COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS A KEY ELEMENT IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

Social work has always recognized the importance of community development as a key element in intervention and social change. Even so, the neoliberal context currently affecting the reality of most of the countries in the Global North is directly influencing the weakening of community actions and reinforcing more individualistic positions.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the extent to which neoliberal policies are impacting on the teaching of community development content of future social workers in Spain and to study the impact of this reality on the implementation of community plans and projects in Catalonia.

The methodology used was qualitative based on a systematic review of institutional documentation community programs and specialized literature. Likewise, the study plans of the 32 universities currently teaching the social work degree in Spain were carefully reviewed to identify and analyse the subjects that focus their primary content on community development.

We highlight the purpose of public and private institutions to maintain and promote community development plans and programs and the need to broaden and promote the community development approach in social work study plans. Finally, we present recommendations on how to promote social intervention and community development as key elements in both the training and practice of the social work profession.

Keywords: Community development, social work education, Spain, community social work

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we address community development as a key element in the social work profession and in social work education. We understand social work both as a practice and an academic discipline that promotes processes of change, social development and empowerment (IFSW, 2014) and that uses community development as one of its intervention methods. In addition, community development and community work[1] share theoretical and practical elements with the social work discipline (Filliponi, 2011). In fact, since the 1920s, social work has been interested in promoting development processes in communities.

At that time, community development was called 'Community Organization', a concept used prior to that of 'community development', which came into use from 1948 onwards (Ander-Egg, 1986). It was also in the 1920s that community organization theorists began to formulate the intellectual foundations that would guide future professional practices (Austin and Betten, 1977).

One representative figure of the theories of that time was Jane Addams, a social worker from the Chicago School and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. Addams considered that social problems were generated by society, and that their solutions lay in society, obtainable by changing its structure and conditions. With this theory, she promoted community social work (CSW), which was recognized as a method of the social work profession in the National Conference of Social Service of the United States in 1947, and at the end of the 1950s it was considered as an area of intervention (Hervas, 2011).

Thus, social work was one of the first scientific disciplines to identify the community as an area of intervention; understanding that it is not homogenous as each community is different and dependent on the different social policies established in each country. Hence, community social work, as a method, would not provide a single solution, but would help each community find the best development responses based on its environment and context (economic, institutional, social, political, etc.). Similarly, in his analysis of the theory of community social work, Marchioni (2001) pointed out the difficulty of constructing a single model in view of the innumerable differences between the different training schools and practices undertaken in community contexts.

In general terms, community development can be understood as the use of community structures to address social needs and to empower groups of people (Mendes, 2009). Moreover, like social work, it starts with the recognition of the agency of people and communities to achieve their own development (Kane, 2010). In addition, community development is an integration strategy that implements techniques to create or strengthen ties between people and to detect the resources and opportunities that exist in a community. Likewise, as argued by Westoby et al (2019), community development implies a process by which the life experiences of a group are given meaning to act collectively to transform social reality favourably.

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[1] Community work and community social work concepts are used indistinctly throughout this article.

Regarding this reality, it is important to analyse the consolidation, since the 1990s, of a new world context marked by processes of economic and technological globalization. These processes have been supported by a neoliberal conception of the world, marked by the reduced role of states under the premise that well-being is achieved through individual freedom and effort (Harvey, 2010; Fenton, 2020). Political analyst Navarro (1998) commented how the capitalist neoliberal system, through the mechanisms of commercial and financial globalization, has placed the welfare state in a position of risk and, simultaneously, reduced the autonomy and decision-making power of states. This reality generated a generalized crisis of social democracy in Europe and the adoption of transversal policies based on the flexibility (and precariousness) of work, as well as on the reduction of social protection systems (Moreno 2003).

This perspective follows the proposals of Santos (2005) regarding the erosion of the concept of citizenship and the generalization of low-intensity democratic systems. These transformations lead to a societal structure characterized by personal, labour and community instability, leading to new models of segregation. In our so-called 'developed' societies, the current economy is chipping away at our sense of the 'common good'; individual survival strategies and competitiveness are prioritized.

This capitalism of the millennium is expressed culturally in the form of individualism, uncertainty and the absence of a collective meaning (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000). The sociologist Ulrich Beck (1986) coined the term 'risk society' to define the dynamics to which Western societies are drawn, deeply transformed by strong processes of individuation and social fragmentation. He spotlighted how the risk society was the result of profound changes caused by globalization and the technological revolution. It is about an "individualization without ties" that constructs more fragile subjectivities, turning identity and community into flexible and fragile concepts, even in social spheres that had remained on the margin of precariousness until now. This is what Zygmunt Bauman described as a paradigm shift, marked by the passage from solid modernity to contemporary liquidity that notably affects the precariousness and fragility of the social bond and the disintegration of the social fabric (Bauman, 1999).

Furthermore, the recent financial crises are affecting most of the countries of the global North and their weakened welfare states are also affected by this trend. Public policies thus tend to reinforce more individualized positions and weaken intervention processes aimed at community development. Consequently, on the one hand, community intervention projects have decreased, a fact that directly affects the role that community social work currently plays as a method of community development: the historical identities based on the struggle for emancipatory community development are ceasing to be effective. On the other hand, community development has become more conservative, facilitating the survival of the 'system' created by hyper-capitalism and characterized by increasing inequalities (Harvey, 2010).

According to some authors, these changes are affecting both the social work profession and social work education (Stepney, 2019; Liddell and Lass, 2019). Regarding this second aspect, as Reisch noted (2013: 716), 'Neoliberalism has also changed the mission of universities, the nature of social work scholarship and the educational process itself'. In addition, apparently,

the general theoretical content of social work continues to focus on a multitude of conceptual aspects, while the study of the application of community methodologies and techniques occupies a secondary role. This fact suggests certain institutional barriers when developing community education; in fact, in professional practice the approach has changed to adapt to a culture with an emphasis on technical and instrumental approaches (Cox et al., 2021).

There are studies that show how the principles, values and vision of community development cannot always be transferred to social work education processes. In social work teaching programs, a certain emphasis can be observed on individual and case social work (Mendes, 2009; Muxí, Martínez and Ciocoletto, 2011; Westoby et al., 2019). There are also authors who argue that community development has been marginalized in social work practice and education (Das et al., 2016, Ledwith, 2005). Thus, recalling Jane Adams, it is necessary to promote another type of intervention more focused on a community logic, more participatory and democratic, in which the citizen becomes the main protagonist and an agent of change.

Bearing this reality in mind, the **main objective** of this paper is to analyse the extent to which neoliberal policies and the increase in individualistic social tendencies are impacting on the teaching of community development content for future social workers in Spain. We will also analyse the impact of this new reality on the implementation of community plans and projects. Our research questions include: What place does community development currently have in the study plans of the social work degree course in Spanish universities? How are theoretical education and curricular practices approached? We think that the emphasis that social work students place on Community Development as professionals depend on the type of training they receive. Furthermore, the extent to which current Spanish public policies have allowed the deployment of community programs and projects in Spain, specifically in Catalonia, is analysed.

Brief methodological notes

This work is based on a qualitative method and divided into four parts. We began with a review of institutional documentation and specialized literature that allowed us to analyse the recent history of Spain, focusing on three aspects: the public policies of the last decades, the community development plans and projects promoted by the state, and social work as an academic discipline.

Then, the two main plans [2] implemented in Catalonia (Spain) to promote community programs and projects were reviewed. The variables examined in these plans focus on the areas in which care is provided, what their objectives are, and how they have been implemented in the territory.

Interested in knowing the role that community development plays in the education of future social workers, the study plans of the 32 universities currently teaching the social work degree in Spain were carefully reviewed. The aim was to identify and analyse the subjects that focus their primary content on community development. Once identified, different variables were analysed: the subject's name, characteristics, teaching hours, the academic

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[2] Understood as an instrument or methodology of community organization.

year in which it is taught, content, methodology used and the evaluation system. Attention was also paid to other subjects that, as part of their syllabus, dealt with community development in a secondary way.

Finally, we undertook a brief review of the place that community development occupies in the compulsory curricular field practices that must be carried out in the context of the degree. We focused on the specific case of the Rovira i Virgili University of Tarragona (Catalonia), reviewing the number and characteristics of the work practice places related to community development, occupied during the last 5 academic years, and of which we were the academic tutors.

Public policies in Spain and community development

From the end of the Civil War (1936-1939) until the end of 1975, Spain experienced one of the longest dictatorships in recent western history, led by the military dictator Francisco Franco. For almost 40 years, the Spanish saw many of their individual and collective rights and freedoms limited. Fear, political and social repression, and ideological control by the government conditioned the life of the population. However, starting in the 1960s, different groups began processes of resistance and collective demand that somehow responded to an organized community logic.

Regarding the development of community social work in Spain, the political situation of the time and the scarce implementation of social work[3] had an impact. Until 1961, community social work was only considered at a theoretical level, based on the contributions of international literature on community development, without direct intervention actions.

In fact, the state at that time had an assistance-based conception of social services and any community intervention that involved community participation would have been considered as an uprising against the dictatorial regime (Hernández Aristu, 2004).

Even so, Caritas Spain did put in place some timid community interventions of an experimental nature. In 1961 the first meeting of social work professionals on community intervention took place in Barcelona. In addition, during the 1960s, two factors reinforced community social work. The first was the publication in 1964 of the report *Social progress through community development*, drawn up by the United Nations; the second was the input of Marco Marchioni, an Italian specialist in community intervention who at that time directed several seminars and courses on the subject in Spain.

The origins of community social work in Spain were aimed at promoting community development, the main objective being to improve the living conditions of the peripheral city

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[3] Social work became a scientific discipline, recognized as an area of knowledge in Spain in 1990 (Hernández Aristu, 2004).

neighbourhoods. The involvement and participation of neighbourhood associations[4] and volunteers was essential, becoming a key instrument in its development. Regarding the theoretical construction and / or systematization of its practice, a certain activism or intuition has sometimes been observed, as well as a certain confusion between theory and methodology. The role of many professionals[5] was key, making community practice the central nucleus of their work, long before the consolidation of the current Spanish welfare state. We refer to the period from 1975 to 1980, when the institutional transformation towards a democratic welfare state took place.

After the death of the dictator in 1975, the transition to democracy began, along with the reform of the organization of the new state. On 6 December 1978, the Spanish Constitution was ratified, offering a regulatory framework that recognizes and protects the social rights of all people, based on the universality of benefits, until then non-existent. The Constitution allowed autonomous communities to assume responsibilities in matters of social assistance and as of 1982 the first social services laws began to be approved (17). These laws primarily concerned the organization of the public system of social services as an essential public service to provide an adequate response to the needs of the individual in a globalized society (Forns i Fernández, 2020). The great contribution of the transition and democracy was the universalizing impulse of the social protection systems (González and Ortiz, 2018).

It is important to mention that the Constitution contains two relevant articles for the implementation and development of community social work: one determines the right of citizens to participate in public affairs, and the other establishes that public powers should facilitate such participation. During this period of transition to democracy, there were certain valuable collective experiences to reinforce social movements (González and Martín, 2008); as some authors highlight, they even laid the foundations of the current welfare system (Fernández and Cabello, 2015; González and Martín, 2008). The generalized idea prevailing then was that there was a lot to be done, considering the lack of resources and previous references. Later, starting in the '90s, the Spanish state promoted various community development plans and programs, still in force today and discussed further on.

Throughout this process of change, the different public powers focused their attention on configuring and developing a social services system that would promote the development of a welfare state following the so-called Mediterranean or Latin model. This model is still in the process of consolidation today, since even during the years of Spanish economic growth

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[4] Organized in Neighborhood Associations and in charge of representing the population of a neighborhood or municipality; they were established in 1968 as spaces for coexistence, participation and social cohesion. Later, in 1980, Civic Centers were introduced in Spain, socio-cultural facilities of a public nature that promoted association and participation.

[5] Social workers were the professionals who led community interventions: making the first diagnoses of the communities, where they included the needs, the characteristics of the population, the potentialities, and resources available, etc. Based on these diagnoses, projects were implemented by making joint decisions with other professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, pedagogues, etc.). More recently (in the mid-1990s), social educators were incorporated

(1994-2007) spending on social protection remained below the European average[6] (Garcia-Moreno and Anleu-Hernández, 2019).

On top of these limitations, more recently the Spanish system had to face the profound economic crisis that began in 2008 and its impact on the labour market, considerably increasing unemployment. This fact, on top of the austerity measures implemented and demanded by the European Union (Reisch, 2013), led to an increase in social exclusion, poverty and the number of people requesting help from social protection systems. This situation is still the same (with ups and downs), worsening in 2020 due to the effects derived from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The direct effect of this economic and social reality was the weakening of Spanish social policies making them even more vulnerable (Forns i Fernández, 2020). The social services system has been the most affected by the crisis, which has caused a reduction in social spending that has repercussions on institutional policies, generating serious difficulties in maintaining public services and legally recognized universal benefits (Esping-Andersen and Palier, 2010; Pérez-Diaz, 2012)

This is a clear threat to community development and social interventions, in this context of increasing needs and a historical deficit of investment in social services (FITS, 2012). The economic austerity measures imposed by the European Union have made the situation even harder, since the crisis is also exerting negative effects on policies and social intervention throughout the continent, especially in southern Europe.

In consequence, an increase in functions more typical of social assistance is observed among the tasks performed by social workers from different services, due to the decrease in financial resources, reductions in social service personnel, and the increase in the demands of the population (De la Red, 2014; Ioakimidis et al., 2014). In addition, in recent years and due to this growing demand for services in times of economic difficulty, the use of specific protocols has been promoted, limiting interventions and reducing personal interactions (Anleu-Hernández and García-Moreno, 2014). Within these kinds of bureaucratic and technocratic systems of work, there is little scope and flexibility for community work (Dixon and Hoatson, 1999; Mendes, 2008). In this regard, we consider that interaction with the community is essential to understand its history, its trajectory, its peculiarities and its resources, key elements for designing and implementing community projects. It is also key to recovering the potential that social work can offer, already demonstrated during the first years of the establishment of the profession in Spain.

Community development plans and projects in Catalonia

Considering the general historical context that we have presented in previous sections, we will now highlight the main instruments that have promoted community development in Catalonia. Although these instruments have arisen at the initiative of the public administration, this does not deny the existence of other initiatives promoted by communities

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[6] According to Eurostat data, while in 2008 the European average for social protection spending was 18.2%, in Spain it was only 13.92%, ranking lowest in the European Union (Alguacil, 2012).

or neighbourhood associations. In the first place, there are the so-called Community Development Plans (PDC), promoted in the 1990s; secondly, the Local Plans for Social Inclusion (PLIS) promoted since the mid-2000s as a response to the European proposals for social inclusion and the socio-cultural transformations experienced in the country.

Community Development Plans

The PDCs pursue different objectives: to transform the reality of neighbourhoods, to improve the inhabitants' quality of life, to deal with social problems and, ultimately, to achieve the social transformation of the territory. To activate a plan the participation of three main actors is necessary: the institutions (public and NGOs), the public services professionals (including social workers, pedagogues, and community workers), and the community population (leaders, local associations). These actors are grouped and organized in what has been called 'Organization Tables', the starting point for projects to try to solve the deficiencies of the community.

Social workers were the professionals who, in the majority, participated and deployed the PDCs (Ballester, 2015; Colomer i Salmons, 2006)[7]. Thus, social work played an important role in promoting community development's contribution to implementing these plans. Another important role is the support given to help the communities to decide what they want, what can be done to promote it, and with what resources. This contribution has hardly been studied and should be systematized by recovering the good practices of the social workers involved.

We can see how in 2017, across the Catalan territory and since approval, 85 PDCs had been deployed, of which 43 were still active in 2019, especially in peripheral neighbourhoods. This implies an important economic investment and a strong community revitalization, promoted initially by the institutions and their professionals and later, increasingly, by local organizations. However, Cortez (2004) maintains that at times real support has been insignificant, and a substantive job has not always been done to allow the inhabitants of the neighbourhood to find solutions to their problems. Likewise, Morales (2016) affirms that, although the PDCs have contributed to the improvement in living conditions and have allowed a greater effectiveness of the work of certain public services, only in some cases have they been platforms for the design of new social policies, as planned when created.

Local Plans for Social Inclusion

The mission of the PLIS (launched in 2006) is the planning, design and coordination of initiatives, measures, and actions of social intervention to detect and eliminate factors of social exclusion and / or vulnerability in the community. Its main objective is to achieve greater social cohesion and better coexistence of the population through the networking of the social actors that operate in the territory. Its appearance coincides with the significant increase in the immigrant population that Spain has experienced since the end of the last century; many have been aimed at encouraging the social inclusion of culturally minority

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[7] Although other professionals, such as teachers and social educators, also collaborated in their implementation.

groups and intercultural community development, with the participation of social organizations, private entities, NGOs, and neighbourhood associations in each territory. The municipalities have overseen promotion of the PLIS in coordination with the basic social service areas and with a notable presence and participation of social workers. The main areas that have been worked on are empowerment of citizens; personal, social, and labour training; childhood, family and awareness for social inclusion.

By 2016, ten years after its launch, 48 projects had been developed. The distribution of these in the territory follows the same logic as that of the PDCs: Barcelona accounts for more than 50% of the plans. In addition, due to the impact of the economic crisis, in 2012 a methodological review was carried out to provide these plans with greater transforming capacity, emphasizing networking among persons, families and local associations. A guide to facilitate networking for social inclusion has been produced, and a database of good practices in social inclusion has also been set up (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2015).

Currently, both PDCs and PLISs are still active and depend on the local and autonomous public administration. Although the main scope of action is the community in general, it should be noted that most of these plans have been developed in neighbourhoods or areas with a higher risk of social exclusion and / or vulnerability. Methodologically, these plans start from the realization of social diagnoses (participatory or not), from which the actions and the main groups with which to work are oriented. Thus, when reviewing the implementation of various plans in Catalonia, we find that work with the elderly and immigrants has frequently been prioritized.

Even so, it must be borne in mind that these plans have been transformed over the years, given that the socio-economic and political conditions in Spain have changed and have been conditioned by successive changes of government. Each government, depending on its ideological position, has had a particular vision regarding social action, social inclusion, community development and the role that the state has to play in its implementation (Morales, 2016). In the case of Catalonia, between 2017 and 2018 a political party of a social democratic tendency and another of a more neoliberal positioning formed a coalition government. To an extent, this joint government[8] has favoured more progressive social policies, possibly with electoral interests in mind.

Thus, since 2017, the autonomous Catalan government has been promoting the merger of the plans already presented, in what has been called the Inclusive Community Action Plan (PLACI) (Generalitat de Cataluña, 2018). This merger aims to introduce and enhance the community perspective as a strategy to strengthen social inclusion policies and programs in each territory. From the basic social services, and especially from the social work perspective, this new plan is conceived as an opportunity to propose possible reorientations of the system and to incorporate improvements in the intervention models, from a more community-based and proactive vision.

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[8] Elections were held in Catalonia on February 14th with the Social Democratic Party winning with a slim majority of the votes. Negotiations are currently (2021) in progress between the two parties to foreseeably continue the coalition government.

Now it is hoped that with this new proposal for community intervention, the transformative nature of social work can be promoted, in search of a profound change in communities, and not only from an individualistic or clientelist logic (Butler Drakeford, 2001). It is a purpose that must be considered in the education of future professionals. Hence, we believe that university education should promote community issues to better prepare graduates who can provide innovative work proposals in line with this new political and social context.

Community development in the Social Work degree

Specific subjects

To find out how community development is reflected in the university education of future social workers, the study plans of the 32 universities that currently teach the social work degree in Spain were reviewed. In the first place, it is observed that practically all the plans analysed have a specific subject of **Community Social Work.** This is presented under different names, the most frequent names being: Social Work with Communities, Community Social Work, Group and Community Social Work and Community Social Services. In a minority of cases, other denominations have also been found that suggest different approaches to the subject. This diversity of approaches entails the risk of not unifying the content when designing the subject, as it would be interpreted by each teacher. In addition, the mainstreaming of the field and its application in different contexts may also lead students away from the central objectives of community development.

Only two universities do not have a specific subject on this theme, although they include it in other more general subjects. Hence, we believe that community development, as a practice, is considered important regardless of how each university denominates it.

Under one name or another, this subject is presented as compulsory or basic in all Universities although, in most cases, with only six teaching credits of the 240 that the social work degree has (in Spain one credit corresponds to ten hours of training). In Spanish universities we found some exceptions: two universities dedicate two subjects to the theme in their curricula, another dedicates three and another four (in the latter case, with 22.5 credits). Therefore, we see that in these cases greater attention is paid to community work, giving it greater importance. In addition, the distribution of subject content over different courses and with deeper information can serve as a guideline for the teaching programmes of other universities.

After reviewing in which course Community Development subjects are taught and considering that the social work degree in Spain is taught over four academic years, we can see that in half of the cases it is taken in the third year, although in others it is placed in the second year. Considering the importance of community development for social work and for shaping future social policies and community development programs in Catalonia, we believe that an introductory course on the subject should be taken during the first or second year of the degree. Later, and in successive courses, it should be completed with other subjects related to the theme and that provide different approaches. It could also be completed through curricular field practices in local organizations that have community projects underway.

Contents and methods

With respect to the content of these subjects, it is striking that most of the plans are focused on topics that help to introduce Community Social Work: history, evolution, objectives, concept of community, profile and roles of the social worker, methods and techniques, diagnosis, planning, evaluation or citizen participation. It is introductory content to the subject, so it seems that it is taught from a too basic perspective. Therefore, we consider that other complementary subjects should be incorporated into the plans. As a suggestion, we have gathered other specific and minority content from the study plans, which can serve as a guide: social cooperation, associationism, emerging social movements, systematization of community practices, climate change, wellness in communities, open, inclusive and accessible communities, rural and urban communities, everyday knowledge and societies of knowledge.

Moreover, we have seen that almost half of the universities regard personal and community networks as a community development technique. Other university subjects include the study of the Research – Action – Participation method as a key methodological tool for community development. In community development, this method is understood as a way of empowering people so that they can take effective actions to improve their living conditions. We believe that the inclusion of this topic in subjects other than community work could stimulate students to learn about innovative approaches that try to preserve social work in the community.

About the methodological development of the different subjects, we see that most of the universities contemplate, in a parallel and equitable way, lectures and practical seminars in small groups. The latter allow students to build collective knowledge from the analysis in the classroom of concrete experiences and community projects implemented in the territory.

Practice training

Finally, we carried out a brief review of the place of community development in the compulsory curricular practices in the context of the degree. To do this, we focused on the specific case of the Rovira i Virgili University (URV) of Tarragona (Catalonia), reviewing the number and characteristics of the field practice places linked to this area. It must be noted that of the approximately 200 active positions at this time, only fifteen correspond to positions related to community development. Specifically, twelve of them are categorized as community promotion places and the other three as community socio-educational promotion places (one in an educational association and two in a non-Catholic private trust).

Concerning the twelve community promotion places, it is striking that half of them are linked to NGOs (specifically, three to Caritas Diocesana and three to the Red Cross). This fact leads us to think that non-governmental organizations continue to play, even today, a relevant role in community development, as they did at the beginning in Spain. Another three places depend on the Catalan autonomous administration (two in civic centres and one in an educational centre). Of the remaining two, one is linked to a Catholic trust and the other to a municipal administration, which leads us to think about the need to increase projects in the territory in this respect.

Implications for Social Work Education and Practice

Throughout our analysis, one of the aspects that has caused us some concern is the tendency of curricula to focus on basic and introductory content in subjects related to community development. In this respect, it is important to consider that without a broad and deep understanding of the principles and approaches of community development, it could be misinterpreted by future social workers who later intervene with communities in an incomplete way. There is also the risk that the 'community' is understood as a client who needs to be diagnosed, supported and treated (Butler and Drakeford, 2001). This is a conservative and individualistic social work perspective, which primarily focuses on individuals and personal problems, helping people to adapt to the world around them (Payne, 1996; Gilligan, 2005). These conservative approaches contrast with organisational development contributions that shift the focus of change from the individual to the system (Argyris and Schön, 1978).

In the content of the subjects analysed, we also observe how questions relating to the global political and economic context are not addressed, nor are issues such as social inequality, limits of the welfare state, climate change or racism and discrimination. These are aspects that, although they are addressed more specifically in other subjects, inevitably affect community development, and therefore should also be analysed in the context of these specific subjects. In a neoliberal world it is vital that social workers appreciate the theoretical context of their work and, in general, their role in society (Garrett, 2013, 215). In this sense, we share the ideas of Spolader et al. (2016) and Garrett (2013) when they argue that a deeper knowledge and understanding of macroeconomics and its implications contributes to better social intervention, capable of developing coherent and appropriate strategies in the current context. In fact, Fenton's study (2020) shows how social work students in Australia have internalized certain neoliberal discourses on individual responsibility for problems and needs, with the risk that this approach implies in the face of community intervention.

Hence, curricula should incorporate other subjects that connect and analyse community social policies and programs that are currently being developed in Catalonia, such as the PLACIs, etc. An in-depth analysis of the current political reality would help students to assess possible reorientations of the system and to rethink future intervention models from a more community-based perspective. This would encourage students to take an active role, thereby avoiding the risk of educating professionals "adaptable" to already established programs and possibly influenced by neo-liberal approaches. In addition, their education in this regard would be further enhanced, avoiding the tendency to create other professional figures who intervene in the territory without specific training.

Community development should be considered as the key to modifying and improving existing social policies and social intervention, since even today the vision of care that 'attends users' prevails, tending to exclude the active role of citizens. As Marchioni recalls (2006), civil society cannot be anything other than an organized and participatory citizenship, pluralistic and aware of its role and its contribution to the process of building a more democratic, free and egalitarian society. We believe that the community training of future professionals should be oriented even more towards the elaboration of social diagnoses developed in a cooperative framework of joint responsibility with the citizens. Professionally,

we would move from having a directive and tutelary role, to one of facilitator, companion, and trainer.

We think that community development education should be promoted in university since it helps to promote and reinforce the integral development of a community: developing services, promoting mutual aid networks, volunteering, neighbourhood aid and cooperation between official service networks in the territory. These networks can be thought of as community social support systems, fundamental to facilitate the population's access to models and spaces of relationships that already exist or that may one day exist in the community environment; they are also a resource for support and collective construction, generating action strategies that help understand, stimulate and optimize the creative potential of citizens (Navarro, 2004).

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the current neo-liberal, individualistic world concept is influencing both professional practice and the training of future social workers in Spain. Even so, we can see that community development, as an intervention strategy used in social work, continues to be a key tool for the construction of a more egalitarian and committed society, and thus community social work has a relevant role as an agent of community development and social change.

In the specific case of Catalonia, we can observe the effort made by different public institutions and social organizations to maintain and promote community plans and projects. Various experiences have been implemented in recent years with community social work playing a leading role, and such experiences can be considered "good practices" to be applied not only in Spain, but in other similar international contexts.

In this respect, and to further strengthen the work of social workers, we believe that it is essential to know and methodically organise the community experiences implemented in a territory, with the aim of making the work carried out visible and profitable. From there, we consider that each experience should be systematised, gathering key information on the process followed: initial objectives, decisions taken, role of professionals and citizens, disadvantages, possibilities, resources, etc. This would be a process that would go beyond a mere description of activities or functions. It should facilitate analysis, reflection and critical interpretation of each experience by all actors involved, including citizens. This process would allow progress to be made at a theoretical level on the issue of community development, starting from professional practice. Furthermore, it could be a valuable contribution for Social Work, but also for other academic and professional disciplines that promote community development in their countries.

Finally, with reference to community development education in the social work degree in Spanish universities, we have seen the need to expand and promote community development whilst considering it as a tool for social and local development; as a way of seeking collective "identity" in a homogenizing world; and as a response to an increasingly complex society with new needs. This would enrich the training of students and, in the short term, would help

to promote future projects, as well as to increase contact with the population and their community leaders.

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