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New charity economy and social work: Reclaiming the social dimension of public life in the context of changing welfare rationales

Griet Roets, *Ghent University*

Fabian Kessl, *University of Wuppertal*

Walter Lorenz, *Charles University*

Abstract: A complex historical transformation of the institutional framework of the welfare state is taking place changing the relationship between citizens, the state, civil society, and the market, which leads to an emerging so-called charity economy. The key question we address is how social work and social pedagogy can continue to fulfil their public and professional mandate while changing welfare rationales increasingly constrain its social justice and human rights aspirations. We will discuss and illustrate how this new charity economy has gradually emerged on the level of local welfare systems in Belgium, relying on dialectics that enable us to untangle changing welfare rationales. We conclude that social work and social pedagogy should stage a political struggle to radicalize democratic debate on complexities and frictions in welfare systems in the local, national, and global realms.

Keywords: Social work and social pedagogy, charity, rights, new charity economy, dialectics

1 Introduction

In the context of the historically shifting and changing relationship between citizens, the welfare state, civil society, and the market during the last centuries (Dean, 2015), it has been argued that a complex historical remaking and transformation of the institutional framework of the welfare state is taking place in social policy, social work and social pedagogy landscapes (Villadsen, 2007; Kessl, 2009; Lorenz, 2016; Garrett, 2019). Although historical developments are complex and non-linear and should not be seen as a “continuity without breaks and contradictions” (Lorenz, 2007, p 599), it can be stated that a shift from charity-based to rights-oriented social work and social pedagogy was noticeable while European nation states evolved from pre-welfare into active welfare states (Maeseele, 2012). A slow development from a patriarchal and conservative welfare rationale, that portrayed welfare as a legitimising instrument of the state, towards a rights orientation manifested itself largely through the campaigns of civil society and civil rights initiatives in the late 1960s and 70s. Since the mid-90s and early 2000s, however, a discursive ‘shift back’ to charity-based welfare rationales can be observed, resulting in contemporary times in a newly emerging so-called charity economy (Kessl, Lorenz & Schoneville, 2020), which poses considerable dilemmas for social work practice.

As Lorenz (2016) argues, social work and social pedagogy across Europe are a front row witness of these developments, being increasingly caught in these welfare state transformations that are interrelated with changing socio-political principles. Social work actors however also intrinsically work in the ambiguous field of tension between care and

control, and might weaken or even dismantle solidarity mechanisms when being made responsible for implementing controlling and intrusive social work interventions towards citizens who are thereby deemed responsible for their own welfare (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). In that vein, social workers are intrinsically enmeshed in a deeply complex and ambiguous venture (Kessl, 2009; Jacquet et al., 2021). The considerations of this paper are meant to offer reference points for practitioners by pointing out the options still available to them and their political implications.

The key question we therefore address is how social work and social pedagogy can continue to fulfil their public and professional mandate as being "responsible for the social dimension of public life" (Lorenz, 2005, p. 93) in contemporary times, while changing welfare rationales increasingly incorporate social work across the globe and constrain its social justice and human rights aspirations (Garrett, 2018).

First, we explore this issue departing from a historical-genealogical perspective, which makes it possible to critically consider what might be the role of social work and social pedagogy in the context of changing welfare rationales.

Second, we will clarify the characteristics of the new charity economy conceptually, and throw light on an urban case study of how this new charity economy has been gradually institutionalized in a Belgian local welfare system as a consequence of the ongoing welfare state transformation.

Finally, taking the complexities, ambiguities and frictions in welfare systems into account as an example of wider welfare state transformations, we conclude with ways social workers could embrace the political struggles and dialectics between actors with a public, professional mandate and private civil society actors by applying core social work principles and competences.

2 From charity, to rights, and back?

We consider it vital to first investigate the changing welfare rationales that have deeply influenced social work, throwing light on elements of change/discontinuity and continuity. We rely on historical reference points, which show that social work has developed its core characteristics at critical transformative moments in the recent history of modernity. In order to classify and gain an in-depth understanding of historical developments, we broadly describe four periods, in which shifting programs and strategies are at play in social policy, social work and social pedagogy: the period of pre-welfare regimes, the rise of the welfare state, the welfare state as providing entitlements and the period of the activating welfare state.

2.1 Pre-welfare state regimes

Throughout the 19th century, pre-welfare constitutional states in Europe were rooted in Western enlightenment ideals and based on the rule of law and liberal democracy (Dean, 2015). As societies throughout Europe were under pressure to reinvent a new basis for social cohesion since traditional bonds could no longer be regarded as natural and given, radical social, political and economic transformations took place throughout the 19th century which led to the emergence of 'the social question' (Donzelot, 1984; Rosanvallon, 1995).

The processes of industrial revolution and urbanisation brought about widespread pauperisation in industrialising countries. Citizens were expected to rely on their labour power to earn their livelihood but were left without any social security in crisis situations

through policies that prioritised social, political and economic individual freedom (Villadsen, 2007). Social problems such as poverty, in line with criminality or alcoholism, were regarded as 'vices' and hence signs of a deficient moral rectitude. Indigent people were categorised as constituting a so-called dangerous class in society (Simpson, 2007) that required civilising and social adjustment strategies (Castel, 2011).

The rather linear rationality of these state policies in addressing the causes and solutions of social problems, such as poverty and criminality, enforced oppressive regimes of workhouses and practices of forced labor, asylums, or prisons. The mediating efforts by charitable and philanthropic organisations echoed the underlying orientation on having to provide 'moral instructions' (Maeseele, 2012). In this perspective, the poor were deemed responsible for their own welfare, and the dominant ideology "naturalised the broader stratification of power, resources and rights" (Carey, 2003, p. 412).

After all, the guiding rationale was "to render the poor useful to the state, not to secure their welfare" (Villadsen, 2007, p. 312). The support provided to the poor was mainly conditional, selective, and instrumental (Maeseele, 2012). As such, the system operated a fundamental distinction between the so-called 'deserving' and the 'un-deserving' poor, between those who deserve help since they basically show good moral standards and those who do not. Paupers were conceived as "a labour force to be fostered and led to behave productively. The focus was on the visible behaviour of the paupers" (Villadsen, 2007, p. 311).

The origins of social work and social pedagogy might be situated as a response to the emergence of the social question, and therefore are functionally part of the emerging welfare state and its organizational apparatus. They became enlisted in the search for answers to the question how social solidarity can be secured under capitalist conditions (Lorenz, 2016). This quest is reflected in the political discussions in the 19th and early 20th century about the need for public social support, social services and a public infrastructure – the legitimation of the emergent versions of welfare states. Besides the role of the press and bourgeoisie debating platforms in the period of early industrialisation, civil associations made an important contribution to the shaping of policies. They provided a platform for "welfare debates" where the "social question" was raised by philanthropic and charity organisations, by the international labour movement and by the international women's movement, of which many early representatives initiated peace campaigns (Kaufman, 2013; Wilmers, 2020). The ambiguous normative nature of debates in the public sphere of societies manifests itself already in that period in relation to the political orientation of those early versions of social work. The professionalisation of social work can be seen as an attempt to raise the social question again and again in changing circumstances rather than placing itself in a position of being solely responsible for 'resolving' it (Lorenz, 2016). At that historical juncture, 'coordinated charitable work' by systematically reviewing the living conditions and stimulating the self-initiatives of poor people in the form of 'friendly visiting' became the hallmark of 'case work', growing out of the models provided by the 'Elberfeld System' in Germany and the 'Charity Organisation Society' in the UK and the USA. Some actors from civil society, the churches and also the academic field however became involved in social and political struggles that criticised social institutions and public arrangements, rallied for systemic social change and pioneered more emancipatory approaches (Hermans & Roets, 2022). Examples are the early reformist initiatives in the field of social work and social pedagogy, like the work of Jane Addams as a driving force in the settlement movement, taking place in the slipstream of the women's movement (Lorenz, 2016). Within the settlement movement, which developed a similar international base, structural factors causing

poverty and related social problems were articulated more critically (Gal, Köngeter & Vicary, 2019). The conception of social work and social pedagogy as a caring agency enabling and empowering people stems from this tradition. We find civic movements, e.g. in German towns in the first part of the 19th century, struggling for social reforms against the growing economic liberalism. There have been scientific positions advocating an insight into the social conditions of education – calling such a perspective "social pedagogy" (Natorp, 1899/1925).

Significantly, the international labour movement exercised hardly any direct influence on the development of social work as a profession, while the international feminist movement, at least in its bourgeoise form, gave several direct impulses for early social work through the work of women like Alice Salomon, Jane Addams, and Mary Richmond (Branco, 2016). Their contribution was to give the traditional "caring" role of women in private contexts a public role and recognition and to link the emergent professional identities to international criteria.

2.2 The rise of the welfare state

From the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century onwards, European nation states gradually started to conceive a role for public welfare in securing the welfare of citizens (Payne, 2005). In the interest of public social order, governments became more directly involved with the problem of poverty and this heightened the public attention given to the social integration of the poor. Increasingly, social policy did not only invest in anti-poverty strategies for the deserving ones, but European welfare states started to develop comprehensive, non-discriminatory initiatives to secure people against social risks (De Bie, 2015) – in an attempt to also pacify the growing labor movement and to push back possible revolutionary movements.

In the last decades of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century, public concern was raised and early laws and structural provisions were sporadically continued or conceived (Carey, 2003), with a clear example going back to the establishment of the first social insurance programmes (in the context of Bismarck's social reforms of the 1880s) and the continuation of public social welfare provisions being installed on the local level for poverty relief and the provision of care in Belgium (Van Damme, 1985). In the first decades of the 20th century, this was particularly the case concerning the welfare of children through child protection legislation and early childhood provisions, giving an early impetus to broader social welfare measures (Maeseele, 2012).

Social service workers, who were often women representing 'the common good' under cover of bourgeois philanthropy, continued to exercise a subtle sort of maternalistic care, intrinsically also related to social control (Jones 1998). But at the same time a universalistic approach to offer support to the citizens became influential. Therefore, care and control (see Böhnisch & Lösch. 1973) as an inherent field of tension, were viewed as necessary educational as well as disciplinary strategies to govern those who were deemed employable and could contribute in key ways to the capital of the nation state, as well as "to control the unproductive and socially different" (Carey, 2003, p. 421).

During the rise of the welfare state, however, western imperial powers became preoccupied with competitive national efficiency, and developed strategies and technologies to simultaneously civilise "the uneducated" in European countries as well as the so-called savage, uncivilised "Other" abroad in colonised lands (Simpson, 2007). These mechanisms of care and control extended to the family, education, work programs, social institutions, and

informal relational practices in the community (Carey, 2003). Social work and social pedagogy actors were involved in the enactment of control, yet also engaged with the tenets of the labor movement (de Swaan, 1988).

After the First World War, the economic crisis of the 30's destabilized many European states, leading to mass unemployment (Driessens & Geldof, 2009), yet the dominant discourse in liberal policy regimes like the UK still focused on the individual inadequacy of the poor (Harris, 2008). By contrast, Nazi and Fascist ideologies applied the divisive device of racism to distinguish collectively between racially defined groups that merited state social support (e.g. through "generous" family policies, youth schemes, workers' protection and recreation policies) and those deemed "unworthy" of support and thereby justified ultimately their 'elimination' through state-organized extermination programs (Kunstreich, 2003). Scientific and socio-political ideas mingled across different political regimes during the first half of the 20th century and found expression for instance in eugenics. As a movement it argued with economic savings to regenerate the nation by declaring the costs of "unemployable citizens" to be an unnecessary financial burden to society (Radford, 1994).

In the decades before and during the Second World War, the desire of many European nation states for a pure human race and a 'perfect' and productive society led to repressive policies (Roets, Dean & Bouverne-De Bie, 2019). Social service workers were often complicit in this project of strengthening 'the deserving', while eliminating 'the undeserving' members of society in the interest of rationality, efficiency and productivity under the cover of a scientific and even humanitarian project (Lorenz, 2016; Roets et al., 2020). The professional engagement of social work with a democratic public sphere internationally was curtailed by the rise of Fascism and Nazism, which imposed racist nationalist identity criteria and policies of "Volksgemeinschaft" (Steber & Gotto, 2014).

2.3 Welfare states as embodiments of entitlements

After the Second World War, in an effort to ensure social solidarity in view of the perceived threat of and the competition with communism in the East, many European nation states promoted the notion of democratic welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Originally, there was a noticeable drive to leave behind the association of welfare with charity and 'deservingness' through a constitutive rights-based notion of mutual solidarity and collective responsibility rooted in the idea of guaranteed social protection as the realisation of social citizenship (Marshall, 1950; Dean, 2015). The rights-oriented welfare rationale, with reference to social rights as a defining feature of citizenship, commonly entails that citizens intrinsically have 'human rights' and are formally and legally entitled to 'social rights' with reference to welfare benefits, resources and services that are redistributed by the welfare state being committed to substantially realize citizens' subjective right to human flourishing (Lister, 2004; Dean, 2015). Next to labor market qualification and securing the social order, creating equal opportunities to live a life of human flourishing became a new social-political goal (De Bie, 2015).

Due recognition was given to human interdependency, which "is quintessential to human relationships", as the basis of social policy-making (Lister, 1997: 105). Human interdependency was regarded to be a universal feature of the human condition (Lister, 1997; Williams, 2001), entailing an over-arching recognition by the state that we *all* "are in need of different types of care and support at different stages in our lives" (Watson et al., 2004: 344). In that vein, Dean (2015) refers to the idea that welfare states realize rights when governments enable their citizens to care not just for their family and neighbours but also for distant

strangers, mediated by welfare state arrangements and institutions. Thus, the pursuit of collective responsibility and solidarity is premised on a rational, socially just judgment in the public sphere, rather than on a sort of moral duty embedded in the private sphere (Dean, 2015; Lorenz, 2016; Zamora, 2017).

The principle of redistribution was premised on the notion that the welfare state could provide full employment and the growth of the economy would ultimately eliminate poverty as a social problem (Reinecke, 2015). However, in the 1970s poverty was 're-discovered' as a stubborn social problem in many European welfare states (Reinecke, 2015). The conception of the welfare state gradually revealed several "construction errors" such as the assumption of a 'melting away of class divisions' despite its intricate link with capitalism and the continued emphasis on 'male breadwinners' and hence on paternalist principles (Cantillon, 2011; Abrahamson, 2008). One example concerns the idea that the nuclear family was framed as the cornerstone of our societies, leading to the neglect of gender inequality and women's capacity to work on the regular labour market, considering it women's duty of doing care work as a kind of 'emotional labour' in the private sphere in the shadows of the public order sphere (Wolkowitz, 2006). Another example of a "construction error" was the emergence of housing as the "wobbly pillar" of the welfare state, since governments failed to challenge and change the dominance of a deregulated housing market (Mallpass, 2003; Abrahamson, 2008). The rights of people in poverty, along with the rights of other groups such as women, were on many occasions not realised in practice: although they achieved a political status and formal entitlement as citizens, their lived citizenship - how they experience and negotiate rights, responsibilities, identities and belonging in everyday social interactions — took only the form of second-class citizenship (Lister 2007; Warming & Fahnoe, 2017).

The social work profession was drawn into this fundamental re-assemblage of formal as well as informal solidarity structures as an intricate part of the various welfare state projects after the second World War, and had to confront new challenges (Lorenz, 2016). After the ending of the Second World War, the newly founded United Nations saw the potential of the social work profession in promoting a democracy and justice orientation for the eradication of authoritarianism and commissioned three international surveys on the state of social work education in the 1950s (Healy, 2022). However, the Cold War soon transformed the universalisation of social work into a largely "Western agenda" in support of democracy and to ease negative effects of capitalism so that the social work perspective and activity was abolished in virtually all countries that came under the influence of the Soviet Union.

In the West in the period before 1989, the social work profession was largely oriented towards administrative case-work methods (Younghusband 1964), representing "bureau-professionalism" (Harris, 2008), techniques of personal counselling (Reid & Shyne, 1969)) and disciplinary power (Donzelot 1984), and thus not well adapted to a rights-based approach (Roets, Dean & Bouverne-De Bie, 2019), and this despite a notional insistence on the equality between case work, group work and community work on professional study programs. On account of this 'adjustment', social work could evolve as a profession with a public mandate, recognized by the welfare state. It acquired a relatively autonomous position, playing an essential role in shaping the relationship between the *private sphere*, in which private troubles and concerns and the public sphere, in which *public issues* and concerns are at stake (Lorenz, 2008). Shaping 'the social' in the relationship between an individual's lifeworld and the system – with reference to the issue of solidarity in our societies – turns into a project to ensure the functioning of an ever more complex web of mutual interdependencies, that is "made all the more difficult in the face of the unleashing of forces which drive societies apart

through dislocation, migration, poverty, economic exploitation, epidemics and criminality" (Lorenz, 2016, p.8). This attention to individualised needs led to tensions with the then prevailing positivist scientific stance on social work courses which sought to treat 'people as people' thereby ignoring issues of diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity and ability.

In that scenario, social workers in more informal civil society organisations, inspired by a new wave of social movements like second wave feminism, civil rights and disability rights movements, supported citizens to gain recognition for their 'right to be different', to voice their needs authentically, to find access to public services, to realise their social rights and to advocate for social change. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s new initiatives were taken by citizens, social workers and social movements as a potential answer to newly articulated needs that were not addressed by public authorities. It could be generalised that these new initiatives aimed to turn the private troubles with which they were confronted, into public issues, in line with the feminist motto, 'the private is political'. As such, these participative practices combined direct help with a more critical, awareness-raising approach towards public policies and society at large. As a response by 'the system', these new initiatives often became institutionalised, financed and scaled up, as public authorities became convinced of the usefulness of these practices for their purposes (Hermans & Roets, 2022).

2.4 'Activating welfare states' and the emergence of a new charity economy and neo-philanthropy

After the rather prosperous post-war period, new economic and socio-demographic questions emerged, caused by periodic crises of the capitalist economic system that produced continued social inequality and associated social risks (Taylor-Gooby et al., 1993). Neo-liberal politics achieved electoral support in the last decades of the 20th century by making an 'over-generous' welfare system responsible for lack of competitiveness in an increasingly globalised market context (Garrett, 2019), particularly after the collapse of communism 1989. Accordingly, prevailing social welfare paradigms were gradually revised. Dean (2015) addresses different dimensions at stake in these welfare state transformations, with their emphasis on self-responsibility, informal care and new subsidiarity, the rescaling of welfare state responsibilities/decentralisation, marketization, and privatization of public service delivery. These welfare state transformations seem to reflect a paradigmatic shift in government commitments from securing the welfare rights of citizens to "a depoliticizing discourse of deficits, competitiveness, and balanced budgets" (Garrett, 2019, p. 190).

In the European context, we see the emergence of scholarly interest in the alarming trends of social policy, social work and social pedagogy that reconfigure welfare support systems into a system of social insecurity (Standing, 2011; Garrett, 2018, 2019; Fletcher & Flint, 2018; Jacquet et al., 2022). Critical scholars have observed how new forms of social insecurity and precarity have become infused by neo-liberal and territorial welfare rationales and regimes and how they impose on people's working lives (Castel, 2011; Zamora, 2017). They evidence how this leads to widening social inequalities of class, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and dis/ability (Hughes et al. 2005; Wolkowitz, 2006; Isaksen, Devi & Hochschild, 2008; Good Gingrich, 2010; Lewis et al., 2014).

It has therefore been argued that the key idea of entitlement to social rights, being traditionally referred to as 'citizenship', has been deconstructed systematically. Post-welfare state transformations produce instead concepts and practices of 'denizenship' and 'semizenship' (Turner, 2016; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019). Turner (2016, p. 1) finds that this status not only characterises citizens who increasingly risk ending up at the bottoum

rung of the ladder of citizenship, merely resembling denizens “with thin, fragmented and fragile social bonds to the public world”, but also persons from foreign countries with a legal right of residence (by virtue of a visa or work permit), but with limited rights to welfare and political participation (see also Dewanckel et al., 2022; Samyn et al., 2023). European welfare states increasingly apply moralised conditions to assess immigrants’ “deservingness” to acquire citizenship as “semizens”, with their status pending between inclusion as citizens and exclusion as denizens (e.g. in the case of undocumented migrants) (Jorgenson & Thomsen, 2016; Monforte et al., 2018; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019).

Governments and social policy makers seem to respond to the emergence of new social risks and inequalities, related to ethnicity and race at the intersection with already existing social risks and inequalities related to, for example, class, gender, age and dis/ability, by a desire to reinvent conditions, obligations, and even sanctions rather than substantially realising rights (Fletcher & Flint, 2018). Such welfare state dynamics often create unequal access to resources, while at the same time blaming these excluded groups for their predicament and lack of successful efforts within the system. These developments lead to the re-emergence of binary oppositions between citizens who deserve rights and individuals whose rights are not evidently safeguarded (Dwyer, 2004; Fletcher & Flint, 2018). Diverse scholars have also referred to this newly emerging discursive distinction between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving poor’, which manifests itself during the last decades (see Villadsen 2007; Maeseele 2012; Krumer-Nevo 2016; Kessl, Oechler & Schröder, 2019).

In our recent work, we stress that this transformation of the welfare state also entails a striking reconfiguration and reorientation of social work and social pedagogy that echoes a 19th century binary and pre-welfare state distinction between deserving and undeserving citizens (Krumer-Nevo, 201). Terms are used such as ‘neo-philanthropy’ (see Villadsen, 2007), ‘new philanthropy’ (see Morvaridi, 2016), and ‘new charity economy’ (Kessl, Oechler & Schroeder, 2019). With reference to the recent intensification of class relations and the growth of inequality, Kessl et al. (2019) argue that professional social work and social pedagogy are increasingly involved in the production of a new charity economy in a the “shadow of the welfare state” (Kessl & Schoneville 2024, p. 21), and argue that “this support can be categorised as being ‘new’ because it results from and expresses the transformation of the welfare state” (Kessl et al., p. 361).

For social workers, the complication lies in the fact that this is not simply a ’return’ to a pre-welfare model of charity but the strategic use of rational rather than normative arguments to create contemporary justifications for the persistence of social inequality. Many of the arguments used in neoliberal onslaughts on universal social rights, like the reference to individuality, freedom of choice and assertion of personal agency, have long resonated with core social work principles and accentuate the dilemma of whether to go along with the new ‘regime’ (which in many situations appears inevitable) or to oppose it on principle (and risk becoming ‘redundant’ in both senses, jobless and irrelevant). This is why formal as well as informal social work practices are involved in the production of new forms of charity and philanthropy, or are even expressions of the new charity economy in frontline social work practice, such as food (re-)distribution of the leftovers, the donation of charity clothes, and furniture that can be recycled, particularly when they can be seen as part of an ecological orientation.

In this situation it is crucial to maintain a strategic awareness of the analytical viewpoint that these practices have emerged on the back of the erosion of social protection and social

security principles which were key pillars of the constitution of the welfare state across Europe, and that a neoliberal market economy deliberately increases social inequalities (Villadsen, 2007; Morvaridi, 2016; Kessl, Oechler & Schroeder, 2019). In this vein, Kessl (2009, p. 309) asserts that also the legitimacy of social work and social pedagogy as a public good should be "more sharply questioned today than ever before". The profession's social justice and human rights orientation demands of social workers that they scrutinize the public discourses and welfare rationales in which they, along with welfare recipients, are becoming jointly enmeshed (Garrett, 2018, 2019) and negotiate together with service users new ways of asserting and using social rights while questioning also the weaknesses and blind spots of "traditional welfare state models". In what follows, we sketch the key conceptual characteristics of the new charity economy, and the urban case example in Belgium illustrates the inherent contradictions in these new welfare practices.

3 Uncovering the gradual institutionalisation of the new charity economy[1]

3.1 Conceptual characteristics of the new charity economy

The "new charity economy" (see Kessl et al. 2009) describes a distribution system in which basic goods – often considered to be in surplus – are distributed for free or sold at discount prices to "the poor" or "the needy" through voluntary helpers. This system relies on the provision of everyday consumer goods from one of three sources: (1) industrial overproduction; (2) goods that can no longer be sold due to factors such as statutory standardisation specifications and marketing objectives; and (3) goods that are no longer needed by private households. The new charity economy targets groups of people who fall into the material supply gaps of the welfare state created by their increasing difficulties of making legal welfare benefits claims. The non-monetary benefits are not based on "having an entitlement, but on receiving charitable gifts" (Schoneville, 2013, p. 25; own translation).

Against this background, the new charity economy is inconsistent with its economic perspective. It is an "economy of gifts" (Mauss, 1950/2002) that potentially transcends the capitalist economy in parts, but also plays a clear role within it (Kessl & Wagner 2011). As such, the charity economy as a new system of poor relief results in an exchange cycle which runs across the sectors of civil society, the market economy and the state. It cannot be clearly situated in any one of these sectors.

Compassion and pity are defining characteristics of the *new charity* economy, as we experience it in food banks, clothing closets or many social department stores, because donors and voluntary workers are motivated by their emotional concern for the situation of others. They notice their misfortune. At the same time, the relation between the alms giver and the alms recipient remains characterised by a fundamental social hierarchy. Just as the beggar receives a sum of money from a passer-by in a moment of sympathy without any further contact, the relationship between the giver and the gift recipient in a soup kitchen or a food bank is usually limited to this aspect with a clear distinction of roles.

The gift based on compassion simultaneously undermines the logic of welfare state social security and social rights: alongside the rights-based social benefits of the welfare state, there are now offers of poverty alleviation to which there is no longer any legal entitlement or accountability justification. The pensioner who asks the local food bank for a weekly food

[1] The following paragraph is based on Kessl, Oechler & Schröder 2021.

donation because his pension is too small has no right to the donation there. He is only a recipient of the alms that he may be given. The volunteers therefore expect gratitude from him, as they make the gift for the alms recipient possible with sometimes great effort (Molling 2009).

However, the helpers usually do not see that the recipient has to submit to a system of shaming. But that is exactly why the pensioner does not put on his watch when he goes to the table, nor his best shirt - reversing the practice of hiding one's own poverty in public under the last ironed shirt. The visitor to the table does not want to leave any doubt about his external image as a needy and also a ‘deserving' person. Nevertheless, he might have hesitated for weeks before his first visit to the food bank, even though he no longer had enough money for his weekly shopping. The shame of having to confess one's need to the food bank in public was still too great. Only when he had overcome this social fear could he make the trip to the food bank or the clothing store.

The practice of new poor relief can be categorised as an *economy*, because a specific form of organising a household can be observed here: on the one hand, gift economic elements can be found in food banks, soup kitchens or clothing closets. We know this from the culture of giving in private contexts: gifts are not offset or even paid for, but rather create an invitation to express gratitude. Users of clothing closets or food banks also feel this social requirement. If a user complains about the gift she received – that she could not cook what she wanted for her own son with the food she received - then one is likely to hear that helpers complain about the ingratitude of table visitors.

In addition to this gift economy, there are also aspects of the prevailing capitalist economy in the field of the new charity economy. Above all, commercial donors, such as discounters who pass on expired food to the local food bank, or car companies who provide a clothing store with a vehicle cheaply or free of charge, do so for their own benefit. This means saving expensive waste fees for expired food and gaining a positive image as a socially committed company. With the new system of poverty relief, a second circulation of goods has now been established, which is by no means decoupled from the first, consumer capitalist one.

3.2 An urban case study in Belgium

In what follows, we illustrate a contemporary urban case of how the new charity economy also emerged and has even been institutionalised in Belgium, as a consequence of decentralization as one of the ongoing welfare pluralism strategies. As Jessop (2013, p. 11) argues, the underlying idea was that the nation state “had become too small to solve the world's big problems and too big to solve its little ones”. This resulted in the re-scaling of nation state responsibilities and powers downwards and sideways. State responsibilities were increasingly decentralised to municipalities. Scarpa (2016) averts aptly that other conceptual terms are also employed in different contemporary European welfare states, such as ‘rescaling’ (Kazepov, 2010; Keating, 2013; Ranci et al. 2014), ‘subsidiarisation’ (Morel, 2007; Kazepov, 2008), ‘regionalisation’ (Ferrera, 2005; Vampa, 2014), or ‘territorialisation’ (McEwen & Moreno, 2005; Andreotti et al., 2012; Andreotti & Mingione, 2016; Bifulco, 2016). In most cases, the subsidiarization of social policies results in the reorganization of regulative powers at the different territorial levels, both in *vertical terms* with reference to the decentralisation of state responsibilities from central government to the local level, as well as in *horizontal terms* due to the multiplication of the number and type of actors involved in designing, managing and implementing social policies (Kazepov, 2008; Andreotti et al., 2012).

As explained in a recent paper (Roets et al., 2022), developments in Belgium offer a highly relevant case since this focus on the local level has long been present, particularly due to the local embedding of the Public Centers for Social Welfare (PCSW) in municipalities. A major milestone in recent Belgian history was the institutionalisation of the universal and unconditional right to social welfare, being guaranteed by local Public Centers for Social Welfare across Belgium (see the OCMW/CPAS-law, art. 1, 1976 in Roets et al., 2022), and implemented by professionally trained social workers. Since 1976 the modernized social assistance systems were organized around the key principle of a universal, unconditional, and lifeworld-oriented right to social welfare. This constituted a key evolution in conceptions of Belgian social policy: instead of reducing poverty in selective, conditional and instrumental ways, human dignity and human flourishing became the new criterion to decide whether a public intervention by the Public Centre for Social Welfare was needed, and citizens would be guaranteed social rights and resources.

To frame the case, we want to discuss ~~relates to~~ the ambition of the local welfare system in Ghent, Belgium, that has recently developed a "future model for material support". In what follows, we explore how the new charity economy has been gradually institutionalized in Ghent, albeit in the context of much political struggle and debate in the public sphere between formal and professional social work actors of the local Public Center for Social Welfare (PCSW) as coordinators of the development of the future model, and informal civil society actors. It is remarkable that the future model regulates publicly that the nature of 'material support', being framed in the model, shifts from public support in terms of financial support and the provision of other resources (e.g. welfare benefits, (social) housing) in line with a logic of social security, and is all too easily replaced by 'material support' being defined as food support/security and second-hand clothing (see Hermans, Cantillon & Marchal, 2024).

Our analysis is based on an incrementally developed framework (see Roets et al., 2020; Jacquet et al., 2020), that allows a differentiation between underlying welfare rationales in contemporary social work practices and interventions, based on four central dialectics: (1) public-private, (2) selective-universal, (3) conditional-unconditional, and (4) instrumental-lifeworld-oriented welfare rationales and practices.

1. *Public-private dialectic as the institutional dimension*: whereas social work in Belgium has historically been assigned a public and professional mandate of the welfare state for the substantial realization of social justice and human rights, European welfare states including Belgium have experienced austerity and growing social and economic pressures on the principle that the state is conceived as the main provider of public welfare services and resources. In these circumstances, the emphasis shifted to the idea that an increasingly significant level of provision should also come from the 'informal sector', such as families, volunteers and informal organizations and communities (see Grootegoed, Broër, & Duyvendak, 2013; Koster, 2014).

   The development and implementation of the "future model for material support" has originally been established in the Ghent context, in a collaboration between the Public Center of Social Welfare and a network of Catholic KRAS services (originally translated as "Church in the Margins of the City"), with more than 550 volunteers supporting people in poverty in 18 civic initiatives. Another network emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ghent Solidarity Fund, which brings together 11 Ghent grassroots initiatives, including several, amongst others religious initiatives, that focus

on material support and food assistance, claiming a more progressive, disruptive solidarity orientation. These civil society initiatives often have a precarious nature themselves, yet try to (re-)distribute basic goods for free or at reduced prices: food (often leftovers), second-hand clothing, care products, etc.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the local Public Center for Social Welfare took the lead in shaping new coalitions between the KRAS network and the Ghent Solidarity Fund, and in establishing the public and online accessibility of the "future model for material support" agreement. The stated rationale was the need for a shared vision of networking and collaboration that is publicly transparent, with reference to challenges such as logistics (e.g. for the redistribution of leftover food), referrals between public and private social work actors, funding, and territorial accessibility of the supply (e.g. to prevent the 'shopping' behavior of people in need), quality control of service delivery…. The relationship between public and private social work actors is therefore changing towards more hybrid constellations, and responsibility of all actors – public as well as private - is increasingly premised on a sort of moral duty in the private sphere rather than on solidarity in the public sphere.

2. *Selective-universal dialectic as the political-ethical dimension*: Selectivity refers to the creation of criteria that determine whether welfare recipients have the right to a certain welfare state intervention, and entails a categorization (division) between those who deserve this and those who do not meet specific conditions that give access to social service provision as undeserving citizens (Villadsen 2007; Maeseele 2012). A universal approach implies that all citizens have the unconditional right to make use of material as well as immaterial resources that are provided (Villadsen 2007; Maeseele 2012). In that vein, selectivity refers to the construction of target groups, and aims to direct public resources towards the most disadvantaged to maximize equality on the condition that they are willing to accept the social norm (Martin 2010). However, in the implementation of these policy rationales, selective approaches often have stigmatizing effects (Maeseele 2012).

   After two years of negotiations and struggles (2020-2022), the future model and quality framework has been made public (also online for social workers and welfare recipients) and is institutionalised, making explicit that the newly developed local social policy model is made operational in strictly targeted and selective ways. The model was legitimized by the finding that Ghent has over 260,000 inhabitants, of whom the most recent counts show that one in seven local inhabitants live in poverty and are struggling to make ends meet. There is moreover an uneven distribution of poverty risk since many people with a migration background are income poor. Ghent hosts 150 different nationalities. Four out of ten Ghent citizens have their origin in a different place. The most common are firstly people with a Turkish background, in second place people of Bulgarian origin and in the third place people with Moroccan roots.

   There is a growing group of people who do not proactively realise their (human) rights, ranging from those in situations of (hidden) homelessness as an extreme form of poverty, and those with precarious residence status who are not entitled to claim social rights and resources, including refugees, asylum seekers and intra-European migrants. The future model for material support is exactly designed to 'help' those local 'denizens' and 'semizens', since they are the ones who cannot, or often do not,

claim social rights and resources. However, these people who are often on survival modus were often already taken care of by civil society initiatives, staffed by informal actors and volunteers who operate in the shadow of the local public welfare arrangements.

3. *Conditional-unconditional dialectic as the social work organization dimension*: Judging this willingness to behave according to the social norm is rooted in the idea of 'goodwill' (Maeseele 2012). The component of goodwill refers to the dependence of the poor on those providing help and the goodwill of those providing help to assist those 'deserving' it (Leighninger 2008). In social work organisations, welfare conditionality refers to the fact that access to publicly provided welfare benefits and services is dependent on individual citizens first agreeing to meet particular obligations or patterns of behavior (see Dwyer 2004; Fletcher & Flint 2018). People's access to welfare resources is restricted due to conditions. A dialogical approach implies that all citizens have the unconditional right to make use of support that is provided, and a dialogue between social work and welfare recipients is taking place without conditions or showing of goodwill (Martin 2010).

   The pillar of the future model consists of a territorial demarcation in seven "clusters" in quarters of the city where there are considerably more social problems and welfare needs, and one specific "cluster" for particular target groups (e.g. the homeless, people without legal residence). In the course of the implementation process, each of the clusters is meant to employ one paid professional (often halftime) to coordinate the activities and networking between the civil society initiatives on that territory. Based on this territorial logic, formal and informal social workers both facilitate access to the supply of basic goods, but they are also gatekeepers since they check the conditions based on a conditional welfare rationale. A key aspect of the future model includes referrals from public, professional social work actors to the civil society initiatives, or from the one civil society initiative to the other, and defines "equal and maximal referral" as a characteristic of the quality of service delivery.

   The Public Center for Social Welfare issues "tickets for referral" to denizens and semizens who seek help, who are obliged to rely on the service of an initiative that is closest to where they live. For many of the 'welfare recipients', this condition might lead to stigmatizing experiences, or does not do justice to their religious background and freedom of movement (see Vandekinderen, 2021). The PCSW has also developed a registration tool that should be used by the civil society initiatives for the sake of transparency. As gatekeepers of public social services, however, institutional and professional social workers can fully go along with the conditional and territorial logic of social rights, and consequently exclude people under the cover of 'referral' – or potentially 'off-ferral'.

4. *Instrumental-life world-oriented dialectic as the frontline profession dimension*: An instrumental social work practice means that the aim of what is to be done is defined from an external viewpoint and without taking into account what is considered as meaningful for welfare recipients in the development of social work practices (Maeseele 2012). This entails that the outcomes of the interventions are defined beforehand by the social workers, without consulting the welfare recipients about their definition of problems and solutions (Roose, Roets & de Bie 2013). Life world-oriented principles and practices, on the other hand, take into account the aspirations,

life worlds, and concerns of people in poverty situations (Grunwald and Thiersch 2009). This implies that social workers focus on the complex and dynamic relationship between the individual and society. According to a social justice orientation, the interplay between lifeworld and system becomes vital as social workers analyse how the everyday life is contingent on social and systemic forces (Grunwald & Thiersch 2009; Roets, Roose & De Bie 2013).

The gradual institutionalisation of the future model reflects that all denizens and especially semizens can get material emergency aid, rather than material and income support as an expression of the right to social welfare benefits (e.g. (family) income, welfare benefit, social housing, ..). The newly developed local social policy model translates the term "material support" as not related to material resources such as income protection, housing, and mobility (amongst others), but to the provision of "material" emergency services. The Public Center of Social Welfare claims that "material aid is not a structural means of fighting poverty, it is "emergency aid under protest". We provide material aid because there is no other way. Preferably, as few people as possible use it for as short a time as possible. It is a means to get them out of poverty by establishing links to substantial social rights, assistance, social activation and encounter".

The Solidarity Fund however puts political pressure on the City of Ghent and the Public Center for Social Welfare, and does not want to be limited to offering emergency aid and making contact only with the most vulnerable. The Solidarity Fund formulates the explicit aim of bringing the experiences gained while offering material assistance to denizens and semizens to a public debate with the policy makers of the City of Ghent. Two examples can be mentioned: the Solidarity Fund organized a "Poorest Week" (Armste Week) in December 2022, while all over Belgium charitable initiatives are championed in organizing the "Warmest Week" (Warmste Week). Another political action they developed was painting the total number of denizens and semizens (all being counted as "hidden homeless") on the streets in Ghent, in the middle of the last week of July when the City is celebrating its "Ghent Parties" to attract thousands of people as a City that is proud of what it has to offer (Gentse Feesten).

4 Concluding reflections

In summary, our contribution shows that historically there was a broad promotion and understanding of public social welfare entitlements in Western European countries like Germany and Belgium, which was complemented by different civil society actions that were also gradually funded by the state. More recent policy developments no longer address poverty as a complex social problem that requires both a structural redistribution of material as well as immaterial resources and of power, and tend to champion newly emerging charitable strategies as a relevant and key anti-poverty approach. Even if different and new categories of people and types of poverty are addressed, structural and rights-oriented poverty reduction strategies are losing ground and shift towards more individualized and charity-based approaches (Roets et al., 2020). In the current climate, neoliberal governments moreover reduce political and democratic steering capacities, transforming citizens into consumers and undermining the dynamics of public political debate on longer-term visions with issues of immediate self-interest. As Nancy Fraser expresses it, "if in sum they are systematically reversing the democratic project, using markets to tame politics instead of politics to tame markets, then how can citizen public opinion have any impact?" (2014, 23).

This development has a potentially decisive impact on the role of social work and social pedagogy. If we go back to our original question, how social work and social pedagogy can continue to fulfil their public and professional mandate, it is clear that social services institutions as well as professionals themselves need to take a stance towards these developments, as it has historically sought to acquire a relatively autonomous and unique public and professional mandate in the welfare state. Its professional "margin of discretion" (Ellis, 2014) can be situated in negotiating the relations between the private and the public sphere in shaping 'the social', with reference to the question how a social justice and human rights orientation is incorporated (Lorenz, 2008, 2016). In that vein, we argue that social work should take the complexities, ambiguities and frictions in local realities and welfare systems into account as an example of wider welfare state transformations, and address a wake-up call in taking political stance in reclaiming the public dimension of social life in the intrinsically global public sphere (Lorenz, 2016). From this stance, a role for social work might be the creation of cultural forums in which different issues of, and takes on, injustice are discussed in a public debate to disrupt hegemonic discourses - where clashes of interest are staged as key dialectics for social change (Marston & McDonald, 2014; Boone, Roets & Roose, 2013).

Whereas a political and politicising role means that these actors push citizens' private concerns which had not received public attention, towards public awareness and hence politicising private concerns, institutionalising the new charity economy means that the tides are being reversed to portray public issues as one's private "business" (Cowden & Singh, 2017). The effect on civil society initiatives for instance is that they can easily be used to keep private concerns private, transforming themselves into "private businesses", aided further by the "new charity economy" (Kessl, Lorenz & Schoneville, 2020). The example of campaigns in Belgium show how this danger can be averted and the necessity of creating more professional social work links to civil society initiatives can become a means of reversing the political impact.

Both formal as well as informal social work practices historically operate in a dialectic relationship in which social workers interact, position themselves and constantly influence each other. We therefore argue that instead of being drawn into paralysing polarisations between the sides of the above dialectics, social work should continue to ask the social question again and anew (see Lorenz, 2016) in the context of changing welfare rationales. Passivity and silence on the part of formal, professional social workers and institutional actors as well as of those involved in informal solidarity practices and civil society initiatives regarding the lack of access to social rights and social services by denizens and semizens, would pave the way for the new charity economy appearing as without alternative. In that sense, Schoneville (2013, 2018) casts a different light on the new charity economy as an 'ugly shed' (in comparison to a good quality house as the symbol of solid social protection) that has become the institutional part of the main architectural complex, the welfare state itself. What if we all go along with institutionalising the idea that the ugly shed replaces welfare state structures and resources, when citizens are referred to this new livelihood support service that is based on charity, not having any entitlement as human beings with human rights? If professional social work is to mean something under current conditions, it must mean building good quality houses grounded on solid structures. User-led grass-roots initiatives can generate the dynamism that helps to achieve that goal in collaboration with professionals.

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Author´s Address:
Griet Roets
Ghent University
Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy
H. Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Gent, Belgium
0032 (0)486 96 77 46
Griet.Roets@UGent.be

Author´s Address:
Fabian Kessl
University of Wuppertal
Institute for Educational Science
Gaußstraße 20, 42119 Wuppertal
kessl@uni-wuppertal.de

Author´s Address:
Walter Lorenz
Faculty of Humanities, Charles University
Pátkova 2137/5
182 00 Praha 8 – Libeň
Czech Republic
wlorenz@unibz.it