

## **Mariusz Granosik**

Department of Social Pedagogy  
University of Lodz

*mariusz\_granosik@poczta.onet.pl*

### **NEW LABELS, OLD STRUCTURES – INTERPRETIVE OBSTACLES TO UP-BOTTOM INNOVATION IN SOCIAL WORK**

Social work as a part of contemporary social reality is influenced by many general cultural processes. The attractiveness of the label “new” seems to be an appropriate example of marketing tendencies that social work is being touched by. The consequence of the tendency there is a necessity to implement into social work “new”, “newer”, and “the newest” methods, models and concepts labeled with names attractive for public discourse or modern social policy. In Polish reality, interdisciplinary team-work and community work could be perceived as new ideas being adopted in municipal centers for social welfare.

On the basis of two researches, I participated in, it was possible to reconstruct the process of implementation in institutional context. The first research was a part of the wider project coordinated by the Public Affairs Institute referring to the standards of community work in Polish social work practice. The findings were grounded in several group discussions with field social workers from urban and rural areas. The interviews conducted were openly structured and aiming for lively discussions between participants rather than responses to researcher's questions. Analytical process followed procedures of documentary method developed by Ralf Bohnsack. The second project, my own, was based on the theoretical and methodological framework of ethnomethodology, interaction and conversation analysis, and grounded in numerous interdisciplinary team-discussions recorded and transcribed with a great respect to details. Main topic of the research it was conversational institutionalisation of social work in municipal social welfare centers.

The two projects, mentioned above, give me a chance to reconstruct a picture of artificial up-bottom changes of social work. Being focused on interpretive patterns, organisational changes and institutional processes, I found important discrepancies in the process of modernisation.

The first trouble, there is an incompatibility of interpretive patterns and undertaken activity. Majority of social workers share an administrative pattern of interpretation, it means they identify their work as a set of formal procedures that needs to be done to overcome clients life-course. On the other hand, they was obliged (and wanted often) to conduct more challenging tasks with focus on cooperation and creativity, where no procedure was established. Because they met a trouble, they searched for solutions, usually experiences of other social workers that appear as draft procedures organising action. Finally, new ideas, implemented up-bottom, was fitted into the old administrative pattern of interpretation applied to diagnosis as well as action construction.

The second trouble, there is discrepancies in external (for and with other people) and internal (for and with coworkers) discourse that social workers developed. It established double standards of work: subjectivity sensitive, humanistic, theoretical external explanations and mechanical, administrative actions. The important condition of the discrepancy, there is public discourse (including a new language of modern social policy) and education (theoretical and over-humanistic language).

The third, there is institutional capacity and flexibility. Although the general theoretical concepts assumed to the research and derived from discursive institutional analysis were very processual and dynamic, the basic organisational frame was very solid and unresponsive. The characteristics of the organisational context forced social workers to extraordinary coordination of activities (that is institutionalisation in deed, according to the adopted definition). There were observed three paths of the process: adapting to administrative expectations, hidden activity and multiinstitutionalisation.

Finally, there is possible to find some more general conclusions. First of all, up-bottom modernisation is a very risky strategy, especially when there is no discursive tool to discuss the ideas „on the bottom“. Accomplishing any modernisation mission, rather interpretive patterns applied by workers should be taken into consideration than modern political trends, of course, if a real change has to be a result, not only PR effect. The first step of any implementation it should be widening of formal frames of the activity and revival of professional discussion to prepare internal discourse and interpretive patterns for changes.