Social workers affecting social policy in Russia[1]

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At the Joint World Conference on Social Work and Social Development in Hong Kong in 2010 a set of values was formulated that defined the mission of social work and the development of social policy. It is assumed that these key values, and in particular the principles of social justice and empowerment, are shared by social work and social policy practitioners, educators and experts. In the history of the profession there are many examples in which social workers sought, and successfully achieved, politically significant changes in the social order. However, there were also periods of a decline in activism and a decrease in the role of structural or political social work.

This chapter presents the results of a study of the participation of Russian social workers in processes of structural changes. Interviews with social workers were conducted in several Russian regions. Case studies present mechanisms of changes evoked through counter-actions and compromises, individual activity or collective action, consolidation with social movements and other agents, through the implementation of new methods and forms of casework in the system of social services, or through the lobbying of legislative changes and the practice of institutionalised forms of conflict resolution in courts. Strategies for promoting social change, agents of change and institutional barriers are discussed in the theoretical context of professionalism as a value system and ideology.

Background

In the early 1990s Russian society changed drastically. It became more open and heterogeneous. This brought wealth to some and hardship to others. It was a time of major political changes and painful social transformations, which were accompanied by a dramatic growth in levels of of poverty and unemployment, homelessness and juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues, and HIV/AIDS (Green et al, 2000; Stephenson 2000, 2006; Pridemore, 2002;

Höjdestrand, 2003; Titterton, 2006; McAuley, 2010). Under conditions of a rapid decrease in the living standard during market reforms, the number of welfare client groups increased and it became evident that existing social institutions could not cope with these new social problems. Russia inherited from the Soviet period a complex system of social security based on public institutions, without professional social work and with very limited and often irregular cash benefits to different social groups (people with disabilities, single mothers, veterans, and so on – altogether making up more than 150 categories).

The 'professional project' (Larson, 1977) of social work has developed in Russia since 1991: new occupations, among them social worker, social pedagogue and specialist in social work, were officially introduced that year. At the same time, university training programmes were opened and several professional associations were established. By 2011 there were 175 university programmes in social work, covering the entire country. Currently the universities are involved in a process of transformation towards the Bologna system, which includes two levels of university education (a four-year bachelor programme and a two year master's programme), but many of them also continue to offer traditional five-year diploma programmes of 'specialists in social work'. The system has certain problems in the labour market for the graduates of such programmes. Due to the low salaries offered to qualified social workers, young university graduates are choosing other jobs.

During the 1990s a wide network of social services was established under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (later renamed the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development), and this social services network expanded rapidly from 2000. According to the 1995 Social Service Federal Law, 'the system of social service agencies includes organisations under the control of both federal and regional authorities, in addition municipal organisations of social services. Social service can also be provided by organisations and citizens representing different sectors of the economy'. There are currently about 6,000 organisations with more than 500,000 employees providing services for older people, people with disabilities and families with children. Most of the services are public agencies designed in a similar way according to an exemplary standing order and regulated by common bureaucratic requirements.

The social welfare sector in Russia covers a variety of agencies that provide direct care and support to service users. The welfare sector of this system can broadly be split into adult services and family and child services. Adult services include residential nursing homes, day care, home help, work with people with disabilities, homeless people

and job counselling for unemployed people. The main component of the family and child services is work with families, encompassing family care centres, rehabilitation facilities for children with disabilities and for children from families at risk, part-time day care facilities and nursing homes for children with learning difficulties. Outreach work with young offenders, drug addicts and homeless people is conducted mainly by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which are active in the big cities.

Recent changes in the Russian social services include the rise of a third sector, a concern with social work professionalisation and the development of new managerialism (Romanov, 2008). The ongoing processes of social policy reforms in Russia are driven by a neo-liberal ideology and the government's efforts to make relations between the citizens and the state more efficient and effective. Due to the perceived ineffectiveness of a universalistic approach, the emphasis in solving welfare problem shifted to means testing. This has led to the cancellation of benefits in kind (for example, free access to public transportation, some medicines, vouchers to resorts for certain categories of clients) and to compensating them via monetary means.

These changes have reinforced bureaucratic forms of stabilisation. There is an ongoing debate about whether or not Russia is now a welfare state (a 'social state', as was stated in the post-Soviet basic law, the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation) or if it is typified primarily by laissez-faire arrangements. Marginalised individuals, families, groups or communities have not gained additional resources as a result of the new managerialism. Although means-tested assistance was supposed to increase the effectiveness of the social welfare system, it has had negative effects on the most vulnerable populations, especially single mothers who are the heads of low-income households. Having engaged in interactions with the social service system in the late 1990s and early 2000s, these single mothers were often frustrated by the inadequacy of assistance and the impossibility of improving their situations. Neither clients nor social workers were automatically empowered in a new way; heavy workloads which limited the initiative of social workers were not reduced.

According to Larson (1997, p 38), a successful professional project would have resulted in a 'monopoly of competence legitimised by officially sanctioned "expertise", and a monopoly of credibility with the public'. The processes of acquiring a monopoly for its service and status and upward mobility (collective as well as individual) in the social order (Evetts, 2003, pp 401–2) has been a difficult project for social work as an occupation in Russia. Since the beginning of the 1990s,

its practice field developed separately from the field of professional training, while the situation in human resources of the social work services sector was characterised by low wages, labour shortage, a high turnover in personnel and insufficient opportunities for retraining. Flexible working hours provided much opportunity for women to undertake care work both in the family and in public services. Added to this, these positions were open while other job chances were scarce – "There are not very many options to find jobs, no choices" (interview with a social worker, 1996) – and were at constant risk of being closed down. This symbolic contract between women and the state was legitimised by the 'National plan of activities concerning the improvement of women's position in Russia and increasing their role in society up to 2000' which promoted a 'creation of additional working places for women by widening the network of social services' (National Plan, 1996). Our previous research (Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov, 2008) shows that, by adopting inadequate wage policies for social workers, the state has reinforced the societal assumption of cheap female labour as well as the lack of professionalisation of social work.

Since 2000 a reform has gradually taken place by which public social services are being converted into semi-autonomous organisations. The idea is to make social services capable of operating in a quasi-market, as they will be required to operate without guaranteed financing and to compete for budgeting with other providers. This reform was launched as an experiment in several regions in the early 2000s and the possibility of choosing the legal frame was opened up to all social service organisations by a federal law in 2010. It has made it possible for various types of organisations, including NGOs, to participate in social services market competition. It is assumed that management will become more flexible, possibilities for commercial activity will grow and the wages and motivation of workers will increase as well as offering opportunities for professional development.

Professional ideologies in social work

According to Julia Evetts (2003), professionalism can be seen as a value system or as an ideology. Social work ideology is an important concept in critical reflection of professionalisation (Souflee, 1993; Mullaly, 1997; Chiu and Wong, 1998; Evetts, 2003; Fook, 2003; Woodcock and Dixon, 2005). This includes the professional values and beliefs motivating people to act in order to realise these values, but it also goes beyond the framework of the profession, being incorporated into relations and discourses about social problems and ways to tackle them (Souflee,

1993). Professional ideologies in Russian social work are shaped and modified by various sources and reflect the post-Soviet legitimacy of care and control (Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2011). Throughout its short history in Russia, social work has undergone a constant process of change; the actual characteristics of social work education and training are (re)defined by the definition of professionalism, by highly ambivalent relations with contemporary Russian public policy, by the background of teachers and departments, by a philosophy and ideology of human rights and by international investments and exchange.

Placing social work ideology in a complex picture of theories, policies, philosophies and myths, it is possible to consider the various agents contributing to the constitution of shared knowledge and value base of the profession. In a changing societal context, this profession may lose its political basis and become less critical (see, for instance, Chiu and Wong, 1998). Ideology in socialist states combined elements of conservative and social democratic value systems, and while the early Soviet political rhetoric appealed to the values of self-government and equality, a shift was then made towards paternalism and totalitarianism. It was reflected in changes in the understanding of social problems, their causes and ways of tackling them, reforming social support and service provision. In today's Russia the principles of neo-managerialism in social work are infused by the ideologies of a neo-liberal welfare state. The intervention of market ideology (or 'businessology') in the 'caring' domain of social services (Harris, 2003) does not solve old difficulties, but rather adds new, dilemmas, problems and contradictions. Dividing the poor into deserving and undeserving turned out to be a very useful means of rationalising the allocation of resources scientifically. By saving resources, ideologies of governmentality create a gap between clients and social workers.

What is the character of changes that might be induced by social workers and to which ideology do they correspond in today's Russia? These ideologies can operate on macro (society, state and market), meso (organisations and institutions) and micro (groups and actors) levels (Evetts, 2003, p 399). Correspondingly, the changes can be considered on macro (changes of policy and legislation, structure of service provision and nature of social work), meso (within an organisation – for example, new kinds of services, departments, directions of work in a concrete service – that is, some institutional transformations, concerning a rather broad circle of workers, administrators and clients) and micro (workplace, such as proposals to change the content or form of existing service provision) levels.

Practitioners themselves, on a micro level, contribute to the construction of the set of notions and values for an ideal client and the ideal technology for intervention, treatment and quality of work, as well as fulfilling the need for certain knowledge and skills. However, individual workers tend to share the way their institutions think.

On a meso level, an organisation is an environment for shaping social work legitimacy (Anleu, 1992). Social workers 'utilize the normative discourse in their relations with clients, their occupational identities and their work practices' (Evetts, 2003, p 399). Newcomers to an organisation are socialised and integrated. As Peter Blau (1960) showed in his research on welfare services in Chicago in the late 1950s, new caseworkers were typically full of sympathy for clients' problems but soon began to experience a 'reality shock' which made them change their orientation. They managed to cope with this disillusioning experience through consolidating with the collective, by telling jokes and stories about their clients. According to Mary Douglas (1986, p 92), 'Institutions systematically direct individual memory and channel our perceptions into forms compatible with the relations they authorize'. There are also examples where the individuals have the hope and eagerness for intellectual independence.

We can consider these discourses as everyday social work ideologies that exist in a form of 'tacit knowledge' (Zeira and Rosen, 2000). This knowledge is interconnected with dominant thinking on gender and social order. Thus the problems of a client might be, for example, an outcome of beliefs in traditional gender roles and traditional family definitions, which presuppose inequality and the subordination of women. This can be explained by the low level of abstraction in social work, which in Russia remains under-professionalised and focuses not on social structures but on cases and facts, with an emphasis on having knowledge of the legal rules and the qualities of a 'big motherly heart'. As such, the problems tend to be privatised, and structural inequalities are not taken into account. By contrast, some NGOs, such as crisis centres for women, which are run with the support of international donors, have developed a strong emancipatory view based on feminist ideology. Currently, a new understanding has formed that the various forms of violence against women are a problem worthy of state response (Johnson, 2009). Even so, an egalitarian and non-discriminatory ideology is lacking in public social services. Service users form their attitudes towards social work as they interact with social services and practitioners, while the general population builds an image of social work from the mass media. Some service users' associations, grassroots

movements and NGOs use emancipatory ideology as a basis for their struggle to fulfil human rights and principles of independent living.

On a macro level, textbooks can legitimise certain value bases of a profession. Many Russian social work and social policy textbooks published since the early 1990s have been written from the ideological perspective of social pathology and represent a large incongruence between the dominant global social work discourse and the Russian understanding of social work theories and practice (see an analysis of 42 social work and social policy textbooks published between 1996 and 2006 in Iarskaia–Smirnova and Romanov, 2008). For example, mothers are generally presented from the point of view of a patriarchal state ideology while single mothers, in particular, are depicted as immoral, unfortunate and dangerous not only for their own children but also for society as a whole.

The first Russian Code of Ethics of social work was adopted in 1994 by the Association of the Social Services Employees. In 2003 it was revised ('Code of Ethics for the Social Worker and Social Pedagogue', 2003). The code is based on the *Code of the International Federation of Social Workers* (The Ethics of Social Work, Principles and Standards, International Federation of Social Workers, 1994) and defines social work as a 'complex of activities aimed at the satisfaction of social needs of a person'. It relates to policy involvement by emphasising social justice and humanism as professional values. It states that, 'according to their opportunities and the level of professional activity', social workers and social pedagogues influence the formation of the social policy that promotes the satisfaction of social needs of people and that they 'conduct active work improving the activity of social institutes, political structures, certain political leaders and local heads with the purpose of elimination of infringements of civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights'.

Since the mid–1990s a growing number of social service organisations have elaborated and adopted different versions of Codes of Ethics. Some of these codes have been based on the translation of internationally accepted documents. The emphasis on human rights and social policy is not present in all versions of locally adopted codes. A thorough comparison of the different versions and the application of these regulations in practice has not yet been made, but there is some evidence to suggest that the Code of Ethics is used at least for the purposes of administration: "well, usually I refer to employees' instructions but sometimes I can also mention the ethical code if I'd like to appeal to morals" (interview with an administrator of a social service organisation, 2011).

University training programmes in social work do include courses on ethics as well as on social policy and research methods. While students are obtaining skills that facilitate critical reflection on policy issues and a consideration of the ethical dilemmas of the social work profession, because of the gap between university training and the professional field, ethical issues continue to be mostly theoretical and distinct from practice. However, some social service organisations have developed a reflexive holistic approach in working with clients and have become exemplary resource centres for others in terms of developed competences and a humanist philosophy of social work. They also conduct supervision and training courses for colleagues from other agencies.

On a macro level, the state contributed to the formation of the value base of the new profession by introducing special mechanisms to accumulate social prestige. In 1995 an award for the 'distinguished worker of social security of the population of the Russian Federation' was introduced by presidential decree, and in 2000 Social Worker's Day was established by the order of President Putin. The choice of this day, 8 June, can be traced back to reforms introduced by Peter the Great: on that day in 1701 the Russian emperor signed a decree assigning poor, sick and older people to poorhouses. Each summer since 2001, the regional departments of social security (or ministries of social development) have arranged concerts and costumed amateur performances at local theatres. This was an important building blocks in the process of making social work into a profession with its own proud history.

Case studies[2]

The ongoing research project began in 2010 after a call was sent to schools of social work for descriptions of cases showing the involvement of social workers in the formulation of new rules and principles of work – in an organisation, a local community, a region or on the national level – that positively affect the wellbeing of a population group. The goal of the study was to determine what structural changes in Russian social policy could be implemented from below, through the initiatives of social workers, and how these initiatives were structured by local conditions. Since then we have collected a dozen case studies primarily describing changes in the wellbeing of individuals and families as a result of individual efforts and their corresponding effects. Several cases reflect structural changes and a few others focus on formal institutional mechanisms designed to promote change. The data relate to change

in eight regions of Russia: Kazan, Krasnodar, Moscow, Petrozavodsk, Saratov, St Petersburg, Tomsk and Volgograd. The collected cases depict more or less successful initiatives with diverse effects that were generated by the actions of the parents of children with disabilities with the support of social workers, and of public officials, of charities, of university teachers or researchers and other actors. In some cases the changes were peaceful while in other they were a consequence of conflicts that catalysed or hindered changes. The sustainability of changes induced has, at times, been problematic after the financing ended.

The main agents of change in the cases collected were social workers (formally termed 'specialists in social work') employed by public services and NGOs, public officials from departments of social security and education, researchers and university teachers, parents of children with disabilities and other citizens who can be the catalysts of change. The majority of cases relate to state employees. Some of the NGO employees identify themselves as social workers, while others distant themselves from this occupational group due to their regular institutional conflicts with social services: "Social workers only interfere when we try to promote changes" (interview with a specialist in a non-governmental service for children with complex disabilities).

The strategies adopted in the cases sought legal, institutional and societal changes, and can be grouped into four categories: the introduction of new technologies for casework, the consolidation of agents and alliance of resources, the mobilisation of collective action and institutionalised conflict:

- New technologies in social services constitute a new focus in social service policy. Examples of new technologies include methods that are often adopted through international cooperation: a network of social contacts, the mobilisation of resources of the social environment of a family; intensive family therapy at home; the active support of parents, and so on (in Volgograd, St Petersburg, Saratov). Usually, these changes are rooted in systemic models of social work, they often affect organisational modification in social services, and they are induced by changes in ideology.
- Consolidation of agents and alliance of resources are the most accessible forms of achieving changes. Sometimes social workers discover gaps in their own authority or in systemic arrangements which hinder their ability to help a client or to solve a problem. They appeal to an ombudsman or engage in advocacy, gain the attention of the mass media, public officials and members of local parliaments

and succeed in integrating several fragments of the social services system, for instance through making a special contract between the centre of social services and medical–social expertise in order to improve mechanisms of individual rehabilitation programmes. Sustainability is secured through updating work regulations and regular collaboration between different specialists and agencies. Interagency collaboration is a very important and an often successful part of social service policy in Russia. Sometimes such innovations lead to significant changes in the legal base and infrastructure of social services, as is the case in Perm, Tomsk and other regions. In some cases, an individual service user can be a catalyst of change. Thus, for example, a mother of a child with severe disability in Saratov motivated social workers at a rehabilitation centre to establish a club for children with special needs. The social workers have attracted charity and political resources and, as a result, several clubs for children and young people with disabilities were established in the city. Not all of these initiatives were successful. Many projects failed to materialise or ceased to exist due to a lack of resources or because of destructive conflicts.

- Mobilization of collective action is a strategy employed by civic groups, charities and NGOs. Parents of children with disabilities often become an engine of such change when they collaborate with active NGOs, social workers or teachers from public services and officials.

- Institutional forms of conflict are the strategy employed by NGOs when collecting information about the violation of legislation and human rights, making official claims and initiating negative sanctions against the violators. For instance, in Moscow in 2006 an NGO (the Centre for Curative Pedagogics) initiated court proceedings concerning the refusal of the social security department to enable parents of children with disabilities to identify and use proper services for children. Perspektiva, another NGO, succeeded in a court case in 2008 concerning the refusal of the airline Siberia to let a person in a wheelchair on board.

In this chapter we will focus on two cases which, in our opinion, are characteristic of social work in today's Russia and illustrative of the strategies of change realised on different levels.

A new service for homeless people in Tomsk:[3] change at the institutional level

This project began in 1997 when a social work student, Gloria Vinogradova, became the leader of a small team advocating homeless people's rights. The members of the team had been selling donations of unsold cloth in second-hand shops, promoting these charity activities in the press, writing appeals to various institutions to help homeless people get to a hospital or to a residential home. However, their major goal was to establish a shelter for homeless people in the city. This plan was difficult to realise as the municipal authorities refused to help, justifying this by referring to legislation which placed work with homeless people under the jurisdiction of the oblast (regional) authorities. These authorities said there were no homeless people in the region and thus there was no problem. Actually, in the oblast there are several residential homes for people who have no place to stay, but these are in remote regional towns while the majority of the homeless people are in the city.

This was a vicious circle that Gloria sought to break. As a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, she had met a missionary from the US who advised her to write a grant application to the Church, which she did successfully. After receiving initial funds to establish the refuge, she applied to the oblast and municipal departments of social security asking for premises for the new service. Even with grant money ready to be spent, it was still not an easy task. In her interview, the social worker describes her efforts to open the public centre as a fight with the system: "these are some games of the officials … they kept silent for a long time … maybe I was so persistent, I kept coming and asking them … but [we] have annoyed them … so that finally everything worked out" (interview with Gloria Vinogradova). The project could not be achieved without the support of the head of the city social security department, who helped to promote the initiative so that it could receive municipal support and funding to pay salaries for an administrator and an accountant, for utilities, and so on. Within two years, the premises were repaired, furnished and equipped, all necessary fiscal and legal negotiations had been achieved and finally, in 1999, the municipal institution, an overnight home called the 'Refuge of a Wanderer', was opened.

In addition to her work as a leader of a NGO, Gloria has become a middle-level manager of this municipal social service for homeless people. Here her efforts have focused on widening the functions of this agency, so that it would remain not only an overnight shelter but

also become a service to help people with official documents, offer legal counselling and so on. In 2001 Gloria received another grant, this time from the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which made it possible to employ social workers and a legal consultant, to establish a database, to provide services (including a job search for clients) and undertake a sociological survey.

In a few years the refuge was successfully changed into a centre for social assistance for homeless people. The facility and the range of services were extended significantly and now include a department for acute social assistance (help with issuing passports and medical insurance), a temporary living ward for 100 people, an overnight ward and a ward for people after treatment for tuberculosis, as well as other services. The employees of the centre promote social inclusion: "homelessness is in fact a person's deprivation of society, it is marginality. And our task is … to 'inscribe' a person into this society, to create social relations" (interview with Gloria Vinogradova). Gloria wanted to become the director of this service but her application was declined as she was seen by officials as 'too young'. As a result she worked first as a social worker and then as an administrator of one of the departments. Later, as an outreach worker, she also collaborated with other refuges and residential homes so that her clients could register for social security benefits, disability benefits, pensions and get a place in one of the residential facilities. As the new director was eager to develop the centre further, Gloria was satisfied: "The director has the wish and power to promote new functions, to find new perspectives, which pleases me. Thus, I think that my task is complete" (Gloria Vinogradova's own case description). However, the collaboration between the municipal organisation and the NGO was not successful: "the voluntary organisation, in fact, has quietly died, so to say, giving the place to the municipal service" (interview with Gloria Vinogradova). Later, Gloria left the centre to go to the US to study at an evangelic university. On graduation she returned to Novosibirsk, where she now works at a crisis centre for women.

As we can see, a social worker could not only establish a small NGO and raise international funds but also mobilise municipal structures of the public social security system and, as a result, create a new, large and successful social service organisation and ensure its sustainable development. This initiative was not easy to implement within the framework of the public social services where the institutions and positions are created from above and on the basis of strictly determined frames of activity. 'Bottom-up' initiatives are viewed with suspicion and thus require special qualities in agents of change. As Gloria puts it:

'Now, in general, at all levels of authority, one might say there is a similar situation. What would happen if an official doesn't budge? At the most [they] would wag a finger at [him], but would not even fire, because they all stick together. Well, he does not risk anything. And why stir if you don't need to?'

It was not only the individual energy of a social worker and that of additional participants in the process but also the existence of accessible resources (which can serve as an alternative to the statutory budget) that were important conditions for success. Crucially, these resources included the Church with its transnational networks, charities and foundations, networks with institutional partners and volunteer support, social work theoretical knowledge and the skills of independent thinking and fundraising acquired from university.

Inclusive education in Petrozavodsk: macro-level changes

In Russia today children with disabilities are entitled to receive education services in regular schools or in special institutions. Psychological–medical–pedagogical commissions have the authority to identify the type of educational setting deemed appropriate for a child with disabilities. The system of education in Russia has undergone deep changes and the schools have experienced transformations influenced by government reforms and the market economy. However various barriers still persist in efforts to introduce inclusive education (Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov, 2007).

Social workers in Russia are seldom involved in human rights movements or the promotion of new legislation. However, collaboration between the employees of social services and social movements and other public agencies can lead to structural changes that are aimed at improving the well-being of large groups of people. Such an exceptional example is that of Svetlana Driakhlitsyna from the city of Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia, situated in the northwest of Russia near the Finnish border. Svetlana had been working as a social worker in a public agency and at the same time was a leader of the Karelia association of NGOs for people with disabilities. In 2004 she supported a court appeal by a group of parents who sought pre-school places for their children with disabilities. Prior to this appeal, the parents had made several unsuccessful attempts to find facilities for their children in kindergartens by approaching the city administration. The city court rejected the appeal and accepted

the city department of education's explanation that it lacked the funds to provide accessible facilities.

After the Supreme Court of the Republic of Karelia failed to reverse the decision, the parents arranged for a press conference in a special library for visually impaired people. They came to the press conference together with their children, members of associations for people with disabilities and several active social workers, including Svetlana. The news about the violation of the children's rights was broadcast on all local television channels and published in local newspapers. Shortly after that, the case was again discussed by the Supreme Court and the original decision was reversed in 2006. Funding for the appeal was made available through the Tacis European project. However, by the time the appeal was accepted, the children were already seven years old and it was too late for them to go to a pre-school (although they were admitted to a special school for children with severe disabilities).

The court decision did not identify which authority – municipal or republic, education or social security – had responsibility for implementing the decision and funding this type of service for disabled children in the future. Thus, a similar case occurred in June 2006, when another two parents of children with disabilities attempted to enrol their children in pre-school services. The parents were better prepared this time and again NGOs and social workers from several agencies supported the petition in court. The subjects of the petitioned parties – the city administration, the ministry of finance, the Karelia Ministry of Education – all insisted they had a lack of jurisdiction. However, within a short time, in December 2006, the court decided to require the city administration to establish special facilities in regular pre-school settings in collaboration with the republic's government and Ministry of Education.

Further collaboration between the parents' movement, NGOs and social workers has led to additional structural changes. On 31 January 2008, new legislation was passed (Law of the Republic of Karelia, N 1168) regarding 'introducing changes in some legal acts of the Republic of Karelia concerning the provision of social support and social services for children with complex disabilities who cannot serve themselves' (Political Life of the Northwest, 2008). According to this law, children with disabilities who are enrolled in kindergartens or schools are entitled to have a salaried personal assistant and to receive 1,880 roubles (US$77) as a monthly payment for transport. In addition, educational institutions that offer inclusive services are to be provided with an additional budget to develop an accessible environment. The implementation of this new law has given rise to several new issues,

including the low salary of personal assistants and uncertainty regarding their tasks, the slow reconstruction of facilities, and so on. Nevertheless, it is clear that the alliance between social workers and the public can promote important changes at the political level.

Participation in this activity has led to a change in Svetlana's job situation. Having experienced pressure from the administration, she left public social service. She is still working as chair of the association of NGOs of people with disabilities in Karelia, and in 2011 she contributed to the promotion of new universal legislation, 'On providing access for people with disabilities and other citizens with low mobility to public buildings and transport', which is now under consideration in the government (Tsygankov, 2011).

Institutional conditions limit the initiative and field of possibilities for the employees of social services. According to Svetlana:

> 'Mostly, possibilities to achieve certain changes are possessed by the managers of social services or their deputies. The specialist in social work has no tools for her own action. From the very beginning, they had to perform functional duties, and … their own initiative is not motivated, rather, it belongs to those who make the decisions.' (interview with Svetlana Driakhlitsyna)

In this case, there were several factors that contributed to the success of the social worker's endeavour. Being involved in international exchange programmes and further qualification programmes, Svetlana and some other social workers recognised and internalised the professional values of social work. As a social worker in a managerial position she increased her autonomy and ability to promote and maintain changes justified by the system. Svetlana was inclined to professional reflection and civic activism – she has long experience of combining work in a public service with civic activity. In 2009 she defended a thesis in the sociology of disability at St Petersburg State University. The geographical proximity of Karelia to Northern Europe also increases opportunities for international collaboration, for finding various resources and support.

Conclusion

The most characteristic feature of the Russian public sector in general, and of the social services sector in particular, is the persistence of the monopoly position of organisations providing public services and the

limited possibilities for creating a competitive environment. During the last few years some experiments have taken place in this area, primarily in those fields supported by international foundations and expert groups. These innovations were directed towards increasing the effectiveness of social services as well as their management, with a great emphasis on measurable outcomes. Although the potential exists for all types of social services to participate in the process of budgeting in the framework of the so-called quasi-market processes, this process in Russia is limited by a lack of standardisation of services, a weak knowledge base concerning the methods of working with clients and standard regulation in this field, a shortage of skills in evaluating quality and effectiveness by many public organisations and NGOs, as well as a lack of knowledge of how to be competitive to promote good services, organisations and methods of work.

NGOs offering social services to the population have succeeded quite well in accumulating their human resources. Due to their flexible organisational structure, strong motivation and the high level of qualifications of their management and employees, many NGOs working with orphans, people with disabilities, survivors of domestic violence and other vulnerable groups of the population have developed professional skills, are involved in international cooperation and in many cases collaborate with local government, social services and universities. Having grown out of the service users' associations and grassroots movements, these NGOs employ an emancipatory and egalitarian ideology in their struggle to establish human rights and principles of independent living. NGOs located in large cities and funded by international and national foundations can provide an attractive labour market for qualified social work graduates as they offer better wages, encourage and support employees to improve professionally, and operate on the basis of project management (as opposed to the traditional bureaucracy that operates on the basis of centralised budget schemes), which is often associated with a flexible and lively organisational culture. However, the number of such organisations is rather limited and unstable due to the specific economic and political situation in Russia whereby large-scale involvement of foreign donors is not encouraged while national funds to support non-governmental activities are scarce. In addition, some major international donors and NGOs, which were previously very active in Russia, are decreasing their presence there.

Social workers are gradually acquiring new knowledge and skills to effect social change in a democratic egalitarian mode rather than following a paternalist scheme of thought and action. This is still the exception rather than usual practice. As we can see, capacity to promot

social initiatives vary at different levels of the organisational hierarchy, while the professional autonomy of specialists is very limited. Several cases in our research exemplify such exceptions when the initiatives of social workers have led to structural changes.

The contemporary situation in Russian social work is featured by under-professionalisation and therefore a low degree of professional autonomy, as well as a lack of activism frameworks in the social services culture, an absence of critical reflection on social work practice, and the rigidity of governance. This is a background that tends to stifle initiatives to change the existing social order. However, recent evidence that local initiatives can bring about a transformation of the social work and social policy system has emerged. Social workers initiate positive changes through counter-actions and compromises, individual activity or collective action, consolidation with social movements and other agents, through implementing fundamentally new methods of casework into the system of social services or through the practice of institutionalised forms of conflict resolution.

It is important for government, foundations and the academic community in Russia to focus more on critical issues in social welfare and on the importance of developing conflict resolution skills, and to support the development of social services research. Democratic, egalitarian and non-discriminatory ideology is required in social services as well as in social work training. It is worth paying more attention to retraining programmes and to raising the level of skills of specialists who already work for social service agencies. University education in social work can have an impact on the enhancement of the professional identity of social work in the frames of critical social thinking with a focus on social justice and human rights. The impact of international cooperation on enhancing the professional identity of social work is a useful contribution to the development of structural social work.

Notes

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