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THE INTRODUCTION OF THE CAPABILITY APPROACH IN SOCIAL WORK ACCROSS A NEOLIBERAL EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of the capability approach in social work across a neoliberal Europe
In the 1980s and 1990s, Amartya Sen developed the *capability approach* (CA) as an alternative to
the dominant models for economic growth. The capability approach puts human well-being at the
centre of thinking about human development. Sen's perspective on human development appears
to be very similar to the way social workers define the goals of their profession. The CA has led
to a tradition of highly qualified research that needs to be translated into the everyday practice

of social workers by applied researchers. The capability approach provides social workers with an action model, a model with which to legitimize their actions and an evaluative model for social policy. In general, actions and policies should be evaluated on the basis of how capable people are of living lives that they (reasonably) value. At the European level, the dominant neoliberal market thinking threatens the position of social workers and the welfare state (social services), which undermines well-being. From a Senian perspective, it is important that European policymakers do not use economics but human well-being as a starting point for development, resulting in the expansion of the freedom that people have to enjoy valuable beings and doings. It is argued that the expertise of social workers is indispensable in achieving this. Consequently in times of economic crisis, there should be more investment in social work and social education rather than less.

Keywords

Human development, well-being, capability approach, social work, neoliberalism

SAMENVATTING

De introductie van de capability approach in het sociaal werk in de context van een neoliberaal Europa

In de jaren '80 en '90 van de vorige eeuw ontwikkelde Amartya Sen de *capability approach* (CA) als een alternatief voor ontwikkelingsmodellen waarin economische groei centraal staat. Met de capability approach wil Sen menselijk welzijn centraal stellen in het denken over ontwikkeling. Sen's perspectief op ontwikkeling komt sterk overeen met de manier waarop sociaal werkers mensen tot hun recht willen laten komen in de samenleving. De CA heeft geleid tot een traditie van hoog gekwalificeerd wetenschappelijk onderzoek waar voor onderzoekers de taak ligt de vertaalslag te maken naar de beroepspraktijk van sociaal werkers. De CA biedt sociaal werkers een handelingsmodel, een model voor legitimatie van het handelen en een evaluatief model voor het handelen van de sociaal werker én beleidsmakers. In het algemeen dienen professioneel handelen en beleid afgerekend te worden op de mate waarin mensen in staat zijn om een goed leven te leiden. In Europa staat door het dominante neoliberaal denken de positie van de sociaal werker, de welvaartstaat en daarmee ook menselijk welzijn onder druk. Vanuit Seniaans perspectief is het daarentegen van belang dat Europese beleidsmakers bij het bestrijden van de crisis niet economische criteria maar het menselijk welzijn als uitgangspunt nemen voor beleid, resulterend in de toename van de vrijheid van mensen om te zijn wie ze willen zijn en te doen wat ze willen

doen. De inzet van de expertise van sociaal werkers is daarbij onontbeerlijk. In tijden van crisis dient daarom eerder geïnvesteerd dan bezuinigd te worden op sociaal werk en onderwijs.

Trefwoorden

Menselijke ontwikkeling, welzijn, capability approach, sociaal werk, neoliberalisme

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Amartya Sen developed the *capability approach* (CA) in the 1980s and 1990s. The reason he proposed this new theory on human development was, he asserted, the excessive emphasis on economic criteria and growth when it came to development, rather than on human well-being. He maintained that this should be the other way round, with well-being as the main focus for human development. Sen's ideas have had a global impact on thinking about human development. An example of this was his creation of the UN Human Development Index (HDI) together with the Pakistani economist Ul Haq in 1990. The HDI is based on Sen's capability approach and focuses on three dimensions: life expectancy at birth, education (average number of years of schooling) and a decent standard of living measured by per capita gross national income. In 2004, Sen founded the Human Development and Capability Association together with Martha Nussbaum and Frances Stewart. The mission of this foundation is:

> To promote high quality research in the interconnected areas of human development and capability […] While primarily an academic body, the Association shall bring together those primarily involved in academic work with practitioners who are involved in, or interested in, the application of research from the fields of human development and capability to the problems they face. (HDCA, 2013)

This article seeks to contribute to this aspiration by introducing the capability approach and exploring its relevance to social work in a Europe that is dominated by neoliberal, market-oriented

policies. The article begins with a reflection on current European developments; it demonstrates the need for a people-centred approach to human development that focuses on human well-being rather than on economic growth. It then goes on to explain the capability approach as a people-centred human development theory – providing a basic introduction to Sen's ideas. The subsequent section explores the relevance of this theory to the domain of social work. It demonstrates that the capability approach can serve as a basis for action, as a normative framework, and as an evaluative instrument for social intervention, social policies and social arrangements. Then, the effects of neoliberal policies in Europe on the social work profession are discussed from the perspective of the capability approach. It is argued that professional support from social workers is crucial in achieving well-being, especially in regions affected by the economic crisis. The article closes with a brief conclusion and some tentative remarks.

THE NEED FOR A PEOPLE-CENTERED APPROACH TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Looking at today's national and international human development policies, there is still a very strong emphasis on economic growth. For example, all the effort directed at the European financial crisis focused on saving the economic and financial system (in the form of the euro), while ignoring the consequences for the people affected by these measures. Serious policies relating to these consequences are still lacking. Non-transparent financial institutions with no democratic basis are dictating national and European policies, while the disruptive social effects, such as youth unemployment rates of almost 60 per cent in some European regions, are being ignored. In the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, Von Randow (2013) discusses the issue of about 8 million young Europeans who are unemployed and have little or no chance of entering the labour market. He raises the question of who is helping them to deal with the consequences of unemployment, such as depression, poverty, and the loss of their social skills and social bonds. This clearly demonstrates the need for a more people-centred approach. The implications for contemporary market-oriented politics will now be explored in more detail at the micro, meso and macro levels.

To begin with the national (macro) level, politicians seem to be more concerned about how they are viewed by credit rating agencies than the citizens they represent. Of course, economic and financial stability are important (for maintaining the welfare state, among other things) but if national authorities ignore the discontent of such a substantial section of their populations, they risk losing their democratic legitimacy, and people will express their dissatisfaction one way or another. The rise of a range of popular and protest movements such as the Movimiento 15-M (indignados) in Spain is

an example of this, as are the Five Star Movement of Beppe Grillo in Italy, those who are retreating from society in autonomous self-reliant projects such as collective farming, and nationalist groups with a strong aversion to Europe who claim that adhering to local and national traditions is the solution to global problems. Too often, these nationalist groups harbour far-right sentiments, such as the Golden Dawn Party in Greece, the Front National in France or the Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. If the EU and nation states continue to ignore the voice of a substantial number of their own citizens, the risk of a violent revolution or aggressive protests will increase and pose a real threat to democracy in general and in particular to the wonderful project of a united, peaceful and prosperous Europe. Recent unrest in Sweden (May 2013), and some years ago in cities such as Paris (2005 and 2007) and London (2011) are symptomatic of groups that feel ignored by traditional politicians. These "small-scale" and localized eruptions of violence are probably precursors to worse things to come. Moreover, in the latest World of Work Report (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2013), the International Labour Organization concludes that the risk of social unrest has increased, especially in Europe, and that this increase is:

> … likely to be due to the policy responses to the on-going sovereign debt crisis and their impacts on people's lives and perceptions of well-being. […] Between 2010 and 2012, the countries that experienced the sharpest increases in the risk of social unrest were Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. (ILO, 2013, pp.14–15)

Not surprisingly, the countries mentioned are those worst affected by the crisis.

While the EU prioritizes stimulating economic growth in its thinking on human development, there are countries and regions in the world that put human well-being at the centre of their policies. A well-known example of this is Bhutan, which gauges its national development in terms of gross national happiness, instead of the gross domestic product. They employ qualitative as well as quantitative indicators for development, such as economic, environmental, physical, mental, workplace, social and political wellness indicators.

Continuing our exploration at the meso level, it seems that in many organizations (profit and non-profit), a neoliberal mode of thought predominates. John Harris summarized this way of thinking as follows:

> Neoliberalism is characterized by marketization (markets are efficient and effective and should be introduced in as many contexts as possible), consumerization (individuals should be respon-

sible for themselves and run their own lives as far as possible) and managerialization (services in the public and voluntary sectors should be modelled on management knowledge and techniques drawn from the private business sector). (Harris, cited by Blok, 2012, p.18)

This notion is based on the principles of scientific management by Charles Taylor who focused on efficiency, control and the division of labour. He laid the foundation for concepts such as standardization, the division between cerebral and manual labour, radical specialization (the right man in the right place) and measuring is knowing (Van Hulst, 2011). As far as the practice of social work is concerned, Mark Garavan concludes the following:

> Managerialist monitoring activity has led to a distorting emphasis on performance measurables, target achievements and output deliverables. This has encouraged a focus away from the mutually subjective quality of social worker interaction with their clients towards a concern to "objectively" demonstrate the achievement of pre-determined outcomes. In many instances, relationships have become secondary to results. (Garavan, 2013, pp.6–7)

Fortunately, people-centred approaches are now emerging. Examples in both the non-profit sector and, remarkably, in the profit sector, show that management can be more people-centred when professionals and clients are the focus of attention. For instance, Ricardo Semler, CEO of SEMCO in Brazil, thinks that the idea of absolute control is an illusion and that it is better to give employees greater freedom and responsibility. He introduced a kind of industrial democracy which turned out to be a great economic success in terms of profitability. Another remarkable example is 'Netherlands Neighbourhood Care'. There are no managers in this organization because all work is done by small teams of nurses and healthcare workers who are responsible for providing care, organization and financing, with their clients as the point of departure. In 2011 and 2012 'Netherlands Neighbourhood Care' was awarded the prize for best employer in the Netherlands in the category of companies with over 1,000 employees (Buurtzorg Nederland, 2013).

Finally, at the micro (individual) level, the Belgian psychologist Paul Verhaeghe made some striking observations based on his work as a psychotherapist on the subject of the dominance of neoliberal thinking in society. Based on his experiences as a therapist, Verhaeghe concludes that the neoliberal way of thinking is destroying the social bonds that used to be an essential part of our identity. Currently, the neoliberal market-oriented struggle for survival and the survival of the fittest are the dominant discourse. Verhaeghe argues that this school of thought leads to a loss of

self-awareness, disorientation and despair. He also suggests that fear and a feeling of helplessness prevent the necessary collective protest against the neoliberal mind-set (Verhaeghe, 2012a,b).

In summary, people themselves should be placed at the centre of societal, organizational and individual levels of human development. At all three levels, the capability approach offers a sound theoretical framework for people-centred human development which is also underpinned by a great number of empirical studies, many of which are accessible via the HDCA association.

WHAT IS THE CAPABILITY APPROACH?

The CA comprises a number of core concepts that together shape the foundation of the approach. In this section, the CA is explained by defining and describing these core concepts. By explaining the CA, its significance in providing a more people-centred approach will be illuminated.

Freedom

The basic assumption of the CA is that human development depends on the freedom to achieve a life that one has reason to value. Freedom is an essential concept because it coincides with development; if there is no freedom there can be no development. Freedom is seen in a positive way, emphasizing the power and resources to realize one's own potential. In his book *Development as Freedom* (1999, pp. 38–40), Sen distinguishes five different instrumental freedoms that contribute to the overall freedom that people have:

1. political (democratic) liberties and civil rights, such as the freedom to vote and criticize authorities, freedom of the press, and so forth;
2. economic facilities, such as the opportunity to earn an income and access to finance and resources;
3. social opportunities, such as social arrangements for education and health so that people can improve their lives;
4. transparency guarantees, such as knowing what to expect in life, the existence of openness and trust, and a society free of corruption;
5. protective security, such as social security to protect people from starvation or death.

Capabilities and functionings

The idea of freedom is expressed through capabilities, which involve the real opportunities that people have in the life that they lead. In other words, a capability involves the freedom to choose

from a set of alternative lives that people want to lead. The most commonly used definition of capability is "the various combinations of functionings that a person can achieve; capability is a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 31; Alkire, 2005, p. 121). This introduces the concept of "functionings", which can be defined as "the various things a person may value doing or being" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 31). Functionings are the activities and states or situations that people spontaneously recognize as important; they make up a person's being. People have diverse values and experiences, so there is no hierarchy in functionings. Achieved functionings are measurable, observable and comparable; for example, literacy, life expectancy, health, and sports activities. Functionings are all "ends" of human life but they can also be the "means". They can be elementary like avoiding morbidity and mortality, or striving for nourishment; or they can be complex like self-respect, participation in community life, or the ability to speak in public without feeling shame. Functionings can be general, like the capability of nourishment, or they can be specific, like the capability of drinking 7 Up or coffee (Alkire, 2002, 2003, 2005).

To summarize, capabilities involve being able to choose (freedom) who you want to be (beings) and what you want to do (doings). Since this is dependent on the context (for example, who I want to be at home (a good partner to my wife) is different from who I want to be at work (a good teacher to the students) or on subjective differences in how functionings are valued, we can speak about different capability sets.

Human agency

Freedom, from the CA perspective, covers two different aspects: the freedom process, which concerns the ability to *act* to do what matters, and freedom of opportunity, which refers to the actual opportunity to achieve the functionings that are valued. The process aspect of freedom relates to the concept of human agency: "it is the ability to pursue goals that one values and has reason to value" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 31). Agency refers to people acting alone or collectively to pursue desirable goals and bring about change. For social workers in particular, the acting agent is a crucial factor in achieving goals in human life.

Commodities/resources

The last concept of CA to be discussed are commodities, or resources. Commodities are goods and services. They should not necessarily be thought of as exchangeable for income or money. A

commodity has certain characteristics that make people want it (Robeyns, 2003). Commodities are very important in pursuing and realizing functionings.

From commodity to utility

The different constituents of the CA are the best respresented schematically:

Commodity	→	Capability	→	Functioning	→	Utility
Bike		*Ability to ride around town*		*Riding around town*		*Happiness*

Figure 1: From commodity to utility (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

The relationship between commodity and functioning is influenced by three *conversion factors* who are responsible for using the (available) commodities in the right way to achieve peoples goals. These conversion factors are: personal characteristics (e.g. social norms, gender roles) and environmental characteristics (e.g. climate, infrastructure, public goods and services) (Robeyns, 2003, pp.12–13). This means that for a person who lives in a place where there are only muddy roads and where biking is regarded as low status, dangerous and bad for your health, it is more likely that biking is something that will be equated with a futile experience. Robeyns captured the concept of the CA in the following schematic (2003, p. 12):
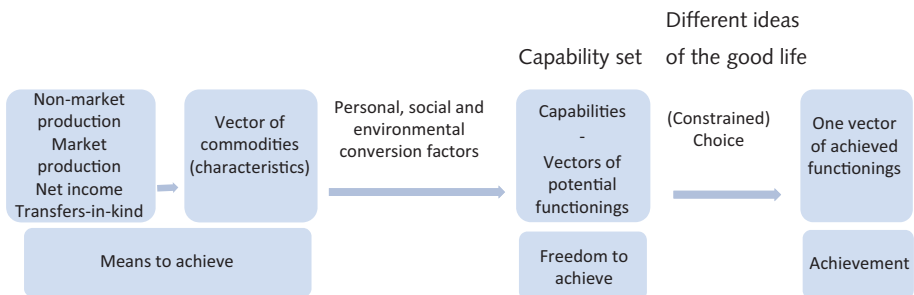

Figure 2: The CA: from means to achievement (Robeyns, 2003).

As Robeyns (2003) makes clear, commodities are important in achieving functionings; however, Alkire (2005) warns that commodity approaches overemphasize commodities compared to basic needs approaches, and that we should remember that commodities are only the means to achieving a good life and not an end in themselves.

Looking at all the core concepts of the CA together, as in figure 2, the theory can be recapitulated as follows: people want to live the lives they have reason to value; to achieve a good life, they need commodities as well as the freedom and capacity to convert these commodities into valued functionings – beings and doings. Obviously, not all people are able to succeed in their ambitions. This is where social work comes in.

THE CAPABILITY APPROACH AND SOCIAL WORK

The global definition of social work is illuminating when seeking to clarify the relationship between the capability approach and social work. The International Federation of Social Workers defines social work as follows:

> The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, *social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being* [italics added]. (International Federation of Social Workers, 2013)

Two definitions of human development help us to identify the connection between the capability approach and social work. The first definition comes from Mahbub ul Haq, founder of the Human Development Reports:

> The basic purpose of development is to enlarge people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and can change over time. People often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not immediately, in income or growth figures: greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political and cultural freedoms and sense of participation in community activities. *The objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives* [italics added]. (Haq, 2013)

The second comes from Amartya Sen:

> Human development, as an approach, is concerned with what I take to be the basic development idea: namely, *advancing the richness of human life* [italics added], rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only a part of it. (Sen, 2013)

The italicized sections in the citations demonstrate the interconnection between the various definitions and demonstrate that the purpose of development theories, the capability approach and the mission of social work are similar. We will now take this observation one step further by relating the core concepts of the CA to social work strategies and tools. This will allow us to identify those strategies or tools that can play an important part in fostering a sense of well-being and to discover how the CA can legitimize social work actions.

Table 1 illustrates how the key terms of the CA are connected with the basic strategies of social work. The table also underpins the three different functions of the CA in relation to social work. First and foremost, the table shows that all the core concepts of the capability approach can be connected with typical social work strategies and programmes, and these connections work in both directions. This means that the capability approach can serve as *a theory of action* for professional social workers, because for every basic strategy used by social workers the capability approach offers directions, and this also works the other way round. For example, community development is a type of social work that serves to enhance political freedom by strengthening the public debate, and vice versa: since civil rights are important for human development, social workers should make their contribution by empowering people to take part in public debates. Moreover, the core concepts mentioned in the table are all related to the main concepts of the CA: capabilities and functionings. To demonstrate, an example of this relationship is added to every core concept.

Secondly, the CA can serve as an imperative *normative framework* that legitimizes the strategies and tools of the social workers as indicated in Table 1, because the social worker's professional agency (as someone who acts alone or collectively to bring about change) focuses on enhancing people's freedom to lead the lives they want to live with reason (for social workers, vulnerable and deprived people in particular). This applies to the micro level of individuals, the meso level of organizations, and the macro level of society as a whole.

Thirdly, the CA can be used as an *evaluative instrument* for social policies, arrangements and actions. An example of this is the UN Human Development Index that Sen developed as an indicator of national economic and social progress. Similarly, the human capabilities list by Nussbaum (2000) is often used as an evaluative instrument for social policies, actions and arrangements. From the perspective of the CA, the most important point of reference for social policies and actions is the extent to which people are free to live the lives they have reason to value.[1]

Table 1: The CA and social work strategies as a toolbox (international social work programmes and strategies as defined by Cox & Pawar, 2013, pp. 105–144)

Core concepts CA	Social work strategies
Political liberty and civil rights (e.g. the freedom to choose to vote in local elections)	Community development and collective empowerment/public debate/participative democracy/civil society
Economic freedom, facilities, commodities, resources (e.g. the freedom to start a business)	Income generation/capacity building/improving entrepreneurship/ economic capital
Social opportunities (the freedom to go school)	Capacity building/social education/healthcare/ empowerment
Transparency (e.g. the freedom to ask my neighbours to do my shopping in case of illness)	Enhancing social integration and social cohesion/building trust relationships/ building- bridging social capital
Protective security (e.g. the freedom to make use of government support when unemployed)	Social security and social services
Agency (e.g. the freedom to select and organize the holiday destination I desire).	Self-help and self-reliance/individual empowerment/self-awareness/education/ cultural capital/resilience/self-organization/ self-regulation

The case of "Artilabo": an example of linking CA with social work

Sen's theory implies that when social workers help their clients fulfil their potential, they contribute their clients' freedom to achieve the functionings they value. Indeed, social workers are equipped with a set of strategies or tools for this task (see Table 1). The professional skills of social workers enable them to support their clients in exploiting and enhancing their capabilities. An interesting example of this is "Artilabo", an initiative of the Amarant Foundation in the Netherlands (Artilabo, 2013). Artilabo comprises an art studio, a gallery, an art library, and a shop, all run by people with intellectual disabilities. The aim of the initiative is for the participants to lead a life that is as autonomous, independent and fulfilling as possible. Their creative skills and abilities of each individual are the starting point from which they can proceed to develop and grow with the support of a professional artist and a social worker. The social worker uses strategies and tools such

as self-organization, arrangement and facilitation of the studio and the gallery, and developing the necessary personal skills (see Table 1). Since participants are offered the full scope to develop their talents with the support of a social worker, they can choose to fulfil their desire to be an artist and thereby achieve a life they value. It is also a reasonable choice since the achievement is based on their own talents, so their choice is likely to be feasible and realistic.

This example demonstrates that enabling people to live the lives that they value is about getting as much out of life as possible, using every opportunity to realize one's potential, and that the professional skills and tools of a social worker are indispensable for making projects such as Artilabo successful and enabling humans to flourish.

THE CAPABILITY APPROACH AND SOCIAL WORK IN A NEOLIBERAL EUROPE

As discussed previously, contemporary neoliberal policies run counter to people-centred human development. The historian Tony Judt makes the following criticism of neoliberalism:

> […] the obsession with wealth creation, the cult of privatization and the private sector, the growing disparities of rich and poor. And above all the rhetoric that accompanies these: uncritical admiration for unfettered markets, disdain for the public sector, the delusion of endless growth. (Judt, 2010, p. 2)

This disdain for the public sector was expressed in no uncertain terms by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who said: "There is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women and there are families." This line of thinking is now easy to spot in contemporary Europe; for example, in the "Big Society" that has been advocated by current British Prime Minister David Cameron since 2010, which boils down to the idea that people can take care of themselves very well, without the help of the (welfare) state. According to this philosophy, investing in the social domain is no longer necessary because people can take care of themselves; and if they cannot, they should appeal to the local community involving friends, neighbours, family, the church and charitable institutions. Enabling and allowing autonomous local communities to flourish is what Cameron calls the Big Society (Socversity, 2013).

Questions need to be asked, however, about whether people are capable of recognizing the qualities, interests and motivations of, for example, someone living with an intellectual disability, or how to

deal with a juvenile addict suffering from schizophrenia who needs care but who does not want it? The importance of social work in these matters is neglected and current politics often overlook what Richard Sennet calls the "craftsmanship" of the social worker (Gradener, 2013). This blindness to the added value of social work professionals in society is resulting in major cutbacks in social care, welfare and social work in European countries. This can be seen, for instance, in the plans of the Greek Ministry of Education to close down social work schools as a part of their recently announced Higher Education Reform Plan (Lawrence, 2013).

If politicians continue to conceive of the social welfare purely in neoliberal terms of costs and if they continue to deny the craftsmanship of social professionals, social workers risk being viewed as redundant. In today's social Darwinian world, people are struggling to make it on their own in an open market, with only the fittest – in economic terms – managing to survive. As a result, many deprived and vulnerable people are not able to live the lives they have reason to value. Conversely, if politicians and other policymakers want to create an environment where people have the freedom to enjoy valuable beings and doings, then they must dare to replace the neoliberal market paradigm with a people-first paradigm. This should include the dedicated efforts of social workers in order to strengthen the well-being of vulnerable and deprived people and communities – after all, social workers are the experts in promoting human well-being, unlike economists or politicians. As such, social work and social work education should be supported rather than undermined. In light of Europe's current crisis, which has resulted in 8 million young unemployed people with unprecedentedly poor prospects, social workers are particularly indispensable. To put this in terms of the CA, social workers are needed to work with people who no longer have the freedom to lead the lives they value. For the sake of argument, here is one more illustration: 40 percent of young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years in the district Hammarkullen in Gothenburg, Sweden, are in neither education nor work. Community workers are being replaced by police officers while social services are being whittled away. Because of developments like these, Swedish sociologist Sove Sernhede (Luttikhuis, 2013) was not surprised by the violent riots that occurred in May 2013 in Gothenburg, Stockholm and Malmö.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

This article has presented Sen's capability approach and demonstrated its relevance to the field of social work professionals and policymakers. The CA offers an empirically grounded theoretical framework that can be used as a theory of action, as a normative framework that legitimizes social actions and as an evaluative instrument for social policies and arrangements. Furthermore, the CA implies that policymakers should develop people-first policies in order to create a society where

everyone, including the vulnerable and the deprived, can enjoy the freedom to develop their full potential. Expressed in an even more Senian manner: "policies should be evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings (beings and doings) they value" (Alkire, 2005). These policies should include the recognizing and supporting of social work and social work education in society.

This article was conceived as a first exploration of the usefulness of the CA for social workers, researchers, and policy makers. Further steps still need to be taken to make the CA more user-friendly for social workers – a task that, according to Alkire (2005), could be more of an art than a science. This means that there is still much work to do to put the CA into practice. For that reason, it is advisable for social workers and researchers to develop collaborative relationships to learn how to promote human well-being. It is equally important that social workers engage actively in promoting social welfare policies in Europe by supporting people-centred development and convincing politicians of the added societal value provided by social workers. There are signs that progress could be forthcoming on this point. The vast amount of research conducted by respected academics and policymakers that seems to show that a more people-centred approach may lead to greater appreciation for the role of social workers in handling the current economic crisis in Europe. One highly respected politician who advocates people-centred policies is Guy Verhofstadt, former Belgian Prime Minister and currently a member of the European Parliament and the leader of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). He is also the founder of the inter-parliamentarian federalist Spinelli Group which includes members such as Jacques Delors, Ulrich Beck, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Joschka Fischer and – there he is again – Amartya Sen. Sen who, as we have pointed out, offers a wonderful framework for the social worker as a craftsman pursuing human well-being for all – now and in the future!

NOTE

1 There are many evaluative assessment tools based on the CA, but a description of these lies beyond the scope of this article.

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