

Laimutė Žalimienė

Department of Social Work
Vilnius University

laimaz@ktl.mii.lt

ENTRENCHMENT OF MARKET RELATIONSHIP IN PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES IN LITHUANIA- PERSPECTIVE OF MARKET ACTORS

After 1990, restoration of independence, Lithuanian personal social services break-away from the old Soviet social assistance system was a complicated process with interplay of various actors, institutions and cultures. However, it was the time when the goals of social services and the needs of customers were a priority to the services cost or efficiency. The situation began to change in 2006 when a new *Law on Social Services* was adopted. The adoption of the new social services legislation in 2006 embedded the prerequisites for entrenchment of market mechanism: the concept of services purchasing, quality standard system etc. Market orientation in the sector became even stronger nowadays and because of the economic crisis. The level of expenditure or efficiency instead of persons needs are highly emphasized in the organization of personal social services.

The process of market relations can be analyzed using the discourse of market actors, because institutions are continuously being formed and re-formed by a huge number of actors which have their own interests, different powers (Beyond continuity : institutional change in advanced political economies, 2005). The role or impact of each market actor depends on his available power – certainly, the actors, which have major powers, dictate more favorable conditions for themselves. With regard to social services market, it can be seen a significant asymmetry of this market actors powers, because clients of these services are vulnerable and can not represent their interests adequately. In Lithuania it can be seen because of the extant old paternalistic care culture from post-Soviet time. One of the examples of old culture in care sector is even to date strong public opinions about necessary hierarchical relationship between the assistance recipients and providers herewith social help is more treated as the charity but not as the right (although this right is embedded in law).

On the other hand, the efforts to provide customers with greater powers, introducing a range of empowerment strategies, can be seen in the sector of social services. The participation of clients manifests in such forms: the involvement of client in needs assessment, service planning, services quality evaluation or by giving care money to buy services oneself. The involvement (participation) of clients is regulated by Laws.

The powers of clients can be enhanced by the network of non-governmental organizations which represent the interests of clients. New institutions or agencies emerge when organized actors, which have resources or political power, have a goal to realize their goals through those established institutions or agencies (Beckert J., 1996). It can be noticed quite obvious NGO impact on the development of Lithuanian social services system. In particular after 1996, it is noticed a very rapid establishment of new social service agencies for disabled people specially due to the strong impact of some disabled people organizations on social policy. On the other hand, NGO's, as the actors of social service market, situation is becoming controversial: NGO, as the network which strengthens the powers of social services clients, experience the decline of itself powers by becoming an actor of market.

Municipalities, instead of being direct social services providers, are increasingly becoming intermediary between agencies, which provide social services, and clients. It can be talked about the strengthening of their powers by analyzing the changes of personal social services funding structure.

Social service agencies, as the corporative actors of market, powers were increasing by

expanding the infrastructure of those agencies. Social Service Catalog (1996, 2000, 2006) was the Law, which was increasing the possibilities for the emergence and recognition of new types of social services agencies. However, the situation of those institutions as “fortress” of assistance for socially damaged persons is extremely controversial when the changes of market-oriented social services systems are taking place. Social services institutions have to find ways how to reconcile economic and social justice requirements organizing their work.

Social worker’s as market actor’s power in Lithuania are quite small because of legislative regulation peculiarities and low prestige of this profession.

Thus, it can be seen, that the power of actors of emerging personal social services market vary greatly in Lithuania and it can result in increasing of market uncertainty, imbalance, the rights and interest of clients may be offended.

References

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