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PROFESSION OR CRAFT? A REFLECTION ON THE MORAL IDENTITY OF SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

Profession or craft? A reflection on the moral identity of social work
What is the occupational identity of social work, and what should it be? Social work is sometimes characterized as a profession and sometimes as a craft, very often without a clear distinction being made between these two categories – and possibly without realizing that a difference exists. An ideal-typical approach, however, may be helpful in clarifying not only the many similarities but also the fundamental differences between these two types of occupations. Following Freidson (2001) and Sennett (2008), it can be shown that the ideal-typical focus of a profession is realizing an abstract value (like justice), whereas a craft will centre on manipulating a concrete material (such as stone). As such, professions – and only professions – are occupations with a moral identity. This moral identity, this humanitarian mission can be found in all self-definitions of social work (e.g.

IFSW, NVMW). Social work should therefore be regarded as a profession and not as a craft. This is not merely an academic discussion but impacts on the position of the occupation in society, as recent developments in the Netherlands concerning the new style of welfare ("Welzijn Nieuwe Stijl") illustrate.

Keywords

Social work, occupational identity, profession, craft

SAMENVATTING

Professie of ambacht? Een reflectie over de morele beroepsidentiteit van sociaal werk
Wat is de beroepsidentiteit van sociaal werk, wat behoort zij te zijn? Sociaal werk wordt wel omschreven als een professie maar ook als een ambacht, vaak zonder duidelijk onderscheid tussen en wellicht zelfs door impliciete gelijkstelling van deze kwalificaties. Met behulp van de ideaaltypische benadering kan echter worden aangetoond dat deze twee typen beroepen niet alleen veel overeenkomsten delen maar ook op enkele punten fundamenteel van elkaar verschillen. Op basis van het werk van Freidson (2001) en Sennett (2008) kan worden aangetoond dat het ideaaltypische doel van professies het realiseren van een abstracte waarde (zoals rechtvaardigheid) is, terwijl ambachten gericht zijn op het manipuleren van concrete materialen (bijvoorbeeld steen). Bijgevolg zijn (enkel) professies beroepen met een morele identiteit. In alle zelfdefinities van sociaal werk is deze morele identiteit, deze humanitaire kern aanwezig (zie bv. IFSW, NVMW). Daarom moet sociaal werk worden beschouwd als een professie en niet als een ambacht. Dit is niet louter een academische discussie maar beïnvloedt bijvoorbeeld de positie van dit beroep in de samenleving, zoals aan de hand van de ministeriële richtlijnen betreffende Welzijn Nieuwe Stijl kan worden geïllustreerd.

Trefwoorden

Sociaal werk, beroepsidentiteit, professie, ambacht

INTRODUCTION

Almost one century ago, Flexner (1915; see 2001) published an article in the title of which he raised a fundamental question: Is social work a profession? His answer was remarkably up to date, for

he not only signals that "if social work fails to conform to some professional criteria, it very readily satisfies others", he also concludes that "in the long run, the first, main, and indispensable criterion of a profession will be the possession of professional spirit, and that test social work may, if it will, fully satisfy". Similarly, the sectoral associations state that social work is a profession (cf. e.g. IFSW, 2000; NVMW, 2006). Nevertheless, in the Netherlands there is also a tradition of viewing social work as what one might describe as a craft (Kamphuis, 1951; Van der Laan, 2005, 2006; Tonkens, 2008). There seem to be two general reasons for this categorization. The first is that these days the meaning of the words "craftsmanship" and "professionalism" are stretched beyond the point at which they can retain a significant meaning. For example, we read in newspaper reports about "the professionalization of criminality", while Sennett (2008) even identifies parenthood as a craft. The second reason is that even if we restrict ourselves to a more limited and precise definition of these two terms, they still share many characteristics. To point out the many characteristics that social work shares with crafts is, therefore, a pointless exercise when it comes to determining its identity as an occupation. The question of whether social work is a craft or a profession can therefore only be answered by focusing on the essential differences between these two categories of occupations.

A reliable answer to the question of social work's identity as an occupation can thus only be found through an ideal-typical approach to professions and crafts, because only this method can help us to define these concepts clearly on the basis of empirical findings (cf. Freidson, 2001). Fortunately, nowadays we can rely on two landmark publications by distinguished sociologists about the identity of their field of work: *Professionalism* (2001) by the late Eliot Freidson and *The Craftsman* (2008) by Richard Sennett. On the basis of these revealing works, we can discern the fundamental differences between the two groups of occupations: the primary aim of professions is to realize abstract values, while crafts are based on manipulating concrete materials. It can be demonstrated, then, that social work presents and understands itself as a profession, rather than as a craft. A major consequence of the identity of social work as a profession is that it has a moral identity: its core expertise is (moral) decision-making and it is confronted with occupational dilemmas – that is to say, moral dilemmas which arise because of the moral nature of the occupation. Categorizing social work as a *craft* would imply a denial of its moral identity, thereby reducing social workers to social engineers.

PROFESSIONS AND CRAFTS: THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Beginning with the analysis of professions by Freidson (2001) and crafts by Sennett (2008), we can identify many similarities between these two categories of occupations. The main similarities

involve the nature of the expertise of these occupations, the importance of the discretion required when carrying out the work, and the relatively strong social cohesion between those who work in the occupation. In these common features, they clearly differ from the two other main models for the organization of labour – namely the free market and hierarchical bureaucracy (cf. Freidson, 2001).

Expertise

In his analysis of the competition between professions in their "fighting for turf", Abbott (1988) makes a revealing distinction between three different kinds of expertise:

> Professionalism has been the main way of institutionalizing expertise in industrialized countries. There are, as we sometimes forget, many alternatives: the generalized expertise of the imperial civil services, the lay practitioners of certain religious groups, the popular diffusion of expertise characteristic of microcomputing. The contrasting examples show the essence of professionalism: professionalism's expertise is abstract, but not too abstract; it is not generally diffused; its practitioners work full time in particular areas. But professionalism shares with these alternatives the quality of institutionalizing expertise in people. As I have repeatedly argued, expertise is also institutionalized in commodities and organizations. To ask why societies incorporate their knowledge in professions is thus not only to ask why societies have specialized, lifetime experts, but also why they place expertise in people rather than things or rules. (Abbott, 1988, p. 323)

Professions, as Abbott points out and Freidson's analysis emphasizes, institutionalize expertise primarily in persons and practices. Sennett's analysis of crafts shows that these occupations are based on expertise of the same nature. Bureaucracies, by contrast, are founded on expertise that is institutionalized metaphorically and literally in procedures and protocols, whereas markets put their expertise increasingly in products that are said to be "smart". This does not mean that professions or crafts can never make use of procedural or product-based expertise. But it does mean that if it is possible to institutionalize the expertise required for a particular type of work completely in procedures or products, the need for a profession or a craft – the need, in other words, for an expert in this area – will vanish. Since it is now possible to program a robot to paint a chair, the painter has become superfluous. If it were possible to build a satisfactory program with which to diagnose and treat medical problems, physicians would also lose a significant part of their work. Professions and crafts, in other words, are only necessary when it is impossible to transfer the

expertise needed for a particular job to a large extent to products or procedures; that is the *raison d'être* of professions and crafts.

Discretion

In their trait-based approach to professions, Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) reveal the necessity for personalized expertise:

> In the navigation of a ship or the inspection of a mine, the essential element, from the point of view of the safety of the public, is the proper observance of a routine. In the practice of law or medicine, on the other hand, the essential element is the exercise of the faculty of judgement, and its exercise, moreover, in circumstances where the validity of the judgement must be a matter of opinion. […] The point which requires emphasis is that the main object of state registration of mine managers and officers of the merchant navy is a negative and preventive one, namely, the avoidance of catastrophe; and it is primarily upon the observance of a routine that this depends. In the case of doctors and lawyers, on the other hand, the main object is positive and constructive, namely, the successful treatment of disease and the assistance of persons in the ascertainment and prosecution of their legal rights; and what is needed for its achievement is, not caution, but good judgement. (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933, p. 399)

Since the expertise of professions and crafts cannot be reduced to procedures or products, and the work cannot therefore be reduced to routines, individuals are required who are capable of judging the situation at hand, deciding what action is needed and acting accordingly. Seen from the power perspective on work, the large amount of discretion in these occupations is at odds with other models for the organization of work: for example, the boss is the boss in the hierarchical bureaucracy, while in competition on the free market the customer always is right, especially when he or she has sufficient money (cf. Freidson, 2001).

Cohesion

Within professions and crafts as occupational groups, individual loyalty and social cohesion are strong while intra-occupational competition is weak, certainly compared to commercial work. Professions and crafts are well-organized into associations or guilds, they are based on occupational standards and they ensure that new practitioners are educated appropriately. They

are well established in society by means of public trust and occupational accountability (cf. Durkheim, 1958; Freidson, 2001; Sennett, 2008).

We could mention many other similarities between professions [as analysed by Freidson (2001)], and crafts [as Sennett (2008) describes them]: calling, code, quality, dedication, honour, pride, practice, experience, pragmatism, innovation and so on (see De Jonge, 2011). These similarities between professions and crafts cannot disguise, however, the differences between these two types of occupations. It is true that both types of expertise are associated with a large degree of discretion, but the nature of this discretion differs. Freidson (2001) distinguishes two types of discretionary specialization – manual on the one hand, which involves a large amount of practical and tacit knowledge, and mental on the other hand, which is based primarily on formal knowledge. Clearly, crafts are based primarily on manual discretionary specialization while professions rely on a large amount of mental discretionary specialization. Although this distinction is not absolute, there is nevertheless a fundamental difference between the knowledge base of professions and crafts. Similarly it is true that both types of occupations feature strong social cohesion, but is it worth noting that in the historical period during which the traditional crafts and their guilds began to fade, the classical professions, as well as some newer ones began to flourish (cf. Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Reader, 1966; Abbott, 1988).

AN IDEAL TYPICAL APPROACH OF PROFESSIONS AND CRAFTS

In order to understand the relationship between professions and crafts, as well as how their similarities and differences interrelate, we have to take recourse to the ideal-typical approach. Freidson (2001, p. 5) notes that only an ideal-typical approach of professionalism "can provide focus and direction to empirical studies". Weber (1985a,b, 1980), who developed the ideal-typical approach, stresses that the construction of an ideal type is based on attributing a specific (and therefore arbitrary and temporary) meaning and value to the cultural phenomenon at hand, selecting the relevant characteristics of this phenomenon in the light of the ascribed meaning and value, and logically connecting these central characteristics. It would be hard to find a relevant characteristic of professionalism that is not described by Freidson's exhaustive account, but the connection between these characteristics seems to be based largely on the association of ideas, to use a phrase of David Hume, while the meaning and value he ascribes to this phenomenon is somewhat ambiguous. This may explain why Freidson (2001, p. vii) speaks of his "sense of inadequacy" and compares his book to a "doughy mass". It is beyond the scope of this contribution to unravel the associations underlying Freidson's construction of an ideal type of

professionalism, but the ambiguity can easily be illustrated by pointing to a remarkable shift in the tone of his book: at the start of the book. Freidson (2001, p. 13) stresses that in his approach to professionalism he wants to avoid "pretentious, sometimes sanctimonious overtones" and "the fog of mystique", while the last chapter is dedicated overtly to "The Soul of Professionalism". Broadly, the meaning and value that Freidson attributes to professionalism in the course of his book seems to progress from a power perspective (the control of work) through an expertise perspective (mental discretionary specialization) to a moral perspective (doing "good work"). It is this latter perspective that can be used to construct an ideal type of professionalism that clarifies the positive potential of professionalism (cf. Sullivan, 2005) and that is logically coherent (cf. De Jonge, 2011).

Professionalism

In summarizing his ideal type of professionalism, Freidson (2001, p. 127) confines the description of his moral perspective on this phenomenon to: "an ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain and to the quality rather than the economic efficiency of work". Indeed, this description enables us to distinguish the three main models for organizing work: while the market focuses on economic gain and bureaucracy (at least according to Freidson) seeks efficiency, professionalism aims at doing good work of good quality. Nevertheless, Freidson's moral perspective on this phenomenon in his analysis is much richer than his own summary would suggest. If we seek to understand what goodness and quality in relation to professionalism really mean, we can find two major clues in his book. For Freidson frequently links professionalism with "a transcendent value" and "the common good" (which is phrased in various ways). We can combine these two characteristics by speaking of "humanitarian value", since a transcendent value that serves the common good will inevitably be a humanitarian value. Essentially, then, professions seek to further a specific humanitarian value. This can be illustrated by an ideal-typical approach to the three classical professions, on whose identification there is a rare consensus in the scientific literature on professionalism (from Flexner, 1915 and before to Freidson, 2001 and beyond). Freidson (2001, p. 167) notices that the three classical professions all aim at one specific transcendent value: the medical profession focuses on health, the legal profession on justice, and the religious profession on salvation (cf. Koehn, 1994). In accordance with these professional focuses, we can discern three different existential domains. Health, as the core value of the medical professional, relates to the physical domain; it concerns our relationship to our own body. Justice, as the core value of the legal profession, is important within the social domain; it concerns our relationship with other people. Salvation, as the core value of the religious profession, belongs to the spiritual domain; it concerns (for believers) our relationship to the Supreme Being. Furthermore,

all professions deal primarily with complexity, a characteristic that seems to be present in all literature on professionalism but which is particularly emphasized and clarified by Schön (1983, 1987), who speaks about uncertainty, unpredictability and instability, for example. In sum, we can, at least as far as the ideal types are concerned, speak of a professional mission (cf. Bucher & Strauss, 1965), which could be defined as: realizing a specific humanitarian value within a confined existential domain under complex circumstances, mostly through direct contact with individuals.

Craftsmanship

The professional mission that is at the core of ideal-typical professional occupations can in no way be applied to crafts. It is quite impossible to relate crafts such as painting and carpentry to a mission. Reading Sennett's (2008) account of crafts, however, from an ideal-typical point of view and with the definition of the professional mission in the back of our minds, we can discern an ideal-typical characterization of these occupations: he remarks that all crafts were originally based on mastery over and manipulation of concrete materials such as stone, wool, clay, metal or wood. This occupational identity leads to a different occupational ethos, as many of Sennett's remarks about craftsmanship illustrate. For instance, Sennett captures an important aspect of the ethos of craftsmanship in the phrase "good work for its own sake". For a professional, this is completely inconceivable, since it would mean that a surgeon for instance could say: "Well, I doubt whether the health of the patient will benefit from it, but we really carried out a first-class surgery". In professions, good work is never performed for its own sake, but for the sake of realizing a humanitarian value. While crafts focus on doing things right, in professions doing things right is always preceded by doing the right things. The quality of performance in professional work is, in other words, closely related to and to a large degree dependent on the quality of the eventual results of this work. By contrast, Sennett rightly describes the attitude of the craftsman as more focused on the "how" than on the "why". According to Sennett, a craftsman chooses nature to be his guide rather than spiritual values. He also recognizes the ethical ambiguity of crafts and speaks about Pandora's box and the banality of evil. He points out that complexity is part of craftsmanship, but in crafts complexity is the exception, while in professions it is, paradoxically speaking, more of a daily routine.

Reflective practitioners

The concept of the reflective practitioner, as developed by Schön (1983, 1987), can be used to illustrate this difference. Many of the characteristics of the reflective practitioner, such as

knowing-in-practice and reflection-in-action, can be applied to both professions and crafts. Schön uses examples from both occupational domains, such as the reflective conversation between a professional and a client or the construction of a fence. However, there is a criterion is his approach that is important for professions and much less so for crafts.

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of the situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigor, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems and non-rigorous inquiry? (Schön, 1987, p. 3)

For craftsmen this question is a matter of individual preference, of personal challenge. There is no contradiction in being a craftsman and being on the high ground. For professionals, however, Schön's question is a matter of occupational obligation. Crafts can very well exist without messy problems, but professions would not exist without the swampy lowlands.

Flexner (2001) pointed out the distinction between professionalism and craftsmanship almost a century ago. An ideal-typical approach in the expert models for the organization of work reveals that professions focus on realizing abstract values, while crafts are based on manipulating concrete materials. This implies that the phrase "good work" has a different meaning for both types of occupations. For professions, good work implies realizing humanitarian values, while for crafts good work is demonstrated in the mastery of concrete materials. This ideal-typical approach not only has theoretical significance, for the distinction can easily be traced in reality, although in reality no existing occupation is entirely one or the other. But even if an existing occupation is a mixture of professional and craft-like elements, the identity of an occupation can only be determined by establishing whether it is primarily based on realizing humanitarian values or mastery of concrete materials. This brings us to the question of the nature of social work – is it a craft because it is based on the manipulation of people as its "material"? Or is it a profession that aims at realizing a humanitarian value – for instance human welfare and well-being?

THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF SOCIAL WORK

If we wish to understand the occupational identity of social work, we have first of all to look at how the occupation presents itself to the world. Of course we must allow for the fact that it may seek to present itself in a flattering light, but on the other hand we should only raise serious objections to this self-presentation when there is good reason to do so . In 2000, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) accepted a brief definition of social work[1]. This definition is quite revealing with regard to the occupational identity of social work.

- First of all, social work is presented specifically as a profession, for the definition speaks of "the social work profession" and "professional social work".
- Second, the definition states explicitly that social work has a humanitarian core: "Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people".
- Third, social work is said to have a mission: "Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction".
- Fourth, social work has a core value: "The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being". Although well-being is the core value of social work, there are nevertheless many other values that are relevant to this occupation, as shown in the definition: "humanitarian and democratic ideals"; "the equality, worth, and dignity of all people"; "develop their full potential"; "human rights and social justice"; "empowerment and liberation"; "solidarity".
- Fifth, social work focuses on one particular domain of life: "[…] social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environment".
- Finally, within this domain the occupation deals with complexity: "Social work […] recognizes the complexity of interaction between human beings and their environments, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them, including bio-psychosocial factors".

A similar analysis could be made of the way in which social work in the Netherlands presents itself – using for instance the occupational profile and ethical code of "maatschappelijk werk". This occupation presents itself explicitly as a profession (NVMW, 2006) and defines a mission (NVMW, 2010). The valuable core of this profession is to ensure that people can realize their full potential in life ("optimaal tot zijn recht komen") in reciprocity with their social and societal environment.

Of course, we could question whether the existing occupation known as social work fully lives up to this ideal, to this ideal typical standard, in reality. Its theoretical foundations and methodological tools, for instance, are less well developed than those of the medical profession. Such flaws in the professional nature of social work, however, indicate primarily that the professionalization of this occupation remains quite a challenge. More importantly, its core values are somewhat diffuse and its domain of life is not very clearly defined. This also implies, however, a kind of moral and professional complexity that is foreign to the classical professions. For instance, social work seems to be particularly susceptible to influences which we could refer to as fashions of ideology and policy. But putting aside the debate about the professional nature of social work as it is practised, there can be no question about its occupational identity: social work is a profession, and in no sense a craft. This does not mean, however, that Sennett's account of craftsmanship has nothing to offer to the development of social work – quite the contrary. But it should only be relevant in complementing the fundamentally professional nature of social work, and not as a substitute for it. Craftsmanship can only contribute to the professionalization of social work when its professional mission remains the central focus. Indeed, all aspects of craftsmanship that can further the realization of the professional mission should be welcomed by the social work profession.

THE MORAL IDENTITY OF PROFESSIONS

Professions are unique occupations because they have a moral identity, while other occupations have an amoral (not to be confused with an immoral) identity. Of course, in reality morality is a complex phenomenon. Sennett (2008), for instance, shows in his analysis that crafts in reality are connected with moral practices in many ways. But the fact remains that crafts focus on the how and not on the why, and this limits the involvement of morality in the practice of crafts in an essential way. Their moral dimension can be heightened through social measures, but these measures have no influence on the occupational identity of the crafts as such.

Moral occupations

Professions are moral occupations: the core of these occupations is of an entirely moral nature. The specific humanitarian value is ideal-typically the moral core around which the occupation of social work evolves and revolves. This implies that in the end, this value determines what belongs to the occupation and what does not in terms of tasks, roles, expertise, practices. The professional mission is decisive: if an activity helps to realize the specific humanitarian value (in a humanitarian

way), then it can be considered part of the profession. It is therefore impossible to arrange the knowledge base of a profession purely according to abstract theoretical principles. The way work is done in a profession can revolutionize the profession without altering its professional identity. Surgery, for instance, does not necessarily imply the use of scalpels.

Moral practitioners

Moral occupations require moral practitioners. Professionals are practitioners with a moral identity. In ideal-typical terms, they are moved by a secular calling (Larson, 1977), which means that they are intrinsically motivated for the work they do. A profession is a vocation based on the vocation of a professional. Professionals usually devote their lives to their occupation, much more than to the organization they work for (Freidson, 2001). Therefore the professional attitude is a crucial part of the occupational identity of professional workers, based on virtues such as respect and dedication (Banks & Gallagher, 2009).

Moral work

Professional work essentially entails taking decisions that have an intrinsically moral character – the prescription written by a physician, the verdict handed down by a judge or the absolution given by a Catholic priest. Of course, moral questions can occur in every occupation. But the moral aspects of these questions do not arise from the identity of the occupation as such, but either from the individual morality of the practitioner as a person or citizen, or from the social morality of the context in which the work is carried out. Making decisions in matters of health or justice, on the other hand, is in itself a moral activity, regardless of the morality of the practitioner or the social context.

Moral expertise

Professional expertise is essentially moral expertise. Professional discretionary judgments always have a substantial moral component. The expertise of crafts, on the other hand, is completely amoral. A carpenter can violate all ecological, economic and social principles of fair trade and yet still be an excellent expert. Moreover, he could even deliberately make lousy products without losing his expertise as a craftsman. But it is impossible for a surgeon to deliberately treat a patient badly without losing some of her professional expertise. Professional expertise cannot be separated from its moral core without losing its professional nature.

Moral dilemmas

Only professions have occupational dilemmas, that is to say moral dilemmas that are rooted in the intrinsic identity of the occupation, and not primarily in the morality of the practitioners themselves or their social environment. Health as a humanitarian value, for instance, implies a tension between the quality and the quantity of life. Justice encompasses a tension between individual freedom and social equality, like wellbeing. It is therefore impossible to work as a professional in these areas without being confronted with moral dilemmas. A physician, for instance, may be forced by circumstances to decide who will live, a pregnant woman or her unborn child. She cannot avoid this decision, and it may even be impossible to consult others before making her decision. Likewise, social workers are confronted with moral dilemmas, for instance in cases of domestic violence (cf. De Jonge, 1995; Van Doorn, 2008). A craftsman, on the other hand, can always conclude that the problem at hand is too complex for his expertise and simply walk away. If he feels obliged to stay and at least try to do something, it will be first of all as a person or as a citizen and not as a craftsman.

CONCLUSION

Trying to decide whether social work is a profession or a craft may appear to be a rather academic discussion of little relevance to daily practice. Nevertheless, the question is relevant to the identity of social work and its place in society, both now and in the future.

This is illustrated by recent developments in the Netherlands, where a new law for social and societal support (or "Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning") has been followed up with a new style of welfare ("Welzijn Nieuwe Stijl") in the form of guidelines issued by the Dutch government (see MVWS, 2010). This new style of welfare is based on eight beacons, the last of which explicitly declares that social professionals are to be given discretionary space. However, the document also states the following:

> A necessary condition for the success of the New Style of Welfare is the improvement of the relationship between local government and welfare organizations. […] Local government is to take the lead and decide which social and societal challenges should be met and which goals it wishes to be realized. It is the responsibility of the [welfare] organization to decide how this goal can best be realized and which activities and services to deploy. (see MVWS, 2010, p. 30; author's translation from the Dutch original)

According to this redefinition of the relationship between local government and the work of welfare organizations, and by consequence the redefinition of the work of social workers, is reduced to the "how". Although the document speaks of social workers specifically as professionals, their tasks are implicitly reduced to the work of craftsmen.

Supposing that social work is a craft – either by stating this explicitly or implicitly limiting the tasks of the workers to the "how" and to doing things in the right way – implies a denial that social work is in essence a profession. Denying that social work is a profession means depriving it of its moral identity. This, in turn, would reduce professional social workers to amoral social engineers, ready to devote their expertise to any job they are instructed to carry out, whatever the outcome and regardless of the consequences. This is something that we should not allow to happen.

NOTE

1 See the website of the International Federation of Social Workers: http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/.

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