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**Innovations in social services in Hungary (1993-2020)**

(thesis brochure)

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Budapest

2021

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## **1. Research topic reasoning and project definition**

During my three-and-a-half-decade career, of which I spent a quarter of a century in the social services sector, I constantly tried to analyze it on the one hand, and to influence certain situations on the other.

Nevertheless, so far it has not been possible to reveal the values and basic variables on the basis of which the roots of the changes would become tangible.

Since the formation of the first, freely elected government in the modern era, many attempts have been made to enable the profession and decision-makers to form an intact, well-understood framework for social services in Hungary. The formulation of two basic pieces of legislation in this area could have provided the best opportunity to achieve this.

Thus, my choice of topic was primarily influenced by the need to be able to grasp these influencing factors by carefully and thoroughly analyzing the innovations of the sector, changes in social services and the current situation. There are explorable values in every operation, and by grasping them we can also describe how well the social services sector is able to meet the challenges of the 21st century, and in most respects its novel conditions.

Thirty-five years ago, the Hungarian system of social institutions could be described by two types<sup>1</sup> of services by the outstanding sociologists of the age<sup>2</sup>. However, the changes that have taken place since then - expansions, emerging and disappearing services - that is, the reasons behind the introduction of new items are difficult to understand. The formal reasons for the changes (official justifications), the current organization and operation of the service system do not point to any social goal that can be formulated in a unified vision.

Important elements of social well-being are social services, which mostly appear in an institutional form, yet they are not perceptible, the consistent, organic construction in this area is not clearly visible.

The focus of my dissertation is on the innovations and changes of Hungarian social services. The description of these changes is still rather patchy at present. The social services sector is characterized by a scarce literature base, little research and even less public policy involvement (and the associated “misunderstanding”). In many respects, there are even basic definitional shortcomings, which I have tried to bridge or possibly fill as far as I can.

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<sup>1</sup> This has now expanded to 54 types of services and personal care.

<sup>2</sup> Angelusz Róbert – Nagy Lajos Géza – Tardos Róbert: Szociálpolitikai kérdések a közgondolkodásban, Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont, Budapest, 1986, 93-94.p.

For my choice of topic, I chose a specific point of view, the field of innovation analysis. In the course of my work, I try to place the system of social services with specific characteristics in the field of interpretation of innovation.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Research methodology**

With the help of the processing of the relevant literature, I want to make conceptual delimitations, for which I have tried to bring a variety of approaches from the professional community to a common denominator.

In connection with this, I would like to explore the peculiarities of regulation, which can help to understand the content elements of the changes and their effects, by analyzing international and domestic legislation. Inseparably, I also performed a public policy analysis, in which I magnify the most important strategies, ideas and programs of the sector.

The sources of my research were, on the one hand, the results of contemporary and current legislation and, unfortunately, a small number of relevant research. The peculiarity of my topic is that it has attracted the interest of few professionals so far, the innovation aspect has not come to the fore, and I have continued my work in a field that still requires a considerable basic research on various aspects (e.g., from the effectiveness and societal significance of social services to its awareness and reputation).

An analysis of change, especially in the field of social services providing personal care, would not be complete without an analysis of the human resources behind innovation. For this, I conducted two studies and surveys. The first concerns the characteristics, specific value choices, and principles represented by the sector's stakeholders. I would like to present this with the help of my survey conducted in a way supported by technological tools, based on my experience as a university lecturer.<sup>4</sup> The second research was generated by the sectoral effects of the pandemic, and I also try to present the results of research conducted in a university environment with an online questionnaire, also highlighting organizational characteristics. I describe and present the methodology of both research and surveys in detail in the given chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> To do this, it was first necessary to outline an appropriate conceptual background for the area under study, social services.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to my previous teaching experience, I have been working since 2018 at the Social Leadership Knowledge Center of the Faculty of Public Health of Semmelweis University.

I conducted an in-depth analysis of some of the selected innovations. By exploring and analyzing these changes, presenting their regulatory features, I would like to analyze the effects they have made. These include concrete, new services as well as thinking through theoretical possibilities (concept analysis) - but the focus was always on innovation in social services.

Thus, I embarked with particular curiosity on the analytical path, the main questions of which are: is there real innovation in my field, is it based on conscious, intentional planning work, where are (if any) the roots of these changes and what vision can be outlined in relation to the innovation of social services.

One of the indirect aims of my dissertation is to make the services more closely analyzable from a new perspective, in terms of innovation impacts and backgrounds.

I placed special emphasis on the systematization and review of the principles and values that can be grasped. According to my hypothesis, real (social) innovation results cannot be achieved by international and domestic regulations alone, but the values appearing in our norms can have a great impact on the implementation and practical operation in this field as well, and thus should be considered as a significant innovation factor.

Thus, the aim of the dissertation - knowing the reasons for the choice of topic and the research methodology - can be summarized with the following questions and suggestions in addition to the description of the innovations of social services in Hungary:

- innovations in domestic social services, regardless of their innovation base and starting position, take place exclusively through regulations;
- the innovation process of social services can also be described along the characteristics, expectations and definitions characteristic of the (public) service sector;
- are there common values and principles behind these changes?

### **3. Structure of the dissertation**

In the first, substantive (2nd) chapter of the dissertation, I present a multifaceted approach to the concepts of social services and innovation, analyzing the narrower and broader literature. I believe that the literature on the social sector in presenting precise definitions and interpretive contexts is still rather incomplete today, so I will also attempt a kind of summary.

I also point out that there are several contradictions in the use of the terms, and there are also inconsistencies in the description and use of the terms within the two basic pieces of legislation.

I explore the fundamental difference between the concepts of “care” and “service”, which also affects values, showing that in contrast to patriarchal, “solution” care, there are other priorities in the use of the concept of service.

I will focus on the important concept of “institution”, which is an important - but by no means descriptive - concept of the service system based on the Basic Law. I present the use of the terms by the European Union, which supports the need for renewal in the field of social services. After the legislation, I explore the definitions in the literature. As an important issue, I shall point out that the examination of the consumers of the service becomes apparent, which can influence the change of attitude.

I try to place social services in the broader system using the defining features of the system of public services. I am attempting to develop a stand-alone definition.

In the next section, I analyze the conceptual scope of innovation. I try to show that it is a valid idea to apply the rules, peculiarities and use of concepts of innovation to social services. I present the classification possibilities of social services by examining the nature and orientation of service contents.

Finally, in connection with the chosen model of the types and characteristics of innovation, I connect the characteristics and peculiarities of service sub-areas, which are analyzed later in detail.

In the next chapter (3rd), I attempt to describe the social service system using several approaches. One such aspect is the approach according to the groups of service users (target group). From the point of view of the users-service providers-maintainers, I try to justify the peculiarities of social services by presenting the basic role of the state.

Reviewing the aspects that can be used to analyze the social service system, I show that these aspects have / can have an important impact on emerging innovations, especially their purpose and impact analysis.

After the presentation, of the elements I describe systematization possibilities. Out of the many grouping, sorting and systematization options, I will guide the target group-specific methods according to the notion of “supply obligation”, based on the specialty of the service content. Then, anticipating a kind of possible solution, I will try to describe a service definition that can be implemented at the level of so-called service elements that can be uniform and up-to-date. (Elements of this already exist today, they are part of the regulation, but their general use has not materialized in the sector.)

In Chapter 4th, I present the regulatory features of the social services system, explaining in detail the background of previous suggestions. First, approaching the issue from the point of view of international obligations, it becomes apparent that the domestic impact of various (UN, EU, EC, etc.) conventions and regulations is weak.

The presentation of the relevant part of the Basic Law is also inevitable, as the legal act replacing the Constitution did not bring about a significant change in the regulation of the area. It reaffirmed previous rights and roles, indicating only minor differences in emphasis.

Based on my previous suggestion that the period of origin of our two basic laws is still decisive today, I will examine these two pieces of legislation separately, supplemented by other important regulations (e.g., Act XXVI of 1998 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Equal Opportunities).

In Chapter 5, I turn to analyzing the background of innovation processes. In doing so, I present concepts and strategies in the field - available in writing.

Using the method of document analysis, I assess the most important, documented (wider) innovation elements I have found in professional, policy and executive materials.

First, I analyze the familiar government programs, highlighting all the points that may have an impact on the direction of innovation in social services. I show that the field of social services receives relatively little attention in government policies, providing little support for analysis.

In analyzing professional concepts, I focus on two broader ideas that offer real innovation - the possible renewal of Social Law and the Democratic, Perspective Development of Social Administration (SZOLID) and the professional materials entitled „*Tékozló koldus ruháját szaggatja*”. However, none of the material reached political decision-makers as a unified idea, as did the longer-analyzed National Social Policy Concept (NSZK). However, the latter material contains the most specifics and it is interesting that the author and the customer of the material were later given the opportunity to enforce it - in a government position. But even this has only been partially achieved without providing a long-term vision for the future of social services.

At the end of this chapter, I will list other external factors. and examine their impact on innovation opportunities. I consider it an important - concluding - statement that my analysis shows that we cannot find too much interest in social service innovations (and their strategic rethinking) in public policy thinking. It can be seen that during the change of government there is an opportunity for conceptual thinking, but these experiments - for different reasons - do not

or have not come to fruition. However, without coordination at the governmental level, neither changes involving interests nor innovations that raise border issues and require coordination can be implemented effectively.

One of the specific parts of the same chapter is the value theory / property theory analysis experiment, which I base on the results of my own research carried out within the framework of education. By examining organizational and managerial values, I attempt to describe the principles and (sometimes underlying) values that characterize the social services sector.

A stakeholder analysis confirms that the key features of the sector are low levels of social esteem, the need for needs-based service organization based on real needs, the constraints of permanent financing risks and the unpredictability of a constantly changing (regulatory) environment. An important basis, however, is that the examination of the personal level (managers) shows that after empathy, expertise, consistency, basic value expectations and important characteristics - with the sixth most frequent mention - innovation and innovativeness also becomes apparent.

Comparing these results with the results of a study covering several service sectors, the similarities and differences between the tertiary sector and social services become visible.

After that, the longest, but at the same time the most concrete chapter of the dissertation (6th) presents the characteristics and peculiarities of the changes that can actually be considered and implemented as innovative. By presenting a detailed analysis of concrete examples, I present positive examples of innovative changes in social services. I also use secondary data analyses and impact assessment examples to analyze in detail the changes affecting the lives of a group of stakeholders of various sizes that can decisively support the functioning of welfare.

Looking at all concrete steps - the emergence of a village and farm caretaker system, signal-enabled home help, the start-up and operation of the care network, the integration of child protection guardians, the prioritization and development of the foster care network, the provision of care for patients with dementia, people with disabilities, the reorganization of development employment for the disabled, psychiatric patients of those with addictions, the creation and launch of the replacement (eviction, deinstitutionalisation) concept (including the expansion of subsidized housing) - I present the regulatory changes, the narrower and wider effects. All innovations contain valuable additives, mosaics to map the processes. It is of paramount importance - a key issue in the 21st century - to study the processes of digitization

that can influence efficiency. (You can also see what - newer - problems arise if changes are not well thought through.)

In this chapter, I deal with an innovation that, when introduced as an obligation, implemented as official training, and starting with a unified program, has an indirect effect on social services: social leadership training. And I consider and try to demonstrate the effect of modern training aimed at shaping the attitude of managers as something that generates a broad, suitable basis for “bottom-up” changes in the sector. By providing organizational and managerial support, social service managers are able to “reach out” to the issue of innovation more consciously and practically, taking advantage of opportunities and (at least) initiating renewal programs at the local level.

This “critical mass”, showing a strong overlap with the opinion formers of the social profession, may be sufficient to form a leadership layer in the field of social services that can identify with the innovative vision of the service system, be able to see and evaluate changes, influence and manage them as needed.

During the preparation and planning of the draft of the doctoral dissertation, it was not yet clear what extreme situation it would be worthwhile to examine the innovation skills and abilities of social services. However, due to its topicality, an important - concluding - part of the chapter is the presentation of the changes seen in connection with the pandemic. In connection with another university research, I present the innovative capacity of social services - primarily managerial - in the field of epidemic management and flexible response. The industry showed a kind of “natural defense” and the elements of this professional immune system were: innovation, a high degree of practicality, a series of quick and quickly enforced decisions, flexibility and the ability to drive change.

Management decisions proved to be forward-looking, and the organizational solutions used were characterized primarily by a commitment to flexibility and immediate compliance with rapid change. The social system has stood the test of time, and although it has never been in the public interest, it is apparently due to the fact that, in any comparison, the sector has defended itself well against the pandemic.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of innovation processes. On the one hand, it can be seen that, due to its public service and other characteristics, it has always been and remains an important element of innovation in the sector. The innovations included in the strict, rigid regulation were able to advance the processes of modernization: the operation of a more customer-centric, more reasonable, more sustainable service system in Hungary.

On the other hand, the external environment and internal conditions of social services generate a number of challenges that need to be addressed today and in the near future if the decision-making and executive community responsible for the social sector continues to aim for the functioning of welfare states.

Recent events have also shown that the social institutional and service sector is capable of rapid and significant reactions. The openness to innovation of the key stakeholder leaders, who also have professional expertise and commitment, is given, but the many failures and dead attempts at reform can destroy the possibility of drawing a vision, thinking through it and planning actions. The most important issue in this regard is the problem of (positive) attitudes towards change, which would be important to constantly examine and strengthen as necessary.

All this is followed by the conclusion of the dissertation, in which not only the dissertation is actually summarized, but I also try to formulate suggestions and remarks based on the findings of my research in order to support the hoped-for future changes in social services.

Finally, in connection with the innovation vision of the social services field, I will try to draw some conclusions, and I hope that future analysts and planners will also provide a useful vision and point of view.

#### **4. Summary of main findings**

Primarily in the light of my initial suggestions, it can be stated that the innovation of domestic social services can always be described along regulatory elements. However, in many cases the regulation only “inserts” the specific regulatory peculiarities, which meet the expectations of decision-makers, and this also generates problems in the use of concepts and definitions.

In today's regulation - the use of terms - coexists with the patriarchal attitude of the 60's, 70's (providing full care) with the service-oriented approach of the 90's (even more strongly the 2010s). Professional uniformity is not served by the different wording, meaning and content of the two basic laws.

I have tried to prove with several examples that - despite the above - the innovation processes of social services can be described along the characteristics, expectations and definitions characteristic of the tertiary sector. The changes presented have / have had a real innovative

impact on the delivery of services. There are several types of innovation in the field and the sector has a good foundation for its attitudes towards change.

Related to all this is whether common values and principles can be found in the background of these processes and changes. This question was partially (positively) answered. It can be seen that there is a customer focus on all innovations. Regardless of time and public policy situation, services have become more and more diverse, seemingly serving the goals of social well-being and improving the quality of life.

However, this has also been accompanied by the creation of an opaque, difficult-to-understand and interoperable system that is difficult to navigate and has not been shown to be effective and efficient. It is therefore necessary to find organizational and regulatory methods that can provide the necessary flexibility and the development of customizable social services. This is directly linked to better enforcement of the recipients rights and a stronger consumer perspective.

So there are root causes behind innovations, as well as common values (improving quality of life, customer focus) that seem to point in the same direction. However, they cannot explain the real reasons for the changes, as this would require a long-term vision. However, these values and principles are able to maintain the appearance that we are seeing continuous, planned development - but this can also predict the emergence of an unsustainable service structure.

Smooth innovation thoroughly assesses the problems to be solved, systematically records them - and continuously monitors changes - and then leaves time to pass on the changes. It has a reasonable, life-like foundation, but it can also articulate the vision on an emotional basis, which is especially important in the social field. Those working in social services, including management, see their own activities as strongly imbued with professionalism. This attitude can and should be calculated before any innovative move in the sector.

In my dissertation I tried to find the root causes behind the changes in social services in Hungary. Based on my starting point - that is, the changes in social services are always reflected in the legislation - I examined the specifics of the changes that were considered the most important. However, this required the examination and detailed analysis of several concepts - and their relationship to each other.

I tried to review my research topic by processing the available scientific results, literature sources and documents, using multidisciplinary aspects.

It is a difficulty that the use of terms and the structure of the examined legislation is so different several times that it is not suitable for the comparative analysis. The two Base Laws nowadays appear to be more like a tablecloth sewn from spots, undoubtedly multi-colored, multi-patterned, than a map and guide to help you find your way. The system of social regulation shows an extremely thorough, restrictive set with little scope for flexibility. There are no transitions between different service levels and types of services, no opportunities for complementarity, auxiliary (subsidiarity), and the overlapping, gradual nature of the system is not visible. However, the focus on needs can be found at several points, under different rules, which, however, does not appear as a single, traceable, measurable efficiency-based diagnosis-based endeavor.

I reviewed the actors influencing the regulation of social services: international obligations and domestic public policy and professional policy commitments. In these, however, I did not find any effect that could explain the direction and content of the changes. I found and presented one of these exceptions, the effects of domestic deinstitutionalisation ideas (facts and plans), which were able to trigger the deepest changes in today's social service system.

I examined the value system of the main actors of the change, the leaders of the field, the implementers / sufferers of the innovation, which confirmed that the opinion formers of the sector are characterized by fundamental openness. Human resources and the organizational atmosphere, if not the driving force, are by no means an impediment to change.

In connection with the topicality of the last year and a half, based on the results of a research, I have shown that social services are also capable of rapid innovation, as we have seen many examples of this in the fight against a pandemic. The biggest test of innovation in the social sphere is the pandemic, which, to the best of our knowledge today, has been adequately performed by services.

I tried to explore all the interpretable circumstances and factors in order to be able to draw some kind of pattern of innovations. However, I was only able to find this in very few cases, as few vectors could be analyzed from the changes in the legislation. In any case, it can be seen that the Social Legislation represented two directions: the strengthening of services close to home and the expanding range of increasingly specialized content. The most important directional change of the Child Protection Act is the strongest possible protection of children's rights.

It stands out in the regulation of social services that the legislators solve the interests of the beneficiaries in several ways and techniques. Consumer protection of service users is embodied in a specific, multi-stakeholder system of advocacy and legal protection, which would often be able to influence change precisely in the interests of innovation.

In summary, my suggestions are:

- Due to limited resources and technological changes and trends in the 21st century, integrated organizational solutions based on wide collaborations can remain viable in the future. The vision of social services must focus on partnership commitment, which is also a synergistic resource and guarantees a willingness to work together on an ongoing basis.
- The implementation of the so-called evidence-based service planning and organization, which can be continuously monitored by the analysis of large amount of available data and recorded facts, will become essential in the future. This can also be used to increase the awareness and recognition of social services, since presenting social efficiency and effectiveness, it can also be made aware of in the wider social environment.
- Partly related to the above-mentioned concept is the diagnosis-based service organization, which sets out the establishment of the most accurate diagnosis with appropriate measuring tools in order to develop the most effective therapy (intervention). Personalized, needs-based, sufficiently flexible, interoperable social services can also have a significant impact on the quality of life experienced and the enforcement of users' rights.
- Design based on individual-level service solutions and social service elements will be needed to maximize targeting and increase efficiency. It is necessary to continue building case management-based social assistance in all service segments that require planned innovations.
- It will be necessary to strengthen consumer protection and to establish "conscious service consumption" (through early education, much more intensive information sharing, "showing" social services, highlighting social benefits, etc.).
- Policy on quality only has a basis for informed consumer choice and a transparent service system. However, in my opinion, the effects of achieving this and the innovation of social services have yet to be seen.

Fixing the direction of innovation in social services - short, medium and long term - could have a serious impact on the "identity" of the social profession. However, in the absence of this, many professionals do not see much chance of formulating a vision. I myself am more optimistic than this: even a "young" profession such as Hungarian social policy and social service management, which might as well go through a paradigm shift, should be able to formulate its own vision. This vision should be about the innovation curve on which sustainable social services will be able to operate in the 21st century, where viability and efficiency can be

realized, thus offering the legislators the opportunity to create and reshape a modern, efficient and transparent set of regulations.

## 5. List of publications arising from this doctoral thesis

1. A hazai demens ellátás szabályozási kihívásai, KRE ÁJDI Jogász Doktoranduszok XVI. Szakmai Találkozója konferenciakötet, Budapest, 2020, Patrocinium, 191-200.o.;  
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3. Támogatott lakhatás - egy innovatív szociális szolgáltatás szabályozási kérdései, KRE ÁJDI Jogász Doktoranduszok XVII. Szakmai Találkozója konferenciakötet, Budapest, 2020, Patrocinium, 177-188.o.;  
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4. Egy kulcs az önálló életvitelhez – a támogatott lakhatás helye és szerepe a magyarországi szociális szolgáltatások rendszerében, Fogyatékoság és Társadalom, 2020/1. szám, 47-58.o.; <http://fogyatekossagtudomany.elte.hu/index.php/2020-evi-1-szam/>
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