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# SOCIAL SERVICE – IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

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## ON THE NEED OF ACKNOWLEDGING SOCIAL SERVICES<sup>1)</sup>

In the Volume 3 of 'Praca Socjalna' 2017 have been published eight – seemingly very different articles<sup>2)</sup>. They talk about social workers, curators, family assistants, school pedagogues, multidisciplinary activity of non-governmental institutions, there is also a little bit of history. Someone could even say that it is a coincidental set, and that the articles have nothing in common. Of course, it is just an appearance. In fact, all of the articles focus on the same issue, which is social services. It is true, that they do that fragmentarily, but what other way is there, if the problem is so versatile. It is true, the articles are different, but they have to be different if they are to convey an abundance and diversity of social services. In reality, their common publication is intentional – such set allows to illustrate – out of necessity a very limited – existence and actions of social services. It should also be an incentive to revitalise and estimate the issue of social services, and, as a consequence, allowing them an appropriate place in a state order of social policy.

In a discourse on helping and its organised, public forms, 'social services' have a well-established place, one can say – for years, or even from the very beginning. Despite that, and above all – despite the actual meaning of social practices hidden behind the term, a rank of social services – up to this point, did not find an appropriate confirmation neither in theory (doctrine) of Polish social policy nor in politicians and decisions-makers view, who are responsible for creating public policies' agenda.

The need of change in social assistance and social work is written and talked about for years, however, the fact that something needs to be done

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<sup>1)</sup> Bibliographical note of the first edition: "Praca Socjalna", 2017, No 3, pp. 5–16.

<sup>2)</sup> In this section are included four of them.

about social services is not talked about at all. At the same time – I am truly convinced, that a key to modernisation of social assistance and development of social work is, firstly an earlier noticing and estimation of the problematics of social services and, secondly, their conceptual and institutionalised ordering. In order for that to occur, social services must have their rank restored/given and their matter should be centralised in the discourse. With the very definition of social services, there seems not to be a problem. It can be owed to a great extent, to Barbara Szatur-Jaworska, who devoted several of her works to the issue (Szatur-Jaworska, 1995, 2001, 2006, 2010). Another work worth mentioning here is one by Michał Porowski (1998).

Social services according to M. Porowski are: a set of versatile actions (services)

- conducted from a professional duty or on a voluntarily basis;
- in a frame of public institutions, non-governmental organisations or informal occupational groups (self-help groups);
- helping individuals or families and societies experiences various types of life difficulties in gaining back a feeling of self-worth, authorship, fighting with helplessness, gaining back or improving a capacity of social functioning, meeting basic needs by appropriately chosen educational, supporting, caring, protective, rehabilitative, corrective and other activities;
- creation of conditions necessary to obtain the above aims.

Social Services according to B. Szatur-Jaworska are institutions, organised groups and also individuals realising a broadly understood social work and other interconnected forms of helping and supporting people. Among remaining subjects of social policy, they are differentiated by:

1. an indirect contact with people using the services;
2. an individualisation of targets and methods of working;
3. a pre-intervention diagnosis of needs and capabilities of individuals, families and societies who are to be beneficiaries of social services;
4. reacting in situations in which common procedures created by society fail to meet the needs and solve problems of individuals, families, and groups;
5. focusing on those needs of individuals, groups, gatherings, which are important for their social functioning, being a part of a society.

A basis of distinguishing social services from other subjects of social policy is a conjunction of all of the above-mentioned traits

Source: Szatur-Jaworska, 2001, 2010; Porowski, 1998

However, that up to this point, the definitions do not have any practical application – they are not used to distinguish and to fully describe a fragment of reality referring to social services, which includes administrative

and/or scientific institutions of social practices, marking areas of undertaken actions and their comprehensive characteristics.

Without a doubt, an inner diversity and spatial and organisational disperse of social services do not help to comprehend them fully:

- social services act to help numerous social categories, among others: people with physical or mental disability and their families, children deprived of a proper care, problematic families, children and adolescents socially unfit, homeless, unemployed, addicted to alcohol or psychoactive substances, former prisoners, immigrants and asylum seekers, people without or with a low income, various types of minorities and so on;
- there are such social services, which, in a legal-organisational way act independently, however, there are also such, who deliver their services in connection with other types/systems of services, e.g. health or educational services, often working on a boundary with them, which makes this boundary blurred (e.g. a case of social support for people with mental disorders, language classes in a country in which a refugee is staying, protected flats, or cultural activation of children from slums);
- social service function in all possible states: in a service-receiver house (e.g. house care service), ambulatory (e.g. all types of health centres and clinics), in semi-stationary state (e.g. support centres, socio-therapeutic common rooms, centres of social integration), in a stationary state (social help hoses, shelters for homeless), but also on a street or in a night club (so-called party work);
- social services create cadres with a very diverse types of education and levels of specialised professional competencies; there is place for both very high qualifications (e.g. family therapists) as well as relatively simple activities (services like housekeeping);
- social services, unlike any other, are open to volunteers – not only for economic reasons, but above all, because some types of help (e.g. terminal care) require from people motivation other than the usual economic one.

A diversity signalled above and a disperse of social services comes in a great degree from its very nature. It should be underlined, however, that institutional factors additionally emphasise it. Let's notice, that, firstly, a part of social services activity happens within law-organisational framework, but in fact there are several of these frameworks: in the first place we

talk about a system of social assistance, but also about educational system (e.g. school pedagogues, psychological – pedagogic counselling), health care (e.g. addiction therapies), justice department (guardianship), and also: a) apart from the case of social assistance, in these systems they are on peripheral places; b) these systems are ready to various extents to accept ethos and deontologist rules characteristic of social services; c) there are no rules and mechanisms of common fluent cooperation. Secondly, a part of social services functions on specific institutional ‘no one’s fields’ (e.g. social and professional reintegration, which does not belong to social assistance nor to professional market services). Thirdly, there are such activities of social services, which are placed in weakly institutionalised areas (some activities/services of nongovernmental organisations e.g. citizen’s counselling).

As a consequence, an existence and activity of social services as a distinguished, having its own identity area of public life and public policies shifts the attention of not only public opinion, politicians and decisions makers, but also the very people employed in social services, for money and for free. In such situation it is unrealistic to assume that it will be easy to create in them an awareness of a common place and interests. Let’s notice also, that the above ‘them’ contains a long list of professions and quasi-professions, and activities (engagements) of volunteers. There are, among others: social workers (general, clinical, social organisers), family therapists, addiction therapists, occupational therapists, educators (of various types), curators, professional advisors, culture animators, school pedagogues, family assistants, foster families and coordinators of foster care, coaches of supportive/social employment, street workers, house carers, members of AA groups and others.

Surely, a terminology chaos, which occurs in a discourse about helping and its organised forms, is connected with the above state of matters. Key notions here are – apart from ‘social services’ – a term which in the last two or three decades became hugely marginalised, above all – ‘social assistance’ (also in versions often used in verbal communication: social assistance/social work, understood ‘broadly’ and ‘narrowly’). A problems lies in a fact that, these notions – cited more or less intentionally as words with similar meaning, or even as synonyms – are often used interchangeably, although in fact they are different. We underline however, that social services are not the same thing as social work and social assistance.

Mistaking social services with social work comes surely from a particular place, which is taken by social work among dispersed and chaotic social



services. It plays two roles. In the first one, social work is a standardised service (one of many, although usually considered as a basic service) delivered to persons/families for whom social services work. It can occur in a form of a so-called general practice or a more advanced clinical or environmental practice (community organising). In the second role, social work is a kind of meta-service – a service performed in reference to the remaining services offered directly to people/families in need by social services. What is important here is managing or developing of actions of social services and also popularising and coordinating them on the level of particular consumers. Among considered roles of social workers, particularly important seems to be the role which refers to a mediation between clients/consumers and services they most need: in its most developed form it becomes a ‘case management’.

A source of a practice of equalling social services and social work is, in turn, an earlier-mentioned fact, that they lie within the same law-organisational framework, social service to a great extent. Such practice is misleading due to two reasons. Firstly, it excluded such activities, which come to realisation within other systems (which was already mentioned). Secondly – in Polish reality – social assistance is also a financial help, whose essence, sense, ‘logic’ and pragmatics are very different than social services (which will be talked about later).

Linguistic carelessness makes a language of a discourse unprecise (not to say – blurred). Using such language makes it impossible to order or even to thoroughly describe social practice, or to change (reform) well-planned public policies. Maybe we encounter here a type of a vicious circle: inadequate language is incapable of expressing problems of helping and their real importance, as a consequence it does not appear in public policies agenda, in turn, as it is not in this agenda, there is no pressure for language precision.

One can explain to him or herself, why public opinion, decisions makers, and politicians do not see and do not appreciate social services. It is harder though to comprehend why they still do not find the right place in Polish doctrine of social policy.

In developed welfare states, social services as a new, autonomic, and equal to others, social policy system serving realisation of its own, important social functions emerged between the sixties and the seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. A common identity of a broad category of actions, which are institutionally unintegrated and not coordinated was noticed then. Such services were addressed to diverse populations of people and families with

specific problems and needs. Their subjective differentiation was justified as follows (Kamerman, Kahn, 1976):

- social services are very diverse from the inside, however, an essence of their actions is very similar – they undertake a set of tasks close to one another and socially very significant, which, importantly, lie outside a range of actions of other institutions' systems – they take care of/support people and/or families experiencing various types of life problems;
- social services act in an individualised manner (personalised) – they are fitted to individual needs and the circumstances of service-receivers;
- an offer of social services cannot be replaced with financial support or with any other types of services, e.g. health, educational or any other type;
- in social services, social work is a central profession, on the same basis as medical professional play a key role in healthcare, and teachers – in education; still, social services require a partaking of representatives of other professions and quasi-professions to an extent in which there are more of those individuals than there are social workers;
- social services in their essence work for persons and families regardless of their economic status.

In development of welfare states, a moment of noticing and acknowledging of social services can be – in my opinion – treated as a completion of the process of instituting of common ideas, unconditional social laws. It also meant an ultimate break up with a tradition dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century of public charity, which was addressed solely to poor people and families and which combined – primary – financial support with – let's call it – non-material support. Sadly, although in Poland at that time, services of social services were present and served in a non-marginal way, they were not acknowledged. It seems, that the main practical reflex of changes and reorganisation happening in social policies of Western countries was a decision from the sixties about a formal introduction to the list of professions a new profession of social worker, which was connected with an onset of a relevant professional education, and allowed to prepare and start an implementation of government program of development of professional social services (which is replacing in communist Poland social carers with social workers).

The actions undertaken in Poland, in reference to the processes of social services autonomy observed in other countries and institutionalised reor-

ganisations stemming from those, paradoxically had an opposite effect. In reality, an attachment of social work and social assistance confirmed a position in social policy doctrine, according to which non-material support (services) given to citizens not coping with life difficulties, belongs, together with social benefits, to tasks of social assistance, which, – as an institution of a caring technique – is an element completing a system of social security.

What is interesting, is that the above-mentioned fragment of social policy doctrine has not changed until today, despite the fall of communism in Poland and a vastness of changes happening afterwards. To confirm, let's cite a short quotation from a text book published within A Library of Social Worker: 'A term social assistance can be used referring to meeting, using public resources, basic life needs of people and families unable to do it on their own. It is created by a system of financial, material benefits and services. Social assistance completes gaps left by other types of social benefits, due to their restricted objective (type of benefits) and subjective (type of people) range, playing an important role in a system of citizens' social security. It interferes, when a person or a family is unable to cope with their difficult situation on their own, no matter, if that was a result of their own actions or whether it was a random case. On the 29th of November 1990, Parliament adopted a new law about social welfare, reflecting current needs and defining a place of social assistance in a system of social security' (Książopolski, Magnuszewska-Otulak, Gierszewska, 1996, pp. 262–263). It should be also noted, that a current law (from year 2004) about social welfare did not change anything in this aspect.

Let's notice, that material help (benefits) and assistance in a form of service (including social work) serve to fulfil different functions. Material help is an essence of a function, which can be named compensatory-protective and whose sense is to ensure necessary life resources for basic needs or which enables a decent living environment for those who do not have such resources. Social services, in turn, together with social work serve a promotive-developmental function – which is obtaining and developing resources and competencies, thanks to whom, individuals and/or families experiencing life difficulties can improve their social functioning, social status, overall life quality. As much as compensatory-protective function fits the idea of social security, promotive-developmental function does not (See also Table 1.).

**TABLE 1.** Characteristics of compensatory-protective and promotive-developmental functions of social assistance

	Compensatory-protective function of social assistance	Promotive-developmental function of social assistance
Aims:	Providing decent living environment	Life independency and integration with society
Basic forms of help (instruments):	Basic importance of material help and services (mostly protective), they are complementary	Basic importance of services which focus on acquiring and/or strengthening various types of adaptive skills and efficacy capacities key from the perspective of environmental requirements of modern society for families, individuals, and communities, they can (but do not have to) be completed by material help
Rule of redistribution:	Selectiveness – benefits are only for persons/families fulfilling income criterion	Inclusiveness – decisive factor is an existence of needs/problems
Basic procedures for ‘an entrance to the system’:	Qualifying procedures (checking living conditions, above all – an income criterion) within an administrative procedure	Diagnostic procedures (identification of needs, problems, resources) performed according to professional deontology
A role of services receiver:	From an aim’s perspective, an active cooperation of a receiver is not compulsory	A services’ receiver is their active co-producer – he or she ultimately influences services’ effectiveness
Helping relationship:	It is unnecessary to build a helping relationship between service giver and receiver	A helping relationship is a basis of cooperation between services’ giver and receiver
Side effects:	Unavoidable – qualifying rules and requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stigmatise services’ receivers (especially people receiving benefits), which influences their social status and results in demanding attitude (Kaźmierczak, 1998), and</li> <li>• encourage to ‘play games’ with social system, whose consequence is mutual lack of trust and negative stereotypes</li> </ul>	There is a danger of simulating activity by services’ receivers when there is no helping relationship built and/or when services’ givers do not follow rules of professional deontology

It turns out, that these functions, when ascribed as in Poland – in a common law-organisational framework of social welfare – are hard to combine without any losses for one of them. This is the case, because a logic of both functions is different: they serve different aims, require different rules of action, use different tools (forms of help). They are also different in terms of an extent in which they require administrative procedures – the first one usually comes down to such procedures, for the second one – they have a secondary meaning, because in a process of qualifying for assistance and also later – in a phase of realisation, other than law-administrative criteria matter, mainly professional ones. A practice of Polish system of social welfare shows, that the compensatory-protective function is somehow stronger, which marginalises the promotive-developmental function. To be honest, it is hard to expect things differently, as it is exactly this function, which makes social welfare an element completing social security.

The promotive-developmental function, as can be easily observed, is fulfilled not only by social services and assistance performed within a social welfare system, but also by a whole of social services. A problem is, that, unfortunately, independently of the law-organisational structures they actually operate within, they are always marginalised, because in none of them do they play a primary role. Such state of matters, I believe, for quite some time, does not have a rational explanation, with one remaining, that ‘It has always been like that’ (Kaźmierczak, 2012). There is however, a very strong argument to change that – to ensure social services a separate place within social policy doctrine and to implement institutional solutions respecting this place. This argument is of course the promotive-developmental function, which is performed exclusively by social services. Therefore, if we agree, that a modern state, just and well-developed, cannot do without this function, we must also acknowledge the need for reorganisation of the institutional order of social policy. In particular necessary is a thorough transformation of social welfare system and – let’s call it – its surroundings. In other words – there are new regulations required – not a singular law, but several, at least two – about social services and about social transfers, but also other, e.g. about social and professional reintegration and a long-term care.

Changes mentioned above will not happen on their own – someone has to make an effort. Such force will probably not be social services users, for the same reasons they decide to reach for help. This force should be

social services professionals. It requires from them an awareness of common interests as a basis for integration and creation of their own environment, active on public scene and able to lobby. A small steps in this direction are presented in this issue of “Social Work in Poland” under the joint title of “Social Service – Identity and Diversity” in the papers as this one and A. Żukiewicz’s about the tradition of social services in Poland, T. Kamiński’s about the dilemmas they face and M. Arczewska’s about cooperation problems of various services in helping children.

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*Transl. Ewa Butowska*