

# TRANSPARENCY AS THE OFFERED SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE ESTONIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*Raudava, Vaike, MSW*

PhD Student at the University of Helsinki

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## Abstract

The aim of the article has been pointed out, what are the main challenges arise from the interaction between the *transparency and the structure of* the social welfare administration. Used the organizational change theory, originally Mintzberg 1979, (Ferlie & Geraghty 2007) and followed the local government`s duties, however, the function of the decision-making process takes in. The strategy of research (methodology) utilised was the collective case study, I followed the information-oriented selection, triangulation has been used as a mixed method of acquiring data. According to the result, there the five challenges existing: 1) The social work profession does not regulate as the profession in the local government, however, the position is the ambivalent and without the professional power; 2) The structure of administration is involving the non-professionals, who are professionals in another field or the about non-educated members; 3) The decision-making process regarding the clients is distributed among different levels; 4) The practice undermines the independence of the social worker, and the social worker cannot protect the rights of the client; 5) The biggest challenge, reflect at the cases, the decision at the client level is politicized. Therefore, I argue, that the Social Affairs Committee or Social Affairs Committee of Municipal Government, the units of the administration of welfare in the local government, they act not necessary.

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**Keywords:** Public administration, social work, knowledge, transparency, social services

## Introduction

Well-organized care for fellow citizens forms an essential part of citizen participation in the society and enhances democratic processes, the ability of a person to cope with his/her life independently is in Europe very important. The foundation of social service´ practice includes an understanding of the process of identification and development of the client

system, as they are adapted to work with individuals, families, groups and communities.

The public organizations aim to provide the best possible service to clients and to ensure that social work intervention will help solve client's problems, satisfy their needs, and, above all, contribute to their overall well-being. Public organization as a specific domain is defined by the concrete political bodies and administrative structures, which are governed public affairs; constitutions, organics and procedures provide the conceptual glue which generates its unity and its limits (Badie, Berg-Schlosser & Morlino 2011; Sullivan 2009; Peters & Pierre 2003).

Public agencies today must demonstrate that they value diversity, understand and respect diverse cultures, and plan and provide culturally relevant and responsive programs and services (Tomescu & Popescu 2013; Sims 2010; Chow & Austin 2008). The public responsibility however is set to guarantee the citizens that they have the opportunity to seek help and get help from the local government and important, point out the accountability and transparency at the local government level (Walker 2002). Traditionally, transparency is a public value or norm of behaviour to counter corruption, according to Ball (2009), transparency is a complex tool of good governance in programs, policies, organizations, and nation. Practically, transparency is expressed in three activities: 1) public information, 2) open government and organization and 3) complex analyses of policy.

The contrast between northern and southern government systems remains a key distinction which describes the distribution of power, the impact of local politics, the form of representation and the capacity of local government to administer services (Stewart & Bailey 2008). For the Nordic states, local governments enjoy great autonomy and can decide independently on their own affairs – locally elected politicians make all major policy decisions in respect of their areas of responsibility, and the municipal council and committees establish goals and guidelines for local government operations (Bergmark & Minas 2007; Kröger 2009).

In Estonia, the single-tier system of local government formed in 1918, the independent period endured from 1918 to 1940. After the communist period, the single-tier basis of the local government system was confirmed by the Government of the Republic Act adopted in 1995. The main principle regulating local government is stated in the constitution, and stipulates that all local issues should in theory be managed locally and independently from central government, where this is in accordance with the law (Lõhmus 2008).

Discovered the historical impacts of welfare administration in the local government, during the first Estonian independence period, a special board decided who to provide assistance in the local government (Peep

2005). Therefore, the principle of collegial decision-making was in effect until the beginning of the Soviet regime in Estonia. The Soviet authorities were not aware of, nor did they recognize the need for social welfare, so the village councils set up in place of the local government had no need for the board. However, in summary, only since the mid-90s can one talk about the duties in the local government and its implements.

In the 21th century, the structure of the administration involving the several units in the local government: the municipal council, Social Affairs Committee, or/and Social Affairs Committee of Municipal Government, the employer of the social work field, the municipal administration and the Ministry of Social Affairs and the STAR (Social Affairs Ministry) program (Raudava 2013).

At the current article, I discover, following the local government's duties, what are the main challenges arise from the interaction between the *transparency and specialization as the structure of the social welfare administration*. However, the function of the decision-making process takes in, using the organizational change theory, originally Mintzberg 1979 (Ferlie & Geraghty 2007)

### **The methodology of research**

The strategy of research (methodology) utilised was the case study (Yin 2003). Utilizing the collective case study, I followed the information-oriented selection: maximum variation cases for the size and location (Luck, Jackson & Usher 2006).

The preparing of cases followed: a) There were nine (9) cases in the local government in the rural area; b) These local governments do not have boundaries with a County Town; c) There are some differences in the way that the title for a social work employer is used and how decision-making takes place; d) There are fewer than 2,500 inhabitants.

The local governments to be more closely analysed were: Vihula, Viru-Nigula, Rägavere, Laekvere in Lääne-Viru county and Avinurme, Lohusuu, Lügänuuse, Maidla, and Aseri in Ida-Viru county.

The data of case studies have been based on a mix of evidence; triangulation has been used as a method of acquiring data: 1) Document analysis (public documents, law documents, strategies, minutes of social committee meetings, legal regulations of local governments); 2) Semi-structured interviews with the members of a social committee of local governments; 3) Semi-structured interviews with social workers in the local governments.

Used the cross-case analysis, the function of the decision-making process has takes in (M. C. Burns 2010). The writing method of case study has utilised the diagnostic case report (van Blonk 2003), original by

Pettigrew, the report is produced in order to interact with the organizations where the research was conducted, and besides analytical chronology contains a listing and analysis of current problems.

### **Theoretical overview**

Social work is an *academic profession*; social work has emerged as a unique field of study and practice with its own knowledge base; professional standards, values, ethics, licensure, and certification, and accredited schools and degrees. Professional social work occurs within particular social contexts and is guided by specific legislation, social policies, cultural practices in a given locality and accumulated professional knowledge's termed "practice wisdoms" (Dominelli & Hackett 2011, Dominelli 2010; Alphonse, George & Moffatt 2008). Each of these elements is constantly negotiated and changed, and those whose knowledge or narrative counts assume a critical position in setting practice agendas (Kessl & Evans 2015).

The paradigm of the profession includes a broad orientation toward people being served, and identifies social work as a community of likeminded people with a shared understanding of the profession and how it is practiced. The term *knowledge base* of a profession means the key theoretical frameworks supported by research that are used by a profession (Swanzen 2011). Social work is an *academic profession*; according to the Global Standards of Social Work, an academic education is a most important component of professionalism.

Professionalism refers to the situation in which the workers themselves are in possession of the specialised knowledge that is required for their work and are also in charge of the discretionary power to organise their own conditions of work, as opposed to merely being puppets subjected to the will of consumers or managers (van Lanen & Martin 2008). Professionalism includes several characteristics: 1) integrity; 2) professional knowledge and efficiency; 3) ethical decision making; 4) critical thinking and lifelong learning; 5) self-understanding and self-control 6) cultural competence and acceptance of others, and 7) social support (Cournoyer 2008; Koukouli, Papadaki, Phillithis 2007).

According to Higham (2006, 98), the new professionalism of social work is based on: 1) Promoting the social model of intervention with people who use services and care; 2) Working with other professional models and with support workers; 3) Intervening to protect vulnerable people when appropriate, and 4) Promoting human growth and developing individual capable. Gorman and Sandefur (2011) pointed out that four central attributes of professionalism emerge from this body of scholarship: (a) expert knowledge (b) technical autonomy; (c) a normative orientation toward the service of others, and (d) high status, income, and other rewards.

“Professional use of self”, the use of self-knowledge and self-awareness, social work skills, knowledge, values and personal experience (Green, Gregory & Mason 2006). Social workers are ethically committed to promoting social justice and social change while honouring cultural and ethnic diversities. Wirth (2009) argues, that a social worker cannot vote for his clients, or go to work for them, he can only guarantee suitable assistance and communication to social addresses who use his services in order to improve their chances at a chance for (re-) inclusion.

Abbott (1988, 325) pointed out what the ideal type of professionalism based in knowledge-based work. Knowledge means the understanding of patterns in perceived information (Lent 2011; Guzman & Trivelato 2010), use of knowledge by a social worker is an intrinsic part of the profession. However, knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information (Dulipovici & Baskerville 2007; Baskerville & Dulipovici 2006).

Three functions are using the knowledge in practice: 1) description, 2) explanation and 3) control (Osmond, Scott & Clark 2008). According to Leung (2010), knowledge is viewed as both an object (evidence-based) and a process (people-oriented process). The social work literature reflects two epistemological views of the knowledge. The evidence-based school presents knowledge as a substantive “product” obtained from logical, scientific, reductionist researches so called the “knowledge-as-object” view. “Knowledge-as process” is based on view of knowledge as something, substantively exists *per se*, clearly articulated and fully describing the subject matter. However, knowledge is viewed as both an object (evidence-based) and a process (people-oriented process) (Leung2014; Leung, Cheung, Chan & Lo Kenneth 2012).

Following to Weber, the necessary element of the public organization is the educated professional (Alfano 2011, Hughes & Wearing 2012; 2007). Nass (1986) has argued, however, the role of professional in the bureaucracy should not be modelled as simple deviation from the classic role of a civil servant, because a professional is not a bureaucratic official. The professional in a bureaucracy is an autonomus organization, sub-contracted by that bureaucracy to achieve a given set of goals. Therefore, the relationship between a professional and the bureaucracy may be expected to be the same as that of any organization that is under exclusive the contract with a larger organization.

Harmon and Mayer (1986) have developed the Weberian theory and have argued that administration based upon information, about employees, processes, records, reports, data, etc. Further, employment which presupposes expert training, the employees hired by the organization must

demonstrate their qualifications for the job through education, training, or experience and employees are full-time career workers. Ferlie (2007) has referred that the role of professionals within large bureaucracies is limited.

According to Smith (1990), the present challenge of neo-liberalism as an economic and political ideology has profound implications for the professions as coherent occupational entries that control task domains and exercise discretion over the performance of complex tasks for the benefit of clients and the larger society. Many of these challenges are clarified using the colloquialisms of the new neo-liberal consensus and contrast those with traditional conceptions of professional practice and the concept of expert labour: a) Consumers know best; b) Markets will determine what is right; c) no credentialing or licensing; d) no codes of ethics, and e) competition will lower fees and salaries (Leicht & Fenell 2008).

The last example of social work as a postmodern activity is the social worker's role in the self-policing of the policing of society. Powell & Gilbert (2007) have argued, however essential part of the professionalization project involves the constitution and operation of social work as a discipline, appeals to "become professional", or claims to professionalism, are ideologically loaded (Williams 2008).

For the organization view, the organizational change theorists study the dynamics of change in distinctive professionalized organizations, originally Mintzberg 1979, with weak managerial capacity and typically resistant to macro or top down change (Ferlie & Geraghty 2007). Mischen (2008) has referred to Choo (1998), who asserted that „knowing organizations“ are those that use information strategically in the context of three arenas, namely, a) sense making, b) knowledge creation and c) decision making.

### **Specialization as the structure of the social welfare administration in Estonia**

The independent social caregiver or the social worker positions did not exist in the local governments in history before 1995. When a person visits a doctor, he or she assumes that the doctor has spent at least six years studying; when visiting a social worker, a person will often not know what to expect. The occupation of social work isn't clearly defined and there isn't the order of the public. The only law that defines the term "social worker" is mentioned in "The Social Welfare Act" and the General Standards of Social Work are absent in Estonia. Reflecting at "Regulated professions and the competent authorities in Estonia", the social worker is not exists in the legal professions system. In regard to the staff of the municipal government, it is not regulated as to a) which positions definitely need to in existence or b) the educational requirements, except for the municipal clerk.

Since 1996 when social work became part of local government again, professional social workers have not existed in Estonia (Tulva 1996). In regards to the staff of the local government, it is not regulated as to which positions definitely need to in existence or which the educational requirements exist, except for the position of local government clerk. According to current examples, the following job titles exist: there are six social advisers (*sotsiaalnõunik*), one social worker (*sotsiaaltöötaja*), one social consultant (*sotsiaalkonsultant*) and one manager of the Social Department (*sotsiaalosakonna juhataja*). The title of “social adviser” (*sotsiaalnõunik*) is widespread in Estonia; the connection between the title and the occupation is imperfect (see Case 1). The responsible employer, who has a professional Master’s degree, bears the title of *social adviser*, (*sotsiaalnõunik*), while his subordinate is not educated, and his or her job title is *social worker*. In practice, we can not to say looking to the job title, whether the employee, who works in a position, represents the profession of social work (educated) or not.

During the past twenty years, the situation has changed, but not necessarily for the better in the local government. For example, 50% per cent of the educated social workers have been employed in the local government in 2006 (Raudava-Salveste 2006). In these figures there is no situation where the responsibilities of the social work official are shared by another official from another field, but there is a common practice in Estonia, where there is "education-sports and social advisers" and other such combinations.

The distribution of social benefits does not require a professional, since the State set conditions in calculating benefits are based on mathematics: household income - expenses documented by accounting type documents (not proving the need according to the situation). The offered social services are not addressed in a systematic way, resulting in a more individual approach to the client, which is a positive effect, but it also gives the social worker an opportunity to remain impassive or to focus on areas which seem to be more inspiring from his/her personal point of understanding.

The statutes of the Social Affairs Committee for two local governments are available publicly, therefore for the rest of the municipality the municipal statutes have been used as the basis. The functions of the Municipal Council's Social Affairs Committee are divided as follows: a) Participation in the development of the local government`s development plan; b) Formulation of the budget by sectors; c) Drafting of legislation and review of acts related to the field; d)The function of assessment of the needs of the client.

In the local government, the social service structure involving the four different units/levels: 1) Political leadership (the municipal council); 2)

Political cooperation (the council committee); 3) Specialist / Officer, or, non-professional (social worker); 4) the political-administrative unit (municipal government and administration) and the STAR (Social Affairs Ministry) program.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has gathered statistics from local governments and providers of social services over the years. The IT "STAR" programme launched in the winter of 2010 requires client work reports of social workers in addition to the statistical data and subsistence benefit calculations. The order from The Affairs of Social Ministry, to send all the client`s cases electronically to the ministry, has increased the bureaucracy in local government and from the client`s perspective, raises the question, is it necessary and can the system safely handle the data.

Based on empirical data, the framework of social welfare administration can be described by four different models: 1) The simple structure, 2) The political structure, 3) The double political structure, 4) The triple political structure (Raudava 2013a). The structure of administration is shared between at several politic-administrations levels and involving the non-professionals, who are the professionals in another field. Discuss as the question as the position of the social worker, is she/he professional or politic, resumed, that social worker is the member of the administrative government (model 3) or she/he is the employer (the professional, model 4). This argument is raises when analyse the function of the decision-process. The assumption is, however, that the social worker makes the decisions in the social worker -client subsystem. They have the knowledge regarding this and they should be given the appropriate decision-making rights.

Describe the function of the decision-making process, the data reveal:

Subsistence benefits paid into the local budget from the State budget, the receipt of the funds is strictly regulated, and using of the funds is under the State oversight, the responsibility of the county government). Subsistence benefits have been incorporated, as a national support package, into the STAR (Social Affairs Ministry) program, which allows the use of the money to be more easily scrutinized.

In order to receive the subsistence benefit, the applicant submits the necessary documents to the local municipality, where they are checked and if necessary, additional controls are implemented. The decision regarding the allocation of subsistence benefits should be within the competence of the social worker, but this happens in only four of the nine townships. In five townships, the Social Affairs Committee, the municipal government or the council participates in the decision-making.

Representing the local social policy, the local benefits are part of the local government budget. Social benefits are mostly related to the individual`s income (proven poverty) and be verified by expense documents.

At the same time, in the list, there are a number of target-based benefits targeted at children, families, disabled and the elderly. However, the social support basing as the third, each other separated criteria: a) to meet requirements of the classification (for example, an age or a disability person; b) the needy-based individual application for the social benefit and c) the social service (for example, the home care service).

Social benefits and services are not a freely available universal service, however, the right to use them or get the local social benefit, the first discussed in the application in the Social Affairs Committee. The council's Social Affairs Committee submits proposals to either the county council or the municipal government, where the final decision is made.

Discovered transparency for the decision-making process more specifically, however, developed the index of transparency for the social services pointed out the big differences in the decision-making process. The pattern has compared, according to the list of the total number, social services, where the social services offered are basing as the third, each other separated criteria, resulted in the rate between the clearly described criteria and the noun described criteria, where the decision based only as the members of social committee knowledge.

The problem is, therefore, the decision process for the offered social services of the local government budget is doubly politicized: 1) at the social commission level, who reviews the allocation and 2) at the council level, who defines the type and amount, and makes the decision regarding allocation of benefits.

The following challenges are carried out at the practice for the structure of the administration of social welfare: 1) The social worker profession does not regulated as the profession in the local government, however, the position is the ambivalent and without the professional power; 2) The structure of administration is involving the non-professionals, who are professionals in another field or the about non-educated members; 3) The decision-making process regarding the clients is distributed among different levels; 4) The practice undermines the independence of the social worker, and the social worker cannot protect the rights of the client; 5) The biggest challenge, reflect at the cases, the decision at the client level is politicized.

### **Towards transparency as the welfare administration**

Modernization of public affair organizations, design the effective organization, however, "effectiveness` meaning", accorded to Kanter & Brinkerhoff (1981), appropriate organizational structure and process, including organizational characteristics, member satisfaction, motivation, communication links, internal conflict resolution, absence of strain between subgroups, etc. Public agencies today must demonstrate that they value

diversity, understand and respect diverse cultures, and plan and provide culturally relevant and responsive programs and services (Tomescu & Popescu 2013; Sims 2010; Chow & Austin 2008).

The organisational structures are typically created by management for specific purposes (Senior 2002; Bartol & Martin 1994). According to the law, the Social Affairs Committee should provide only general guidance. The main activities, however, they are participating in the client work and deciding on the allocation of social benefits and the use of social services in practice. In analysing government's legislation, a legislative act could not be found that would give them the right to discuss and decide about for the services to clients, even if it is only at the proposal level. Social Affairs Committee Members justify the reasons for their own social activities by saying that: 1) the Social Affairs Committee has been there all the time; 2) there is the movement of information, especially on matters relating to children, and 3) they are making a contribution to community-based problem solving.

Understanding to the aim of social work and its values are missing in the post-communist society, the profession of social work has not developed yet in Estonia (Raudava 2013). The social work is the knowledge's profession, social work qualifies for acceptance into the fold of professional occupations where the theoretical knowledge base for professional qualification is 'academic knowledge' (van Heugten 2011; Heggen 2008). Modern speciality practice and literature make a distinction between the professional practice of social work professionals and amateurs/non-professionals, which are generally associated with charitable work (Hughes 2008).

An even more serious problem is the participation of the Social Affairs Committee members in the social worker-client decision-making process without any professional knowledge. The current practice includes several problems stemming from social work ethics and the profession's independence; autonomy is based on a number of problems. The committee members do not have the education-related pre-requisites, thus influencing the decisions of the council members are specific knowledge or ignorance of the world and personal experiences.

Therefore, the decision should be in the purview of the social worker, as only the social worker can offer the client appropriate solutions based on social work goals. Local governments need a social worker, who could act by professional intervention and use his or her own knowledge in the complex and diverse world (Leung 2014; Wensing, Bosch & Grol 2010; Hall & Slembrouck 2009; Danto 2008). According to Weinberg (2010), workers feel individually accountable for any judgments made. The prominence of personal responsibility results in the creation of practitioners who work at

developing strong decision-making skills and follow the rules so as to avoid litigation or disciplinary action.

Most important ones, there is the client protection issue, as the Social Affairs Committee members are ordinary rural residents, who become aware of all client cases and details, but at the same time are not limited by the confidentiality obligation; adding to this debate in the council or municipal government, the client case can become doubly public. The framework of local government arrayed of professional social work, the decision-process regarding the clients is distributed among different levels, the practice damages the independence of the social worker, and the social worker does not protect the rights of client. This practice, where *people from the street* are directly related to client work then, it be regarded as historic, the principle of collegial decision-making continuing in the 21st century.

Use of the collective style in the decision making process, there is lack of understanding of functional the ethical code of the social worker, human rights, human dignity), apparently also lack of skills and knowledge. Gray and Gibbons (2007) have argued that ethical guidelines do not guarantee ethical social work practice, but professional intervention requires professional knowledge. The members of council stressed by the value of local democracy, however, local democracy usually is pursued through two types of instrument: (i) the making of infra-municipal institutions; (ii) the direct involvement of citizens through the procedures of referendums and initiatives and the establishment of neighbourhood councils. Both instruments have been used and developed in European countries in the context of better governance, however, in this case, the concern carried out in the professional social work.

In social work, context is not about exploiting other people or disempowering them; though, granted, many institutional contexts often make it difficult for the authority of the social worker to be exercised in ways that minimise or avoid exploitation and disempowerment. Social work involves working with people who are usually, though not necessarily, located in positions of powerlessness. Therefore, it follows that social workers are obliged both to recognise that difference, and to take reasonable precautions with respect to their own conduct, to ensure that they do not exploit or disempower those who seek (or are forced to seek) their assistance (Jose 2009).

As professionals, social workers have the responsibility to further the principles of social justice by challenging discrimination on all levels, including discrimination based on one's socioeconomic status. Social workers must work together to abolish the social conditions that contribute to economic inequalities by challenging unjust policies and practices at every

level. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that those most in need receive resources first, and that the resources offered are distributed fairly.

## **Conclusion**

Local government has been assigned the responsibility to organize social welfare. Responsibility is set at the same time to guarantee the citizens that they have the opportunity to seek help and get help from the local government. The European Union has been conceived as a community of law and is based on the rule of law (von Danwitz 2010). However, be regarded as a local government body responsible for synchronizing information, planning activities and the offered social services each other. The right to receive assistance comes from the constitution, and the exercising of this right should not depend on the region and local authority, where the individual or the family lives.

The results demonstrated that the challenges are, however the changes will be necessary towards transparency social work in local government. In local government, there are two local government bodies, the representative body and the executive body. Understudied that the social worker is a multi-professional one in the local authority, the local governments must clearly define the social worker's position as a position, which only a qualified social worker, with the appropriate educational preparation can hold.

The Social Affairs Committee or Social Affairs Committee of Municipal Government, the units of the administration of welfare in the local government, analysed by the specialization of structure, they do not act necessary. The social affairs committee could be regarded as a citizenship based working method if their activity was limited to solving strategic matters.

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