CONSTRUCTING MEANINGFUL AND VISIBLE SOCIAL EDUCATION CONTEXTS IN PORTUGUESE REALITY: A CRITICAL APPROACH OF PROFESSIONALISM AND PRACTICES[1]

Florbela Samagaio. Higher School of Education Paula Frassinetti. CIPAF. Porto. Portugal

Gabriela Trevisan. Higher School of Education Paula Frassinetti. CIPAF. Porto. Portugal.

José Luis Gonçalves. Higher School of Education Paula Frassinetti. CIPAF. Porto. Portugal

Abstract

There is a growing acceptance in Portuguese reality of the Social Educator profession as well as it's recognition in institutional dynamics. Still different challenges to full recognition are in discussion, namely those of invisibility related to processes of recognition from a theory of action perspective and with impact in the construction of a social and moral epistemology (Honneth, 1994; 2003). In spite all constrains, different professional features enable social educators to respond to new arenas of intervention, since they are challenged to reinvent themselves professionally by amplifying their intervention scope. Their profile is resilient and prepared with multidisciplinary knowledge making them capable of an ambitious intervention. It is time, then, to recognize that these professionals are able to conciliate methodological and pedagogical knowledge, guided by humanitarian values that define their professional practices.

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[1] Higher School of Education of Paula Frassinetti. CIPAF – Paula Frassinetti Research Centre. Rua de Gil Vicente, 138-142. 4200-055 Porto. Portugal. E-mail: research@cipaf.pt. José Luís Gonçalves. Researcher GFE/IF – U Porto - RG-502-2086 - Philosophy and Public Space. Gabriela Trevisan, Researcher CIEC/University of Minho.

Résumé

Au Portugal il y a une acceptation croissante de la profession d'éducateur sociale ainsi qu'une recognition dans des différentes dynamiques institutionnelles. Quand même il y a des différents défis vers une recognition complète, notamment l'invisibilité des processus de reconnaissance dans une théorie de l'action et avec impact dans la construction d'une épistémologie sociale et morale (Honneth, 1994 ; 2003). Malgré ces contraintes les éducateurs sociaux ont des caractéristiques que lui permettent répondre aux nouveaux domaines d'intervention et de se réinventer d'un point de vue professionnelle et personnelle eu même temps qu'ils amplifient leur spectre d'intervention. Le profil est résilient et composé de connaissance multidisciplinaire capable de rendre l'éducateur sociale dans une intervention ambitieuse. Alors on doit reconnaitre la capacité de ces professionnelles de concilier les connaissances méthodologiques et pédagogiques guidés par valeurs humanitaires qui définisse leur profil professionnelle.

Introduction

Looking back at Social Education in Portugal, there is a growing acceptance of the profession as well as it's recognition in different institutional dynamics. Some clear signs can be found towards its visibility slowly growing up: graduation courses in different schools and universities, post-graduation programs and master's programs, specialized journals and publications, seminars and congresses, etc. This recognition is also obtained, from our personal point of view, from: the plurality of tasks that the Social Educator is able to perform; the complementary role with other social workers, the scientific training and "know how" to do with solving problems and the recognition of lifelong learning as a key to improve professional performances, amongst others. As we live in a moment of serious environmental problems, made visible throughout nature's degradation and the world's population quality of life, these contexts force us in creating new imaginaries, values and lines of thought that allow the overcome of this crisis. In fact, one of the needed conditions to reinforce Social Educators as a profession is a higher diffusion on the profile of professions. For its social,

educational and socio-ethical training, Social Educators develop a set of skills and conscience of their own virtues, abilities, rights and duties, helping self-promotion. These ideas are sustained also by authors such as Teixeira (2008, p. 70) and Carvalho and Baptista (2004) who analyzed reasons that can enable or constrain the placement of social educators. Visibility and recognition must be related to the fact that Social Education is a recent profession that crosses different arenas of action – educational and social – which makes it harder to have precise conceptual definitions of the profession.

This paper starts by arguing on how different social, cultural and economic complexities interfere in the need of intervention in and for the XXIst century. One of the key aspects is precisely the ability to train social workers in multidimensional and transversal areas that enable them to become reflexive practitioners. Following these ideas a specific discussion on the Portuguese reality of Social Educators in Portugal is held, particularly looking at the profile features and the main framework located in a Human Rights and Wellbeing perspective. A final reflection is made regarding different dynamics of recognition working from Honneth's and Brun and Dugas's perspectives. Final reflections are presented by analyzing current challenges to the profession and to potential contexts of intervention.

The complexities of social work and intervention in the XXI century

Our century is still strongly marked by a set of convergent social, political, cultural and economic events that constrain human's relation to life and wellbeing. Transformations in demographic structures over the past decades, women's entrance in labor markets, family setting changes, unemployment, migratory movements, social exclusions and poverty figures, amongst others, have modified theoretical and practical frameworks for social intervention practitioners. Contemporary societies featuring constant renovation and transformation movements on values and life styles, both individually and collectively present themselves simultaneously as a context of growing opportunities but also of higher vulnerability that place individuals and communities in risk situations. If traditionally risk could be dissociated from a specific group or community today it is believed that we are all at risk by considering the instabilities to which individuals and groups are exposed. These risks, however, are different in intensity and could be personal, collective, professional, ethical, etc… and call for a prepared and careful insight (Xiberras, 1996; Paugam, 1996).

That preparation implies an acquisition of knowledge that is capable of producing specific competences that make sure that solutions are adequate to meet personal, social and professional needs. As professionals working with human beings and groups social workers, in which they are frequently placed, Social Educators need to develop a different set of competences during initial training programs but also on life-long ones able to ensure that rapid transformations are followed by those competences. In this sense, curricula should be able to promote imaginative competences, ethical postures of openness to a complex world and of cultural creativity. More than focusing solely on technical competences, curricula should focus on engaging students with desire and curiosity (Hansen, 2009). For a complex society then, a complex knowledge is necessary.

On working in complex environments and lives, Social Educators are often faced with ethical questions that go far beyond mere technical issues. A solid ethical training of students will help them become more reflexive when facing vulnerable groups and communities as it often happens in social work professions. For us, focus on problematization strategies and ethical dilemmas training allow students a direct contact with growing uncertain realities. Their intervention in the field is then less based in unique and exclusive knowledge and more sustained in transversal, complex and multidisciplinary knowledge. Hence, groups that are potentially more exposed to risks of abuse, family abandonment, social exclusion and poverty, urban violence, different addictions, migrant communities, etc… request an intervention conducted by specialized workers with competences and knowledge's capable of preventing and intervening in fragile social and educational contexts guided by a Human Rights conduct. As Dias de Carvalho (2001) argues Human Rights application:

> "(…) depends less on its declaration and more on practices and representations that turn them into social actors, circumstance in which educational mediation is implied" (2001, p.8)

For a significant part of Political and/or Social Phylosophy, principles of "human dignity" are a theoretical background and a rational referent for Human Rights in societies built on the basis on rule of law States. Historically human diginity has been conceived in a political pardigm only in modernity, being included in 1948 in the preambule of article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where it became related also with values of libertity and equality. Its major and central role is unquestionable nowadays. As Habermas argues

"notions of human dignity are a conceptual pivot that links morals of equal respect for all to the positive right and democratic legislation so that its combination allows the coming of a political order based on dignity, in historical favourable conditions." (2012, p.37)

In contemporary societies the historical expression of this evolution allows any citizen as a juridical person the ability to reclaim politically in public space universal rights for themselves and for others, in a self confident way and with a positive right ground. Even though a dialetic tension is found in theoretical and pratical plans in a determined State, bewtween human rights and civil rights, the potential conflict allows moving forward in understanding empirical contentes necessary to to the universalization of human dignity. Hence this "internal nexus between human dignity and human rights is the only one that allows that explosive link from moral to right, in which it is necessary to built fairer political orders" (Habermas, 2012, p.57). It is in this contexto marked by human rights of fourth or, quiçá, fifth generation that Social Educators develop their professional activity.

Social Education in Portugal

Without reducing the theoretical and practical complexity present in the construction of an epistemological and professional profile of the Social Educator nor on reducing it to pragmatic and empiricist identities, we look to Carvalho and Baptista (2004, p.23): training institutions of Social Educators must assume fully the systemic, hermeneutic and projective dimensions of Social Education profession – systemic since it integrates social and educational phenomenon in the current social complexity by articulating intervention possibilities with several actors and institutions; hermeneutic, by introducing subjects to critical self-awareness of events and problems and the meaning of conflict in order to develop creative processes of autonomous solutions able to dignify human beings; and projective since it is capable to mobilize subjects and communities by exponentially valuing subjects and by recognizing that solutions are usually transitory and fallible.

Assuming that this is the wanted training profile and articulating it with humanist values of contemporary societies, social educators are then defied to rely on anthropo-educational fundaments in order to build their professional competences: a solid inter-disciplinary training grounded on social pedagogy and general culture; an ethical sensibility to exercise in limit-situations of human vulnerability and the

ability to elaborate personal life projects; the technical capacity to conceive, implement and evaluate intervention programs that are able to promote social solidarity and cohesion; to act in multi and inter professional teams. Seen as a professional of the human condition, actor and social mediator, there are models and principles that identify them (Carvalho, A. & Baptista, I. 2004, p. 83 to 103) and place them in the epistemological thresholds of Social Education as *praxis*.

In order to achieve these profile features, there are theoretical knowledge acquired in initial training that focus particularly on project design and implementation in different social and educational settings, in practicum curricular units. Different intervention methodologies are also put in place, alongside a general knowledge specifically on Educational Sciences, Social and Behavior Sciences, Exact and Natural Sciences and Language. These areas are seen as central in order for Social Educators to be able to respond positively to this demanding professional profile.

General competences are: to identify social and educational problems; characterize social realities with accuracy; adopt a proper posture in intervention realities; identify and use social services and resources; recognize the importance of social networks and team work; articulate knowledge from different scientific areas; accept and promote social, ethnic and cultural diversity in professional practices; work in pluri-disciplinary teams; demonstrate social awareness and built a reflexive and prospective thought. In order to achieve these, specific competences are also designated to Social Educators, namely and among others: construct and apply instruments of social and educational diagnosis; conceive projects based on these diagnoses; plan and execute social and educational projects; evaluate results from social and educational projects; develop different methodologies and techniques of social and educational intervention; help promote autonomy, integrations, participation and creativity of individuals and groups; develop technical, interpersonal and social competences needed to field work; develop interventions guided by ethical commitment and social responsibility.

Facing these demanding competences problematization and ethical dilemmas methodologies are put in place to help student's critical thinking and information selection in which they base decisions. Student's learn how to select, fundament, argue and justify their options, which is key for their autonomy development. As Orange argues (2012):

"(…) in daily life, problems are perceived as negative; they are, in a certain way, bearable. On the contrary, in scientific work, problems are seen as intellectual challenges even if at times they defy emotional resistance from researchers: not only they are not avoided they are searched by scientific community" (Orange, 2012, pp. 52-53)

Constructing a professional profile in social education points to flexibility in labor market following the complex evolution of social realities. Social educators are then prepared to act in multidisciplinary teams and to work in proximity with subjects and scenarios of intervention. Generally they must work in Excellency patterns with solid scientific and technical knowledge, flexibility and respecting European guidelines that sets professional matrixes adequate for the new millennium (Comissão Europeia, 1997)

The professionalization of social educators calls for a set of practices able to create a professional culture with specific values, believes and attitudes, on one hand, and the conceptions of their role and ways of acting, on the other, that help define differences with other professionals. This construction of a profession brings together theoretical elements, procedures and strategies, resources and goals integrated in a wider vision of the Social Education professionalization (Cf. Carreras & Molina, 2006). However, recognition and visibility of the profession in the European Union has a long way to go. If a certain degree of convergence in training programs and regulation instruments of the profession is conquered, major obstacles are placed, amongst others, in the existence of an idiomatic and terminological diversity of Social Education and Social Pedagogy, for instance; the different theoretical perspectives that sustain a relatively undifferentiated use of these terms; a lower interest of theoretical frameworks and concepts and a major concern in justifying the need to work, etc. (Berñe, Asun Llena (2014).

Recognition and Professional Validation

The concept of profession is a result of a social construction variable according to contexts and social conditions. The word itself originates a plurality of meanings that makes it impossible to achieve a universal definition (Popkewitz, 1991). Nevertheless profession must not be seen as a mere some of specific and distinctive characteristics but more as a process of construction and social differentiation of a given occupational group that finds a formal place in labor market. Profession could be seen as

"(…) the performance of a human activity, supported in a proper knowledge and values, featured by specific attributes and so recognized by the social whole and confirmed by the State" (Sarmento, 1994, p. 38)

A profession identifies a specialized group with specific competences able to have specific tasks and services recognized by the State. It is also frequent that professions are associated to specific economic power and cultural and social authority (Popkewitz, 1991).

When looking back at the Social Education path in Portugal one can easily state its growing acceptance. Clear signs are related to the visibility that these professionals are gradually gaining: undergraduate degrees, post-graduation courses and masters, specialized journals and books, seminars and international professional associations, etc… This recognition was possible due to the plurality of tasks performed by Social Educators, their complementary towards other social workers and a specific know-how towards problem solving. In spite this growing recognition it is possible to identify a set of constrains to its full recognition in the professional field (Serapicos, Samagaio, Trevisan, 2012):

a) A difficulty in defining in a clear way the tasks and competences of the Social Educator, frequently compared and/or confused with other social work professionals. It becomes urgent to clarify the essentially pedagogical role of Social Educators and the ethical framework based on the promotion and respect of Human Rights. As Argued by Carvalho and Baptista, "the pedagogical knowledge gives (Social Educators) wide conceptual tools according to the demands of educational activity, simultaneously valued as art, science, technique and philosophy" (2004, p.83);

b) Research in the Social Education area is still scarce even though it is recognized as a fundamental step for the profession's recognition. Social Educators must write about their practices from a solid theoretical perspective alongside a critical evaluation of their projects results and processes. Traditionally seen as a field work professional he must work in a constant confrontation theory-practice, reflexive and critical that is able to produce specialized knowledge, particularly working from action-research perspectives;

c) The need to raise general society awareness of the role of Social Educators, their competences and specific features of the profession. In order to achieve this goal, training schools/universities as well as professional order/Associations, must invest in this awareness raising strategies in order to make the profession more visible. Examples can also be found when practicum units are guided by supervisors that also help institutions improve their practices and instruments.

d) A small investment made by professionals in lifelong training or/and post-graduate studies. These investments allow social educators to improve specific competences particularly those related to the field of work and/or expertise. Also because pedagogical and technical referents are constantly changing this makes it even harder to define a complete professional profile without these training opportunities. Creativity and innovation can make a difference in the labor market and in professions' recognition. As Carneiro argues "there has never been such a strong appeal to the ability of generative learning – the one built upon different thinking and non-conventional solutions search as today (2001, p.76).

Finally one could argue that the recognition of Social Educators could also be dependent of general dynamics of wider society and the appreciation they are able to build to educational and social intervention professions. At the same time, as Romans, Petrus and Trilla (2003) point out the wide range of profession in the social field and of different visions and perceptions of "educational intervention", of "social" and so on adds to the juxtaposition of task that often do not constitute extra added value.

Recognition dynamics in Social Education

As argued elsewhere (Serapicos, Samagaio, Trevisan, 2010), Social Educators trained in our School see some difficulties in obtaining the first job as a social educator. The first one, according to ex-students, is some unawareness of employers regarding social education; as a second reason students point out the lack of job placement offers for social educators; finally, the lack of serious public investment on social areas and on social policies. These ideas are sustained also by authors such as Teixeira (2008, p. 70) and Carvalho and Baptista (2004) have analyzed reasons that can enable or constrain the placement of social educators. Visibility and recognition must be related to the fact of social education being a recent pro-

fession and one that crosses different arenas of action – educational and social make it harder to have precise conceptual definitions of the profession. However, it should be mentioned that in Portugal, over the past years we have seen the opening of placements for social educators where there usually was only for other social workers – examples could be given on the teams working with the Social Income Program, City Councils, Children and Youth institutions and Child and Family Services as well as schools. As Teixeira argues: "Emergent jobs imply by its contents and skills a new professional category with specific abilities to perform a set of tasks that, up until then, were developed by other professionals or inexistent" (Valente, 2005, p.124 quoted by Teixeira, 2008, p.80). These contexts force us in creating new imaginaries, values and lines of thought that allow the overcome of this crisis.

In fact, one of the needed conditions to reinforce social educators as a profession is a bigger diffusion on the profile of professions. For its social, educational and socio-ethical training social educators develop a set of skills and conscience of their own virtues, abilities, rights and duties, helping self-promotion. Thus the underlying idea of his intervention is to make human improvement possible by implicating people in the construction of their own histories. Because social educators believe in improvement potentials as well as in solidarity and education for the full of citizenship they never give up fighting for better well-being, physically, psychologically and structurally. Their profile is resilient and prepared with multidisciplinary knowledge making them capable of an ambitious intervention. It is time, then, to recognize that these professionals are able to conciliate methodological and pedagogical knowledge, guided by humanitarian values that define their professional practices.

The recognition of new personal and collective subjectivities in public space has led to a growing theoretical effort of a set of authors meant to construct new normative basis to social and political contemporary thinking. This contribute is especially clear in the systematization of a "critical theory of recognition" of Axel Honneth (1994). In his theory he interprets Hegel's social thinking working from the notion of ethical community (ethicity) where he sees the seeds for a social alternative theory of the contemporary liberal tradition. By articulating Hegel's notion of intersubjective recognition with the notion of social esteem Honneth proposes to establish a bridge between private sphere (affection and solicitude) and the public sphere (juridical respect) of community life, by suggesting that the intersubjective public space as a place of esteem and mutual appreciation of the moral subject, beyond claiming differences.

Over the last years the concept of recognition has gained significant practical and theoretical advances in different knowledge areas bringing a conceptual framework to different disciplines. The search for a normative fundament for a social and political theory capable of overcoming the 1980'2 insights led authors of the Critical Theory to build an approach that questions liberal theories from its normative limits. These are especially important when challenge to think about social life and confronted with injustice situations towards individual people and minorities (Gonçalves, 2015). Research on the importance of recognition theories raises the question: is recognition subordinated to a specific normative theory (whether of an ethic of communication, Habermas, or a theory of justice, Rawls) or, instead, if normative conditions of self-realization and equity between subjects – as fundamental conditions for the claim and exercise of human rights – emerge from a demand and distribution of recognition.

> «Une bonne partie de la discussion courante se focalise sur la distinction entre ce qu›on pourrait appeler la reconnaissance positive et la reconnaissance normative, autrement dit l›identification réitérée ou l›attestation d›un fait, d›un événement, d›un fait ou d›une personne, ou l›attribution d'une valeur positive ou négative à l›événement, au fait ou à la personne.» (Caillé & Lazzeri, 2009, p. 14).

Authors studying logics of exclusion (Sartre and Foucault), of domination (Taylor, Fraser), economic agents (Walzer), social and political elites (Bourdieu, Honneth) are not indifferent to the question for the object of recognition: "can theories of recognition not give answer to what should be recognized, which should be the object of recognition so that individuals are constituted as such? This question is the one that seeks to know the value of the individual, the value he wishes to see recognized" (Alain Caillé & Christian Lazzeri, 2009, p. 18). The authors introduce the question of "value" as a mediator between the individual and recognition. The "respect of self" and the "esteem of self" constitute for them the valuing of different properties and qualities of people in the political community:

> On one hand, the "recognition-respect" is conquered whether by moral faculties of rational and reasonable (Rawls), by the capacity of argumentative inter-understanding (Habermas), by deliberative capacity (Pettit, Thomson, Gutman), by an attitude to autonomy (Honneth) or by conditions for an equal participation of citizens (Fraser) – to make them "socially visible", having a right to rights and being treated with the dignity of a Person;

a) On the other hand, the "recognition-esteem" is, contrary to the previous, socially variable since it depends on the performances and abilities of individual's in competing contexts. The multiplicity of these capacities, adaptation to the context and adoption of specific procedures in distinctive environments in still an open discussion (Bourdieu, Walzer, Honneth, Fraser).

Directly linked to this possibility of recognizing subjects in public space, is the notion of "invisibility". This reality constitutes an ongoing multidimensional process (psychological, social, economic, political and cultural) of our societies, raising psychological barriers that interfere negatively in inter-subjective networks and frequently generate conflict. The perspective on "social invisibility" we adopt on people and professional groups is only sociological in its first look. In the context of this paper we are focused on the social and cultural impact of "social invisibility "of certain professions within the public space, using mainly its epistemological dimension. Two factors are more important in creating social invisibility of specific professions, in our point of view: the notion of representation and the confusion between the singularity of a subject and its professional identity. In the first case, notions of representation configure a cognitive filter of psychosocial and cultural origin in the mind of subjects. As a process,

> "representation is integrated in an articulated dynamic, on one hand on the psychological structure of the individual and, on the other, on social structure. Therefore, a representation is never static, it evolves with the subject, time, society, history (…) and it is object to periodic modifications" (Abdallah-Pretceille, Martine, 1996, p. 30).

Representation, then, is the result of subject's interaction with their social and cultural environment. When applied to the recognition of a relatively recent profession, such as social education, it is important to ask: what are the reasons for an erasing or confusion between Social Educators and other professions of social work? Whether because of prejudice, stigma or indifference, there is a certain language applied to less socially valued professions that can be placed at the root of a lot of Social educators as "socially invisible". Reasons can be found in the binding relation established between the subject and its social and professional identity. In order to undo these binding processes, Guatarri uses a useful distinction where he argues:

> "singularity is [above all] an existential concept; identity, on the contrary, is a reference concept, of circumstance of reality to reference frameworks, that could be imaginary" (Guattari, Félix e Rolnik, Suely, 1986, p. 68).

It is precisely this occultation of singularity of the other in the perception of the self – via representation – that makes him "socially invisible". This "social invisibility" is, perhaps an acute symptom of a professional identity crisis in contemporary societies. The marginalization of certain subjects regarding their professional identities builds in the subconscious a subtle representation of "invisible" men and women leading to a status of "non-professional existence" in public space. And even if these professionals are able to find "recognition-respect" from their community a "recognition-esteem" is still to be conquered. Struggles for professional recognition have been long and often constituted as a reaction from the experience of many moral wounds inflicted to professional claiming for decency (Margalit, 2007), dignity (Lamont, 2002) and respect (Sennet, 2003). For social educators, finally, a bigger weight exists due to the fact that their profession is related to logics of care where not only socially useful competences are needed but also a break of the association of these professions as mainly feminine (Paperman & Laugier, 2006).

Final Reflections

As we have argued, Social Education is mainly understood as a "professional space drawn at a meeting point, a cross, between social work and education" (Carvalho, A. & Baptista, I. 2004, p. 83). As a professional practice it is seen as a social-educational intervention with technical, relational and ethical features with people and human groups in vulnerability situations and risk of social exclusion. Its main goal is, therefore, to facilitate the emergency of the Person capable of transforming herself and social ties. Intervention is therefore, the educational relation in itself. Occasionally questions emerge on the distinction and/or complementarity of the professional profile of social educators and social workers. Without entering a long discussion on a wide topic and taking as a premise the existence of several contact points with both professional profiles we believe two main differences can be found on the perspective and object of intervention. On one hand, social education is based on a projective and preventive vision of its intervention whereas social service performs, executes and evaluates services, programs and social policies in an emergency perspective. If, for social education, the object of intervention is the educational relation in itself seen as promoting personal life projects, for social work intervention objects are located in the efficiency of inclusion and solidarity policies. This distinction becomes more complex when we understand the inter-disciplinary and multi- disciplinary nature of its field works, generally designated as "social work". Therefore, if social service is featured on constructing support, responses and projects aiming

vulnerable populations in different social exclusion processes, social education finds its main field of action in building life projects of people and communities focusing on their citizenship and autonomy.

In order to work with their subjects, the educator needs to understand this complexity and apply a set of tools and methodologies that bring different knowledge areas together namely those that allow him to better intervene in field. These complexities have a specific impact in educator's visibility as well that of the people he works with. Recognition of these competences and complementarities allow social educators to enter working fields that are seen as new or non-traditional to their intervention. A great effort is done then to demonstrate the role of these professionals in different areas, namely through internship propositions on initial training that allow institutions and projects to understand the importance of their work.

In our reality, main fields of action for Social Educators are:
• Institutions and/or social responses to the elderly population
• Institutions and/or social responses for children
• Institutions for foster care of children at risk
• Cultural institutions
• City councils
• Schools
• Community intervention families
• Projects with families – Social inclusion income
• Institutions for disabled citizens
• Child Protection services

When entering major fields and combining their expertise and knowledge social educators are building not only meaningful places for themselves but also making their own subjects of intervention visible and meaningful in their lives and communities. One major factor for social educators to have more visibility is the ability to work in different contexts and achieve high levels of employability. Alongside all aspects already focused in this paper, different studies have been suggesting a set of employability competences throughout initial training programs as valued by employers in different areas including the one of social work. From employer's perspectives, for instance, and in Portuguese reality: there is a need to capacitate young people to build pro-active attitudes and cooperative work; to develop transversal skills – "soft skills"; to access labor market with an organized support from universities/training schools. Other interesting data emerging from these studies has to do to which

experiences are seen as the most effective in preparing students for labor market: Internships/practicum units; Extra-curricular activities; Volunteering; Erasmus; Finishing a master's degree.

These studies, where students and employers were heard, also listed the most important competences students should be bringing to labor market. From the top 10 competences, the first 5 are the ones coincident with students and employers perspectives: problem analysis and resolution; innovation and creativity; adaptation and flexibility; planning and organization; leadership and team work. Other competences were listed even though with different valuing for students and employers: motivation towards excellence; technical and scientific preparation in the field area; interpersonal relations and conflict management; foreign languages; ICT.

In order to overcome "social invisibility" dynamics as we have explored, social institutions and training institutions must be aware of these constrains but also the possibilities offered by the complex professional profile of the Social Educator in contemporary societies. By offering curricula capable of identifying these constrains and possibilities, and by gaining different work areas with specific social and educational approaches in building life projects with individuals and communities, visibility of these professionals could be stronger and more meaningful.

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