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## **Building healthy life models centered on human and democratic values in a changing society.**

### **Abstract**

This chapter presents an essay based on social research, professional and personal experience on the major issues facing contemporary society, ranging from quality of life, healthy living, the family, and the harmonization of social and human relations from a collective perspective. The structuring points I mention are human and democratic values from the humanist perspective of life in society; some concerns about healthy models: opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties. We end with some questions for reflection on a new balance in the social model of life in society. We are reinforcing the deepening of collective participation and the co-creation of societal models that promote greater social inclusion, quality of life and social well-being.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Healthy models, Changing society, Social Work, Values

### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter we reflect on democratic values from the perspective of contemporary society and their impact on healthy living models. We begin with an analysis of democracy and citizenship centered on opportunities that promote social equality and inequality, establishing relationships between traditional and emerging social groups in this globalized society.

We analyze family policy and its relationship with social citizenship, as a societal model centered on people rather than capital. We reflect on the contradictions and paradoxes that bias the practical impacts on the lives of citizens and families motivated by financial interests and not based on social welfare. We reflect on processes of social inclusion and insertion through the most vulnerable groups with an evolving trend in global society.

We develop a dialectical reflection between the social protection system and the welfare state, rescuing inclusion policies at local and decentralized level and reinforcing

the Bottom Up model, giving voice to the silent groups in society who live precarious lives. We reinforce social and economic intervention as well as territorialized politics, accepting the diversity of territories and resident populations with mutual respect for cultures of origin.

We end with a proposal for social work as an area of knowledge in the social sciences, based on human rights and essentially on the democratic principles and values of a society in which no one is left behind.

The chapter draws conclusions but leaves the reader with an invitation to reflect on democracy and social and human development.

## **2. Democracy and Citizenship**

The economic crisis, the deficit, unemployment, the poverty rate, competitiveness, and unequal access to opportunities produce social inequalities in a population group characterized by fewer resources (known as vulnerable communities or territories that generate insecurity) (Nair, 2008), promoting unemployment, social exclusion, and conditioning democratic construction in some contemporary societies. Examples: TROIKA's intervention in Portugal from 2008 to 2014; the Covid-19 pandemic; the Ukraine-Russia war; natural disasters (Lebanon's situation; Morocco's earthquake) and climate change around the world.

The definition of uncertainty is associated with crises, events, changes, in turn created by political, economic, cultural, and social dimensions and is used as "an expression of threat, danger and as an element that jeopardizes the effort and the permanent search for security and balance of citizens and social groups" (Ferreira, 2014: 27). Promoting employment, improving living conditions and adequate social protection are the means to achieve the common goal of the European Union and the Member States to combat poverty, social exclusion, and situations of greater vulnerability in the daily lives of individuals and families. We are living in a period of history that appeals to us and challenges us daily to strengthen human rights, democratic values and principles and individual and collective social and human development. People, young people, must be enabled/empowered and supported in the different life cycles as free, competent, and supportive citizens (Pausch, and all, 2021).

In this sense, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) also adopted by Portugal for the social protection system seeks to analyze, in a social dimension, indicators that make it possible to assess situations of poverty, social exclusion and social vulnerability, proposing social integration through the promotion of employment and the adequacy of incomes adjusted to the cost of living. We are referring to the Europe 2020 objectives of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, which through guidelines to its Member States have sought greater social investment and monitoring of phenomena that require greater attention to visualize the risks of macroeconomic imbalances (European Commission, 2010). We highlight citizenship education aimed at co-building "awareness of political structures, processes and content and, above all, helping people to recognize their own individual role in the political system and to reflect on their own political socialization". Pausch, and all;2021:2). Educational methods need to be further developed to raise general political awareness for an open society among all citizens.

According to the national report (Portugal) on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (July 2017/UN), that is, "the new UN 2030 Agenda is a plan of action centered on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships (5Ps), with the ultimate goal of poverty eradication and sustainable development, in which all states and other stakeholders assume their own responsibilities regarding its implementation and emphasizing that no one should be left behind" (pp/2).

This analytical reflection on the construction of democracy in a contemporary society allows us to identify some elements that block or condition this democratic construction in a way that is equitable and accessible to any citizen. These elements have an endogenous (local) identity in the specific community, but they also have an exogenous (global) identity. By placing equal opportunities for participation, citizenship, and collective solidarity at the forefront of democratic thinking, it puts pressure on people, organizations and professional teams, which has a counterproductive effect (Pausch, and all, 2021). We are currently witnessing very significant developments that threaten democracy and in which both authoritarian politicians or parties and anti-democratic extremist groups are professionalizing themselves to misuse and recruit young people for their own.

While at a global level we have identified macroeconomic elements more related to the market economy, at a local level these elements are related to political power, the

orientation of public policies, diverse cultural matrices, the dominant religious matrix within a diverse religious thought and, currently, the imbalance of demographic rates in some of the countries where Portugal is integrated is of great importance. These factors condition or limit the true construction of the rule of law and the understanding of new governance structures in social protection, multi-level governance networks and inter-institutional and community collaboration (Fukuyama, 2006; Dominelli, 2004; Hamzaoui, 2005; Gonçalves, 2018; Duranton & Vernables, 2018).

This process requires a relationship of collaboration and cooperation between the state, civil society, and the private business sector, adopting the principle defined by the EU: Peace, Security and Good Governance. The set of principles defined aims to combat inequalities, in particular the promotion of gender equality. They represent a commitment to maximising the synergies of the different social actors. The issue of decentralisation from central to local power requires a change in the way public and social policies are thought out, which makes it difficult to build consensus at a political, economic, social and professional level, but highlights the positive effects of the local, as specific strategies that contribute to involving and making citizens and local institutions co-responsible in a permanent process of participatory democracy: an opportunity or an uncertainty?

Even today, democracy is a concept susceptible to different interpretations and readings according to the political, social, cultural, and religious system of each community. If for some it is interpreted as the law of the market and capitalist domination (Debray, 2008), for others it means the conquest of human rights and representative society. According to the latter interpretation, the institutions of local power are changing their paradigm from hierarchical (top-down) governance to horizontal governance, enforcing the principle of representative and participatory democracy. Currently in Portugal we are seeing an effort being made in this participatory citizen process, namely: participatory budgets in town halls, participatory budgets in secondary schools managed and participated in by students (the Ministry of Education allocates one euro per student to each school and the total amount is applied to actions defined and approved by the students).

Democracy, or rather the co-construction of democracy in contemporary society, must be based on the dimension of the person, not the individual, as an autonomous subject capable of participating or being empowered, in a participatory dimension, and

not just as the beneficiary of public and social policies or the charitable actions of civil society.

Another value of democracy is based on the humanist current, which seeks to respond to the cultural uniqueness of each citizen and, consequently, to the emancipation of each culture in a context of cultural and ethnic diversity, albeit very much conditioned by the democratic model implemented in each community/country. The diversity of social, local, residential and cultural contexts in people's lives challenges social inclusion based on citizenship values as a way of affirming humanitarian values in real contexts (Pavan, 2016). "The promotion of citizenship in contexts of diversity is now a reality of contemporary society, which places culture, customs, art and the individual and collective thinking of kinship groups or community relations at the Centre of the social question." (Ferreira; 2021; p.4).

If we reflect on the concept of Civil Society, a privileged space for democratic action, it is important to return to Gramsci's thinking in this regard:

- Civil society - interpreted as the set of organizations commonly called private [...] and which correspond to the hegemonic function that the dominant group exercises throughout society (Mayo; 2017). Gramsci states that his reflection had led him to certain characteristics of the concept of the state, which is generally understood as political society (or dictatorship or apparatus of coercion) [...] and not as a balance between political society and civil society (or the hegemony of a social group over the whole of national society), exercised through organisms that we usually consider private, such as the Church, trade unions, schools, etc. Let's try today to make a dialectical reflection between the author's thinking and today's social, political, economic, and cultural reality.

In reference to another author of history, Portelli, (1974), considers in Civil Society: three complementary dimensions: ideology of the ruling class, encompassing all branches of ideology, from art to science, through economics, law, etc .a conception of the world disseminated among all social groups, to which the elite class adapts to all groups; hence its different qualitative degrees: philosophy, religion, common sense, folklore, and the ideological direction of society, articulated on three essential levels: ideology itself, the ideological "structure", the organizations that create and disseminate ideology, the

material ", the technical instruments for disseminating ideology (school system, media, libraries, etc.).

More recently, we can mention the contributions of Ipea, (2010), on Civil Society, stating that the most influential interpretations of civil society carry the ink of the normative stylization of a virtuous civil society that produces democratizing effects on a political, cultural, and economic level. Civil society is far more heterogeneous than the theoretical formulations of the "euphoria" period would lead us to believe, and for this reason - rather than being unified by common commitments and values - it is permeated by divergences and conflicts and has characteristics that can generate positive or negative effects. Civil society or the group of actors qualified to be part of it in each context has taken on institutionally recognized roles - by national governments and multilateral institutions - in designing, monitoring, and implementing public policies and aid programmers, as well as representing diverse audiences and diffuse interests.

Simionatto, (2006), also reflects on civil society, organizing it into three concepts:

The first liberal-democratic conception of civil society (based above all on Cohen and Arato), which replaces categories and concepts related to structure and superstructure with subjective arguments related to the dynamics of the "world of life", which to a large extent exhausted the understanding of civil society as a space for political struggle beyond the conquests of citizenship rights. This perspective is close to liberal formulations in which civil society is situated as an autonomous instance, a space for the articulation of individualities, crossed by class neutrality (with tendencies derived from M. Walzer, C. Taylor, A. Wolfe, J. Keane, and E. Gellner, among others). Participation is recognized as a methodological innovation to give greater commitment and legitimacy to the actions of a wide range of social actors, including NGOs, local, national, and international governments, community organizations and informal social networks (Sachs, 2002), the private sector, trade unions and various organized groups.

The third concept he distinguishes is the Gramscian one, in which the concept of civil society is a design tool. This movement implies the creation of strategic alliances between the labor movement and social movements, with a view to broadening the emancipatory horizon, raising the point of view of the subaltern groups to the maximum of universality, the synthesis of which is the "national-popular collective will".

The concept of Civil Society is seen as a good one, as it promotes values of solidarity, non-violence, conflict resolution and is based on the principles of freedom, equality, and tolerance. However, today we have societies that are: insecure, violent, precarious, vulnerable, terrorist, or what we might call Uncivil Societies, since they produce contrary principles and values.

We can illustrate this reflection through the mostly "authoritarian" process of public policies, both national and European, aimed at the poorest classes in society without allowing them to participate in the same process, which allows us to question how the democratic consultation of the person as a citizen in society and in their singularity has been carried out? "The genesis of democracy is not always democratic". (Eric Weil in Nair; 2008: 62).

Today, in democracies that are so universally recognized, we see differences in the relationship of belonging to the community in which we live and to society in general, in which cultural values take precedence over moral values and in a more individualistic matrix in which we can say that the predominant cultural identity has nothing to do with moral integrity, founded on human rights. This includes immigrants, refugees, victims of war, natural disasters, minorities, and ethnic groups. This leads us to a question: how can we develop democratic humanist values when confronted with dominant cultural consciousnesses that transform the feeling of vulnerability into expressions of power and social intimacy? (Matthies and Uggerhoj; 2014).

For Beji, "human beings find themselves enslaved by a democracy that suffocates them through the speed and power of its organs of dissemination and is silent in the face of the intensity of cultural archaisms, experienced as resistance by people who keep their humanity alive and testify to a faith in themselves that has lost its democraticity" (Beji, in Nair; 2008: 73).

Democracy cannot only be implemented by and with the People, it must also be implemented by and with the State, and by Civil Society, as a framework for the security and protection of citizens in the world. Sometimes there is some ambiguity in the intermediate institutions and professional practices in response to the social needs of the population, confusing democracy with mechanisms for alternating power and democracy as a political culture based on the principles and values of citizenship as a fundamental

element in guaranteeing equality and respect for individual freedoms and minorities. The degree to which democracy is realized in society depends very much on the human and social conditions of society that are offered to citizens today. This is why we consider it pertinent to include the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in the critical thinking of Social Work.

### **3. Family Policy & Social Citizenship**

Family policies are now a matter of social, economic, and political debate in contemporary society, and are permeable to changes in society and ways of life, as Wall and others (2010) pointed out. The diversity of families and household forms has changed, but so have the expectations created by people in their relationships with others (for example, easy access to luxury goods and consequently new debts). Policies to protect against (or "maintain") poverty are not enough; we need policies that strengthen people's and families' skills and value them as ordinary people and citizens of any society. The family structure has changed a lot, we have new marital identities (fewer marriages), a late departure from the parental home for a life of our own; we postpone parenthood and compete daily for a well-paid job. We also have more divorces, more out-of-wedlock births and, above all, fewer children (reduced birth rate), which also contributes to the decline in family households and productive adult actors.

Families have different configurations, ranging from the most classic, which reproduce the traditional model (mother, father, children), to the most complex levels in defining the configuration of today's family group (Wall, 2005). The composition of the family today goes far beyond biological and legal factors, making aspects of subjectivity important in family configuration and demanding greater legitimacy and acceptance by society and the legal-normative instruments of the national state and the European Union in a more comprehensive and equitable way.

Progressively, the family is being valued as a producer of well-being and as a recipient of welfare policies and measures. In the 21st century, the issue of distributive and redistributive social justice is gaining importance, and not just as a problem of gender equality in family tasks and responsibilities. "(...). The solutions must be to seek the development of a new welfare society in synergy with an institutional welfare state that

offers a safety net in which individuals and families can be citizens/subjects of a network of assistance and care services. Social policy interventions must be centered on the family (Malta Conference)".

The promotion of citizenship builds a balance between people's individual needs and the needs of social justice, with the aim of maximizing individual well-being. According to Mozzicafredo, "the political foundation of citizenship rests primarily on the relationship between the principles of individual freedom and those of social justice" (2000: 194). According to Marshall et al. (1998), citizenship is based on a progression of civil, political, and social rights that are fulfilled by the state through social programmers. Civil rights are necessary to guarantee the subject/citizen's freedom of public intervention in society. Social rights are a subset of rights to well-being, income for social integration, the right to participate and to live civilized lives according to the standards of an organized society. For the author, the expansion of citizenship rights develops through conflict within civil society and through an empowerment approach. The change brought about by the empowerment process can be understood in three ways: as a conflict between those who control the division of power and resources, those who are marginalized and deprived in this process and the role of the professional, which consists of preparing disempowered citizens to demand a fairer division of resources and to advocate for a more participatory and intervening role in society. Social citizenship is based on the principles of equality, participation, social responsibility, and social diversity (Ferreira, 2011). Social citizenship requires that the citizen/subject, as well as being a person who lives in a family, in a community, also has a social notion of themselves (relationship of belonging), to assume their shared social co-responsibility with the forces that live in the same community, i.e., the need for the person to participate in exposing their needs anywhere in the world.

The change and imbalance in demographic indices that has taken place over the last few decades, with a tendency towards greater complexity, has produced new social issues in the context of active groups and an increase in inactive, dependent, and independent groups. The process of globalisation, technological changes, and the urgent need to adapt human resources with a view to greater social inclusion, social justice and the reduction or eradication of poverty rates, migration, and immigration to a single European area. The need for a minimum income, as a human right, considered and recognised as fundamental

for social integration and for greater participation in citizenship as an expression of the human dignity of the individual.

#### **4. Social Protection System Vs Social Welfare**

Today, when we reflect on the social protection system in a democratic society, we must do so based on an eco-social and social welfare approach to the social protection system that promotes citizenship. We must reflect on a model of territorial intervention, of a participatory and collaborative nature, in other words, its influence on top-down and bottom-up policies, to support our understanding of the process of centralisation and decentralisation.

The ideal model for the implementation of social and public policies by the social protection system, with the aim of promoting the well-being of society and citizens, is undoubtedly the bottom-up model, which is the one that most closely relates to the intervention of citizens and local communities in promoting active social citizenship. But this is not the model favored by the state, since it always places the management of public policies in the public sphere, leaving the social and community partners with a supplementary and complementary participation, which weakens the participation and decision-making of the social agents (individual and institutional) of civil society, let's reflect on housing policies.

It is important to reflect on family policy in the context of human rights. Influenced by positive discrimination programmes such as the Bolsa Familia, the social insertion income, the basic food basket, for example, the constitution of the welfare state is underpinned by an ideological discourse, putting human rights at risk. In essence, the result of the discourse does not promote public policies or social policies, less human rights, but rather social responses operationalised by social action control measures and recognised (control) errors as guarantees of equality, well-being, and improved redistribution of social benefits (Ferreira et al., 2016).

In Portugal, social policies are mostly based on a corporatist welfare regime in which there is a concern with differentiating between social classes and preserving status, with policies shaped by religion and family tradition, (Esping-Andersen, 1990:27) For the author "fighting social exclusion requires not only acting on the effects, but also

influencing them, and especially on the preventive causes that prevent the realisation of social citizenship" (Pereirinha, 2008: 237-238). Social and public policies are increasingly responding to social problems on an emergency basis, a palliative and superficial response to social problems without resolving macro-structural inequality. Measures of strong social control are adopted, the effectiveness of which is questionable.

Potentialities can be identified in the professional action of social work, namely: networking; social diagnosis and helping to build a life project (short, medium, or long term). According to Rodrigues (2014), until the mid-1990s, the social protection system centered on work as a means of social integration. However, the inability of the labor market to meet people's employment needs meant that alternative mechanisms had to be created through a new social contract, which includes the responsibility of the state, the market, and local communities: the "solidarity economy" or social economy and regenerative economy.

In turn, this typology should not absolve the state of its responsibility as an instrument of social protection, but should modify it, centering responses to social problems on valuing the person as a person. A new challenge is the inclusion of citizens in the process of formulating and evaluating policies, since participation democratic "public management" and shifts the priorities of administrations towards policies that are not just aimed at emergency issues.

#### **4.1.The territorialised intervention dimension**

Territorialised policies are administered in a decentralised way, but they don't change their logic or their design depending on where they start to act; they follow the general rules already known in their management, transferring the centralised model to a more local level; the participation of the actors and the integration of action remain the same as the traditional forms of policy management, not signifying a change in their design matrix, orientation and action strategy; the action is enacted outside the territory and this is only the field of application of a national policy (Autès, 1999).

In other words, they are those in which the place makes the difference, and from the interrelationship between politics and territory new forms of management emerge, capable of developing new ways of managing the social bond (Koga, 2003); here the

territory emerges as the political space, constituting the place for exercising representative democracy and collective representations of "living together" and as a relevant space for mobilising collective action (Rocha, 2016 ).

The report of the research project called "Territories of well-being. Asymmetries in Portuguese municipalities<sup>1</sup>". This study shows that "the safety and environmental quality of the place where we live, the possibilities for managing family life and work, access to housing and to education, health and transport services, along with involvement in communities, are some of the factors that most influence people's perception and experience of well-being (...)". "Civic participation, as a dimension of well-being, is influenced by territorial differentiations that manifest divergent levels of apathy between local politics and national and European politics." (pp107). It's up to all of us to cultivate a new culture, a new language and to innovate conservative management and development models that are too centered on structure and less on the well-being of citizens. I'm referring to the implementation of new practices, now known as collaborative, integrated, empowering, and essentially based on positive, co-building partnerships for a better social environment with a strong impact on territorial development.

"For a characterisation of Low-Density Territories, whose designation has been consolidated in public policies, we propose analysing it from the dual perspective of social inequalities and the dynamics of producing well-being. Depopulation, ageing, a lack of job opportunities which means that young people and adults are constantly leaving, impoverishment with a strong presence of an inactive population, predominantly with basic schooling or no schooling at all, economic strangulation, and the inability to retain human resources that generate employment and stable life projects present significant challenges to these territories which should be considered from a social cohesion perspective. Naturally, well-being is influenced by these structural constraints, but local development agendas and the various intersectoral public policies can count on the social, organisational and institutional capital that is necessary to counteract the current depressive structural trends. Local political actors, associative and social support networks and the presence of the welfare state, based on bonds of identity, mutual aid and

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<sup>1</sup> Coordinated by researcher Professor Maria Rosário Mauriti, Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation and professor at Iscte (June 2022).

solidarity, may be able to mobilize participation and endogenous and supralocal local resources that are catalysts for the improved well-being that these territories offer" (pp108-109).

Local organisations in the form of associations, IPSSs<sup>2</sup> or NGOs<sup>3</sup> promote proximity contacts, social relations and develop activities for self-esteem and personal enrichment and break the flow of social isolation and loneliness by promoting outdoor activities and leisure/ social spaces. Entities that work above all in small communities as "(...) hubs for socialising and stimulating different forms of solidarity, nurturing social cohesion and a sense of belonging to a collective and thus contributing to a feeling of general and individual well-being. In villages from the north to the south of the country, summer festivals, processions on days of religious festivity and, more broadly, participation in church activities, lunches to celebrate significant dates or events, activities promoted by recreational groups such as walks or recreational trips, sporting events are some examples of promoting people's well-being and quality of life". (pp 173).

The political dimension of Social Work emerges from professional action in different areas of knowledge to achieve the objective of public and social policies in their mission to solve problems. The identification of a social or public problem involves the process of systematising the social and economic needs resulting from the systematisation of professional practices, needs as the social rights of people in society. This systematisation leads to the recognition of the problem as a collective and not an individual social construction. "The social inclusion of any person or group primarily involves access to citizenship and economic, political and social rights, as well as access to possibilities and opportunities for effective participation in the political sphere" (Subirats, 2013: 276). Local social intervention makes it possible to find out about social needs and make an analysis that promotes programmers and services to respond to these identified needs, as challenges to local politics and as a challenge to the knowledge of social interveners in the field of planning, which Cardoso says "is the permanent updating of social diagnoses and the planning of actions to be implemented, requiring the participation of the different actors involved" (Cardoso, 2012: 186).

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<sup>2</sup> Private Social Solidarity Institutions

<sup>3</sup> Non-governmental organisations

Subirats (2013) considers that the centralised and standardised design of major social policies is inadequate to respond to the new realities, and points to the residual or merely executive role that has been assigned to local governments as evidence of this, forcing the implementation of flexible and bureaucratized forms of management because "social actors involved in highly bureaucratized institutional contexts (filling in forms) only carry out casuistic action devoid of personal and social appreciation and enrichment" (Idareta and Ballestero, 2013).

In this social change, we must consider the constructivist paradigm, centered on the citizen's skills and abilities. This is Partnership, guided by the logic of action in Network intervention; Social Citizenship, recognising all citizens as subjects of rights and essentially their Human Dignity (human rights approach). Professional intervention also needs to be reconfigured, based on a practice of "Partnership", which is not a concept, since it does not establish a new theoretical field, but a reference for public action. Associated with this set of guidelines is the construction of Networks, as a new model for professional intervention. Networks have an effective potential for promoting participation and autonomy (Ferreira, 2011).

Social and public policies must be geared towards sustainable development, based on valuing local services and natural resources, strengthening the relationship between state and society. This requires greater attention to the local development model in the global context of each Member State, the European Union, and the globalisation process.

In order to be able to talk about human and social development in contemporary society, we have to understand sustainable development as a process of satisfying current needs without jeopardizing the needs of future generations, implying three requirements: intergenerational solidarity, the integration of natural resource management into development strategies and the durability of the production and consumption processes inherent to development, implying a logic of sustainable rhythm of balance between the input of inputs and the output of outputs in the interaction between the economic and ecological subsystems. (Report (1987)).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> published by the W.C.E.B.

Social welfare policies today must be guided by the principle of sustainability, developing values and guarantees for social, human, and economic development. According to Sen (1999), sustainable development is centered on dynamic and interrelated levels: the person, the process, the context, and time. Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development ecology (1996) defines human development as a set of processes through which people and the environment interact, bringing about constancy and change in the person's characteristics throughout their life (Rocha, 2016).

The problem of Urban Sustainability is due to the increase in urban population density, which causes an enormous need for space. Cities continue to be centers of development, referenced today by the term Smart-cities: there are consequences and impacts in all dimensions and contexts, in the Economic Sector, Employment, Education, Health, Culture, Technology, Social Change and Political Power. The issues of housing and urban regeneration, beyond the economic and financial dimensions, establish interdependencies with all dimensions related to people's well-being and daily lives. And here we find a segment of intervention for Social Work, which is related to human well-being.

## **5. Social work: a field of opportunities**

Social work, as a social science that aims to improve the quality of life and well-being of all citizens in society, develops an intervention centered on promoting people's social competences and skills with the aim of guiding them towards gains in autonomy and effective participation in changing their socio-economic situation and as a subject of rights in their community.

From this perspective, social work takes three possible directions in its intervention:

- A mere executor of public and social policies.
- A technocrat at the service of the institutional bureaucracy.
- A specialist who intervenes with the person to strengthen their self-esteem, empowerment, the acquisition of new independent living skills, the establishment of co-operation networks to solve the problem and the association of formal resources (public and social policy measures) and informal resources (neighborhood network and family);

- A mediator who establishes links, co-operations and relationships between public authorities, society and citizens at world, international, European, and national level in the macro, micro and meso dimensions.

Each of these interventions will produce a different result, i.e., it can promote intergenerational transmission, the accommodation of the person in their situation of poverty, or it can promote new opportunities and new life horizons that lead to a change in the social and economic situation, creating better living conditions in society.

Social work takes on a preventive role that includes its political dimension of pro-activity and social change, intervening on the one hand in the person's skills gains but also in the environmental and ecological development of local communities, strengthening their economic and industrial activities, and making the most of local natural resources, making proposals for entrepreneurship and creative initiatives, as Pereirinha points out, "there is an aspect that stems from the previous ones and that puts the poverty eradication strategy on another level: prevention." (Pereirinha, 1997: 132). According to the author, there are two objectives at stake here: social policy, the reduction of poverty through social transfers and the provision of social services, and preventive action against the new factors of impoverishment and vulnerability in society.

Social work is responsible for diagnosing the causes of problems - not just the symptoms - and developing effective social responses that promote the social inclusion of the group of people who don't have the necessary resources to make it on their own. This intervention requires the mobilization of scientific theories from the social sciences. The theoretical current most identified with situations of poverty and social vulnerability is called Structural Social Work (Mullaly (2007), is associated with critical theory by developing an intervention in holistic contexts, with the aim of reforming or promoting changes in society, not only focused on guaranteeing social rights, but also, and above all, on promoting human rights that facilitate the expression of opinion, autonomy, and participation in public debate.

We conclude that the Structural model deals with strategies and plans for public administration and social services; it creates spaces for inclusion, participation and social solidarity. It works with social justice and equality, as well as social responsibility and the development of public social protection services.

In the 21st century, Social Work is part of an economic, political, social, and cultural context of great change, marked by a neoliberal context in terms of economic policy, associated with the paradigm of partnership and networks, with profound consequences for the lives of citizens, labor and employment relations and the social management of everyday life. We are facing a new challenge in terms of the construction of the object of intervention, which needs to be rethought in terms of social and human development in a sustained and integrated way.

Ecological theory, based on the perspective of interaction between man and the social environment, defines a continuous adaptive exchange in the life cycle and is essentially characterized by environmental problems, developing co-responsibility in individuals and communities for improving the social and daily environment. This intervention is gaining relevance in contemporary society as an alternative model in the practice of the social worker in response to the problems and needs of populations, within a framework of globalisation and social development sustainable.

The eco-social and digital transition can also mean a change in the understanding of professions and institutions. Cities in transition are particularly developing economic structures, strong mobility, and deepening resilience.

Also, for Social Work, the way in which transition processes are expected is central: they will be inclusive, participatory, and multigenerational from the bottom up and will respect social diversity within the framework of the normative and ethical codes of a democratic society.

## **Conclusion**

New social issues are emerging in the 21st century that deserve attention, reflection, policy measures and new knowledge more suited to the new social reality:

- Changes in the modus vivendi of families (new family forms, increased migration, "precarious" labor relations, mobility, new forms of violence - an increase in vicarious violence);

- Increased insecurity, greater exposure to situations of social vulnerability (use of weapons, trafficking in people and illicit substances);
- Cultural changes, the emergence of new ethnic groups, cultural super-diversity, changes in habits and customs, more plural relationships in society;
- Religious diversity, the search for ideals and public social identities of reference, new values and beliefs;
- Changing social and family paradigms, more individual and less collective life projects, social participation based more on competitiveness than solidarity;
- The ambivalence of professional fields, the search [again] for versatility and the devaluation of professional competence for action.

The participation of young people today in the construction of a democratic society, based on principles of social citizenship, takes on different forms, including social networks and the use of email, mobilizing groups of young people on certain causes, including climate change, feminism, and anti-racism, which are considered global and intersectional issues. "Democracy requires political participation on the part of citizens, which is expected to be active and free, in public debate, in the election of political representatives, in membership of political parties, civil organisations or social movements." (Mamede;2022 :76)

Young people expect society and political decision-makers to pay more attention to their opinions and needs. "This is a challenge we are facing today (...), and one that may have the capacity to transform and democratize democracy at a time when it is trying to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and control the political risks it has made evident." (Mamede; 2022: 77).

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