

Trends in Social Services: Opinions of the Municipal Management in Smaller and Larger Municipalities

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Abstract

Social services encompass a vast range of activities which gain in importance as the population of developed countries continues to age significantly and becomes more and more diverse in increasing number of aspects. Increasing expenditures on social services strain the public budgets and in some countries, the municipalities are obliged to secure provision of social services for their citizens. The paper deals with municipal perceptions of the social services which are offered in their territories to various groups of social services clients. As per two stage survey the municipalities are moderately satisfied with the social services provided in their territory. Significant difference may be recorded among smaller and larger municipalities in which the first tend to perceive the social services provided in their territories as less sufficient, especially for the client groups of senior citizens, the disabled people and those recently released from prisons. Small and larger municipalities alike are aware of the ageing of the population and in the future expect increase in demands for senior oriented social services which the small municipalities perceive as an issue to satisfactorily provide in the future.

Keywords: Czech Republic, municipalities, senior citizens, social policy, social services

1. Introduction

Social services encompass a vast range of activities which gain in importance as the population of developed countries continues to age significantly and becomes more and more diverse in increasing number of aspects. The model of providing of social services, however, differs significantly across Europe and even the European Union. Although there is a concept titled European social model, which Jepsen (2005) describes as an institution which at the same time exercises undertakings to obtain both economic growth and social cohesion, it has been strongly affected my number of events occurring on the global scale. Sapir (2006) argues there is no such single model and divides European countries into four groups and names the

Nordic, the Anglo-Saxon, the Continental and the Mediterranean model. The first two he considers efficient, the two following unsustainable. The countries he names in connection with different models, however, include only southern and western parts of Europe. Similarly Esping-Andersen (1990) formulates his opinion on the three regimes of welfare states - liberal welfare regime, conservative welfare regime and social democratic regime - and does not deal overly with the post-communist countries in general and the Czech Republic in particular. Even though the post-communist regimes have already seen quite a bit of development after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, these countries are still often excluded from classification such as the aforementioned ones, while still being significantly different among themselves (Žukowski 2009). The attributes found in the Czech Republic, its social policy, including the development are described for example in Večerník (1993, 2005), Orenstein (1995) and more recently in Večerník (2008) or Aspalter, Jinsoo and Sojeung (2009).

The expenditures on the matter of social services, which in some countries semi-include services of health care as well, are under constant strain (Izák & Dufková 2006). In some countries, such as the Czech Republic, the responsibility for the provision of social services is shifted to lower administrative levels which, in theory, should be better aware of the needs of individuals who live in their territories. This responsibility is greatly demanding as far as the municipal budgets and strategies are concerned and the representatives of the municipalities and even regions must plan accordingly (Pilát 2015). The paper focuses on provision of social services, which in the Czech Republic, is the responsibility of the municipalities. Governed by Act on Social services no. 108/2006 Sb., there is a precise enumeration of existing services and rather broad responsibility of the municipalities to ensure the provision of and information on the social services to the inhabitants of the groups of inhabitants in their territory. According to the same law, the municipality is also obliged to cooperate with other administrative levels.

The question of price of social services is pressing, too. The clients, who use the social services, tend sometimes to belong among the lower income groups and thus are unable to pay full market price for such services (Cordery 2012). Apart from the financial strain, there is constant struggle to deal with the concept of client of social services. The client may be seen as a person somewhat dependent of a provider of social service who is unable to take care of themselves sufficiently (McLaughlin 2008; Nečasová, Dohnalová & Řídlová 2012). However, this is obviously an undesirable situation as the client is now in a position to decide as much as possible with respect to care they obtain and the commercial character of the social services which is even more prevalent reflects the client's strengthened position (McDonals 2006). The situation in the Czech Republic, which is the territory of interest in this paper, is further complicated by the fact, that the actively working population pays a type of social insurance throughout their working lives which, supposedly, should cover a part of expenses, which the individual then feel entitled to for free. Arnoldová (2012) speaks of three pillars of the Czech social insurance which include a compulsory state governed system of paying certain part of earnings, second pillar is represented by inter-generational cohesion and network it creates, the third pillar then is the individual responsibility of persons. Currently the system of funding the social services in the Czech Republic relies on funds from multiple sources. Besides the public funding, there are private resources being incorporated ever more (Huber 2007).

There are multiple groups of clients and mostly are divided into groups reflecting the type of social service they make use of. Considering the social services in the Czech Republic, the client groups include senior citizens, chronically ill, physically disabled, mentally ill, families with children, people at risk of death or injury, addicts, people at risk of violent behaviour of another person, the homeless, people under 26 years of age living at risk of

encountering socially undesirable phenomena, people released from prisons, people leading a risky way of life, persons in a difficult situation they are unable by themselves to solve, as per the Act on Social Services.

This paper deals with the municipal perceptions of the social services which are offered in their territories to various groups of social services clients. The aim is to interpret the available data obtained via a survey and focus on the differences between small and large municipalities.

2. Methods used in research

Since the research presented focuses on the difference between small municipalities and the larger one. The Czech Republic is characteristic by a rather small average number of inhabitants in a municipality and a rather fragmented structure of settlement comparable perhaps only to France in European context (Hampl & Müller 1998). The smaller municipalities suffer negative consequences of their size with respect to decline in offer of most services and infrastructure (Maříková 2005), their functions are reduced to merely being a place for housing (Illner 2006) and they suffer from inefficiency considering the running of local government for smaller number of people. The ideal size of a municipality is uncertain and subject to numerous studies which do not give a precise answer. Currently, the Czech Republic has 6258 municipalities as recorded by the Czech Statistical Office and the beginning of the year 2016. Although some researchers give the size of a small municipality as that with less than 2000 inhabitants (Illner 2006; Maříková 2005), this paper focuses on a specific subset of municipalities within a single administrative region on the borders with neighbouring Slovakia – Zlín Region. The statistical characteristics of the municipalities are such that among the 307 existing units the average number of inhabitants per municipality is 1 904 and median size is 737 in a set of municipalities that range in size from 38 to 75 171 inhabitants.

The survey itself was carried out among 307 municipalities of Zlín Region, which were asked to express a degree of agreement on a Likert scale with certain statements concerning the sufficiency of social services offer for various target groups. In accordance with the Act on Social Services and other literature (Bareš 2008; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic 2011; Matoušek 2007; Matoušek, Kodymová & Koláčková 2005) the survey distinguished among following groups: senior citizens, families with children, physically and mentally disabled people, people released from prison and the homeless people. The survey resulted in 215 answers used in the evaluation detailed in following chapter.

The municipalities taking part in the survey were of various sizes, the range of the sizes fits that of entire Zlín Region as both the smallest and the most populous municipality chose to participate. Considering the characteristics of the Zlín Region municipalities, the size of 737 inhabitants, the size corresponding to the median of the municipality size in the region, was chosen to mark the smaller municipalities. Thus 98 smaller municipalities answered to 117 larger. After the first survey concerning merely the degree of agreement, the municipalities were contacted again to give follow-up answer to open questions dealing with

3. Results

The data gathered on the various groups were processed in the SPSS statistical software by means of t-test. The first group tested was the senior population. This group is fairly well known and object of multiple research studies as the ageing of the population is Europe-wide issue. Given the results, as presented in table 1, the test indicates an existence of a difference between the smaller and larger municipalities. As to the reasons, we may suspect that the senior citizens are recipients of rather wide variety of social services interconnected with health services ranging from general to specialized which tend to concentrate in the larger municipalities or their hinterland. The second tested group were the families with children. As with the seniors, this group is rather large and as it is also tied to a certain point of human life, present just about on every municipal territory. This group, however, gives no indication of significant difference in the smaller and larger municipalities. Disabled people as well as the people who have recently been released from prisons both show that there is a significant difference of the services that are offered in small and larger municipalities, the homeless, however, show no such situation occurring.

Table 1: Independent sample t-test for the client groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Senior citizens	Equal variances assumed	.119	.730	-3.587	213	.000	-.508	.142	-.788	-.229
Families with children	Equal variances assumed	.778	.379	-1.351	210	.178	-.180	.133	-.442	.082
Disabled people	Equal variances assumed	.551	.459	-2.084	211	.038	-.290	.139	-.563	-.016
People released from prison	Equal variances assumed	1.580	.210	2.090	213	.038	.348	.166	.020	.676
Homeless	Equal variances assumed	.006	.938	.609	211	.543	.115	.189	-.257	.487

Source: authors

The results of testing suggested the existence of difference in the groups of senior citizens, disabled people and people released recently from the prisons, which may be now described in more detail.

The senior citizens are a group for whom the social services are described as more likely sufficient in larger municipalities, whereas in the smaller ones the satisfaction with the services on offer is lower. In the follow-up survey, 90 % of the municipalities indicated, they expect a growth in demand for social services offered to senior citizens. To further impart the importance of this citizen group, it must be said that 20 % of surveyed municipalities expect that the social service offer for this group will become a prevalent issue in the future as the municipalities expect decrease in familial care, lack of available places to live, especially in senior oriented housing with complementary health care services. While the expectation of increased demands for services for this group are equally distributed among smaller and larger municipalities, the smaller municipalities expect more often that they will have trouble to provide these citizens with sufficient services in the future.

The disabled people with any form of disability, whether physical or mental, are perceived to be worse off in smaller municipalities as far as the social services for them are concerned. While the larger municipalities indicate moderate satisfaction, the smaller indicate moderate dissatisfaction with the social services offer. While the disabled people are a group with apparently unsatisfying social services in smaller municipalities, the expectation of increase in the demand for such services are overall smaller and there are scant indications of the municipalities being worried for the future provisions.

The former prisoners are a group which is not sufficiently provided for. This situation is worse in the smaller municipalities which indicate severe dissatisfaction with the services for this group, the larger municipalities record only moderate dissatisfaction. The overall dissatisfaction, however, concerns the present situation as there are no indicators of future issues with connected social services, nor do the municipalities expect an increase in demand for the social services connected with this group.

4. Conclusion

There are different approaches to the area of social policy not only in the world, but even within more cohesive transnational units such as the Europe and European Union. The paper presented deals with offer of social services which are essential part of social policy in various municipalities of the Czech Republic. The authors focused mainly on the difference between smaller and larger municipalities. Given the characteristics of territory subjected to the research, municipalities with smaller than the median size were considered as smaller. The authorities in the municipalities were then surveyed as to the offer of social services for various groups of clients. The groups recognized were senior citizens, families with children, physically and mentally disabled people, people released from prison and the homeless people. Out of these groups the senior citizens, disabled people and people released recently from prison are recorded as those, for whom the offer of social services significantly varies in the two types of municipalities. The prevalent concern is for the senior citizens, which was further evidenced by additional survey. The municipalities expect both increase in demand of social services for the senior citizens and especially those small foresee issues with providing them. No other client group is seen as more progressing in number and in importance.

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