Preface

Social work profession should be characterized by a reflective equilibrium based theory, the professional experiences being triggered by the values that give the nature of this profession. The ethics literature in social work is dominated by the normative approach centred on underlying the codes of ethics and the secondary ethical legislation involved in the professionalization of social workers (Butler, 2002; DiFranks, 2008; Greif, 2004; Reamer, 2005; Strom-Gottfried, 2000).

The preoccupation for developing codes of ethics in social work has been consistent throughout the profession, basically since Mary Richmond and the stage of pioneering in social work (Bulgaru, 2013; Dolgoff, Harrington, Loewenberg, 2012). The code emerged in 1920 under the name “experimental draft code of ethics for social case workers” (Agnew, 2004).

Currently, most of the professional national associations of social workers operate on certain codes of ethics internally developed, starting generally from the ethical values of the profession. The interest for these codes is given by the possibility of their development, through a management of ethics and the construction of certain personal ethics policies, specific for organisations providing social services (Congress, 2000, 2006; Valentine & Godkin, 2016).

The codes of ethics usually include professional values and principles of practice that derive from it (NASW, 2008; The Policy, Ethics and Human Rights Committee, 2014; Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). The social workers’ obligations to the beneficiaries, colleagues and organizations are encoded from an ethical perspective. The systematic analysis of the codes of ethics in social work led to the identification of two types of such codes. A type of code based on minimal standards, interdictions and sanctions, and a type of codes based on values, principles of good practice and the appreciation of the professionals’ results. The two directions correspond to the two different approaches of ethics: a normative minimal one, focused on strengths and oriented towards professional excellence and high standards of practice. Another major direction in the literature on ethics in
social work is the analysis of professional values based on which the social workers operate (Brenden & Shank, 2012; Drower, 1996; Kreitzer, 2006).

The social workers’ interest on ethics can be attributed to the fact that the fundaments of the profession are profoundly infused by the ethical values. Social work can be seen as a professionalization of charity (Agnew, 2004; Sandu & Caras, 2013).

A series of other ethical values are involved in substantiating social work: social justice, equity, and equality as constitutive values (Frunza, 2016).

In our opinion, the professional values are operational, correlating the organizational constitutive values with the effective practice of the professionals. Professionalization in social work implies a powerful adherence of the professionals to the values that are deeply human, and internalize them, thus bringing their contribution to the development of the profession, in the spirit of the constitutive values of justice and the public good.

Ethical decisions are the result or ability developed in the context of previous moral development, the interest for ethics inside the organization being determined by a series of social factors.

THE CHALLENGES

In the process of development, ethics in current social work stopped to a theoretical understanding from the perspective of the professionals, the very transposal into practice being blocked at the formal level of the organizations’ constitutive acts, in reproducing the values and principles into codes of ethics. The literature consulted is limited in the normative and axiological dimensions, with very few references to the field of ethics management and ethics expertise practice, while being required to ensure the transfer of know-how from knowledge to practice. The current ethical reflection tends to theorize what exists in social practice, at the level of values, principles and good practices, without having a prospective dimension, referring to the ethical needs of the beneficiaries that would grant the development of new adequate welfare practices.

Elaine P. Congress synthesizes the ethical elements we consider most important for the practitioner social worker. In the author’s opinion, mere knowledge of the codes of ethics does not turn the social worker into an ethical practitioner. The knowledge of a series of ethical principles, such as those of beneficence and non-maleficence, is also insufficient, being necessary to have knowledge of certain instruments of the ethical decision (Congress, 2000). Aside this knowledge, we find it necessary to collaborate with a counsellor or supervisor of ethics, and introduce the ethics expertise as an area of training in social work, dedicated at least to social workers
with role of supervisor. Trainings of ethics, but also individual counselling of ethics, as well as supervision of ethics of the activity of case management are only few of the solutions that can transform the social worker from a simple practitioner, into a practitioner with a predisposition towards ethics.

Establishing an act of ethical practice is based, according to Congress (2000), on a process which involves: examining the personal, social, organisational and professional values; thinking about the ethical standards supported by the code of ethics and the relevant legislation in the field; hypothesizing certain possible consequences of different decisions; identifying the consequences of the beneficiaries and the potential harmful actions and consulting the colleagues or the supervisor before taking a decision.

The practice of social work is infused by ethical values – which within the volume will be discussed from their perspective of constitutive values, the social worker following to guide his/her practice according to the operational values.

One of the core values of social work the practitioners must turn to in order to operationalize it, is the responsibility towards the individual, towards the Other. This type of responsibility is considered to be an imperative one, and asked to be manifested with sensitivity and empathy (Gehrke, 2010). In a process of deconstructing charity into responsibility (Sandu & Caras, 2013), in both a wide sense, and a specific one for social work, we observe how a charity-based ethics is funded on the duty towards the Other, while the ethics of moral agency is funded on responsibility, the operationalization of responsibility as ethical value becoming one of the forms of professionalization of social work (Frunza, 2016; Sandu & Caras, 2013). In the field of welfare we turn to the theory of care, whose object is the professional’s duty to maintain the beneficiary’s status-quo and its integration in the society, but also the theory of social change, which follows the beneficiaries’ empowerment. Transposed in the context of ethics of care, responsibility is treated by Diedrich, Burggraven, and Gastmans (2003) as a parallel between the ethics of care (of the model of Joan Tronto), and the potential transposal of responsibility towards the alterity (Levinas, 1969), into an ethical model centred on the third party’s responsibility in inter-social relationships. In the ontological approach of responsibility, Levinas refers to the status of the third party through the fact that each of the Others we report to represents a third party in relationships with the Others, starting from the assertion according to which the individual’s responsibility for all others can be manifested through Self, by its limitation.

This volume includes, in the third part, namely the “Ethics Expertise in Social Work Organizations”, references to the role the ethics expert (as a significant third) has in the relationship of supervision in welfare practice, to ensure the affective and reflective balance, and the moral intensity in the relationships between the
practitioner and the beneficiary (Frunza, 2016). Therefore, the call to Levinas and the significant third allows us to ontologically justify the relationship of supervision in social work, as a triad: beneficiary – supervisee – supervisor.

SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION

In fulfilling the model based on social action, we propose the communicative action as a fundament of a particular type of ethics expertise.

The character of the communicative action of social work is given by the relationship beneficiary – social worker centred on social change, based both on behaviour modification, as in the influence of the social services on the social environment of the beneficiary, in order to facilitate their social integration.

In our vision, the social services are grounded in social action because they are directly interested in the efficiency of transforming the social space, while supervision, both the classical professional one and the supervision of ethics, is based on the communicative action.

Each organisation has a set of values that has generated the very existence of the organisation. The constitutive values generally target the public good and are those values that led to the need to establish an organisation.

The constitutive values can be found in the mission of the organisation and are beliefs shared by all the members. Generally, the members of an organisation, or at least its founders, share a preference for a certain style of business conduct compared with all other competitors. We frequently encounter values such as: performance, satisfaction, competitiveness, efficiency, fairness, justice, fidelity or honesty. We could consider these to be operational values that will generate ethical principles. The transition from the value to the principle is the acting out of an interpretative consensus. If the values are fundamental to the need of an organisation, the principles punctuate the directions of development, and the future programs to be developed.

The development of ethics in social work should be based on its detachment under the empire of axiology and political philosophy, rather following an orientation towards the management of ethics and the ethical expertise. The exit from the spectrum of theoretic towards the applied ethics without abandoning the meta-ethical fundaments can only be done, in a first stage, by similar developments to those of applied ethics in medicine. The professionalization of respect towards the patients’ rights, either through means of bioethical principle, or through ethics of care, can underlie a bioethics of the social intervention.

In a further stage of development, the ethics of social work should overcome the principle level. For example, if the principle of autonomy in bioethics targets the specialists’ respect towards the patient and his/her right to make an informed
decision, in social work the autonomy and obtaining the quality of moral agent of vulnerable people is the very purpose of practice, and not a modus operandi. In other words, if for the medical practice, the autonomy is an operational value which guides how should the medical act take place, it becomes a constitutive value for the social intervention, as it guides the purpose of the social worker’s practice.

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME**

This volume aims to provide a new perspective of developing a social work profession and (ethical and professional) values-based practice. The volume will strengthen the knowledge in the social work field, contributing to the development of a professional and ethical axiology. Throughout the chapters, the reader will discover topics such as: Ethical values in Social work practice; The principle of justice in social work practices and resources; Governing principles of social work practice; Social work supervision; Supervision of ethics; Ethics audit in social practice.

**Section 1: Philosophical Approach of Social Work Ethics**

Chapter 1 focuses on the philosophical ground of ethics expertise in social work. Throughout the chapter, the author made conceptual distinctions between the theoretical and the practical nature of the expertise, between the ethical and the moral ones, in order to finally justify the need for a new model of ethics expertise. The deontological, utilitarian and virtue perspectives, as models of theoretical ethics that underlie the professionalization of social work.

Chapter 2 approaches the functioning of social work from an ethical perspective. The chapter focuses on the ethical values of social work, especially of certain series of values with untraditional nature, such as: tolerance, respect for “difference”, empathy, own lifestyle, etc.

Chapter 3 aims to fundament the activity of social workers from the perspective of collectivism and individualism, and the way in which these values co-exist in welfarist practice. The author refers to individualism and collectivism as being mutually non-exclusive, both being embodied in the idea of social solidarity.

Chapter 4 emphasises the importance of the professionals’ awareness of the ethical dimension of social work. The ethical values approached in the chapter, *Respect for human rights, social justice, equality* – are considered to be central for social work.

Chapter 5 discusses the values considered central for social work, (social) justice in the context of the legislation of soft law, and the European practices which consider ensuring the equality of chances, fighting discrimination and promoting equal treatment for all citizens, especially those belonging to the vulnerable population.
Section 2: Applied Ethics in Social Work Practice

Chapter 6 explores social work centred on strengths and ethical particularities of such an approach. The strength-based social work approach focuses on transforming the social worker, from his/her position of authority into facilitator of client’s social and personal development. The ethical aspects raised include questions regarding the beneficiary’s self-determination and the issue of informed consent.

Chapter 7 addresses a series of ethical dilemmas the social workers in Botswana encounter in the everyday practice. There are approached both difficulties and ethical challenges encountered by the practitioners, so that in the end, a series of recommendations and solutions for overcoming them and improving practice are being outlined.

Chapter 8 continues the approach of ethical dilemmas, starting from the Turkish practitioners’ experience. The aspects the Turkish practitioners most frequently confront with, according to the chapter, are associated with the institutional, legal and ethical causes.

Chapter 9 aims to identify the ethical and axiological frameworks of the process of development of probation practice. The author identifies a series of theoretical perspectives based on which it highlights the speech on the practice of probation counsellors. This practice is a profession related to social work, in the area of deviance and delinquency at least in the Romanian welfare environment, where the research is conducted.

Chapter 10 pursues the significance of the obligation of confidentiality and the respect for the right to a private life in the practice of social work, as well as the clarification of these principles’ applicability limitations.

Section 3: Ethics Expertise in Social Work Organisations

Chapter 11 focuses on the reconstruction of ethical expertise in the field of social services, starting from its philosophical grounding and the ethics of medical practice. This chapter approaches a series of models of ethics expertise – counselling of ethics, ethics audit, whose functions are complemented by a new model of ethics expertise – supervision of ethics, as it is proposed by the authors.

Chapter 12 approaches the issue of ethics audit of the organisations of social work, from a theoretical perspective. Within the chapter, there are discussed the theoretical origins of ethics audit as a model of ethics expertise, as well as the values and ethical principles that underlie this model.

Chapter 13 focuses on the approach of supervision as practice with strong ethical fundamentals in ensuring the quality of certain social work services, in dedicated
institutions in the Republic of Moldova. The chapter comes to support the practice of supervision, in the context of a welfarist system, which will face difficulties in implementing the practices of ensuring the quality of services.

Chapter 14 focuses on the lack of credibility and the loses of resources generated by the unethical practices of the employees.

The volume will have an impact on the field of social work and applied ethics through the novelty it brings in approaching social work as an appreciative, ethics-based profession. The current work will be of interest for students, practitioners and scholars in the field of social work and applied ethics, while being used as a reference source in both schools and organisations that develop professional training for their experts.

Antonio Sandu
Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania

Ana Frunza
LUMEN Research Center in Social and Humanistic Sciences, Romania

REFERENCES


