

Technology and Social Work : a question of identities ?

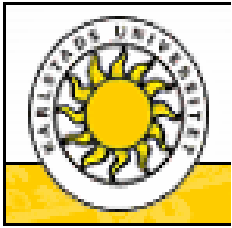
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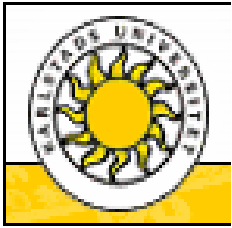
I. Presentation

Two mains questions

- What is the impact of introducing ICT in social organizations on the work and identity of workers of Belgian Social Public Action Centers (CPAS) ?
- Is there a cultural shock between frameworks of ICT and of social work ?

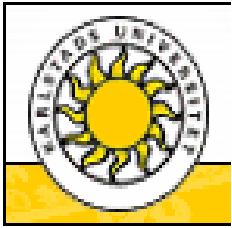
Six parts

- ❑ **Empirical research**
- ❑ **The universe of social work and its evolution**
- ❑ **Identity perspective**
- ❑ **The place of technology in social work**
- ❑ **Confrontation** between frameworks of ICT and of social work
- ❑ **Practical recommendations and conclusions**



II. Research projet

- ❑ Holistic and empirical research about computerisation in Belgian Public Action Center (CPAS)
- ❑ Period : November 2005 to june 2007
- ❑ Interdisciplinary team and point of view
 - ❑ Sociological (organisational challenges of computerization)
 - ❑ Legal (legal challenges concerning ICT : personal data, electronic signature, use of ICT by workers,...)
 - ❑ Psychological (users of social centers and digital divide)
- ❑ Data-collection : visits, interviews, big survey, book...
- ❑ **A work in close relationship with workers**



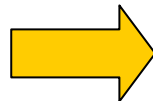
II. About CPAS

About CPAS ...

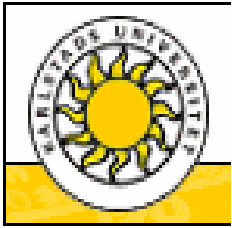
- Belgian Public Action Center
- One in each municipality (589 in Belgium)
- In charge social help of citizens (material, legal, financial help...)
- Independent juridical statute but execution of decisions and laws coming from various level of power (Belgian Federal State, regions, provinces, municipalities, ...)

CPAS are really concerned about computerization

- Social professions have a frequent use of ICT in various fields (communication, human resources, management, secretarial work, treatments of users, accountancy, ...)
- Since the 1st January 2006 : **national obligation** for CPAS to be connected to a national computerized network of data-bank concerning users



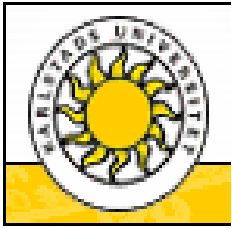
New challenges are interesting to observe !!



III. The universe of social work and its evolution

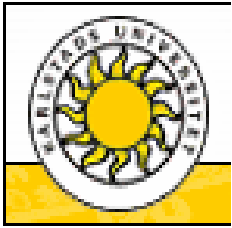
Poverty, social work and missions of CPAS have evolved in accordance with their time, since 1970 to now...

- ❑ Social care (1970), to social integration (1990) to social action (2002)
- ❑ Greater diversification of social care activities (housing, debt mediation, management of old people's houses, family services, catering, ,...)
- ❑ Greater diversification of benefitors (citizen being not necessarily in conditions to receive financial help can also benefit from services ex: old people's home or family services)
- ❑ Bigger interconnection with other actors (public authorities, associations, subsidiary powers, companies, ...)



IV. Identity perspective

- ❑ Psycho-sociological point of view : H. Tajfel and J. Turner (1978)
- ❑ Social identity as *“a part of individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.”*
- ❑ Identity is independent from objectives properties
- ❑ Three components of identity
 - ❑ Cognitive component (knowledge of a group)
 - ❑ Evaluative component (positive or negative value connotation)
 - ❑ Emotional component (emotions directed towards one’s group or towards others : love, shame, ...)



IV. 5 ways of conceiving social work

(Bajoit and Franssen 1997-1998, Monique Wautelet 2004)

Two axis of identity

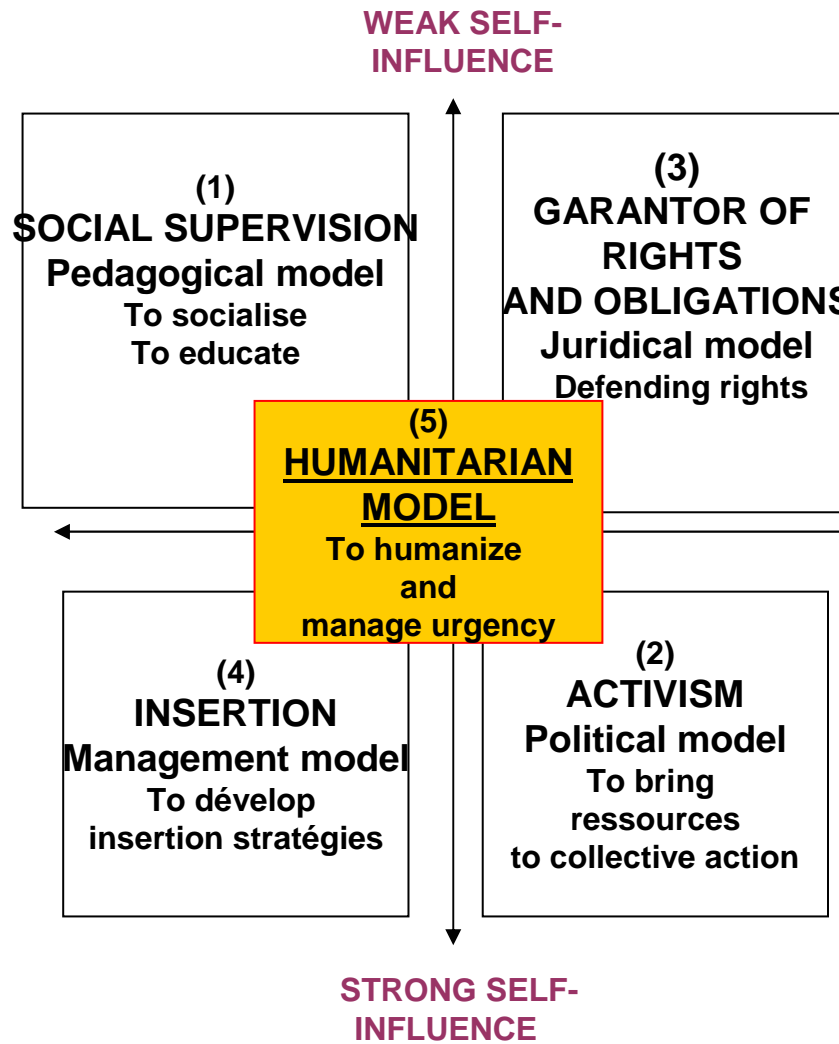
Axis 2 : Capacity of individuals to change their situation

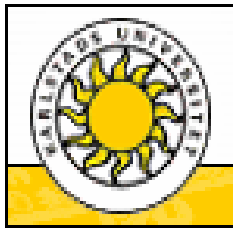


INDIVIDUAL CAUSES

STRUCTURAL CAUSES

Axis 1 : Causes of marginality





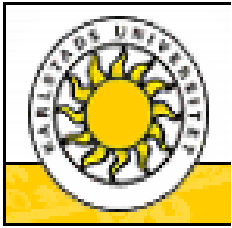
V. The place of ICT in identity of social work

How are ICT integrated in the identity of social work ?

I. Cognitive component of ICT

Two spontaneous visions

- Computerisation viewed as a tool, helpful for social action with different benefits (to gain time, increase speed in the treatment of documents, be more efficient...)
- Computerisation viewed as a barrier (needing special qualifications to use or to repair it, adaptation period, ...)



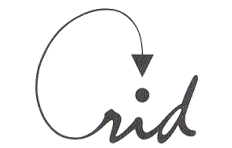
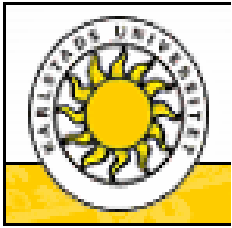
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II. Evaluative component of ICT: A positive but restrained opinion

- **Efficiency of computerization is mainly underlined (96%)**
 - Improvement of internal communication and facilitation of the exchanges of information (73%)
 - Acceleration of the treatment of documents (74%)
 - Increasing of the capacity of action and resolution of problems by a better access of each worker to information (84%)

- **Risks are less recognized / admitted**
 - Computerization implies a better control of the work of employees (**only** 22%)
 - « Computerization » burdens social work : complexity, difficulties of uses (**only** 36%)
 - ICT decrease freedom of employees for the treatment of documents concerning social assistance (**only** 26%)

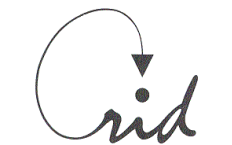
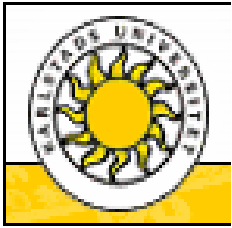
- **Meanwhile, some fears have been underlined**
 - Computer decrease a work of proximity for a clerical world (50%)
 - Computer doesn't improve the relation between social workers and people being given social care (74%)
 - ICT could be a barrier for social workers (52% agree, 45% do not agree, 3% have no opinion)



V. The place of ICT in identity of social work

III. Emotional component of ICT:

- ❑ **Computerization and ICT are perceived rather as an obligation than as a negotiated decision**
 - Influence of constraints of political authorities and computer firms
 - Lack of computer scientists (1 for 3 CPAS)
 - Lack of financial means
 - Lack of defined policies (only 48% of CPAS)



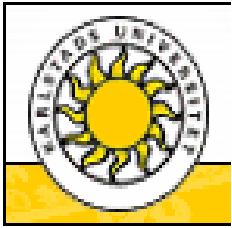
V. The place of ICT in identity of social work

A contrasted computerization in CPAS

- ❑ **One one hand**, CPAS have invested finance and time in their equipment and appreciate the efficiency of technologies
- ❑ **One the other hand**, CPAS are not adapted to ICT by their lack of computer scientists, computer policies and of financial means

Identity models of social work can have an influence

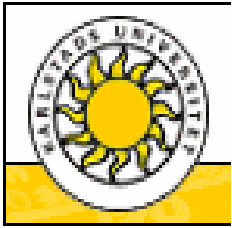
- ❑ Computerization seems to correspond rather well to two models that actually prevail : **social management** (goals of rationalisation and efficiency) and **humanitarian model** (social urgencies)
- ❑ ICT seems less in accordance with models like **pedagogical models** and the **militant model**, based upon elaborate work with users, personalized care or defense of excluded people



VI. Two opposed frameworks ?

Computerization	Social work
Standardization-rationalization of social care with the use of formatted programs or applications	Personalization of practices – case by case work
Information sharing due to computer servers, Internet, e-mail, ...	Confidential work Each social worker has his own way of working
Written tradition – Bureaucratisation	Oral and proximity tradition
Speed - Efficiency	Slow work with users
Quantitative judgments and global approach of reality (statistics)	Qualitative judgments (more individualized approach)





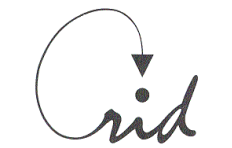
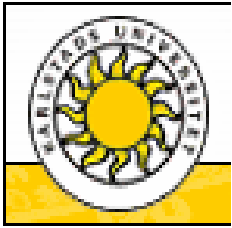
VI. Two opposed frameworks ?

New stakes, related to those two frameworks, can appear...

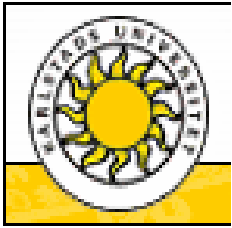
Examples

- Networking with employees and external organisations
- ICT require more complex skills (maintenance, adaptation to ICT)
- New power games around ICT between people knowing and using ICT and not knowing and using ICT
- New distribution of tasks in organisation between administrative and social work (more administrative work for social workers)
- ...

VI. A limited cultural shock

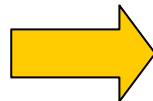


- ❑ **Structurational approach VS deterministic position**
« *Human actions are enabled and constrained by structures, yet that these structures are the result of previous actions* » (Giddens 1984, Orlikowski 1992)
- ❑ **A key factor : appropriation !!** It is necessary for workers to adapt themselves, to be ready to use ICT and to integrate it in their everyday practices.
- ❑ Appropriation has two conditions : It *"requires not only that the receiving ground has the necessary means to assimilate and use the object, but also a need of the object to answer questions or a difficulty which arises, even implicitly"* (Gérard Chevalier, 1995)
- ❑ Computerization has its **limits** : strategic behaviours of resistance, freedom of playing with the rules, ...
- ❑ Technology is not sufficient by themselves to replace the practices of social workers by machines... Most of social workers daily use relational, listening and empathy qualities with their users...

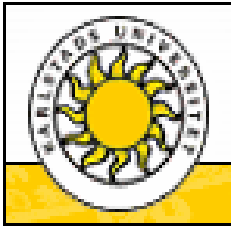


VI. Conclusion - Recommendations

- ❑ In CPAS, computerisation is **more perceived as an obligation** than as a real project
- ❑ **Difficulties** are **inequally perceived** by CPAS according to their needs, their resources and their perceptions of social, action
- ❑ A lot of **adjustments** and **dialogues** are possible to avoid a « marriage of convenience » between the two part
 - A regional platform federating CPAS, intermediary between CPAS, public authorities and computers companies...
 - Communities of practices for CPAS (solidarity between CPAS, computer teaching, sharing of experiences...)
 - Create an external observatory about computerization of CPAS having influences over public authorities



**Deployment of ICT is not a fate.
Human workers always have the possibility to be
actors of their computerization.**



More information

Book :

« Quand l'informatique rencontre l'action sociale... »

Cédric Burton, Véronique Laurent, Claire Lobet-Maris, Françoise Navarre, Yves Pouillet, Philippe Versailles

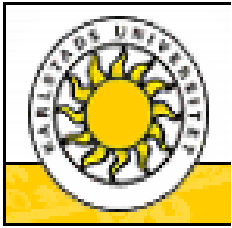
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Thank for your attention and your questions...

Don't hesitate to contact us

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