

Research Article

Dynamics of Development and Functions of Social Services in Bulgaria

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Abstract

The research objectives of this article are two: 1. to attempt to analyze the current dynamics of development of social services in Bulgaria over the last 4-5 years and 2. to analyze the content of the functions of social services existing today in Bulgaria. The leading method of work on this article is the theoretical analysis aimed at two types of sources: 1. theoretical analysis of the main legal effective document on social services in Bulgaria and 2. theoretical analysis of some literary sources in social work. The dynamics of development of social services in Bulgaria is the result of the entry into force of the Social Services Act, which has a reforming nature in the social sphere in the country. The established practices of the societies of the democratic countries and the broad theoretical generalizations achieved for the social sphere in the 20th century in the works of many authors today really help the countries of Eastern Europe to consider and receive ready-made models for constructing public relations in the field of social services. Some of the functions of social services in nowadays Bulgaria can be distinguished and derived on the basis of the current legislation in the country, and another part is fundamentally inherent in the social sphere in democratic countries and in the theory. Social services in modern Bulgaria have the following functions: preventive, supportive and restorative, control, complex, organizational and planning, accessibility function, function to protect human rights and provide equal opportunity, function to implement change for people, guiding function, social-educational and correctional function, personality change function. The significance of this article consists in the theoretical explanation of the leading functions in social services in the modern conditions of life in Bulgaria. Social services are a field of action and probably have some potential to become one of the tools for uniting the currently diverse not only Bulgarian society, and clarifying the problem with the functions of social services could help to find some practical solutions to live together in peace.

Keywords

Social Services, Social Work, Functions, Functions of Social Services, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

Social work and social services in any modern country are based on adopted state policies in the social sphere. In the second half of the 20th century and now, in the first quarter of the 21st century, the dynamics of the development of the

social sphere have an increasingly serious focus on protecting the various risk groups in society.

This article analyzes and uses as background information the relatively recently adopted Social Services Act [1] in

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Bulgaria and finds theoretical confirmation of the raised microtheses in some of the leading publications, related to social work, community and society.

As R. Pinker points out, "the basic concerns of social welfare – poverty, disability and disease, the dependent young and elderly – are as old as society itself" [12]. But the 20th century made these problems social, i.e. dependent on publicity, on the decisions of the state, but also on public opinion, on the financial possibilities of society, but also on the most intimate considerations of humanity.

The established practices of the societies of the democratic countries and the broad theoretical generalizations achieved for the social sphere in the 20th century in the works of authors such as M. Payne [11], L. K. Engelbrecht [3], R. Pinker [12], today really help the countries of Eastern Europe to consider and receive ready-made models for constructing public relations in the field of social services.

Bulgarian society today is faced with many challenges, one of which is the search for the potential to be able to overcome some delays due to the circumstances of its history and today to be able to build a truly democratic, legal and social modern state. In this broader context, the problems of modern social services by Bulgarians for Bulgarians also find a place.

Many scientists in Bulgaria strive to support these social processes both through the knowledge of what has already happened and what is happening in the world, as well as with their ideas and their research. Among them are the names of older scholars such as K. Spasov [15] and I. Shivacheva [14], but also of modern researchers such as V. Tsvetanova [16], Pl. Genov [4], Al. Ranev [13] and many others.

At the same time, a "credibility gap" towards politicians "plagues modern" society in Bulgaria, if J. Murphy [10] can be paraphrased.

Bulgarian society today has many problems, and the community is divided, as if there is a lack of common values. Every community is built precisely around the common values for people [18].

It is their shared way of thinking, shared beliefs and shared experiences that make them a community, not just their geographic location [9].

It is joint effort and action that creates and unites the community, not the external traits of people [3]. To put it another way, in the language of R. Esposito, "community is etymologically associated with the munus (gift) and cum (with-ness)". [17].

I. Young creates faith for divided communities, as speak of "differentiated solidarity" [19]. This means that in a community there are different points of view that relate to each other and thus create diversity in the community.

It is likely that Bulgarian society is going through a stage of "shrinking publicity", as J. Habermas [5] says, and depriving society of more depth and serious debate on the real problems. Moreover, today J. Habermas develops his classic work of 1962 in a second volume, related to the modern public, which ignores fundamental landmarks such as the truth itself or the

intellectual hierarchy of the knowers and the ignorant, and defines these as claims that threaten modern societies [5].

But whatever the circumstances, it is always true that there are "no commons without community" [8].

Social services are an operational field and probably have the some potential to become one of the tools for uniting the currently divergent not only Bulgarian society, and clarifying the problem of the functions of social services could help to find some practical solutions to this challenge.

The research objectives of this article are two: 1. to attempt to analyze the current dynamics of development of social services in Bulgaria over the last 4-5 years and 2. to analyze the content of the functions of social services existing today in Bulgaria.

The dynamics of development of social services in Bulgaria is the result of the entry into force of the Social Services Act, which has a reforming nature in the social sphere in the country. Some of the functions of social services in nowadays Bulgaria can be distinguished and derived on the basis of the current legislation in the country, and another part is fundamentally inherent in the social sphere in democratic countries and in the theory.

Social services in modern Bulgaria have preventive, supportive and restorative, control, complex functions, but they also have other functions that can be theoretically specified as organizational and planning, accessibility function, function to protect human rights, provide equal opportunity, function to implement change for people, guiding function, social-educational and correctional function, personality change function and others.

2. Dynamics of Development of Social Services in Bulgaria

The dynamics of development of social services in Bulgaria, which is the subject of research in this article, refers to the last 4-5 years. Its explanation is necessary in order to understand the need to clarify the content of the functions of social services in a country like Bulgaria.

According to a legal definition in Bulgaria, social work is "an activity that is based on human rights and social justice and is aimed at supporting the individual, family, groups or communities to improve their quality of life by developing skills to use their own capabilities and those of the community in meeting their needs" [1] (art. 4). This definition is part of the Social Services Act currently in force in Bulgaria. The document entered into force in Bulgaria right at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic on July 1, 2020. It became one of the mechanisms for overcoming the pandemic situation in the country and remained permanently among the implemented social policies to support the most vulnerable people. In fact, this new law was prepared not because of the pandemic, but it appeared at the exact moment for society when it was in dire need of such regulation. With this new law, a substantial

reform of social work in the country took place, because the matter of social services was removed from the old Social Assistance Law and formed its own field of action. In addition, with this new law another concept of the essence of social services in the country was adopted – until that moment they were defined as a place of performing social work and were comprehensively listed in the old law, and with the new legal regulation social services are now perceived as support activities that are not listed in advance, but can be organized and structured according to the needs of the population. The law also gave a clear definition that social services themselves are “activities to support individuals for: 1. prevention and/or overcoming social exclusion; 2. realization of rights; 3. improving the quality of life” [1] (art. 3, para. 1).

Based on the general system of social policy, social work now places special emphasis on social services in the community. Today it is they who become a key factor for effective social inclusion, fight against poverty and participation in the life of society of all vulnerable groups.

With the new Social Services Act, the nature of social policy in the country has changed, because by law it is now aimed at the development of services in the community and in the home environment, which will replace the institutional model of care inherent in the totalitarian state and still widely-applicable in Bulgaria during the past 3 decades. Despite the clarity of the theoretical concept, the positions of scientists and good specialists in the social sphere, during these three decades of transition, the Bulgarians themselves, if they had to use social services, preferred institutional care, because it was actually safer, clearer for people and more settled, including by law. That is why the appearance of the Social Services Act is really significant for public relations in the country – it provided not just a normative regulation of social services in the country, but also answered the need of the Bulgarians for more clarity and security in this sphere.

Today, among the social services that are provided and actually work in the community, the following can be mentioned: A. various daycare centers for children and/or elderly people with disabilities; elderly people with disabilities with weekly care; children with disabilities with weekly care; old people; B. centers for social rehabilitation and integration; social educational and professional center; center for community support; center for working with street children; C. “Mother and Baby” unit; D. foster care; E. public dining rooms.

The other large group, that of residential-type social services, respectively refers to: A. various Family-type accommodation centers (for children/youths without disabilities; for children/youths with disabilities; for elderly people with mental disorders or dementia; for elderly people with physical disabilities; for elderly people with mental retardation; for old people); B. centers for temporary accommodation; crisis center; C. transitional housing; alms (sheltered) housing (for people with mental disorders; for people with mental retardation; for people with physical disabilities); supervised

housing; D. shelters.

In general, it can be said that by its nature now social work and social services in particular are “professionally engaged in improving the quality of life of people through various diverse activities aimed at social change” [16].

Something more, other sectors of public life, such as construction, economy, medicine, quite professionally commit themselves to work for the cause of the new concept of social services in Bulgaria.

So a serious part of the architectural community in the country does. An example can be given with the monographic work on architecture created by arch. Pl. Genov [4], who in an extremely rational way makes a theoretical synthesis [4] (p17-20) of the concept of the alms housing in the modern conditions of the country. It is impressive that the architect goes deep into the essence of purely social issues by making “visits to alms houses” [4] (p24-231). Starting from this position, the architect offers a serious set of successful architectural solutions for alms houses [4] (p365-421). He even collects numerous interviews with social workers and staff from a large proportion in existing alms houses. In one of them, the interviewee literally says the following: “/In/ Family-type accommodation centers /are/ 15 children. It is not an institution. To serve them as a big family. One of the first is called “children's house” [4] (p220).

Some scientific publications that interpret the various social services in Bulgaria are also impressive. Among them, Alexander Ranev's study of the “supervised housing” stands out for its frankness and insight [13].

Despite the presence of individual achievements, the sphere of social services in Bulgaria as a whole remains insufficiently researched. In particular, there is a lack of broader theoretical researches and generalizations that have the potential to see in a larger framework what is happening in people's real lives.

On the other hand, this ambiguity about the functions of social services in the modern conditions of the country is often seen in the responses of students and practicing social workers. This is the opinion of many specialists in Bulgaria – already in 2008 I. Shivacheva published the critical analysis on this issue “Need to raise the qualifications of those working in the social sphere” [14]. There is definitely a misunderstanding of ongoing social processes in general, and processes in the social sphere are no exception. The dynamics of world processes and the traditional desire of Bulgarians to be more reasonable probably contribute to all this, which usually leads them to greater inertia and waiting for the “safer”. That is why often the so-called “public opinion” in Bulgaria has a strange, even illogical reaction, especially in critical situations, which are not lacking at all, both nationally and globally. Thus, in Bulgaria, important decisions are always made slowly and with difficulty.

All these circumstances became an argument for the creation of this work, which has the modest goal of making a short theoretical analysis of this dynamic and the functions of social

services in modern Bulgaria.

3. Functions of Social Services in Bulgaria

In an effort to avoid wide discussions about the meaning of the concept of “function”, here it is clarified that in this article the concept of “function” is as close as possible to the Latin “functio, -onis, f”, and it is accepted that it means “work, action, activity, service, purpose, existence”.

In other words, the article seeks to clarify what the service is, what the purpose of social services is in Bulgaria at the current stage of their development.

Some of the functions of Social services in modern Bulgaria can be distinguished and derived on the basis of the current legislation in the country, and another part is fundamentally inherent in the social sphere in democratic countries, and it is the democratic tradition that created the concept of them and turned them into a theoretical given in the scientific literature.

In this context, Payne [11] argues that “theory must go through a process of naturalization in order to adapt to social work practice” [11]. L. K. Engelbrecht defined that “the theory of social work is a philosophy that is based on certain values according to which human behavior is explained” [2].

3.1. Preventive, Supportive and Restorative Functions of Social Services

According to the provisions of the legal text in the current conditions of Bulgaria, the provided social services are divided into three main groups, from the existence of which it is possible to indicate the corresponding three main functions – preventive, supportive and restorative.

The first group of preventive functions can benefit “all persons or a certain group of persons without a previously identified specific risk” [1] (art. 13, para. 2).

The second group consists of social services with supporting functions. They are aimed at persons for whom a certain risk has been found or “to satisfy a specific need” [1] (art. 13, para. 3).

From the aforementioned legal definition of social services themselves, it can be concluded that they have a supporting function. Social services exist to support citizens in difficulty, and this is their most essential function.

Social services also have a restorative function. Its existence stems from the fact that the law itself singles out a third group of restorative social services that offer “highly specialized support to persons with specific needs” [1] (art. 13, para. 4).

3.2. Control Function of Social Services

The Social Services Act itself, on another occasion, also speaks of “control functions” of various bodies in the social services system. For example, in Art. 116 states that “when

performing their control functions, the employees of the Agency for the Quality of Social Services have the right: ... to visit and check the persons,... the places,... the activity”, as well as “to demand explanations” in case of certain violations of the rules for provision of social services [1] (art. 116). It can be said that the control function is a specific guarantor of the security expected by the Bulgarian citizen in the field of social services.

3.3. Complex Function of Social Services

The realization of their complex function also finds a place in the work of providing social services. The texts of the current legislation speak of a “complex of different social services” [1] (art. 18, para. 3), of “complex support through various activities” [1] (art. 18, para. 4), “complex provision of different social services” [1] (art. 93, para. 4) and complex support through different types of social services [1] (art. 134, para. 1). The complex approach is part of the concept of social work and social services in modern Bulgaria. All this justifies the presence of the complex function of social services.

All the diversity and the potential opportunity to discover new social services, necessary and corresponding to people's needs, on the basis of the concept established in the law, provoke thought to more precisely highlight the other types of their functions not written in the law.

3.4. Organizational and Planning Function of Social Services

In this context, the organizational and planning function [15] of social services determines the ways, means and mechanisms in the daily social work of risk prevention and the implementation of real mediation towards users who already use social services. A specific individual plan is developed for the implementation of each social service in each individual case. It is compiled as a result of the qualified work of the specialists for preliminary examination of the case, which includes the analysis of the social environment, finding, admitting or rejecting the specific problem. As a result, the intended work process is outlined and the direction to go is designed so that the user receives the necessary support and feels good at the same time. Through the development of specific programs for working with the specific person and their implementation in the activities of providing social services, the aim is to achieve restoration or preservation of the self-determination and functioning of the person in an individual and community aspect.

3.5. Function of Accessibility of Social Services

A function of accessibility of social services to people in need of support is essential. It is realized through the potential opportunity for everyone to receive a social service when they are in a situation of not being able to meet the basic needs for

their existence by themselves.

The understanding of accessibility of social services includes the existence of the real guarantee of easy access to social services, i.e. whether the social service is available to everyone who and when they need it.

This is probably why M. Ilieva considers availability and accessibility even as a principle of the current legislation [6].

Function of accessibility of social services should be legally guaranteed for everyone, without any form of discrimination or any restrictions, because only in this case the social reflection on the society will be satisfactory.

Therefore, the function of accessibility of social services must be permanently improved according to society's expectations.

3.6. Function of Social Services to Uphold Human Rights and an Equal Chance for Everyone

As a result of the individual approach explicitly declared in the Social Services Act, it can be said that social services also have a function to uphold human rights and to enable an equal chance for everyone in need. For example, social services even include activities for "prevention of placement of children in residential services" [16] and search for more permanent solutions for children deprived of parental care – foster care, placement with relatives and friends, etc. Also, the aspiration of social service workers is "to provide quality alternative care for children" [7].

Social services overcome a person's difficulties, which often occur as a consequence of disturbed relationships with members of the family or community, caused by insufficient knowledge, experience or skills for timely and accurate reactions when the problem arises. By helping individuals, social services also contribute to the development of vulnerable groups and the improvement of social relations in general.

For different cases, different intervention options are determined based on the identified needs of the person. Giving the opportunity to solve social problems and conflicts on a personal level and realizing change for the person is of essential importance. Applied with recognition and respect for human dignity, with respect for personal qualities, rights, interests and needs, social services carry out a wide range of activities aimed at improving the status of the individual in the community.

3.7. Partnership and Communication Function of Social Services

Social services implement a variety of supporting activities aimed at improving the quality of life of people through the communication and partnership function. I often joke with students that social work has one universal tool – talking. Of course, communication and partnership is a far more complex activity, but it is based on the rules and the skills of making contact with human kindness and care. It is possible to protect

children at risk in a family environment, therefore, in such a case, communication and partnership is carried out not only with the child, but also with his parents, teachers and relatives. In other cases, it is possible to support a person with disabilities, and then communication and partnership are directed not only to the family, but also to the whole community. In the third case, it is possible to work with offenders (children and/adults), respectively, communication and partnership will include the family, the community, and state institutions, etc.

There is no area of the humanitarian and social sphere that does not emphasize the importance of communication and partnership, does not study it as an important factor in its field and does not require communication and partnership building skills from all participants in the relevant process. The main thing is that the communication should be "must be both tactful and acceptable" [2] (p7). L. Engelbrecht actually devotes a whole chapter to this issue in his book [2] (p69-86).

Communication and partnership also underpin the next three derivative functions of social services.

3.8. Guiding Function of Social Services

Among the functions of social services is the guiding function, because social services educate, explain and give different options for responding not only to the socially vulnerable person, but also to the people around him – parents, children, teachers, resource persons, teachers, relatives, neighbors.

In Bulgaria, people already understand that when a social problem or significant difficulty arises, it is solved with social services that are home-based and community-based as opposed to traditional institutionalization [6]. This is precisely the deep meaning of the guiding function of social services.

The guiding function has another expression: Guide or Implementation Methodology has been created for each social service in most cases. It is especially useful for social workers who are new to the practice.

Also, the classic phrase "Dum docemus, discimus" (Latin – "As we teach, we learn") should not be forgotten, which has the potential to guide the leader's behavior and remind him that the process itself and the contact with the other person sometimes suggest the most correct decisions.

3.9. Socio-Educational and Correctional Function of Social Services

Very important function of social services is the socio-educational and correctional function.

It is available when working with children, adolescents, youth, families, groups and communities who share the common characteristic of socially threatening behavior.

A large set of the most diverse behavioral deviations can be included here – from running away from home, through hooliganism, to committing serious crimes.

This group also includes all addictions – from alcoholism

and drug addictions, through gambling, computer and Internet addiction, to gluttony and smoking, and even to workaholism and graphomania, filmomania, telemania, etc.

Problems in communication and adaptation to changes in the social environment also belong to this group of social services.

Not everything can be done by the social services – most often the Correctional Function can be fully implemented only with the intervention of many other specialists such as doctors, psychologists, therapists, etc.

The socio-educational and correctional function is directly related to the personality change function of social services.

3.10. Personality Change Function of Social Services

Social services have the personality change function, because they can develop personal skills for setting and achieving precise goals, for concretizing problems and needs that previously hindered the social development of the person. By using effective strategies to meet and cope with difficulties, social services also have the function of activating the available possibilities of the individual to achieve social change, to develop in the community and to increase the quality of life. Through activity, in which the main role is performed by the user himself, the aim is to increase the capacity to deal with negative influencing factors and encourage the undertaking of purposeful and organized activities to increase the quality of life.

The specified functions of social services contribute to the implementation of social policies in the interest of the individual. These are social tasks such as to limit the long-term mentoring of people in institutions, to implement supportive activities in the community, to increase social functioning and improve the quality of life of both the individual, as well as the entire social environment.

After all, this is also the real interest of the whole society - for people to know that in a difficult moment they can count on the support of the community and the whole society.

Social services play a significant role in modern societies to support the human personality and entire social groups, along with social institutions for the social protection of people such as health care, education system, labor market, insurance, social assistance, etc.

A product of the achievements of the concept of modern discursive democracy, views on the purpose of social services are in permanent development in the harmony with the liberal idea of protecting the rights of every person.

4. Materials and Methods

This article is neither empirical nor phenomenological in nature, it contains theoretical considerations resulting from theoretical analysis and synthesis, referenced to current legislation and scholarly literature.

The leading method of work on this article is the theoretical

analysis aimed at two types of sources: 1. theoretical analysis of the main legal effective document on social services in Bulgaria [1] and 2. theoretical analysis of some literary sources in social work not only in Bulgaria, in which the author of the article finds support as a way of searching and thinking for the set research problem (such as [5, 8, 10, 15]).

5. Results

The main result of this article is that it try to make an explanation of the functions of social services for Bulgarian social workers, for the whole Bulgarian society and for anyone who is interested in the subject. It can be summarized that social work in modern Bulgaria is directly related to the functions of social services that aim to overcome the social exclusion of vulnerable groups, and at the same time try to overcome the inertia of institutional care inherited from the country's communist period before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Now in the system of social services in Bulgaria, the improvement of the quality of life is sought through professional guidance, counseling and solving of socially significant problems of the person in such a way as to increase personal development and security. A field of expression is opened to develop or stimulate the community's own potential and capabilities to fully and precisely meet the relevant needs. The purpose of social services is aimed at the possibilities of solving social problems and misunderstandings at the individual level and implementing change representing better mutual adjustment in personal and social terms.

6. Discussion

In social work, it is a daily challenge to find the appropriate solutions to understanding the meaning and further interpretation of the functions of social services. Therefore, a process of future research discussions will undoubtedly take place on these topics as well, whether organized or not, overt or latent.

The directions in these discussions will probably be related to the conditions and circumstances of each community and country, to the specifics of the needs of vulnerable groups, to the specifics of the individual development of the human personality. Among these guidelines, it is appropriate to find a place for the socio-political, socio-economic and cultural factors that will influence the development of the functions of social services. It is quite possible that among the guidelines of such future discussions, would be issues such as: A. the priorities for the community and the individual, which will be decisive for the selection of the implemented function of the relevant social service; B. the social effect of the selected function; C. the prevention of various social risks through the functions of various social services; D. the effect on the psyche of people using social services which are home-based and community-based, but not institutionalized, etc.

7. Conclusions

The significance of this article consists in the theoretical explanation of the leading functions in social services in the modern conditions of life in Bulgaria.

The relevance of this material to the social circumstances in Bulgaria is expressed in the fact that at this stage not only the Bulgarian citizens need more information about the possibilities and the way of functioning of the changes in the social sphere, but these questions are not completely clarified theoretically even for some social workers and employees in the country.

This article presents a problem of public relations in Bulgaria, which provokes not only those working in the social sphere, but also all those who are simply interested in the topic.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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