



CIF 29th Conference
Nicosia, CYPRUS Sep 26 – Oct 1, 2011

Social Work in Cyprus: Past, Present and Future challenges and opportunities

Dr. Stefanos Spaneas
spaneas.s@unic.ac.cy

27 September, 2011



Some general demographical & historical details

- ◆ Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean.
- ◆ It has been inhabited since 10,000 BC and conquered numerous times throughout its history by several major powers, including Hittites, Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Venetians, and Ottomans)
- ◆ Following the Ottomans' control, it was placed under the British administration in 1878 until 1960, period that became an independent state.
- ◆ There is an influence by different populations & civilisations, which have determined the evolution of the country economically, culturally and socially.

Evolution of welfare state & social work practice

- ◆ Social welfare and social work practice may be separated in four main time periods:
 - 1926 – 1945
 - 1945 – 1974
 - 1974 – 2000
 - 2001 – present
- ◆ Historical and political facts influenced both the character of social welfare state and social work practice

First period (1926 – 1945)

- ◆ The first signs of systematic social welfare are noticed at the beginning of 20th century.
- ◆ The administration of Governor Storrs (1926-1932) introduced laws to :
 - regulate the employment of young persons and children,
 - protect female domestic servants
 - provide rehabilitation services to people who suffered from mental disorders.
 - Juvenile courts were also established the same period, on an effort to regulate the supervision of juvenile offenders, the after care of reform school boys, and the protection of the deprived children.
- ◆ Those legislations resulted from the first survey that was implement regarding the social conditions of the island.
- ◆ Though Cyprus, to a large extent, did not feel the full repercussions of World War II, the consequences in the economy were more than apparent.
 - There was a rise to the unemployment.
 - People & regions were suffering and even they were starving.
 - Cooperative movement in rural areas was arisen as an alternative strategy to cope with money-lenders excesses
 - By 1946 almost the 80% of farmers were members of such cooperative schemes.

◆ cheap credits could be arranged (Persianis, 1996)



Second period (1945 – 1974)

- ◆ Major developmental plans were promoted.
- ◆ It was the first time, in which a Ten Years Development Plan was publically introduced, aiming to improve the social conditions and cohesion of residents.
- ◆ Those measures have to be interpreted under a more general perspective which was promoted in Europe after the Second World War.
- ◆ Systematic efforts were adopted to:
 - improve the post-war conditions;
 - fight poverty;
 - promote the human rights;
 - endorse social justice
 - support community development.
- ◆ They have also to be viewed as a reaction to the social & political pressure for independence and reunification with Greece.
- ◆ Trade Unions setup clinics to provide free health & welfare services for its members. They also established an insurance scheme for its members providing sickness and other social benefits.

Second period (1945 – 1974)

- ◆ the majority of those laws were copied from the UK, without giving any importance to the local conditions and character of the island.
- ◆ The British failed to export their technological advantages & know-how to Cyprus, as they did not follow a conclusive policy & ignored the local characteristics and poor conditions of the island.
- ◆ In 1953, the Public Assistance scheme was established.
 - That scheme was referred to a strategy to fight the worst forms for poverty
- ◆ As part of this wider strategy, the Public Welfare Department (1952), was also setup that period.
 - The core aims were to provide personal social services to families and children, the elderly, offenders, and generally to the vulnerable groups of the population who were in desperate need for care.

Second period (1945 – 1974)

◆ Public welfare Department

- The initial recruitment was teachers followed by policemen and administrative officers.
- Priority was given to their personal communication and ability skills.
- However, as by the years more responsibilities were taken over, it was acknowledged the need to employ qualified staff and/or to provide proper training to the rest of them.

◆ As there was no tertiary education in the island, social workers were trained abroad.

- Greece, UK and/or USA was a common place for study social work abroad.
- Moreover, in-service long term training programmes were, quite often, provided.

Social work practice models in 1950s

- ◆ The daily practice of social work was influenced by the psychodynamics theories.
- ◆ Emphasis was given to the individual, adopting the western practices and personality assessments.
- ◆ However, as the Cypriot social and cultural environment was ignored, the results were rather ineffective and negative.
- ◆ the need for social planning & advocacy to undertake social responsibilities was underestimated.
- ◆ The culture of Mediterranean people who tend to focus on the future rather than in the past, was not primarily indicated.
- ◆ Following an earthquake at Paphos area (1953), SWs were actively participating in reorganising the life, distributing supplies and investigating the urgent needs of families.
- ◆ On an attempt to emphasise the shift to the community planning, the Public Welfare Development was renamed to “the Department for Social Development” in 1956

Social work practice in 1960s

- ◆ That social development was interrupted by the independence of Cyprus (1960).
- ◆ During the early stages the Cypriot government lacked any significant commitment to social welfare.
- ◆ New community programmes are introduced on the period of 1966-1971.
 - There was an effort to provide better opportunities to those living in rural areas.
 - A number of conventions were signed with European and International Organisations such as WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, Council of Europe etc.
- ◆ Cypriot SWs focused on intervene in individuals' lives to help solve social problems based either on individualist theories or on engage themselves to long term changes through institutional and structural changes.

Third period (1974 – 2000)

- ◆ The Turkish invasion in 1974 caused considerably changes to the structure of the social welfare system and policy targets.
- ◆ The priority was shifted from social development to the social restructure.
- ◆ Primary aims became the development of an organised system of welfare benefits for the displaced as well as on the reconstruction of the social life in the island.
- ◆ By developing programmes to accommodate the needs of people in need (i.e. children and elderly), their carers could enter into the labour market to rebuild the economy.
- ◆ Social work vacancies were filled again with personnel who did not have proper professional qualifications
- ◆ In 80s, the social work practice was still focused on the community restructure by settling the forced migrants into new local communities.

Social Work Practice in 1990s

- ◆ Public Assistance and Services Law (August 1991) secured a minimum standard of living for all persons residing legally in Cyprus.
- ◆ It was provided in the form of money and/or services to persons whose resources do not meet their basic and special needs
- ◆ Funds were also allocated to NGOs to organise innovative programmes for that period, such the development of community youth centres.
- ◆ Social Welfare Services restructured to adapt to new realities and decentralisation was promoted as part of this change.

Fourth period (2000 – present)

- ◆ The decade of 2000 finds social work practice under pressure
 - managing constraints;
 - time constraints;
 - dealing with conflict demands;
 - setting priorities;
 - stress and frustration.
- ◆ The first law about the consolidation of the profession (The Registration Law for Social Workers, 2000- 173(I)/2000) was introduced in 2000.
- ◆ It was the first time for the Republic of Cyprus, in which the social work profession was described and academic qualifications were set.
- ◆ No one could pursue a related job, without holding a degree Social Work from a recognised tertiary education institute.
- ◆ Moreover, the Law introduced the Cyprus Registration Council for professional Social Workers.
 - It is the legislative body that provides the professional licence to practice social work and assess the quality of it.

Challenges to think: is there a need for indigenization?

- ◆ Till today, the huge majority of Cypriots SWs has been educated abroad.
- ◆ Those educational systems and models of practice facilitated their professional culture.
- ◆ They are trained in a different environment where academic stimulus and programmes used in social work area had most of the times no reference to the local context.
- ◆ Cypriot students did not have the chance to learn and explore their indigent context apart from those who would decide to do their final practice fieldwork placement in Cyprus.
- ◆ There were not any local think-tank institutions to support and/or critically analyse social conditions.

Tertiary Social Work Education in Cyprus

- ◆ The first SWP was introduced in 2001.
 - The curriculum was heavily influenced by the Greek educational system
 - A lack of fostering to the local culture's principles and practical paradigms was identified as major weakness in correspondence to the heavily teaching.
- ◆ The second SWP was introduced in 2005 and the third in 2008.
 - Those programmes followed a rather different pathway, most probably influenced by the local needs, other educational systems and the fact that were designed from academics, who were living in the island.
 - As all of them are coming from private institutions and are subject of continuous evaluation and accreditation from committees that have different traditions, priorities and expectations, no one actually managed to avoid replications in the curriculum or to develop a different character from the Western theoretical models.
 - On the other hand, they brought changes to the reflection thinking, they challenged practices, they embraced social work research, and they established a primary trait of indigenization

Looking at the future

- ◆ Fight to strengthen their position in the welfare arena and to prove their differentiation from other disciplines.
- ◆ Elevate the status of the profession to the wider society as currently priority seems to be given to economic issues rather than to the exploration of social factors, although the relations are interdependent.
- ◆ Life-long training and professional development.
- ◆ Search for a social work model in the light of those circumstances prevailing in the country, and then critically reflect on towards effectiveness of the society needs.
- ◆ Indigenization needs to be seen as a movement to ensure that social work practice
 - appreciates the different thinking,
 - incorporates theoretical knowledge into local settings
 - triggers a productive reflection and critical understanding on how to respond effectively & efficiently to new social situations.

Contact

Questions, proposals, comments ...
are welcome

spaneas.s@unic.ac.cy

Dr. Stefanos Spaneas

University of Nicosia

Department of Social Sciences

Social Work Programme

