Social Workers Affecting Social Policy in Russia[1]

Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov

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.

Russian social work is characterized by under-professionalization and a low degree of professional autonomy, as well as a lack of activism in the social services culture, an absence of critical reflection on social work practice, and rigidity of governance. Not surprisingly, initiatives to change the existing social order are virtually absent in this setting. However, there is some evidence of local initiatives that promote the transformation of social work and social policy systems. 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 case work into the system of social services, or through the lobbying of legislation changes and the practice of institutionalized 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 hardships to others. It was a time of major political changes and painful social transformations, which were accompanied by a dramatic growth of poverty and unemployment, homelessness and juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues, and HIV/AIDS (Green *et al*, 2000; Stephenson 2000; Pridemore, 2002;Höjdestrand, 2003; Stephenson, 2006; Titterton, 2006; McAuley, 2010). Under conditions of a rapid decrease in the living standard during market reforms, the number of welfare client groups increased. It was evident that previous 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, etc., comprising altogether more than 150 categories of population).

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 in that year. At the same time, university training programs were opened and several professional associations were established. By 2011 the number of university programs of social work was 175 and they cover the entire country. Currenlty the universities are involved in a process of transformation towards the Bologna system including two levels of university education (a four year bachelor program and a two year master program) but many of them also still continue to offer traditional 5-year diploma programs of "specialists in social work". The system has certain problems in labor market for the graduates

of such programs. Due to the low salaries offered qualified social workers, young university graduates are choosing other jobs for themselves.

During the 1990s a wide network of social services was established under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (recently renamed – the Ministry of Health Care and Social Development). This social services network has expanded rapidly during the last decade or so. According to the Social Service Federal Law (1995), "the system of social service agencies includes organizations under the control of both Federal and regional authorities, in addition to municipal systems which involve municipal organizations of social services. Social service can also be provided by organizations and citizens representing different sectors of the economy". There are currently about six thousand organizations with more than 500 thousand employees who provide services for the elderly, 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.

During the last ten years, a reform has gradually taken place by which public social services are being converted into semi-autonomous organizations. 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. It is assumed that management will become more flexible, possibilities for commercial activity will grow, and the wages and motivation of workers will increase.

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 children services. Adult services include residential nursing homes, day care, home help, work with people with disabilities, homeless people, job counseling for the

unemployed. The main component of the family and child services is work with families, which encompasses family care centers, 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 youth delinquents, drug addicts and homeless people is conducted mainly by 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 professionalization, and the development of new managerialism (Romanov, 2008). The on-going processes of social policy reforms in Russia are driven by a neoliberal 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. That has led to the cancellation of benefits in kind (e.g. 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 stabilization. There is an ongoing debate whether or not Russia is now a welfare state (a "Social State" as was stated in the post-Soviet basic law, the Constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993), or rather if it is typified primarily by *laizzes-faire* arrangements. Marginalized individuals, families, groups or communities have not gained additional resource as a result of neo-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 population, 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 to improve their life 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, 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' (Larson, 1977: 38). 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: 401-402), has been a difficult project for social work as an occupation in Russia. Since the beginning of the 1990s, its practice field developed apart from the field of professional training, while the situation in human resources of the social work services sector was characterized by low wages, labor shortage, the high fluctuation of 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 women's labor as well as the lack of professionalization of social work.

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

[2] The authors thank Natalia Sorokina for help in coordinating this project.

and principles of work in an organization, a local community, a region or on the national level, which positively affect the well-being of a population group. The goal of the study was to determine "What structural changes in Russian social policy it is possible to implement bottom-up, from below, through the initiatives of social workers, and how these initiatives are structured by the local conditions?" Ever since we have collected a dozen case studies describing primarily changes in the well-being of individuals and families as a result of individual efforts and their corresponding effects. Several cases depict structural changes and a few others focus on formal institutional mechanisms designed to promote change. The data relates to change in eight regions of Russia: Kazan, Krasnodar, Moscow, Petrozavodsk, Saratov, Saint-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 catalyzed 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 non-governmental organizations, 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*" (a specialist in a non-governmental service for children with complex disability).

The strategies adopted in the cases sought legal, institutional and societal changes, and can be grouped in the following way: mobilization of collective action, consolidation of agents and alliance of resources, introduction of new technologies of case work, and institutionalized 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 co-operation: "a net of social contacts, mobilization of resources of social environment of a family"; "intensive family therapy at home"; "active support of parents", etc. (Volgograd, St. Petersburg, Saratov). Usually, these changes are rooted in eco-systemic models of social work, they often affect organizational 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 realization of changes. Sometimes, social workers discover gaps in their own authority or in systemic arrangements, which hinder their capabilities 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 social services system, for instance through making a special contract between the center of social services and medical-social expertise in order to improve mechanisms of individual rehabilitation program. Sustainability is secured through an update of work regulations and regular collaboration between different specialists and agencies. Inter-agency 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 has been 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 center to establish a club for kids 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 realize or ceased to exist due to a lack of resources or due to destructive conflicts.

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

Institutional forms of conflict are the strategy employed by non-governmental organizations when collecting information about the violation of legislation and of human rights, making official claims, and initiating negative sanctions against the violators. For instance, in Moscow in 2006 an NGO (the Center for Curative Pedagogics) initiated court procedures concerning the refusal of the social security department to enable parents of children with disabilities to identify and use proper services for children. *Perspectiva*, 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 a number of cases which, in our opinion, are characteristic of social work in today's Russia and illustrative of the strategies of change realized on different levels.

Professional Ideologies in Social Work

According to Julia Evetts (2003), professionalism can be seen as a value system or as ideology. Social work ideology is an important concept in critical reflection of the professionalization

(Souflee, 1993; Mullaly, 1997; Chiu and Wong, 1998; Evetts, 2003; Fook, 2003; Woodcock and Dixon, 2005). This includes professional values and beliefs motivating people to act in order to realize these values, but it also goes beyond the framework of profession, being incorporated into relations and discourses around social problems and ways to tackle them (Souflee, 1993). Professional ideologies in Russian social work are shaped and modified by various sources and reflect 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 the international investments and exchange.

Placing social work ideology in a complex picture of theories, policies, philosophies and myths, it is possible to consider 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 of 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, but rather adds new, dilemmas, problems and contradictions. Dividing the poor into deserving and undeserving turned out to be very useful to scientifically rationalise the

allocation of resources. 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 which ideology do they correspond to in today's Russia? These ideologies can operate on macro (societal, state and market), meso (organizations and institutions), and micro (groups and actors) levels (Evetts, 2003: 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 organization, e.g. new kinds of services, departments, directions of work in a concrete service, i.e. some institutional transformations, concerning rather broad circle of workers, administrators and clients), and micro (working place, e.g. proposals to change content of forms of existing service provision) levels.

The practitioner herself, on a micro-level, contributes to the construction of the set of notions and values about an ideal client and about the ideal technology for intervention and treatment, quality of work, as well as the need for certain knowledge and skills. However, individual workers tend to share the way their institutions think.

On a meso level, an organization 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: 399). Newcomers to an organization are socialized and integrated. As Peter Blau (1960) showed in his research on welfare services in Chicago of the late 1950s, new case workers were typically full of sympathy for clients' problems but soon began to experience a "reality shock", which made change their orientation. They managed to cope with this disillusioning experience through consolidating with the collective, by telling the jokes and stories about their clients. According to Mary Douglas, "Institutions systematically direct individual memory and channel our perceptions into

forms compatible with the relations they authorize." (Douglas, 1986: 92). However, there are examples where the individuals have the hope and eagerness for intellectual independence.

We can consider these discourses as every day 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 due to the low level of abstraction in social work which in Russia remains under professionalized and focuses not on social structures but on cases and facts, with an emphasis on knowledge of legal rules and qualities of a "big motherly heart". As such, the problems tend to be privatized, and structural inequalities are not to be taken into account. By contrast, some non-governmental organizations, such as crisis centers for women, who are working 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). However, 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 non-governmental organizations use emancipatory ideology as a basis for their struggle to fulfill human rights and principles of independent living.

On a macro-level, textbooks can legitimize 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 on the whole. "The code of ethics of social workers and social pedagogue" (Moscow, 2003 http://socpedagogika.narod.ru/Kodeks.html) defines social work as a complex of activities aimed at satisfaction of social needs of a person". It does not relate to policy involvement or the macro level. University training programs in social work do include courses on ethics as well as on social policy and research methods. While students are getting skills of critical reflection towards policy issues and considering ethical dilemmas of social work profession, due to the gap between university training and professional field, the ethical issues continue to mostly "theoretical" and separated from the practice.

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 population of Russian Federation" was introduced by presidential decree. In 2000 the Social Worker's Day was established by the order of the President Putin. Justification of the choice of this day, 8th of June was traced back to reforms introduced by Peter the Great: on this day in 1701 the Russian Emperor signed a decree assigning paupers, the sick and elderly to poorhouses. Ever since 2001, each summer the regional departments of social security (or ministries of social development) have arranged concerts and costumed amateur performances at local theaters. This was one of the important building blocks in the process of the making of social work as a profession that should have its own glorified history.

A New service for homeless people in Tomsk[3] : Institutional level of change

This project began in 1997 when a social work student Gloria Vinogradova became a 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 the homeless in the city. This plan was difficult to realize as the municipal authorities refused to help, justifying this by referring to legislation which placed work with the homeless under the jurisdiction of the *oblast* (regional) authorities. However these authorities said there were no homeless 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 a majority of the homeless are in the city.

This was a vicious circle that Gloria sought to break. Being a parishioner of Evangelic-Lutheran Church, she has met a missioner from USA who advised her to write a grant application, 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. Yet even with grant money ready to be spent, it was not an easy task. In her interview, the social worker describes her efforts to open the public center as a fight with the system: "*these are some games of the officials <…> they kept silence 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). The project could not be realized without the support of the head of the city social security department who helped to promote

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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 premise was repaired, furnished and equipped, all necessary fiscal and legal negotiations have 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 non-governmental organization, Gloria has become a middle-level manager of the municipal service. Here her efforts have focused on widening the functions of this agency, so that it would remain solely an overnight shelter but become a service to help with official documents, offer legal counseling, etc. 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 center 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 the issuing of a passport and of medical insurance), a temporary living ward for 100 people, an overnight ward, a ward for people after treatment of tuberculosis, and other services. The employees of the center promote social inclusion: "*homelessness is in fact a person's deprivation of the society, it is marginality. And our task is <…> to "inscribe" a person into this society, to create social relations*" (interview with Gloria). Gloria wanted to become the director of this service but her application was declined as she was seen by officials as "*too young*". As such, 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 her new boss was eager to develop the center further, Gloria was satisfied: "*The director has wish and power to promote new functions, to find new perspectives, which pleases me. Thus I think that my task is resolved*" (Gloria's own case description). However, the collaboration between the municipal and non-governmental organization was not successful: "*the voluntary organization, in fact, has quietly died, so to say, giving the place to municipal service*" (interview with Gloria). Later Gloria left the center to go to the United States to study at an evangelic university. Upon graduation she returned to Novosibirsk where she now works at an anti-crisis center for women.

As we can see, a social worker could not only establish a small NGO and raise international funds but also mobilize municipal structures of public social security system and as a result, create a new, large, and successful social service organization and ensure its sustainable development. This initiative was not easy to implement within the structure of the public social services where the institutions and positions are created from above and on the basis of strictly determined frames of activity determined from above. "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 may say, there is a similar situation. What would happen if an official doesn't budge? Maximum, [they] would wag finger at [him], even would not fire, because they all stick to each other. Well, he does not risk anything. And why stir if one may not stir?*" 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) 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 skills of independent thinking and fundraising acquired from the university.

Inclusive Education in Petrozavodsk: Macro Level Changes

In Russia today children with disabilities are entitled to receive education services in regular schools or special institutions. Psychological-medical-pedagogical commissions have the authority to identify the type of educational setting deemed appropriate for a child with disability. The system of education in Russia has undergone deep changes and the schools experience transformations that have been 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 and 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 association of non-governmental organizations of people with disabilities of Karelia. 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 to the courts, 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 the visually impaired. They

came to the press conference together with their children, members of association of 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 (though 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 enroll their children in pre-school services. The parents were better prepared this time and again non-governmental organization 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 upon 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 Government and Ministry of Education of the Republic.

Further collaboration between the parents' movement, non-governmental organizations and social workers has led to additional structural changes. In January 2008, new legislation passed (the Law of the Republic of Karelia of 23.01.2008 N 1168) regarding "introducing changes in some legal acts of the Republic of Karelia concerning the provision of social support and social service for children with complex disability who cannot serve themselves". 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 1880 Rubles (77 USD) as monthly compensation for transportation. In addition, educational institutions that render inclusive services are to be provided by 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, etc. Nevertheless, it is clear that the alliance between social workers and the public can promote important changes of 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 chairperson of the association of non-governmental organizations of people with disabilities of Karelia, and in 2011 she contributed to the promotion of new universal legislation, "On providing access for people with disabilities and other low-mobile citizens to the public buildings and transportation" , which is now under consideration in the government (Tsygankov, 2011).

Institutional conditions limit the initiative and field of possibilities of 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 very beginning, they had to perform functional duties, and <…> their own initiative is not motivated, rather, it belongs to those who makes a decision"* (interview with Svetlana Driakhlitsyna)

In this case, there were several factors that contributed to the success of the social worker's endeavor. Being involved in international exchange programs and further qualification

programs, Svetlana and some other social workers recognized and internalized the professional values of social work. As a social worker in a position of management, she increased her autonomy and capabilities 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 the 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 monopolized position of organizations providing public services and the limited possibilities for creating a competitive environment. During 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 an increase of effectiveness of social services as well as their management, with a great emphasis on measurable outcomes. Although the possibility 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 standards of services, a weak knowledge base concerning the methods of working with clients and standard regulation in this field, a lack of skills in evaluation of quality and effectiveness by many public and non-governmental organizations, as well as a lack of knowledge of how to be competitive to promote good services, organizations and methods of work.

Non-governmental organizations offering social services to the population have succeeded quite well in accumulating their human resources. Due to their flexible

organizational structure, strong motivation and the high qualification 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 co-operation and in many cases collaborate with local government, social services and universities. Having grown out of the service users' associations and grass-roots movements, these NGOs employ an emancipatory and egalitarian ideology in their struggle to establish human rights and principles of independent living. NGOs located in big cities and funded by international and national foundations can provide an attractive labor 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 which operates on the basis of centralized budget schemes), which is often associated with a flexible and vivid organizational culture. However, the number of such organizations 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 non-governmental organizations, which were previously very active in Russia, are decreasing their presence here.

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. However this is still an exception rather than usual practice. As we can see, capabilities to promoting social initiatives vary at different levels of the organizational 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 the structural changes.

The contemporary situation in Russian social work is featured by under-professionalization 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 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 initiate 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 institutionalized 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 worthwhile to pay more attention to retraining programs and to raise 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 co-operation on the enhancement of professional identity of social work is a useful contribution to the development of structural social work.

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