appropriate. Many

of the community social workers who interacted with adult victims of childhood abuse reported that many of their clients wonder why abuse happens to them. “They wonder what the point of “all of this is. If there is a God, what kind of God would let this happen? Or “If a loving higher Power or spiritual force knew that little children were being abused, why would they continue to let it happen?” (participant 9, age 19, practitioner). Facilitating spiritual growth through discussion was often part of the daily routine for the participants who worked primarily with abused children and adult victims of childhood abuse.

Organizations/Community Development

A fourth theme, occurring in all interviews was that of organizations/community development. Lofland defines organization as beyond small groups, including formal organizations, such as hospitals, schools, and agencies. Every participant interviewed spoke of a newly developed well-known and regarded social service organization, “Generation House.” Generation House discussion emerged in all conversations and was a recurring topic throughout the research process. The development of Generation House was the outcome of several grass-root organizations identifying a need in the community through a series of meetings and then implementing a plan of action to bring the organization to completion.

The History of Generation House

“In focusing on the geriatric population, Lithuanian community practice social workers along with further encouragement, assistance, and collaboration from the social work program at the University of Vilnius, developed several grass-roots organizations. Both entities sought to identify and meet the needs of individuals and families in a certain geographic location in the city of Vilnius and were able research this need by meeting with residents in the community, observing and analyzing their needs, collecting personal stories, and meeting with as many government officials in that community face-to-face. The social workers and students did not conduct a “formal” community study as such, but combined strategies from fieldwork, community analyses, and problem and service studies. After months of informal research, community meetings, government round-tables, one such grass-roots organization, "Generation House", was developed. Generation House was established by Lithuanian Caritas Federation in January 1995 and is financially supported by Kaunas Municipality. The three-generation home is the first such organization in Lithuania. Since Generation House opened in 1997, administrators have developed a system for referral for both young women and older people. Generation House is a home for the aged and for single homeless mothers with children. The purpose of the project is to provide shelter and implement generation care programs which aim to increase communication and exchange to better meet the needs of children, their mothers, and older people. There are separate programs for each group and one general program aimed to unite the generations. Both older and younger persons are expected to benefit from the programs (participant 6, age 24, practitioner).

Programs of Work with Young Women

“Generation House provides temporary accommodation for young women and their children. The young women may reside in the House for up to 12 months. During their residency they are required to complete an in-depth psychosocial assessment. This assessment assists the social workers to identify potential deficient areas in parenting and coping skills, budgeting,

housekeeping and maintaining a household. Each new resident signs an agreement which specifies all the areas identified in her assessment. The residents and social workers have individual weekly meetings in order to review the resident's progress toward these goals. Residents also meet in groups twice a week for approximately two hours and discuss child development, child safety, nutritional practices, sexual health and assertiveness, communication skills, care and control of children, parenting skills, and any other relevant topics. Residents also attend one hour religious and prayer services and Bible readings offered on-site through volunteers from local churches"(participant 5, age 28, practitioner).

Programs of Work with Older People

"For older people, Generation House is their permanent home. The House aims to meets the psychological, social, cultural, physical, and spiritual needs of their older residents. The following services are available to each elderly resident: Bible studies, music appreciation, newspaper and book libraries, and board games. There are also a number of informal social meetings which both old and young residents attend for coffee and light refreshments in order to increase interaction as well as communication" (Participant 6, age 24, practitioner)

General Programs for All Residents

"All residents are encouraged to assist one other. The younger female residents assist with shopping, sewing, and cleaning of the older residents. The older residents assist with watching the children and sharing personal and professional skills and experiences as a form of indirect training. Generally relationships between the residents are constructive and many residents "become fond of the older residents as regard them as parental/grandparental figures". (participant 6, age 24, practitioner)

Future Plans of Generation House

One participant clarified that "one of the major difficulties with Generation House is lack of suitable accommodations once a young woman has met her one-year requirement or is ready to move out into the community. Accommodations are provided by older people who come to live at the House. The older residents, upon entering Generation House, agree to allow the young women, once they are ready to move out into the community, to move into their empty houses or apartments. However, most of the empty houses are in disrepair and need significant renovation. At the present time, Generation House does not have adequate funding to repair these homes, leaving the younger residents with little, if any, available options. The younger residents become frustrated because they have been progressing toward a goal over the last 12 months of being independent and responsible, while living on their own. A further consequence of this problem is that many more young women in need are denied admission to Generation House, as there is no available space" (participant 6, age 24, practitioner).

"Social workers are also developing a follow-up protocol for the young women who relocate back into the community. The protocol plan will identify the duration and frequency of social support services needed by the relocating resident" (participant 5, age 32, practitioner).

"Prior to the development of Generation House, many unwed teenage mothers found themselves to be homeless, lacking parenting and coping skills, isolated from friends and family, and without any type of social support system. Graduates of Generation House often express a desire to work

for the agency or do volunteer work to "give back" the support they received while in residency. Future plans, according to the social workers in the House, include continued good works, good results, and good community improvement" (participant 4, age 28, practitioner).

Other research participants explained that "there are, many social workers in Lithuania working toward sustainable economic and community development. Without strong communities, there is no community development. Two to three times a year, a large number of local volunteers come forward throughout the cities and spend a weekend improving the surrounding environments. As time progressed, however, the volunteer organizations anticipated a decline in volunteer activity as people begin to focus on their own economic problems and have to commit more time to their jobs in order to survive financially (Participant 10, age 42, practitioner) . "Community development as such established itself as a sector or distinct stream around 1995 when the first community development activities in urban areas, such as the cities of Kaunas and Vilnius emerged. Those development activities: (1) mainly related to minorities, (2) focused on working with smaller populations, (3) sought to improve public spaces, (4) rebuilt and energized community organizations, and (5) within last two years, focused on the regeneration of housing. In rural areas, these activities are related mainly to environmental issues and regeneration of rural customs. In 1995, there emerged the first coordinated systematic programs for the support of community development. The main one was a joint program of three foundations; however, the outcomes of this main program were met with mixed feelings and uncertain responses from the residents of the community. The program focused on technical assistance and probably the time was not right for it then; certainly, the outcomes are still to be seen. This program raised some important questions about where the financing for community activities and community development would come from, an issue social workers in the United States have struggled with for some time. Surprisingly, the smallest part of funding for such organizations comes from Lithuanian municipalities, which often contribute very little (Participant 11, age 39, practitioner).

"Lithuanians still face the problem that regional approaches to solving complex social issues still prevail. Lithuanians need assistance with the environment, transportation, and public health. But community development is still lacking. The second main issue Lithuanians face is the limited transparency and openness of planning and decision-making processes in the cities of Lithuania and in the country itself. This again relates to that long period in Lithuania's recent history when they had centralized decision-making in government and no one at the local level was invited to think about or participate in any planning or decision-making. This of course is not only a problem for decision-makers, but it is a problem for citizens as well, who quite often do not appear to care what is happening around them. In the past two years, however, there has been an increased awareness that it is necessary to adopt horizontal approaches or more coordinated regional approaches. This growing awareness has come about largely because of the need for preparation of structural funds where there are strong requirements for partnership, coordination, and cooperation (participant 12, age 30, practitioner)

Lithuanian social workers interested in developing a community awareness center must first improve relationships between the non-profit-sector public authorities and businesses—also know as networking or community referral networking in the United States. Networking, a common characteristic of many countries, is even more important in Lithuania and other Baltic

counties because the public and also non-government, non-profit sectors are not seen as important partners in community development (participant 10, age 42, practitioner).

Implications for Social Workers

Lithuanian social workers have acquired extensive knowledge of the problems of community development, but they are still struggling with "what" they are doing when they do community development. There is no real shared understanding of community development even though a hundred agencies in Lithuania do some form of community development. Because of the lack of understanding, it is often difficult for these agencies to communicate with each other. The first important challenge for the social work profession in Lithuania is to develop and possess a clear understanding of community development. A second challenge is for these social workers to develop a "language" for community development. Many Lithuanian citizens are unfamiliar with community development terms including "animation", "community development", "advocacy", "social marketing", and "mediating structures". The social work profession will need to develop a community development dictionary in order to be able to communicate effectively with the citizens. A third challenge for the profession is to work collaboratively with other agencies and to develop formal networks. At the writing of this article, Lithuanian social workers did not have a clear model for building networks but were trying to develop a clear direction for community development, to promote best practices, and to articulate the value of community development.

Despite the benefits of learning from social workers from other countries and nations, Lithuania social workers remain largely unaware of the experiences of their colleagues in other developing nations. They lack access to publication sources that can disseminate their ideas, and because of certain financial constraints, they are often unable to attend international meetings and conferences. While social workers in the Western countries have traveled to Lithuania, we seldom study the welfare programs in order to learn from them or implement them in our countries. The international social work community should encourage the mutual exchange of experience, education, and program knowledge in order to educate ourselves in an international perspective. Future directions for research may include both qualitative as well as quantitative studies to determine professional progression, integration of educational curriculum into practice, and program evaluation.

Social workers in the city of Kaunas observed a social problem, informally research the problem and way to fulfill the need, identified three at-risk populations (unwed teenage mothers, their infants, and a neglected elderly community), developed a plan of action, activated the community for assistance, and implemented a multigenerational living facility which has been show to be effective in helping those at-risk populations. The implementation of an idea into a complete effective social work organization indicates that community organization and development is realistic, feasible, and essential for social workers.

Conclusion

As social workers, we have many choices regarding our effectives in this changing world. We cannot wait for others to make our choices for us: we must act now to respond to our clients' needs and the needs of the communities in which we work and live---just as the Lithuanian social workers did with the development of Generation House. These social workers did pioneering

community practice without knowing really what they were doing, much less the importance of their work. They saw a need and they fulfilled it. As a compassionate, action and results oriented profession, stepping up the pace in community organization and development can be easily executed. Lessons from new social workers in a newly freed country can provide us with the impetus, motivation, and encouragement to develop innovative, effective, and pioneering programs similar to Generation House. Collaboration between university systems and social work agencies makes the development of such innovative programs that much more exciting, accessible, practical, and essential.

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