

Public social service systems. New rights, new responses

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Executive summary

Our aim is to explore the conditions for the possibility of using the right to social services by means of public social service systems. After this summary and the introduction, chapter 3 outlines the framework of human rights, more specifically social rights, as the context of reference for social services. We underline the relational and benefit-related nature (although also demandable in true justice) of social rights (corresponding to social needs) and assume the existence of a continuous human rights specification process, enabling us to aspire to define, here and now, the right to social services, to a certain extent a new social right.

In the fourth chapter, based on more or less familiar references, we approach the challenge of defining the purpose of social services in relation to a universal social need, which everyone can perceive as their own. The goal is, therefore, to identify the good (a positive formulation) promoted or protected by social services. We aim to understand that we are referring to human interaction, defined as the dynamic adjustment between personal autonomy and relational integration. We believe that, with this definition, social services, without distancing themselves from tradition and, in particular, the segments of the population with which they are typically concerned, can find their place, on a universally and synergically equal setting with other branches of the welfare field, such as education, healthcare, guaranteed income, etc.

Chapter five discusses social intervention, using the term to include all the activities involved in social services, providing assistance, promoting and transforming, based on principles such as prevention, community approach, personalisation, synergy, continuity of care, promotion of autonomy, normalisation and integration. Benefits (basically technical, although also economic) are seen as the ingredients comprising the services and we propose a list of benefits (social diagnosis, personal assistance, social accompaniment, etc.) and a classification of service modalities (at home, ambulatory, daytime, etc.) which could be useful for editing benefit and service catalogues and portfolios, although this should always be based on systematic knowledge management and, specifically, research, development and innovation.

The sixth chapter approached the issue of structure and management of public social service systems. Based on the design of services, they are structured (as are other organisational units) according to level of care (primary, secondary, etc.) and articulated in a coordinated manner based on decentralisation and de-concentration (geographic and functional), bearing in mind that public social service systems are often co-managed by different administrations. With regards to management, we propose a model with ten management processes: planning, contact, evaluation, human resource management, economic-financial management, information management, material resource (and infrastructure) management, relations, structure and learning management. This chapter also considers coordination with other systems or policies and identifies key factors in the legal regulation of social services.

Chapter seven contemplates participation as a way of adding dynamism to the public social service system on its micro, meso and macro levels. On the micro level, we basically refer to participation, rights and the empowerment of social service users. On the meso level, we focus on social initiative and agreement-based management as a privileged way of ensuring the honesty of the public authorities and the specific and irreplaceable added value of the third sector, without forgetting other forms of collaboration between the public and private sectors. On the macro level, we refer to complex governance and citizens' participation in public social service systems. On all three levels, we emphasise

the synergy between the ultimate purpose of social services and the participative nature of social policy, management and intervention, together with the strategic significance of the participative dimension of social services and welfare systems in view of the social changes currently underway.

In the eighth chapter (before the final considerations and the references) we discuss the financing of public social service systems, identifying some of the criteria to be considered (sufficiency, sustainability, equity, competitiveness, promotion of responsibility, assessability, efficiency, etc.) and some of the options related to public financing mechanisms (for both obtaining and allocating funds). Finally, we consider some approaches to co-payment and its limitations and some related debates, proposing an evidence-based policy aimed at its re-design and reduction.

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