

## SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN SPAIN

Elena Roldán, July 2009

### **Implementation of social work education and discipline**

The first school of social work was established in 1932, during the II Republic (Estrada, M. 1976). It was a subsidiary of the Belgium Catholic Social Work School. This school suffered the vicissitudes of the instability of the II Republic and the Spanish Civil War. In 1939, after the Civil War, activities resumed at the School of Barcelona, depending first of Catholic Action and, after the bishopric.

The schools created after the Civil War was under the Catholic Church momentum, which gave a religious character to them. Therefore religion had influence on the subsequent history of Spanish social work. Confesionalism also affect the schools established by the “Women's section” (Sección Femenina) where teaching was impregnated with the ideas of National Catholicism (Bañez, T. 2004). From 1932 to 1960 we could call the initiation of Social Work in Spain. Both degrees, the development of professional practice, took place in the private secular and religious field.

During the sixties it was an important expansion of social work schools which occurred was influenced by the official recognition of the studies in 1964, establishing the first official curriculum (Hernando, 1991).

The seventies was truly a milestone in Spanish social work but it occurred during an identity crisis in the profession that was resolved thanks in large part to the massive access of professionals to work. But the period was also noted marked by claim actions from teachers and professional fields that led finally to the integration of social work studies at the University.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 brought again the democracy and with it very important changes in the social policy, inspired from then in the European social model of welfare state. In this context the public social services was created in conjunction with the education and health systems

In fact in 1983 social work education arrived at the universities with significant improvements of the curricula. Other meaning factor was the official recognition of Professional Association of Social Workers in 1982. The decade 1980-1990 is the confirmation of the professional social workers, as there is a strong demand for professionals in the labour market, mainly due to the incorporation of social

workers in social service system.

During the nineties the consolidation of the studies at the University has been reaffirmed with the establishment of a specific area of knowledge at the university: "social work and social services area." But its implementation has not been without difficulties, rather to get more recognition of the subjects of social work and to incorporate social workers as professor, the area has been nurtured by professors from various disciplines that has not allowed strengthen enough the discipline of social work. (Brezmes, 2008).

### **The Bologna process**

In accordance with the principles of the Bologna Declaration and the creation of the European Higher Education Area, Spain has introduced a national reform of higher education in 2007. These changes involved the studies of Social Work. From now there are three cycles: Bachelor Degree, Master Degree and PhD programs. Also the reform involved a change in teaching methodologies that link theory and practice as the central focus of university education.

In order to incorporate this perspective as a whole the Board of Directors of Departments and Schools of Social Work, representing all universities that offer degrees in Social Work, has been working in recent years in close relationship with the Professional Association of Social Work in the preparation of the adaptation to new demands. The configuration of joint commissions composed of representatives from academia and professional has been very productive generating various studies, research and discussion seminar on new models and design proposals that were shaping the educational future of Social Work

This has resulted in the final paper: *Criteria for designing curriculum for bachelor degree in social work* now published and which aims at establishing a framework that serves as a guide to universities and guidance for the development of new curricula. This document meets the global standards that were approved in 2004 by the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers. The curricula have 240 European credits (ECTS), 60 credits per year, which contain all the theoretical and practical training that students should acquire. The external practices are limited to a maximum of 60 credits and should be provided preferably in the second half of the curriculum. These studies are already starting in some universities in 2008-2009, but mostly will be implemented in 2009-2010.

At present social work professionals are trained in 33 universities in different regions of the country and the total number of students are around 5.500-6000. The new bachelor degree, with 240 ECTS in four years will be implemented in the 2009-2010 in almost every Spanish university.

Master university studies in social work are dedicated to advanced specialized or multidisciplinary training. They can be an academic or professional Master or to promote the initiation of research tasks. The structure of the Masters in Social Work is 120 credits over 60 credits per year. Master studies in social work us a very new issue therefore only a few universities are offering this degree (around 10 master courses). During the past school year 2008-2009 PhD programs in social work has been implemented in two universities (Complutense, Madrid y UNPa, Navarra) which is an important achieve. At the moment to be part of the university staff is necessary to be PhD and it was important to have our doctorate programme instead PhD in others disciplines like sociology, psychology, political sciences, etc. that happen before.

### **Social work as a profession**

As it was point out the official recognition of Professional Association of Socials Workers in 1982 has been a milestone in the social impact of the profession. A sample of the institutionalisation of social work as profession was the approval of the professional code of ethics in 1999.

The growth in demand for professionals has been very important as a result of the implementation of social policies in Spain. However this increase has resulted in a gradual bureaucratisation of social intervention and a loss of performance objectives in the field of social justice (Ituarle, 1999; Barbero, 2002). Moreover in recent years appear to increase criticism of the social worker's image as a mere mediator between needs and resources.

The number of Professional Association of social workers in Spain is 36 with different representative levels: local and regional. Of a total of approximately 47,000 professionals throughout the Spanish State by the end of 2008 roughly 60% (28,374) form part of any of the associations, although the membership is compulsory for professional practice. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges in pursuing the present structure is to enable the professional exercise of compulsory membership, by offering competitive and quality services that make the professional feel identified with his professional organization. Furthermore, it is need to improve continuous training and professional development according with social changes.