Sustainable Innovation in Social Work Practice: Challenge and Possibility Definition of Outline

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Summary. Sociocultural challenges of society nowadays foster to search for solution ways associated with the welfare assurance of the most vulnerable and sensitive groups. Globalization and the changes it causes do transform the attitude towards social work, furthermore, it expands its activity spheres. Employing social partnership, diagnostic and monitoring, planning and different stage risk management, the social worker functions take a position of a manager having responsibility for multifunctional assignments. Also the latter acts in micro and macro levels. This context makes sustainable innovation in social work relevant highlighting their possibilities and bringing up challenges.

Keywords: Sustainable innovation, social work practice, challenges, possibilities, modeling.

Introduction

A modern society, involving change tendencies such as formation of the digital society, growing migration, social demographical structure, etc, poses new challenges for social work practice. A rapidly changing socioeconomical, cultural and other conditions trigger new demands for high competences of social sphere professionals according to the mentioned tendencies. Micro and macro challenges for social sphere professionals are highlighted as well. Meanwhile globalisation which can itself be understood as a change or social transformations raises new possibilities involving innovation as a problem
solution (Gallouj, Djellal, 2002; Majer, 2005; Gudauskas, 2005; Bakkenes et al., 2010; Wadmany, Yaniv, 2011; Wadmany, Yaniv, 2013; etc.) and demands new social professional knowledge, capabilities, skills. Getting more modern daily, our society provokes social workers to deal with the unique situation promoting innovation development in the social work practice. In the cohesion of the environmental, social and economical systems, the sustainable innovation in the social work practice is becoming obvious. It enables social sphere professionals to positively cope with nowadays challenges evaluating the imperative – necessity of the analyses of the social work practice taking into consideration the context of the social, economical, policy and other transformations.

The objective of the article is to define the content essence definition at sustainable innovation in social work practice based on theoretical literature analysis. Therefore this article describes the concepts that have not yet been investigated in Lithuania are not well established. Their definition creates a theoretically new approach of the article.

The key methods are the following: the analysis of scientific literature and modeling.

Sustainable Innovation Concept

A comprehensive analysis of social work cases in corresponding contexts discloses the cohesion among them being particularly specific so that stereotypical decisions would become unprofessional as they would not apply the situation and harm the logic of sustainability to a certain in social work. It is sustainable innovation which is interpreted in sundry ways, for instance, every century had a different innovative activity (1 picture).
H. Majer (2005, pg. 169) reveals the transforming of the innovation from an idea to research agencies and argues that sustainable innovation involves all the individuals connected by learning organization (society):

„With the third stage of the learning society, I intend to grasp some evidence still weak but visible for those who want to see it. This learning society will be the sustainable society. Innovating will be a „normal“activity by all or most citizens.“ The presented transformation underlines the growing importance of individual as an innovation generator and focuses on sustainability supporting the democracy processes by active membership in such kind of progress.

Moreover, sustainable innovation in the social work practice can be analysed employing various keywords such as “modernization”, “post-traditional”, “neo-liberal”, “transformation”, “challenging” (Gudauskas, 2005; Garrett, 2008 and ect.) and it can be interpreted in a rather different meaning in accordance with the underlined tendencies or characteristics and scientistics.

It is important to point out that in Lithuania changes and innovation were analysed by V. Aramavičiūtė, E. Martišauskienė, 2009; M. Barkauskaitė, 2009; B. Janiūnaitė and ect., 2009; E. Motiejūnienė, L. Žadeikaitė, 2009; A. Rutkienė, 2009; V. Targamadzė, 2009, 2006; R. Želvys, 2009; R. Bruzgelevičienė, 2007; E. Gečienė, 2003 and other scientists who investigated different aspects of the innovations: changes of education system and values, potentials for development of social pedagogues’ competences, new challenges in social work practices and other relevant issues. At the same time innovations, based on specific examples from the education field, or educational innovations are rather rarely realised in the works of Lithuanian scientists: R. Gudauskas, A. Kaušylienė (2010), B. Janiūnaitė (2009), P. Jučevičienė (2006, 2008), A. Garalis, G. Stroždienė (2007) and others. In the works of foreign authors sustainable innovations are often related to technological novelties (Shear, Moorthy, 2010; Freeman, Bell, Comerton-Forde, Pickering, Blayney, 2007; Coll et al., 2007 and etc.), education (Bakkenes et al., 2010; Henze et al., 2009), new learning methods (Lamie, 2005; Murray, 2008 and etc.). However, there are no researches about the sustainable innovations development in the social work practices as well as the definition of these terms, though it is really significant aspect of its occurrence, implementation and dissemination.

Furthermore, the term „sustainable innovation“ is connected with „sustainable development“. A. Dearing (2000, pg. 103) declares that:

“sustainable development is a metaphor for opportunity and progress as well as a reminder of obligations and uncertainty. It requires a step-change improvement in performance. Merely doing better what we are already doing is not sufficient to meet the needs and aspirations of a growing world population with dignity”.

As far as sustainable development in the social work practices is concerned, the aspect of innovation is assumed by the imperative of new possibilities and challenges. It is understood that when analysing the sustainable innovation in social work practice in
the particular situation, the terms will acquire the specific content (unique specificity), because the terms are associated with the certain theoretical approaches. In this case, it is complied with the perception of H. Majer (2005) and S. A. Webb (2006).

Hence, sustainable development acquires the imperative of challenges and possibilities in social work and the realisation process calls for sustainable innovation, i.e. one has to act in such a competent way so that “your obligation would benefit in social work”, although a particular condition is crucial.

**Transformations in Social Work Practices**

Knowledge society opening additional opportunities brings up contemporary sociocultural challenges in social work laying stress on social exclusion, migration and negative consequences being caused by them, as well as the lack of tolerance and other risks. The phenomenon of globalization, in fact, leads towards the processes of transformations involving each sphere of daily life and addressing the focus to sensitive groups, i.e. children, human beings of special needs and matured age. In addition, it is also related with potential threats or risks which are pointed out by various scientists of social work and other fields correspondingly (Parton, 1996; Webb, 2006; Kvieskienė, 2007; Heilmann, Randers, 2012 and etc.). S. A. Webb (2006), a leading UK scientist of social work, emphasizes the sociocultural threats, including changes, and accents the importance of risk in the practice of social work. S. A. Webb (2006) has determined the concept of risk stating that it as a subject and its management can be referred to the possibility or challenge in the current social work. The author claims (2006, pg. 23):

“"The concept of risk is one of the most significant in modern times. We live on a word saturated with and preoccupied by risk. Despite unparalleled degrees of social stability and affluence, we are living through a period of acute personal insecurity, anxiety and change.”

Globalization and its influential shifts substantially change the point of view towards social work and formulate a novel paradigm directed to risk management and planning of life risk in society. The latter academic assures that motion from the period of classical modernism to late modernism does transform the object of social work in principle (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type of Social Activity</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classical modernism</td>
<td>1850–1935</td>
<td>Charity and philanthropic performance</td>
<td>Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernism</td>
<td>1945–1979</td>
<td>Universal state financed activity</td>
<td>Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late modernism</td>
<td>1979–present</td>
<td>Neo-liberal social work</td>
<td>Risk</td>
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Hence, three periods are distinguished, i.e. classical modernism, modernism and late modernism. As S. A. Webb (2006) puts it, a particular type of social activity attributes to each period – the performance of charity and philanthropy, the state funds the activity, neo-liberal social work, which is fairly investigated in Lithuania. However, the latter tendency is associated with sustainable innovation in social work in particular. Virtually, changed activity practice and the objective puts stress on the otherness of the performance which, in fact, is linked with novelty in social work practice. Moreover, as is declared by P. M. Garrett (2008) neo-liberalism or social service transformation frequently consolidates prevailing innovative direction or modernism ideas whereas pointing out an „up-to-date“ human being confident in applying the challenges of the „modern globe“. Thus, a current universe calls for new challenge solutions and novel competencies of the professionals and, on the grounds of it, P. M. Garrett (2008), with reference to the official UK documents relating social work practice, emphasizes essential transformations as keywords.

The society is undergoing a process of rapid change, moving toward what is identified by P. M. Garrett (2008) such challenges as „flexibility“, „freedom / freeing“, „independence / independent professionals“, „innovation“, „opportunity“, „professionalism“. Virtually, they can be interpreted as certain possibilities or challenges as they open novel space for innovative activity in social work, social work context, objectives, etc. shift. In the field of social challenges and possibilities, it is the competence of the professional which earns significance, in particular one’s ability to opt the right instruments for activity and logic of social work as a process. S. A. Webb (2006, pg. 31) highlights social regulation methods, estimation and planning in social work practice.

Novel challenges, requirements to search innovative ways of solutions are the considered criteria to comprehensively analyse the mentioned transformations, the tendencies of late modernism and neo-liberalism as well as identify and project successful management of future scenarios.

**Sustainable Innovation as Solution in Social Work Practice**

Sustainable innovation as solution in social work practice could be explored by investigating G. Kvieskienė’s paradigm of positive socialization, which is defined as the policy of positive actions and following it the social sphere professionals correct the behaviour of socialization subject, endeavour to consolidate positive elements of culture and put obstacle in the way of socially unacceptable consequences of the mentioned culture (Kvieskienė, 2007, pg. 19). In other terms it may be put as the theory of successful life scenario of the individual or group when a managed and planned process involves the following 6 stages (Kvieskienė, 2007, pg. 18):

1. **Diagnostic** (the case, situation analysis);
2. **Social partnership** (including the inner, i.e. the family, etc. and the outside, i.e. non-formal groups, school, etc.);
3. **Strategic effect** (predicting alternatives, mechanisms of the effect);
4. **Planned effect** (framing activity plan / scenario);
5. **Case management**;
6. **Observing (monitoring).**

It is important to highlight G. Kvieskienė’s paradigm of positive socialization correlation to H. Majer (2005, pg. 157–158) identified specific conditions for actions:

1. A joint (shared) vision;
2. A potential of cooperation and interacting and basic trust within the society (cultural aspect);
3. The willingness and ability to cooperate and to communicate (behavioral aspect);
4. Qualification for T-learning (scientific aspect);
5. Embeddedness in a learning society (holistic aspect);
6. Institutions and organizations of learning and experimenting (educational aspect);
7. General rules for regional, sectoral, technological, and national innovation systems (constitutional aspect).

However, this context lets one note that it is possible to choose various logic as a process of social work even though the stages can be put in any order. Therefore, the professional is likely to face certain tensions and seek particular behaviour and conflict solving strategy (Targamadžė, 2006).

H. Majer (2005) argues that conditions (holistic, cultural, scientistic, etc.), analysed in different ways, are significant for sustainable innovation. In this context social policy is underlined as a guide for sustainable innovation, i.e. the same objectives can be interpreted as challenges and some as possibilities according to the social policy in the process of modeling the definitions of outlines for sustainable innovation in the social work practices.

Actually, it is worth estimating this subject as the UK scientist S.A. Webb (2006) points out social work which has to be investigated in the cohesion of social, economic political current context. The latter one also determines the complex system dimensions, i.e. social including risk society, political with leading liberalism, and at last but not least, cultural reflecting late modernism. In fact, here is space for novel social work challenges and possibilities – the subjects, objectives, contexts, etc. of social work tend to shift, whereas, each transformation stimulates new possible, typically plain and common, solutions.

Underlining the importance of the social policy, scientists (Foxon et al., 2004) present sustainable innovation (SI) policy process guidance based on the empirical analyses and experience. SI policy process guidance should aim to:

1) Stimulate development of a SI policy regime, by bringing together the innovation and environmental policy regimes and improving the rationale for public policy interventions to promote SI;

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1 The guidance have been have developed in the course of a research project, ‘Policy drivers and barriers for sustainable innovation,’ supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council’s Sustainable Technologies Programme: <www.sustainabletechnologies.ac.uk>.
2) Apply system thinking engaging with the complexity and systemic interactions of innovation systems and policy-making processes;
3) Advance the procedural and institutional basis for delivery of SI policy aims, including improved strategies for stakeholder engagement;
4) Develop a more coherent and integrated mix of policy instruments to promote sustainable innovation;
5) Improve policy review, correction and learning mechanisms for adaptive improvement to SI policy processes.

Each guideline provided by the author is analysed from the point of sustainable innovation in social work view as their function plays a vital role in the activity of the professional coming across, identifying, seeking solutions for challenges and innovative scenarios addressing the context and objectives of social work. Particularly it is of primary importance in the event the social professional does not consider that striving of the latter innovations is not for the purpose to demonstrate one’s ability to solve in innovative manner the objectives in one’s way but respond optimally expectations of the receivers of social work services in sundry contexts.

It is manifest that sustainable innovation in social work is the challenge and possibility for the professional to improve one’s performance and meet the expectations of the customer in search of the optimal solution in certain activities and their contexts.

Nowadays social work has to meet new requirements in present society. In addition, globalization phenomenon and tendencies of the digital society has considerable influenced and still has an effect on the profession, substantially, calling for sustainable innovation in their activity. However, it is rather problematic employing social partnership, diagnosing, monitoring, planning, managing risks of different stages since the social worker takes multifunctional position a manager of aims and objectives mainly acting both in macro and micro levels.

The article analysed theoretical approaches of sustainable innovation in social work practice which should be tested in practice and practically assess the methodological approaches.

**Conclusion**

Summing up, one can draw the following conclusion:

Social work transformation take part in sundry contexts. Their diversity and abundance function as challenges and possibilities for the professional in social work. In the face of them, the professional can not be satisfied with stereotypical or merely modified stereotypical solutions, therefore, sustainable innovation remains vital responding to sundry changes, contexts and customer expectations in social work.

Sustainable innovation in social work is interpreted in a number of ways, however, aiming at searching and modeling process, systematic and situation attitude of the professional is necessary. Hence, each process of social work is separated by stages which are
assessed by the systematic point, whereas situational actions exist in every stage where objectives, activities as well as their contexts of individual subjects are rather specific.

Sustainable innovation in social work substantially is the imperative of the 19th century. Yet they are related with the risk of activity and, due to the competence of the professional, identified and accepted challenges and solution modeling can prove to be fertile. To put in other words, the professional ought to possess the right competences enabling the process of modelling and projecting the challenges and possibilities in social work and realise it in the world of reality responding to the objectives and contexts of social work.

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Tvariosios inovacijos socialinio darbo praktikoje: iššūkių ir galimybių kontūrai

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Santrauka

Sociokultūriniai iššūkiai visuomenėje skatina ieškoti inovatyvių sprendimo būdų, susijusių su gerovės užtikrinimu labiausiai pažeidžiamoms visuomenės grupėms. Globalizacija ir pokyčiai keičia socialinio darbo veiklos erdves bei plečia jo veiklos sritį. Socialinio darbuotojo funkcijos, įtraukiančios socialinės partnerystės plėtótę, diagnostiką ir monitoringą, planavimą ir rizikos valdymą, akina imtis atsakomybės už daugiafunkcinių užduočių organizavimą ir įgyvendinimą mikro- ir makrolygmenimis. Šiuo kontekstu aktualizuojamos tvariosios inovacijos socialiniame darbe, atitinkamai pabrėžiant jų potencialą ir auginančius iššūkius. Straipsniu siekiama apibrėžti tvariąsias inovacijas socialinio darbo praktikoje, remiantis teorinės literatūros analizė ir modeliavimu. Tokiu būdu, analizuojant šalyje nenusistovėjusias sąvokas, straipsniu brėžiamas naujas teorinis požiūris aktualizuojama tema.

Esminiai žodžiai: tvariosios inovacijos, socialinio darbo praktika, modeliavimas.

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