New responses to poverty and social exclusion from Social Work: the Mesa de Instituciones Sociales en Acción Social de Elda (the Mesa ISAE)

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Abstract. In the last decade our country has been involved in a serious economic crisis which has evidenced the difficulty of the Welfare State to respond effectively to situations of poverty and social exclusion. In relation to Social Services, new proposals and new networking strategies have been fostered to satisfy the social needs of those who face social difficulties. The Mesa ISAE, which was constituted in 2009, was conceived with the aim of providing an alternative to the work which was already being developed by both the public Social Services System and third sector entities of the municipality of Elda (Alicante, Comunidad Valenciana). This coordinated action has succeeded in avoiding overlaps, establishing formal inter-institutional proceedings and improving management. The results of our research confirm that this tool is able to provide an immediate response to citizens, as it reduces bureaucracy and improves citizens’ well-being.

Key words: Social Services, Social Welfare, Social Planning, Social Policy, Social Work.

Summary. Introduction. 1. Poverty and social exclusion in a context of economic crisis. 2. Objectives and methodology. 3. Results. 3.1. The background of poverty and social inequality at territorial level: secondary data analysis. 3.2. The typology of the families assisted by the Mesa ISAE. 3.3. Application of resources by the Mesa ISAE. 3.4. Social actors’ discourse analysis. 4. Conclusions. 5. References.


Introduction

The Welfare State was settled in Europe after the Great Devastation with the aim of tackling situations of poverty and social exclusion by means of full employment. For many years, an inter-class agreement assured social stability, economic progress and equalized population living conditions, especially concerning those citizens who belonged to the lowest social groups.

Following the oil crises starting in the 1970s and the turns towards a neoliberal ideology in the 1980s, the role of the Welfare State as guarantor of social equality was criticized. At the same time new social phenomena, such as the “outsourcing”, which increased the number of precarious jobs and labour insecurity, began to appear as a consequence of the globalisation.

The trend towards poverty and social inequality has intensified throughout the last decades, especially since the start of the last international economy and finance crisis. The security which society enjoyed had disappeared, but the Welfare State had not been able to face the risks of the new social phenomena.

New social intervention alternatives are being developed with the involvement of public and private institutions with the aim of answering to the new social challenges: long-term unemployment, lack of income to pay for basic needs, absence of short-term perspectives in the near horizons, impossibility to cover basic supply (electricity and water), etc. People in such situations need an immediate and rapid response. Nevertheless, coordinated timing between the different social actors rarely exists in public administration. An example


