

## СОЦІАЛЬНА РОБОТА

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### SOCIAL WORK ACADEMIZATION IN UKRAINE: REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCE

*In Ukraine the last decade was marked by the significant changes in social work education development which evidence its academization and professionalization. The international cooperation was a useful catalyst in these processes. The above has specific implications for developing the three cycles of social work education in Ukraine – bachelor, master and doctoral programmes.*

*Participatory observations and reflections demonstrate that Ukrainian social work education history evidences of permanent localization of the international standards and experiences that has negative effect on academization of social work.*

**Keywords:** social work education, doctoral programme, Ukraine, EU Project.

#### Setting the problem

Social work as a profession and academic discipline was introduced in Ukraine in the early 1990s. This process had been actively supported by a range of international projects engaging partner universities and NGOs from the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Portugal, Belgium, USA, Canada, etc.

In 1990–2000s, the Ukrainian schools of social work were responsible for building their academic capacity and the content of their training by themselves while bringing various experiences of international academic cooperation, and, in parallel, enriching the training content with valuable indigenous knowledge. Up to mid-2015, social work had marginalized status – neither acknowledged as a separate field of education nor having the three cycles of education (so far only bachelor and master programmes exist).

In 2010–2012 the first in Ukraine Doctoral Programme in Social Work and Social Policy was

developed and piloted by the staff of the National University of ‘Kyiv-Mohyla Academy’ and partners from five European universities.

The new Law of Ukraine “On higher education” (2014) amongst other academic degrees acknowledges PhD assigned at the third level of education. But this Law has not been implemented yet at the full scale, and at the moment of writing this paper no doctoral programmes in European style have been accredited in Ukraine, including programmes in social work.

#### Literature review

Many international scholars [3–7; 9] during the last decade had intense discussions in creating and development of social work doctoral programmes. British academics L. Dominelli, K. Lyons, I. Shaw made a contribution to the theoretical background of social work doctoral programs. A. Barnard, J. Leigh, L. Morriss, J. Scourfield, S. Shardlow

studied organizational needs of such programmes, doctoral students' needs, topics of doctoral studies etc. Other international scholars B. Black, R. Cunningham-Williams, B. Maynard, J. Orme and J. Powell, C. Petr, D. Harrington discussed that lack of the third level of education can have negative effect on the number and quality of social work research. This could be explained by the lack of qualified professionals which could combine knowledge on the research specific, and based on this to develop social work theories and practices grounded on its values and local specific.

Introduction of the first European international doctoral programme in social work (INDOSOW) in the post-socialist country of Slovenia had been analyzed by D. Zavirsek who stressed the professional values of international social work research under neo-liberalization of welfare policies [12].

However these authors do not look in details at the processes of academization of the social work research in the post-communist context.

### **Objectives of the paper**

Objective of this paper is to describe the role and impact of extensive experience of international cooperation in social work education in Ukraine. This is done based at a brief review of existing social work education system, description of the background for creating the first Doctoral Programme in Social Work and Social Policy, main challenges and success faced in this process, and sharing the lessons learnt.

The paper is grounded on participatory observations and reflections of various stakeholders, as well as on a range of different empirical literature. It is based on the analysis made in consultations with the local and international social work academics, educators, practitioners while implementing a range of international projects on social work education and practice.

### **Key results**

#### *Key features of social work education system*

In Ukraine, social work as a profession has emerged around twenty years ago. Like in some post-Soviet countries, in Ukraine the first social work training programmes were introduced at the beginning of 1990s, after announcement of its independence from USSR. Actually, there was a simultaneous process of social services' development, social work emerging as an academic discipline, and formation of civic society institutes.

Officially social work as an academic discipline was established in Ukraine in spring 1991. The first professional School of Social Work in Ukraine was founded in 1993 with the support of the European Union funds – the Tempus Programme – within the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy'. The project international team successfully developed and introduced in 1995 in Ukraine the Social Work Master Programme and trained the first cohort of students. The latter became teachers and formed the core of the School of Social Work. This was the first Master degree programme launched in Ukraine, and it was done by the international support based on generalist approach to social work and European values. The challenging experience of creating of social work education in Ukraine had been described by UK, Portuguese and Ukrainian authors [1] stressing the complex balance between what was offered by the Western partners and what was taken up by the Eastern partners.

Later the Bachelor Programme in Social Work was developed and introduced at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy'.

As a follow up of the above project, by the support of the other EU Tempus Programme, modular courses 'Social Work Education' and 'Research in Social Work and Social Policy' were launched at the School of Social Work at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' to disseminate social work education across Ukraine.

The above initiatives created the ground and launched introduction of other social work programmes at the universities across Ukraine. Some of these universities were supported by various European, American and Canadian projects. Thus in the case of Ukraine the international partners and international experience were certain catalysts of changes in social work education.

On the one hand, international aid programmes assisted developing international cooperation links, bridging people and ideas to change social work context, making them launching and legitimizing innovations in the country. The fact of supporting such initiative by the EU financially and existence of such international cooperation ensured additional value for the arguments by the Ukrainian academic community to instigate changes in social work education and practice.

On the other hand, Ukraine experience influence of Soviet type of thinking, concept of pathology, social control and positivism as the core vision of professional activities [8]. It is also influenced by Russian language professional literature based on post-Soviet traditions. Language issue is important challenge for many social work academics and

practitioners who do not know English, but easily understand Russian. This makes them using Russian language resources which promote social work and social policy approaches different from modern European concepts of social work, e.g. ignoring community work or case management, ideas of empowerment and social development.

Thus, there are different understandings of approaches between different universities to social work practice. Internationalization means for us not only bringing international experience and sharing it with the rest of people. We have different, sometimes radically opposite views and approaches within the local academic community to social work theorizing, education, research and practice in local context. The School of Social Work at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' staff is trained mainly by UK academic staff and thus more oriented on the UK social work approaches. Academic staff from other Ukrainian universities which is oriented on American or Canadian models has their own understanding of social work. Certain schools are oriented towards (post)Soviet type of thinking and look at social work through concepts of social welfare and pathology. It might be considered as 'indigenous' knowledge developed within the country itself [11], however, it seems to have little in common with social work as a professional concept [2]. Extensive knowledge and experience in the field of academic international cooperation has assisted some other social work schools in building their academic capacity via on-going discussions on theories, concepts, research and practice.

The Global Standards for the Social Work Training and Education (2004) where the core standards are described on training programmes, including practice placements, standards on basic curriculum, standards on teaching staff etc. are mainly ignored in Ukraine. Only few institutions are aware of them and try following them, but exclusively in those issues which do not contradict the strict regulations of the national Ministry of Education and Science.

It is worth mentioning that initially social work as an academic discipline was ascribed to the sociology knowledge area. Later, by the national Ministry of Education and Science initiative, it was redefined to become a part of the 'social welfare' knowledge area. 'Social assistance' and 'social services' are two other specialties included into this knowledge area, but these are totally new ones for Ukraine, have no theoretical background and actually are tribute to Soviet style understanding of social work and social policy as pure welfare issues. Thus, there is an

evidence of significant impact that local context and old Soviet welfarism traditions has on the profession regarded as a new one in Ukraine.

#### *Background for creating the first Doctoral Programme in Social Work*

There has not been existing social work as a discipline and profession during the Soviet time, and, thus, there was no training and dissertation thesis defense for the highest academic degree in social work in Ukraine before. Because of this, those academics making attempts to advance their academic degree and to complete the third cycle of social work education (PhD) had to find the space for their dissertation thesis within other fields of education such as 'Pedagogy', 'Sociology', 'Psychology', 'Political Sciences' etc. But research capacity is extremely important for professionalization and academization of social work, while in Ukraine social work research is not recognized, and professors teaching social work have no degrees in social work. The lack of trained social work academics and professionals teaching in the programmes leads to diffusion of the social work body of knowledge in the country and creates certain obstacles for its professionalization (Boyko & Kabachenko, 2011).

The social work education system – despite the fact that it was introduced in post-Soviet time – is based on old models, and does not correspond to the Global Standards for the Social Work Training and Education. Harmonization of this system with the European Higher Education Area has been proclaimed as an official policy by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. However, current discussions within the Ministry demonstrate no evidence for promotion of social work at the third level of education.

Situation in Ukraine contradicts the recent Statement on social work research, adopted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (2014). This worldwide association of institutions of social work education considers that research 'must form an integral part of social work education at undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral levels' [10]. While in Ukraine postgraduate and post-doctoral levels of social work education are absent at all, and social work is sometimes viewed as an applied profession that needs only instrumental knowledge for action. While academic research in social work, exploring own practice have sufficient impact on the profession public and academic status, trust to it, and enables developing and improving social work theory and practice base. Likewise in the European neighborhood countries, 'the development of doctoral studies means academic independence from other social science

disciplines' [12, p. 100], and the social work identity is significantly challenged while Ukrainian social work education is elbowing its way through the other professions with older history, already acknowledged by public.

*Piloting of the new programme*

The first in Ukraine programme for training professionals of the third cycle of social work education (PhD programme in Social Work) was created within the project 'Advancing the three cycle system in social work education in six European countries' by the financial support of the EU Tempus Programme. During 2010–2012 the PhD programme was developed and piloted by the staff of the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' and partners from five European universities: Sheffield Hallam University (UK); Tbilisi State University (Georgia); University of Ljubljana (Slovenia); Tallinn University (Estonia); Vilnius Pedagogical University (Lithuania).

The experience of introducing such programmes in European countries brought by international partners provided an opportunity to identify its principles, concepts and approaches. New PhD programme has been built on the idea that gaining theoretical knowledge, training on methodology, development and promotion of research practice by social work practitioners form important base for social work establishing and development as a profession and an academic knowledge with its own knowledge base. For social workers it's important to generate new knowledge in order to create new theories, improve understanding of problems which they are engaged with, as well as to analyze their relations with policy and practice, cultural context specific etc. So, focus in doctoral training was done on mastering research methodology, methods, as well as on developing PhD student's research competences. The latter is of special importance for social work which was formed as an academic discipline quite recently. This approach sufficiently differs doctoral training from traditional for Ukraine 'aspirantura' studies.

The content and design of a programme are based on evidence-based practice (integration of research and professional practice) which is a very important component of a modern society that is built on knowledge, development of education and research in social work and social policy; development of skills through critical thinking of one's own practice. This doctoral programme is developed according to the Bologna principles which suggest using such a new for Ukraine paradigm of higher education like competence – based education.

At the same time, as in Ukraine social work belongs to the knowledge area of 'social welfare' which is a social policy component, it was necessary to include into the curriculum the courses devoted to the in-depth study of social and political theories, social policy analysis etc. Moreover, such focus could meet the local need in active engagement of social work academics and practitioners into policy building. Thus, created and introduced PhD Programme in Social Work and Social Policy, when comparing it to other European social work programmes, is oriented on more in-depth study social policy itself, as the core strategic decisions on social work competence and its regulation is identified by social policy which is implemented at different country development stages. From this perspective we consider that academics and scientists could freely orient and work in cooperation with colleagues – representatives of such directions like public governance, political sciences, and not to restrict by an academic discourse within psychology, pedagogy etc. like it often happens today.

It is worth noting that the PhD Programme in Social Work was part of the structure of the Doctoral School of the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' established with the support of a few European projects. This school holds the official status of a pilot project of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine as it was aimed at creating a model of PhD programmes of European style that differ from inherited from the Soviet Union 'aspirantura'.

Piloting the first Social Work PhD programme within the Doctoral School has its advantages and disadvantages. It allowed combining resources and opportunities of the projects (for PhD programme in Social Work and for Doctoral School). However, it had its impact on the curriculum design, structure and content, as well as a range of other organizational limitations.

Up to the moment of writing this paper, the first in Ukraine PhD programme in Social Work is still not recognized by the governmental bodies.

General analysis of the experience of introducing the first PhD Programme in Social Work and Social Policy at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' provides the background for identifying certain specific features which are important not only within the context of creating other doctoral programmes in social work in Ukraine, but in other post-soviet countries. There should be understanding of the necessity of harmonization with the European Higher Education Area and more clear vision how Ukrainian system of education can be integrated into common European practice.

### Conclusions

The social work education in Ukraine experiences a lot of challenges. It was introduced in 1990s and highly inspired by international projects that bring European, Canadian, American academics' knowledge and experiences, as well as modern concepts of social work into the local context. Certain diversity was a key feature of introducing social work as an academic discipline in Ukraine. Thus it is based on different understandings of social work. Local traditions of looking on social services through paradigm of welfare, pathology and social control dominates now over ideas of empowerment and social development. Such views are hindering the process of its academization and

professionalization, as they narrow the knowledge base to the knowledge needed for actions.

The first in Ukraine PhD in Social Work programme had a pilot nature and was supported by the EU project. It had uncovered a lot of challenges related to development of educational system and further academisation of social work in the post-socialist context. Some of these challenges had an organizational nature related to local old-style perceptions of academic research and research trainings inherited from Soviet system of higher education still preserved in Ukraine despite the fact of Bologna declaration adoption. The other issues are related to the necessity to overcome different interpretations of social work theories, the expressed need to 'localize' international experience and practices.

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## АКАДЕМІЗАЦІЯ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ РОБОТИ В УКРАЇНІ: РЕФЛЕКСІЇ ЩОДО ДОСВІДУ

*В Україні в останнє десятиліття відбулися значні зміни в розвитку освіти з соціальної роботи, які свідчать про її академізацію та професіоналізацію. Міжнародна співпраця слугує корисним каталізатором цих процесів. Усе це має конкретні наслідки для розвитку трьох циклів освіти з соціальної роботи в Україні, тобто бакалаврських, магістерських і докторських програм.*

*Власні спостереження і рефлексії підтверджують, що українська історія соціальної роботи сповнена доказів постійної локалізації міжнародних стандартів та досвіду, що впливає на академізацію соціальної роботи.*

**Ключові слова:** освіта з соціальної роботи, докторська програма, Україна, проект ЄС.

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