

Applied Scientific Research Design: Romanian Social Work between Ideology and Science

George NEAMȚU
George Bacovia University, Bacau, ROMANIA

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Abstract: In comparison with the international classifications ISCO 88 and ISCO 88 COM, towards which there is an homogenisation tendency, the Romanian version of Romanian Occupational Classification (ROC or COR in Romanian) presents not only formal differences but classifications' content ones as well. These differences generate difficulties in having the professional qualification certificates recognised, as well as in having the specialists properly categorised, and for the mobility of the labour force within the European Union space. And for some areas like the one of the social work, the issues are even more acute and profound because of professional and occupational activities' specific: novelty, diversity, complexity, knowledge development.

The VET standards structure has been adopted at the European level and has as the main purpose to make functional a definite cooperation mechanism between the suppliers of social work formation / training and the real requests from the labour market. In Romania, these exigencies were stipulated in different normative documents, starting with The Education Law no 84/1995, that regards the initial and continuous formation, as well as the formal and non-formal one, the issue was carried in The Government Decision (G.D.) 779/1999 that set up The Council for The Occupational Standards and Certification, which had the purpose to elaborate occupational standards in regard with the European practice, as well as to approve new standards, modify and anole the inadequate ones; the process continued with *Law 253/2003* that transferred these attributions to The <National

Council for the Professional Formation of the Adults (CNFPA – in Romanian). Following this course, we find out that today within the Romanian Occupational Classification (ROC-COR in Romanian), there is a certain structure on steps – major and minor groups, sub-groups and basic groups – with specific contents for each classified occupation.

It is worth to be mentioned that in comparison with the international classifications ISCO 88 and ISCO 88 COM, towards which there is an homogenisation tendency, the Romanian version of Romanian Occupational Classification (ROC – COR) presents not only formal differences but classifications' content ones as well. These differences generate difficulties in having the professional qualification certificates recognised, as well as in having the specialists properly categorised, and for the mobility of the labour force within the European Union space. And for some areas like the one of the social work, the issues are even more acute and profound because of professional and occupational activities' specific: novelty, diversity, complexity, knowledge development.

Within all the official documents of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Chance Equality (the one in charge with social work domain), the first two components of the VET standards, precisely **The Occupational Standards** and **The Evaluation Instruments** are either unspecified defined, minimally, or scanty, and the evaluation specifications are completely absent. The third component is left to The Ministry of Education's latitude, actually to universities as the main professional trainers within social work; and so the Ministry cannot apply a homogenous politic on a national level because of the universities' autonomy. These deficiencies have repercussions over the 14.000 graduates of university social work education (for the year 2005, *apud* Elena Zamfir) from Romania.

For the first two VET components we are to exemplify from ROC (COR) with a description of the social work occupation catalogued as 346 minor group: the social workers offer their assistance to the individuals and families with personal and social problems; initiate actions to prevent delinquency or for the delinquents' readjustment; grant their support to the physically and mentally challenged people in order to improve their capacity of social integration. Then, to the description of the basic groups components the same reductionism, inadequate and unscientific formulations are to be found. To all these can be added the formal critics – e.g. the language used (the social worker grants consultations). On the 2446 category "Specialists in social activity" where it is inserted the "higher level social assistant" the same problems are to be found: un in-definition of the professional activities specifications; un in-definition of the professional competencies areas, along with obsolete language and content confusions.

For comparison, *The Bureau of Labour Statistics* from UK, in 2005, details the specificities for a social assistant specialist (who works with children, family and school) on the following structure: Theoretic knowledge (with 33 sub-domains, from Psychology up to Buildings and Constructions), Skills (with 35 groups, from active listening up to equipment maintaining), Abilities (with 52 qualities, from oral communication expressivity up to sound localisation), Professional activities (with 41 actionable packages). And the list can continue: the physical space and its management, work area, interests and motivations, professional needs, work stiles, correlated occupations, education and others. (See *The National Occupational Standards for Social Work*, Topss UK Partnership, April 2004, www.topssengland.net)

It is obvious that in the European practice the functions and the occupations from the social work domain are very well defined while in Romania we are only at the beginning of a departure that is needed no matter the costs or duration. The comparison between the ROC and the international classifications must be accomplished not only to a formal level but: groups, sub-groups, occupations, levels etc., but as well as the occupational contents are regarded because the majority of the dysfunctions derive from here. The most pressuring issues of the social work practice refer to: specialists' employment contests, and promotion steps, the development of a professional career, the

correlation of the university education programs with the labour market, the difficulties of certificates recognition in other European countries, the denial of the professional competences gained on non-formal ways, certain pseudo-authorities' role substitution etc.

So, it seems necessary a correlation of the 3 components with the VET standards. An accessible direction can be the standardization of the social work first two components that would determine institutional pressures for the correlation of the Profession – Occupation – Position / Job. This exigency is emitted as well by the international occupational classifications, and ROC must be harmonized with ISCO 88 COM. The long term consequence regards inclusively the facilitation of the comparisons between EU occupations in order to allow the international mobility of social workers. The constraints and the immediate problems to be solved refer especially to the social work professional recruitment, selection and promotion within non- and governmental sector.

Actually, based on direct observations and local diagnosis researches, it has been determined that the public administration employers of social work specialists, as well as the non-governmental actors are generally (national, and on a local and county level) confronted with the serious difficulty of objective evaluation and of the proper selection because of the occupational standards do not exist or are insufficiently determined and specified on certain profession within ROC. The Social Work County Offices, along with town services and the Non-governmental organisations do not poses homogenous and national recognised evaluation instruments; they cannot access a data base regarding the competence units and the job descriptions regarding the social work. This situation is registered and condemned by all the managers in social work. And so, the organisation of employment contests and further the job description construction are contaminated by irrelevant professional elements, holding a local and even arbitrary character. The fundamental need regards the definition of competency units and the elaboration of social work occupational standards stating with the practical, direct, and visible activities. The next step would be for the resort Ministry to assume this project results and to disseminate the standards to the interested structures.

In Romania, it already exists a theoretic background as well as preoccupations regarding this topic: Elena Zamfir, *The Development of the Social Work System: A Long and Difficult*, in: C. Zamfir, L. Stoica (coord), *A New Challenge: Social Development*, Polirom, Iasi, 2006, pp.197-216, Ana Radulescu, "The Development of the Social Worker Role and Profession In Romania", in: A. Muntean, J. Sagebiel (coord), *Social Work Practices – Romania and Germany*, Polirom, Iasi, 2007, pp. 161 – 170, George Neamtu, *The Professional Formation of the Social Worker from the Bologna Declaration Perspective*, A. Muntean, J. Sagebiel, *op. cit*, pp. 138-149. The Subject of social work occupational standardisation in Romania has been presented as well in international conferences: G. Neamtu, *The Research of Romanian Social Work Professional Standardisation and the Formation of Specialists during Post University Studies*, on the SPACE - Annual General Meeting and Conference from 21st till 24th March 2007, Cyprus College, Nicosia.

ROC (COR) must be up dated, detailed, completed, homogenised with international regulations, as well as correlated with labour market, harmonised with the knowledge development and the current practice models. A standardisation project would solve these complicated tasks for the social work domain – an area where new professions, occupations and jobs showed up. It is an attempt of meeting *Law 47/2006* appliance regarding the social work national system, where new institutions show up, precisely *The Social Inspection* and *The Social Observer*. The results should be applied on a national level because the methodology used is concordant with the scientific conditions of representatively and sociologic validity. The results would create the conditions for chance equality on the labour market for the social work graduates and specialists. The project is

based and promotes as well the partnership within the analyses and research domain (see project's team structure).

A SPAS Project should have as a purpose the identification, description, evaluation and standardisation of the professions / occupations from the social work in concordance with ISCO-88-COM and ISCO-88, as a completion or a construction of the occupational standards of the existent professions from the ROC: social worker – upper level 244601, social worker – medium level 346001, research assistant in social work – 258208, head of office manager in a public institution –111059, head of department in a public institution – 111064, specialised inspector in public administration –247003, inspector social protection –315203, inspector social insurance and retire allowance, mediator –244702, social mediator –513903, socio-educational animator – 511307. An objective regards the inclusion of new social work specific occupations in ROC in concordance with the practice of other European countries and with the legislative modifications from our country, like the supervisor in Social Work, case manager, social work inspector, (see *Law 47/2006*), social work observer (see *Law 47/2006*). Together with the appliance of the methodology promoted by CNFPA, the project would develop, elaborate and establish the social work occupational standards and would suggest to be included in ROC due to the field studies and occupational analyses in 4 Romanian counties (Bacau, Braila, Sibiu, Timis) and comparative international *curricula* analyses. Three main directions are to be approached: a) occupational analyses of the activities of the social work field; b) documentation and correlation of the international competence units; 3) frame program for the restructuring of the university professional formation curricula. The project would compare standards list and the job description with the occupational standards in Germany and France, as well as with the European Union and UN ones. As main results: 1. occupational standards for the social workers; 2. Evaluation, Recruitment and Career Promotion Guide in Social Work. 3. Frame Program (Curricula) for the university professional formation. And the Project is supposed to initiate international collaboration research.

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