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Common Law, Charity, and Human Rights as Responses to the Socio-Economic Crisis in Galicia, Spain

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This article presents the findings of a research project analyzing the effects of the Spanish socio-economic crisis on rural areas. It describes the perceptions of social workers in the public sector engaged in community practice and the perceptions of social leaders working for public and private human service organizations within the province of Ourense, Spain. It explores how the current economic crisis has affected people, health care units and the social workers' scope of action. The study relied on secondary data, surveys and qualitative interviews. Study findings suggest that the adopted measures for responding to the effects of the crisis have been scarce. The primary responses to the crisis include privatization of human services and the transfer of responsibility from government to civil society organizations. Instead of focusing on charity, this study in Galicia, Spain proposes a greater focus on rural social work and on the promotion and defense of human rights by civic and other organizations.

Keywords: crisis, social services, rural areas, social work, human rights.

Literature Review

The effects of the socio-economic crisis—known as the ‘Great Recession’ (Jenkins, Brandolini, Micklewright & Nolan, 2013) due to its global dimension, depth and prolonged duration—produced a decrease of the purchasing power on a large part of the population in Spain. It also created a context of economic precariousness that generated a very sharp increase in the levels of social exclusion, as well as an increase in the number of households below the poverty line (Laparra, 2010; Laparra & Pérez, 2011, 2012; López & Renes, 2011a, 2011b). Zurdo and Serano (2013) emphasize the social over the economic dimension, given the impact of the recession on the living conditions of citizens and on social cohesion. In Spain, the unemployment rate tripled between 2007 and 2012. The rate went from 8.4% to 23.8% (INE—National Institute of Statistics, 2012), and youth unemployment increased to 57%. Moreover, both labor precariousness and the number of workers living in poverty also increased (Aragón et al., 2012). According to the *Survey on Living Conditions* (INE, 2015), the vast majority of households in several Spanish autonomous communities struggled to make ends meet. These include the Canary Islands (80%), Andalusia (77%), Valencia (76.4%), and Ceuta (76.2%); Navarra, the best faring region in Spain, has a 35% poverty rate. In the third quarter of 2013, the INE calculated that 651,200 Spanish households did not have at least one employed family member. By May 2015, this number had increased to 770,000 households, or 11.5% of the 6.7 million households in Spain. “Absolute unemployment” mainly means households without any type of gainful employment. By 2013, the Spanish Foundation for the Promotion of Social Studies and Applied Sociology (FOESSA) reported 580,000 households without any type of income coming from work or social security system protection funds (FOESSA, 2013).

The *Survey on Living Conditions* (INE, 2015) calculated the existence of 4,000,000 households below the poverty level. This is approximately 25% of the total Spanish population. The official government source, Eurostat, also estimates that a quarter of the Spanish population lives in relative or severe poverty (Eurostat, 2015). While poverty has had a devastating impact on families, its impact on children and youth has been even more alarming. According to Eurostat (2015), 29.9 % of children and

the young population live in relative poverty. This places Spain as the European country, after Romania (34.6%), with the second highest child poverty rate.

Because of poverty, many families are unable to make the rental or mortgage payments for their homes, leading to a still unknown number of evictions. In 2013, the General Council of the Judiciary produced a report that reconciled data from the Association of Property Registrars, the Bank of Spain, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) and its own judicial statistics. They identified 75,375 settled foreclosures and 198,076 pending foreclosures in 2012 alone. Almost 80% were working or middle class households. Families were also unable to pay for their household energy expenses (Consejo General del Poder Judicial, 2013). According to the FACUA consumer organization, in 2013 the electric energy service was disconnected to more than a million families, out of 23.5 million (FACUA, 2014).

Finally, the current economic crisis in Spain has led to the polarization of society and a growing income gap between the rich and the poor. Such polarization has been fuelled by factors such as fiscal adjustments, tax increases and social cuts. In Spain, 10% of the lowest income households lost 13% of their annual income between 2007 and 2011, compared to the loss of only 1.5% of their annual earnings for the 10% richest households (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015). As the OECD has pointed out, during the last few years, social inequality has grown the most in Spain, as compared to other European countries.

In spite of the ongoing socio-economic crisis and high levels of unemployment, the European Union has implemented neo-liberal and neoconservative austerity policies and has adopted a different view towards social welfare (Del Pino & Rubio, 2013). Several authors have examined the evolution of the welfare system in Spain and have denounced the current dismantling of the welfare system (Álvarez, 2009; Barrera-Algarín, Malagón-Bernal & Sarasola-Sánchez, 2013; Fernández, 2012; García, 2011; Recio, 2010; Urteaga, 2012). Others have focused on the effects of austerity social policies on social work and social services (Abad & Martín, 2015; Alguacil, 2012; Barriga, 2012; Díaz, 2012; Lima, 2011; Lima, Verde, & Pastor, 2016; Pastor & Sánchez, 2013; Roldan & Castanyer, 2012; Santos, 2011; Serrano et al., 2011).

According to Abad and Martín (2015), “precarity policy” has been used to manage precariousness in the new crisis context and within the framework of current neoliberal policies. These two authors believe that the current economic crisis has led to structural or systemic violence against the population. Such violence has taken the form of privatization of social services and psychologization of uncertainty and precariousness. Privatization refers to a redefinition of our concept of social responsibility and to the transfer of the responsibility for human services to the private sector. Netto (2002) calls this process re-philanthropization, which he sees as a justice duty and a moral duty. Psychologization refers to the process of conceptualizing a social problem as a problem of the individual, who must ultimately be responsible for solving it (Beck, 1998).

According to Mata and Pallarés (2014), while historically social welfare has emphasized charity, we are now moving in the opposite direction. The State’s withdrawal from social welfare contributes to the privatization of universal social services and to transferring the responsibility from government to civil society or the voluntary sector. Hence, the growing institutionalization of food distribution programs allows politicians to disregard lack of food as a social problem (Riches & Silvasti, 2014). In the last few years, food banks have proliferated, demonstrating a solidarity pattern (Pérez de Armiño, 2014). Both the media and public administrations disseminate a distorted meaning of the term ‘solidarity,’ since the concept is only used to promote charity and individual altruism. As a result, the social relevance and visibility of philanthropic actions has increased (Mata & Pallarés, 2014).

The previously mentioned actions imply a desire of certain sectors to return to charity as a means to promote social welfare. It has been proposed, however, that charity is mainly individual, partial and not preventive. It is not consistent with the spirit of Spanish law or with a universal social protection system. Charity may be seen as part of the State’s transition from an emphasis on the collective to an emphasis on the individual and from security to insecurity (Rodríguez Cabrero, 2004).

As Poppendieck (1999) warned, the proliferation of charity contributes to society’s failure to effectively and significantly deal with poverty. Charity helps alleviate political pressure, while finding solutions that are more relevant. Additionally, it helps soothe the conscience and reduce the discomfort

provoked by visible misery. Moreover, the creation of a charity culture normalizes mendicancy and legitimizes personal generosity as a response to social and economic dislocation.

Given this reversion of rights, several authors propose social work practice based on human rights (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016; Verde, 2016; Wronka, 2014, 2016). The human rights perspective provides meaning and guidance to social policies and interventions, given that human rights are guaranteed and legitimized by the international community. The previously mentioned authors propose a comprehensive perspective and a complete system based on human rights principles, rules and standards. Furthermore, Staub-Bernasconi (2016) highlights that human rights and social work are historical allies.

For Ife (2016), the relationship between social work and human rights can be approached in two ways: by means of the worldwide participation in human rights campaigns, or by means of social work for ensuring human rights. In the second case, the author proposes an approach that is based more on humanities and less on an anthropocentric worldview that limits a liberal and individual building of human rights.

The previous literature review served as the basis for this research project aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the scope and effects of the current economic crisis in the province of Ourense, located in the autonomous region of Galicia in northwest Spain. This article is based on data collected from rural or highly dispersed rural areas in the province of Ourense. Ourense is characterized by a sizeable elderly population, and a context of abandonment and depopulation prior to the economic crisis, which has been in existence for a few decades. This article describes the effects of the crisis on community social services in rural areas. It identifies the responses and measures already under way, both from the public sector and from other social organizations. It focuses on the perceptions of social workers in these areas and on how the crisis has affected people and the work of professional social workers. Finally, the article provides recommendations for interventions for the targeted rural areas. We hope the study findings will motivate us to reflect on the role of community social services and social workers in rural areas.

Social Services in Rural Areas

The system of social services emerged in Spain in the late 1970s and early 1980s, coinciding with the beginning of the democratic period. Throughout these years, the system has developed significantly to the point of being recognized as a fundamental instrument of the welfare state (Uceda, 2011). Article 148.1 of the Spanish Constitution transferred this function and responsibility to the autonomous communities. This has produced significant inequalities among the autonomous communities. According to Vila (2012), despite their conceptual and organizational similarities, 17 different social service systems have been developed in the regions of Spain.

The first study using the Law, Economy, Coverage (LEC) index was conducted in 2012 by the Association of Social Services Directors and Managers. It sought to measure the development of social services in Spain. It found a weak general development of social services in the whole country, as well as a huge disparity of efforts, coverage and rights between the different regions. Moreover, the data from 2012 to 2015 suggests a deterioration of the system and extraordinary disparity in terms of funding and program development. Between 2011 and 2013, the country's annual expenditure on social services was reduced by 13.3%, while the expenditures of local governments increased by 20.8% (Asociación de Directores y Gerentes de Servicios Sociales, 2015).

The Spanish welfare state is centered on the family, consistent with the Mediterranean style. In this type of system, the family is an important supporter, welfare provider and distributor. This system is based on an ideological and political view that legitimizes family strategies based on intergenerational micro solidarity and gender (Naldini, 2002). The *VIII Report of the Social Reality Observatory* (Caritas, 2013) reported an exceedingly high Spanish family protective capacity and described its survival strategies in the face of the crisis. Consistent with this notion, the first report on social services in Spain produced by the Labor General Council found that cuts in social welfare benefits, tightening of eligibility requirements and delays in the processing of social benefits had an even bigger negative impact on social vulnerability and on the financial burdens carried by families (Lima, 2014).

The last economic crisis is a global phenomenon that has worsened the living conditions of a large number of people and populations (Sassen, 2010). The unceasing process of economic development and globalization has had an effect on rural areas in particular. Furthermore, changes in traditional agricultural societies have generated economic and social transformations (Buckwell, 2006).

Today more than ever, rural societies are immensely heterogeneous. The complexities of such societies make their analysis more difficult. The boundaries between rural and urban areas are no longer clear, and migration patterns do not always flow in the same direction (Camarero, Sampedro, & Oliva, 2011). New migrants include former rural dwellers, retired people and newcomers without previous family or affective bonds. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to take these factors into consideration and identify the new rurality (Roseman, Prado, & Pereiro, 2013). We must identify and understand new lifestyles and ways of relating to one another, the needs of farmers, the possibilities for diverse economic activity, and a future where local and global concerns overlap (Alonso & Conde, 1996). This will hopefully lead to bringing together persons from seemingly separate worlds and helping them become part of the same “multicultural, multilingual, multiracial, multimedia and maybe also multipurpose” society (Camarero 1996, p. 125).

Various authors have expressed their social concern for rural problems and have acknowledged the need to formulate economic and social policies aimed at supporting the rural population (González Regidor, 2008; Márquez, 2002; Moyano, 2005). In the opinion of Rico & Gómez Limón (2008) we need to learn how society perceives rural social problems, and we must agree on rural development policy goals and strategies. This information will hopefully facilitate the formulation and implementation of citizen-centered rural development policies. For Juste, Gómez, and Fernández (2011), local rural development must take multiple factors into account. Successful policies will require considerable economic resources as well as social cohesion.

Social service providers must remain aware of their roles and potential contributions. They represent key players in the area's development. De la Rosa, Rueda, de la Red and Prieto (1995) consider that the need for multidimensional interventions from social service providers is more obvious in rural areas,

given the decentralization of problems and resources. For this reason, we need new approaches for the study of rural contexts, for resource organization and for local service coordination.

We must also keep in mind the particular features and determining factors of social services in rural areas. Morales (2007) found that social services in rural areas have a substantially lower level of development than their urban counterparts. This may be due to: (a) the inadequacy of urban social policies for the rural context; (b) the ignorance of some social service professionals of the socio-structural context and social problems of rural areas; (c) the absence of a proper alignment between social policies in rural areas and wider development policies; (d) physical distance, and (e) lack of coordination of the different rural councils.

Rural areas should not be understood merely from a geographical point of view. They should also be seen as the result of historical and cultural methods of production. According to Besada, Castro, and Rodríguez (1999), the daily activities of social workers must revolve around the special needs of specific groups in rural areas. The needs and demands will vary depending on the different rural environments and on the territory's socio-economic structure and characteristics; therefore, programs designed for each reality are required. A community approach to individuals and groups is needed for active participation in rural activities.

Rural community development presents complex challenges that cannot be exclusively dealt with at the level of the individual. The overlap between community development practices and human rights principles is increasingly recognized by the United Nations. Both human development and human rights aim at promoting welfare and liberty based on the dignity and the inalienable equality of every person (ONU, 2009).

The market economic model hinders the implementation of a genuine human development model for rural populations focused on self-management, self-reliance and empowerment. Given the reproduction of the current economic system, we need alternatives based on human development in line with Max-Neef (1986). A focus on human development is an alternative to the neoliberal economic model that requires dynamic cultural processes that recognize the rural population as subjects of development.

Social workers play a vital role in making many people aware that they are deprived of their fundamental human rights. Such awareness may be created through individual and collective methods. The empowerment approach, the strengths and the freedom for working with individuals, families, groups and communities transcend the micro-macro distinction (Sewpaul & Larsen, 2014). Consistent with this, Healy (2008) and Wronka and Staub-Bernasconi (2012) propose that the social worker needs to be aware of his/her human rights practices and must generate interventions that promote ongoing social change. Social workers can promote social, economic, cultural and environmental development while supporting the Social Work Global Agenda (IASSW/IFSW, 2012). It is important to stress the role of social workers that are politically and humanely committed to producing social change aimed at peace, social democracy, human development and human rights (Sewpaul, 2015).

In Galicia, like in the rest of the country, Law 13/2008, regulating social services, passed on December 3, 2008 and provided for two types of care: community services and specialized services. The first has a predominantly local character and refers to a certain territory and population. Councils represent the basic planning entity for community social services (Ley 13/2008). The existence of social workers in rural councils responds to Decree 9/2012, enacted on March 16, 2012, calling for the regulation of community social services and their functioning (Decreto 9/2012). This was consistent with Law 13/2008, of December 3, 2008, regulating the social services in Galicia.

The enactment of Law 27/2013, *Rationalization and Sustainability of the Local Administration*, by the Popular Party endangered many community services nationwide, as well as the local network of social services (Ley 27/2013). Local municipalities and rural councils with lower population were most affected by this law. Although most autonomous regions enacted laws and moratoria that ignored the dispositions of this law, authors such as Uceda et al. (2013) and Boix (2015) are greatly concerned about the reduction of the municipal skill-based approach and about a strategy that outsources services and moves them away from citizens, because these ignore the social and territorial cohesion of rural communities.

Community Social Services in the Rural Areas of the Province of Ourense Facing the Socio-Economic Crisis

Research Design

The research study was conducted between 2014 and 2015. It started with an exploratory study and included secondary sources of data. Secondary sources provided data on the elderly, unemployment rates, province councils, household composition and habits, people with special needs, and people with difficulties making ends meet. Based on that information, the research project was structured into two segments: questionnaires mailed to social workers employed by rural councils and qualitative fieldwork.

First, questionnaires were mailed to social workers employed by rural councils. All social work council members were contacted by telephone before questionnaires were mailed to them. The members of 35 rural and highly dispersed rural councils responded to the questionnaire. Questionnaires were organized in five sections: (1) perceptions of professionals about the early stages of the crisis and its consequences; (2) typology of users based on old and new needs; (3) perceptions of professionals related to people's socio-economic strategies; (4) institutional resources and support measures in response to the crisis; and (5) professionals' recommendations. The questionnaires served as a starting point for conducting comprehensive interviews.

The qualitative fieldwork consisted of interviews of social workers and other key informants. Metropolitan, suburban, rural and highly dispersed rural areas were taken into account while trying to calculate the number of social workers that would be needed to staff rural councils. The number of inhabitants in a specific geographic area determines the number of social workers, and the numbers are broken down as follows: less than 2,000, 2,000–4,999, 5,000–11,999, and 12,000–20,000 inhabitants. Two interviews were conducted in urban areas and two interviews in metropolitan areas. In the province of Ourense, the city of Ourense is the only population center with more than 20,000 inhabitants. The city and its metropolitan area comprise 30% of the province's population. Nine interviews

were conducted in rural areas where the majority of the councils in the province are located. One interview was conducted in a highly dispersed rural area. Eight interviews were conducted with key informants and selected leaders. These included directors of social services and non-governmental organizations and representatives of rural and neighborhood associations.

From Common Law to Charity

In the opinion of social work respondents in rural councils, the Spanish economic crisis took place mostly between 2009 and 2011. Reportedly, the crisis resulted in: (1) more people needing assistance after their unemployment benefits were depleted; (2) an increase in the number of family reunifications; (3) budgets cuts; and (4) decreased access to available social service resources.

The implementation of the Law 39/2006, 14th of December 2006, titled *Promotion of the Personal Care and Autonomy for Dependent People*, requires the delivery of new services (Ley 39/2006). This law sees bureaucratization as an obstacle to social service delivery and not as a guarantee of it, given that bureaucratization is often associated with lack of knowledge of people's current needs at the autonomous community level.

Many social workers identified the elderly as the group most affected by the crisis (29.4%). As a result, many of them ended up needing rural community social services. The elderly are the most frequent users of services. However, underage youths (26.5%), middle-aged people between 35 and 50 years old (17.6%) and unemployed families with children (14.7%) were also identified as being negatively affected by the crisis.

The consensus of the interviewed rural social workers was that resources and benefits provided to families in response to the crisis have been very scarce. Furthermore, 85.7% of these workers believe that such resources and benefits were not adequate to ameliorate the conditions of vulnerability in which many people found themselves. People's basic needs were not being met. They viewed the financial relief and related services as short-term or restrictive welfare measures. The provided resources were not adequately planned or adapted to the needs of rural communities.

Some of the most commonly reported difficulties were:

- Reduction of human resources, benefits and services, even when the number of people in need had increased;
- Tightening of eligibility requirements for services that left many people and families without services;
- Slowness and delays in the processing and provision of social benefits;
- Auditing of service delivery expenses and increases in workload that restricted and slowed down service and aid delivery; and
- Measures were too isolated and too welfare and palliative-oriented, without any real joint work with families aimed at overcoming their difficulties.

More than a third of the interviewed social workers (35%) indicated that their councils did not create any specific programs to assist people who were most vulnerable from crisis-related issues. On the contrary, cuts in social services and rigid controls of expenditures by the local administration limited municipal emergency benefits and programs, which were already more limited in rural councils. In some cases, budget line items aimed at responding to immediate and urgent needs disappeared.

Professional workers identified specific initiatives aimed at easing the effects of the crisis and meeting basic needs. These included: increasing municipal funds for social emergency programs; entering into cooperation agreements with entities such as the Food Bank or foundations to supply products; collaborating with companies and associations for the distribution of non-perishable food; and the creation of flea markets, charity wardrobes, and food and toys collection campaigns at Christmas time, etc.

One of the main responses to the crisis has been the privatization of social services. Because of this, the responsibility for the provision of human services was transferred to third sector

entities and to informal networks. Large organizations such as the Red Cross, Caritas or the Food Bank, and others present in certain shires noticeably increased their social emergency programs. During the crisis, all of them increased their provincial activities in order to reach rural councils. This led to the creation of new local headquarters in main shire's settlements and to the reinforcement or creation of new emergency aid programs such as invoice and rental payment, among others.

Reportedly, the programs and assistance provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are very diverse. They range from economic aid for responding to basic needs to more specialized interventions. Contrary to what happens in public or governmental organizations, NGOs' eligibility requirements are more flexible and the processing of requests for benefits is significantly faster; that is why NGOs are often responsible for responding to the most urgent needs.

All social workers that participated in this study admitted that, since the beginning of the crisis, they have referred clients to non-governmental organizations, mainly because of the lack of prompt responses from public administrations. Most referrals have been made to the Red Cross (35%), Caritas (30%) and the Food Bank (22.5%), depending on the distance to each of them in any given council. Residents are often referred to parishes and, to a lesser extent, to neighborhood and rural women's associations. Referrals are quite common when looking for prompt solutions not readily available within the public sector. Referrals are made in spite of the workers' reluctance to encourage charity. They make the referrals because they view the provision of assistance as a right: "You refer much more to other organizations such as Caritas or the Red Cross. Now we coordinate much more at a professional level. But we continue processing the requests, because it is a right" (Social worker # 1).

Interviewed social workers highlight that mutual help has always existed in rural areas and that it has never disappeared. They make constant reference to the existence of family solidarity, the sharing of retirement pensions, and the self-consumption economy. All of these have softened the short-term consequences of the crisis for families.

The increase in requests for benefits, the lack of response from the administration, and increased bureaucratization and

inspection, have an emotional and physical effect on workers. Feelings of discomfort, helplessness or stress are common among these intermediaries between people seeking social services and administrations that see helping them as a priority, even though they do not provide adequate resources: "We have an incredible work overload. We do not have any sort of support from the administration. We suffer emotional costs because we see blatant situations which have no solution, helplessness" (Social worker # 2).

Recommendations of Social Workers for Rural Areas

Recommended actions and strategies for rural councils related to social services and regional and national social policies include:

- Reduce the processing time of requests for services and the approval of aid and service delivery.
- Increase the number of social workers in rural councils and social budgets.
- Increase social emergency lines and aid to rural councils.
- Continue offering lunches in those schools already providing them.

Interviewed social workers identified the need to create jobs in the autonomous communities and nationally to generate economic resources and higher levels of social welfare. They assert that local and national governments must stop eliminating financial resources designated to social services and stop modifying social welfare policies and service delivery systems without any specialized knowledge, given that those actions hinder their work. Unfortunately, many legislators and bureaucrats responsible for policymaking do not know the social work profession and/or the realities of service users.

On the other hand, social workers' recommendations for highly dispersed rural councils highlight the need to respond to the needs of the elderly and migrant or incoming residents,

especially young adults and children. The recommendations include home care and a true residential and day care policy.

Contrary to lay or non-social work views, interviewed social workers believe housing opportunities for newcomers are scarce and for this reason they propose rental programs for rural areas. They also propose services for palliating social isolation at the provincial level. These include improving facilities in the neighborhoods, and providing means of transportation between councils and the main villages in the shire or neighboring villages for the purposes of work, school and medical care.

Social workers also proposed the promotion of cooperatives in an effort to promote economic development and economic self-sufficiency in the rural councils. They believe this would be the best way to create continuous, sustainable employment that attracts population. This will require however coordination with local development groups and agents. Furthermore, they believe more social work action at the community level is needed to counter the restrictions imposed on the profession by increased bureaucracy.

Finally, we should expand the scope of social policies at the regional and national levels to restore citizens' social rights, stimulate the economy, and modify recent regulations which content reveals lack of knowledge about social services and the socio-economic situation in the Spanish territories.

Conclusion

Social policies and programs implemented by community social workers aimed at palliating the effects of the socio-economic crisis have primarily included privatization and the deterioration and elimination of guarantees and social rights. Noncompliance with laws related to plans, benefits and services have led to violation of the constitution and the neglect of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Many social services, resources and benefits formerly provided by public agencies have been eliminated. Furthermore, many social service users have been criminalized through very perverse and exhausting inspections. Privatization has transferred much public responsibility for social welfare from public entities to non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, it has interfered with the family-based welfare model by delegating the

responsibility for public care to informal networks and micro solidarity mechanisms. The previously mentioned policies and practices are expected to impact social demographics given that they may lead to low birth rates, depopulation, abandonment of rural areas, elimination of equipment and resources, etc.

The findings of this study highlight the social concern about living conditions in rural areas, as well as the need to promote social and economic development in these territories. The most commonly reportedly problems in rural Spain include: the loss of population in rural areas; the outward migration of young people; the weakening of rural councils; social isolation and related difficulties; lack of transportation; and greater difficulties accessing needed resources. Because of these problems, new policies and strategies are needed to counter them. Furthermore, significant job creation is needed in rural areas to attract more population.

This study's findings about social workers' perceptions are consistent with the findings of other studies conducted in Spain such as the *II Report on Social Services in Spain* (Lima, 2015). According to that study, 73% of social workers agreed that policies and budget cutbacks implemented in response to the crisis violated the human rights of citizens.

The possibility of going back to the provision of social services based on charity and philanthropy makes the rights-based approach more necessary than ever. We need to guarantee equal access to social services and minimize social and economic inequality in rural areas. The constitutional support for the right to access social services, which is being promoted by social and academic organizations in Spain, can represent a solid foundation for this work.

The social work profession in Spain must focus on rural social work (Murty, 2005). This must include rural content on social work curricula as well as interventions addressing theoretical-methodological, ethical and political issues. According to Santos (2012), this process may start by acknowledging general and less significant realities. This may lead to substantially modifying the current perception of social services to something indispensable in Spanish society. This ideological and conceptual construction will require recovering traditional social values and interpreting them in a way that leads to human rights and to the integration of excluded minorities.

We agree with Abad & Martín (2015) in that the social deconstruction associated with the crisis places new demands on the profession of social work, given the profession's emphasis on emancipating and transforming social action. In addition to the human rights approach, an emphasis on community social work may represent the best way to contribute to the transformation and development of these rural territories. Hence, we as social workers must own and promote a human rights focus of social welfare and move in the opposite direction of the neoliberal emphasis on charity and budget cuts.

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