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History and Development of Social Work Education in Spain : From School of Social Assistants to Faculty of Social Work

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STUDIA

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Introduction

Social Work education in Spain and many other countries is implementing important innovations in order to improve the quality of training plans. The main line of generational change is related to the implementation of the European Higher Education Area, which establishes the purpose of promoting a common frame of reference, improving external knowledge and providing students' mobility as well as employment opportunities. Before we begin the analysis of current situation of Social Work education program, we will briefly describe the evolution and history of the discipline in this regard.

Development of Social Work education in Spain

The development of studies in Social Work in Spain has been accompanied by the professionalization of social workers¹. This profession has its origin in

¹ F. G. Gómez, F. H. Buendía, *The development of social work education in Spain*, „European Journal of Social Work”, 12 (1), p. 113–117.

the 30's, coinciding with the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic. Most of the theorists who have explained the origin and evolution of Social Work in this country, have proposed four phases in the history, which coincide with the most important changes in education²

First Stage (1930–1970): As we mentioned previously, the first years of development in this profession were influenced by a Republican political system and the Civil War, and the action of social workers was limited to charity methods. It was in 1932 when the first school of Social Work was founded, and it was the predecessor of what is now known as Schools of Social Work. However, the education plan proposed for titling “Social Assistants” was extremely influenced by the religious tradition. Coinciding with the arrival of the dictatorship of General Franco, training and work of social workers were linked to religious ideas, thus experiencing a period of several decades in which there was no evolution.

Second Stage (1970–1990). In the late 70's, with the advent of Democracy in Spain, scientific influence starts to be included into the profession of Social Work, as well as the first official studies. In the early 80's the education plans in this discipline started booming, and the Diploma in Social Work was introduced in university schools.

Third Stage (1990–1999). Time to consolidate our discipline, which matches with a search of responses to an unsatisfactory situation related to social demands of the population³. Added to this, the area of Social Work and Social Services is recognized as an independent knowledge area and a three years' Diploma is established. The first congress of the profession takes also place in Spain in this decade.

Fourth stage (from 2000). This professional stage is influenced by the need of reorganizing and redefining Social Services and Social Work. At the same time, training plans at universities are definitively developed. In 1999, Bologna Plan is approved by the Higher Education System, also for Social Work plans, introducing important changes in Spanish education system.

² N. De la Red, *El Trabajo Social en los servicios de bienestar social [Social Work in Social Welfare State]*, In VII Congreso Estatal en Trabajo Social y Asistentes Sociales, 1992.

³ M. D. C. M. Cano, Y. M. de la Fuente Robles, *Trabajo Social en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior: el caso español [Social Work in European Higher Education Area: The Spanish case]*, “Documentos de trabajo social: Revista de trabajo y acción social”, 2013 (53), p. 91–107.

Since 2010, colleges are renamed Faculties of Social Work, and the guidelines set by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) start working. In the case of Spain, degrees are structured as follows:

- *Degree*: A basic degree of four year duration, developed within 180–240 credits.
- *Post Graduate Degree or Master's Degree*: A specific plan which provides a competitive plan for postgraduate students. It is usually developed during two years and it provides 60 credits or more.
- *Doctoral degree*. Born in 2008 in Spain, this qualification is the highest educational level and it is related to create scientific research in Social Work. It must be developed in three years and 300 previous credits are required.

Bologna Plan and European Higher Education Area: Education for social workers in Spain today

Five years after the adoption of Bologna Plan, state members began introducing university education plans proposed by the European Credit System (ECTS) and through which students could recognize their studies in any of the state members programs. Specifically, each university established programs that contain profiles and objectives by area as well as specific subjects, through which the development of certain skills and competencies in students are achieved.

Specifically, the process of higher education reform is organized around two main factors⁴. On the one hand, the establishment of a single system for all qualifications at all levels. Furthermore, the reorientation of the traditional teaching methodology to a system focused on more practical learning. To do this, the White Paper in Social Work was developed in 2004, which sets the rules and guidelines. It raised the worldwide standards that were already approved in 2004 by the Internal Association of Schools of Social Work and by the International Federation of Social Workers. Taking the White Paper of Social Work degree developed by ANECA⁵ in Spain, different objectives and

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ ANECA is the National Agency for Quality Evaluation and Accreditation of Spain. On the one hand, allowing greater professionalization of students, focusing training on achieving professional skills and competencies. On the other hand, it has also meant the first step to achieve a training plan more adapted to the reality of the job market. Last but not least, the claims that

specific competences in new social workers curricula were proposed. It should respond to improving both disciplinary content and attitudes that contribute to generate professionals who not only know how to do, but also know and analyze the context in which they work⁶.

Thus, three groups of objectives for Social Work degree in Spain were approved based on European Higher Education Area proposals. These goals try to include all those competencies relating to expertise, knowledge and know-be⁷. Specifically, an amount of 25 skills were presented, which students must have incorporated by theoretical and practical methodology. These are the six groups of specific competencies mentioned⁸:

1. *Working together with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities to assess their needs and circumstances.*
2. *To plan, implement, review and evaluate social work practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities and other professionals.*
3. *Supporting people to be able to express the needs, views and circumstances.*
4. *Act in resolving situations of vulnerability, conflict, crisis, shortages or difficulties with individuals as well as their own and those of colleagues.*
5. *Manage and be accountable, with supervision and support, about the own practice within the organization.*
6. *Demonstrate professional competence in social work practice.*

Conclusion

The EHEA has raised the necessary guidelines for configuring a new higher education system in Spain, having facilitated the implementation of the degrees in all universities. In Social Work this adjustment led to a profound reformulation of curricula and a chance at all levels within the profession.

teachers, students and professionals have been making about the need to obtain a higher level of education, recognition and prestige for Social Work have been acknowledged. Therefore, departments of Social Work plans are making an important effort to be adapted to the requirements of the EHEA, and it is an opportunity we must take in order to achieve a better level of students' preparation for their inclusion in a competitive European job market.

⁶ O. Vázquez, *El espacio europeo de educación superior y el trabajo social en España [The European Higher Education Area and Social Work in Spain]*, "Portularia. Revista de la Universidad de Huelva", 1, 2005, p. 239–255.

⁷ O. Vázquez, *Libro blanco del título de Grado en Trabajo Social [White paper of Social Work]*, ANECA, Madrid 2005.

⁸ O. Vázquez, *El espacio europeo de educación superior...*, op. cit., p. 201.

Abstract: Social Work education in Spain has a relatively short history (originates from around 1932), and is currently in the process of adaptation to the proposals made by the European Higher Education Area. After the Bologna Plan approved in 1999, Spanish schools of Social Work have had to introduce changes related to achieve a uniform and high quality education system, enabling students from the universities of the 29 European members acquire competences and professional skills required. Throughout this article, we discuss the history and evolution of the training in Social Work in Spain since its birth and in particular we analyze how the Plan established by Bologna has affected it, reflecting on how advantages and disadvantages of this agreement have influenced Social Work degree.

Keywords: social work, education, European Higher Education Area, Bologna Plan, Spain

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