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Neoliberal governmentality in social work practice. An example of the Polish social security system

Neoliberalne urządzenie w pracy socjalnej na przykładzie polskiego systemu pomocy społecznej

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ABSTRACT

The text contributes to the debate on power relations in social work practice and the impact of neoliberal governmentality on the professional conduct of social workers. The aim was to examine the nature of the relationship between policy shaping social work practice and power relations exercised by social workers in the changing welfare state in Poland. The perspective combining 'governmentality' and 'historical-political sociology' was engaged to answer questions of *why* and *how* in the context of dominant discourses affecting regimes of practice. Qualitative data were generated from in-depth interviews with 30 social workers and family assistants. The analysis was based on engaging theory that enabled knowledge to proliferate and there to be multi-faceted interpretations. Local patterns of neoliberal governmentality were identified: 'suboptimization', the role of 'historical legacies' taking as an example 'catholicization' and pastoral power, and installing 'homo oeconomicus' by inculcating self-discipline and personal responsibility. The question of why those forms of governmentality were introduced was also answered in terms of implementing a 'business model' in social work, the prevalence of 'historical legacies' and the Catholic church in constituting welfare state, and discursive domination of neoliberalism leading to deprofessionalization and submission of social work to market demands.

ABSTRAKCYJNY

Tekst odnosi się do debaty poświęconej relacjom władzy w pracy socjalnej oraz wpływu neoliberalnego urządzenia (*governementality*) na działania profesjonalne pracowników socjalnych. Celem artykułu jest zidentyfikowanie i analiza relacji między polityką kształtującą pracę socjalną oraz władzą w jaką wnikają się pracownicy socjalni w kontekście zmieniającego się państwa socjalnego. Perspektywa teoretyczna i analityczna łączy koncepcję foucaultowskiego urządzenia oraz socjologię historyczno-polityczną. Ich zastosowanie wiąże się z próbą odpowiedzi na pytania *dlaczego* oraz *jak* władza urządza społeczeństwo w kontekście dominujących dyskursów kształtujących reżimy praktyk. Dane o charakterze jakościowym zostały wygenerowane na podstawie indywidualnych wywiadów pogłębionych, przeprowadzonych z 30 pracownikami socjalnymi i asystentami rodzin. Analiza została przeprowadzona w oparciu o zastosowanie teorii, co pozwoliło na wieloaspektowe interpretacje materiału badawczego oraz

KEYWORDS

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wygenerowanie nierozpoznanych wcześniej obszarów wiedzy w zakresie badanych zjawisk. Zidentyfikowano lokalne wzory neoliberalnego urzędowania, takie jak: 'suboptymalizacja', rola 'dziedzictw historycznych' na przykładzie 'katolicyzacji' państwa opiekuńczego i władzy pastoralnej oraz wytwarzania 'homo oeconomicus' poprzez narzucanie samodyscypliny i indywidualnej odpowiedzialności odbiorcom pomocy społecznej. Dlaczego owe formy urzędowania znalazły zastosowanie w ramach nowoczesnego państwa opiekuńczego? Na to pytanie można odpowiedzieć analizując adaptację 'modelu biznesowego' w polu pracy socjalnej, 'dziedzictwa historyczne' państw opiekuńczych oraz rolę kościoła katolickiego w kształtowaniu współczesnego państwa opiekuńczego a także dyskursywną dominację neoliberalizmu, prowadzącą do deprofesjonalizacji i podporządkowania pracy socjalnej wymaganiom logiki wolnego rynku.

Introduction

Social work is an international activity, which means the way the practice is operated and how international agenda and institutions influence its theoretical content and practice. It has been shaped by international policies, value systems and knowledge development as well as by local factors. Therefore Hare (2004) states: 'social workers worldwide must learn more about global forces affecting societies in various stages of economic development' (p. 417). Today, policy transfer in terms of the individual agency of actors engaged in the implementation of policies and programmes should be reconsidered. Contemporary knowledge flow is crucial for understanding the nature of social work. The article contributes to the debate on power relations in social work practice and the impact of neoliberalism embedding current governmentality in the professional conduct of social workers. The general idea was to understand and examine the nature of the relationship between policy shaping social work and practice, taking the example of power relations exercised by social workers. Findings concerning the nature of relationships between social workers and clients led me to the implementation of the governmentality perspective and neoliberalism as an explanatory idea of forces affecting the Polish welfare state and social work. I use the perspectives adopted from Hardy and Jobling (2015), which combine governmentality with historical-political sociology (henceforth HPS), to answer the questions 'why' and 'how' in the context of dominant discourses influencing regimes of practice in social work. The study is based on qualitative methodology and data analysis based on an adaptation of the governmentality and HPS perspective.

Governmentality is a way that alliances of institutions, discourses, ideologies and individual motives determine dominant rationalities or 'mentalities of government' (Miller & Rose, 1988). Thanks to Foucault's (2009) analysis, it is possible to trace techniques and strategies of disciplinary power by assuming that power in society can be both oppressive and productive, which means that it is not only a repressive force imposing particular ways of conduct. The general idea is that power is present in every social relation and institution as a ubiquitous and hardly recognisable form of discipline obviously present in social work practice that is hiding its power-related assumptions. As a part of governmentality, social work comprises techniques of disciplinary power as far as it is a part of 'disciplinary society' that cares about people's conduct and mentality through manifold subjectifications that bind subject to relations of power on the one hand, and at this point creates self-knowledge based individuals on the other. The welfare state in governmentality studies is perceived as a modality of government – distinctive techniques, strategies, ideas and rationalities by which power is exercised (Dean, 2010).

The HPS focuses on key role ideas that take part in the construction and reconstruction of institutions and discourses shaping institutional reality. On the historical part it recognises the past by critical concern that describes the present, it 'aims to trace the forces that gave birth to our

present-day practices and to identify the historical and social conditions upon which they still depend' (Garland, 2001, p. 2). The history is used to read out the present rather than analyse the past. My concern in engaging HPS into qualitative analysis was to trace social and historical forces that shaped the welfare state and social work practice in order to understand the relation of causality between policy and practice.

This integrated model of governmentality and HPS has already been tested by Hardy and Jobling (2015) with reference to the example of knowledge 'flow' in the international perspective. The approach enabled the integration of policy, culture and ideology levels with the individual agency 'ensuring that both descriptive and causal accounts are accommodated' (Hardy & Jobling, 2015, p. 539).

Expansion of neoliberalism in Poland in the context of the welfare state

Marketisation, managerialism and neoliberalism have profoundly challenged the values of social work and had a great impact on its practice (Ferguson, 2008; Lorenz, 2005; Rogowski, 2010). Market orientation and neoliberalisation have influenced social work not only in Western countries but also in Central and Eastern European (henceforth CEE) countries. Poland is just a symptomatic example of a CEE country that was one of the most influenced by neoliberal 'shock therapy' (Murrell, 1993) and the development of its 'emergency welfare state' still persists today. Overall, the CEE region, including Poland, stands out in EU statistics in terms of the lowest ratio level of expenditure on social protection as an amount of GDP (Eurostat, 2017).

It is clear that after 1989 many international institutions, think tanks, ideology, public opinion and current policy issues influenced the reform of the welfare state in Poland as well as 'historical legacies' of CEE countries. Inglot (2008) points out 'historical legacies' in Poland that influenced welfare state reforms. They appeared in the context of shock therapy that consisted of two elements: political and economic transition to capitalism and enormous commodification of most public fields. The second process was reinforced after EU accession (Rae, 2015) that led to the implementation of the 'Lisbon Strategy' and later 'Europe 2020'. They created a social investment policy that possesses many similar assumptions to neoliberalism. For instance, there is strong pressure on activation and services based on occupation integration (Rymsza, 2013). In this light, one can conclude that European integration was neoliberal in nature.. Therefore, the dominant conviction was that employment was the panacea for all social problems. The post-communist period was basically oriented towards the so-called active social policy based mainly on employability (Rymsza, 2013). As a consequence of 'Europeanisation', social work become engaged in the process of managing social problems rather than solving them.

Research design

The study is based on qualitative methodology and analysis that comprise the adaptation of the *governmentality* and HPS perspective. The approach enabled the integration of policy, culture and ideology levels with the individual agency ensuring that both descriptive and causal accounts are accommodated. The aim of the study was to describe power relations at work: functions and effects of power in the field of social work practice. Based on interpretations of power relations in social work practice by social workers and family assistants, it considers whether this practice is an expression of specific welfare state governmentality developed by processes of neoliberal expansion of certain regimes of truth. The impact of neoliberal governmentality was traced by the researcher on the basis of narrative perspectives of social workers describing their practice and relationships with clients. Questions concerning power relations were asked directly through reference to the idea of power over the client and indirectly by referring to the general relationship with clients. The assumptions were that there exists a relationship between policies,

discourse and 'historical legacies' influencing the social security system and practice, and this relationship is identifiable on a micro level.

Qualitative data were generated from in-depth interviews with 30 individuals (10 per agglomeration): 27 social workers and 3 family assistants with at least one year of practice experience and employed full-time in social work centres in larger agglomerations in the Pomerania region in Poland. Data were also retrieved from 30 h of participant observations in social work centres focusing on social workers' practice. The purposive sample was based on several criteria to generate the most possibly diverse data. These are gender, years of practice, type of practice and department. The aim of differentiating between sample criteria was to widen the perspective of a social worker and family assistant within which the data were recorded, transcribed, categorised and coded, allowing the identification of essential elements in the data set and comparing them with other data and interpreting it with the theoretical perspective of governmentality and HPS. The analysis was based on engaging theory into the qualitative analysis that enabled knowledge to proliferate and there to be multifaceted interpretations while avoiding reducing data to simple categorisations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Findings

The leitmotiv of public debates concerning the welfare state focused on a pension and family allowance system that was perceived, by most of the population at the beginning of the 1990s, as a social security base. At that time, and in some ways still, the social security system is rather limited to financial transfers. This was one reason for critiques of the welfare state by neoliberals who often contrasted democracy having a neoliberal face with old, 'bad' communism. Therefore, the meaning of welfare state was delineated to 'fiscal burden' when faced with growing poverty defined as the 'necessary cost of transformation' and the real welfare state would soon come after the inevitable transition to capitalism. Consequently, discourses of individual responsibility, employability, and domination of entrepreneurs and employers' perspectives are implemented in public debates.

'Suboptimisation' as the impoverishment of goals of social work practice

The role of think tanks in debates on welfare was crucial. However, in Poland they were dominated by neoliberals who were supported by the US and international organisations promoting neoliberalism. Intellectuals and NGOs developed their critique of the welfare state and social security system on the moral assumption that it leads to higher state spending and higher taxation that limits the employability of potential workers, the minimum wage excluding some employers from the market. Other actors involved in the implementation of the neoliberal regime were transnational corporations that operated in a global context and were able to regulate markets and transfer economic power into political power (Crouch, 2011). The main consequence in social work was the emergence of New Public Management (henceforth NPM) in the public sector, which became part of social services management and led to the system of subcontracting and implementation of the 'business model' in social security systems (Schram & Silverman, 2012). Hence, the private sector makes changes in social policy through outsourcing, NPM and the introduction of quasi-markets and performance measurement systems.

One of the consequences of the 'business model' in social work is the phenomenon of 'suboptimisation' that occurs when one outcome is affirmed at the expense of other outcomes and is treated as an indicator of other, even non-measurable dimensions. In the case of social service provision, it relates to the situation in which one particular goal – employability – stands for the overall goal of social work. It seems evident that social workers' perception of the goal of their practice is mostly defined in terms of self-sufficiency, independence and locating people outside the social security

system. Typical narrations involve occupational activation and employment as ways of becoming independent of 'the social security system':

The aim of practice is putting somebody outside the social security system, to be independent and cut themselves off from social security.

Self-reliance means taking up work and an independent life. Independently but with the hand of our institution. For example, they should be reintegrated into employment. Have a stable job so their financial situation improves and they become independent. Actions that lead to functioning without our support. Independently.

On the other hand, the perception of relations is based on the assumption that social security is a burden on society and dependency discourse prevails among social workers who identify the paradoxical relationship between dependency culture and social security 'making people lazy'. The paradox is doubled by the fact that Poland has almost the lowest welfare spending in the EU. One social worker affirms:

Yes, we make them dependent. If someone gets into the system, they will not stand up quickly. They stay for a year or two and become dependent. And now, we do not require anything from them. In the case of longstanding clients, I think that we support them, there is no social work with them.

The 'business model' introduced mainly by the NPM approach has strengthened the conceptual complexity of dependency discourse about clients and employability as a mark of a shift from the welfare state to welfare-to-work. In practical terms, it leads to moving clients from 'the system' to the 'labour market', which in Poland does not mean improvement in the quality of life. So the 'welfare poor' become 'working poor' or in the case of pensioners, 'poor pensioners'. Moving older people from welfare to the 'pension system' was one of the strategies identified during the research. The problem defined by social workers was that many 'clients' did not apply for their pension due to the fact that welfare benefits are higher than their future pension and cannot be sequestered by debt collectors. In one case the social worker talks about the tools used in such cases:

Yes, at present we have a tool, conditioning decisions, that is the decision where clients, I put everything down during the interview, are obliged to submit pension ability documentation to the Social Insurance Institution (henceforth: ZUS) to gain pension benefits. Because they will get the pension benefit. Finally, they get the decision and this so-called conditioning paper puts it in beautiful print that they must do it in a certain amount of time. This might be the reason to repeal public help, because they did nothing to get their pension. Because they said that the debt collectors would come. It does not apply to our benefits.

The implementation of the 'business model' was not just 'western' policy transfer, but the 'suboptimisation' was also strengthened by local factors connected to the historical welfare state. Three 'historical legacies' of the welfare state were distinguished by Ingłot (2008), who states that they strongly determined social policy in Poland. The first one is based on the assumption that ZUS, the only state institution responsible for social insurance, is irreplaceable when it comes to institutional infrastructure of the welfare state. The second, disability pensions were split into two categories: unable to work and those who could earn extra money up to 70% of the average wage. It was the government's reaction to an unstoppable unemployment rate that led to compensation in the form of disability pension. The third, the system of disability pensions was reinforced, simultaneously eligibility was loosened and accessibility was increased (Ingłot, 2008). The consequence of the development of Polish and other CEE welfare was characterised by the hybridisation and layering of institutions, policies and structures. The post-communist legacy of the welfare state based on institutional resources, bureaucracy, certain social policy patterns of redistribution and infrastructure led to the situation where the 'emergency welfare state' remained under neoliberal financial regimes that led to the retrenchment of social policy by focusing on short-term social insurance transfers. Possibly all of them led to local variants of 'emergency welfare states' in CEE and determined the post-communist transformation (Grzymała-Busse, 2002).

The 'philosophy' of the welfare state adopted at the beginning of the transformation in the 1990s took the predictable form of self-dependency by all possible social service users. As Szmagalski (2004) comments on the Social Welfare Act:

provision of social welfare should be aimed at ensuring the self-dependence of individuals and families and their social integration. Individuals and families benefiting from the opportunities provided by social welfare are obliged to co-operate in solving the life problems that they are facing (p. 246).

The problem is that social services were facing the incompatibility of the social security system and statutory functions of social work with the reality of the welfare state. Szmagalski identifies the major problem limiting social work practice in Poland that is a subsidiary principle according to which local governments are responsible for social security but when faced with public government's control over public expenditure, fail in implementing local policy and low decision-making.

'Catholicisation' and pastoral power in the Polish welfare state

The very characteristics of Polish debates on the welfare state were that all the actors taking part did not really try to find alternatives to the commodification of the public sector, including political parties. As Szelewa (2014) points out: '20 years after the start of the transformation, in spite of changes in the composition of Cabinets, the neoliberal consensus concerning marketisation and neoliberalisation of public life in Poland could not be broken'. Moreover, after EU accession neoliberal trends in social policy were also sustained when faced with the 'anti-crisis package'. An important actor in those debates was the Catholic Church that influenced conservative ideology on social policy. Although the Church was not directly involved in any reform of social policy, it was still one of the largest beneficiaries as a subcontractor of social services developed in most cases by church organisations. On the other hand, there is a significant impact of Catholic social teaching on the Social Welfare Act. One significant principle is subsidiarity which locates responsibilities for the social life of individuals in the smallest units of organisation, i.e. the family. The conjunction of the neoliberal economy and Catholicism led to the process of 'catholicisation of neoliberalism', which does not mean the rejection of the free market but the 'injunction that parts of this wealth ought to be redistributed through charity. As an ethical orientation, Catholicised neoliberalism thus combines material opulence with one of clean conscience and good feeling' (Muehlebach, 2013, p. 455). The moral style of Catholicism co-occurs with neoliberalism and probably keeps it intact, despite allowing a temporary suspension of market rules. In the case of Poland, catholicisation led to at least two interpretations for shaping social work practice: subsidiarity and a new form of pastoral power based on confession. One social worker describes the way she checks on clients:

We write to ZUS to the personal identification centre, if a person is alone or has grown-up children, they are entitled to alimony, we need to check if the parents can be helped by the children

The idea of subsidiarity was fairly adapted by neoliberals and is often used in social work practice as a way of shifting the protectiveness burden from the state to the family that goes along with employability as part of the larger strategy of building independence in clients. The legally imposed responsibility of family members for an individual was subsumed into the neoliberal overarching aim that is imbuelement of personal or family responsibility instead of engaging cash assistance from the state. The case of alimony is one example of the state-assisted exercise of responsibility discipline over clients' family members and themselves. Another social worker describes a client's embarrassment on informing his children about his situation:

The guy asked me not to write to his children. He begged me: I do not want them to know, I am ashamed. He was reasonable. I went to the coordinator after the interview, and he decided to proceed with the alimony. In the end, I had to send the alimony request. He would not get his homeless shelter if I did not send it. I hate writing alimony requests. I think our clients accept being controlled by us and being forced to visit different institutions, but it must be painful that we are also governing their lives and telling their family about it.

The following narrative is an example of extended responsibility for the client imposed on children that were victims of their father. It shows how disciplinary of responsibility exercised over the population does not consider individual experiences and resembles an act of needless suffering assisted by the state. However, as Das (2007) points out, suffering creates moral citizens through institutionalised disciplinary while containing an element of maliciousness and hurting a person in the name of great projects for society. The last example shows the other side of institutionalised punishment – children’s suffering:

Sometimes a social worker goes to the children and says: “your father needs help” and then all recollections appear and the whole story comes back. I remember my first alimony procedure, the daughters gave me their statement, I am glad I did not see them, I had to do it according to the law. They wrote me a letter and told me about their childhood with their father. He was a cruel man. And I think they are now grown up and have turned their lives around. I do not have right to change it.

These are examples of consequences of subsuming ideas from the Catholic social teaching into neo-liberal governmentality. They are all painfully present in social workers’ practice and lead to ambivalent attitudes towards their duties. This responsibility discipline becomes a part of a larger system of investigation into the client that is based on the idea of confession present in the governmentality called pastoral power.

According to Foucault (2009), pastoral power is modelled on the shepherd-flock relationship that is reproduced in liberal modes of governing and includes techniques of individualisation. The modern welfare state reproduces responsibility developed by pastorality assuming the relationship between pastoral responsibility for the flock and individual responsibility to the pastor (Dean, 2010). In modernity, the role of the pastor has been taken over by the state, which adapted pastoral power to changing reality.

As Foucault points out, pastoral power is rooted in the ritual of confession, establishing intimate relationships based on telling the truth and later developed in manifold systems of interrogation. Confession becomes the paradigm of institutional interrogation, whereas pastorate is a ‘prelude to governmentality’ (Dean, 2010). Though it was related to religion, after centuries it has spread over the social body of modern societies and been adapted by liberal governmentality. The social security system is based on self-knowledge and self-governing of ‘clients’ while gathering information about the whole population. In this respect, social workers should be regarded as modern pastors using techniques of governmentality such as self-governing, counselling and expertise consisting of two approaches: quantitative, concerning the population, and analytical, spreading out over individuals. This knowledge about clients can be identified as a form of control stemming from interviews and collaboration of institutions gathering information about the client:

We check on clients. I believe what a client says but I write to ZUS, I check if they are registered at the employment agency. I do not force them to bring me confirmation. But for example, if they don’t tell me they have children I send a letter to the Public Electronic Population Evidence System to check if they do, and get other helpful information so that I can know everything and then I’m sure the help is adequate to their needs. I know how to work with them, it gives me the possibility to guide them well.

In the above case the social worker was convinced that the truth was an important part of guidance, counselling and teaching the client responsibility, often by forcing them to give back illegally claimed (due to dissimulation) cash assistance or impelling clients’ children or other family members to pay alimony. The relationship established in the act of confession is a form of subjectification immersing individuals in the system of power relations using the revelation of self-knowledge. In the following case, the social worker describes how the relationship between telling the truth and the institutional network is established.

We check on a client’s credibility if we have any suspicions. We check on the children, their functioning in society, we check information held by the police, in court, by the prosecutor’s office. And signing a social contract. As social workers, if we work together according to the contract, to achieve something, this is a way of controlling the client. They have clinched the deal and I have to scrutinise that.

The local phenomenon of pastoral power is located in social work practice and could be explained by the fact that the 'emergent welfare state' in Poland relies not only on bureaucratic disciplinarity but also on 'historical legacies', which in this case is the impact of Catholicism. The research provides evidence for the importance of the 'question of truth' in social worker-client relations and the importance of verification of a client's narrations through, as a disciplinarity strategy, using documents and the network of institutions taking 'care' of them.

Reconstructing 'homo oeconomicus'

Neoliberal discourse in the context of social policy appeared after 1989 when justification of austerity policy was necessary. The semantic axis around which the discourse was exercised was connected to such terms as 'laziness', 'learned helpless syndrome' and 'homo sovieticus'. The last term describes a person that was brought up in a real socialist system which made him passive, helpless and subordinated, with high expectations of a paternalistic state (Sztompka, 1993). Furthermore, there has been a significant change in professional discourse over the last thirty years after the Polish 'shock therapy' since the process of professionalisation has developed very slowly. As Granosik (2016) points out, faced with domination of administrative discourses inside the field of emerging social work, external discourses, grounded in theories, ideologies and religion, started to shape social work practice. One of the consequences of the non-interventional state idea was the deprofessionalisation of social work and the lack of legitimisation of the welfare state and social work in wider ideological and political contexts. EU accession influenced administrative discourse in social work centres that were obliged to apply for EU programmes, fulfil all the requirements of procedures and assumed effects. In consequence, the role of internal technical and procedural discourse was strengthened along with deprofessionalisation and the lack of structural change (Granosik, 2016). The process of Europeanisation of social work in Poland strengthened neoliberal tendencies and led to the current situation where the most valued competencies are those connected to NPM. As Granosik (2016) concludes, institutional discourse present in social work was strongly connected to the procedures and diminished 'humanistic' content of social work, whereas the relationship with clients is strongly subjected to procedures and indexes. As a consequence of neoliberalisation, the idea of individual responsibility led to the strengthening of the role of sanctions and emphasis was put on blaming the unemployed who are perceived as a burden for the state budget (Szelewa, 2014).

Another context identified in the research was the administered attempts to reconstruct 'homo oeconomicus' through efforts of establishing a new type of responsabilised citizen. It is a mutual change in which discipline is imposed on both social services and clients to achieve compliance and lower dependency on welfare. The following social worker's statement represents the perception of the role and techniques of implementing client responsibility:

We agree on the decision after a month when I do the interview and reduce their benefits. So we, as the centre [Social Work Centre], cash in because we do not bear the cost of their full benefits. The client is thrown into the world and customs of paying the rent and fees in advance.

So, the client uses their benefits, theoretically 100 percent and is entitled to household allowance, but they want their full benefits. What is the consequence? They do not pay their rent. But the housing allowance is within the remit of the Provision Centre and they reduce the benefits to cover the rent. So this is teaching, to take responsibility.

The above calculation is just another example of installing 'homo economicus' that stems from the idea that recipients of welfare benefits are eager to become lazy. Therefore, they need discipline from the moment they get the support. Foucault presents the paradox of subjectivation where becoming the subject means being subjected to a certain form of power (Foucault, 1995). This contradiction between individual autonomy and subjugation by the power in the process of constructing the individual is present in social work practice according to the formula that subjugation is at the same time making the subject. In this respect, I ask what kind of subjectivity is created and why? The

technologies of power construct an individual 'through the promotion of subjectivity, through investments in individual lives, and the forging of alignments between the personal projects of citizens and the images of social order' (Miller & Rose, 1988, p. 172). Neoliberal governmentality assumes individuals are the means of production but also human capital and the source of capital itself. According to rule responsibility, lessening the burden also means teaching how to get rid of debts. One of the social worker's comments on the problem of debt:

They have debt collectors on their back. We teach them how to return the money. We have lawyers who help write letters to debt collectors. We can also make agreements with employers, how a person will be employed so that the collector does not take their whole pay. (...) This is the reason they refuse to go to work. They have no money and there is nothing to divest. Sometimes clients are willing to work but the debt collector will never stop chasing their debts.

In this case, social work serves as a ladder to participation in a market economy for excluded people willing to engage in the support process but on the assumption that the basic idea of social bond is connected to the free market and financial industry. Support is defined as paying debts and finding a job. This is due to the fact that neoliberal discipline in social work subordinates clients to fulfil market demands.

Narrations on the educational impact of social work practice are often focused on teaching a person effective work habits by implementing a number of tools such as a social contract:

For example, they undertake basic commitments, initial work activity, socially useful work. For the long-term unemployed, we need to focus on work habits, like getting up at 6 AM and making them ready to work.

We use contracts to control our clients, to make them carry out their activities in the context of financial support, too. It is like a collaboration agreement, we agree on something and put it down. I will write to their building administrator, to ZUS, to the National Archives and determine all their workplaces. In the meantime, they will do their own thing. When we summarise it turns out that I did my job and them? We are grown up, right?

In the last case, the social worker's narration is about the use of a social contract to influence an individual's conduct when relocating a person outside of welfare benefits and making them live 'on their own' – on a pension lower than their previous financial support. The following statement describes how restrictions and punishment are engaged in the reconstruction of 'homo oeconomicus':

Yes, we make an agreement that they will comply with. In January, register at the Employment Agency, take up therapy, bring me a rent check. There is a loophole, article 39 of Social Work Law, that assumes support is acknowledged under the realisation of the contract.

Documentation shows how individuals are constructed in terms of knowledge and understood as well as processed as 'cases' or 'folders' in terms of social work assistance discourse. Common examples of the disciplinary tool shaping individual work habits are making clients register at the Employment Agency and show their continued willingness to work. Nevertheless, social workers use a 'withdrawal period from the Employment Agency' where the client does not take full responsibility in justifiable cases:

After a month health insurance is taken away. But if someone delivers documents and proves their absence because of a withdrawal period due to hospitalisation then I decide to strike it from the protocol. But I need all the papers, then we can talk about support. If they are not complete and I go to my manager and he asks me about the person I do not know, I will not defend them.

One of the most intriguing ways of building responsibility in clients is teaching them the 'neoliberal political economy' where everything is countable and is defined as potential capital. In the following example, waste collection is interpreted as a source of income:

We often explain that our benefits, financial support comes at the end. If someone has their own possibilities, they need to use them. (...) Sometimes I ask the clients how they support themselves? Do you feed yourself with air? And it turns out that they collect cans. Yesterday they earned 20 zloty but then nothing for two days. I ask: can you

remember how much you earn a month? And then they start to think. A couple of hundred. (...) So I put down on their financial interest declaration that they live off collecting waste and have an income of this amount. We really insist on that.

The above narration considers the main effort of social work as teaching self-discipline and inculcating in clients the sense of Social Return of Investment (henceforth SROI) by which every aspect of life is measured in terms of social value (Heady, 2010). This is the ultimate form of privatisation in the process of internalising self-governance by activating the poorest by making them invest in their lives. Social work was partially downsized to managing social problems and guidance over clients thought to be treating themselves as a source of capital and to be responsible to the economy led by the financial industry by paying their debts. The body is disciplined according to the principle of usability both in the economic sense, as a restitution of 'homo oeconomicus', and as an object of neoliberal governmentality focusing on constraints and more repressive forms of power by engaging the body in the number of institutions characterised by a different degree of carcerality, from social work centres, social integration centres and probation officers to police officers and the Court. Reconstruction of 'homo oeconomicus' leads to the creation of rationally responsible clients through small investments and burdening them with a huge responsibility by installing the sense of consequence of their decisions and making them believe that they are responsible for what happens in their lives. According to Foucault (1977): 'The individual is an effect of power and (...) the element of its articulation' (p. 98) which in this case means the creation of subjects as 'responsible' clients is also an articulation of dominant forms of power, neoliberal governmentality.

Discussion and conclusions

An examination of the relationship between policies and social work practice through the example of power relations leads to the general conclusion that integrating governmentality and the HPS approach can answer not only the question about how power works within the social body but also why certain forms of power are exercised in particular historical, social and institutional contexts. Taking Poland as a specific case study, the research illustrates the role of social work as a tool of neoliberal governmentality that comes down to teaching clients how to manage without a welfare state that was already weak and 'emergent', which is typical of most CEE countries. Unfortunately, depoliticised and liberalised Polish social work (Granosik, 2016) became the tool of privatisation in terms of SROI and resembles a neoliberal regime with a behaviouristic trait that is represented by self-sufficiency and SROI when faced with dominant 'dependency discourse' common among social workers.

The traits of neoliberal governmentality shaping power relations in social work practice identified were explained using the integrating approach of governmentality and Historical and Political Sociology. This research is consistent with studies concerning neoliberalisation of social work assuming that in the context of service provision there are certain identifiable consequences of transformation of social services these days: the impact of 'neoliberal paternalism' (Schram & Silverman, 2012), the change of professional identity of social workers (Hyslop, 2018), social services being regulated and defined by market mechanisms leading to de-professionalisation (Spolander et al., 2014), and bottom-up adjustment processes applied by social workers in their practice that is bound by neoliberal assumptions (Albuquerque, 2018).

In this research local accounts, adaptations and translations of policy transfers came to the fore while explaining how power relations are exercised and why particular forms were introduced. This integrated perspective made it possible to answer two general questions suggested by Hardy and Jobling (2015):

- how discourse via power/knowledge relations defines goals of social work practice in terms of 'suboptimisation', use and subsume 'historical legacies' to neoliberal governmentality by the example of 'catholicisation' and pastoral power, and constitutes 'homo oeconomicus' by

inculcating self-discipline, personal responsibility and a sense of being part of capitalisation in a free market economy

- why specific forms of governmentality were introduced in terms of neoliberalisation introduced by NPM implementing the 'business model' in social work, the prevalence of 'historical legacies' and the Catholic church in shaping the welfare state, and discursive domination of neoliberalism leading to deprofessionalisation and submission of social work to market demands.

The study has its limitations, which are obviously related to the non-probabilistic sampling that had to be adapted to the real possibilities for conducting the research. Firstly, the research is heavily localised in the Pomerania region of Poland making it biased to local conditions that might be different in other regions. However, it would be hard to assume that policy transfer and general trends identified in the research were different in other regions. Secondly, research methods were focused on in-depth interviews and participant observations, which concern only the perspective of social workers, excluding clients' perspective since social workers decided the conditions of observation. Due to legal requirements and confidentiality, the clients' perspectives were absent in the research process.

Neoliberal governmentality in social work relies on not just a basic reproduction of social structure and buffering between the poor and rich but on recoding and incorporating mechanisms of oppression and dominance when faced with the transition to a free market economy and sustaining it. In this respect, there is a constant need to ask about the role of social workers who, according to this study and due to the absence of critical perspectives on social work in Poland and neoliberalism in social work, seem to be uncritical of neoliberal transformations of the social security system and show a lack of consciousness of power relations in their practice. Hence it is advisable to raise the consciousness of power relations through engagement of multidimensional understanding of power relations in social work education. The concept of power as a productive force in a sense of life possibilities and making the individual should also be adopted by emancipatory approaches present in social work. This should include the assumption that every practice is immersed in power relations that can be both oppressive and productive. The second recommendation concerns policy transfer and assumes that institutions responsible for policy implementation should thoroughly consider the role of 'historical legacies', local accounts and translations of policy accounts in order to better understand its role in international development.

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