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Between Welfare culture and professional identity (Polish example)

In Poland as in other EU countries have been undergoing important changes in welfare system for last decades. In context of these changes there is a great need of debate related to responsibility for social infrastructure and its provision. Polish mixed market economy in which the division of responsibility between private enterprise and the public sector in the economic sphere, and between organizations and individuals, is intended to secure a fair, socially acceptable distribution of income and wealth and the eradication and absence of poverty without decreasing economic efficiency and growth in the long term.

We created *“a social system in which welfare assumptions are an organic part of everyday life”* (Rodger, 2000, p.8), where are dominating principles of activity against passivity of citizens (clients), where is underlined role of family and local environments and increases private responsibility for social security.

During last years there in welfare system is a kind of new “welfare culture” which has been constructed in real life, in dynamic social and institutional relations and at the same time different sources have got an influence on welfare system in the country. In prospect of that “welfare culture” connects very often contradictory or diverging interests of particular actors (politicians, professionals, users).

Nowadays in context of the new “welfare culture” social workers perform such activities, which require thorough knowledge, skills and responsibility. Therefore, there appear certain attributes necessary for the members of this profession, mentioned for the first time by William E. Wickenden as early as in the first half of the 20th century: the mixture of knowledge and abilities acquired during the education process; individual predispositions (referring to character and attitudes); the codes of conduct based on kindness, honor, empathy and professional ethics; a good reputation resulting from the acknowledgement of professional status (Skidmore, Thakerey , 1996, p. 304).

“The basic feature of profession is fulfilling tasks associated with public benefit and institutionalising the means to control the performance of these tasks by their performers” (Szmagalski, 2001, p. 212).

To undertake professional work in the new welfare culture surroundings, social worker needs good advocacy skills, a good understanding of the legal and technical aspects of social security law, as well as an understanding of the social policy context of social work practice and the effect of poverty and social exclusion on service users (Bateman 2003, p.371).

In context of professional social work in welfare culture there is an appearance of professional

identity, which is a result of contact with group of social workers, defining ourselves by belonging to this group. Identity with exact group determinates essential condition of participation in the group activity and loyalty to the group. As Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki (1971) said, "*the group identity is a reality which exists in human consciousness of those who participate in it and create it*".

Professional identity of social workers composes set of characteristic features (individual, social, professional) of different quality which are influenced and completed in process of socialization, education and professional activity in "welfare culture" (norms, principles, behaviour, attitudes, responsibility, professional skills and competences, formal rules, institutional framework, legal aspects, social control etc.). Professional identity integrates and infiltrates many levels of identity, assuring its duration and development of the profession.

Undertaking recently the empirical research on the problem of professionalizing social work in Poland, in the proposed paper I would like to show some aspect of relation between professional identity of Polish social workers and their professional activity, which is determined by institutional framework and by "welfare culture".

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