

Social Work Education: The Portuguese Story in a Local and Global Perspective

## **A Formação em Serviço Social em Portugal numa Perspectiva Local e Global**

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# Social Work Education: The Portuguese Story in a Local and Global Perspective

This article presents the general framework of social work education in Portugal covering its beginnings and more recent milestones. It focuses on the dynamics of break and continuity between its pivotal socio-political periods and international influences.

The social work education itinerary in Portugal during the period between the Republican Regime foundation (1910), the constitution of *Estado Novo* (1933–1945), the succession of Salazar (1968), the revolutionary crises associated with the Carnation Revolution (1974), and the academicisation period (1989 to the present) will be revisited, paying special attention to the underpinnings of theory and knowledge, social and political issues, and the impact on social work practice.

Keywords: social work education; social and political issues; international influences; social work practice.

A proposta deste artigo é apresentar um quadro geral da formação em serviço social em Portugal cobrindo o período de emergência e os marcos mais relevantes, focando a dinâmica de rutura e continuidade entre períodos sociopolíticos fundamentais e as influências internacionais.

O itinerário de formação em serviço social em Portugal, durante o período que se desenrola entre a fundação do Regime Republicano (1910), a constituição do Estado Novo (1933-1945), a sucessão de Salazar (1968), a crise revolucionária associada à Revolução dos Cravos (1974) e o período de academização (1989 - até o presente), será revisitado, prestando especial atenção à base de conhecimento e teoria, às questões sociais e políticas e o seu impacto na prática em serviço social.

Palavras-chave: formação em serviço social; questões sociais e políticas; influências internacionais; prática em serviço social.

As Morales & Sheafor (2002, p. 51) point out, “a series of events affected its [social work] development and will continue to shape social work in future”. In this

article, a socio-historic perspective is adopted, understanding “social work as a historical production of a society that generates social problems and tries to manage them in different ways, namely by the action of social work” (Mayer, 2002, p. 3). In this sense, the social work education itinerary in Portugal is analysed in the context of national and international events, developments in social welfare, and certain social work events that affect the Portuguese approach to social problems and challenges. Regarding the social work events and itinerary, despite paying special attention to social work education, the article explores a wider perspective articulating education, fields of practice, and identity. Table 1 identifies some of these important events and shows the principal milestones defined. On this basis we can divide the history of social work education in Portugal into four more or less distinct phases:

- Institutionalisation of social work education: from the Estado Novo to the 1960s
- Modernisation of social work education: from the 1960s to the Carnation Revolution in 1974
- Reconceptualisation project: from the Revolutionary Crisis to the 1980s
- Academicisation of social work: from the university degree to the present (mid 2018).

The emergence of social work as a profession in Portugal was preceded by a campaign to create social-medical occupations. The expansion of social medicine and the hygienist movement, with their scientific methods, required the reorganisation of hygiene and social assistance services and the training of new professionals (Matias, 1999, p. 113). It is in this context that the first attempts to institutionalise the training of nursing professionals (in 1910) and school nurses (in 1911) took place, in addition to the establishment of the fields of school nursing and social nursing (1923) (Martins, 1999, pp. 51-142).

These initiatives, despite the prominent public position of the leading figures of these movements, have not succeeded in achieving their goals. The economic and financial difficulties associated with Portuguese participation in World War I and the political instability of the Republican regime established in 1910, along with the programme of republicanism, which was more focused on political and cultural dimensions, were the main reasons for postponing the action claimed by the hygienic and social medicine movements. The reform or progressive realisation were only to take place after the overthrow of the first Republic in the military coup of May 1926, in the context of the military dictatorship and the setting up of a new political regime - *Estado Novo* (1933).

### **Phase I: The institutionalisation of social work education**

After some attempts to introduce social work education in Portugal in 1928 and 1934, aiming to train staff linked to juvenile justice and juvenile psychology services (Martins, 1999, pp. 207-212), it was, however, the first congress of the National Union (the political body of a single-party state), in 1934, that approved a recommendation to establish the Institutes of Social Work (ISS) in the cities of Lisbon, Oporto, and Coimbra. The ISS was implemented in 1935 with Lisbon as the first social work school in Portugal, through the initiative of the Catholic Church. In 1937, in Coimbra, the *Escola Normal Social* (Normal Social School) was created under the influence of the physician Bissaya Barreto, a prominent member of the social medicine movement. Despite the creation of the Lisbon and Coimbra schools, social work education was regulated only in 1939, by Decree-Law n°. 30 135 of 14 December, which defined the training guidelines according to a three-year curriculum and certified the diploma and

professional title of social worker. Later, in 1956, the Institute of Social Work of Oporto was created under the auspices of the Bishop of Oporto.

Students' entry requirements<sup>1</sup> and the attributes related to the professional profile and performance, as shown by the binding of legal regulations and doctrinal documents, were gender-oriented. The admission of male students to the profession began only in the 1961–1962 academic year, following the recommendation of the Corporatist Chamber from 1956. It should be noted, however, that its rationale was a re-elaboration of gender stereotypes.<sup>2</sup> This vision was similar to early social work education in many other European countries, where there have been social work schools for women and for men with different professional profiles, as, for example, in Germany (Hering & Waaldijk, 2003).

Social work education in Portugal was established under a Francophone influence, which had been present in earlier campaigns for the profession. The channels of this influence were Francophone authors such as the Belgian René Sand, who translated into French Mary Richmond's seminal book *What Is Social Case Work—An Introductory Description* (1922),<sup>3</sup> with which academics, physicians, and other Portuguese elite members made contact. In addition, international organisations such as the French *Union Catholique des Services de Santé et des Services Sociaux*, located in Paris, and the *Union Catholique Internationale de Service Social*, located in Brussels, were involved.

The draft of the Lisbon social work school organisation was entrusted by the Patriarchate of Lisbon to the Countess of Rilvas, who sought advice and guidance from the *Union Catholique des Services de Santé et des Services Sociaux* (Catholic Union of Health Services and Social Services). Equally relevant is the fact that the first academic head of Lisbon's Institute of Social Work, between 1925 and 1944, was the French

social worker Marie-Thérèse Lévêque. Similarly, the Normal Social School, in Coimbra, followed the French model of the *École Normale Social*, combining social work training with the social and medical professions, and had as its first head Constance Davon, a French religious woman educated in child care by the Faculty of Medicine of Paris.<sup>4</sup> These processes show clearly, despite the insularity of Portugal as a consequence of the political regime established in the 1930s, the power of transnational influences and connections that occurred in the institutionalisation of social work education and professionalisation, mainly through international Catholic organisations.

The institutionalisation of social work in Portugal as academic qualifying subject and as a profession took place in the socio-political context of the *Estado Novo*, a system of authoritarian and corporatist nature, which was averse to public intervention in the social sphere and the welfare state model that were becoming established in the more developed and democratic countries of the Western world. Social work as a profession emerged during a period strongly influenced by a corporatist orientation in the domain of social insurance as well as by a subsidiarity philosophy of the role of the state facing private initiatives in the social assistance realm. Another important characteristic of the *Estado Novo* was its familistic policy orientation.

In this first period, the training of social workers was based on four main domains: health and medical knowledge, law and social legislation, philosophy, and social work.<sup>5</sup> Another essential component of the curriculum was field practice (internship) over three years, in different realms, but with a particular emphasis on health services (surgical services, medicine, paediatrics, nursery child care, maternity and pre-natal consultations, social hygiene dispensaries) and also services within factories, community centres, and domestic and family education centres.

Regarding the theory and knowledge that underpin social work education in this foundational period, we should point out the influence of the technical-scientific rationality of the hygienist and social medicine movements, as a requirement for coping with severe public health problems. To this was combined with the experimental sociology of the French School of Social Science, developed by Frederic Le Play and his disciples, based on the transposition of the method of the natural sciences into the study of social phenomena using empirical observation based on monographic method and surveys. As underlined by Cruz (1982, p. 116), the academic impact of social science is mainly observable in the realm of social policies and especially in the organization of social work and nursing courses. But if this rationale was already present in the former initiatives that created social-medical occupations, despite a greater influence of the School of Social Science in Portugal in the 1930s<sup>6</sup>, the training orientation and the purpose of social work assumed a strongly doctrinal character, corporatist and conservative, with emphasis on a moralising mission among poor families and disadvantaged classes, according to the *Estado Novo* ideology:

[...] it should be noted, given the possibilities they have of unexplored horizons, the creation of social training schools where girls are qualified, even of the best [social] condition, to work in factories, professional organisations, institutions of assistance and collective education a persistent and methodical action of multiple objectives — hygienic, moral, and intellectual — in direct contact with families of all conditions.

[...] The mission of extraordinary scope and the decisive influence which the labourers of Social Work have in the various environments in which they are to work, particularly among modest and limited culture families, the most easily influenced [with hygienic, moral, and intellectual purposes], require the

Government not to withdraw the formation that is given to them, so that it can never deviate from the human, corporative, and Christian sense. [Decree-Law no. 30 135, of 14 December 1939, author's translation].

It should be noted, however, that this vision of social questions as being moral questions is consistent with the conservative social reform perspective of Le Play, which aroused particular interest in social Catholicism first in France, then in Portugal. And this is why, in this light, the creation of schools of social work in Portugal “can be considered, in part, as the result of the practical affirmation of the reform intentions of social science among us” (Cruz, 1982, p. 116).

## **Phase II: The modernisation of social work education**

From the 1950s, social work education in Portugal was progressively based on professional methods (case work, group work, and community work) supported by the classic manuals of social work, produced in countries where the discipline had already been subject to greater professional development, and which were published in Portuguese, as the seminal work of Mary Richmond in 1950, and particularly those published in Brazil.<sup>7</sup> But the 1960s was a turning point in social work education in Portugal. Following the 1956 revision of the public regulation of education in social work, a four-year curriculum was introduced, social work was recognised in higher education (1961), and the curriculum was gradually reoriented, with the progressive introduction of social sciences courses (sociology, anthropology, political science, social psychology, psychopathology, demography, social planning, social policy) and the consolidation of classic methods in social work, with particular emphasis on the method of community organization and development (Branco et al., 1992); (Branco & Fernandes, 2005). Regarding the Lisbon School, what came to be the optional nature of

the religious teaching, representing a cautious **secularism** of the programme, was also a very relevant feature of the profession's development.

This reorientation, here interpreted as modernisation of social work education, was expressed in the official justification of the curriculum revision and reflects an incremental openness to external influences:

*[...] the need to introduce certain amendments to the former [...], amendments mainly aimed at achieving a more perfect correspondence to the requirements of Portuguese social evolution, which, similarly to other countries, calls for an increasing development in group activities, cultural, community-based movements and organizations, and sociological studies on which these activities and movements must necessarily be based [Decree-Law No. 40 678, 1956, emphasis added].*

The 1960s, or more precisely for the Portuguese context, the period from 1958 to 1969, was a changing time in economic and political terms both at the national and international levels, with several events affecting social work. In 1958 a presidential election took place with a strong political mobilisation around a candidate in opposition to the regime. In 1959 Portugal became a member of the European Free Trade Association and began implementation of the 2nd Portuguese Development Plan. The Portuguese Colonial War began in 1961. And, with Prime Minister Salazar's resignation, Marcelo Caetano became the new prime minister from the late 1960s to April 1974, a period that became known as 'Marcelo's Spring' due to its characteristics of political openness, economic liberalisation, and social policy improvement under the motto 'Estado Social'.

Internationally the world witnessed the eruption of different social movements, such as the civil rights and feminist movements, and the United Nations, given the

strong disparity between the levels of development achieved by countries in different continents, proclaimed the 1960s the United Nations Development decade.

An example of the influence and articulation with international organisations can be found in the initiatives of the Lisbon Institute of Social Work (ISS) in the mid-1960s. In 1966 the ISS board asked the United Nations to appoint social work teachers who could ensure the quality of social work education as well as an external assessment of the social work degree. And in the same year the ISS applied for membership of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (Branco et al., 1992, pp. 65-85). This period also saw the publication of *Cadernos de Serviço Social*, the first social work periodical in Portugal.<sup>8</sup>

Together with the importance assigned to the method of community organisation and development, this period featured the functionalist and structural functionalist theories that compose the theoretical framework of social work education, despite the emergence of the critical strands of human and social sciences at the end of the decade.

Within the realm of social work practice, the Office of Community and Social Promotion was created, and several local and community development projects were launched throughout Portugal. This innovative strand, with a developmentalist orientation, coexisted with traditional domains of social work practice in Portugal.

From the late 1960s and early 1970s, social work education in Portugal first experienced the critical and reconceptualisation movements, especially those that emerged in Brazil and Latin American countries. A milestone of the social work reconceptualisation modernising strand in Brazil was the Araxá Document (1967), which stated new roles for social work in underdeveloped countries and represented a break with the exclusive use of case, group, and community methods, arguing for the incorporation of new methods and processes. It also emphasised the macro-action of

social work in social policy and planning as a social work function distinct from micro-action or the administration of social services aimed at individuals, groups, and communities (CBCISS, 1986). This stream had continuity with the Teresópolis Document (1970). This movement and others that emerged in the United States advocating the practice of New Social Work (cf. Kahn, 1973); (Bartlett, 1970), and in France questioning about *Pourquoi Le Travail Social* (AA.VV., 1972), was to have significant impacts on the knowledge base of social work in Portugal, but nevertheless, their effective influence occurred only in the post-April 1974 period (Branco & Fernandes, 2005, p. 170); (Martins, 2003, p. 57).

### **Phase III: The reconceptualisation project**

With the institutional, cultural, and ideological transformations that followed the ‘Carnation Revolution’ on 25 April 1974, a new phase of social work in Portugal opened, shaped by the revolutionary and democratic dynamics that permeate contemporary Portuguese society and the climate of ideological and cultural freedom.

In the social policy field, despite some advances, Marcelo’s *Estado Social* remained a rudimentary welfare system and the ‘Carnation Revolution’ was to be the start of a new era in the construction of a Portuguese welfare state. During this period, the social policy agenda was oriented toward democratisation and rising living standards for the working class, and public social expenditures grew significantly despite a lack of economic growth (Pereirinha & Branco, 2013).

In this new context, social work education was strongly influenced by the currents of critical and radical social work, especially the so-called reconceptualisation movement from Latin American,<sup>9</sup> which led to the defence of ‘Alternative Social Work’, with its questioning of classical social work (based on the triad of case, group,

and community); the introduction of an integrated and global methodology; and, above all, the concept of the social worker as a professional committed to the interests of excluded classes and as an agent of institutional change.

In this phase, social work knowledge deepened its previous orientation, especially regarding the place assigned to human and social sciences (Fernandes, 1985); (Negreiros, 1999), but further was strongly influenced by Marxist social theory, in particular during the so-called revolutionary phase (1974–1976). During this phase what became hegemonic were the influence and orientation of the School of Social Work of the *Universidad de Valparaíso* in Chile (and other Chilean universities during the government of Salvador Allende: *Universidad Católica, Universidad de Concepción*), and the so-called model of Belo Horizonte, from the *Universidade Católica de Belo Horizonte* in Brazil, but also from the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire and other critical authors (Pinto & Bravo, 2016); (C. M. d. Santos & Martins, 2016, p. 326). The added presence in Portugal of some Brazilian teachers, some of them political exiles, contributed significantly to the dissemination of the Latin American Reconceptualization Movement (C. M. d. Santos & Martins, 2016, p. 326). This Marxist influence was sustained into later periods even though its influence decreased and was shared with other schools of thought. In this context, the stability of the bases of knowledge in social work was affected by questioning, both of the purposes and nature of social work, giving rise, above all in the 1974–76 period, to the emphasis of the socio-political dimension over scientific and technical components.

In the professional field, this orientation influenced a break with institutional work, questioning of the traditional fields of practice (social assistance, social insurance, health and private companies) in favour of the methodologies of collective action and political action with popular and social movements. Two illustrations can be

presented as examples of how social workers adopted proactive stands to influence social policy in this period. The first one concerns their involvement in the movement of parents with disabled children and led to the creation of the CERCÍ Movement, at national level, and developments in social support for these families (Negreiros et al., 1992). At the same time, across the country, there were local social movements that led to the creation of a network of social services that provided support and public funding for children, older people, and other family services ((Ferreira & Negreiros, 1978). The second example refers to the involvement of social workers in the movement for housing rights of slum inhabitants in some major cities of the country, aiming for the rehabilitation of those urban neighbourhoods. Among the many products of this social movement were the Ambulatory Service of Local Support, an initiative of the Ministry of Housing in 1974, which involved residents, architects, and other professionals, including social workers. It was based in local teams and developed a participatory approach for new social housing neighbourhood planning in the original localities or nearby neighbourhoods (Branco, 1979).

Other important events of this period of social work in Portugal, with special relevance for social work education, are the movements for the integration of schools of social work in the public university sector and the recognition of university level qualification in social work. The first movement began just after April 1974 as an academic movement with very strong student engagement; it remained active for a decade until fusing with the movement to recognize the university level qualification in social work. The latter, which had its most active phase between 1984 and 1989, was preceded by several initiatives of academic development of social work such as the adoption of a five-year study plan (1985) and the first master's degree in social work,

the result of cooperation between the Lisbon Institute of Social Work and the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (1987).

In late 1975, Portugal entered a new phase in its modern political history. After a revolutionary period, there was a process of democratic and institutional normalisation; a new constitution was adopted and the first democratic elections were held in April 1976, after 50 years of dictatorship. In the field of social policy, following the clear constitutional enshrinement of social rights, successive governments adopted an important set of measures to consolidate and structure the welfare state in Portugal.

Relative to social work practice, this phase of democratic and institutional normalisation, which will open new professional fields, has been taking place through an extension of public social functions; the development of a Portuguese path to a welfare state; and political and administrative decentralisation with an increase in the numbers of qualified social workers.

#### **Phase IV: The academicisation of social work**

The development of social work education in Portugal is characterised by a late and complex academicisation process. Since the 1980s, as mentioned above, despite some academic initiatives and a strong push for university level qualifications and public rather than private education in social work, these aims were only recognised in 1989 for the university degree, and public education also came very late (2000).

The subsequent years were characterised by a complex dynamic with contradictory impacts on social work education and practice. On the one hand, there were academic developments: the creation of the first master's degree (1995) by Portuguese social work schools; an early PhD programme (1996), also cooperative efforts between the Lisbon Institute of Social Work and the Pontifical Catholic

University of São Paulo; a first PhD programme at the Catholic University of Portugal (2003); and the creation of research centres and the participation of Portuguese scholars in research units (Branco & Rodrigues, 2008). On the other hand, since the second half of the 1990s, the new social work courses multiplied in number, changing completely the panorama of social work education in Portugal. From just three schools of social work up to 1995, 15 more courses were created over a ten-year period, in both public and private high education institutions and by universities and polytechnics. This reintroduced in this area, after a seeming extinction in the 1970s, the question of potentially differentiated degrees in professional terms, which risks were lessened by the Bologna reforms that promoted unification of polytechnic and university degrees.

This “boom” of social work education was not the result of evidence from educational and scientific projects, but, above all, the result of contingent logic associated with the growth in the higher education market and the financial crisis that affected public sector higher education in Portugal. This unplanned expansion of social work education, in the context of the recent development of quality assessment and accreditation systems of higher education (2007), was a factor that demanded special attention in respect of quality, namely education standards, academic staff qualifications, and research activity.

In terms of the body of knowledge that underpins social work education, this period was one of reaching a new equilibrium in the theoretical orientation of social work education in Portugal. There evolved a pluralist paradigmatic matrix where critical social work perspectives under the influence of Anglo-Saxon authors coexist with a remaining strong Latin American strand and other orientations, mainly systemic theories and models in social work. This entails considering that the critical and radical Latin American authors and their theoretical orientations lost the dominance facing of a

plurality of European and international authors and schools of thought in social work. However, Europeanisation seems to have been particularly influential in Portugal, particularly following the European Union integration of Portugal in 1985, which contributed to the progressive integration of Portuguese social work schools and scholars in European academic and scientific programmes and networks 20 years after Portugal formally signed the Accession Treaty to join the European Community.

### **Final note**

This article is a ‘short story’ of social work education in Portugal set in the context of local and global perspectives. It has presented evidence of how both international influences and local socio-political events have shaped the itinerary of social work in Portugal, and particularly in social work education.

Salient to social work education in Portugal, is that social work education is a consolidated reality in Portugal rather than a new development, having been pursued since 1935 and having been recognised in higher education for over half a century (1961). The process of social work academicisation is more recent, with just over two and a half decades of existence, following a late and complex process, as evidenced by the history of university-level accreditation of social work programmes (1989), the absence of public sector professional social work education until recently (2000), and the fairly recent creation of a PhD in social work (1996/2003). These changes will play out as social work education in Portugal begins to reach its centenary.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 1935 regulation the admission criteria were: female, between 18 and 35 years old. Secondary school or equivalent and aptitude examination. Preferred criteria: family education high school course. The gender criterion was formally abolished in 1956.

<sup>2</sup> According to Statement no. 37 / VI of the Corporate Chamber, “for some social works—for example, assistance in prisons with minor’s delinquents, the mentally ill and the deaf, in refugee camps and for many of the tasks of basic education and community organisation—experience has shown the advantage of male agents” (March 31, 1956, item 6, page 779).

<sup>3</sup> René Sand, *Les Méthodes Nouvelles d’Assistance. Le Service Social des Cas Individuels* (1926).

<sup>4</sup> For a profile of these two French women, see (M. I. Santos, 2011, p. 676) and (Martins, 1999, pp. 288-295).

<sup>5</sup> Medical and health fields: anatomy, physiology, microbiology, infectious diseases, general and food hygiene, child care, hygiene and town planning, sanitary legislation, etc. Legal fields: constitutional law, civil law, law and labour and social insurance law, etc. Philosophical, moral, and religious fields: philosophy (general ideas, psychology), notions of child psychology, pedagogy and education, moral philosophy, religious culture (encyclicals, etc.). Social work: technical training (including accounting and typing); social action and corporatism—national unions; social organisation of industry and industrial hygiene; agricultural social organization: “Houses of the People”.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the influence of Le Play’s School of Social Science on Portuguese social work, former professional occupations, and sociology, see Cruz (1982), Martins (1993) (1999), and Ágoas (2013).

<sup>7</sup> AGIR Editora assumed a relevant role in publishing in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s several seminal social work books: Gordon Hamilton, *Teoria e Prática do Serviço Social de Casos* (Theory and Practice of Social Case Work), 1958; as well as the Zahar Editora and other Brazilian publishers.

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<sup>8</sup> This periodical would be published between 1956 and 1962 by the initiative of The National Union of Social Work Professionals. In the same period, in the context of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of ISS several brochures were published on social work (community social work, social work in the labour sector, education and social work, medical social work, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> If it is true that in March 1974, by the initiative of the National Union of Social Work Professionals, the *Seminar on the Reconceptualisation of Social Work in Latin America* had already taken place, having as keynote speaker Professor Herman Kruze, from Uruguay, focused on the topic social work and its role in dictatorial and underdeveloped societies, it was only after 1974 that the influence of these critical and radical movements in Portugal was felt.