

Urban Nothdurfter

Free University of Bozen/Bolzano, Italy

urban.nothdurfter2@unibz.it

Social work between local welfare governance, managerial way of thinking and academization in South Tirol, Italy

The paper highlights the most important factors responsible for the emergence of a new professional culture of social work in South Tirol, Italy and tries to explore the resulting challenges for social work education in order to enhance the reflexive engagement with current issues of local policy development in the light of social works' professional identity.

The local social welfare system in South Tirol has been deeply changed since the early 1990s. A fundamental reorganization of the public welfare agencies changed the organizational context of social work in a significant way. The accountability for the provision of social services was decentralized to the level of municipalities. Simultaneously increasing importance was given to the role of private not-for-profit organizations in the social service sector which lead to new forms of collaboration and to the emergence of new ways of local welfare governance. But the consequences of these processes for social work were not only limited to the level of work organization but they can be made out in a changing professional culture regarding social works' allocation and role in the new local welfare scenarios as well as its methodical dimension. New working instruments of case management were adopted with the aim to enhance the collaboration between different public and private services and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services performance. But these instruments seem to be primarily external regulations by a managerial way of rethinking social work practice rather than the results of a process of methodological development from the inside of the profession itself. Another important event for the development of social work was the start of the Social Work Education Program at the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano ten years ago. While before all the social workers had been educated at other Italian (or foreign) universities, the first "generation" of social workers holding a social work degree from the University of Bolzano has entered the local labour market. A preliminary analysis of the results of a research project on their experiences and their valuations of both academic training and practical experience can bring light to the changing challenges for the development of reflexive professional social work identity and culture in the region and the future challenges for academic social work education and training.