



**Paweł Czarnecki**

Vysoká škola medzinárodného podnikania ISM Slovakia

## The History of Social Work

The concept of social work is relatively new, for the term “social work” and “social worker” were created in the USA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For the very first time it was officially used in 1911, when the National Charity Organization Societies was given the name National Alliance for Organizing Family Social Work. Six years later the world’s first organization for social workers was created (American Association of Social Workers)<sup>1</sup>.

This fact does not mean, however, that the actions referred to social work had not existed much earlier. In fact, to help the most vulnerable human communities is as old as the communities themselves. Obviously, before the rise of civilization this assistance was not organized nor institutionalized, there is no doubt, however, that people helped each other since prehistoric times, and in the small, simple communities they looked after sick people, old people and orphans. In some of today’s primary communities the duty to help the most vulnerable applies to the local elite. In some ancient states the special institutions have been established for the care of the most vulnerable members of society. In China there were free eating houses for those unable to work, free schools for children from the poorest families, associations involved in distributing clothing and other assistance to the poor. In many countries there was a custom of supporting the paupers, who in Buddhist countries even took the form of a social institution. Also in ancient Greece there was organized help for the sick who did not receive support from their families, Athens had even introduced a special tax dedicated to help the poorest<sup>2</sup>. The obligation to give alms to the poor existed in Judaism and Christianity.

In Christian Europe until the Enlightenment social assistance was provided by the Catholic Church (and after the Reformation by other churches). Care of the poor, the sick, the infirm and children were exercised by the orders which, over time, began to build shelters, hospitals, schools, etc. Gradually began to emerge

1 R. L. Barker, *Milestones in the Development of Social Work and Social Welfare*, NASW Press Washington 1999, p. 11 and next.

2 Cf.: R. A. Skidmore, M. G. Thackeray, *Introduction to Social Work...*, p. 41.

laws and regulations relating to the charity. In England in 1536 the provision was introduced, under which local authorities and churches were ordered to allocate all the money on Sunday to help the poorest. It was not the first provision establishing the principle of helping the poor, the earlier regulations, however, had the character of the prohibitions, which aimed to reduce begging in cities. A little later, in 1572 there was created in England, a new government agency, the responsibility of which was the care of the poorest layers of society, as well as a special tax was introduced to provide financing for this care. At the turn of the XVI and XVII century the poor have been divided into three categories: able to work, which the authorities were required to find the employment and to punish in case of refusal to work, unable to work, which had the right to stay in the poorhouse, and the children that the authorities were obliged to train to the profession. At the same time a system of financing of care was created, indicating several sources of income. At the end of the XVI century the law was introduced in England that imposed an obligation on the local authorities to take care of the poor. This law has played a significant role in shaping the consciousness of responsibility among the local community for the fate of its most vulnerable members and it survived until 1834. In the XVII century in the Netherlands and England, and later in the US in some cities, local authorities have been financing the urban doctors for the poor. In 1884 in England, thanks to the efforts of Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, there was created the Toynbee House, institution providing education and social services, which sought to implement the program of breaking down social barriers separating the layers of rich and poor. House operating on similar principles was opened a little later in the USA by J. Adams.

The XIX century, however, brought no solution to the problem of poverty, on the contrary, the development of industry and the rise of the working class has exacerbated this problem. Forms of assistance, in principle, have not changed, but an increasing number of people required different forms of care. In many countries at that time various rules came into force regulating the aid to the poor. Eg. In England three commissioners were appointed to supervise the activities of aid institutions across the country. Direct care of the poor was exercised by the local units led by their officials. These units had the right to create the workshop in their areas employing the poor, at the same time they were forbidden to provide the assistance to those able to work outside of these workshops. Attempts have also been made for the coordination of activities of various charity institutions<sup>3</sup>.

All these solutions have focused on emergency assistance, while growing problem of impoverishment of large sections of the population required reforms covering the whole of society. Projects of such reforms emerged in the second half of the XIX century. (In England thanks to activists such as Octavia Hill and Edward Denison). First organizations were established at that time dealing with the organization of the social assistance system.<sup>4</sup>

3 Cf.: M. Payne, S. M. Sharlow, In Search of 'British' Social Work: Identity, History and Engagement, in: *Social Work in the British Isles*, red. M. Payne and S. M. Sharlow, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London 2002.

4 Cf.: R. A. Skidmore, M. G. Thackeray, *Introduction to Social Work...*, p. 44.

In the United States in the early days of colonization the forms of assistance to the poor did not differ in principle from the European models. The obligation to care for the poor, sick or disabled was resting on the city government, which gradually began to create institutions dealing with different types of assistance (shelters, hospitals, orphanages, workshops, correctional homes, schools for children from the poorest families, etc.). The first such institution, a shelter for the poor, began its operations in Massachusetts in 1662, hence even before the establishment of the United States. In 1729 the Order of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth started a school for orphans whose parents were killed by the Indians (another orphanage was established, however, half a century later).

The conditions in these early social welfare institutions were often very poor. Difficult living conditions concerned in particular the mentally retarded and mentally ill, because it was thought that they do not have the ability to feel pain. But the situation of the poorest was not much better. Until the XIX century, poverty was generally treated as a culpable state caused by incompetence and laziness, and so the help to the poor was considered as the privilege only in the most severe cases and for a short term. Only the charities (eg. The Association for the Improvement of Conditions of the Poor, The Association of Charitable Organizations in the US), whose members visited the poor in their homes, "discovered" that the situation of each person in poverty is different and that, therefore, each of these people should be assisted by other means.<sup>5</sup>

The rapid development of social work in the United States took place after the end of the Civil War. In the largest cities the private and local government organizations started to provide the help to the varied groups of the needy. A growing number of charities made the need to coordinate their actions. For this purpose the Society of Charity Organization was created in 1877. In turn, in 1909, the first council coordinating the activities of independent charitable agencies was created. These agencies were established at the beginning of the XIX century, and their task was to collect money for charity as well as the direct action, for example, assistance in finding jobs for the unemployed. Until 1950, in the United States was founded 1500 such agencies. Initially their operations were based primarily on the work of volunteers, but over time they began to employ qualified social workers. Another form of social assistance was the creation of cultural institutions. The first such institution was founded in the US in 1886, now they are located in the poorest neighborhoods of all major cities. Their task is to organize recreational and cultural activities, and the provision of health and social services<sup>6</sup>.

It is worth noting that, from a formal point of view, social work developed as an independent profession first in the US because the first social work organizations were established there, but we cannot forget that social work has developed in Europe in parallel and independently of America. Moreover, Americans used the best practices developed in Europe, especially in England, developing and adapt-

5 Cf.: R. A. Skidmore, M. G. Thackeray, *Introduction to Social Work...*, p. 63.

6 Cf.: *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, Vol. 2, National Association of Social Workers, Silver Spring, Maryland, p. 827; D. Grindberg, *Civic associations as a force of reform in nineteenth-century America* "Znak" 1982, no 335, p. 1202.

ing them to their own reality. Therefore the idea according to which social work in the modern sense was established in the United States and other countries drew from the American experience, is not entirely justified. The opinion that social work as a professional activity was first developed in the US, is probably due to the fact that the theoretical basis of social work have been created in the early years of the XX century (inter alia by the American activist Marry Richmond)<sup>7</sup>.

In many countries, the development of social welfare and social work followed a time of crisis, such as world wars and the economic crisis of the 30s. Number of needy during these periods was so large that the governments have been engaging themselves in aid organization. That was the case in the United States, where in 1935 the federal government adopted a law that introduced an insurance system, subsidize help at the state level, obligating state authorities to help specific groups of the population (eg. single mothers, cripples, unemployed) and so on<sup>8</sup>.

After World War II social welfare systems and social work have evolved in different ways in different countries. Increasing wealth of developed countries allowed the implementation of social policy and financing forms of aid, which before the war did not exist or existed in rudimentary form, therefore it became necessary to organize a system of care in such a way as to make it an effective tool for implementing social policy of the state. A number of programs dedicated to different groups of people and aimed to solve various sorts of problems, including protection programs, to prevent the emergence of social problems. Suffice to say that in the 70s in the United States, the program of family allowances alone was covering almost eleven million beneficiaries, and the total budget allocated for these benefits reached hundreds of millions of dollars<sup>9</sup>.

A detailed discussion of the models of this policy and the role of the social work within, would require a separate analysis of the various aspects of the assistance<sup>10</sup>, what is, however, beyond the scope of this article. The common element linking systems from different countries was, as I mentioned, the fact that they have become a tool of the consciously pursued social policy. The aim of social welfare and social work was no longer providing the means to physical survival to those most in need, but also – and over time most of all – to support the development of entire social groups. In all developed countries, ranging from the 60s, there were introduced programs targeting the unemployed, young people at risk of social pathologies, people with disabilities, programs equalizing educational opportunities for children from poor families. Next to the institutions funded by the state and employing professional social workers one should also mention here about the private organizations, based on the work of volunteers. An example of such an organization is the American Peace Corps, which leads aid measures in poor countries around the world. The task of social workers after World War II became the

7 C. de Robertis says that the methodology of social work in France in the 30s and 40s was based on American patterns. Cf.: also *Methodology of action ...*, p. 14.

8 Cf.: R. A. Skidmore, M. G. Thackeray, *Introduction to Social Work...*, p. 49.

9 Cf.: R. A. Skidmore, M. G. Thackeray, *Introduction to Social Work...*, p. 49.

10 Eg. the evolution of the system of care for the elderly in selected countries discusses J. Lynch. Cf.: *Age in the Welfare State. The Origins of Social Spending on Pensioners, Workers, and Children*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006.

identification of needs and support the development of the individual and because the list of social problems, that solving began to be the responsibility of the authorities due to the economic growth, became increasingly longer – the phenomenon of the specialization appeared in social work.

The differences concern not so much the objectives or the functioning of the social welfare system, rather the social policy. An example of this kind of difference is the scope of social insurance. In European countries, the free or almost free access to health services based on compulsory insurance is the standard, while in the United States, free health care covers only certain social groups, eg. the elderly and disabled (within introduced in 1966 Medicare program) and those with the lowest incomes (within the Medicaid program introduced in 1965)<sup>11</sup>.

Simultaneously with the emergence of professional social work from the charity, began to develop the theory of social work. Initially, this theory has focused on the moral aspects of charity, especially assistance and protection of the working class. It emphasized the need to know the situation of the ward and to adapt the assistance activities to the needs of the wards. The biggest impact in this early period influenced the work of Marry Richmond the pioneer of professional social work in the United States.

The issue of social assistance also played a significant role in the socialist parties programs, advocating for social justice, understood as equal access to certain public goods such as education, healthcare and social assistance precisely. These programs criticized the existing model of social work, accusing it of focusing on emergency aid to the poorest individuals, while the goal of social work should be to raise the standard of living of the whole population<sup>12</sup>.

Starting from the 30s until the end of the 60s the psychological concepts gained great popularity in the theory of social work, including Freudian psychoanalysis. This involved the redefinition of the concept of social problems and social assistance, which were seen mainly as a result of psychological maladjustment of the individual towards society. It did not focus neither on the individual nor the society, trying to create the conditions for socially maladjusted individuals to maintain mental balance, ie. the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Individual was treated as the whole of relations that had bonded him with the social environment, and the social work as a healing effect of these relationships.

Also in the 70s and 80s the psychological concepts of social work enjoyed great interest among the theorists, although it attached not much importance to psychoanalysis anymore. Theory, which looked most promising was the behavioral psychology, and therefore started to pay more attention to empirical research in social work. In parallel the efforts have been made to explain social problems based on sociological concepts. Theorists representing this trend were convinced that the way in which the individual operates in a society depends largely on the society as

11 Cf.: R. A. Skidmore, M. G. Thackeray, *Introduction to Social Work...*, p. 50 and next.

12 M. Payne, *Social Theory and Social Work*, in: *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of social work*, red. M. Davies, The Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2003.

such, therefore in order to revise the social functioning of individuals, one should change the way their social environment functions.

Since the 60s the view has gained in popularity, according to which society has a duty to ensure every individual the basic living conditions in the economic sense. The implementation of this view was possible on the one hand due to the increase of wealth in developed countries, and on the other by the overriding consensus of the main political forces in these countries in terms of social welfare. One of the goals of social work became thus identifying and meeting the economic needs of society. Such a redefinition of the tasks was associated with the necessity of the development of different methods of social work<sup>13</sup>.

Development of the theory of social work proceeded in parallel with the development of the education of social workers. In this period a systematic training for charitable work also began, which, together with the professionalization of charitable activity gradually evolved into social work education. This professionalization started in the 20s of the XX century and continued for the next two decades<sup>14</sup>, wherein the education for charity work began much earlier, already in the seventies of the XIX century. In 1886 The British University of Colonists along with the National Association of Working Women and the London Society of Charity Organization organized a one and a half year preparation course for charity work. A little earlier, in 1873, also in the UK began the first organized courses for the volunteers held by the London Association for Pauperism Prevention<sup>15</sup>. In 1898 the first school for staff involved in charity work was established in the United States, the New York School of Philanthropy (it exists until now under the name "Department of Social Work, Columbia University"). In 1920 the higher education faculty of "social work" have been launched in Chicago and in 1923 in Cleveland, thanks to the efforts of Clara Kaiser social activists, the school was established preparing for the application of social work group methods<sup>16</sup>.

The world's first school preparing for social work was established in the United States in 1893. The Congress of Caring Workers in New York adopted a resolution to establish a school preparing for social work and it began to operate five years later. Shortly thereafter, in 1903, in London there was created Europe's first school of social work. Another school of social work developed in the Netherlands (1899), France (1907), Germany (1908), Switzerland (1908), Austria (1912), Ireland (1912), Czech Republic (1918 r), Norway (1920), Sweden (1921), Belgium (1922) and Poland (1925)<sup>17</sup>. In other European countries such schools were created in the 30s and after the World War II. It is the schools of social work that be-

13 Cf.: On the issues of the history of social work in Poland and the world, red. A. Małek, K. Slany and I. Szczepanik-Wiechy, Jagiellonian University Publishing, Kraków 2007.

14 In 1922 in the United States the only profession, the exercise of which was associated with the need to acquire qualifications attested by a diploma, was a profession in-house nurse. Cf.: C. de Robertis, *Methodology of action ...*, p. 14.

15 *Social Work Education in Europe. A Comprehensive Description of Social Work Education in 21 European Countries*, red. H. J. Brauns and D. Kramer, Frankfurt a.M. 1986, p. 213 and next.

16 B. Szatur-Jaworska, *The theoretical basis of social work [in:] Social Pedagogy*, red: T. Pilch, I. Lepalczyk, Kraków 1995, p. 106 and next.

17 Cf.: E. Kantowicz, *Social work in Europe...*, p. 200.



came the centers which began to develop a theoretical reflection on the functions and methods of professional help.

In countries where Catholicism was the dominant denomination, organization of social work and education in the first half of the XX century, also remained largely under the influence of ecclesiastical institutions. An example in this respect is Austria, where social work was reserved exclusively for women, and men were not admitted to the profession until 1948. In Belgium, training for social work dealt parallel private schools, public and Catholic. In France, the first school of social work was established in 1907, although it had the secular character, the following school was established at the initiative of the Catholic Church (1911.). Also in Spain, the first school was built in the 20s under the auspices of the Church. On the other hand, after the World War II there were 29 Catholic schools out of 44 schools operating, nine were public schools and 4 private. A similar situation prevailed in Portugal, which remained an authoritarian country until 1974.

In the first two – three decades after World War II in most European countries, people wishing to start a career as a social worker passed one or two year training. These courses were organized mainly by universities and other institutions of higher education. The requirement for graduation at the Bachelor or Master level was introduced in some countries in the 70s which was associated with the strengthening of government control over the institutions of social assistance<sup>18</sup>.

Intensive development of various forms of social work (individual case, with a group or community) falls in the US and Europe in the 60s and 70s of the XX century. This is related to the rise of formal, legal framework for the operation of institutions of social work, the formation of the organization of social workers and the development of social pedagogy. During this period, unions of social workers began to form (except of the “Eastern Bloc” countries), the purpose of these compounds was (and still is to this day) to protect the interests of social workers, as well as the impact on the development of the profession<sup>19</sup>.

In conclusion, the history of social work in Europe and the United States can be divided into several periods. In the first period practical steps were taken to provide aid, but devoided of theoretical reflection, and not requiring professional preparation. In the second period, although appeared theoretical reflection, it was not associated with empirical research, therefore this period is characterized by attempts to implement through the work of social work the particular concepts of social society and the individual. In the next period, the number of empirical studies has increased considerably, and so began to develop a theory of social work. Finally in the subsequent period, which continues to this day, the theory of social work has become fully-fledged research discipline, providing practical business tools. The number of empirical studies has significantly increased, attempts are made to synthesize knowledge from different fields (social pedagogy, sociology, psychology),

18 Cf.: E. Kantowicz, *Social work in Europe...*, p. 204 and next.

19 R. Wroczyński, *Social pedagogy*, 1976, p. 49 and next., A. Kamiński, *Functions of social pedagogy...*, p. 27 and next, B. Szatur-Jaworska, *The theoretical basis of social work*, in: *Social pedagogy*, red. T. Pilch i I. Lepaczyk, „Żak” Publishing, Warsaw 1995, p. 106 and next.

there are areas designated to be explored, such studies are carried out in a planned and systematic manner. Increased importance of social work, whose main goal was to support the individual and social development, which led to a trend of increasing professionalism and specialization. Social activists and theorists who most contributed to the emergence and development of social work should include people like: J.H. Pestalozzi<sup>20</sup>, F. Disterweg<sup>21</sup>, R. Owen<sup>22</sup>, P. Bergemann<sup>23</sup>, P. Natorp<sup>24</sup>, J. Adams<sup>25</sup>, Mary Richmond<sup>26</sup>, A. Solomon<sup>27</sup> and others.

In Poland, before the World War II, the development of charity and social assistance proceeded in a similar way as in the whole Europe. Until the early XIX century the development of the charity have been influenced by the Catholic Church. Its origins date back to the Middle Ages and are associated with the formation of orders leading the shelters and hospitals for the poorest. The monasteries in the Middle Ages were the only institutions providing a systematic and organized charity assistance. They were engaged in distributing the food and clothing, often also provided shelter to pilgrims, soldiers and beggars. Over time, there were even separate orders specialized in helping certain groups in need.

- 
- 20 John Henry Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827) developed a theoretical basis for initial education, called for universal access to education and reform of the feudal social relations. He run the institution for orphans in France. He popularized his ideas in numerous journalistic articles and literary works.
- 21 Adolf Friedrich Wilhelm Diesterweg (1790-1866) was an educator and social activist. Called for universal access to education, seeing in education the main tool of social reforms and improved livelihoods. He was the author of the popular handbook for teachers *Wegweiser zur Bildung für deutsche Lehrer* (1835).
- 22 Robert Owen (1771 – 1858) created in Wales the foundations for the cooperative movement, was also engaged in charitable activities. He had views similar to communism: he criticized private property, free market, division of labor etc.
- 23 Paul Bergeman (1862 – 1946) laid the foundations for the social pedagogy (was also the author of the term). He stressed that the structure of society is changing, so the education goals should be adapted to the current state of society. He believed that individual and social pedagogy should be an empirical field, therefore he referred to the discoveries of Ch. Darwin and the philosophy of H. Spencer. Cf. J. Miąso, *History of education – the twentieth century*, PWN, Warsaw 1984, p. 270
- 24 Paul Natorp was primarily a philosopher, but also spoke out on social issues. He believed that education should aim to achieve the planned in advance ideal of the individual and society. The most important feature shaped in the educational process is the strong will of the individual, through which the society is able to achieve total unity of moral and transform itself into a “whole community”. Cf. J. Miąso, *History of education...*
- 25 Jane Adams (1886 – 1935) was an American social activist, also engaged in the work of the international movement for women and children. She has published a number of theoretical papers on charity, of which the most famous were *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910).
- 26 Mary Ellen Richmond (1861-1928) developed a theoretical basis for social work incl. a postulate of professionalization of social work and the creation of training schools for social workers. She is the author of the introductory textbook in social work practice *Friendly Visiting Among the Poor* (1899), as well as *Social Diagnosis*, containing the first theoretical approach the issue of diagnosis. Popular was also the work of *The Good Neighbor in the Modern City* (1907) and *What is Social Casework? An Introductory Description* (1922). Cf.: E.N. Agnew, *From a social charity work: Mary E. Richmond and the creation of an American profession*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 2004
- 27 Alice Salomon (1872 – 1948) was a German social activist involved in the activities of the women's movement. Advocated the equalization of women's rights, legal protection of children, also undertook efforts to the professionalization of social work, the culmination of which was directed by her course then school for social workers. Cf.: A. Kołodziej-Durnaś, *Alice Salomon – a sketch of the life and works*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 2011.



The first hospital was built in Poland in 1108 in Wrocław. Separate hospitals and asylums were formed later on for certain groups, eg. the soldiers or people infected with leprosy. These institutions have been covering the basic needs of living of their residents, providing them with accommodation, food and clothing. Patients were admitted without proper selection, grouped according to the criterion of types of disease or infirmity. In the later period (XVII – XVIII) there were created also institutions or branches of caring for children. There were no staff prepared to provide professional help, the conditions were very poor, health care was not assured, hence the mortality rate was high and reached 70%.

Gradually also lay people started to engage in the charity, however, until the XIX century, the institution coordinating the activities remained the Catholic Church. There were created the so called brotherhoods of the laity by the churches, organizing fundraisers among its members to help the poorest, collecting alms, distributing the material assistance and support for patients. Some types of aid charity was governed by the state. The first regulations governing charitable activities have been approved at the end of the Middle Ages. Dating 1347 the *wiśnicki status* defined the principles of care for the handicapped. From the later period comes the legislation limiting the number of people begging, sometimes even there were certificates issued authorizing the mendicancy. In 1528 the first “insurance” law was established regulating the collection of donations to help the miners in Opole. The next year there was a regulation adopted that provided the order of care for people suffering from mental illness.

Starting with the Enlightenment began the process of gradually taking over the social assistance by the state. In Poland the process started at the same time as in Europe, in the XVIII century, however, due to the loss of independence and the partition it proceeded at different rates and took different forms in each of the partitions. In 1768 the commission of “Good order” has been established whose task was to provide control over charities as well as mitigation of social problems such as begging and vagrancy. This committee used coercion by placing the homeless in the homes of forced labor, where they had to earn for a living. A few years later, a similar committee was formed taking the care of the hospitals, which operated until 1870.

Charity began to develop intensively in the XIX century, which was associate with the rise of industry and the education of the working class. In times of partitions the aim of the social work was not only to improve the fate of the most vulnerable members of society. This activity had also patriotic dimension, sought to prepare the public for the future independence, and grew form the ideals of positivism popular in Poland in the second half of the century<sup>28</sup>.

Gradually there were invoked to live more and more organizations and state institutions that were engaged in social services. We should mention Social Warsaw Charitable Society (1814), which objective was the creation of shelters for children, Warsaw Hygiene Society (1864), Society for the Protection of the poor Mothers and their Children (1864), Society of Friends of Children (1880), Society

28 R. Wroczyński, Educational programs of positivism in Poland against the social and economic, Department of Social Education, University of Lodz, Łódź 1949.

against Tuberculosis and others. Meanwhile a change in legislation followed, an example of which is adopted in 1817 an act granting certain benefits to miners including health care for themselves and their families, as well as cash benefits during sickness.

All these organizations have operated only in the larger cities and their offer was addressed to selected, relatively few social groups, so they were not able to prevent the progressive impoverishment of the working class. The first reform involving the whole of society have been carried out in the late XIX and early XX century. At the end of the XIX century workers has been granted the right to an eight-hour working day, which initially covered only the children workers. At the same time entrepreneurs have been prohibited to employ children under five years old, moreover the prohibition of child labor in the night was introduced. In the same period there were adopted basic principles of health and safety and in factories the inspectors appeared to supervise the introduction of these principles into practice. In many workplaces there were created points of providing emergency medical assistance to victims of accidents at work, similar points started operations at hospitals. Care of pregnant women were included and families who had small children (nurseries at workplaces, medical advice, paid maternity leave). At the beginning of the XX century the compulsory insurance for employees have been introduced.

There were also educational actions undertaken. At the beginning of the XX century there were created several associations dynamically operating that aim was the eradication of illiteracy among the lower strata of society. For example, Pedagogical Society in 1903, Circle of Educators established in 1904, Association of Mutual Aid Societies and the University for All in 1905. By the Warsaw Charity Association was launched reading rooms department in which, in the early XX century, there were registered several thousand readers. *Kurier Warszawski* of 1905 (no. 177) encouraged neighborly help in learning to read and write<sup>29</sup>. During this period the Association Courses for Adults Illiterate was established and was chaired by Boleslaw Prus. Many other organizations have been organizing training and courses, eg. Polish Educational Society, Society of Polish Culture, and even the Farmers' Association and Apicultural Society<sup>30</sup>.

All these solutions were also gradually introduced on Polish soil, the fastest in the Prussian partition, slightly slower under Austrian rule and Russian. In Galicia, social work aimed at strengthening the Polish culture, which was facilitated due to the multi-ethnic and multicultural Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the Prussian partition the defense of polishness was associated with the opposition to the policies of the *Kulturkampf*, and the leading role in "organic work" and therefore the activities of self-help, played the Catholic Church and the landed gentry. In turn, the Russian partition basic problem, which tried to fight back, was a low level of education. In the second half of the XIX century in all the partitions in the upper

29 „If in every house two or more people take up to teach unenlightened people in that building, each will have a small number of students, which can easily spend one or two hours in the evening”. Cit. after: B. Smolińska-Theiss, *At the root of the socio-cultural work in an environment with Polish tradition*, „Social Pedagogy” 2007 no 4, p. 25.

30 *Ibidem*.

layers of Polish society began to promote the ethos of social service. The charitable activities often involved women<sup>31</sup>.

The leading activists and theorists of this period include E. Abramowski, L. Krzywicki, K. Krzeczowski, S. Rychliński and others. These authors also saw opportunities for social development in scientific research, based on the assumption that the reforms effectively improving the existence of society must be based on the knowledge of the society.

There were large differences in the organization of social assistance in different partitions. In the German partition the responsibility of organizing the social assistance laid on the municipalities, which were required to support the people residing permanently in their area. There were also the assistance organizations at the national level, offering assistance to persons who were not entitled to support from the municipality or such that municipality could not effectively help due to lack of resources. In Germany, since 1883, by Otto Bismarck initiative there was the care program implemented for sick people, the elderly, invalids and victims of accidents. In other European countries similar programs have been introduced later (in Poland in 1925.). Also under Austrian rule social assistance was provided by the municipalities, but they were supporting only those people who were not eligible for aid by the welfare institutions. The municipalities in the Russian partition offered the assistance only to people registered in the lists of the population residing permanently in the municipality.

After regaining independence, it became necessary to create a unified system of social assistance. This assignment was possible to implement due to the new Act of Social Welfare introduced in 1923. It is modeled on the solutions of German by separating the government aid and imposing on the municipalities the duty of the care for the poor<sup>32</sup>. In the interwar period the most important for the development of social work was directed by H. Radlińska Study of Social Work at the Free Polish University in Warsaw. It was established in 1925 and took the form of a two-year course designed for those already involved in social assistance and having in this area some experience, mainly from poor peasant families. The study was preparing teachers (in this period the percentage of illiteracy in Poland was still very high<sup>33</sup>), specialists in the field of librarianship and care for mother and child. Through involvement of its creator in the international social work organizations, the course program of the studies from the outset was in line with the prevailing global standards of education for social workers<sup>34</sup>.

Study by WWP, however, was not the first nor the only institution preparing for social work, since much earlier was established, also in Warsaw, The Faculty of Social Work at the Higher Courses for Women. In the years 1918-1939 the social

31 Ibidem.

32 Cf.: B. Krajewska, *Legal basis for social work...*, p. 14.

33 According to the census of 1907 in Warsaw the percentage of illiterates was 41.7% among men and 51.4% among women; in Lodz respectively 55% and 66%. Cf. R. Wroczyński, *Pedagogical notion and educational programs in the Polish Kingdom at the turn of the XIX and XX century*, Warsaw 1963, p. 218.

34 *Social professions in Europe...*, p. 397 and next.

work education in Poland was also provided by two other institutions: Catholic Social School in Poznan and Social Work Studies in Lviv<sup>35</sup>.

After the war, H. Radlińska continued her efforts to educate social workers. Thanks to her efforts, the Polish Institute of Social Work was founded that continued the operations of Study of Social Work at the Free Polish University in Warsaw whereas at the University of Lodz in 1945 the Department of Social Pedagogy was established (since 1962 headed by A. Kaminski<sup>36</sup>). In the preparation of a training program for social work there was also involved the Scientific Research Commission of the Polish Free University Society, which also organized various courses (eg. two-year study of social services, courses for the probation officers and managers of residential areas).

Radlińska comprehended social work as the activities aimed at improving the living conditions of the whole society, not just selected individuals or social groups. According to Radlińska, the social pedagogy and social work should be activating the unit, defined as motivation and ability to work on oneself and to cooperate within the society and the state. She assumed that in every man there is the ability of self-development, which sometimes is being suppressed by unfavorable external conditions, in order to liberate the energy, the focus should be on eliminating these external obstacles. Radlińska criticized the excessive specialization, assuming that the overspecialized employee will not be able to adapt to new challenges. In her opinion, social work education should be based on general knowledge in the humanities and natural sciences. This position differs from the American views on education of social work, where the emphasis is put on mastering the skills. Radlińska also sought to promote patriotism, commitment to national values and traditions, the need to work for the good of the state and nation. Radlińska treated social theory as a field of social pedagogy examining the impact of the environment on the development of the individual in order to modify this impact to enhance the potential of the individual and its environment. Radlińska pointed out, however, that the theory of social work cannot have a permanent object, because the scope and objectives<sup>37</sup> changes along with the social reality development.

The most important works of Radlińska include: *The Basics of National Education* (1909), *Educational work, tasks, methods, organization* (1913), discussing the idea of non-school education, *Attitude of the educators to the social environment* (1935), discussing the idea according to which social pedagogy should pay attention to the interaction between the individual and his social environment. In 1937 the work appeared entitled *Social causes of success and failure at school*, discussing the social barriers to the access of children to education.

To some extent, the years 1939 – 1945 were the continuation of the pre-war pe-

35 Cf.: W. Theiss, Fighter – instructor – professional. From the tradition of a social worker in Poland, „Social Work” 2004, no. 1.

36 A. Kaminski was also one of the creators of the theory of social work in Poland and the author of several textbooks. Cf.: eg. *Social pedagogy for social workers*, PWN, Warsaw 1972.

37 M. D. Brainerd, Helena Radlińska. The message of social work from the past, in: *Silhouettes of Lodz scholars – Professor Helena Radlińska*, Łódzkie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Łódź 2004, p. 61 and next.

riod, however, due to the occupation the social work proceeded in incomparably more difficult conditions, and relied heavily on volunteer activities. Throughout the period of the war Free Polish University directed by H. Radlińska led the secret teachings in the form of Social Studies.

Also after the war until 1948 theoreticians and practitioners of social work continued the tradition started in the interwar period. Soon, however, it turned out that in the new political system social work and social pedagogy should meet the new challenges. In communist countries the social work was not initially conceived as an action to counteract social pathologies, in fact it was assumed that the new system by its very nature precludes the formation of a wider scale of these phenomena. Over time, however, also in the “people’s democracy” one began to see social problems, there were even some research works devoted to these problems<sup>38</sup>.

Ideology of science has led to a situation in which many professors were forbidden to give lectures to the students, many faculties were liquidated in Poland, incl. Department of Social Pedagogy at the University of Lodz. Only after 1956, it became possible to develop social pedagogy and social work (which at the time was treated as a sub-discipline of social pedagogy). In 1957 at the Warsaw University Department of Social Pedagogy have been established, headed by R. Wroczyński, in 1962 similar unit was founded at the University of Łódź and subsequently also in other Polish universities: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan in 1970, at WSP in Bydgoszcz in 1972, at the University of Silesia in Katowice in 1974, at Nicolaus Copernicus University in 1976. In 1958 the Society of Polish Free University was established, whose tasks include the implementation of training and journalism (it was issuing the magazine *Man at Work and the Estate*<sup>39</sup>). In the sixties began to emerge the post-secondary schools that were training to the social worker job.

During this period specializations within the profession of social worker began to develop, such as a social assistant (i.e. employee helping in the rehabilitation of people with disabilities), probation officer, social worker in the workplace etc. The training for these occupations took place on the secondary and post-secondary level.

It is worth mentioning that in Poland after the World War II, there was no theory of social work as an independent field of research and related disciplines, such as pedagogy, sociology or psychology were dominated by the Marxism approach, which clarified the social problems of the class struggle and oppressive nature of social relations as specific to capitalism. It should be emphasized, however, that the reference to Marxism have been made not only in communist countries but also in Western countries. Supporters of Marxism in these countries have stressed the need for cooperation and mutual support among the most vulnerable sections of society eg. through the creation of unions, who were assigned tasks related to the objectives of social work. Great importance was attached to workers education,

38 In 1972, by the initiative of A. Podgórecki there was created the Interdisciplinary Institute of Social Prevention and Rehabilitation of Warsaw University which until 1990 was Poland's leading research center investigating the phenomenon of social pathology. Cf. also eg. Selected issues of social pathology, red. M. Jarosz, PWN, Warsaw 1975.

39 J. Mikulski, Cz. Gulda, Social services in Poland, IW CRZZ, Warsaw 1981

through which they had to understand the real, essential causes of their difficulties in life. At the same time there have been measures taken to reduce discrimination related to the class division of society.

Poland's first profession similar to the profession of a social worker, the exercise of which was associated with the need of university education, was an educational psychologist. Studies for the profession were created in 1974. In the same year there were launched four extramural studies in the field of labor and social policy at the Institute for Social Policy at the Department of Political Science and Journalism at the Warsaw University. Poland's first extramural social work studies have been running at the Jagiellonian University in 1988. (Extramural Study of Sociological Studies offered the specialty of "social work"). Earlier, in 1977 at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science at the Institute for Social Policy at Warsaw University there were launched studies that provided a higher education for social workers. In turn, in 1983 Medical Center for Continuing Education the studies of social service organizations were created<sup>40</sup>.

Social work education at tertiary level could develop in Poland on a large scale after 1990, which was associated with the changes in legislation relating to the profession. First university, which opened the faculty dedicated to social workers was UAM in Poznan (three years of study at the Bachelor level at the Department of Sociology). Soon after, similar faculties have been launched in other Polish universities.

The fact that universities have started training for social work, does not however mean that there were at that time training programs realizing particular concepts of social work. Universities seek to emulate Western patterns rather than to offer education knowledge and skills useful in Polish conditions. This involved, of course, the collapse of the existing system of social assistance and the emergence of new social problems with which neither practitioners nor theoreticians of social work in Poland so far encountered. It should be mentioned here the unemployment reaching up to over a dozen percent and a general decline in the standard of living. Subsidies were abolished for many articles and services that have been widely available, have become payable. At the same time, real wages have fallen considerably and the cost of maintaining the household increased<sup>41</sup>.

As noted by D. Trawkowska, in the early nineties there were not crystallized concepts of development of social work in Poland, or the concepts of social policy, so that "it was not clear what direction would take the model of social policy and, therefore, what will be the importance of the social work, but it became increasingly obvious that the existing social security guarantees shall cease to apply."<sup>42</sup>

40 Cf.: J. Starega-Piasek, The program assumptions and content of education at the specialization of social service organizations at the Study of Social Medicine at the Medical Centre of Postgraduate Education, in: *Education of social workers*, red. E. Leś and J. Rosner, Polskie Towarzystwo Pracowników Socjalnych, Warsaw 1989, p. 59 and next.

41 Cf.: M. Książkowski, The crisis of the socialist system of guarantees in social policy, in: *Threats and opportunities of social policy in Poland during the transformation*, red. M. Książkowski i J. Supińska, Fundacja im. F. Berta, Warsaw 1993, p. 13.

42 D. Trawkowska, *Portrait of a modern social worker...*, p. 95 and next.



In the first half of the 90s there was no coherent social policy, it is therefore difficult to assess what role in the whole system of social security attributed the governments to social welfare and social work. According to B. Szatur-Jaworska the authors of the reforms in advance assumed that social assistance is to be one of the tools to reform the state, mitigating the effect of pauperization and exclusion, which were not treated as a marginal phenomenon, but as an unavoidable cost of reforming the state. This means that the role of the social welfare system was in the first period of transformation much broader than is commonly supposed<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, there were no other tools to identify and evaluate social needs and the social welfare system, with all its frailties, performed such a function.

Social welfare system in Poland during the transformation struggled additionally with the same difficulties which had to cope whole country: the scarcity of resources, not enough staff, staff work overload, low level of professional qualifications (in 1991 almost half of social workers had no formal training for the profession), etc. According to D. Trawkowska these problems have led to a situation in which the role of social work in the social welfare system was minimal<sup>44</sup>.

Significant improvement of the situation was only in the second half of the 90s. The most important factor in initiating these positive changes was the adoption of the law on social assistance. Although this act contains some significant shortcomings, however, it allowed the system to improve the functioning of social assistance and social work raising its profile as one of the elements of this system (incl. clarified some concepts, to established requirements for the qualifications of social workers, expanded and diversified the catalog of services). The financial background of social work has been significantly improved and the importance of professionalism and specialization has increased.

This does not mean, however, that social work in Poland plays the same function now is fully comparable with that of the function it plays in countries such as the US, UK, Germany etc. Social workers are now facing with the same problems are being faced by the entire social assistance system, but the situation is slowly, but continuously improving. There are many new institutions and new types of social assistance centers (Provincial Departments of Social Affairs, District Family Assistance Centers). On the other hand, there are problems, which in previous years had not been in such a large scale, such as the increasing bureaucratization of the system, or the tendency to grant benefits of negligible value (eg. several PLN), which is a result of errors in social policy (to provide assistance targeted to a wide public is simpler than the aid directed to the narrower specific category of people, granted on the basis of more complex criteria)<sup>45</sup>.

43 Cf.: B. Szatur-Jaworska, The importance of social work in social policy, in: Threats and opportunities of social policy..., p. 130.

44 D. Trawkowska, Portrait of a modern social worker..., p. 99

45 Cf.: S. Golinowska, I. Topińska, Social assistance – change and the conditions of effective action, CASE, Warsaw 2002, p. 61.