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Social Assistance. Compendium of History, Theory and Practice. Book Review

Claudia FRATILA¹

Abstract: Mr. Doru Buzducea's paper intitled "Social sevicees. A compendium of history, theory and practice" is a fascinating incursion into the social domain that offers a history of the beginnings, the methods of intervention, as well as theories and suggestions which come to support the development of social services.

Keywords: social services, vulnerable groups, social intervention.

"Social sevicees. A compendium of history, theory and practice" written by Doru Buzducea- Ph.D. professor and Dean of the Faculty of Sociology and Social Services Of the University of Bucharest, president of the National College of Social Workers from Romania, was published at the Polirom Publishing House in 2017 and represents the result of more than 20 years of exploring, analyzing, research and critical thinking in the area of social services.

The contents of the book are profoundly comprehensive, assembling together the essential aspects of the history, theory and practice in the field of social services interventions and it is helpful to the practitioners as well as to those who intend to embrace the career of a social worker, and to an equal degree to those social actors interested in upgrading the profession and the social services system in our country or at an international level.

The paper is comprised of 8 chapters in which we can find elements of social services practice and also specific theories, a critical analysis of the social services system, after being introduced- in a whole chapter- to the social assistance systems from Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. The author examines these systems by outlining the impact of the social assistance on social change, its contribution to the reconfiguration of the 21st century social structures, in the larger context of globalization. WE can't know exactly where we're heading, it depends on the world evolution as a whole, on the evolution of the other social subsystems to which we are interconnected.

The present global interdependence has also created new areas of responsibilities and international opportunities for the social services

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(Buzducea, D. 2009), and has generated a series of challenges, some of which are carefully examined in the present book. In this context, a distinct place in the general construct of the book is given to the public-private partnership in the area of social services (chapter 5)- seen as a modern way of solving social problems at the level of local communities by making public services more efficient. At the European level, the public-private partnership is regarded as a tendency strongly supported in the area of social politics (Buzducea, D. 2004), also found at a national level as a consequence of the progress towards a more open society in which the civil society and the non-governmental organizations play a visible role. Even if the state represents the main actor in providing social protection, in time the representatives of civil society have become involved in social life in an organized manner by institutionalizing their approaches. In this way they were recognized by law as non-profit non-governmental organizations that participate in a normal dialogue with the state in the name of social progress.

The globalization phenomenon is developing in a differentiated and irreversible manner and it has, evidently, advantages as well as disadvantages, more visible being the rise of social polarization, of risks and inequities all of which are highlighted by the author and defined by the necessity of social policies reconfiguration at a global level. Certainly, for years, there has not been an interest and a serious concern for the fate of the social worker (Buzducea, D. 2008). The state has not fulfilled, among others, its role as a controller, nor that of an efficient manager of the labor force market, especially in the area of the professions needed in the social field. That is why, the fact that the author allocates space for promoting the profession of social worker generates a sense of validity for the well-informed reader who practices this profession and validates this paper to become a title of reference in the specialty literature. The novelty of this book consists in bringing together what has been with what we wish to become, placing each social actor (individually-that is the social worker and institutionally- public and private providers of social services, public authorities, non-governmental organizations) in a well-defined system, and at the same time offering theoretical and practical benchmarks.

A valuable part of this paper is represented by the examples and the case studies that help a less well informed reader to better understand the social endeavor while the well informed reader (that is the practitioner) to replicate those models of good practice, adjusting their endeavors and interventions to the specificity of each category of beneficiaries.

Another strong aspect in this paper's architecture is represented by the information boxes that contain extracts of normative acts or literature of

reference in the social field, essential to the understanding of the social assistance system (for example: work skills in social services, social assistance characteristics in different periods of time, roles of the social services, organizing principles of the social services) all of which are important parts to the understanding of this field. Also as a strong feature, we can consider the schematics we encounter throughout the book that allow a cognitive structuring of the information facilitating the understanding and learning process.

Perhaps it is not by chance that the last chapter of the book- “Children and teenagers in other situations of vulnerability”, makes reference to the categories of beneficiaries, because connecting to the other, identifying his/her needs and understanding them is what makes the specific of social assistance, a field in which, without the love for the others, the interventions lack foundation and consistency. One can be a social worker if it has a certain personality, understands the social vulnerability of the human nature (Buzducea, D. 2005), can empathize with those who suffer, have the capacity to understand them and, more than that have the will to get well prepared theoretically in order to become good practitioners and to contribute to the wellbeing of their peers.

As any other valuable work, so does this paper offers not only conclusions but also suggestions in its final part in the context in which for some problems in our society identified throughout the years, viable solutions were not found in a reasonable time in order to permit a decrease of some phenomena that has generated stigma and social exclusion.

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