

# **THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL **SOCIAL WORK** ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS IN FIGHTING SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF PANDEMICS**

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# MEANING OF AN ORGANISATION

- **Voluntary association** is generally regarded as an "open" organization, democratic in the sense that formal authority rests in the whole membership and that formal methods are utilized whereby the membership may express its will as to the policy to be pursued
  - Geiser and McDonagh (1962)
- A **professional association** on the other hand is not, strictly speaking, a voluntary association for it is "closed" to all but a few who can meet special qualifications for entry.
- It is not a voluntary association because the applicant's **freedom of choice is conditioned by reasons of commitments** made by the association not only to the members but to the larger community as well. A symbiotic relationship exists between the professional association and the community.
- Organising into associations is one of the **hallmarks** of social work professions, building links among members and trends to self-organize
  - Healy and Hall (2007)



# THE FUNCTION OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION

- The professional association performs a function of **coordination** without which no profession can effectively promote those of its purposes lying contiguous to the public interest.
- In order to perform this function effectively, the association must ascertain the **unitary interests** of its members within the processes and structure of social organization and must from time to time, crystallize these interests in such a way as to provide momentary images of the associational collective.
- the **sense of belonging** to an intellectual community, is the main 'glue' of the association.



# FEATURES OF AN PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION

- Weick, (1976, 1993) *coined the term of loose couples relations* while researching organizations such as schools and universities, and it might be useful to understand some challenges faced in the management of the *professional organisations*.
- The notion refers to the fact that in some organisation, each entity has links with the others, but preserve its *autonomy* and retains its own *identity*.
- Their links are loose, to a different extent, according to the different organizations, and are largely nurtured by symbolic activities and communication.
- They become members on the basis of reasons far away from material or practical rewards, with the main motivation of being part of a cultural community, committed to shared values and the wish of sharing knowledge and practices. The main bond among members is *intangible and symbolic*



# FEATURES OF AN PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION

- It is the **belief in the mission** of the association, in the feeling of being part of a community, in getting in contact with others that share similar goals.
- It is the aim of expanding each one's **networks** and gaining new **knowledge** that everyone can use in their context.
- Other 'hard' rewards, as a salary or career's progressions are non – existent. Building and nurturing the feeling of a **collective engagement** is therefore central.
- Nevertheless, it is also crucial that there is an organization capable of responding to the aspiration of members **to participate** and to give their own contribution as well as to ensure that members can take always some learnings from others



# FEATURES OF AN PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION

- Despite their great variety, most professional associations hold in common three characteristics:
  - a dues-paying membership base,
  - tax-exempt status,
  - and a mission of collective action (Fyall & Gazley, 2015).



# OUTBREAK OF PANDEMIC

- The pandemic, which struck it the entire world in 2020, introduced a radical change in ***our lives***. Limiting our regard to ***the world*** the pandemic has introduced two major differences:
  - first, a **huge flow of money and resource** is poured in all welfare policies, within the regulation of the public and the state;
  - second, the relevance and the need of **solidarity** was rediscovered, together with the need to think in terms of the commons goods and reciprocal collective responsibility.
- ***But*** it is not clear how far our systems will be able to translate these changes into radical and lasting improvements
- ***What*** is clear ***is*** that the **background has moved** and the challenges, including in preparing future social workers, are different.



# SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PANDEMICS

- *A dramatic increase of mortality – losses in families*
- *Psychological consequences of „social distancing“*
  - the vulnerable *groups* are particularly affected
- *Domestic violence*
- *Poverty*
- *Social divisions and conflicts (antivaxer movement, denial of the existence of a pandemic, conspiracy theory etc.)*



# WHAT POSSIBLE ROLES OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC (AND AFTER)?

- PO&N as:
  - important factor in process of **nurturing of community feeling** among members
  - as **kind of barrier** against deterioration of professional standards. In maintaining of these tasks it should be known that the social base of an organization may be identified by a number of requirements.
- What is needed:
- As stressed by Geiser and McDonagh (1962):
  - first, it is necessary to understand the formal purposes of organization and the relation between the ends and the instrumentalities for the fulfilment of these ends.
  - Second, it is necessary to understand the differentials that exist among organization subgroups regarding conditions and degrees of commitment to the organization.
  - Third, while it is desirable to know the values manifestly served by association membership, it is of even greater importance to be aware that many of the factors identifying an interest group are confusing and obscure.



- *To be successful in doing this the suggestions written by Payne (2002) while referring to the work of the British Association of Social Workers in the period 1970–2000 can be very instructive.*
- *He wrote that to achieve influence in wider social policy issues, it needs:*
  - *to form alliances with other stakeholders.*
  - *It has a role in delivering experienced and competent representatives of social work to other decision-making processes, can initiate activities and services for members and provides useful member benefits.*
  - *Influence and activity is probably enhanced by steady, recognizable leadership and stable, strong finances.*
  - *It has, at times, been a contributor to thinking about the nature of social work and its role in society, for example*
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- ***PO&N promote, nurture and save:***

- ***'professionalism',***
- ***internationalism***
- ***values,***
- ***volunteering,***
- ***social action***
- ***different social work tasks***



# BENEFITS OF JOINING A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

- developing new skills and competencies,
- connecting with colleagues, and
- sharing the talents and knowledge with the professional community.
  - Escoffery & al. (2015)
- Most associations have in-person conferences and/or other professional development activities such as webinars to enhance skills and competencies in the field.
- Associations also offer a variety of ways for members to network to locate and advertise potential jobs in the field.



- Getting active in the professional association offers the **opportunity to learn** more about the infrastructure and operations of an organization and connect with professionals from the field.
- Getting active can also help in **building a resume** in the area of professional service and research or presentations by presenting the work as posters or presentations or articles in their journals.
- Membership in an organization can offer the opportunity **to connect with others** who have a similar mission, goals, and skills.
- Members perform many formal and informal **volunteer functions**, including serving as board and committee members, organizing professional meetings, recruiting and mentoring new members, testifying before legislators, soliciting donations, preparing and reviewing publications, and preparing standards and practice.



- As stressed by Wharton (2014) professional associations are **political entities**, typically viewed as a force that **reproduces** rather than challenges the professional status quo, **reinforces** professional identities and status, and **protects** the profession from external threats to its status and legitimacy.
- Professional associations are also **arenas for interaction**, providing opportunities for members to develop normative frameworks, disseminate knowledge, and reaffirm their professional commitments and roles.
- Their purpose is to serve members, but they also rely heavily on members' participation and engagement. Members "coproduce" the benefits that the association provides, so an association that cannot foster engagement will struggle (Hager 2014).



# TO CONCLUDE

- *Challenging time seeks allies and partners*
- *Professional organisation can provide the sense of belonging, support, protection and hope*
- *Professional organisation creates teams*
- *The voice of an professional organisation is stronger than that of the individuals*
- *Working in and for professional organisation requires additional engagement, time, motivation, skills etc.*



# POINTS TO DISCUSS:

- *What more roles we can imagine PO&N can play?*
- *How we can make professional organisation more visible, influenced and attractive to potential members?*
- *What types of activities would be particularly needed in time of crisis (pandemic)?*
- *Is there any concrete contribution of professional organisations relevant to the pandemic in your country?*