INTRODUCTION: THE COMPLEX SCENARIO OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION: HARMONISATION AND CONVERGENCE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

UNA ESCENA COMPLEJA: LA ARMONIZACIÓN Y LA CONVERGENCIA EN LA EDUCACIÓN Y PRÁCTICA DEL TRABAJO SOCIAL. INTRODUCCIÓN AL VOLUMEN.

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Abstract

This article offers an overview of the issues concerning *harmonization and convergence* of educational programs in Europe after the Bologna Declaration in 1999. It offers clarification of the language of convergence, drawing upon a model by Threlfall (2003). References to social work programs across the English speaking world are offered as samples concerning professionalization and standardization, with an analysis of specific articles appearing on the same volume of Portularia for which this overview was written.

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece un análisis del debate sobre la harmonización y convergencia de programas de educación superior en Europa después del Acuerdo de Bolonia en 1999. Ofrece clarificación del lenguaje que se usa en relación a la harmonización y la convergencia, basándose en un artículo de Threlfall de 2003. Se hace también referencia a los programas de trabajo social en países de habla Inglesa, sacando de ellos ejemplos de profesionalización y ofreciendo algunos estándares. Se analizan los artículos que aparecen a continuación en el volumen de Portularia para el que se escribió esta introducción.

Keywords: Convergente, Harmonization, European social work education, English speaking world social work, Spain social work, Professionalization, Standard setting

Palabras Claves: Convergencia, Harmonización, Trabajo social en Europa, Trabajo social en el mundo de habla Inglesa, Trabajo social en España. Profesionalización, Estándares profesionales

The language of harmonisation or convergence in various policy arenas and particularly in the 'social areas', is still imprecise and evolving. Threlfall (2003) suggested that, though

dating back to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, these ideas are under-conceptualized and not clearly defined. Editing this issue was an extremely interesting learning exercise. The complex thinking and vocabulary surrounding efforts to bring together, 'converge' or 'harmonize' the various areas of policies and systems throughout Europe, are presenting substantial challenges to those involved in them and to scholars attempting to understand them. It is the purpose of this introduction to offer a review of useful concepts that will help the reader fit the basic concepts and the various contributions into a useful framework.

Threlfall (2003) noted the economic roots of the European Union (EU)[1] processes, initially intended to free individuals in the Community 'from the confines of the social and legal systems of their state of residence' (p.122). Their purpose was to help citizens 'experience living and working in the EU as if it were a single country, at least in certain domains' (p.122). Threlfall also noted that Article 117 of the Treaty of Rome had provided, since 1957, an impetus to 'harmonise' conditions in various areas while improving them (Threlfall, 2003). Article 117, she suggests, planted the seeds of these still unresolved processes. Since that time, many documents and some treaties have addressed aspects of integration, harmonisation or convergence.

It is opportune here to define, albeit tentatively, these three related concepts. Again Threlfall's writings offer some guidance: "… Social integration is a process that results from social policy-making and can be identified through the literal meaning of integration: to make parts into a whole" (Threlfall, 2003:124).

She suggests that the concept applied first to market and labour processes that would become barrier-free across countries in Europe. Labour mobility was and is a central objective in both, the convergence, and harmonisation and globalisation agendas. By extension, 'social integration' would result from the abolition of barriers 'allowing cross-national consumption of social services and the enjoyment of the social practices of other member states' (Threlfall, 2003:124). Further analysis of Threlfall' typology of social integration processes (p.125) suggests that social integration is an umbrella concept or objective, made up of proposals at various points in a continuum. From this umbrella concept emerge two others: harmonisation and convergence. The term harmonisation appears to refer to laws, policies and processes that are similar but applied within each member state. In Threlfall's words, 'bounded by frontiers' (p.125). The term convergence indicates, "…no regulation, yet increasingly similar policies adopted, leading to more similar outcomes. Ranges from incipient to advanced convergence". (Threlfall, 2003:124)

In spite of their inherent ambiguity, Threlfall's definitions or interpretations represent one of the clearer frameworks I encountered.

In 1999, the Bologna Declaration (Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education) focused on the creation of a "European Space for Higher Education." Kornbeck (2002) notes that this is not "…a state treaty or other legally binding document but a pledge taken by 29 countries to reform the structures of their own higher education systems in such a way that overall convergence emerges from the process at the European level". (p.328).

Kornbeck (2002) further notes that although the locus of this process is outside

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[1] The European Union will be referred to interchangeable as the EU or the European Community or the Community.

the EU system, it is being closely followed by the European Commission because of the implications it can have for students and graduates. According to Threlfall (2003), "…higher education is another field in which a single social area has emerged out of the application of free movement principles to EU citizens' rights—this time to become mobile degree-seekers". (p.131).

In fact, there is pan-European access to higher education developed on the principles laid out by exchange programs such as Erasmus and Socrates. Higher education institutions "…are obliged to treat all EU students equally in respect to access and fees and all member states' qualifications are subject to mutual recognition…" (Threlfall, 2003:131).

There are directives on these matters, but for our purpose here, suffice to say that the principle has set into motion many accommodations in each member state.

Kornbeck (2002) comments that the Bologna Declaration has as one objective: the adoption of a higher education system based on two cycles, undergraduate and graduate. The first cycle, or undergraduate, would last a minimum of three years. The second cycle would lead to master or doctor's degree. He also suggests that these proposals can have critical consequences for 'national degree systems if they do not fit this essentially Anglo-Saxon model' (p.328). He also notes the strong drive to align to the Bologna requirements in some countries and the strong opposition in others.

In this evolving and contested context, I was asked by the Editorial Board to explore, within the field of social work, the different processes that may have been used to harmonise or converge social work education in specific countries of the English speaking world. The Editorial Board was very aware that not all English speaking countries were European, and that the forces propelling these processes would be different, in, for example, Canada and the US if such situations had arisen. In the English speaking countries I was familiar with, no 'treaties' addressing cross-country harmonisation existed, though there had been professional pressures, internal and external to the countries, to become more alike than different.

With this background, it was agreed that the January 2005 issue of Portularia would explore whether social work and social work education have become more 'universal' and less 'differentiated' in countries such as Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland and the United States. (The language to be used by all contributors would not necessarily be that of the EU, but the notions explored would be similar.) I was aware that such explorations would also lead to focusing on the status of the profession and the level of self-regulation in education and practice in each of the countries just mentioned.

The essays in this issue of Portularia could address whether certain trends in social work education and practice were becoming more universal, at least in the English speaking countries included in the volume. At a more personal level, as the issue editor, the preparation of this issue would also help me reflect on the situation in the US in comparison to that in other countries. Quickly, it became clear that before we could offer reflection and critique of trends across the countries selected, it would be necessary to offer good description of their developments. Thus, the charge to the contributors was to reflect and describe the development of their own country systems of social work education and offer whatever suggestions they may have about the forces making it more or less universal, more or less standardized. If the language of convergence or harmonisation fitted, as might be the case for the European countries, then, the writers were free to use it.

An additional contribution, not from the English speaking world, was included. Kornbeck (2002) had reported on developments on the subject of convergence for the European Journal of Social Work. Kornbeck's article in this issue helps place the concept of convergence within the sociological literature and the policies of the EU. In Threlfall's typology, statutory or legal changes are not a requirement of convergence. But when policies are adopted to achieve similar outcomes, cultural factors in each country cannot be disregarded. This is Kornbeck's thesis in his paper here (pp. 29-44). His conclusions add a note of caution as social work in Europe moves in the direction of convergence. Most of the articles in this issue, in fact, ponder on the nature of social work, discussing the pros and cons of policies to standardize its content, even within single countries.

Another cautionary note, though not overtly expressed in the articles offered in this issue was expressed by (Pugh and Gould, 2000) in an earlier essay. These authors suggested that to assume that 'globalising'—I would say universalising—forces would inevitably overtake all others in relation to welfare challenges is '…to pre-empt the possibilities of change by [an] unwittingly depoliticized reading…' of the reality of how politics operate' (p. 136). Nation-states are still powerful entities that can resist or not what might appear to be unstoppable forces from the outside, particularly in the cultural arena.

Of course, we also offer Spanish contributions to provide the necessary background against which all articles should be read. One article, Zorita's is historical and philosophical, including reflections on the Spanish social work ethos or paradigm. What Zorita calls 'talante.' Zorita traces the contributions of the social teachings of the Catholic Church, which provided the flavour and philosophic background to Spanish social work and makes a plea for its continuation within the current European realities. Zorita ended recognizing the strength of the European reality, including the commitments made in Bologna. In this respect, she agrees with the observations of Vázquez-Aguado. Nevertheless, like Kornbeck, whose observations were presented at the outset, she warns that the process of Europeanization must be followed with great caution.

Vázquez-Aguado grounds his discussion on the current Spanish educational and political situation. He reviews the basic premises to which the ministers responsible for the development of the European Space for Higher Education subscribed at a meeting in Berlin in 2003. These premises touch upon competition, inequalities, the responsibility and quality of public education, and the integration of research and teaching. He also highlights the commitment of the signators to an educational system of two cycles. Within this framework, Vázquez-Aguado sees the opportunities that the new system offers Spain. He moves on to the process of identification of competencies, which also occurred in Spain. In this respect, the process resembled that followed in England and Scotland and the critique offered by Dominelli and Pugh would apply. Competencies are seen as the pivotal axis of the profession, bringing social work closer to a technical profession.

IDENTIFYING TRENDS AND ISSUES

For the past thirty years or so, I have been intrigued by how higher education in the US and indeed, all over the world was becoming less and less differentiated not only in content but in form. Given that one of education's highest aims, at least in the scientific tradition, is universality of knowledge, lack of differentiation in content could have been a source of pride for any member of the academy. But, complete lack of differentiation

in form and content beyond that which was sure-footedly based on science, had social and political connotations, since institutions of higher education have been the product of different cultural traditions and histories. The trend toward universality resulted in standardization and decreased the relationship between learning and local contexts. Thinking globally, that is with the world in mind, had always been the sign of a good education. But, would anyone be able to act locally? Even the environmentalists' motto warned citizens that action was always local. In professions such as social work that are, or must be, by their very nature, related to action, the distancing of higher education from specific geographic, economic, political and linguistic contexts could have a number of undesired consequences. Furthermore, at least in the US, higher education was, at the same time, purporting to be more and more community oriented and more and more ethnic sensitive. This was the result of political demands from state legislatures, in the case of state-funded universities, or from grass-roots groups or local constituencies, in the case of private higher education. As '' and 'internationalisation' of institutions of higher education were becoming more salient, the same institutions were voicing their intent to be more serviceable to the public in their local communities. Could this be done? Did higher education have the resources to do it?

In the US, an additional concern was the balancing of 'local' – often defined as state level—demands and 'central'—often viewed as Washington-based ones, if not always government-required. Although most social services are devolved to states and often to counties, central government funding and requirements play and important role in what states and local governments can and cannot do. In terms of professional practice, the states regulate who and who will not be able to call him or herself a 'social worker' and most states have an additional level of control through the vehicle of licensure. (This does not mean, however, that only those who are professional social workers are employed in the social service field.) State boards establish the requirements and the process is separate, though heavily lobbied and influenced by the professional association. Ginsberg's essay in this issue (pp. 45-58) offers a detailed perspective on these parallel processes.

There is a perhaps a corollary of this tension in relation to social work education. In his essay, Ginsberg describes the long-established system of accreditation of social work programs in the U.S through a central voluntary body, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Though 'voluntary', in the sense of being non-governmental, CSWE derives its authority from government and its 'accreditation standards' exercise a strong control over programs in colleges and universities. The CSWE system attempts to reconcile institutional autonomy with regulatory demands, but in spite of its reasonable success and high levels of compliance by member institutions, there has always been tension within this system. Because of a long tradition, the loss of accreditation can spell the demise of a graduate or undergraduate social work program.

As in most professions, apparent contradictions between the professionalizing and regulating demands of the 'central' and the local-need and constituency-based demands of 'local communities'— be they state, province or other local units— often present a philosophic and practical dilemma. In Europe, the dilemma also plays across national boundaries. In some instances such as the US or Australia, the debate is more constrained. In Britain with its four constituent nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland),

it seems to play both ways, inside the UK and in relation to all of Europe. In Canada, the bi-cultural and bi-lingual nature of the society offers unique perspectives. In all situations, the question to ponder is whether the two trends identified, namely, professionalisation through compliance with central standards and responsiveness to local community constituencies can inhabit the same space. How can it be done? How can these apparently contradictory demands be reconciled? Much can be learned on this topic.

Many insights, useful beyond Europe, can be gained through perusing various points of view on how social work practice and education are moving toward convergence across the European Union —whether in response to external pressures and structural reform— or to a slow but significant blending of cultures. In becoming more alike, less and less divergent within and across the various nation-states, many questions emerged: To what degree was this happening in social work? Was this occurring across countries, regions, cultures and languages? If a level of harmonization or convergence was taking place, what were the forces shaping it in diverse countries? What would be effects of the search for the global on local communities and local needs? Could the helping arts, of which social work is one, be decontextualised from their immediate environment?

The questions in my mind were numerous. While the articles in this issue do not answer them all, they offer the reader essential information to begin the perusal of good answers. They also hint at ways in which some of the problems of harmonising multi-national structures against local political realities, community demands and resources, are being addressed.

Some Lessons Drawn from the Contributions

An examination of the papers included in this volume confirm that the push for market control, standard setting and professionalizing services has been exercising a powerful influence in social work education throughout the English speaking world. In Europe, these trends are coupled to the EU push for convergence-which relates to length of studies and similarity of preparation. While social work educators appear to be concerned, there does not appear to be a united opposition. "Globalization has cut across…debates by imposing a market discipline on social workers… It has also led to the internationalization of social problems... Yet, practice is predicated largely upon what happens on the ground in a particular locality, and social work educators have yet to engage with the implications of globalization for their teaching." (Dominelli, p. 65)

This might be because gains made in one front are often countered by losses or concerns on another. Increases in professional regulatory standards are countered by a loss in autonomy. Increases in accessibility for consumers are countered by shortened and more technocratic training of personnel, and so on. Social work continues to be torn by its many varied goals and commitments. All of the papers in this issue suggest that this dilemma is fairly universal and offer different insights and historical perspectives on these issues.

From the perspective of England, the article by Dominelli (pp. 59-76) suggests that recent changes, including EU trends, have 'reaffirmed social work's place in the academy and integrated the professional qualification with an academic degree' (Dominelli, p. 62). Yet, Dominelli also states that the issues of European harmonisation 'do not weigh heavily on British social work educators' (p. 62). Overall, Dominelli makes a convincing case that it

is the market forces that have been most influential in all the recent changes in social work services, practice and education in England. It appears that employers' demands play a major role in the development of curricula, and that while 'users' have greater input now than in the past, the input is too often passive rather than interactive. She regrets the resulting undermining of autonomy among academics and calls on educators to really challenge the 'neoliberal agenda'[2] in education, where universities are becoming like businesses and are run as such, with the accompanying alienation of professional programs.

Pugh concurs with Dominelli on most of the issues concerning recent developments in the UK, particularly on the influence of market forces. In an already cited essay, Pugh and Gould (2000) had contended that a lot of social work's problems with professional identity and fragmentation had preceded the '' debate. In his paper here, however, Pugh (pp. 77-94) focuses on the trend to standardization and to creating a 'one size fits all' approach to professional education and training" (p. 92). Furthermore, on the side of professionalisation, Pugh raises questions about how "…the development of professional standards, professional registers and codes of conduct, all ostensibly aimed at providing better and safer services for the public are also creating powerful regulatory mechanism, which may be used to discipline not only erroneous and poor practice, but have the potential to squash or inhibit unorthodox perspectives and dissenting practitioners too". (Pugh, p. 92).

More importantly, he reflects on the contested nature of social work as a practice and profession, a problem that is clearly not new, and a thread that is also woven through the articles from Canada and Australia.

Timms and Perry (pp. 95-110) describe the profound changes that are taking place in Scotland, changes that for the authors are still both 'uncertain and unclear' (p. 95). They state that the pattern of devolution introduced by the Scotland Act of 1998 named Social Work, Local Government and Higher Education as part of the devolved powers to the Scottish Executive. This reflects a high level of political autonomy, at least from Westminster and fosters a character of social work in Scotland 'different from its counterparts in other countries in the UK' (p. 100). This would appear to be a victory for insuring a local flavour in Scottish social work. Yet, on the service provision side, these authors note the narrowing of the tasks of local authority social workers who have become more 'managers' than providers. Employers want training to focus on assessment and contracting of services, a concern common to England and Wales. On the educational side, the traditional Scottish 4 years Honours degree 'is replacing existing three year degrees in Social Work thus standardising course length and level across the eight Scottish universities with the Open University in Scotland likely to follow suit.'[3] This move increases the period of education for Scottish social workers, making it longer than in other European countries.[4] Scottish social work is also distinctive in its brief, since it includes practice in the criminal justice field, which presents different challenges than those in England or Wales. It would appear that at least some elements of distinctiveness continue to be noticed in Scotland.

Ireland presents, according to Christie (pp. 111-130), an interesting variation. Four main groups are identified as social professionals: social workers, youth workers, community workers and social care workers. The system is young.

Until the 1990s, the Church rather than the state had been the main provider of social

[2] Personal communication with Lena Dominelli, July 2004

care. However, during the 1990s, with the institutional decline of the Catholic Church and increase in social problems, the state increasingly involved itself in the provision of social care and is now the main employers of social professionals. (Christie, pp. 111-130)

This Church-related history is similar to that described by Zorita (pp. 205-222) in Spain. In Ireland, Christie suggest that welfare ideologies at the policy making level might reflect more of an American than a European model, an interesting link across the ocean, which he characterizes with the phase 'Boston versus Berlin'. In relation to professionalisation, Christie notes that of all the groups providing social care, it is in the area of children services that most efforts at registration are being made. He notes that the introduction of registration is related not only to quality of care but also to the implementation of EU directives on third level qualification. Again, the gains and losses of higher professional qualifications are noted:

Registration…may well have the consequence of reducing diversity within the profession and making it less effective in challenging social inequality. (Christie, p. 113)

The articles from Canada and Australia offer other interesting political histories within the Anglo-Saxon model. Westhues (pp. 131-150) describes how Canada, which was first a French and then a British colony, became a multicultural society with two recognized official languages, French and English. This, in itself, speaks for the need to accommodate social structures to cultural and linguistic demands, a lesson that has not been yet fully learned in many of the heavily Spanish-speaking areas of the US. Social work in Canada is also a fairly new profession, having its roots in the 20th Century. The relationship between Christian values—whether Protestant or Catholic—is noted by Westhues, who also suggests that grounding in the social sciences moved the profession to its current secular status. Westhues also notes that 'educational policy is the responsibility of provincial governments' (p. 134). The Social Service Diploma, offered by community colleges, reflects the autonomy of the provincial system. At the degree level, whether Bachelor or Master's, it is the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work that provides basic standards for accreditation.

Another issue is still being debated in Canada at the provincial level.   Regulation of the profession for purposes of protecting the public is the responsibility of seven of ten professional associations, which are affiliated with the Canadian Association of Social Workers. Of course, these associations also promote the profession. The debate, which will also have resonance in Australia, is "…whether it is a conflict for the same organization to have responsibility for both, promotion of the profession and protection of the public from incompetent or unethical social work practice. In three of the ten provinces… the current decision is to separate these practices, and independent organizations have been created to regulate the profession". (Westhues, p. 136)

It will be interesting to see how this is resolved. However, it must be recognized in many countries, the professional social work community is small and relationships among various organizations tend to be close and often inter-twined.

Our Australian contributors add issues related to access which are currently affecting University education throughout the English-speaking and other countries of the world.

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[3] Personal communication with Elizabeth Timms and Richard Perry, July 23, 2004.

[4] Informants suggest that in Scandinavia, the shrinking of their 4 year programs to three is being hotly debated.

Fees paid by students for their university education have become a contentious subject in many countries. In the case of social work, higher fees often translate into fewer numbers of under-represented students enrolling in courses. This will be something to be watched in England, and depending on a pending decision, in Wales (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2004). It will also be something to be watched in Australia. Camilleri (pp. 171-186) states that the recent Australian 'reform package' for higher education definitely favours the use of a market approach to funding and managing universities.

Camilleri identifies the 'contested nature of human service employment' (p. 179) as one of the most problematic areas for social work in Australia. This will ring true in many other countries. Many of the positions in various areas of social work practice are advertised by employers as requiring a generic qualification such as a degree in the behavioural sciences. The profession, continues Camilleri, has not been able to get employers to agree on 'what constitutes work specifically designed for social workers' (p. 184).

In relation to social work education, he believes that the 'relationship between Schools and the profession' (p. 184) will be tested over two issues. First, the need to internationalize the curriculum at the Master's level to make it more attractive to overseas students who will constitute important revenue for the Schools. Secondly, the need to accelerate the length of education for social work at the Master's level for those students who enter Master's program with a Baccalaureate (4 year) degree in social work. The latter, of course, has consequences for the ever increasing problem of financing an education.

Wilson (pp. 187-204) suggest that social work always had an international flavour in Australia. As it occurred in many of the less-industrialised countries in the world at the beginning of the 20th Century, '…knowledge and skills were imported from overseas, in particular from the United Kingdom and the United States' (p. 188). She identifies another issue related to both, funding and level of training, which has its parallel in other countries such as the US, though not exactly in the same way. After significant reforms in 1988,

Funding universities continued to be the responsibility mainly of the Federal government. Human service training was also available at TAFE colleges, a responsibility of State governments. Articulation arrangements between social work programs and these courses continued to evolve, encouraged by federal government policy that required universities to recognise prior learning in other tertiary training institutes. The AASW now sets guidelines to assist courses in determining what credit should be given for TAFE welfare programs and university social work programs (Wilson, p. 191).

It is clear that given the various jurisdictions, the tensions between the central and the local continue to exist, even if in subtler ways, today. In Australia, the professional association, as a national body, sets the standards, for practice and social work education. As Wilson notes, it plays a significant role in maintaining professional standards in social work. Yet, social workers have always been ambivalent about power, so there is significant debate as to whether becoming more professionalized should be an objective.

I believe an important point of danger was incorporated by Wilson in her essay: "It can be said that while social work has achieved many of the trappings of a profession in Australia, it has not converted these into a strong, sustained demand for its professional services" (p. 197).

Finally, the Spanish contributors discuss the past and present situation in Spain from a number of perspectives. Zorita (pp. 205-222) offers a historical review of higher education

in Spain, particularly of social work education. She suggests that there have been two parallel altruistic traditions in Spain; one liberal the other rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church. She notes that the liberal tradition never came to fruition before the advent of democracy, thus solidly places the practice of social work in the teachings of various religious communities. The first schools of social work in Spain, she suggest, were those of the church and the first influential social workers were their graduates. She suggests, however, that although these schools were Catholic, they viewed themselves as educational centres not just for Catholics. The teaching in those schools was rooted in the progressive social teachings of the Church and on a strong service philosophy. In the Anglo-Saxon world, it could be said that what was stressed was the 'cause' of social work, its commitment to social justice and caring, rather than the technical aspects or 'function'.

Zorita recognizes the current of the 'Europeanization' of social work, including the strong commitment to the Bologna agreement, which is now codified in the Spanish law *(Ley de Organizacion Universitaria, LOU, 2001)*. However, she, like Kornbeck, would warn the schools of social work in Spain to use the 'Europeanization' of social work education with the same caution with which the schools made the transition from the a strong native and even Catholic philosophy of caring to the more secular one of today.

Summary and Conclusions

Of the many important issues identified through the writings, a number would appear to resonate for the recent changes taking place in Spain and in other European countries. First of all, social work traditions as they are conceptualized today in the industrial world have their roots in ways of thinking or paradigms that are essentially Anglo-Saxon and industrial (Martinez-Brawley,). Given the frameworks for analysis offered by Kornbeck (pp. 29-44) social work in Spain needs to refrain from looking only at an approach from a different 'family of nations'. Cultural forces need to be taken into consideration, which is also the point made most forcibly by Zorita (pp. 205-222). Given the realities in which the country operates, this requires educators to exercise caution before embracing major changes.

Secondly, the professional status of social work continues to be rather tenuous, if by professional status we mean recognition and assurance that a particular line of work is best suited to people holding a specific qualification and that salaries are be assigned accordingly. Even with current market demands—where the need for 'social workers' in a generic sense seems to be great — professionally recognized and qualified social workers do not appear to control who is employed to perform many tasks of social caring. While the various professional associations have accomplished a great deal in achieving recognition for social workers, they have not been able to control what employers do in the market. This lesson is fairly universal and is noted throughout the articles in this issue.

Thirdly, the professionalisation efforts of social workers have led to increased requirements for education and practice. In most countries, the level of training in terms of years of studies has increased; many countries have introduced registration and some, such as the US, licensing for practitioners, though this is a state level decision. While increased educational requirements are sometimes an indication of advancement, in the case of social work, given its commitment to a paradigm of participation of all groups, additional educational requirements are not without negative consequences.

Fourthly, there seems to be a pervasive fear that the further subjugation of the social services to market forces will present two fundamental dilemmas: it will make social work more technocratic, emphasizing quick results and solutions, and it will de-emphasize social work's commitment to the poor, the marginalized and those who think 'outside the controlling paradigm.'

Finally, while the historical nuances and today's details differ from country to country, the push toward a less differentiated practice and education appears to be almost overwhelming. It behoves the practitioners and educators who read this issue to remain alert to these strong currents so that they may safeguard what is valuable in their own experiences and discard what is best surrendered. Culture should never be an excuse for remaining static, but it should be a force that helps adapt and adopt valuable growth that is valuable, rather than transplant flora that will never blossom.

On the struggle for professionalisation, social work, by its very nature, might continue to face its challenges at the 'margins'. But perhaps, there is still a need for a profession whose voice is different, a profession that can think in broad, global terms, be open to universalising forces but continue to be rooted in action and, above all, in caring, which, like politics, is always local not in its vision, but in its actions.

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