

## Habilitation Thesis: Building a social work perspective in Romanian social research

### Abstract

Social work is a science with a theoretical apparatus, a field of practice and specific research methods, which contribute to the production of new knowledge and theories as the proposed new global definition of social work from 2015 states. However, in post-socialist Romania, after an absence of more than 35 years from the academic field, social work is regaining its momentum and rebuilding to face the challenges of the new Millennium. One of the areas where rebuilding is urgent is represented by defining and refining the research methods – on one hand to consolidate its scientific identity and on the other hand to contribute to the social development of the country.

During my research activity I always tried to promote the social work perspective in social/sociological research. On one hand, at least in the last years, I concentrated on researches relevant on topics meaningful for the profession in general (Lazăr, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d), and on the other hand I was interested in the relevance of the results for social work by adapting the research design to social work topics, but also by increasing the complexity of the research tools and of the scientific value of the researches. Moreover, the presentation of the results was accompanied most of the time by discussions on the implications for practice and policy recommendations to improve the situation of social groups under investigation.

The great majority of my researches and publications has been carried out in teams – as a member of the team, or as a coordinator/principal investigator (PI) or co-PI (when I did not coordinate the research alone). Looking back at my publication track in the last 5-6 years, after finishing my doctoral studies, I identified 3 main ‚pillars’/areas:

1. Studies on social work as a system and profession in Romania in general.
2. Studies on HIV/AIDS phenomenon
3. Studies focused on children’s welfare

The three domains reflect to a great extent the areas of my career as social worker (at first I worked in child protection (i.e. young offenders), then with children and adults living with HIV/AIDS, and then I moved to coordinating and managing social programs; also, since its establishment in 2005 I became member of the National College of Social Workers from Romania). This intertwining between practice and fields of research allowed me a deeper understanding of the domains, but also the expansion to neighbouring areas (e.g. adoption, probation). Also, many of my publications include policy analysis of the specific field, reflecting my specialization in social policy during the doctoral studies. Moreover, I was involved periodically in the elaboration of public policies or strategies in the social field (eg. In 2011 to develop an action plan to implement the Strategy for reform in social work from 2011 to 2013, in 2012 in the working group from UNICEF to develop a basic/minimum social services package for children, and in 2013 in the development of the strategy for the promotion and protection of children's rights 2014-2020), thus enhancing the perspective of social policy. On all three domains the presentation begins from the general perspective, namely of social policy or macro issues and then focuses on more specific topics that serve as examples of general problems mentioned before. For the thesis, due to space restrictions, I selected only publications issued (also) in Romanian.

1. Studies on social work in Romania in general include a historical analysis of social policies in Romania, focusing on post-communist period, and placing it in the broader context of the evolution of social policies in Romania since 1989 (Lazar, 2015c ). Follows two research conducted for the National College of Social Workers in Romania as a member of the Commission for Social Work Research in whose creation in 2015 I have contributed. Thus, in May 2015 appears the first national study on the profile of social workers in Romania,

based on data from the National Register of Social Workers from Romania available mid-2014 on more than 4,600 registered social workers (Lazar, 2015a). The second research appeared in November 2015 and focused on human resources from local Public Services for Social Assistance (SPAS) and the qualifications people employed in them have, being analyzed data on nearly 40% of the territorial administrative units/municipalities in Romania (Lazar, 2015b).

2. Studies on HIV/AIDS begin with an analysis of the situation of access to antiretroviral treatment for people living with HIV (Buzducea & Lazar, 2011b) based on a national representative survey. Then, based on data derived from a mixed methods research carried out during a postdoctoral fellowship within Excelis project (2014-2015) specific aspects of life of people living with HIV are pointed out, namely factors associated with stigma (Lazar, 2014; Lazar, Luca, Marincu, 2015). Finally, based on a case study (Segarcea case) some considerations are made on the professional ethics of social workers, respect for privacy and its limits in the context of stigma (Lazar, 2015e).
3. Studies on children's welfare begin with the presentation of the child welfare system in Romania (Lazar & Grigoraş, 2013; Lazar, 2015d) and then two studies on adoption are presented: the first aimed at describing the profile of adoptive parents in Romania and analysing the adoption of children with special needs/hard to adopt (Buzducea & Lazar, 2011a), while the second focused on communication about adoption in adoptive families (Buzducea, Lazar, Grigoraş, 2014). The two research in the field of adoption, coordinated with Prof. Dr. Doru Buzducea are the first of its kind in Romania, the only so far on nationally representative samples of adoptive parents.

As regards the plans for future studies, I present in more detail the research methodology of two studies already in the process of implementation: one study on social workers from Romania using a mixed methods approach (900 questionnaires and 100 interviews) financed by ANCS/UEFISCDI under the programme Young Research Teams and another one on the rights of children in residential care in Romania, implemented with support from UNICEF, Ombudsman and National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption.