



One, no one, or one hundred thousand? Voices of social workers in international comparison

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Journal: | <i>The European Journal of Social Work</i> |
| Manuscript ID | CESW-2018-0071.R2 |
| Manuscript Type: | Original Article |
| Keywords: | BRICS, neoliberalism, policy practice, advocacy |
| | |

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

One, not one, or one hundred thousand? Voices of social workers in international comparison¹

This article focuses on features of contemporary professional debates and reactions of social workers to social policy and reforms in five European countries (Italy, Spain, Turkey, Portugal, United Kingdom) and in the five so-called BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). It considers these features as they appear in different national arenas, for instance professional bodies, associations and journals/newsletters specialised in social work. A questionnaire submitted to experts in the ten countries guided both the data collection and the qualitative review of the literature and grey literature (internet, official documents, etc.).

The findings highlight the diversity of the countries and the extent to which social work has developed in them as a professional community. There appears to be a link between the formal structure of the profession and the level of the debate undertaken in this occupational group. Some of the so-called BRICS countries have only recently started to define a specific role for social workers in the implementation of social policies. In contrast, the other five countries have a stronger tradition of social work. Four of them are Southern European and Mediterranean (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Turkey), while only the UK represents a different European history and development.

Keywords: BRICS, neoliberalism, policy practice, advocacy

Introduction: What do social workers say about social policies and their reforms?

In the latest revision of the Global Definition of Social Work, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) have emphasised that “policy formulation and analysis” should

¹ This article is based on one of the segments of the research project entitled IRSES - Marie Curie "Civil Engagement in Social Work: Developing Global Models" (CIVIL_SW) conducted in the period from 2013 to 2016 thanks to funding provided by the European Union. This project explores the relationship between social work and civil society from the perspective of social policy structures and reform processes.

be included within the range of social work practice. This seems in harmony with the fundamental mandates of the profession of the social worker, identified in “promoting social change, social development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people” (IFSSW, IFSW 2014). These mandates are indeed perfectly consistent with any action taken by social workers to influence policies in order to ensure a proper framework for the full achievement of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity; in other words, the fundamental precepts of social work.

Pressures and opportunities to participate in policy formulation and analysis may vary from one country to another, as we shall in fact argue; however, some international trends can be observed, at least insofar as world-wide economic and social forces influence social policy and social work. These pressures may be considered among the consequences of the advance of neoliberalism in every part of the world. This theory of political economic practices proposes eliminating most of the limitations on markets and trade and giving more freedom of enterprise to individuals and more strength to private property rights. To ensure an institutional environment that fosters these processes, the state should limit its role and favour the market even in those areas where it is traditionally not present, like education, health care and social security (Harvey, 2005).

In this context, the problem of defending and extending the rights of social citizenship is evident, together with the risk that social work may lose most of the space needed to pursue its core principles. But while the goals of public debate and collective action by social workers may seem clear, much less so is the actual determination and concrete realisation of social workers’ activism.

A number of questions thus arise, which our research attempted to address: to

what extent are social workers participating in a public debate on policy and reforms in their respective countries? What are the main issues that they address, and what do they say and propose to do about them? What factors determine higher and lower degrees of “activism” by social workers and their associations?

These questions guided the exploratory research involving four European countries (UK, Italy, Portugal, Spain) together with Turkey and all the so-called BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Given the exploratory nature of the study, the selection of countries was intended to ensure wide variation of the variables under scrutiny and of context variables: the UK was included to represent an established model of social work and a structured and self-aware network of associations of social workers. The four Euro-Mediterranean countries represent diverse stages of development of the profession and levels of economic development different from that of the UK and the other countries. Additionally, the BRICS countries were included for their global significance and for their differing strategies and stages of development in structuring professional social work and social-work communities.

Due to the inclusion of countries with such huge differences in size (China’s population is 130 times the population of Portugal), economic and historical backgrounds, as well as social and political situations, the research design was not aimed at testing specific, given hypotheses on the basis of systematic, analytical comparison. Rather, it comprised a very limited number of variables in order to generate hypotheses which may contribute to discussion and support future research. The variables observed (summarised in Table 1) were the long-standing vs. recent establishment of the social work profession; the existence of registration systems to access the profession; the intensity of debate in social workers’ associations about policy debates. Moreover, the main issues and perspectives of such activism are

discussed in the text.

It could be useful at this point to highlight that moments of crisis in specific nations may stimulate cross-national research when there are similar perceptions of crisis in other areas of the world. This form of research based on comparison often makes visible those specific national traditions and welfare cultures whose impact on social work practice are normally invisible at a local level (Trevillon, 2010). For example, this could be the case of the UK, where the neoliberal wave started in the 1980s as a reaction to the policy doctrine expounded by Keynes in the 1930s (Spolander et al., 2014). In every field, the emerging global consciousness of the local impact on social work has generated deeper interest in comparative research within the profession (Ornellas et al., 2018). However, a strong limitation to the development of this form of research derives from a deficit in appropriate research methods for comparative social work, even if there are a few meta-analyses of comparative social work studies but mostly conducting country-to-country comparison without a more global perspective (Hämäläinen, 2014).

Hence, from a methodological point of view, the main difficulties encountered were the lack of known similar comparative studies, the great heterogeneity of the ten countries involved, and the difficulty of finding and treating the sources of information to use.

Consequently, and in the absence of other feasible strategies with the means and resources available, the technique implemented was the expert survey: a questionnaire was submitted to each of the research teams participating in the CIVIL_SW project.² It

² The teams included professors and researchers based at the Social Work Schools/Departments of the following institutions, partners in the CIVIL_SW project: Universidade Federal Do

asked the respondents in rather open terms to describe the nature and extent of the professional debate on social policy, the role of professional organisations in promoting that debate, and the possible sources for further investigation of forms and contents of such debate.³

The replies to this questionnaire were collected and analysed, and they guided the following steps of the research: continued dialogue with the teams of experts, requesting updates on and integrations of the material provided; analysis of the sources indicated by the experts (journals, newsletters, and especially websites for the study of topics of discussion); cross-referencing of the information thus obtained with the existing literature and previous outputs of the CIVIL_SW project concerning the role and institutionalisation of professional organisations, on the one hand, and social policy making on the other (Ornellas et al., 2018).

The following sections of this article report the main findings from each of the countries observed (next section), provide some comparative considerations (section *Global trends and dynamics in the contemporary professional debates and reactions*) and concluding remarks (last section).

Espirito Santo (Brasil), Sun Yat-Sen University (China), Loyola College (India), Università della Calabria (Italy), Instituto Universitario De Lisboa Iscte (Portugal), Coventry University (United Kingdom), Saint Petersburg State University (Russia), Universidad De Alicante (Spain), Stellenbosch University (South Africa), Kocaeli Universitesi (Turkey).

³ The questionnaire was addressed to the coordinator of the research team in each partner institution, and was formulated as follows:

- “1. In your opinion, are there a professional debate and reactions to policy proposals and implementation in your country? If so, where/how can they be seen and what are the main contents?
2. Are there professional bodies or associations of social workers in your country? Do they have an official newsletter or website where I can find traces of the above debate and their positions on social policy?
3. In your country what are the main journals/newsletters specialized on social work? Do you have any article to suggest me (and hopefully provide me, thank you very much in advance) where I can find the main lines and positions of the debate above?”

National specifics of the debate on social policies within social work

The basic ideas and concepts briefly described in the previous section guided the exploration and the comparison between distant and very different geographical areas. In fact, the countries involved in the research are located on four continents. They comprise a total of over 3.2 billion inhabitants, and - as already mentioned above - are extremely diverse in their histories and current political and economic-social settings. The United Kingdom and three continental countries, namely Portugal, Spain and Italy, represent the European continent, the starting point for large-scale welfare policies.

The **United Kingdom** is still a very important landmark in international social work, not only because of the historic early development of the profession but also because it gave rise to some of the most important trends that have deeply influenced social policy first in the whole European continent and then also in the rest of the world. Two significant examples are the Beveridge Plan after the Second World War, which started the productive phase of massive state intervention in social policy and, on the opposite side of the political spectrum, the neoliberal policies promoted by the Thatcher Government in the 1980s as well as subsequent governments. British journals of social work represent the debate and the concerns of the local professional community but, due to their wide circulation and their prestige, they are much read abroad, reflecting and fuelling the international debate. However, on local general media there is currently a wide discussion on the implementation of social policies, but the voice of the social workers is rather weak. The main organization involved in social work in the United Kingdom today is the British Association of Social Work – BASW. It was formed in 1970, and approximately one social worker out of nine is a member of BASW (Williams, 2009). Although with a smaller number of affiliates, the Social Work Action

Network (SWAN) is a significant and usually more assertive association. It was born in 2004 as a network of social workers, academics, students and service users all concerned with managerialism, marketization, stigmatization of users and spending cuts for welfare programmes. Its website (<http://www.socialworkfuture.org>) shows the vivacity of the internal debate and the many actions taken to engage policy makers and public opinion in order to oppose the reduction of social policies and social workers' operational spaces.

The Iberian Peninsula has been hard hit by the recent recession with consequent heavy cuts in social spending. In **Spain**, this situation has generated a lively debate among social workers on social policies and their professional implications. This has been expressed also outside the professional community by street protests and statements published in the media (<http://mareanaranjaragon.wordpress.com/>). These actions were taken together with organizations of other professions and of the non-profit sector, as well as trade unions and political groups. The main target was the *Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad* (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Equality), the Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, but some of the protesters also picketed the European Parliament. Even the social work academics were activated and wrote a “Manifesto on Social Work in the Crisis”, signed by the Council of Heads of Universities and Social Service Departments ([Luis-Doniz & Muñoz-Pérez, 2013](#)), while organizing many initiatives inside and outside the universities in conjunction with the General Council of Social Work (*Consejo General del Trabajo Social*), the national organization representing all 37 associations of Spanish social workers involving a total of 40,000 practitioners. Probably the most interesting event was the large-scale mobilization activated under the label of *Marea naranja* (Orange Tide) to denounce the drastic cuts to the detriment of public social services. In this context, the iniquity of

recent public policies is denounced, and the negative consequences of austerity policies and the reduction of social citizenship rights in the most recent legislation are highlighted. These changes are attributed to the further increase in the spread of poverty in the country (Luis-Dóniz & Muñoz-Pérez, 2013; Martínez-Román, 2014; Porcel Mundó, 2014). The tension between social work practice and education and political response to social needs in Spain has been frequently explored also in the recent literature (among many, see Ioakimidis, Santos & Herrero 2014; Pastor Seller, Verde Diego & Lima Fernandez, 2018).

The existence and extent of a debate ongoing in **Portugal** on social policy is quite controversial. Evident traces of it are available in the national and regional seminars organised by the *Associação dos Profissionais de Serviço Social* (APSS) on the new social policy measures and on the impact of the economic crisis on Social Worker intervention. The events are listed on the website at the address: www.apss.pt (formerly it was www.apross.pt). Some of the themes of the news posted on this website are also possibly related to the position of the professional body on Portuguese social policies: social action in schools, domestic violence, growing number of people in bad social conditions going to hospital, not enough social workers to deal with new social problems, social workers advocating a new law to regulate their field of work, growing amount of aggression against social workers because of the crisis, precarious workers in the public sector ([APSS, 2013](#)).

In **Italy** the mobilization of social workers to support the reforms of the 1970s is a distant memory. Italian social workers have shifted their attention from the collective to the individual dimension in analysing and working on social problems, and this attitude has produced close attention to the relationship with the users of social services (Facchini & Lorenz, 2013) but a sharp reduction of most of their past involvement in

forms of policy practice (Campanini & Facchini, 2013) However, the establishment in 1993 of the *Ordine professionale* (professional association with which registration is compulsory in order to work as a social worker in Italy) gave the profession a collective, authoritative and united voice. As highlighted on the institutional website (www.cnoas.it), the Presidency of the *Ordine professionale* has often issued press releases and letters to defend the social rights of the most vulnerable people and population groups, as well as of the profession and its dignity: for example, it has done so when media incorrectly represent the role and functions of social workers (Allegri, 2006; Rizzuto, 2016). Furthermore, emerging social problems and social policies are often at the centre of such positions, with particular regard to the issue of child protection, social inequalities and migration. A recent research study on governance processes in Italy, addressing the main actors involved in social policy-making, sheds new light on policy practice across the country. It shows that political action by Italian social workers has different representations within different frameworks and ranges from being seen as almost impossible to being considered an essential factor in the policy-making processes (Fargion, 2018).

Split between Europe and Asia, **Turkey** has only recently seen a more widespread and structured presence of social work. Positioning on social policies is mostly the expression of non-governmental organizations. Only a few social workers are able to influence some of the choices made at the political level. In some cases, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies involves social workers in planning and directing its actions. Professional associations usually engage in press releases or public positions in the event of wider bargaining. In Turkey there is the Turkish Association of Social Welfare Associations (TASW, www.shudernegi.org), which, like other smaller-scale associations, deals with aspects more directly related to the profession than to

actions affecting social policies. It is likely that this state of affairs has become more acute as a result of the political change in the country after the initial research was carried out. No evidence has been found on how this new situation is influencing the social workers' contribution to social policy, but an interesting research study on political participation amongst students of social work at a Turkish university shows that political participation by these young people is low because of sociocultural and historic features involving the culture of fear and the paternalistic notion that the government protects the people without the need for active political participation (Cankurtaran Ontas, O. , Buz, S. & Hatiboglu, B. (2013).).

After many years of fragmented associations in **South Africa**, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-SA) was established in 2007. It is a voluntary organisation that supports professional development and gives social workers the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the Global Agenda for social work and social development (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015).

Among the practitioners and scholars of social work, there is an on-going debate on social policies in general and, specifically, on the South African social assistance programme implemented after the end of apartheid. This programme has become one of the most controversial aspects of social policies, and public opinion on it has been analysed as it appears in newspapers and other mass media.

The current public discourse of grant beneficiaries reconstructs them as passive, dependent, entitled and dishonest people. It also represents them as people who are easily swayed by politicians for their own ends. (...) These representations of grant beneficiaries quite unknowingly amount to an attack on beneficiaries and poor people, blaming them for their misfortune. A complete reframing of social welfare and social development is needed as we move to the 20 years milestone of our democracy. It is a public good that should define our democracy and search for social justice (Patel, 2013, p. 12).

Nevertheless, there is a need to reform social policies because of the failure to achieve some of the most important goals set. Indeed, one of the most important debates in South Africa today is about the financing of the NGOs by the State. In particular, there is an on-going debate in child welfare because the NGOs rendering child and family welfare services are not fully subsidised even if they are doing statutory work. There is a similar situation in the field of disability (Patel, 2013; Weyers, 2013).

After the change of government in 1994, a White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) was adopted to guide the transformation of the social sector from welfare to social development services seeking to improve the quality of life of all South Africans. The White Paper linked the mandate of the Department of Social Development to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This means seeing the provision of social development services not narrowly as a matter of charity, but as giving effect to the government's constitutional obligation to human rights. This White Paper was revised in 2016, with key recommendations for overarching national legislation to provide a framework for the functions, scope, size and types of provisions in social development.

Many social workers actively participate in the debate on social and economic policies in **Brazil**. The *Conselho Federal de Serviço Social* (CFESS) is responsible for registration (also in Brazil registration is a necessary condition for practice of the profession) and, even on its website pages (www.cfess.org.br), frequently declares its position on the impact that social policies have on society and the profession of social worker. In particular, criticisms concerning the privatization of health services and the introduction of foreign capital into the healthcare system and the stance in favour of strengthening social services, public health services and democratic forms of communication are frequent and strong. Particular emphasis is also placed on the need

to defend the rights of women, indigenous peoples and the LGBT community and to improve the national education system.

In the Brazilian ethical political project, social work has an obligation to defend values such as social justice in everyday social work practice. The involvement in social policy is not new in Brazil, where social work has been involved in health and social policies since its beginning in 1930 (Santana & Teixeira Garcia, 2015). A recent study on peer-reviewed articles in international and Brazilian academic journals confirmed that social work is widely considered in Brazil as a profession with political implications and a strong focus on social change through collective transformation (Heitmann, 2017).

India, the second largest country by population in the world, has a rather complex federal structure and includes very diverse territories. It has recently celebrated the 75th anniversary of the first initiative of social work education (Adaikalam 2014). The social work profession in India has taken many of its principles from foreign experiences. In the field of ethics, for example, formal, indigenous ethical standards have not yet fully developed, although there are nascent efforts in this direction (Reamer & Nimmagadda, 2017). There are numerous associations at local and federal level; the most representative among them are the “Professional Social Workers' Association” (<http://www.pswa.org.in>) and the “Indian Society of Professional Social Work” (<http://ispw.in>). Also the “Indian council of Social Welfare” has a very informative website as a virtual space for the exchange of information and experiences among social workers and social agencies. (<http://www.icswindia.org>). Social policy decision-making is particularly intricate and involves, at different levels, the participation of diverse social partners and those that are deemed competent in the

specific subject, including social workers, who are sometimes heard through the most representative associations.

In **Russia** there has been an increasing professionalization of social workers since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and now many universities and institutes offer training programmes in social work (Pervova 2015). This made social work one of the fastest growing professions in Russia in the 1990s when professional standards and identity started making significant progress (Templeman, 2004). A recent research study on the relationship between social work and social policy (Iarskaia-Smirnova & Podstreshnaia, 2014) has shown that Russian social workers declare a high level of interest in following developments in social policies, are in favour of existing standards and apparently adhere to conservative positions (for example, 37.6% of respondents look adversely at sexual minorities issues) although they consider that regional and federal government bodies are not interested in involving social workers in decision-making related to their field of work.

Finally, **China** was one of the latest arrivals on the scene of social work at the beginning of this century. Following huge socioeconomic reforms, social work is developing very quickly. This process is driven by the central government, which has launched a programme to train 1.45 million social workers by 2020, and it is implemented with different energies by local governments and at different speeds, that is, much more rapidly in major urban centres than in rural areas (Meng et al., 2018). According to Chau (2001), social policies' reforms in China are based on welfare residualism and strengthen the role of the private market in regulating people's entrance also to public welfare services.

Chinese social workers, gathered in professional associations located at different territorial levels (municipal, provincial, etc.), work in non-governmental organizations

that operate with funding provided by local government bodies (Chi, 2016). Lacking the long-term institutional experience of many countries, social work in China is often considered well behind in terms of professionalism even if it is exploring paths different from those in the West, especially in rural areas where almost 60 percent of the total population live and welfare service are based on a broad definition of social welfare (Han & Huang, 2017). Although the development of this profession is taking place in an extremely rapid manner, as well as the spread of various forms of social services, it seems too early to furnish a clear picture of the contribution of social workers to the formulation of national and provincial social policies.

Global trends and dynamics in the contemporary professional debates and reactions

The rich material examined and briefly summed up here provides a diverse and global picture and outlines a series of ideas useful for a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between social work and social policies. The qualitative and quantitative diversity of the data collected for each country and summarised in the previous section has made the construction of an adequate homogeneous comparative framework particularly complex. Nevertheless, even within the framework of this first comparative exploration, an emerging common thread seems to outline some interesting global trends in the ten countries examined.

Firstly, socio-economic, cultural and historical complexity and diversity in these countries are also reflected in social work. Long-term traditions exist in such areas as the United Kingdom, Italy, Brazil and South Africa where social workers appeared in the first decades of the past century. By contrast, in China, Turkey and Russia only recently, at the end of the twentieth century or at the beginning of the new century, has social work been recognized as a profession and academic discipline. Consequently, the

development of a single, albeit sometimes pluralistic, representative voice of the entire professional community is currently at different stages. For example, more than half of social workers (China, Brazil, Italy, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Spain) have the obligation to enrol on professional registers that, in some cases, are managed by the organization that becomes the official voice of the professional community.

Table 1 lists the most representative national professional associations and also proposes a synthesis framework developed on the basis of three variables emerging from the material studied: the historical duration of professional development, the presence or absence of registration systems, and finally the intensity of the debate on the basis of the statements made by the experts involved in the investigation and also of what is visible in those "arenas" of debate mentioned earlier. Inevitably, the intrinsic limitations of this exploration and the composite nature of the voices of national professional communities make any estimate of the intensity of the debate approximate. Nevertheless, the overall picture emerging from the table clearly shows a positive covariation between the consolidation of social work over time (and the presence of national registration systems) and the intensity of the debate on social policy.

While the intensity of debate varies markedly, however, the analysis that we conducted of the topics discussed on websites (the most vital debate arena in this first part of the 21st century) of professional associations or orders highlights widespread, deep concern about the impact of austerity and neoliberal social policies. The marketization of welfare systems and the reduction of public intervention are often severely criticized. No apparent trace of social worker's thinking on the role of the third sector in social policy has been found. The protection of human rights and social citizenship is also at the centre of the debate. Minors, children, LGBT community and

psychiatric patients are the most frequently cited groups of service users in terms of *advocacy*. (see, for examples, www.cfess.org.br and <http://mareanaranjaragon.wordpress.com/>).

The voices of social workers from Brazil, Spain and the United Kingdom seem to be the strongest in claiming social justice and better policies. **By contrast**, as expected, the voices **of** workers **in the countries that** have just begun professional social work (Turkey, Russia and China) are much feebler.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this exploratory research highlight the diversity of the countries involved and the different degrees of development of social work as **a** professional community. The connection between the formal structure of the profession and the intensity of the on-going debate within the professional group is quite evident. Among the BRICS countries, those with a longer history and stronger establishment of social work (Brazil, South Africa, India) **exhibit** significant activism in **the** social policy debate by social workers' associations; on the other hand, both BRICS and non-BRICS countries with relatively "young" professional communities (Russia, China, Turkey) have lower degrees of participation. Further research, especially through case studies, should attempt to shed light, on the one hand, on the mechanisms by which long-standing professional legacy and professional organisations help construct a community of social workers ready to participate in public debate: through which activities and functions is such debate actually sparked? On the other hand, political science and public policy studies might help explore the capacity of social workers (associations) to have a real impact on social policy in their respective countries, so that their voices are not 'lost in the wind'.

[Some considerations, however, can be drawn from the research presented in this article.](#)

[Indeed, the contribution of social work professionals in the public debate is](#) the starting point for the development of collective actions aimed at promoting social work values not only in everyday practice but also at a more political level. This form of action has been considered one of the core dimensions of social work practice since the beginning of its professionalization (Stuart, 1999). At the same time, even with very different intensities because of the diversity of conditions outlined above, the [feature shared by](#) the functions of social workers from different countries on policy makers seem related to the topic of advocacy as a component of social work, as clearly shown in its international definition where “advocacy and political interventions” are brought together amongst the forms of social work practice that [are](#) believed to exist [around](#) the world (IFSW & IASSW, 2014). The paternalistic attitude [of](#) the past has been [largely](#) abandoned in favour of the involvement of service users: doing things *with* them has been considered more effective and ethically consistent than working *for* them. This shift is still incomplete [to](#) different [extents](#) in many areas of the world. Statutory, voluntary and private sectors employ social workers, so [that](#) the latter may act as agents *of* the state or advocates *against* the state (Pierson & Thomas, 2002). Clearly, this is not a black-and-white picture and the activity of social workers in any country (also in the ones considered in this article) is situated in more intermediate positions [on](#) the continuum rather than too close to the two extremes.

Furthermore, according to some authors (Bressani, 2013), the concept of advocacy, summarized in the promotion and defence of rights, has to be clearly distinguished from that of *lobbying*, which is focused on organized actions to promote and defend specific interests. Global forces, however, seem to shrink the scope of such

action in the everyday lives of social workers by reducing them to mere performance providers, and by eliminating the link between individual conditions and the socio-economic context in favour of an increasingly psychologized reading of needs and problems (Fargion, 2013). The neoliberal perspective applied to social work also replaces the "work" with the mere accompaniment of service users within a sort of "supermarket" of services built by the aseptic presentation of available services and procedures to use them (Dominelli 2004).

Opposing these trends is not only necessary to avoid hopelessly losing the very essence of social work but it is also possible, as demonstrated by the social workers of those countries where there is a more lively debate and more intense forms of policy practice. This international comparison seems useful and appropriate in this regard not only for better understanding of the current phenomena, but also for the development of a more in-depth understanding of what social work can do to influence social policy for the benefit of service users. Sharing strategies and experiences in this field can promote effective social work actions at any level, global and local.

References

- Adaikalam, F. (2014). Contextualising Social Work Education in India. *Alternatives. Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, 21, 215-232. Retrieved from: https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/44786/6/Alternativas_21.pdf
- Allegri, E. (2006). *Le rappresentazioni dell'assistente sociale : il lavoro sociale nel cinema e nella narrativa* [The social worker's representations: social work in cinema and in fiction]. Rome: Carocci Faber.
- APSS (2013). Press Release, Assistentes Sociais sob enorme pressão [Press release, Social Workers under enormous pressure.]. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/APSS.SERVICOSOCIAL/posts/10150271772589981?stream_ref=10
- Bressani, R. (2013). Advocacy. In A. Campanini (Ed.), *Nuovo dizionario di servizio sociale* [New dictionary of social work] (pp. 31-33), Rome: Carocci.

- Campanini A., & Facchini, C. (2013) Social workers affecting social policy in Italy. In J. Gal & I. Weiss-Gal (Eds.), *Social Workers Affecting Social Policy: An International Perspective* (pp. 79-100). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Cankurtaran Ontas, O. , Buz, S. & Hatiboglu, B. (2013). Youth and political participation: case in Turkey, *European Journal of Social Work*, 16:2, 249-262, doi: 10.1080/13691457.2011.620567
- Chau, R. (2001) Making welfare subordinate to market activities: Reconstructing social security in Hong Kong and Mainland China, *European Journal of Social Work*, 4:3, 291-301. doi: 10.1080/714052916
- Chi, I. (2016). Social work in China. *International Social Work*, 48(4), 371-379.
- Dominelli, L. (2004). *Social work : theory and practice for a changing profession*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Engelbrecht, L.K., & Strydom, M. (2015). Social work in South Africa: context, concepts and some critical reflections. In E. Kolar & A. Sicora (Eds), *Social work around the World. Colours and shapes in a complex mosaic* (pp. 223-243). Quaderni del Csal - 3, Special issue of Visioni LatinoAmericane. Retrieved from: <http://www.openstarts.units.it/dspace/handle/10077/11772>
- Facchini, C., & Lorenz, W. (2013). Between differences and common features: The work of social workers in Italy. *International Social Work*, 56(4), 439–454. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872813486689>
- Fargion, S. (2013). *Il metodo del servizio sociale. Riflessioni, casi e ricerche* [The method of social work: reflections, cases and investigations]. Rome: Carocci.
- Fargion, S. (2018). Social work promoting participation: reflections on policy practice in Italy. *European Journal of Social Work*, 21(4), 559–571. doi:10.1080/13691457.2017.1320528
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hämäläinen, J (2014). Comparative research in social work: methodological considerations using the ‘diachronic–synchronic’ distinction in linguistics, *European Journal of Social Work*, 17:2, 192-205. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2013.777333
- Han, Y., & Huang, J. (2017). Evolution of social welfare in rural China: A developmental approach. *International Social Work*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872817731140>

- Heitmann, T. (2017) The construction of social work in Brazil: a study of scientific texts, *European Journal of Social Work*, 20:5, 666-684. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1255594
- Iarskaia-Smirnova, E., & Podstreshnaia, E. (2014, April), *Is policy practice possible in Russian social work?* Paper presented at the 4th European Conference for Social Work Research "Private troubles or public issues? Challenges for social work research". Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy.
- IFSW (International Association of Social Workers) & IASSW (International Association of School of Social Work) (2014). *Global Definition of Social Work*. Retrieved from: <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- [Ioakimidis, V., Santos, C. C., & Herrero, I. M. \(2014\). Reconceptualizing social work in times of crisis: An examination of the cases of Greece, Spain and Portugal. *International Social Work*, 57\(4\), 285–300. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872814524967>](#)
- Luis-Doniz, R.B., & Muñoz-Pérez, D.J. (2013, November). *El papel de los Colegios de Trabajo Social como un referente para la defensa de los derechos sociales* [The role of the Social Work Schools as a reference for the defence of social rights]. Paper presented at the XII National Congress of Social Work 'The intervention social en tiempos de malestares' [Social work intervention in times of uneasiness]. Spain, Marbella.
- Martínez-Román, M.A. (2013) Social workers affecting social policy in Spain. In J. Gal & I. Weiss-Gal (Eds.), *Social Workers Affecting Social Policy: An International Perspective* (pp. 121-142). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Martínez-Román, M.A. (2014, April). *Policy practices among Spanish social workers*. Paper presented at the International Seminar 'Social Innovation and Engagement: Social Challenges, Policy, Practice, and Professional Training of Social Workers'. Center for Social Work Development. Washington University, St. Louis.
- Meng, Q., Gray, M., Bradt, L., & Roets, G. (2018). Emergence of social work practice in rural China: A way forward? *International Social Work*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818755859>
- Ministry for Welfare and Population Development of South Africa (1997). White Paper for Social Welfare. Notice 1108 of 1997. *Government Gazette*, 386 (18166).

- Ornellas, A., Spolander, G., Engelbrecht, L. K., Sicora, A., Pervova, I., Martínez-Román, M.A., Law A.K., Shajahan PK, das Dores Guerreiro M, Casanova J.L., Garcia M. LT., Acar H., Martin L., Strydom, M. (2018). Mapping social work across 10 countries: Structure, intervention, identity and challenges. *International Social Work*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818788395>
- Pastor Seller, E., Verde Diego, C. & Lima Fernandez, A.I. (2018). Impact of neo-liberalism in Spain: research from social work in relation to the public system of social services, *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1529663
- Patel, L. (2013, October). *Do social grants created more problems than they solve?* Helen Joseph Memorial Lecture, Center for Social Development in Africa University of Johannesburg,
- Pervova, I. (2015). *Social problems and social work in Russia*, In E. Kolar & A. Sicora (Eds), *Social work around the World. Colours and shapes in a complex mosaic* (pp. 83-106). Quaderni del Csal - 3, Special issue of Visioni LatinoAmericane. Retrieved from: <http://www.openstarts.units.it/dspace/handle/10077/11772>
- Politics and social work (2002). In J. Pierson, & M. Thomas (Eds.), *Dictionary of Social Work. 2nd edn*. Glasgow: HarperCollins.
- Porcel Mundo, A. (2014). *Conclusiones abiertas. XII Congreso Estatal de Trabajo Social* [Open Conclusions. XII National Congress of Social Work], "Servicios Sociales y Política Social", 104, 117-130.
- Reamer, F. G., & Nimmagadda, J. (2017). Social work ethics in India: A call for the development of indigenized ethical standards. *International Social Work*, 60(1), 182–195. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872814559563>
- Rizzuto, F. (2016) Ladre di bambini? Il servizio sociale raccontato dai media. Un'indagine qualitativa [Thieves of children? Social work told by the media. A qualitative research]. In I. Bartholini, R. T. Di Rosa, G. Guicciardo & F. Rizzuto (Eds.). *Genere e servizio sociale. Habitus professionali, dinamiche di relazione, rappresentazioni* [Gender and social work. Professional habitats, relationship dynamics, representations.]. Torre del Greco (NA): Edizioni Scientifiche e artistiche pp. 129-152

- Santana, J.V, & Teixeira Garcia, M.L. (2015). *Brazilian social work*. In E. Kolar & A. Sicora (Eds), *Social work around the World. Colours and shapes in a complex mosaic* (pp. 156-167). Quaderni del Csal - 3, Special issue of Visioni LatinoAmericane. Retrieved from: <http://www.openstarts.units.it/dspace/handle/10077/11772>
- Spolander G, Engelbrecht L, Martin L, M, Irina Pervova I, Marjanen P, P, Sicora A, & Adaikalam A (2014). The implications of neoliberalism for social work: Reflections from a six-country international research collaboration. *International Social Work*, 57, 301-312. doi: 10.1177/0020872814524964
- Stuart, P. H. (1999). Linking clients and policy: Social work's distinctive contribution. *Social Work*, 44(4), 335–347. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/44.4.335>
- Templeman, S. B. (2004). Social Work in the New Russia at the Start of the Millennium. *International Social Work*, 47(1), 95–107. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872804039387>
- Trevillion, S. (2010). From Social Work Practice to Social Work Research: An Emergent Approach to a Basic Problem. In I. Shaw, K. Briar-Lawson, J. Orme, & R. Ruckdeschel (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Work Research* (pp. 164-179). London: Sage.
- Weyers, M. (2013). Towards the reconceptualization of social welfare in South Africa: An analysis of recent policy trends, *Social Work / Maatskaplike Werk*, 49(4), 433-455.
- Williams, R. (2009, October 23). Balls clashes with social work leaders. *The Guardian Newspaper Online*, 23 October 2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/oct/23/balls-clash-socialwork-leaders>

Table 1. Main findings of the expert survey.

For Peer Review Only

| Country | Main associations of social workers | History of social work | Registration system | Intensity of the debate |
|---------------------|--|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| UK | British Association of Social Work - BASW, Social Work Action Network - SWAN | +++ | Yes | +++ |
| Brazil | Conselho Federal de Serviço Social - CFESS | +++ | Yes | +++ |
| Italy | Ordine Nazionale degli Assistenti Sociali, Associazione Nazionale Assistenti Sociali - AsNAS | +++ | Yes | ++ |
| South Africa | South African Council for Social Service Professionals (SACSSP; National Association of Social Workers (NASW-SA) | +++ | Yes | ++ |
| Spain | Consejo General of Trabajo Social (General Council of Social Work | ++ | No* | +++ |
| India | National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI), National Co-ordinating Committee of Professional Social Workers (NCCPSW) and many others at national and provincial/state level | ++ | No | ++ |
| Portugal | Associação dos Profissionais de Serviço Social - APSS | ++ | No | ++ |
| Russia | Union of social workers and social pedagogs (Soyuz sotsial'nykh rabotnikov i sotsial'nykh pedagogov). Association of social workers and social pedagogs (Assotsiatsiya sotsial'nykh rabotnikov the sotsial'nykh pedagogov), Association of social services employees (Assotsiatsiya rabotnikov sotsial'nykh uslug) | + | No | + |
| China | Association of social workers at provincial and municipal level | + | Yes | + |
| Turkey | Turkish Association of Social Workers (TASW) | + | No | + |

Legend: Professional history: + short (under 20 years), ++ medium (between 20 and 60 years), +++ long (over 60 years); Intensity of debate: + no debate or low intensity, ++ medium, +++ high

* A university degree in Social Work is compulsory by law