

8th ESPAnet conference 2010

Social Policy and the Global Crisis: consequences and responses

Budapest (Hungary), 2-4 September 2010

Stream: **Social Work and Social Policy: control or empowerment?**

Abstract

“Social Work practices within the new social policy trends: a Portuguese perspective”

The institution of public policy schemes and the bureaucratization of social policy systems provided the historical structural context for the consolidation of social work as a profession. Rapidly, the profession became mainly public and its scope as policy administrator has deeply enlarged. Many have argued that in this process social work have gradually been drained from its core foundations and turned into an administrative and managerial practice.

The trend in contemporary societies is for the reinforcement of an instrumental rationality focused on competitiveness, efficiency, efficacy and result-oriented practice; this rationale is not alien for social work, which more and more is influenced by this kind of inspiration. The consequences have been diverse and topics like the de-professionalization thesis, managerialism and evidence-based practice are definitely in social work agenda.

In this sense, new influences in social policy have a strong implication in social work and, otherwise, the ways in which social workers face the mission of the profession strongly condition the horizons to which social policy can aim at. The new directions in social policy towards activation, individualisation, contractualization and so forth are key elements for the comprehension of today's social work practice.

This paper will discuss how active social policy gave birth to an “active social work” and what kind of issues does it raise to the profession, taking into account the acknowledged IFSW definition of social work. One of the most relevant discussions in this realm concerns the notion of empowerment and its extent from individual to community levels. The analysis will rely under data collected from two empirical studies on social work and social policy in Portugal.

Key words: Active Social Policy, Active Social Work, Evidence-based practice, Empowerment

Prof. Francisco Branco, Portuguese Catholic University, Portugal
Palma de Cima, 1649-023 Lisbon, Portugal
Tel: +351 962563618
E-mail address: fnbranco@fch.ucp.pt

Prof. Maria Inês Amaro, Portuguese Catholic University, Portugal
Palma de Cima, 1649-023 Lisbon, Portugal
Tel: +351 966810592
E-mail address: ines.amaro@fch.ucp.pt