

# Social Assistance in the Context of Social Changes. The Gustian Reform Programme

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**Abstract:** The present study is a brief incursion into the history of social assistance in Romania and its role in social changes. In this context, the contribution of the Sociological School of Bucharest founded by D. Gusti is emphasised with respect to the emergence of the modern statues of social assistance as distinct institutional field, and specialised profession. Dimitrie Gusti, a man of remarkable professional-scientific openness (studies of philosophy, sociology, ethics, social and political sciences, social statistics, etc.) was the promoter of a wide Social Reforms Programme based on the positions of scientific knowledge regarding society. It had as core objective to guide the evolution process of Romania on a modern development path. At the core of an extended programme of reforms laid also the assumption of the social responsibility of sociology and socio-humane sciences. Sociology emerges according to the Gustian vision as one of the fundamental social sciences involved in the processes of changing the society. As “sociologia militans”, it is in the service of the nation and of the community. Next to sociology, social assistance’s transformative function plays an essential role in approaching, solving, and preventing severe social phenomena. The changes demanded by Romania’s modernisation had also perverse effects at social, human, and moral level by multiplying/emerging risks generating marginalisation, and social exclusion for a good part of the society. Thus, sociology and social assistance (centred on supporting vulnerable communities/individuals) gained a completely particular role in the reform model proposed by the Sociological School of Bucharest. Here, social and socio-humane sciences were regarded as not only active tools for gaining knowledge about the society, but also as efficient intervention and change means. Due to their technicality and professionalism, social and humane sciences in general, and sociology and social assistance in particular were regarded in the process of social change as true “social and human engineering” (Zamfir, 1981). Thus, the Sociological School of Bucharest created by D. Gusti and supported by cultural and politic-administrative institutions mobilised also a wide collective of experts, and intellectuals of multi- and interdisciplinary openness, men with wide-ranging cultural perspective, as demanded by transformative processes. The objectives of the Gustian reform project were structured clearly based on a general theory of the social system. They were guided with priority on knowledge about the society starting with empirical research regarding local communities, as such. Focusing on field research regarding the reality of the communities in their entirety, underpinned the idea that villages developed historically, as distinct social entities. Consequently, their research and knowledge about them imposed the monographic-type analysis. In the vision of the Sociological School of Bucharest, the village and the communities become sure milestones of social development and activism. In this context, social assistance plays a central role not only in recording the needs of the vulnerable ones, but also in solving their specific issues by multiple approach. This participative instance of social intervention and support work at the community and individual level is sustained by “action-research”. Thus, taking into account its multiple levels of practical intervention in social reality, assistance gains also a special mission of prevention and diminishing modern risks.

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## **The mission of social intervention. Historical perspective**

The society, by its own forms of social solidarity was always concerned by those social disadvantaged group/person categories, vulnerable to risks, marginalisation, and exclusion. All these categories required for surviving a minimum social and/or moral support. One thing was obvious: the needy and the helpless had to be supported under various forms for surviving. The sentiment of charity/compassion, of solidarity against those in difficulty was understood at the same time also as support for the social balance and security of the community as in the saying “help them in order to make them help themselves”, “help them to help yourself”.

Though, in the beginnings, social assistance was linked to charitable and voluntary action, it structured in time its own specialised system, based on an own institutional construction, a specific legal-normative framework, with specialised forms of social action and intervention. These were oriented towards individual/social change based on social programmes coordinated by public institutions. Once the Law of 1601 was issued in England, respectively the “Elizabethan Poor Act Law”, a first legislative initiative was recorded regarding social assistance. This law proposed the initiation of some charitable actions of the wealthy, compelling them to pay a “poverty tax” intended for those socially disadvantaged. Hence, formal means of solidarity were implemented within the community. The purpose was to support

voluntary services of help for the poor, elderly, sick, and for those lacking family support. The philosophy of this formula of community help was based on social control in identifying the wealthy with the purpose of directing part of their taxes on wealth to assist the poor or those with health problems. By specific forms of financial redistribution, the funds collected from the wealthy who were grand landowners, and opulent living resources, were distributed to the poor or helpless, who had no support. Though important for the social assistance of the time, the law legalising such a Robin Hood-type philosophy, proved to be inefficient in relation to the high numbers of the poor population and of the groups in difficulty. The idea as such, is later on brought up again in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in England and USA represented the background of a modern social protection system. True, initially, more marked emphasis was put on the health field. This type of social support is found subsequently in Germany (during the times of Chancellor Bismarck) under the form of a broader and compulsory social insurance formula for illness and maternity support, but also for orphans, widows, work accidents, and pensions for the elderly. The Bismarck model extended in the ensuing period to the other European countries. Later on, this stimulated the emergence of some alternative formulas of protection in the framework of social policies: the “Welfare State” model, but also the “Workfare State” one, with differing approaches and options in ensuring social welfare by means of the social security and assistance system (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1995).

“Social assistance, as essential part of social protection, represents an operative way of putting into practice a structured

assembly of policies, social programmes, and measures for recuperating vulnerable individuals and groups with risk of social exclusion. The social assistance system is founded on a basic principle: means tested benefits. The persons in difficulty depending on the profile of their needs for gaining the necessary autonomy for leading a decent life are supported from budgetary funds of the state, or from other funds obtained based on voluntary action from the individuals or the community. The social assistance intervention is achieved by specialised support forms (mainly financial benefits and personalised social assistance services)” (Zamfir and Precupețu, 2018, 307).

Over time, the complexity of societal answers increased regarding the needs of those in difficulty. The diagnosis of social issues was reconsidered in its swift dynamics. The issues related to social marginalisation by population’s impoverishment received increased attention at the level of antipoverty and social inclusion policies.

Nevertheless, the answers of social assistance by concrete solutions proposed for gradual alleviation and elimination of poverty and social marginalisation did not meet the size/dimensions of the phenomenon, nor its depth. This is because the reasons for people’s dependency on social support were and still are multiple, extremely different depending on the individual. They are strictly personalised and closely interlinked. Moreover, the needs of the individual, that are extremely diversified and structured according to a specific profile, are individualised markedly. Therefore, the consistency of the punctual responses given by the assistance to the needs of the beneficiary is linked to identifying and partial knowledge of the actual cases/situations at the individual and/or community level. This explains why, only by placing concrete activities of support and rehabilitation of the various types of vulnerabilities, located in the most different

locations and spaces (schools, hospitals, maternities, penitentiaries, institutions for children, elderly, disabled individuals, family, community, and churches, etc.), social assistance gains a new **“practical-action” of the participative-type** substance. Thus, it becomes an active instrument of social/human intervention and change.

Modern social assistance can no longer be associated with philanthropic forms, and charity acts that were present in its prehistory. To the contrary, it imposes itself as a universal right of the individual in difficulty, as necessary support through his/her periods of crisis, as a necessary element for balancing his/her community room. By its promoted values, the assistance becomes an important milestone of social justice. Therefore, the basic functions of the social assistance, exercised by financial benefits, personalised services, and other forms of emergency help, are centred with priority on rehabilitating and integrating/reintegrating the vulnerable ones into the normality of life. To this is added the most important mission of social assistance regarding the prevention of marginalisation and social exclusion risks. If the basic function of social benefits in money is mainly a rehabilitating one, the one of social services includes next to the function of immediate help, of rehabilitation/recovery, also the one of preventing risk situations (Zamfir, 2012a). The efficiency of an integrated social assistance system presupposes the complementarity of all forms of help, monetary, and services, as these are closely interlinked. While financial benefits in assistance mitigate an economic-monetary deficit, the assistance services cover/rebuild the deficit of individual and/or moral capabilities required for hisautonomous life. In fact, social assistance benefits and services only together, based on the interdependence of their functions can ensure the rehabilitation and even complete recovery of the autonomy for the marginalised ones (Zamfir, 2012b).

Modern social assistance, as profession and practice of social change developed specialised evaluation and monitoring standards for the institutional forms of social support. These might mark the progress registered in the process of social inclusion and social justice. ISFW in 2000 underpins that “social assistance promotes social change, solving issues in inter-human relationships, as well as the mobilisation and participation of individuals for increasing welfare. By using theories about the human behaviour and social systems, assistance intervenes in the points where people interact with the environment. The principles of human rights and of social justice are fundamental for the social assistance” (Krogstad Miley, O’Mellia and DuBois, 2006, 28).

Perhaps this is the reason why social assistance in its evolution aimed not only the technical professional competences required for assisting vulnerable individuals/groups/communities. It included, at the same time, compulsively, ensuring the quality of specialised support actions, based on the high principles and moral values. Consequently, in applying social support forms are incorporated basic principles regarding the compliance with specific norms of the deontological code of the profession. Here, at the forefront, is shown the respect for the dignity, integrity, and autonomy of the disadvantaged individuals.

## **Social assistance in Romania. History and evolution**

In Romania, as anywhere else in the world, the pre-modern history of the first forms of social assistance support are related to philanthropic actions, charitable, and religious type actions. In the beginnings, monasteries, churches, and parishes developed a support system for the needy (sick, elderly, orphaned children, and persons with handicap, etc.). It is interesting

that initially, social assistance by its various forms of support highlighted the role of parishes/communities in caring for the vulnerable and for those with increased risks of marginalisation. Actually, by stimulating the solidarity and mutual help spirit, the Romanian community presented itself permanently as an active social actor for maintaining local balance and harmony of its living space. If at the beginning these seemed as current habits in the community, under the form of customs, over time a major change occurred in the philosophy of social assistance. The idea of solidarity with those in difficulty was doubled by precise institutional-legal norms that ensured the right to assistance for the disfavoured categories. One mention is necessary in this context. These rights were accepted not only as simple advantages for the marginalised ones. Their beneficial effects were captured also at the community level ensuring the stability, security, and social community balance.

By active forms of social support granted to those in need, the community protected itself actually against negative, unwanted consequences of the marginalisation risks. The private initiatives of the charitable organisations were taken over gradually by official services/institutions with a decisive role for the emergence of modern social assistance. In Romania, the very slow urbanisation process led to the emergence of systematic concerns for registering the helpless and lacking elementary subsistence means only after 1300. In 1565 is set up in Matal de Jos (Campulung), a hospice for protecting the persons with handicap (crippled, blind, gnarled persons, and with other infirmities). The oldest form of social assistance under the supervision of the state by distributing public funds to the needy is represented by very **Poor Houses communities** (in Romanian, old term, **Caliciile**). These had the form of “professional organisations of those in need – of the guild – had as leader a headman of the poor elected by them” (Encyclopaedia of

Romania, vol. 1, 520). The poor houses could benefit of help out of public money. One document from 1686 shows that the registered poor received one coin per day from the state's treasury to which were added the necessary clothing and footwear. The hospitals founded after 1695 had also social assistance functions being used also as shelters for the helpless and poor. An example in this case is the Asylum for women Domnita Balasa set up in 1751 for supporting poor girls and "impoverished boyars", which is regarded as the first institution with the character of modern social assistance from Romania. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, state social assistance in both Moldova (*House of Charity*) and Muntenia (*Charity's Box*) records concerns in caring for orphaned, poor, or abandoned children. The assistance for these categories is granted from state funds (see Encyclopaedia of Romania, Ch. Social Assistance, 519–545).

Subsequently, organised social models emerge for supporting persons in difficulty, sustained by institutional measures regulated by clear normative-legal acts.

The year 1775, is the year when the first law for the protection of child and for setting up specialised institutions for vulnerable persons (unwed mothers, poor, persons with handicap, elderly), and thus might be considered as a year of reference for the birth certificate of modern social assistance in Romania. The social objectives of the modern public system are highlighted by the adoption of the *Organic Regulation of Wallachia in the year 1831*. This document establishes a functioning regulation for the first entities of social assistance.

After the **Union of the Romanian Principalities in 1859** are set by means of normative documents attributions for the social assistance services at the level of villages and counties.

In 1881 is recorded with the Town Hall of Bucharest the first state social assistance service followed by other social support institutions. The first Census of social

assistance issues realised in Romania in the year 1936 identified **521** entities of social assistance, from which **50** belonged to the state<sup>1</sup>.

## Social assistance and the Social Reform Programme of D. Gusti

Dimitrie Gusti succeeded in mobilising a wide intellectual community with inter-, and multidisciplinary profile in designing a programme for Romania's exit from underdevelopment and for guiding the country towards a modern society. His Programme was conceived as an open project, an ongoing process of social construction and development.

**The Gustian Programme** seems as very ambitions by both amplitude of approached social-economic development issues of the country, and by proposing some structural changes in all components of the Romanian society. In the context of swift modernisation, the programme is noticeable by the exactness of the integrating analysis about the components of the social system based on **deep scientific knowledge of the Romanian society's reality** (urban and rural communities). Thus is opened a new integrated, systemic type approach in the framework of public policies of the time. Among the socio-economic, humane, and demographic sciences, sociology, social statistics, and assistance take a privileged place. Sociology as "science of the nation" assumed, then, the mission to support and monitor the modern process of social government. Here, its active, transformative role in the process of constructing the social confers to it also the novel instance of "**sociologia militans**". Thus, Gusti proposes in 1935 to set up a sociology review "**Sociologia Militans**", that would gather the results of field researches of the Monographic School from Bucharest. "Two are the instances for making a radiography of the «nation's sociology» in the interwar

period: on one hand the theoretic aspect – the *cogitans* sociology of the nation, on the other hand, the practical and applied aspect, the *militans* sociology” (Dungaciu, 2003, 78). The sociological project of social change was a permanent milestone for the political decision factors of the time. It is found in active governmental measures. It is not accidentally that remarkable personalities of the scientific world were heading key ministries of the time, like the Labour, Health, and Justice. The modern vision of social changes proposed by the Gustian Programme ensured also an efficient mechanism for evaluating and monitoring its outcomes over time. It is interesting that the suggestions of social change included in the **general reform** programme were founded on a scientific methodology of society’s analysis built professionally. They started from a clear diagnosis referring to the needs of the population correlated with the existing resources of the country and sustained by the active force of public social policies. D. Gusti, as Chairman of the Romanian Academy (1944–1946) sets up the *National Council of Scientific Research*. In this institutional framework is emphasised the integrating power of social and humane sciences in changing/reforming society. Their role as “true human and social engineering” qualified them as basic tools in the knowledge and modelling of the social. The entire social reform programme is coordinated by the **Romanian Social Institute**. Later on, after the model of RSI is established the *Social Institute of the Nations* (1946–1947), with high international visibility for post-war Romania. Another major component of the Gustian Social Programme is the Project regarding *Research of the regions and the sociological map of Romania for the years 1948–1949*.

In the framework of this extended programme of modernising the country was conceived also a **unitary, coherently integrated social assistance system** for recovering marginalised individuals, victims

of some modern risks. The system was imagined on its main components: vocational and professional training, institutional, and legislative building based on the clear deontological norms of the profession.

Thus, social assistance was circumscribed on a rapid and spectacular evolution path and turns into an example for western countries with tradition in the field, as well. Between the two World Wars, both at the level of vocational training, and regarding the practice by means of community services, the Romanian social assistance gains a prestigious place in the world. In the twenties, Romania was one of the first countries to implement the **profession of social worker**. The modern profession of social worker, already at its beginnings, imposed itself as a component of the Gustian programme for social reform. In 1927 began the training of social workers based on post-high school courses. Subsequently, in 1929, the post-high school changed into faculty, which operated up to the year 1947. Sociologists of high professional standing were involved in the superior training of social workers. The original vision of the Romanian School of Social Assistance placed Romania at the top of the pyramid in the world hierarchy of social assistance practice (Mănoiu și Epureanu, 1996; Zamfir, 1995).

In this context, the first **Law regarding Pensions from 1912** remains as reference within the system of public social insurances. **In 1920, together with the set-up of the Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Protection**, social assistance enters into a new stage of development. Its rethinking is realised in the framework of structured assembly of social reforms based on the **scientific knowledge about the society**. Hence, a **General Integrated Project of Country’s Social Change** is formulated. The newly established Ministry of Labour gains in the context important functions in developing the entire national programme of social reform. In addition, it receives as

attribution also the role of methodologic and professional coordination of the entire activity of social assistance (Mănoiu și Epureanu, 1996).

Throughout this period, the emergence of public and private institutions of assistance focused on specialised forms of protection and support helps to developing/strengthening a modern administrative system.

The Sociological School from Bucharest under the coordination of professor D. Gusti considered the training of social assistance experts as major challenge regarding the severe social issues generated by the rapid process of urbanisation. The transition from village to town of a large number of Romanians, without any prior preparation in order to meet the modern risks of urbanisation requested urgent solutions in their adjustment process. Thus, the massive migration from village to town was accompanied by worrying phenomena of adjustment for the rural population. The issues related to vagrancy, prostitution, alcoholism, domestic violence, delinquency, rapid impoverishment, social inadequacy of all kinds, and accompanied by divorces, family disorganisation, abandon, neglect, and many child abuse cases, etc. were multiplied. The new emerging social issues had to be identified, recorded, controlled, and solved within specialised centres.

In 1929, under the direct coordination of the Romanian Social Institute, and with the approval of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is established the *Superior School of Social Assistance “Princess Ileana” from Bucharest*. D. Gusti, together with the Minister of Health and Social Protection, Doctor Iuliu Moldovan, and the director of the Institute of Statistics Sabin Manuila, and the director of the Social Assistance School, Venturia Manuila developed the curricula and analytical programmes for the experts.

Even though these were deeply rooted in the concrete socio-economic Romanian realities of the time, they made full use of top modern educational experience from

advanced western countries where many of the Romanian experts were trained (Mănoiu și Epureanu, 1994; Zamfir și Filipescu, 2015, 149–171; Pop, 2002, 116–126). The duration of the studies’ was initially of 4 years (1929–1959) and thereafter of 3 years (1959–1969) and accompanied compulsory by a consistent practice module in specialised services and model centres dedicated especially to the activities of the students.

In 1930, within the Romanian Social Institute was elaborated the *Law of Social Service for the Community*. This law provided for the institutional framework of organising public social services that were used also as model centres for the practice of the students. The implementation of this law represents an efficient initiative of wide-reaching scope in the practice of modern social assistance. It is a significant touchstone of active, participative-type community support also nowadays. The law had as starting point the importance of personalised social assistance services placed in the proximity of those in need. At the same time, the law was based on stimulating the initiative of the community, and on the existence of an active solidarity spirit regarding community social actions (Zamfir, 2000). In the present, as well, the development of community assistance services remains a core objective of active assistance policies. The law, by its contents, has major significance even nowadays in the modern process of decentralising social assistance services, and of personalised assistance centred on needs.

In this incentivising context for the community practice, Xenia Costa-Foru, a close collaborator of D. Gusti, suggests for training experts in the field two correlative objectives:

- Knowledge about all social issues and of situations generating risks, by using methods and techniques of sociological investigation: empirical research, interdisciplinary monographic studies. These were realised by data gathering methods referring to “frames,

manifestations, relationships, processes and based on the idea that there could be no primacy of any of the elements...” (Golopentia, 2016, 23). A systemic, integrating vision of the social life elements is obvious in the context. The analysis **“on frames” is focused on research** from cosmologic, objective perspective of the community. The one **“on displays” highlights a subjective approach** focused on moods, and active intervention realised by **“relationships/actions”** of the community actors);

- Elaborating some active intervention techniques by social assistance means developed inspecialised entities and institutions of the closed type, but also by open social assistance, personalised and focused on the individual-type requirements’ profile (Mănoiu and Epureanu, 1996).

The training of the expert laid particular emphasis on evaluating the intervention methods in risk situations, on counselling, and individual therapy, but especially on active techniques of social action for changing the situation of individuals in difficulty. In this context, the particularities and role of social statistics for knowledge about, diagnosis and analysis of issues gain major significance. The courses of the school were of the multi- and interdisciplinary type, while predominant were the socio-economic and psychological-social disciplines (e.g. sociology of communities and dependent social groups, the bio-sociology of disorganised families, concubine or divorced, the delinquency, the issues of women and children, etc.), followed by social statistics, law, and social medicine. Compulsory were the information about the legislation of the country, the economy, sociology, general and differentiated psychology, cultural anthropology, public hygiene and health, demography, etc. The general aspects of methodology and technique of social investigations were

doubled by a casuistic wealth provided by vital and social statistics (Mănoiu and Epureanu, 1996). These provided for a set of general knowledge required for any social expert and activist. If the sociology of the period emerges in the actual process of social reforms in the instance of “active sociology”, and “sociologia militans”, the social assistance focuses guides its researches towards supporting the actions of social change and intervention of the “action-research” type. The constructive role of the sociology and of the social assistance, as “social and human engineering” is an obvious one, in the context of social reform process.

The techniques of social action were focused on communities, and groups of beneficiaries, or on individual social cases (see handbook in two volumes developed by Ioan I. Matei and H.H. Stahl: “Prevederi sociale Metode și tehnici de asistență socială” (“Social insurance/previsions. Methods and techniques of social assistance” (in Romanian from 1962).

The specialised practice was organised within the entities and institutions of social protection in the profile, or in experimental centres created for the purpose. A few examples are relevant in the context. For the assistance of the family, was dedicated the Demonstration Centre from the district Tei. It was created in 1930, initially, for elaborating a district monography, but also for organisational activities for a State census. For the hospital social services was allocated the Demonstration Centre near the Coltea Hospital. For the practice in industrial assistance was used the A.C.F.R. association. To these were added other practice centres, as well, for the students from state institutions of social profile, the Tribunal for Juveniles from Bucharest, the penitentiary Vacaresti, the hospital Colentina respectively the department for mental disturbances, and the one of venereal diseases for granting assistance to prostitutes. The hospital Filantropia was used for heart diseases and maternity, as well as other departments of the

hospitals Pantelimon, Brancovenesc, Dr. Cantacuzino. Regarding assistance for the children, the centres were at the Society the Sf. Ecaterina Shelter, the society Prince Mircea, and the children's hospital. Activities with the profile of specialised assistance extended rapidly from Bucharest to the other towns of the country. Distinct entities were created near the "shelter offices" from the municipalities of Brasov, Cluj, Sibiu, Craiova, Ploiesti, and Timisoara. The modern, original vision of promoting social assistance by means of specialised social services at community level, centred strictly on the needs of the beneficiary as promoted in Romania throughout the thirties placed the training of experts in social assistance among the top positions in the world in this respect (Mănoiu și Epureanu, 1996; Zamfir, 1995, 2009, 2015; Zamfir, 2006).

At the same time, a wide legislative construction in key fields of the society accompanied the social reform programme. The legal-normative institutional framework was added to the regulation regarding the functions of the social system on modern basis. **The Sanitary and Social Protection Law** of 14 July 1930 represents a significant moment for the modern social assistance. It ascertains the global integrated perspective of the social reform process from Romania in the interwar period. The vision of macro- and microsocioal change of all-important fields for ensuring normal living conditions is the dominant one in the Gustian reform philosophy.

The changes of an articulated, coherently structured reform of that time are found in an integrated assembly of social development measures and programmes. They are rendered concrete by the construction of an articulated administrative-institutional system, by the openness towards a wider legislative-normative and formative-educational framework in agreement with the requirements of the modern world. In the framework of these wide initiatives/projects of social-economic development was

designed also the **reform of social assistance on three distinct components: at institutional building, vocational training, and active support practice based on services for the vulnerable ones level.** The researches regarding the actual profile of the needs of vulnerable persons and groups started from a clear diagnosis of the issues they faced. The researches were oriented on intervention actions for helping the beneficiary out of the dependency on social assistance. Together with the identification of social issues and their specific knowledge, the distinct profile of vulnerable groups/persons could also be clearly established. Starting from the profile of needs, techniques, personalised rehabilitation and prevention services regarding risk factors were initiated. In this large context of social reforms, assistance emerges as integral part of the general process of modernising Romania.

A systematic account about the pre-history and history of social assistance in Romania up to the year 1990 is found in the Encyclopaedia of Romania vol. 1 (519–545) and in Florica Manoiu and Viorica Epureanu, 1996, Zamfir, E. 1998, 2004, 2008, 2009.

### **Marginalisation of social assistance in the socialist period**

The interwar period represented for Romania an important stage on the modernisation and social progress path in all fields of economic, political, scientific, and cultural-artistic fields. This period was accompanied also by the hope that Romania will be able to achieve the level of the European developed countries. Unfortunately, Romania's evolution in the twenties and thirties was more complex, with a contradictory trajectory, and many undesirable effects. It was dominated not only by economic and technical increases, but also by numerous disruptions because of the tough economic and moral crises, and by

political instability and multiple searches for directions of development. The modernisation process was interrupted suddenly by the outbreak of the Second World War. It should be noticed that the modern social assistance in Romania was shaped in a clear, coherently structured framework of institutional and legislative building according to the requirements of international standards.

Unfortunately, the ensuing socialist period is noticeable by its numerous restrictions imposed to social and humane sciences (sociology, social assistance, psychology, social psychology, etc.). Although immediately after the war attempts were made based on numerous public debates, to resume the Gustian social programme for rebuilding the country with the help of the scientific knowledge tools. In spite of this, the effort was completely ignored by the new communist regime. It is interesting that, this time, Gusti emphasised the role of scientific knowledge not only for determining the future directions of development for the country, but also for the requirement of creating some coordination, control, and for monitoring institutions of the social-political change process, with emphasis on the form of governance. D. Gusti proposed to the political factor of the time a modernisation and social-economic development programme for Romania based on wide sociologic researches in the service of the nation. Thus emerged two large projects of the Sociological School from Bucharest, but without chances of being finalised by the socialist regime:

- ***The research of regions and the sociological map of Romania.*** The project was supposed to be realised between the years 1948–1949.
- ***Establishing the Social Institute of the Nations*** (1946–1947), created after the model of the Romanian Social Institute.

As acknowledgement of his theoretic, but also practical-institutional merits, D. Gusti was elected The President of the *Romanian*

*Academy* for a brief period of time (2 June 1944–6 June 1946). He establishes the *National Council of Scientific Research* and formulates the *National Research Programme*. The coordination of the entire programme pertained to the *Romanian Social Institute*. Unfortunately, the socialist regime ignored the elements of this Programme, moreover, abolished institutionally as professions both sociology and social assistance. In 1948, are wound up also the institutions initiated by D. Gusti, respectively the *Romanian Social Institute*, and the *National Council of Scientific Research*.

The socialist period was less than receptive to the practice of social assistance under the form of specialised services of the personalised type, though they existed in Romanian communities and operated successfully in the interwar period. The answers to the severe social issues of the communities were transferred in the framework of bureaucratic-administrative type institutional structures. Thus, in 1949, the Social Assistance School is changed into the *Institute of Social Provisions*, which operates up to the year 1952 when it is disbanded. For preparing a new re-launch of social assistance under the new socialist system, Henri Stahl and Ioan I. Matei publish a couple of handbooks/references works in the field. In 1962 are published two volumes with major significance for the practice of social assistance. These works remain among the few social assistance handbooks published in the world. They will direct the post-high school social assistance education until the time of its abolishment in 1969 together with the entire practical network of social assistance throughout the country. Even though with lower social-professional statutes, the post-high school while operating under the communist regime created a new generation of social workers. They were properly trained, especially regarding community practice. By their professional vocation, by their capacity of active intervention within the community, by their

understanding/empathy with those in difficulty, but also by the respect shown for the moral values of the profession, they preserved the traditions of the Sociological School from Bucharest.

Actually, the socialist regime of Romania had a destructive effect on the modern professional system of social assistance that had been successfully launched by the Sociological School from Bucharest.

Next to sociology, the social assistance suffered perhaps most than any other social disciplines because of the pressures of the new regime that was intractable about social and humane sciences. Thus, the practice of support social services diluted up to disappearance. The socialist state, by its bureaucratic-administrative tools assumed gradually the social protection and assistance functions. Social assistance survived only due to the vocation of the social assistance workers' generations trained in the past, and due to the sociologists with active orientation towards social actions and reforms. (See Zamfir, C. and Filipescu, I., eds., *Romanian Sociology: 1900–2010, A Social History*, 2015, chapter. Social Assistance) (Zamfir and Filipescu, 2015).

### **Instead of conclusions: references to the Post- December social assistance**

The void left for more than 25 years in the collective conscience regarding the training of experts in social assistance had as effect that the relaunch of social assistance (as profession, institutional system, organised practice, and deontology) in the post-December Romania in 1990 was rather problematic and hardly accepted unanimously in the social reform projects. During the transition, social justice and social inclusion as core values of the public policies had differing weights in the political programmes of the governing parties. If, immediately after the Revolution, the

tradition of the interwar period would have been picked up, the post-December social assistance could have benefitted by a rich and sound inheritance in its process of institutional building. Unfortunately, this top experience of interwar Romania was much too less fructified in the institutional construction and in the practice of community social assistance services. The successful relaunch of social assistance education at university level after 1990, though not a fluid, hindrances, and pressures lacking process, was accomplished by a team of a couple of prestigious sociologists and another team of intellectuals dedicated to socio-humane professions. The profession of social worker gained in time academic prestige, and the trust of the community. The interest and motivation for the profession of social worker increased for both young and those working already within the system of practical activities (Zamfir and Filipescu, 2015).

The experience of the Gustian school in the field of assistance was used for training-educational purposes in preparing experts (at the level of university education for bachelor and master degrees). Maybe this is the reason why during the first period of transition a significant gap was recorded regarding the development of social assistance in the formative-professional sphere (e.g. training experts), and in the one of the public institutional system for developing practical services (Zamfir, 1998, 2006, 2009). Research and tertiary education during transition advanced rapidly as they were supported by a wide multi- and interdisciplinary network of experts. Thus, a generation of specialised professionals on categories of beneficiaries and needs profile was shaped. By means of research were proposed models for a coherent, integrated social assistance system. The experts from the academic field of research, and scholars were social actors involved actively in the institutional construction. They contributed to elaborating and evaluating some modern

legislative strategies and projects of social development.

Nevertheless, for a long period, the public system of assistance was used only by unskilled public clerks in the field, despite the existence of a large number of experts trained in universities. Completely unjustified, experts in the field were forced to embrace other skills, and to leave skilled activities to some bureaucrats, mere public clerks. Maintaining within the social assistance system some unskilled clerks in the field meant misunderstanding completely the position and role of the expert within the system and, hence, a major deficit of coherence and integrated vision regarding public social policies. Under the pressure of solving emergencies, social assistance ignored often the priorities within the system. Prompt answers to the risks of poverty and social exclusion were unjustified postponed and thus their severity and amplitude grew markedly threatening also the future for large segments of vulnerable population.

This is the reason why today, even after 30 years of transition, heated controversies re-emerge in the public debates, even conflicts about the injustice regarding and exclusion of some vulnerable groups (elderly, children, Roma population, young delinquents, etc.). Often, these discussions are doubled by shocking images about their social condition, however, images that were dominant only in the first years after the Revolution.

Actually, the activities of the social assistance institutions throughout the post-December period were dissipated a lot at local level, and very often developed chaotically, haphazardly, without systematic monitoring and control. Unfortunately, the distribution of social help was dominated by a 'fire-extinguishing' vision, chaotic, fragmented, dominated by narrow parish interests. This is the explanation why social support actions lacked consistency over time, and the initially aimed for efficiency. All the way, intra-, and inter-

institutional/departamental cooperation was ignored. Thus, the assistance system was pushed in contradictory, confusing directions, while the possibility of monitoring over time the effects of social assistance on the beneficiaries was excluded. A substantial gap was recorded regarding the mitigation and active intervention capacity of the social assistance forms with respect to severe social issues, in particular during the times of economic crisis, and periods of austerity. Unfortunately, the role of social assistance of prevention and rehabilitation was weak in these periods, and inconsistent when related to the high difficulties and risks faced by the population.

Many actions and projects of assistance were dependent on external financing. The underfinancing of the social assistance system remained a constant throughout the transition period. Romania was placed most times at the periphery of European standards regarding the quality of assistance delivery and personalized social services.

Another lacking aspect of social assistance policies during the post-December period was owed to the missing cooperation and dialogue of the political and governmental decision factors with the experts from the academic and scientific environment from Romania. Academic researches and studies remained more often than not just researches in the field, without major impact in the public social policies. The repeated proposals of the Romanian academic community for active measures of the integrated type for the rehabilitation of vulnerable individuals and groups, as well as the ones regarding the prevention of marginalisation risks were often ignored by decision makers. Thus, in time, were accumulated to the existing severe issues also other new issues that contributed to more marked marginalisation of the vulnerable categories. All these shortcomings of the public policies regarding social assistance have given a fluctuating, spontaneous, and often hasty character to the institutionalised forms of social assistance.

Over the transition period, the capacity of solving multiple social issues by the public authorities based on active support policies remained extremely underdeveloped.

The present limits of the assistance system in solving severe social issues faced by individuals and large communities are not only the outcome of underfinancing as is mentioned within many papers and other publications. They are owed also to a **major deficit of coherence and vision of public social policies in the institutional and legislative development** of the new system (Zamfir and Precupețu, 2018). **The initial confusion about prioritising needs** on categories of beneficiaries, and concrete forms of specialised support led to maintaining chronic underdevelopment in the sphere of social assistance services. The costs of the services, depending on the minimum quality standards and on the functioning specifics seemed by the beginning of the transition for the political decision factors too high as related to the restricted budget of social expenditures. They failed to understand the flexibility of costs for assistance services that were very diversified and adjusted to the difficulty degree of the new risks entailed by modern

societies. Probably, it was simpler at the beginning of the transition for the assistance of vulnerable groups to focus more on financial help. Financial benefits, though oversized and more heavily financed, had also high fluctuations over time. Much too low in relation to the amplitude of poverty and the necessities of those in need and poorly focused on types of beneficiaries. They could not ensure constant/sustainable social protection for large segments in difficulty. In relationship to the difficulties of individuals and groups with exclusion risks, Romania had constantly throughout the transition the lowest expenditures for social protection and assistance within the EU. **The chronic underfinancing** of the social assistance system, especially of the public assistance services determined the accumulation of severe social issues, as they escalated in time. **An articulated public-private system of measures to mitigate the needs of the family in its entirety, but also of each member of the family was never created. Actually,** the quality and efficiency of public services of social assistance related to European standards requirements remain a priority objective to be achieved even in the present.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> An analysis and presentation of the social assistance history in Romania up to the year 1990 is found in F. Mănoiu and V. Epureanu, 1996;

Zamfir, E., 1995, 1998, 2009; Zamfir, C. and Filipescu, I., coord., 2015.

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