

# COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY

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# Some questions

- Can community social work exist/be successful without political engagement?
- What are “sustainable” relations between CSW and politics?
- What skills do SW-ers need for being successful and for survival in the political arena?

## 3 assumptions of SW

- 1. Each particular person is important
  - 2. Each person can have some problems in his personal, family or community functioning – these problems arise from the interactions with others
  - 3. It is possible to do something to prevent or to eliminate these problems and to enrich the people's lives
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- Poverty
  - Vulnerable groups
  - Family relations
- Underdeveloped communities
  - Cultural relations
  - Human rights

# Levels of influencing in SW

- Personal or political
- Private or public
- Micro or macro relations
- Local or global issues
  
- Historically, SW went through the way of moral educating of the poor to the influencing more broader social and political relations

# Poverty as a paradigm

- Poverty as an individual problem
- Vs
- Poverty as an structural problem

What it is?

# What answers are possible?

## Conservative SW tenet

- Ind & family responsibility & Private over public
- Attend to defects & maintain a safety net

# Liberal view

- Individual & institutional change
- Partnership b/w public & private

# Radical view

- Restructuring of broad political, social & economical structures
- Will result in redistributing resources



# Social work – profession with many faces

The social work profession promotes :

social change,  
problem solving in human relationships and  
the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being.

Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems,  
social work intervenes at the points where people interact  
with their environments.

Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental  
to social work.

- May SW be uninterested for political activities/engagement?
- What about political neutrality, objectivity, impartiality...?

- The social work profession, through historical and empirical evidence, is convinced that the achievement of human rights for all people is a fundamental prerequisite for a caring world and the survival of the human race

# This is the reason for SW commitment toward:

- Participatory democracy
- Cultural competence and ethnic-sensitive practice
- Feminist practice
- Challenging violent structures and processes
- Anti-oppressive practice
- Empowerment
- Strengths perspective

...as well as for the core SW values

service,

social justice,

dignity and worth of person,

importance of human relationships,

integrity,

competence

SW as value based and not value neutral  
profession! Is this the reality in our everyday  
practice?

# CSW and political activities

- The influence of the political decisions on the equal access to the resources is huge
- Should SW-ers include themselves in the political activities and ask for the equal access to the resources? **How?**

# Macro practice – 5 major categories

- Administration
- Community organization
- Social planning
- Policy practice
- Political social work

Often these five areas overlap. For example, a community organizer may lobby for legislation that helps social workers or the people they serve

# Administration

- Activities in social welfare agencies that transform policy into concrete human services.

# Community Organization

- Activities which help groups of people within geographic and non spatial communities enhance their social well-being through planned collective action.



# Social Planning

- Managing social change in a rational, logical fashion. Planners write grant proposals, develop new programs, and make policy recommendations to government decision-makers

# Policy Practice

- Social workers can analyze the content of policies, study the policy-making process, or lobby for legislation

# Political Action

- A social worker may be employed by or volunteer for a political campaign. Social workers may also run for political office.

# Political influence through the CSW

- Identifying social problems
- Conducting research on community needs.
- Consulting with community residents, business owners, political decision-makers, service providers, and people who are members of oppressed groups.
- Using strategies and tactics to help oppressed people gain power and acquire resources.
- Strengthening relationships among community members.
- Lobbying for legislation and engaging in politics.

# Political influence through the CSW cont.

- Identifying a number of alternative ways to address problems.
- Choosing the best plan based on available data and the preferences of the people with whom they consult.
- Designing programs and applying for funding.
- Evaluating programs and services

# Political influence through the CSW

## - cont...

- Analyzing legislation or develop new legislation.
- Keeping track of how new legislation moves through the legislative process.
- Lobbying for legislation or encourages others to lobby for legislation.
- Any other activities?

# The Roles of the CSW-ers

- Advocate
- Community Developer
- Fundraiser
- Program Coordinator
- Program Manager
- Research Analyst
- Supervisor
- Outreach Worker

# Skills for dealing with the politics in the CSW

- Skills of listening, responding, persuading, and caring
- Political skills of linking, brokering, and advocacy
- Ability to consider alternative solutions
- Consensus building
- Negotiation and mediation
- Navigating government agencies and services
- Completing short term and task-centered activities
- Assisting people with accessing benefits and services
- Resolving disputes between people and agencies



# Final remarks

- Generally there is few number of the SW-ers in the political arena (power comes from the numbers)
- Traditionally SW is placed in the filed of the curative/remedial social care (SW-ers as helpers)
- Critical and radical approach is weak (if not totally unknown)
- The influence on the creating of the social programmes possible mainly up to the level of the proposal writing
- Implementation is mainly obstructed because of the political opportunity

# Some final questions

- Can community social work exist/be successful without political engagement?
- What are “sustainable” relations between CSW and politics?
- What should SW-ers do to become more political influential?
- Are there some hazard for the profession in the political engagement?