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Disaster social work in Sweden: context, practice and challenges in an international perspective

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Introduction

Over the past several decades, the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters have significantly increased (Duyne Barbestein & Leemann, 2013) and the numbers of disasters affecting humanity is still increasing, as is the number of disaster victims (Gillespie & Danso, 2010). The growing burden of disaster includes those events that in part occur due to human activities, so called social-natural hazards (UNISDR 2009) as well as technological hazards (ibid.). *Disaster* is defined by the United Nations as “a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope with its own resources” (UNISDR, 2009). In the management of disasters, regardless of cause, social work has been recognized as an important resource both before (mitigation/preparedness) and after (response/recovery) the occurrence (Gillespie & Danso, 2010). Generally, the main focus of social work is the local scene (municipal and community level). It involves support to the individual and his or her family and their ability to recover after a critical situation. However, there are also endeavours involving the distribution of emergency aid, identification of the most exposed, providing a channel for information and working as mediator between individuals, communities and organizations, in reconstruction of social functions as well as in preventive interventions. Disaster social work has been increasingly topical internationally during the last few decades, not least in the wake of earthquakes (in India, Gujarat 2001 and China, Wenchuan 2008) and, hurricanes affecting many countries in the Americas such as Mitch (1998) and Katrina (2005) as well as of the India Ocean tsunami (2004). These disasters have had an impact on research as well as on education and praxis of social work in the United States (Gillespie & Danso, 2010), Latin America and Asia, especially in China (ex. Javadian, 2007; Tang & Cheung, 2007; Han, 2013).

In regard to the management of disasters, Sweden has extensive experience both nationally and internationally with a long-standing tradition of preventive policies and has a continued presence in supporting international management of disasters. However, despite an increasing topicality internationally, social work in Sweden can be said to have a relatively undeveloped role and function in the context of disasters as well as in serious events and crises. This is true both concerning social work as an academic multidisciplinary field and as a praxis field. As disaster social work has not been developed as a domain of knowledge, disaster management is not a field of research and is not included in the curricula for neither undergraduate nor graduate programs. In summary, there is a lack of a social work perspective in relation to disasters and crises in Sweden. This lack implies that social work does not contribute in the contingency system in Sweden to the extent it can be assumed that social work has a potential to do, based on its unique position to interpret and approach a social context both before, during and after crises and disasters have occurred.

In the future, an increasing burden of disasters that also involves new risks and vulnerabilities in social life will increase demands on contingency systems. This implies intensification of the establishment of legitimacy in terms of trust between institutional systems and citizens. Legitimacy and ability to act depend on the individual's trust in the individual staff member as well as on enjoyed

confidence at the institutional level (Bjorngren Cuadra, 2012). Research on trust has demonstrated that social categories (i.e. gender, age and ethnicity) affect the emergence of such qualities (ibid.; Hallin et al., 2010), which consequentially implies demands to handle such issues with consideration and sensitivity.

Based on these initial observations the aim of this article is to explore the Swedish context as well as outline a possible development of the role of social work based on an examination of practice and literature. It is hypothesized that the Swedish approach regarding social work in the context of disaster is a result of the structure and function of current civil protections and security systems as well as a path dependency in relation to a specific historically developed tradition of social work. Generally, social work is thought of as having dual foci; the individual and the social environment (Yan, 1998). Accordingly, in the Swedish case, a certain emphasis on one focus, the individual, at the expense of an orientation towards the environment, is assumed to have a repercussion on the role of social work in the context of disaster management.

Further, it is hypothesized that the prevailing role of civil society in the Swedish context contributes to the formation of the role of social work in the context of disaster management. In this regard it is assumed that the welfare state regime and ideology in regard to the role of civil society organizations, (Casey, 2004) are relevant factors that bear upon the degree of 'horizontal subsidiarity' (i.e. degree of involvement of civil and private actors) (Kazepov, 2008).

It is further hypothesized that social work has the potential to play a key role in future disaster management and the development of community resilience, not least from a legitimacy perspective. This is based on an appreciation of the general knowledge domain of social work as well as the fact that orientation towards social risks and vulnerability has always been part of the field of knowledge of social work (Soliman & Rogge, 2002). As social work manages consideration and sensibility in regard to constructs such as class, gender, ethnicity as well as disability and age, it has the potential to play a key role in future disaster management from a legitimacy perspective.

The next section will present Sweden's case in terms of experience, the specific national context and its conditions (legal, structural, organizational) in order to give the reader an overview. This is expected to provide a basis for the discussion regarding the role of social work and its challenges and possibilities to take on a more explicit role within the civil contingency system.

Disasters in the Swedish context

In an international comparative perspective, the serious events that Sweden faces are fairly limited in scope. Sweden is geologically and geographically situated in a region that is struck by neither earthquakes nor tsunamis. Sweden's geopolitical position has not resulted in major terrorist attacks but a few minor assaults resulting in a comparatively low number of casualties. There was a severe incidence in Stockholm in 2010 (only the "suicide bomber" himself was killed) (Lindberg & Sundelius, 2012). In terms of emergencies Sweden has most been struck by flooding, winter storms, landslides, forest fires and ice floes (European Commission, 2013). There have also been emergencies due to major fires (for example 1998 in a discotheque and a major forest fire 2014) as well as shipping disasters with many dead and injured (counted in hundreds).

The management of disaster and crisis in Sweden

It should first be noted that the concept 'disaster' is not commonly in use in the Swedish discourse, but rather concepts such as crisis, serious event, emergency and accidents. This approach give primacy to

situations that have not yet exceeded the ability and resources to cope, but still involves a serious strain in regard to resources. Management in this area, most often referred to as involving 'crises' or 'emergencies', follows the national administrative structure of public responsibilities. Thus the responsibility for what is called civil emergency planning (CEP) is handled by three different levels of government; national (government, ministry, national authorities), regional (county councils and county administrative boards), and local (municipalities). The levels correspond to responsibility of a geographic area under the law (see below). The objective is to minimize the risk and consequences of emergencies, enhance and support societal preparedness for emergencies and coordinate across and between various sectors and areas of responsibility. The system is primarily based on the principles of responsibility, similarity and proximity. Responsibility means that agents responsible for an activity under normal conditions maintain the corresponding responsibility and initiate cross- sector cooperation during emergencies. Similarity implies equal organization during emergencies as under normal conditions while proximity denotes the handling of emergencies to be at the lowest possible level in terms of structure. The following section provides a basic structural overview based on official information (i.e. European Commission and Swedish authorities).

Legislation

In terms of legislation and from a social work perspective is the Ordinance (SFS 2006:942) on crisis preparedness and heightened alert relevant. It regulates the demands on government authorities at national and regional (i.e. county administrative board) levels. Under this ordinance, all Swedish authorities are obliged to carry out risk and vulnerability analyses in their own areas as a measure to strengthen their own and Sweden's overall emergency management capacity. At regional (i.e. county councils) and local levels, the Act (SFS 2006:544) on measures to be taken by municipalities and county council in preparedness for and during extraordinary incidents during peacetime and periods of heightened alert outlines that municipalities and county councils should attain a fundamental capacity for engaging in civil defence activities. The act regulates planning of and preparation for the handling of complex, extraordinary events that demand coordinated management between various societal activities at local and regional levels. Under this law are the municipalities tasks to perform risk and vulnerability analysis, develop contingency plans and prepare for crisis, organize a crisis management committee as well as training and education for staff and politicians, be responsibility for their geographic area (to coordinate all local actors) as well as report to national authorities. It is of a certain interest that the performance of risk and vulnerability analysis are further regulated (MSBFS 2015:5). There is a corresponding Ordinance (SFS 2006:637) addressing the municipalities key role (i.e. to coordinate local actors). The municipalities are also responsible under the Civil Protection Act (SFS 2003:778) which regulates the Rescue service as well as a responsibility to prevent accidents and limit injury to individuals, and damage to property and the environment. Thus has the legal framework from the municipalities perspective two related strands, one for accidents and one for unexpected high consequence events (crisis and disasters) (Sparf, 2014). There is no specific legal regulation especially targeting volunteers and nongovernmental organization.

Organizations and actors

The overall political responsibility at ministerial level for civil emergency planning rests since October 2014 with the Ministry of Justice and the Minister of Home Affairs (before that date it was with the Ministry of Defence). In order to ensure that the Swedish Government Offices possess the coordinated

ability to handle cross-sector emergencies, the Crisis Management Coordination Secretariat at the Swedish Government Offices is responsible for everyday management (operating 24/7). Following the principle of responsibility, every government office is responsible for planning and handling crises in its own area of responsibility (European commission, 2013).

In terms of agents, no single organization has the sole responsibility for the entire country in all crises. The framework for operations is defined by the actual event that triggers the crisis. The national authority Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) has under its instructions an important role of coordinating various sectors and areas of responsibility in what is understood as a "whole-of-society"-approach (Lindberg & Sundelius, 2012). Their assignment is to build resilience across sectors and levels of government. It involves the entire spectrum of threats and risks - from everyday accidents to major disasters at all level of society as well as in different phases, before, during and after the occurrence of incidents (ibid.). The principle of responsibility implies that The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency will not take over the responsibility of other actors (European commission, 2013).

At the regional level, the county administrative boards (appointed by the national government) are responsible for coordinating civil emergency planning activities, such as exercises, risk and vulnerability analyses, and acting as a clearing house between public and private partners within their geographic area (SFS 2006:942). They are also responsible for having contingency plans in place to handle situations before, during and after an emergency. County administrative boards coordinate the relevant measures with relevant actors (including key companies) at local, regional and central levels and provide support in order to maintain the level of responsibility during the crisis. In addition, the county administrative board has the overall responsibility for reporting the need for national support in the event of a major emergency as well as coordinating contact with the media during major emergencies and crises (European commission, 2013).

At the local level and in accordance with the principle of proximity, Swedish municipalities have historically a large degree of autonomy. They play an important role in civil defence, civil emergency planning and preparedness as well as accident and disaster prevention through safety in land use planning and accident prevention work in accordance with the Civil Protection Act. As indicated, the municipalities have responsibility for their geographic area (SFS 2006:544). During a major emergency the municipal executive board is the highest civilian authority within municipal borders. It enacts responsibility for all civilian command and crisis management at the local level, including planning and preparedness. The county board provides continuous support and assistance as well as monitoring that the municipalities are complying with laws and ordinances (European commission, 2013).

As the focus of this article is social work in the context of disaster, The National Board of Health and Welfare (SoS) under the Social Ministry needs to be mentioned as it forms a part of the Swedish contingency system. This board is highly relevant in the field of social work due to its mandate under the already mentioned ordinance (2006:942) on crisis preparedness and heightened alert. The board shall support and supervise the municipalities as regard their ability to manage crisis, prevent vulnerabilities and withstand threats and risks. They shall also carry out risk and vulnerability assessments within their area of responsibility on a yearly basis. Such analyses consequently involve the social services (SoS, 2014). This will be elaborated below.

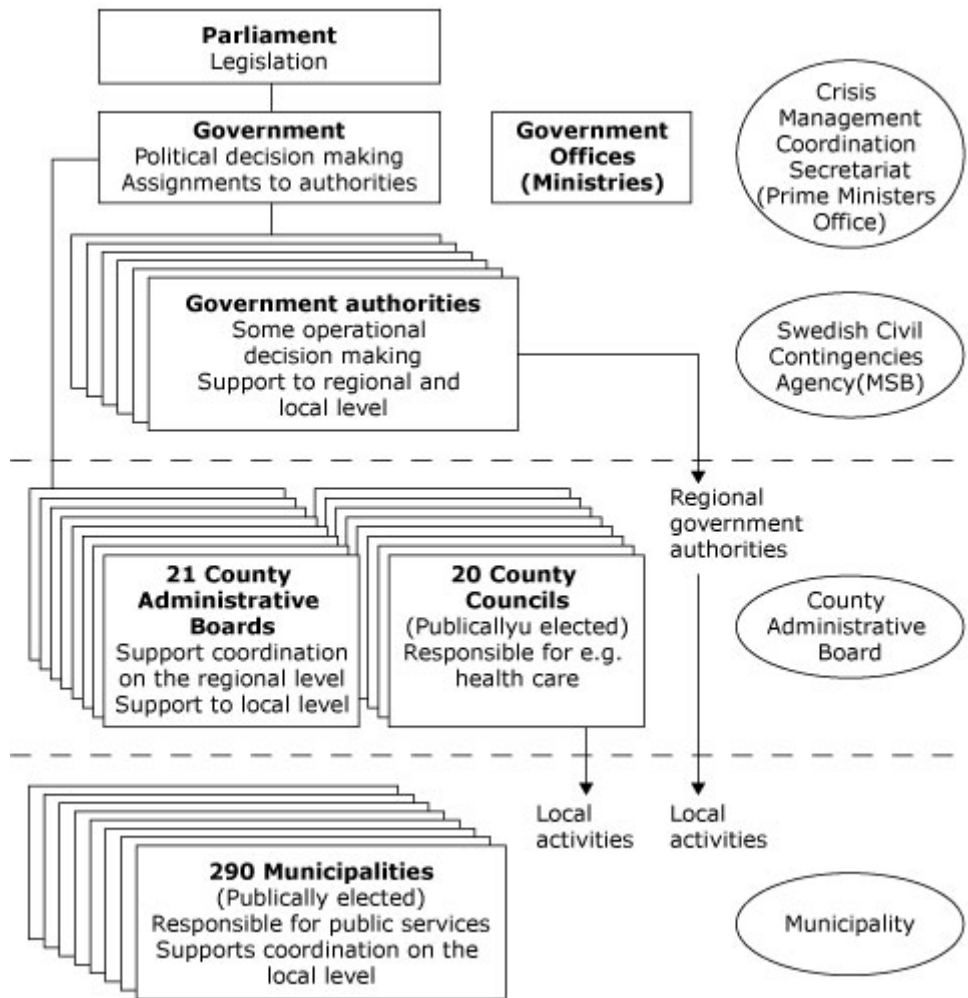
As regards the involvement of civil society and volunteers, the activities of the Civil Defence League, which includes several organizations, is highly relevant. This organization focuses on safety for both everyday life and in times of crisis. They organize training activities such as first aid, risk awareness, emergency support, voluntary reinforcement resources and tracking. In addition, the Civil

defence League organizes and educates Voluntary Resource Groups (FRG) in which members of other non-governmental organizations take part. The aim of Voluntary Resource Groups is to reinforce the municipality's resources (such as evacuation, information and other practical activities) in case of emergencies, when requested by the council of the municipality. In March 2013, the Swedish Association of local authorities and regions (SALAR) and the Civil Defence League jointly launched a recommendation to municipalities regarding the involvement of non-governmental organizations in crisis preparedness. The recommendation involves strengthening the role of civil society in crisis preparedness by setting up Voluntary Resource Groups (if they are not already in place) as well as formalizing agreements with the FRGs with the aim of clarifying criteria of responsibilities.

In regard to the involvement of civil society in the context of crisis and disasters, the Swedish Red Cross (SRC) is committed to the provision of emergency and humanitarian relief both nationally and internationally through its network of volunteers and delegates. Within Sweden, the Red Cross provides emergency services through first aid teams, mobile emergency units and counselling support groups managed by specially trained volunteers. The Red Cross endeavours also to increase knowledge on how to prevent injuries and how to take care of wounded and ill people by offering first aid courses for the National Home Guard.

The figure below is intended to give an overview over the contingency system. However, in this official chart, civil society is omitted (possibly because they do not operate under the law). In the next section, I will turn to the local level, that is, the municipalities who are most central in the context of social work.

Figure 1. Organisational chart (European Commission 2013)



Social work in the context of crisis

As previously stated, social work in Sweden has a fairly undeveloped role and function in the context of crisis management. The role involves the public support schemes at the local level with some involvement of the civil sector. Given this coupling to the public sector, interest is geared towards the municipalities and is most salient towards the Public Social Services that the municipalities organize under the Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453). The Public Social Services are officially considered to be critical function of society in a context of crises and disasters (Governmental proposition 2007/08: 92 on strengthened preparedness) as their failure or severe disruption can (alone or in synergy) lead to an increase in the seriousness of the crisis. Furthermore, the services are acknowledged as necessary or essential in managing crisis and disasters.

Responsibilities as defined by the Social services act apply both under 'normal' situations and in the context of crisis. They encompass the entire population as well as certain areas (involving individuals and families, care for persons with disabilities and elderly as well as newly arrived refugees). Each municipality is responsible for social services and has within their area the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that individuals receive the support and help they need (2 Ch. § 1) as well as overall responsibility for individuals residing (2 Ch. § 1) in the municipality. This responsibility includes both

structurally oriented ventures as well as services. The former involve being well informed regarding the living conditions of the entire population and being an active part in planning of society. Services are general (such as giving information, counselling, out-reaching programs, etc.) as well as specific to individuals (for example economic support, child protection, treatment for substance abuse, security alarms for the elderly and caring, cleaning and distributing prepared food).

Neither the Social Services Act nor other legislation governing the Public Social Services (targeting for example substance abuse or disabilities), addresses specifically the responsibility of municipalities for operations in case of crisis and serious incidents (SoS, 2009). Rather, the principle of similarity (during emergencies as well as under normal conditions), guides the contingency system, determines what is outlined in the Social Services Act regarding ultimate responsibility for those individuals residing in the municipality. Responsibility in case of crises relates to ordinary requirements of quality, safety, sustainability and planning in order to maintain existing operations and manage the tasks ahead. In addition, the municipalities' responsibility for Public Social Services in the context of crises derives both from Act SFS 2006:544 which governs municipalities' and county councils' measures prior to and during extraordinary events in peacetime and high alert and also in the corresponding Ordinance (SFS 2006:637) which give municipalities a key role (i.e. to coordinate local actors). The municipalities must therefore plan according to what is deemed necessary to deal with a crisis or serious incident (SoS, 2009) as well as be prepared for changes in terms of priorities (ibid.).

In this context it is interesting to note that in 2012 The National Board of Health and Welfare identified in their risk and vulnerability assessment, threats, risks and vulnerabilities as well as critical relationships in relation to crises and disasters within their areas of responsibility (SoS, 2012). The majority of what they identified as problematic concerned the role and function of Public Social Services in terms of serious or very serious consequences. This was found critical when taking into account that a serious incident can lead to an increase in needs for services of already known groups as well as new groups (ibid.). Against this background, the board found it equally critical that evaluations of situations that have occurred have shown a tendency to focus on activities required for maintenance of normal functions and comparably less on activities that target those who normally are managing themselves (SoS, 2012). According to my interpretation, therefore, the structurally oriented responsibility (being informed regarding living conditions of the entire population and being an active part in planning of society) is not entirely being pursued. There is a need for Public Social Service to plan for how to inform, as well as get in contact with, persons who might need help in case of a crisis (SoS, 2009). Against the background of this critical analysis, the National Board of Health and Welfare proposes a series of measures involving management, collaboration and information; information security; robust infrastructure; backup energy and opportunity for moving services/operations, human resources and critical dependencies. The analysis is based on 16 municipalities (out of 290), and implies that the overall ability of the Swedish Public Social Services to withstand crisis and disasters is today not clear. Moreover, according to my interpretation, the analysis indicates a need for development. This theme will be elaborated below.

Another important weakness identified by The National Board of Health and Welfare (SoS, 2012) involves a suboptimal coordination with non-governmental organizations (such as Voluntary Resource Groups, the Red Cross and other volunteers) (SoS, 2012). In part has this issue been addressed (in 2013) by the recommendation (see above) launched by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and the Civil defence League in regard to Voluntary Resource Groups. However, The National Board of Health and Welfare has further indicated that the competence represented by for

example the Red Cross is not reflected in crisis preparedness in the context of social services (SoS, 2007). In concrete terms, the contingency system is not fully taking advantage of the both national and international experience of the Red Cross (ibid.).

The role of civil society

In the literature, the role of civil society and its relationship to the public sector has been generally discussed in terms of being complementary (as opposed to being an alternative or conflicting course (see Börjesson, 2010). Further, the relationship can be understood in terms of the role of civil society organizations being linked to the welfare state regime and ideology (Casey, 2004). As this logic also applies to the public social work - civil society nexus, it can contribute to the understanding of the lack of coordination with non-governmental organizations as identified by The Board of Health and Welfare, as well as a not very elaborated role of civil society.

As regards the welfare state regime in Sweden, it is based on a strong alliance between the state and the individual (Scaramuzzino, 2012 with reference to Berggren & Trägårdh, 2009). Comparative works have characterized the Swedish model using a variety of concepts, all implying it to be a 'high-spender' model, (Arcanjo, 2011) in terms of social expenditure. Some well-known denominators corresponding to different typologies are: universal (Sainsbury, 1991), institutional (Titmuss, 1974) and social democratic (Esping-Andersen, 1990). It is characterized by a universal model with a striving to be general in respect of population coverage, implying emphasis on equal rights for all citizens and universal access. The logic of distribution of goods, such as services and social support, within this model is, in a Titmussian tradition, understood as being the promotion of integration between the members of a society (Borevi, 2002). The role of civil society might in this context be expected to be weak. However, the statist approach that historically resulted in the state taking over a range of welfare services from voluntary organizations (Scaramuzzino, 2012), has resulted in a still strong civil society with a complementary role and an orientation towards advocacy rather than to service production (ibid.). This arrangement has been labelled a Scandinavian model implying a strong centralized civil society sector organized in service areas (Casey, 2004). In terms of subsidiarity, the model involves a low degree of 'horizontal subsidiarity' as regards the role to actors such as non-governmental and private in the implementation of policy (Kazepov, 2008). This means that the role in the Swedish case for such actors is not comprehensive.

Disaster as a knowledge domain

Initially it was hypothesized that social work has the potential to play a key role in future disaster management. In order to address this issue, this section will introduce the academic approach to disaster social work internationally as well as in Sweden. Further, I will argue that a certain appraisal of a social dimension in the understanding of disaster is in line with the knowledge domain of social work.

Academic approach

This subject area was, in my interpretation, consolidated internationally as a field within academic research in the 2000s. However, this is not reflected in the Swedish research that gives an impression of being limited both in interest and scope. International research is dominated by North America, Asia and Australia, partly based on other conceptual systems than the Swedish (Cuadra, 2009). In my view, this impression is confirmed by the latest Joint World Conference of Social Work (Hong Kong, 2010; Stockholm, 2012) in lectures and presentations.

The international literature contains studies of operational approaches for development of methods related to natural and climate-related disasters such as earthquakes (Tajbakhsh, 2012), floods and hurricanes (Sanders, Bowie & Bowie, 2003), tsunamis (Tang & Cheung, 2007) and fire (Webber, 2013), but also technological incidents and disasters (Des Marais, Bhadra & Dyer, 2012). The interest is primarily on a local level (Bliss & Meehan 2008) with a focus on community capacity building, service management, interaction and communication with victims and those affected as well as professional and organizational collaboration (Pockett, 2006). This does not exclude approaches involving theoretical development, for example based on concepts such as vulnerability, resilience, risk and risk perception, psychosocial preparedness, social capital, capacity and recovery (Gillespie & Danso, 2010). Moreover, there are gender analyses (Enarson, Fothergill & Peek, 2006), human rights-based analysis (Pyle, 2007; Nikku, 2012) and consideration of ethical values (Soliman & Rogge 2002). The literature contains also some studies of pedagogical interests of education of social workers (Smith, Lees & Clymo, 2003; Chou, 2003; Tang & Cheung, 2007).

In Sweden, research in the field of social work in relation to crises and disasters appears limited. Two main psychosocial perspectives with international connections prevail; individual-centered and task-centered. The former addresses the crises of life and the individual in crisis and dominates what is called crisis intervention (Payne, 2008). The starting point is that individuals seeking help are in a form of crisis that is responded to with crisis intervention (or crisis work) (ibid.). This perspective omits aspects of crises associated with disasters. However, such aspects are addressed in the second, task-centered perspective, which addresses specific problems. A variant of this is the so-called crisis teams with a focus on the processing of traumatic process that has been addressed in research (Nieminen Kristofersson, 2002). Lastly, there is the perspective that in terms of risk and prognosis develops epidemiological and social-psychological models of childcare for preventive and treatment (Lagerberg & Sundelin, 2000). In terms of publication, some dissertations in other disciplines with relevance for social work are available (such as Guldåker, 2009 in geography; Sparf 2014 in sociology). In addition, there are valuable scientific papers and reports (ex. Enander, 2006; FRIVA, 2007; Hallin et al. 2014) and 'grey literature' of high relevance for social work (reports, evaluations of interventions) from authorities and stakeholders with responsibilities in the area (e.g. the series of reports from the Rescue Department and the National Board of Health and Welfare).

An appraisal of social dimensions

During the last decades, social dimensions, as opposed to the view of crises and disasters as emerging out of dimensions all 'given-by-nature', have been given more attention internationally as being crucial aspects in understanding and managing disasters (see for ex. Blaikie et al., 1996). 'Social' is given a broad understanding encompassing cultural, political as well as economic dimensions (McEntire, 2001). This interest is also reflected in the concept 'socio-natural disasters' (UNISDR, 2009). Possibly, this recognition of social dimensions can be related to the advanced modernity that generates both new risks and new endeavours to handle them (Beck, 1992; see also Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1993). In theory development there is an interest in how key analytic qualities of social structure and collective stress reflect patterns that might re-emerge in future disasters (Drabek, 2006). Theories of disaster vulnerability that contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of disasters with an emphasis on both societal and environmental causes of disasters, are forming a basis for fruitful community interventions to build resilience in vulnerable populations and communities (Zakour, 2011).

From the perspective of social work, the understanding of disaster can be incorporated in the mainstream perspective on social problems. 'Disaster' is from this perspective understood as a non-routinely social problem and a manifestation of latent conditions (Drabek, 2006). Such a 'social problems perspective' highlights both objective conditions and social definitions of human harm and social disruption as a theoretical framework. In order to capture how objective dimensions interrelate with the social definitions (involving human interpretation) there is a need to pay attention to what Drabek call 'mainstream social problem constructs' such as power, status, class, gender and ethnicity (ibid.).

Social risks and vulnerability, critical dependencies and threats to vulnerable individuals have always been part of the field of knowledge of social work (Soliman & Rogge, 2002). It has been argued that the 'emphasis on vulnerability brings social work into the heart of disaster work and research' (Gillespie & Danso, 2011). Thus, questions on crises and disasters are of ample relevance to social work and the distribution of risks as they reflect the underlying pattern of vulnerabilities. Such patterns of distribution emerge under the strong influence of Drabek's mainstream social problem constructs such as class, gender, ethnicity, age, functioning, immigration status (ibid.), and global distribution of resources and migration processes (Bjorngren Cuadra et al., 2013). Social differentiation may also have an impact on access to assistance and interventions in crises and disaster situations (Zakour & Harrell, 2003). There is a range of international studies of allocation of aid and resources that show that this tends to differ along the lines of power distribution in a society (see for example Duyne Barenstein (2013) on the impact of poverty on post-tsunami relocation; Hartman and Squires (2006) on the impact of racialized poverty in relation to hurricane Katrina). Illustrative Swedish experiences can be an identified concern relating to providing information to victims and those affected in multiple languages (Stockholm Fire Department, 2001) as well as a confirmed inertia to include religious communities outside the Swedish Church as an actor in crisis preparedness (SoS, 2009).

Challenges for social work in Sweden

As social work as a theoretical and practical field involves questions regarding processes that create and counteract social vulnerability as well as how social work can be organized and implemented to prevent and reduce social vulnerability, it might be surprising that Sweden did not develop disaster social work. However, coincidentally and as indicated above, the Public Social Services are considered to be a critical function of society (Governmental proposition 2007/08: 92) implying that the social services are necessary in managing crises and disasters. In the following section, this somewhat dual situation will be explored further aiming at addressing the two initial hypothesis concerning the Swedish approach of regarding social work in the context of disaster as a result of the structure and function of current civil contingency and protection systems as well as a path dependency in relation to a specific historically developed tradition of social work.

A fruitful starting point might be to put the UN definition of disaster (see Introduction above), which focuses on serious disruptions of the functioning of a community or a society as well as their ability to cope (UNISDR 2009), in a social work perspective. My first observation concerns the fact that social work has a dual foci; the individual and the social environment (Yan, 1998). The duality embedded in social work is a historic heritage reflecting on the one hand the Charity Organizations Society and on the other the Settlement Movement (Yan et al., 2012). The former gives priority to interventions at the individual and family level while the latter is geared towards social change and opens up for community based services and interventions (ibid.). As disasters are understood to affect communities and their

ability to cope and recover as recognized by the UN definition (Duyne Barbestein & Leemann, 2013), the interface between disaster interventions in this context and the very role of social work are dependent on the understanding of social work in terms of what is seen as its main focus.

As presented above, the responsibility for operations in the context of disasters lies primarily with the municipalities in Sweden and, as also was stated initially, the role of social work is relatively undeveloped and does not explicitly encompass a knowledge domain. As the municipalities are responsible for the Public Social Services under the Social Services Act, I argue that an understanding of the relatively weak role might benefit from considering the historical dual foci of social work. In this vein, it is heuristic to acknowledge that the main tradition within the Swedish Public Social Services is geared towards individuals and families. It most often involves investigation of conditions regarding economic support, child protection and substance abuse (Wahlberg, 2013). Approximately 10 percent of the population is in contact with the Public Social Service on a yearly basis. In most cases this occurs not as a free choice but rather out of necessity or at the initiative of the authorities themselves. As regards community work, there is a fairly weak tradition within the Public Social Services even though the Social Services Act does provide for such opportunities (*ibid.*).

I argue that the emphasis on individuals and families (case- work tradition) at the expense of community work can be a part of the explanation of why social work in Sweden is not understood as to be involved in the context of crises and disasters. The fact that the municipalities tend not to pursue their structurally oriented responsibility, encompassing the informing of the entire population, and take an active part in the planning of society, including crisis preparation, can be understood to be a concrete consequence. Given a strengthened structural perspective, I argue that social work has the potential to play a stronger and more explicit role in future disaster management and can contribute positively in developing community resilience. A stronger role would be in line with the principle of proximity.

In addition, social work would, due to its knowledge domain and sensitivity as regards processes involving social stratification, class, gender, and ethnicity as well as functioning and age, be prepared to cope with increased demands on the creation of legitimacy in terms of trust and confidence between institutional systems and people in general, as well as of special needs communities. This can be particularly important in the wake of new forms of social risks and vulnerabilities that will most likely be added to the existing list of 'natural' or 'man-made' crises and disasters. Trust and confidence building processes and creation of legitimacy affect the possibility of institutional cooperation with other agents (to reach 'emergency consensus') to have good communication with those affected and to promote recovery (Soliman & Rogge, 2002) as well as the ability to assess the capability of individuals (children and adults) to perceive and handle different situations (*cf.* MSB 2011 p.25). How actors, in their turn, assess the impact of social factors on how individuals perceive risks, will affect their ability to implement preventative work and make interventions (*i.e.* evacuation plans) that takes people's circumstances into account (Drabek, 2006). Accordingly, trust is a prerequisite for the ability to act adequately. Again, social work has a potential to have an impact in such processes. An example in this area could be the predicted global climate changes (IPCC, 2013). For example, in the case of a need to evacuate or even relocate a local community due to flooding, social work would have a salient role in the relocation process as well as mitigating social effects.

Another example in terms of crises that call for a stronger social work approach than today is the social unrest, such as 'youth riots', in the wake of a restructuring welfare state that Sweden has already witnessed (together with France and UK among other countries). In this context, extremist attacks are relevant to the approach from the perspective of social work. Other equally possible social

consequences of crisis imperative to social work in the future relate to a restructuring of the global labour market that might give birth to 'mass unemployment'. In addition, is it advocated to consider migrants, irregular as well as regular, as a special needs community with increased social vulnerability. A current concern is the migrating EU citizens who lack or have unclear residence under the free movement within the EU.

Conclusion

Against this background, social work in Sweden and especially the Public Social Services as a main actor will need to redefine its rolls and functions and vitalize its interface to the existing contingency system. A strengthened structural perspective in social work seems to be called upon, and would imply a vitalization of community work and cooperation with civil society in order to take on a more explicit role within the system. It appears to me to be essential for social work, both as an academic multidisciplinary field and as practice field, to develop disaster social work as a knowledge domain. Such a domain implies deepening the understanding of new additional causes and new forms of expression of the risks as well as of the logics of these processes, the possible effects, and the actors (public, civil, private) that have to face the new risks and vulnerabilities. Consequently there is a need to develop concepts (indicators) useful in disaster social work to analyse, for example, preparedness and ability, planning, roles and responsibilities, trust and confidence, identification of the most vulnerable, operations of various kinds as well as monitoring and evaluation. In this venture, an international comparative perspective would be heuristic and favourable.

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