Understanding Portuguese social workers' values preferences

Helena Teles, Universidade de Lisboa

Maria Irene Carvalho, Universidade de Lisboa

1   Introduction

Values are abstract concepts that have been approached from a variety of viewpoints, disciplines, and contexts, including personal, universal, and cultural aspects (Gimenez and Tamajon, 2019). They can be conceptualised as "organised and relatively durable systems of preferences and (which) be analysed on two distinct levels: one relating to the cultural dimensions of society and the other on the group and individual levels, to the systems of dispositions internalised by the actors, which synthesis their past experiences while guiding and justifying their behaviour and strategies" (Almeida, 1994: 177).

In social work, values refer to the attention given to facts, distinguishing the essential from the accessory, the justifiable from the significant and the insignificant (Carvalho, 2016). Social work is a profession of values (in practice and research) (Sobočan et al., 2019; Banks, 2014; 2012; 2013). Initially concerned with the morality of citizens, the profession has aligned itself towards resolving the complex ethical dilemmas of today (Reamer, 2017).

The era of moralism, temporally positioned between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Reamer, 2013), prototype the new order of progress. This is described as a foundation phase (Askeland and Payne, 2017), and by then social work practice was based on moral values (good and evil), as it was guided by instruments such as social diagnosis and case work that focused on the person and their situation (Richmond, 1917). At the time, social workers were selected for their moral character and their function was to impose the natural rule of things, to "moralise" the poor accordingly. In the middle of the twentieth century, the debate shifted beyond the clients' morality or immorality towards the need for social reforms– welfare model.

After the second world war, the profession was established in all continents (Askeland and Payne, 2017), thereby attracting a diverse group of people who possessed varied beliefs and views. In so doing, a more in-depth debate on values in social work ensued (Biestek, 1957), and subsequently the first ethical codes of the profession emerged (Reamer, 2013; Garnier, 1999). With the adoption and publicisation of the universal declaration of human rights in 1948, the social work profession was challenged to reexamine its character, both benevolent (welfare) and the social controlling.

Social work identifies itself with modern values (autonomy, liberty, self-determination) and is built basing on rationality; whereby bureaucracy characterises everyday life, giving meaning to the profession and removing insecurities in it. This rationality aims to respond to the chaotic aspects of human life by providing a semblance of normalcy and order (Howe, 1994). This rationality was challenged by both the postmodern values and as well as the ideological constructions of maintaining political and economic power (Pluckrose & Linday, 2021;

Howe, 1994). To these authors, postmodernity emphasises the power of language, relativism rather than absolute and universal truths and the fading of boundaries not only epistemologically but also between man and nature. What postmodernity affirms is the value of people being as equals but essentially different beings. The post-modernist theoretical framework (Howe, 1994) allowed the profession to re-discover and reorient itself towards the values of human dignity and strengthen the socio-political dimension to the detriment of its "assistentialist" dimension. This transformation took place more visibly from the mid-sixties onwards in a movement called "reconceptualization"; practice started basing on critical theories and ideologies, and ethics centered on social justice and human rights (Healy, 2008).

This epistemological revolution necessitated social work to accommodate welfare based on philanthropic practices alongside a sociopolitical practice committed to social change and human rights (Ferguson et. al., 2018; Ferguson, 2013). Eventually, social work became grounded in professional decision-making, whose ethical principles were based on universally and culturally specific human rights. The decisions centered around non-neutrality; that all professional actions are political. In that context, the dilemmas of practice required the formulation of ethical protocols from which codes of ethics and guidelines for action including informed consent grew (Reamer, 2013).

At the end of the 20th century, a period of advanced modernity and unrelenting structural economic crises characterised by reduced public policy investments, the social work profession's increased actions in policies were guided by managerialist administration and focus was on groups defined as particularly vulnerable. This issue became a subject of concern in the codes of ethics, namely, professional conduct and the identification of inappropriate practices. To precisely demonstrate this, Sobočan et al. (2019) state that social work code of ethics *"show particular sensitivity to vulnerable populations, issues of social justice (human rights), conflicts of interest, and respect for dignity and privacy"* (p.805).

Bauman (2007) stated that we live in a society that is ambivalent in terms of values, and is constantly creating opportunities but as well new fears. These new fears can lead to the social exclusion of culturally distinct groups, the growth of nationalism and populist ideologies.

Social work emerges in the form of risk control embodied in a 'new managerialism', it focuses on minimal interventions that emphasise risk management, resource allocation, and a culture of evaluation to sustain support and funding of social policies. The issues of fear, risk and networks pose many questions for the profession. In terms of values, one such issue is the use of technology in interventions with people and the associated uncertainties, notably, the protection of personal data, confidentiality and the right to information; all of which are fundamental principles to be protected in this society (Reamer, 2017, 2013; Carvalho, 2016).

Technology is replacing humans in an ever-expanding set of everyday activities. This should be a subject of discussion, especially regarding the ethical implications when providing digital information services, as well as the replacement of the traditional provision of face-to-face services by virtual or online services. For example, if social work education is coordinated and supervised by avatars and virtual entities through online training, in such environments, participants experience situations contextualised in time and space and do not interact with the real people who they will work with. Under such circumstances, the ethical values of the profession can be a source of resistance against the prevailing orthodoxy to resolve some of these problems (Hill and Laredo, 2020).

The values of social work in the current era commit to the values and ideals of virtue, duty and welfare ethics, as approaches that promote justice and well-being. The ethics of caring, of emotions and of responsibility towards humanity are essential in social work (Papouli, 2016; Banks, 2013). Additionally, bioethics and green and sustainable ethics are fundamental and therefore should be included in the axiology of social work.

The universalism of human rights should not disregard the fact that cross-cultural differences influence the preferences of values, and that must be considered in social work. For example, Fang Zhao Fu and Bingqian (2018) note that the influences of traditional Asian philosophies (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism) have an ideological inclination towards collectivism and a lower degree of consideration for the welfare values and individualisation prioritised by Western society. This influence has an impact on the frame of reference of social work in Asia.

However, despite the philosophical differences amongst the European, Asian and American continents, and their ideologies and cultures, there is a set of values that remain in and are central to the profession. These values are in the global statement of ethical principles of social work of the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IFSW and IASSW, 2018). These overarching international bodies established a set of core values to be followed in the profession, they include dignity, self-determination, personal development, and human potential at the individual level, and as well as broader social values of; service, responsibility, and justice.

Framework
Although values are fundamental to the social work profession, they have not been objects of research, especially compared to other areas such as social intervention with families, children and young people, mental health, disability, the elderly, health, and work. Despite this complexity, there exists studies that highlight the significance of values in social work (Banks, 2013; 2012) and the importance of teaching social work values (Hatiboğlu et al. 2019; Papouli 2016; Lou Pearson and Wong 2012), and lastly studies that highlight the values that professionals prefer and use in their practice and research (Ribers 2020; Giménez and Tamajón 2019; Sobočan et al. 2019; Tartakovsky and Walsh, 2018; Chui-Man et al. 2017; Frunză and Sandu, 2017; Čepulionytė and Dunajevas,2016).

Teaching the profession and its ethics has a significant influence on the ability of students while in professional environments such as internships, inspires them to make ethical decisions, use ethical resources and behave ethically (Papouli, 2016). The author avers that teaching social work values is a complex process, especially in internship field contexts, and underlines the need for research that reinforces not only the increased awareness of these values, but also the development of the ethical capacity of students.

At the level of practical education, Hatiboğlu et al. (2019) examined the strategies of social work students to resolve conflicts between their personal and professional values in a context of growing neoliberal capitalism. The results indicate that it is essential to provide information to students on how to both establish reflective and emotional processes that challenge uncomfortable feelings and to manage the fear triggered when personal and professional values are in conflict. Lou, Pearson and Wong (2012) argue that teaching humanist values to social work students in modern China is not highly cherished compared to theoretical frameworks and professional skills, as professional values rely on the culture of each country. This reality is explained by not only culture but also by the fact that social work

education in recent China is more concerned with technocratic and normative aspects compared to politically and pedagogically oriented practices (Fang Zhao Fu and Bingqian, 2018).

At the professional level, ethical practice is defined as a commitment to the values and ethical standards of the profession contained in national codes of ethics and the IFSW International Declaration of Ethics (IFSW&IASSW, 2018). The profession is guided by values derived from various ethical theories, some of which may even be contradictory (Čepulionytė and Dunajevas, 2016; Banks, 2012). The authors argue that this contradiction isn't only resulting from universalism vis-à-vis cultural particularisms but is also associated with the support and control functions of the profession itself. On the other hand, human choices depend not only on the set of existing alternatives but also on the way choices are presented by the organisation and professionals, hence interfering with the preference of values over professional practice.

Frunză and Sandu (2017) analysed the ethical values of social work professionals and stressed a series of mechanisms by which ethical values influence social practices. There seems to be an interpretative conundrum that ethical values present when transposed into social practices. According to the authors (op. cit), the value of relational autonomy may partially lose the ethical dimension of moral action when confronted with the specificity of professional practice. For instance, a case of vulnerable groups such as the mentally ill who require decisions to be taken on their behalf positions values in opposition: the well-being of the community vs self-determination.

Tartakovsky and Walsh (2018) using the Schwartz scale (2003;2012) to examine the value preferences of social workers in Israel, they noted that the values of these professionals differ substantively from those of the general population. In the case of social work, social workers opt more for values associated with transcendence (emotional) and less for values of conservation and self-promotion (general and emancipatory). The use of the Schwartz scale of human values (2003;2012) shows that cultural differences can interfere with people's value preferences. These values can be prioritised differently depending on the type of welfare state and the type of social work practice, i.e., politically, pedagogically, or normatively oriented (Giménez and Tamajón, 2019).

Social work professionals are increasingly aware of the need to examine their personal values and develop decision-making strategies to address complex ethical judgments (Chui-Man Cheung and Ming-Sum, 2017). Values are essential because they guide the professional conduct of social workers regardless of their positions in the organisational structure, impose guidelines for professional decisions, and control evil practices. Indeed, Banks (2014) argues that professionals must assume non-indifference and trust ethics, which are integrative, challenging and resistant.

Methodology
Shalom Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values (2003) is one of the most widely used and tested transcultural theories in the field of behavioral research. This theory has been refined since the 1980s to arrive at its most recent version, that of 2012. The underlying reason for the continuing evolution of this theory is that it assumes that values form a circular motivational continuum; meaning that items have no exact limits in between values and thus have a shared responsibility in more than one, giving rise to multicollinearity.

Furthermore, by measuring different aspects, each value appears multidimensional, thus reducing the internal consistency coefficients. The refined version represents an attempt to reduce or even eliminate these problems. However, until today, on only one occasion, a confirmatory factor analysis has been performed to ensure the validation of the third order structure of this refined version. By using this scale, the intention is to carry out a validation analysis of this structuring, albeit in a different social context and in another geographical scope of action (Giménez and Tamajón, 2019). In this case, in the Portuguese population.

In methodological terms, we have opted for a deductive, quantitative and extensive methodology. Using the Schwartz scale (2003;2012) as a data collection tool, we sent the instrument to 20, 000 public, private-profit and non-profit organisations registered in the social charter which employ social work professionals. In the end, we obtained 1,911 valid responses. Upon obtaining these responses, it was important to correlate these values to those of the Portuguese population, since in any code of conduct it is crucial to include specific cultural values. To perform a parallel analysis between the values of social work professionals and the Portuguese population, the results of the 1,270 Portuguese questionnaires from the European Social Survey (File Round 1-8 of 2016) were examined. The Schwartz scale of human values was used, and so the variables are identical.

Instruments
Sample 1 (n= 1,911 Social workers) and sample 2 (n= 1,270 Portuguese respondents to the European Social Survey) (ESS1-8, 2016). These two populations responded to the same questionnaire, but at different times. The questionnaire used in this survey is the same questionnaire used in the European Social Survey (ESS1-8, 2016). The questionnaire is divided into three parts: demographic information collection (7 questions); professional background (8 questions); and the Schwartz Human Values Scale (2003;2012), consisting of 21 items of ten types of basic motivational values- "transitional"- grouped into four values with a dynamic relationship, and can be summarised into two orthogonal dimensions: self-promotion vs self-transcendence and openness to change vs conservation of a higher order that pursues separate goals and interests (Almeida et al., 2010).

The 21 items of this instrument are at an extreme. The first dimension presents the motivational types, "power" (two items: 2 and 17) and "achievement" (two items: 4 and 13), and at the other, the values of "universalism" (three items: 3, 8 and 19) and "benevolence" (two items: 12 and 18). These axis orders of values are based on the motivation of the individual to promote his/her own interests even at the expense of others, as opposed to transcending his/her selfish concerns. The second dimension opposes the motivational types "self-determination" (two items: 1 and 11), "stimulation" (two items: 6 and 15) and "hedonism" (two items: 10 and 21) to "conformism" (two items: 7 and 16), "security" (two items: 5 and 14) and "tradition" (two items: 9 and 20), ordering values based on the motivation of the person to follow his own intellectual and affective interests through new experiences as opposed to self-restriction, order and resistance to change. "Hedonism" shares elements with "openness to change" and "self-promotion" (cf. Almeida et al., 2010). The instrument of enquiry was made up of a set of values; to which the responses used a scale from Likert (1967) with six points (ranging from "(1) It has nothing to do with me" to "(6) Exactly like me"– Table 1.

Table 1. Definition of the Schwartz ten values system

Dimension	Value	Description	Schwartz items scale
Openness to change	Hedonism	Pleasure and personal gratification	10. Having a good time is important to him. He likes to "spoil" himself.
			21. He seeks every chance he can to have fun. It is important for him to do things that give him pleasure.
	Stimulation	Varied, challenging life stimulation	6. He likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. He thinks it is important to
			do lots of different things in life.
			15. He looks for adventures and likes to take risks. He wants to have an exciting life
	Self-determination	Independence of thought and action, creativity, freedom, choice of objectives	1. Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him. He likes to do things in his own original way.
			In the three 11. It is important for him to make his own decisions about what he does. He likes to be free to plan and to choose his activities for himself.
Self-transcendence	Universalism	Understanding, openness of thought, wisdom, social justice, valuing and protecting others, the environment and peace	3. He thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. He wants justice for everybody, even for people he doesn't know.
			8. It is important for him to listen to people who are different from him. Even when he disagrees with them, he still wants to understand them.
			19. He strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to him.
	Benevolence	Concern and preservation of the well-being of the family and close persons, responsibility, loyalty, honesty, indulgence	12. It's very important to him to help the people around him. He wants to care for other people.
			18. It is important to him to be loyal to his friends. He wants to devote himself to people close to him.
Conservation	Conformism	Restriction on acts, opinions, or impulses likely to harm others or violate social norms, education, politeness, self-discipline	7. He believes that people should do what they are told. He thinks people should always follow rules, even when no-one is watching.
			16. It is important to him always to behave properly. He wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.
	Tradition	Respect, acceptance and commitment to traditional ideas and customs of culture or religion, moderation, humility	9. He thinks it is important not to ask for more than what you have. He believes that people should be satisfied with what they have.
			20. Religious belief is important to him. He tries hard to do what his religion requires.
	Security	Harmony and stability of society, of social relations and of oneself, national security, family security, social order	5. It is important to him to live in secure surroundings. He avoids anything that might endanger his safety.
			14. It is especially important to him that his country be safe from threats from within and
			without. He is concerned that social order be protected.
Self-promotion	Power	Prestige and social status, control or dominion over people and resources, authority, wealth	2. It is important to him to be rich. He wants to have a lot of money and expensive things.
			17. It is important to him to be in charge and tell others what to do. He wants people to do what he says.
	Achievement	Personal success by demonstrating competence within social parameters, ambition, upwards over others	4. It is especially important to him to show his abilities. He wants people to admire what he does.
			13. Being successful is important to him. He likes to impress other people.

Source: Adapted from Sagiv and Schwartz 2000

Procedure

The data collection questionnaire was availed to the professionals for answering via email, with approximately 20, 000 e-mails sent to the researcher's personal contacts who are social

workers, social workers' networks, and organisations registered in Portugal in the social charter– a government database. The questionnaire was in the Google Doc platform from 16 May to 17 June 2019. A total of 2,051 registrations were obtained. 140 responses were excluded (73 for not being social workers, i.e., not having a degree in social work or social policy and 67 for repeated answering). A total of 1,911 valid responses were processed.

It is recognisable that online data collection methodological choice has generated a wide debate in the scientific community. However, possible distortions of the data have not been confirmed yet in the non-presential data collection (Gosling et al., 2004). Therefore, we consider this to be the best strategy, hence, allowing us to reach a larger number of professionals, enabling multiple responses and ensuring anonymity of participants, with the latter being an extremely sensitive issue in research for those in this category.

Univariate analysis was carried out (it only involves one dependent variable), which allows the observation and more detailed understanding of each variable, that is, it allows to determine the distribution and dispersion of the data (Pereira and Patrício, 2016; Park, 2015; Groppe et al., 2011). In the study on simple variance, non-parametric adherence tests are used, particularly the "t" test for related or unrelated samples. Bivariate analysis was also carried out (involves the analysis of two variables) to identify the associations, correlations, and the study of the linear relationship between two variables, through the application of the Pearson and Spearman tests (Stamatatou et al., 2019; Pereira and Patrício, 2016).

The statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 25) software. The study started with the exploratory factorial analysis on the Schwartz Human Values Scale 2003, from which the reliability tests to internal consistency were performed (Hill and Hill, 2002, p.377). This was carried out using the calculation of the Cronbach Alfa coefficients, with the lowest value being 0.816, verified in items 13 and 14 and the highest value being 0.827 in item 2. The scale in its total of 21 items presents a value of 0.828.

The Kaiser-Meter-Olkin test (KMO=0.853) was also performed, and indeed the factorial analysis presented a "Good" quality, whereas the Bartlett sphericity test assumes a significant value (sig=0.000). Finally, we proceeded to analyse the rotation of the matrix of components using the Varimax method, which revealed that 50.07% of the sample is represented in a classification of 4 factors; shown to us in the study of the psychometric characteristics that is carried out on the Schwartz Human Values Scale (2003; 2012).

To achieve the objectives of this study, a descriptive statistical analysis was carried out first, and then the analysis of clusters using the hierarchical grouping method, this made it possible to optimise the minimum variance within the scale. Thus, three clusters with similar dimensions were identified. The data was using students' t-test to analyse the differences between the two independent samples (n= 1,911 Social workers and n= 1,270 Portuguese respondents from the European Social Survey) (ESS1-8 2016).

Ethics issues
This research was not subjected to the assessment of an ethics committee given according to the Research Centre where the study was conducted this was neither a requirement nor mandatory.

However, all participants and social workers were informed of the aims of the study and its purpose. They were also clarified about the implications of their participation and that the data collected was to be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity. To achieve this, there was a question where respondents could give their informed and free consent at the opening of the questionnaire form. While responding through the google forms link, there were security questions that were answered by social workers, namely, if they had a degree in Social Work, the place where they worked, their functions and the institutional email.

On the other hand, the data from the European Social Survey is freely accessible online on https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/ and there are no data protection issues here.

Findings

Social work professionals are mainly female, between 21 and 80 years of age and with an average age of 41.34 (M_d= 41, M_0= 38, SD= 9.58). Most professionals are either married or living in a non-marital relationship (63.27%). Most have an average of 15.18 years of professional experience, and it should be noted that 38.30% of social workers have postgraduate training. These professionals work mostly in private services (56.51%) and on full-time basis (96.18%). Their position is typically categorised as senior technician (64.31%), and the majority (58.45%) earn a gross monthly income of between EUR 901 and EUR 1,500.

The social policy sectors in which majority work are social security (40.50%) and health (27.21%), with housing (4.29%) and employment (2.30%) occupying the lowest positions. Unsurprisingly, these last two sectors have the least public investment in Portugal. Regarding the working environment, social work professionals classify it mostly as either "Good" (47.57%) or "Very Good" (21.72%).

Table 2. Sample characterization (N = 1911)

Features	N	%	Features	n	%
Gender			**Social policy sector**		
Female	1791	93,72%	Education	177	9,26%
Male	120	6,28%	Employment	44	2,30%
Age group			Housing	82	4,29%
Between 20 and 29 years	202	10,57%	Justice	101	5,29%
Between 30 and 39 years	693	36,26%	health	520	27,21%
Between 40 and 49 years	616	32,23%	Social security	774	40,50%
Between 50 and 59 years	323	16,90%	Other	213	11,15%
Between 60 and 69 years	73	3,82%	**Position Held**		
Between 70 and 79 years	3	0,16%	Coordinator	207	10,83%
Between 80 and 89 years	1	0,05%	Director	432	22,61%
Civil status			Trainee	23	1,20%
Married	930	48,67%	Research	2	0,10%
Divorced	175	9,16%	Professor	7	0,37%
Separated	18	0,94%	Technician	1229	64,31%
Single	489	25,59%	Other	11	0,58%
The fact union	279	14,60%	**Regime of work**		
Widwed	20	1,05%	*Full* time	1838	96,18%
Degrees			*Part* time	73	3,82%
Degree	1179	61,70%	**Salary month**		
Postgraduate	422	22,08%	No income	4	0,21%
Master	291	15,23%	< National minimum wage	26	1,36%
PhD	18	0,94%			
Pos-doctorate	1	0,05%	National minimum wage	20	1,05%
Year of SW degree			Between 601€ and 900€	213	11,15%

Between 1960 and 1969	1	0,05%	Between 901€ and 1.200€	652	34,12%
Between 1970 and 1979	18	0,94%	Between 1.201€ and 1.500€	465	24,33%
Between 1980 and 1989	162	8,48%	Between 1.501€ and 1.800€	281	14,70%
Between 1990 and 1999	478	25,01%	Between 1.801€ and 2.100€	107	5,60%
Between 2000 and 2009	863	45,16%	Between 2.101€ and 2.400€	68	3,56%
Between 2010 and 2019	389	20,36%	Over 2.401€	75	3,92%
Where do you work			**Evaluation of the relational environment**		
Public services	761	39,82%	Very bad	14	0,73%
Private Services	1080	56,51%	Bad	60	3,14%
Both (public and private)	70	3,66%	Satisfactory	513	26,84%
			Good	909	47,57%
			Very good	415	21,72%

Schwartz Human Values Framework of social work Professionals

Analysis of the absolute values on the Schwartz scale (2003; 2012) when applied to social work professionals revealed that they are positioned at 4.16, above the average value on the scale (3.5). "Hedonism" (4.57), "Universalism" (5.09) and "Benevolence" (5.39) are the predominant dimensions in social workers compared to "Stimulation" (3.69), "Conformity" (3.28), "Power" (2.56). "Conformity" and "Power" are below the average value of the scale. With regards to the dimensions of the scale, responses show "Self-transcendence" at 5.21, "Openness to change" at 4.21, "Conservation" at 3.91, and lastly, they place "Self-promotion" at (3.14) (**See Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Schwartz Scale for the social workers in Portugal
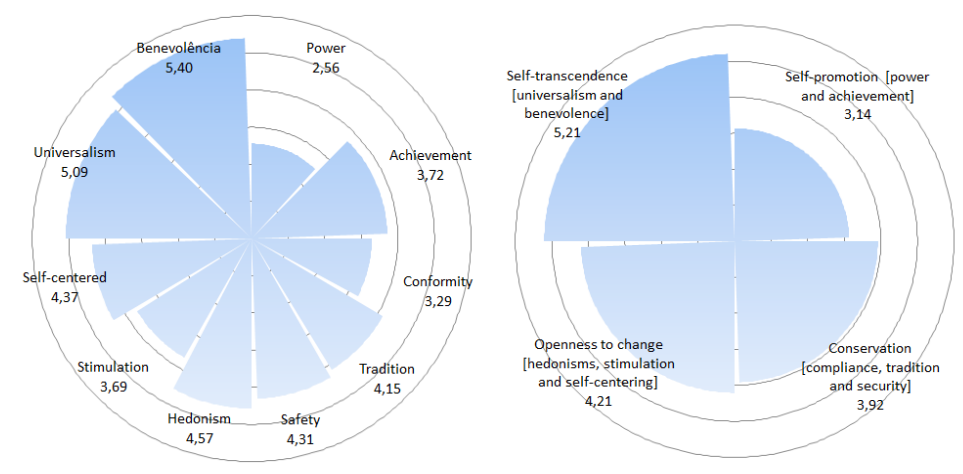
The values of social work can be conceptualised generally as emotional and emancipatory (Thompson 2015). The general and emotional values refer to self-determination, respect, individualisation, responsibility and confidentiality, expression of feelings, emotional control, unconditional acceptance, non-judgement, positive consideration, empathy, congruence, and authenticity; and emancipatory values involve de-individualisation, equality, social justice, partnership, empowerment, and citizenship.

In this study, emotional values are highlighted, followed by universal, hedonistic, and self-centred values that are associated with values of social justice in Kant and Mill. These values are in accordance with the study carried out by Tartakovsky and Walsh (2018) amongst social workers of Israel. The values that stand out precede security, are linked to conservation, stability and social order. Social workers ultimately recognise the values of power and personal fulfilment. The multicollinearity of the values identified by professionals is thus recognised as a characteristic of the application of this type of scale (Schwartz 2003 2012).

Understanding the uniformities of Portuguese social worker values- Clusters
When understanding the uniformities, three clusters dominate the Schwartz Value pattern (2003; 2012), illustrated in Table 3. The first cluster is made up of 802 professionals, with the average age of 40, who have been working for an average of 14 years. Those in this cluster show the best positioning vis-à-vis the scale studied (4.65), having been identified as the ones that best fit the profession's values of social change. The second cluster is made up of 677 members, with the average age of 41, who have been working for an average of 15 years. On the scale of values, they are slightly below the first cluster with 4.04 (-0.61), and are identified as the ones centred on values of personal fulfilment.

The third cluster is made up of 432 members, with the average age of 43 years, who have been working for an average of 17 years. This set of professionals has the lowest values on the Human Values scale (3.44), below cluster 2 by 0.60 and below cluster 1 by 1.21 points. This profile avows to the values of organic conformism.

Table 3. Clusters

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
	n = 802	n = 677	n = 432
Average age	40	41	43
Average years of professional activity	14	15	17
Average value of the total scale	4,65	4,04	3,44

The analysis shows that cluster 1, social change; is a characteristic of the interior of the country and some municipalities on the northern coast, such as Aveiro (4.75), Bragança (4.74), Castelo Branco and Évora (both with 4.71). These are the districts where professionals

are positioned with higher values and more oriented to the values of social change. Port Alegre (4.61), R. A. Madeira (4.60) and R. A. Azores (4.45) have the lowest values on the scale.

As for cluster 2, personal fulfilment; it is polarized by professionals from several districts in the north of the country; the coastline and hinterland, but also in the south, with regions of Aveiro and Évora (both at 3.56), Viseu (3.54) and Coimbra (3.53) having the highest values. The districts of Porto and Santarém (both 3.36), Castelo Branco (3.35) and Beja (3.33) have the lowest values, meaning that they may be more dissatisfied with their work.

Regarding the territorial analysis of cluster 3, organic conformism; it is a characteristic of the southern and northern interior of the country, where Braga (4.09), Évora (4.07) and Santarém (4.06) exist and present the highest values on the scale, while Leiria and R. A. Madeira have both 3.99. There is also a cluster in Évora characterised by a high consistency and positioning in all identified clusters.

European Social Survey: Human Values of the Portuguese
Portugal lies to the west of the European continent, a peripheral country within the European Union. The predominant values are Judea-Christian, where conservative values of submission and subordination are existent, and adherence to the status quo still stands out. Almeida et al. (2010) argue that the Portuguese share a greater identity with post-communist countries that cherish self-promotion and conservation compared to complacent traditional values. In these countries, just like in southern Europe, openness to change presents the lowest levels of identity.

The authors (Almeida et al., 2010) also reveal that gender by itself does not influence values. However, when this variable is traversed with social class, gender differences become relevant. Thus, there seems to be a paradox between the values of traditionalism verses modernity, mirrored by inequalities in social classes, hence leading to a conclusion that, partly this depends on the material conditions of existence (Almeida et al. 2010).

In this section, we have pointed out the results of sample 2, that is, Portuguese values. Although there is a difference between the times and spaces when the survey data for the Portuguese values was conducted vis-à-vis the questionnaire was applied to social workers, it is still possible to draw some deductions related to the importance of the context from the interferences on the values of social workers. From the results of sample 2, we can deduce that there are statistically significant differences between the samples under analysis. The differences indicate that, in general terms, social workers are more favourably placed on the Human Values Scale, i.e., they stand at 4.16. In contrast, the population (ESS File Rounds 1-8) stands at 4.08. It should be noted that the numbers are above the average value of the scale (3.5). At the level of the four sub-dimensions of the ten values, we found that there are statistically significant differences, except for the "Realisation" and "Security" values.

Table 4. Differences between the human values of the Portuguese population and social workers.

	Social workers		Portuguese Population		t de Student
	Average	Standat desviatio	Average	Standat desviation	
Auto transcendence	5,21	0,61	4,76	0,69	t=-19,435; gl=3179; sig=.000

Universalism	5,09	0,69	4,67	0,76	t=-16,260; gl=3179; sig=.000
Benevolence	5,40	0,67	4,89	0,79	t=-19,322; gl=3179; sig=.000
Self-promotion	**3,14**	**0,88**	**3,30**	**0,83**	**t=5,182; gl=3179; sig=.000**
Power	2,56	0,89	2,82	0,85	t=8,122; gl=3179; sig=.000
Achievement	3,72	1,12	3,79	1,13	t=1,582; gl=3179; sig=.114*
Openness to change	**4,21**	**0,75**	**4,03**	**0,82**	**t=-6,532; gl=3179; sig=.000**
Hedonism	4,57	0,97	4,14	1,04	t=-11,965; gl=3179; sig=.000
Stimulation	3,69	1,08	3,37	1,15	t=-8,017; gl=3179; sig=.000
Self-concentration	4,37	0,86	4,57	0,91	t=6,242; gl=3179; sig=.000
Conservation	**3,92**	**0,78**	**4,07**	**0,77**	**t=5,570; gl=3179; sig=.000**
Compliance	3,29	1,14	3,51	1,12	t=5,482; gl=3179; sig=.000
Tradition	4,15	0,93	4,28	0,94	t=3,859; gl=3179; sig=.000
Security	4,31	1,02	4,42	0,93	t=3,169; gl=3179; sig=.002*
Schwartz value scale	**4,16**	**0,54**	**4,08**	**0,55**	**t=-4,371; gl=3179; sig=.000**

* Without statistically significant differences

The values that social work professionals choose are positioned above those of the Portuguese population, with most significant differences in "self-transcendence" (with +0.45) and followed by "openness to change" (with +0.18). In contrast, "self-promotion" and "conservation" stand out, with social workers' choice slightly below the reference framework of Human Values of the Portuguese population, that is, (-0.16) and (-0.15) respectively.

A comparative analysis of the ten Human Values on the scale shows that there are statistically significant differences. Social workers stand out favourably compared to the Portuguese population in "benevolence" (+0.51), followed by "hedonism" (+0.43), "universalism" (+0.42) and "stimulation" (+0.32). In turn, the values that social work professionals position slightly below the benchmark of the Portuguese population are "tradition" (-0.13), "self-concentration" (-0.20), "conformity" (-0.22) and "power" (-0.26).

Discussion

Both social workers and the Portuguese population prefer self-transcendence values, though clearly social workers stand out in universalism and benevolence, and openness to change (personal gratification and freedom). These two dimensions are closest to the values of social work as a profession, be it generally, emotionally, and emancipatory (Thompson, 2015). Social workers prefer the values of benevolence (loyalty, well-being, honesty) compared to the values associated with conservation (self-discipline, tradition, religion, security, authority, and order). However, these values are not linear, especially considering the Portuguese reality. The results show that social workers working in the north, south and interior of the country (more remote areas) prefer values that are more self-transcending compared to social workers in the Lisbon region, the Tagus valley, and central coast of the country (more urban areas).

In general, neither social workers nor the Portuguese pick the self-promotion dimension (power and achievement), which can be explained by two reasons: the first refers to the fact that self-promotion values are contrary to the values of the profession (individualism, success, prestige, status, and control), i.e., values that conflict with the profession itself (Banks, 2013); and the second is associated with class inequality in Portuguese society (Almeida et al.,

2020). Social work has a prominent role in this aspect, as it can use its competences in social justice to modify the conditions of the population, thus creating opportunities to improve the wellbeing of people. The socio-political and pedagogical dimensions of social work interventions is fundamental to change the values of the Portuguese society, hence creating an avenue for social change.

On the other hand, it is crucial to not only teach values but also apply them effectively in order to essentially encourage the involvement of professionals with specific universalist and cultural values. The challenge is to reinforce not only the values of freedom, autonomy, emancipation and well-being, but also of caregiving and helping others. In the era of neoliberalism and deregulated world capitalism, there is need for these values to be adopted in education, that is, strengthen the ethics of non-indifference particularly to vulnerable groups, build and strengthen trust in people and organisations, defend integrative and restorative values, promote peace, and these should be framed as challenging and resisting the neoliberal world view (Merlinda and Banks, 2019; Banks, 2014).

Opportunities and limitations of the study
It is important to continue advancing research in this area given the significance of values, especially when they are linked in the exercise of the profession. It is paramount to note that the values of the profession are beyond the fields of professional practice in different social phenomena, and the code of ethics is an important reference tool when contextualised with the Schwartz conservation/scale values (2003; 2012). Besides, the findings can also be useful for making comparisons with other countries in studies using the same scale.

Despite the opportunities, there are some limitations; the Schwartz Scale conditioned the preference of the respondents since it captures only a particular set of items without allowing the inclusion of others. Another concern is related with the differences in the samples' profile. As professionals, social workers are graduates and mostly female, while the Portuguese population (ESS1-8, 2016) have different educational level and have a higher gender parity. Social work values are taught as foundations of the social work profession, for instance the values of emancipation and social change are fundamental to the profession, and this is likely to induce preferences in professionals when subjected to these types of studies.

Another point relates to methodological issues. Although the researchers ensured as much as possible that the questionnaire was answered by social work professionals, this was certainly not possible to control in some situations.

At least it is also important to mention that this is not a comparative study between the values of Portuguese people vis-à-vis social workers', but only a parallel and approximate analysis. It would not be possible to compare realities and databases that are completely different in form and time. We assumed in this study that social work is influenced by the values and culture of the society where it is exercised, therefore, knowing the values and thinking ethically is essential, especially when the values of the society are in dispute with the values of the profession.

Conclusion
From the 1970's, Portugal has embraced the values associated with human rights, freedoms, and well-being, incorporated them into its democratic constitution, thus being able to counteract the impacts of the past decades of dictatorship and colonialism. This new reality

has made it possible to open to universalist values, even when conservative values remain part of the society (Almeida et al., 2010).

In this research, values were analysed mainly at the group and individual levels (social workers) and in the context of the value dimensions of the Portuguese society. The values of social workers reflect a polarisation in the dimension of self-transcendence as opposed to self-promotion, which translates into a gap between the values of benevolence verses power. Regardless of this polarisation, the importance of social work values remains prudent, and particularly paramount in practice with vulnerable groups, as sometimes decisions require weighing between community well-being vis-à-vis self-determination (Čepulionytė and Dunajevas 2016; Banks, 2012).

Professionals are trained in these values and are prepared to identify and act against any violation of rights and other social injustices. They are professionals committed to their profession, people of integrity who care for others and work for social change (Merlinda and Banks 2019). In this era of neoliberalism and managerialism, it is fundamental not to lose the essence of universalist values (social justice), and therefore maintain the connection with the values of care, compassion, and collective responsibility. Accordingly, it is essential to teach and research on the values of the profession (Papouli, 2016), and reconfigure those values into practice ethics (Banks, 2014; 2013; 2012).

Understanding personal motivations and values can enable social workers to understand their own process of self-development and growth, as well as to define how the profession can fulfil its aims. But as Ribers (2020) argued, "ethical issues tend to be individualised, whilst the organisational (and society) focus on social responsibility" (p.1). Social work professionals are challenged to actively participate in improving well-being conditions while honing their skills for the benefit of both their profession and the society. In doing so, they need to be aware of the values in the context of a broader society given values impact social policies significantly (Giménez e Tamajón, 2019).

In times of crises, Pentini and Lorenz (2020) argue that social workers "dealing with the underlying contradictions and their specific knowledge on how to constitute social solidarity in conditions of justice and equality are now more than ever relevant in the post-crisis reconstruction" (p. 543). In sum, the values of the profession are more necessary in tackling the difficulties and constraints that impede access to citizens' and professionals' rights, and we hope that this research has further illuminated on the importance of values in exercising the profession in a broader society.

It is important to note that this research on the values of social workers in Portugal has been carried out in a period of change and valorisation of the profession. Currently the constitution of the council as a professional body that self-regulates the profession in Portugal was approved by the assembly of the republic in 2019, after 20 years of struggle by professionals to have this statute endorsed.

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Author´s Address:
Helena Teles
CAPP/ISCSP Universidade de Lisboa
Rua Almerindo Lessa, 1300-663 Lisboa
00351 21 361 9430
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5937-0362
hteles@iscsp.ulisboa.pt

Author´s Address:
Maria Irene Carvalho
CAPP/ISCSP Universidade de Lisboa
Rua Almerindo Lessa, 1300-663 Lisboa
00351 21 361 9430
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1921-3212
mcarvalhos@iscsp.ulisboa.pt