

## **Social work in Spain: a new social and economic reality to develop in Practical Academic Training**

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### **Abstract**

This work focuses on understanding how the current Spanish economic crisis is generating changes in the social and economic reality in which social work degree students are developing their practical training and on knowing if this new reality has an impact on their training and on the vision, they can create of the profession. Using a mixed qualitative methodological approach, we aim to visualize and analyze the opinions and insights that both social work professionals and students provide. Online and face-to-face interviews were conducted with social workers working as practice tutors. Likewise, two focus groups were set up and social work degree students at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Spain) were also interviewed. The main results show that the new scenario creates a debate not only among professionals, but also among the students themselves. They value this stage as an opportunity to rethink their future professional practice. This article may be applicable to the European context, given that the economic crisis is affecting, to a greater or lesser extent, on the different welfare states in Europe.

### **Key words**

Social work education, economic crisis, professional practices, practice teaching, Spain, training.

## Introduction

The main theme guiding this work is the importance of external curricular practices in the training of social work students. Internationally, social work education now includes the incorporation of practical or field subjects into the curriculum (usually called field education, practice, practicum or professional practices). Although differences can be found depending on the country, university and degree (bachelor or master), field education is an integral and important component of the social work curriculum (Higgins, 2014; Zuchowski, 2014). This is shown by the large number of hours assigned to professional practices. In most of universities consulted (University of Sussex; Loyola University of Chicago; New York University; University of British Columbia; Universidad de Córdoba; y Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), students do between 400 and 700 practical hours in external institutions.

In Spain, the social work degree (a four-year degree course) follows the approach approved by the Spanish Ministry of Education in 1983, giving pre-professional practical training the importance, it deserves; the average number of practice hours in Spanish universities ranges from 300 to 400, done in the third and fourth years. In the Universitat Rovira i Virgili-URV (located at Tarragona, Spain, where we centered our study) it is worth mentioning that the social work curriculum includes the obligatory subject *Intervention Practicum* during the 4<sup>th</sup> year; students perform 375 hours of practice in external public and private institutions, focusing on specific elements of the professional role.

The URV counts on the professional collaboration of social workers operating in institutions, who play a key role as *practice tutors* (also known as *supervisors*, *practice educators*,

*training practice assessors* - Higgins, 2014; Zuchowski, 2014), carrying out continuous, direct monitoring of the student in real work contexts, where it is necessary to apply and to use the knowledge, techniques, and ethical principles acquired during the degree course. Students learn their future professional role through their contact with these social workers, from their way of working, and from their personal attitudes. This practical training period allows contact with and knowledge of the social reality in which they will intervene, a reality marked by the current Spanish economic crisis, leading to the reconsideration of social policies and a questioning of those citizens' rights acquired in recent decades.

An increase in research work addressing the impact of the crisis on social policies and services, in the Welfare state and in intervention models followed by social workers, can be currently observed (De la Red, 2014; Ferguson, 2013; Ioakimidis, Santos and Herrero, 2014). Also, how the professionals deal with this new scenario has been studied. García-Domingo and Sotomayor-Morales, (2017), analyze in different European contexts the perception of social work experts about their role during the crisis highlighting it as an opportunity and the necessity to develop a dual role: one supportive and other, mediator.

Nevertheless, we have found few studies focusing on the impact that this context of change is having on the practices of social work students and future professionals. Bogo's study in the United States (2015), explores how is impacting the contemporary challenges in field education for clinical social work practices; and Ayala et al (2018) examine, among other elements, the repercussion of social work practice contexts on social work field education in Canada. Our work is thus presented as innovative and is intended to provide new elements for reflection, with the aim of offering a Spanish case study that can be extended to other European countries, whilst also shedding new light on this question.

Therefore, our research question asks how the current Spanish economic crisis is generating changes in the social reality where students of social work develop their practical academic training and how this new scenario is affecting their training process.

### ***Impact of the economic crisis on the Spanish State Social Services system***

Over the last 35 years in Spain there have been several factors that have contributed to the increased recognition of citizens' social rights: the approval of the Spanish Constitution in 1978, subsequent economic growth, political decentralization, the approval of protective laws at state and regional levels. During this period of change, different public authorities have made significant efforts towards consolidating a state Social Services system that along with education, health and pensions, has been considered the *fourth pillar of the welfare state*. Thus, began the development of a welfare state (still pending consolidation) that would cover such rights, based on what is known as the Mediterranean or Latino model, a model characterized by different elements, as allocating smaller budgets to social issues, the coexistence of public and private services, decentralization and an incomplete universalization services (Subirats, 2007).

Now, more than three decades since the system was set up, it has to face the profound economic crisis affecting Spain since 2008, which has also impacted on the labor market, raising unemployment. This has led to an increase in social exclusion, poverty and in the number of beneficiaries of social protection systems, thus weakening social policies and making them more vulnerable (Forns i Fernández, 2018; Laparra & Pérez Eransus, 2012; Lasheras & Pérez Eránsus, 2012). According to data provided by the Foundation FOESSA, in the first trimester of 2013 unemployment in Spain hit a record 27.2%. Moreover, in 2012,

the number of homes without any income stood at 3.7%, having doubled during the crisis (FOESSA, 2013).

Of all the social protection systems that make up the Spanish welfare state, the Social Services system has been the most adversely affected by the crisis, resulting in serious difficulties to maintain services and benefits (Esping-Andersen & Palier, 2010; Pérez-Díaz, 2012). During the years of Spanish economic growth (1994-2007), the budget for social development was not increased. This situation has worsened because of the crisis, leading to a reduction in social spending which is impacting on institutional social policies. This is a clear threat to social interventions, framed in a context of increased needs coupled with historic underinvestment in Social Services (IFSW, 2012; Laparra & Pérez Eránsus, 2012). Some even say that in this context of austerity and cuts, social policies become tools of population control (Harrison & Sanders, 2014).

Neither is the European context proving to be of help, as the crisis is also having negative effects on policies and social intervention across the continent; particularly in Southern Europe where the model of internal devaluation is very similar.

*“Significant cuts in funding health and welfare services, extensive privatization schemes, salary cuts for both private and public-sector workers and substantial rises in direct and indirect taxation. Such measures seem to have pushed large sections of the former middle classes into poverty, creating a new section of new-poor.”*  
(Ioakimidis, et al, 2014, p-289).

### *Social work in the new Spanish socio-economic context*

Social work in Spain is now an established discipline, a profession clearly defined in the social framework and present in many varied fields of action. Since the profession began, social workers' actions have been guided by values and principles based on the ideal of a fairer, more democratic and more caring society; we highlight freedom, equality, social justice, recognition of the person's dignity and of their human and social rights. These have been shared and optimized by various international and national organizations linked to social work as a discipline, such as the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and Asociación Internacional de Escuelas de Trabajo Social (AIETS).

The economic crisis has led to two new scenarios in social work. The first is related to the emergence of new profiles of those attended, new social realities and an increase in demand. The second refers to the discipline itself and is focused on the influence that this new situation may have theoretically and methodologically.

With regards to the first scenario, the consequences of the economic crisis present a discouraging panorama which is not limited to an increase in poverty, understood exclusively as material deprivation, but by extension to an increase in social exclusion situations. This reality mostly affects different vulnerable groups such as infants, the elderly, the disabled, those with mental health issues and immigrants, etc. (Frazer & Marlier, 2011). But on the other hand, structural changes are promoting an increase in general demands, derived from unsatisfied social needs because of unemployment, reductions in salaries, and the housing crisis. We are seeing an expansion in the number of people who request social attention, because a new group, unknown until now, is joining traditional social service users. They are

the ‘newly excluded’, a group made up of people who have lost their jobs or houses, with dependents, without financial liquidity, who do not understand or cannot face their new situation (; Frazer & Marlier, 2011; Ioakimidis, et al., 2014; Martínez-Herrero, et al. 2014). The Social Services Report in Spain shows that the main change in the profile of those attended by Social Services during 2012 is that of those who belonged to the middle classes before the crisis. (CGTS, 2013).

Considering the second scenario, this situation impacts directly on professional practice and the conceptualization of social work itself. There is an increase in welfare assistance tasks performed by social workers from different services, due to the decrease in financial resources, reductions in social services personnel, and the increased demand for their services (De la Red, 2014; Ioakimidis et al., 2014). The increase in non-covered basic needs in the population at risk of social exclusion is causing a saturation of the Social Services that directly affects the practice, to the point of determining or reconsidering the responses traditionally given (Carbonero, et. al., 2012; De la Red, 2014; Ioakimidis et al., 2014; Martínez-Herrero, et al, 2014). Neoliberalism consequences include the devaluation of social work skills and knowledge, the reduction of practice autonomy, and a general loss of significant social work identity (Morley and Dunstan, 2013).

### ***Objectives***

Two objectives guided our work: 1) to understand practice tutors’ appraisals and reflections regarding the impact of the current economic crisis on their professional practice, and particularly on their role as tutors. 2) to analyze student valuations about their perceptions of

the profession, what they learned and what conclusions they have reached after this practical experience.

### *Methods*

Consistent with our research objectives the methodology utilized was qualitative using ethnographic and phenomenological approaches to explore the construction of reality and the interpretation of meaning according to perceptions and social interactions of participants in the study (Taylor And Bodgan, 1987).

### *Participants*

There were two groups of participants involved in the study. One group consisted of 34 social workers in the Tarragona province of Spain. The majority of them had more than five years or professional experience in different fields, and usually collaborated as practice tutors, (table 1). 13 worked in the public sector and 21 in the private sector, thus covering the main ambits of intervention. The second group consisted of 149 students who did their external practices, during three academic years (representing almost all of those who did this degree). Voluntary participation and anonymity were assured.

### *Data collection method*

A literature review was conducted prior to the commencement of the data collection. Fieldwork was carried out over three academic years 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15.

TABLE 1



The research methods used were considered to be the best to meet the objectives and allow insight into both participants (students and social workers) experiences:

Thirtyfour online written asynchronous interviews were undertaken using open-ended questions with social work professionals who had worked as practice tutors during the last two academic years.

Fifteen inperson semi structured interviews with social work participants enable a deep comprehension of the training process and to carry out the corresponding analysis together with the tutors.

One hundred and forty-nine written open-ended interviews were undertaken with students from the last three academic years. This was part of a general interview that students carry out annually to evaluate both the academic management and their learning and personal experiences during the external practices.

Two focus groups were set up, one with 18 students from 2012-13 and the other with 23 from 2013-14. Their opinions were digitally recorded and transcript for later analysis.

An ethnographic field diary was kept with notes made following appraisals of students during the work and practice supervision seminars in the University.

### *Data analysis*

Following the Grounded Theory approach, (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) information was collected and coded using a numerical sequence (students' interviews) and identifying the field of practice with initials, as cited in the results. Categories were constructed according to two thematic axes: 1) the crisis and professional practice and 2) the change of profession

perception. Analysis has been done using an inductive qualitative approach differentiating students' opinions from social work participants. Using this method of analysis, it was possible to compare perceptions, identify relevant issues, and obtain a comprehensive understanding of the data.

The limitations of the study are that it is focused in a single university. We intend to continue with this research in the future, extending it to other universities in Spain in order to deepen our analyses.

#### *Ethical considerations*

We followed the ethical guidelines of the Association of Anthropology of the Spanish State (ASAAE in Spanish) and the principles of the profession contained in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). All participants were informed about the objectives of the research and its methodology and gave their informed consent. We guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

## **Results**

### ***Impact of the Economic Crisis on Professional Practice and Student Training***

Throughout ethnographic work, we found that social work participants were concerned about the changes taking place in everyday social work practice due to the economic crisis. They highlighted that most of the demands for service were linked to basic needs such as food, medicines and housing related aids (difficulty paying the mortgage, rent, electricity and heating.). They also stressed that a new group of users has emerged, hitherto unknown,

comprised of the long-term unemployed with dependents, without economic resources and in need of an urgent response.

Other aspects also affected intervention. For examples, as social worker in primary care stated, *'some services such as assistance for immigrants, employment plans and court staff are disappearing. And this lack of professionals frequently generates demands that we didn't receive before'* (Primary Care S.W). Given this reality social workers nowadays are more overworked than ever before. *'There is an increase in demands due to a lack of resources to face the most basic needs, demands that have to be satisfied with the same number of professionals and less economic resources'* (2013-32). Even so, students valued the good availability of internships and how practitioners always found time to discuss their doubts and explain different aspects of the profession and social intervention, as one student responded: *'They are great professionals who fight every day for what they believe in and to maintain the values and principles of the profession'*. (2015-136)

It is worth mentioning that this continuous increase in demand has not been accompanied by an increase in professional resources, leading to an evident decrease in the professional ratio, a fact that, as commented by the tutors, enlarges social service waiting lists. Nor have financial resources increased, frequently making it harder to meet the most basic demands, to maintain or improve home care, to provide adequate care for people in situations of dependence, to implement community projects. This new reality increases the risk of social exclusion, decreases the chances of reintegration in some areas and the rehabilitation processes in others. As an interviewed social worker reminds us: *'Not having the minimum*

*resources to work with does not help to achieve the established objectives in the individual and group work plans designed to improve the user's situation.'* (NGO S.W.).

Due to a lack of time and resources, professionals working in primary care services are increasingly experiencing a resurgence of regressive and pre-welfare forms of charity care. Many public service professionals have become involved, for example, in helping with community soup kitchens, the distribution of food or social emergency aid.

Other participants in the study stated that public funding dependent on state budgets is decreasing. In fact, public spending on Social Services in 2014 was reduced by 36% (CGTS, 2013). One of the social workers explained the situation this way: *'For years we have been feeling the cuts in our field; there are whole years without new work positions, and when there is one the conditions for access are increasingly restrictive, thus having fewer applicants'*. (Mental Health S.W.). It seems that more and more specific requirements are necessary to apply for funding, resolutions take longer to be public and aid payments tend to be enjoyed over the long term.

Participants emphasized that working conditions are worsening. They also explain that, as mentioned by Anleu-Hernández (2015) in recent years, the use of protocols has been promoted medicalizing and limiting, to some extent, intervention and interaction with the individual. Thus, in some cases, the intervention has been reduced to 'filling in protocols'. *'Protocols are the novelty in social contexts ... soon everything will be protocols. It is copied from medical protocols. And now this is being applied to social and educational contexts. We will end up forgetting about people'*. (Health S.W.). This has been one of the widespread

complaints of the professionals interviewed. They commented that the possibility of applying a systemic perspective, in which the importance of the environment and social networks is central, is reduced. Although they acknowledge that applying protocols can guide their work, it is indispensable to have the necessary time to consider the personal history of the service users, their trajectories, their way of understanding life, their particularities, personal resources, and feelings that are key elements to raise an individualized intervention plan.

Students participants in the focus groups observed how government norms were becoming more severe, thus leading to more charitable and palliative practice. This seems somewhat contradictory to them, especially when considering the different intervention methods theoretically analyzed. One student participant stated: *'In class we have always been told of the need to strengthen measures focused on prevention and the promotion of users' capacities, aspects that now, at a political level, seem to occupy a second place'*. (2014-68)

### ***The Professional Model and Students Evaluations***

In this section we firstly present the thoughts of the practice tutors about this new social and economic reality and its impact on the practical training of the students they tutored. One of the most common ideas expressed:

*I think the most positive thing is that it allows the students to see the importance of the professional-user relationship as the essence of our work (...). The budget cuts and the lack of material and financial resources lead to the realization of the importance of the help relationship itself, and that the professional and the user are the real resources. (Primary Care S.W).*

They comment that given the complexity and diversity of current problems, and given professional limitations, skills must be developed to manage scarce institutional resources, as well as the tools to do so acquired through the evolution of the discipline itself.

An interesting, but not generalized, comment from the social work participants was that some noted that nowadays their work is marked by unstable regulations and continuous changes in the requirements to access some social services/ benefits. This fact often leads to confusion and doubt in their daily work when drawing up intervention plans, something they consider unacceptable as their lack of decisiveness could impact negatively on them and on their students.

Secondly, we analyze the image the students have of the profession after their external practices. In general, both in the focus groups and in the interviews, the students stated that is not until they begin their practices that they gain a real idea of the importance of the profession. A student commented: *'I believe it is one of the most appropriate jobs to lead and support initiatives that help to eradicate the effects of the crisis.'* (2015-97) In this regard, stress that they have been able to appreciate how their tutors examine every situation in detail and that, under the strict legislation affecting the distribution of scarce resources. Now, *'they [professionals] have to be more capable of analyzing cases and developing their 'sixth sense' even more than before when designing intervention plans.'* (Focus group). Curiously, this aspect is also commented on by the social work participants but from a different point of view, linking it to the increased responsibility they must now assume.

Almost all the students agree that this crisis is cutting benefits and assistance to the needy, and on occasions they have felt the same impotence experienced by their tutors. Nevertheless,

they recognize that the crisis is enriching the practice of their profession. In general, value they how their tutors made efforts to reach a greater proximity with people and their families, emphasizing their ability to listen and their promotion of self-esteem. *'(...) in short, the most valuable resources available to social workers are to be found in the people they serve.'* (2014-94).

Students, in general tended to consider having to do their external practices in this context of crisis and budget cuts as an opportunity. They considered that this reality helping them to reformulate different options when they intervene, to analyze the role they should assume soon, and even to consider protesting about the current situation both personally and professionally. The majority referred to the importance of knowing how to cope with changes, as commented in a focus groups: *'It is our turn to live in a time of constant change and it is necessary to be flexible and, above all, to be innovative in procedures and techniques for intervening'*; and also explained by another interviewed student: *'To intervene in this changing reality requires to be very well prepared, to work in a team, to work with the community, to know the resources well and to develop personal and professional skills'* (2013-21). This has made them aware of the need to broaden their knowledge and training and, according to their responses, this is one of their primary concerns and purposes after completing their degrees.

Finally, they are aware that social workers in Spain are affected by rising unemployment and a significant deterioration in their working conditions. Hence their evaluations are marked by the anxiety of not knowing if they will be able to get a job and put everything that their tutors have taught them into practice.

### *Opportunities for the Profession in the New Economic Scenario*

An aspect of interest in this study is knowing how the professionals interviewed are facing the new social and labor context. A key aspect that they are promoting is to expand their own knowledge of available resources in the area, according to their field of action. At the same time, they are strengthening the networks between different professionals working in the social protection systems, both public and private. Teamwork, networking, coordination and transdisciplinarity are increasingly present in their work. They are elements that have become an effective way to share information, to learn from each other's experience, to work together and to avoid the excessive waste of resources that duplication of work means.

This has also been noticed by the students during their practical training highlighting that their tutors are 'great professionals' working in a connected and coordinated way to optimize the limited resources available and to maximize the wellbeing of those they help, strengthening and reinforcing the positive image that they usually have of the profession. This image and the new methodologies are also being reinforced at a theoretical level in specific subjects of the URV's social work curriculum, for example in subjects such as Social Work in Groups and Teams, Social Worker Skills and Community Social Intervention, which are relevant. In the last few years the three subjects mentioned had become core and compulsory in the curriculum.

Another aspect noted in the professional valuations is that social workers are reinforcing other capabilities and strategies dependent on the personal inventiveness of the professional. They mentioned the need to recover the basic concepts of the profession as well as aspects of emotional support. *'Capabilities that we had forgotten have been awakened in us,*



*recovering some of the essential and differential elements the profession has recently been missing: listening as a link, relationship, support, imagination, coordination'* (Primary care S.W).

To meet increasing needs, they present the crisis as an opportunity to question the work methodology of the last few years, and to question future action plans. They also mention that it could be beneficial to avoid certain routines and practices (assumed or imposed) that occasionally depreciate social work. As an example, some commented that in some primary care services it has been implementing intervention that is also done in specialized services, assigning a differentiated role to social workers according to the main need to be covered (poverty, drugs, etc.). This do not mean that holistic family intervention has been forgotten.

### **Discussion and application to social work practice training**

During the last decade, there has been an increase in demands on Social Services in Spain that has not been accompanied by an increase in resources nor in the number of social workers that can address the new social needs. In the light of this reality, and according to our results as well as with other studies (Carbonero, et al., 2011; López & Renes, 2011, Gonzalez et al, 2015), social workers today are more overburdened than ever, especially in primary care services.

As stressed by the social work participants, the practice has become more bureaucratic and has also adopted some more charitable features that question two of the fundamental ethical and political professional principles: the right to dignity and the commitment to the development of a just and equitable society (Martínez-Herrero, et. al. 2014). In this regard,

the resurgence of 'primitive and pre-welfare forms of urgent charity' in Spain, Greece and Portugal are atypical for developed European states and can be understood as a regression in social work practice (Ioakimidis et al, 2014). Meanwhile, Manzano i Santaella and Bazan i Jodar (2014) mention as an example the case of England, where bureaucratic procedures have increased, and the professional autonomy of social workers has been reduced, as decisions now are usually taken by administrators and managers. These changes are creating new scenarios, that are influencing the field of practice, adding new challenges to both professionals and practice tutors (Bogo,2015; Ayala et al 2018).

On the other hand, it has been observed that interventions in Spain are becoming marked by a paradigm of risks, gaps and weaknesses, minimizing the recognition of the strengths, skills and abilities which all human beings have, and which should be enhanced in any program or project of social intervention (Anleu-Hernandez and Garcia-Moreno, 2014). In addition, as already highlighted by Rimbau (2014), the bureaucratization of care processes is favoring the deskilling or deprofessionalization of social work, instead promoting a professional role as managers of access to different social resources.

Key social work activities, such as sufficiently exploring the factors most influential on a person's life, elaborating complete social diagnoses, consolidating the aid relationship, and the assessment of the capabilities or strengths of the persons attended are tending to be performed less due to the lack of resources and time. This is what we have termed an 'incomplete intervention', producing the risk of developing social diagnoses less adjusted to reality, complicating the design and implementation of appropriate intervention plans suited to the particularities of each case.

These are aspects that are still highly valued by the social work participants interviewed who are unwilling to give them up. Especially interesting is how students valued this also, recognizing they are important elements for the construction of a professional identity. This has been supported in previous studies (Domakin, 2014; Pehrson, et al, 2009; Zuchowski, 2014.).

In fact, the need to strengthen the activities and to face these risks are aspects that are well included in the theoretical content of the subjects offered in the URV's social work study plan. They are taught as key aspects to define any intervention. In the specific case of the field practices, supervision seminars (sessions) of two hours are held bi-weekly with 15 students in each group who are guided by social work professors (among whom are the authors of this work).

In these seminars, the rigor in the analysis of situations observed by students and the relation between the knowledge provided in classroom and its practical application are progressively evaluated. The importance of establishing relationships with both the students and the practice tutor has already been highlighted in the literature as well as the fundamental role of supervision as a basic element for learning (McMahon, 2002; Abram et al., 2000).

From this context, it is intended to avoid the risk of practices becoming a training ground for efficient employees, rather than an important context for producing critically educated social workers for the profession (Bellinger, 2010). Among the students there is often a reference to the contradiction between the theory studied and the praxis that is trying to be imposed

from political instances on professionals. As the contradictions tend to generate search for answers, it is important to look at this fact as an advantage, which would allow students to develop their critical and analytical vision and look for possible alternatives as a way of responding. It is what we define as a 'context of opportunity', understood as a scenario marked by several factors (economic, social, family and cultural.) that promote the emergence of ideas that may not have been generated under other circumstances. Educating students in social work requires that they also become critically involved with neoliberal policies and the defense of social rights (Morley and Dunstan, 2013). A pedagogical culture that actively involves students in their learning should be encouraged (Bellinger, 2010).

It is also interesting to analyze the shock experienced by students given the knowledge that in this new socio-economic context anyone can fall into poverty and/or vulnerability at any given moment. As one student reflected: *'I believe that a new era has begun, in which the profile of the user who resorts to social services is not so distant from ours nor the professionals'* (Focus group 2). And it is important to consider their training and future professional practices, as they are faced with realities easy to understand, and it facilitates the development of empathy, a relational link with the user, and the opportunities to reinforce the intervention

Social work is perhaps one of the most flexible and adaptable scientific disciplines. It is linked to variable and voluble socio-economic conditions, inviting reviews and adjustments according to the social changes that are arising. In this sense, Ezequiel Ander-Egg already analyzed that we are facing a world that changes rapidly, placing society and the profession in a dynamic of temporariness and facing the need to propose methodological proposals

adapted to the new requirements. Among them, he mentions the imperative to promote the development of the community and to encourage its initiative and participation in accordance with collective decision-making. Thus, a solidarity and militant commitment should be assumed to confront the social strategies of neoliberal globalization (Ander-Egg, 1993). Similar ideas have been raised by other authors (Ferguson, 2013; Ioakimidis, et al, 2014;), in which the citizen becomes the main protagonist and an agent of change.

On the other hand, it must also be a priority that social workers with the capacity for analysis and evaluation are involved more than they have been up to now in the process of defining social policies, especially from the community perspective that we have been commenting on. Students, meanwhile, should participate in emerging community organizations and closely look at multidisciplinary work (Abram, et al., 2000). In this sense, a big challenge is the identification of new fields of practice more related to the management of social issues, mediation and conflict resolution, research, and community social work as a field still underdeveloped in Spain.

The study affirmed the role of tutors is key because they are assuming the task of contextualizing and updating the information acquired in the classroom, from the context of practices.

They become “bridges” between theory and practice, an essential feature for maintaining the quality of professional training and knowledge. Consistent with this might be to have the participating tutors in some of the sessions of the supervision seminars, as they are spaces out of the working context, ideal for reflection and analysis between students and

professionals. With regard to students, greater evaluative weight should be given to their participation in the sessions and their capacity for analysis, since these are essential elements that they should be starting to develop from the educational ambit.

In addition, between academic and practical tutors, the exchange of information and cooperation are important ingredients for the success of training practices and for the development and improvement of the profession (Karban, 1999). It is therefore necessary to establish a quarterly contact and to consider that the opinion of the professional tutor has a considerable weight in the final evaluation of the students (not less than 60%).

## **Conclusion**

In the light of the findings of this study it is important to consider whether the social work profession is at risk if the saturation and collapse of services continue to increase whilst institutional and political measures are not taken. In this sense, the question arises as to what extent the instability and political / economic control of jobs will influence students, curbing future resistance or keeping them away from possible strategies for change. In fact, the neoliberal system is gaining strength, weakening public policies, which will impact directly on both the approaches and on the sense of the profession. On the other hand, this situation can be and is being viewed, by both participants (social workers and students), as an important opportunity for learning and growth and, above all, as a context from which to analyze and rethink the role the discipline must play from now on.

The capitalism of the millennium is expressed culturally in the form of individualism, uncertainty and the absence of a collective plans. Even so, leading a change towards a welfare

model based on collectivism and entrepreneurship seems to be the key. In addition, the lines of action should also reinforce social and family networks, recover community and participatory responses and form a network of support and exchange of professional experiences as the basis for future actions and not forgetting future study plans.

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