

## WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

**Marilda Jance**

Lecturer at University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, E mail: mjance@unishk.edu.al

### Abstract

Work with communities has had an interesting place in social work practice. The approach to community work has been described as the process of assisting ordinary people to improve their own communities by collective action (Mayo, 2002). In doing this community workers attempt to understand situations in terms of not only who holds the power, but also whose interests are served by particular policies and practices. Although focusing on the community rather than the individual was seen to be positive move away from casework approaches which had been criticized, there was a danger that a community could be pathologised and experienced as the problem (Loney, 1983). This study aims to give an overview of different approaches to working with communities and the relationship of this to social work practice. By acknowledging different definitions it has highlighted that policies for working with communities can involve top-down approaches that seek to placate and pacify individuals and groups. This study concludes that community development approach seeks to engage with communities to ensure that needs are identified and that resources are demanded.

**Key words:** *Community, social work, community development, approaches, directive intervention.*

### Introduction

With the change of political system in Albania changed its way of functioning and life in general. The transition was associated with previously unknown problems with need for intervention in solving them. Precisely for this purpose were created mainly local non-profit organizations, foundations and international agencies were located throughout the territory to assist in the delivery of services to populations in need of risk not only supporting individuals but supporting also them as a part of communities.

Life already sought another trend and people were moving to larger cities for a better life. In this way the most frequent phenomenon relates exactly to the localization of population to urban areas of major cities, which was prohibited, except those reasonably and permitted by the state mainly basing on their job (mainly officers, doctors or artists).

### Methodology

This study aim to explore, the context and the importance of work with communities, basing on theoretical perspective of different studies. In the first part of the study, the researcher will present the historical development of the community work, considering the liberal and the radical approach. The second part will be focused on the Albania case, the main processes and functions that developed community work in our country. The last part

will present the link between the community work and social work in nowadays.

### **The development of community**

The domain community work came out after 90-s in Albania. It was an unknown experience working and treating people who suffer same problems. According to the studies, the period that marks the most active phase in terms of relationships between social work and community work was the 1960-s. The national community development projects were set up by the Home office children's departments and community development workers were employed who were independent of the newly created social services departments. Workers were to be active mobilizing resources within the community. The focus was on organizing local communities and improving co-ordination between welfare agencies.

These tasks were often called community action. They involved workers working with community group and finding collective approaches to resolving problems, even if the problems were being experienced primarily by individuals. Those engaged in various forms of community work were concerned with affecting the course of social change through the two processes analyzing social situation and forming relationships with different groups to bring about desirable change (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1968).

This approach to community work has been described as the process of assisting ordinary people to improve their own communities by collective action (Mayo, 2002). In doing so this community workers attempt to understand situations in terms of not only who holds the power, but also whose interest are served by particular policies and practices. Although focusing on the community rather than the individual was seen to be positive move away from casework approaches which had been criticized, there was danger that a community could be pathologised and experienced as the problem (Loney, 1983). The notion in the 1990-s of 'sink estates' shows how areas that are seen as having numerous problems can be labeled negatively. Other dangers were that community work would be employed as a palliative when the substantial resources needed to overcome major injustices were not forthcoming (Popple, 1995, p.27). This is a particular if community work focuses on communities 'making do' rather than advocating, for example, better housing, local health and education resources.

These dangers highlight competing perspectives on, or traditions in, the role of community work. These are alternatively defined as the differences between the political left and right (Mayo, 2002), or the differences between top-down and bottom-up community action (Popple, 2002).

### **The main approaches**

The liberal approach to community work, which is about promoting self-help and improving services delivery within the existing frameworks. This approach has also been labeled as a professional or technicist approach.

The radical, or transformational, approach to community work, which tries to shift the balance of social relations by empowering the powerless to question the causes of their deprivation and the challenge the sources of their deprivation and challenge the sources of their oppression (Mayo, 2002, p. 165).

The different approaches also have repercussions for those undertaking the work. The 'professionals' had an uneasy relationship with statutory employers if they were inciting communities to overturn arrangements for service delivery. Community action approaches involved emerging voluntary groups who worked with local community groups, particularly

in working-class areas, to fight local causes (Coulshed. V. & Orme. J, 2006).

Definitional distinctions therefore emerged that separated community work, which was undertaken by those paid to do it and community action, which was undertaken by those in conflict with authority. These distinctions led to debate in the 70-s about whether community workers should become a separate profession and whether there was scope for radical activities by those undertaking community work in statutory agencies, including social work agencies (Coulshed. V. & Orme. J, 2006).

### **The role of social worker in the community**

Popple (2002) argues that a generic definition of community work is working with people using skills, information and strategies in ways that encourage them to do things for themselves. However historically the identification of tasks and skills tends to reflect the tension between the liberal/radical and the top-down/bottom-up approaches. Early models of community organizations and intervention included social planning, locality development and social action (Rothman, 1968).

Social action was about direct work with people, particularly those identified as having or joining together because of mutual interests or oppressions. The power structure is assumed to lie outside the client system and is therefore an external target of action, but the intervention is top-down. York (1984) developed a different framework for theorizing community work, or community social work, as he calls it. He focuses on the differences between directive and nondirective intervention. The notion of directive and nondirective reflects the primary goals of the workers, what they want to achieve, rather than roles that they adopt at any one time in their work.

- Directive intervention: involves the agency deciding, more or less specifically, what it thinks the clients need, what they ought to value or what they ought to do, and even at times how they ought to behave.
- Non directive intervention: the worker does not attempt to decide for people, or to lead, guide or persuade them to accept his specific conclusions about what is good for them, but works to get them to decide for themselves what their needs are. The worker's role is to provide favorable conditions for successful action by strengthening and stimulating incentive, providing information, helping community members to analyze problems systematically.

Some way of analyzing community work intervention draws on understandings of systems and involves identifying the different arenas in which community workers are involved and in which they might use the methods discussed above.

### **Urbanization and migration parallel phenomena in Albania**

As we mention before in Albania began “a new era” and as a consequence there were a lot of changes even in the life style. The population of the city began to lose homogeneity and losing old levels the relationships with neighbors. So cities began to create another new concept that related to specific groups of large numbers of people who had common characteristics. This large group was named community, namely income community, but borrowed term that best fit the situation created (in fact people used terms related to collectivization).

People began to use new terms referring not only to the geographical status but even the characteristics that lie to them. So communities actually were not confined to residents to

come in a certain area, part of a community will be called minorities belonging to certain ethnic groups, e.g. Roma, etc. The main problem that raised was the fact that cities weren't enough prepared to support and cope the flux of people coming from other areas, specially rural zones. In fact none of the cities that faced large flow was not prepared, either by structural, institutional, infrastructural, etc. This moment marked the beginning of the creation of communities in need. In this group will enter the unemployed, abandoned children and abused children, single-parent families that have severe economic problems (mainly families who had lost their fathers as a result of various conflicts of the time), people with blood feud, the with HIV / AIDS, gays, young people with developmental or behavioral, battered women, etc.

There were not a supporting system for none of these categories, and as a result solving their problems were the challenge these due to the unorganized or local institution or social schema.

Considering all this facts, the intervention requires specialized people and therefore specific policies for both government institutions, local or central, that would support the work of these professionals. For this reason during the following years, numerous laws have been adopted and raised many structures that manage services within municipalities and communes. But even with these initiatives there is still much to be done referring to the problems faced by individuals, groups or communities.

Faced with such facts and widespread phenomena we say that proper intervention should be expected from local leaders. It was significant that in both cases would be intervention at the macro level with the involvement of many stakeholders, so that the solution would be part of everyone and led to all.

### **The importance of community work and intervention**

Drawing on group processes Henderson and Thomas (1981) identify seven types of interventions/discussions that exemplify nondirective approaches in community work. Although the functions need to be performed in community work with local people they do not all have to be undertaken by the same person. While others can undertake the tasks/interventions the community worker needs to ensure that the relevant processes occur.

When working at the interface between local people and more formal and established organizations, the community worker also has to ensure that a number of other functions are carried out, which include broker, mediator, advocate, negotiator and bargainer. Again different people can perform these functions, but thought has to be given to what role will be played by which individuals. A balance has to be struck between the appropriate activity for the paid worker might act in some form of representative role for the group or community at town or city council meetings or interviews with local authority officers. Also when community members take lead roles, the paid worker might have a set of facilitative functions, which include observer, recorder, delegate or plenipotentiary.

Finally, as in all work with people, it is important to recognize that power operates in all sorts of subtle ways, and that individuals might dominate in communities, but might not represent the views of the majority. The worker needs to ensure that as many people as possible feel included and have their voices heard.

This notion of representative becomes more complex for a paid worker when he or she has to manage transactions about the group or community within her/his own employing agency. Henderson and Thomas identify two functions for the worker, but emphasize the need to establish guidelines between the community and the worker to clarify the worker's status and ensure effective communication.

Many of skills that link to the community intervention are the engagement with

individuals, groups and organizations, assessment process, negotiation, communication, management of resources, resourcing, grant application, monitoring and evaluation (Mayo, 2002).

These help to highlight that while community work might not necessarily be carried out by those employed in statutory social work agencies, workers undertaking community work draw on skills that are core to the social work profession. This is the complex relationship between social work and community work.

## **Conclusions**

This study has attempted to give an overview of different approaches to working with communities and the relationship of this to social work practice. There is a danger that community care policies merely require communities to replace other statutory resources for meeting need. However a community development approach seeks to engage with communities to ensure that needs are identified and that resources are demanded. Also communities can operate creatively to advocate for resources or to meet needs in ways that are meaningful to those in the community.

Unfortunately, we can say that in Albania, still not function the intervention in macro level. The intervention, still remain random and not programmed or adapted to local needs of the population. The role of social workers remains unknown and impracticable, as long as the state itself does not provide a detailed and correct position for them. As a result part of society that is in danger will remain so at least for a certain time period after instances and local levels of government are functioning in a vacuum, and funding strategies.

## **References**

- Coulshed, V. & Orme, J (2006): Social work practice. Fourth edition: Series editor Jo Campling, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Henderson, P. and Thomas, D. N. (1981): Skills in neighborhood work. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Loney, M. (1983): Community against government. London: Heinemann.
- Mayo, M. (2002): Community work. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Popple, K. (1995): Analysing Community Work, its theory and practice. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Rothman, J. (1968): Three models of community organization practice their mixing and phasing. Itasca, Ill. Peacock.
- York, A. (1984): Towards a conceptual model of community social work. British Journal of Social Work, pp. 241-55.

