

University of Strathclyde

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences School of Social Work
and Social Policy

**Social Work Activism – A Comparative
Study of Romania and the UK**

Ionut Cioarta

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2022

Declaration of Authenticity and Author's Rights

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author under the terms of the United Kingdom Copyright Acts as qualified by University of Strathclyde Regulation 3.50. Due acknowledgement must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.

Signed: Ionut Cioarta

Date: 16.07.2022

Acknowledgements

This has been a really meaningful journey! Challenging, but meaningful. I am truly grateful for it. First and foremost, I would like to express my most profound appreciation to my amazing supervisors, Prof. Beth Weaver and Dr Gillian McIntyre. Thank you so much for your kindness, patience, constant encouragement, and feedback. I would not have reached this point without your unconditional support and understanding. Definitely, I could not have wished for better supervisors to enlighten my journey.

I am also extremely grateful to my reviewer, Prof. Daniela Sime, who believed in my project from the beginning and offered me guidance during this process. Further, I feel privileged for having the opportunity to be part of the Strathclyde family. On this occasion, I would like to thank the teaching staff who directly or indirectly inspired and guided me through my work as an academic and PhD student.

My journey would not have been the same without my dearest friends I met in Glasgow (Amlan, Alemao, Basem, Pablo, Jani, Miro, Constantin, Konstantina, Iulia, Norman, Roland, Hanna, Lorena, Pat, Ross, Penny, Tia, and Mr. Alex); my friends back in Romania (Irina, Simona, the other Simona), and the EYW crew have a special place in my heart. Thank you so much for your support, input, and encouragement. It meant a lot to me.

To my family, thank you for your patience, for tolerating my long periods of absence and silence.

Nevertheless, I express my gratitude to all the inspiring social workers in both countries who have participated in my research.

Thank you so much all!

Table of Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	VII
<i>List of Tables</i>	IX
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	X
<i>Abstract</i>	XII
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Overview</i>	1
1.1. Personal motivations.....	1
1.2. The rationale for the research – Conceptualisation and definitions.....	3
1.3. The context of social work activism.....	4
1.4. Outlining the research questions	10
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW	14
<i>Overview</i>	14
2.1. Conceptualising activism.....	14
2.1.1. A general conceptualisation of activism.....	14
2.1.2. Theoretical lenses for interpreting activism	18
2.1.3. Classification of activism.....	21
<i>Activism between peaceful and hostile manifestations</i>	23
<i>Activism between formal and informal manifestations</i>	24
<i>Activism between transformation and resistance</i>	28
<i>Activism between online and offline development</i>	30
2.1.4. The role of activists within activism.....	33
2.2. Conceptualising social work activism.....	37
2.2.1 <i>The relationship between social work and activism</i>	37
2.2.2. <i>Exploring the ideology and practice of social work activism</i>	40
2.2.3. <i>Delimitating the concept of social work activism</i>	41
<i>Social work activism as a political component of the profession</i>	42
<i>Social work activism as a form of resistance</i>	45
<i>Social work activism inside and outside of the profession</i>	47
2.2.4. <i>Defining the concept of social work activism</i>	49
2.2.5. <i>The role of social workers in [social work] activism</i>	50
2.3. Filling a gap in the existing literature.....	53
2.4. Social work [activism] in Romania and the UK – The Background.....	56
2.4.1. <i>Historical background of social work in Romania and the UK</i>	56
2.4.2. <i>Social work in Romania and the UK in contemporary times</i>	61
2.5. Conclusion of the Literature Review	64
2.6. Research Objectives and Questions.....	66
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY	69
<i>Overview</i>	69

3.1. Positioning the research within the critical realist paradigm.....	70
3.2. Critical Realism and Social Work [Activism]	77
3.3. Critical Realism and Social Work Research	78
3.4. Research Design Overview	80
3.5. Engaging with Comparative Research	83
3.6. Engaging with Mixed Methods.....	85
3.6.1. Phase 1 – Using online surveys.....	86
3.6.2. Phase 2 – Conducting semi-structured interviews	90
3.7. Information about the target group	93
3.8. Recruiting and sampling	95
3.9. Data analysis.....	96
3.10. Ethical considerations	103
3.11. Limitations of the research.....	107
3.12. Key points of the Methodology	109
CHAPTER 4 – DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS.....	111
4.1. Demographic profile of the survey participants.....	111
4.2. Demographic profile of the interview participants	116
CHAPTER 5 – ANALYSIS OF THE DATA (I) IDENTIFYING AND EXPLORING THE MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL WORK ACTIVISM.....	121
<i>Overview of the main themes.....</i>	<i>121</i>
5.1. Participant’s interpretation of activism and social work activism	122
5.2. Interpretations of the relationship between activism – social work	126
5.3. The role of activists in social work activism	129
5.4. Key points on the interpretation of activism, social work activism, and activist identity.....	132
5.5. Structural Mechanisms	133
5.5.1. Neoliberalism.....	135
5.5.2. Social and cultural norms	141
5.5.3. Other stakeholders.....	143
5.5.4. Internet and social media.....	147
5.5.5 Key points on structural mechanisms	153
5.6. Psycho-social mechanisms	157
5.6.1 Driving mechanisms at the personal level.....	158
5.6.2. Driving mechanisms at the relational level	163
5.6.3. Limiting psycho-social mechanisms	166
5.6.4. Key points on psycho-social mechanisms	169
5.7. Individual and collective outcomes.....	170
5.7.1. Individual outcomes	171
5.7.2. Collective outcomes	176
5.7.3. Key points on individual and collective outcomes.....	179

CHAPTER 6 – ANALYSIS OF THE DATA (II) DECONSTRUCTING SOCIAL WORK ACTIVISM.....	181
6.1. Positionality of social work activism	181
6.1.1. <i>Social work activism between non-political and political orientation.....</i>	<i>181</i>
6.1.2. <i>Social work activism between traditional and progressive values</i>	<i>182</i>
6.1.3. <i>Social work activism between formal and informal practice.....</i>	<i>183</i>
6.2. Forms of social work activism	185
6.3. Typology of social work activism and activists.....	189
6.4. Key points of the chapter	192
CHAPTER 7 – EXPLAINING THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL MECHANISMS.....	193
7.1. Introduction	193
7.2. Morphogenetic Sequence applied to the Romanian context.....	198
7.2.1. <i>Period A (1945 – 1989) the Communist Period.....</i>	<i>199</i>
7.2.2. <i>Period B (1990 – 2004) – Transition Period.....</i>	<i>205</i>
7.2.3. <i>Period C (after 2004) – Contemporary Period</i>	<i>213</i>
7.3. Morphogenetic Sequence applied to the UK context.....	222
7.3.1. <i>Period A (1945-1979 – The Rise of Social Work Activism).....</i>	<i>223</i>
7.3.2. <i>Period B (1979 – 1990: The Rise of Management).....</i>	<i>230</i>
7.3.3. <i>Period C (after 1990 – The Consolidation of Neoliberalism)</i>	<i>233</i>
7.4. Key points of the chapter	240
CHAPTER 8 – DISCUSSION	249
8.1. Situating this study within existing research.....	249
8.2. Answering the research questions	253
8.3. Empirical and theoretical contributions	259
8.3.1. <i>The interpretation of activism.....</i>	<i>259</i>
8.3.2. <i>The interpretation of social work activism</i>	<i>261</i>
8.3.3. <i>Social Work activism as a form of New Social Movement</i>	<i>263</i>
8.3.4. <i>Social work activism and online activism.....</i>	<i>264</i>
8.4. Methodological contributions.....	265
8.4.1. <i>Critical realist research and social work activism.....</i>	<i>265</i>
8.4.2. <i>Model of data analysis.....</i>	<i>267</i>
8.5. Practice and policy implications.....	267
8.6. Limitations	270
8.7. Further research and considerations	272
Conclusion	274
APPENDICES (electronic versions).....	276
REFERENCES.....	286

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Historical landmarks of social work in Romania and the UK

Figure 3.1. Bhaskar's domains of reality (Source: Mingers, 2004)

Figure 3.2. Research Framework Overview

Figure 3.3. The Framework of Data Analysis

Figure 3.4. Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer, 1995)

Figure 4.1. Gender distribution of the participants in this study

Figure 4.2. Age distribution of the participants

Figure 4.3. Ethnic distribution of the participants

Figure 4.4. Religion of the participants in Romania

Figure 4.5. Religion of the participants in the UK

Figure 4.6. Working experience in social work of the participants

Figure 5.1. Mechanisms Acting on Social Work Activism

Figure 5.2. The distribution of Structural Mechanisms

Figure 5.3. Psycho-social mechanisms influencing the engagement in activism

Figure 5.4. Individual and collective outcomes

Figure 6.1. *Typologies of Social Work Activism/sts*

Figure 7.1. *Adaptation of Morphogenetic Sequence to explaining contexts of social work activism in Romania and the UK*

Figure A.1. *Why do you engage in activism?*

Figure A.2. *In general, how often are you involved in these activities?*

Figure A.3. *Why do you get engaged in activism?*

Figure A.4. *In which kinds of issues are you involved?*

Figure A.5. *How do you find opportunities about activism?*

List of Tables

Table 3.1. The target group for this research

Table 3.2. The stages of Danermark et al. (2002) Model

Table 4.1. Work placement of the participants

Table 4.2. Profile interview participants – Romania.

Table 4.3. Profile interview participants – United Kingdom

Table 5.1. Main themes on activism interpretations (survey)

*Table 5.2. The analysis of the interviews suggests that the relationship between activism –
social work*

Table A.1. Have you ever participated in activities such as [...]? (multiple choice)

*Table A.2. The perception of social workers regarding the correlation between activism and
the social work profession*

Table A.3. The main barriers that obstruct activism

Table A.4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements

List of Abbreviations

ASproAS – The Association of Social Workers in Romania

BASW – British Association of Social Workers

COS – Charity Organisations Society

CR – Critical Realism

HCPC – Health and Care Professions Council

IFSW – International Federation of Social Workers

NCSWR – The National College of Social Workers in Romania

NGO – Non-governmental Organisation

NISCC – Northern Ireland Social Care Council

NSM – New Social Movements

RO – Romania

SCW – Social Care Wales

SSSC – Scottish Social Services Council

SWA – Social Work Activism

SWAN – Social Work Action Network

SWE – Social Work England

SWRO – Social Worker in Romania

SWU – Social Workers' Union

SWUK – Social Worker in the UK

TA – Thematic Analysis

Abstract

Activism, as a concept, refers to an action or a set of actions aiming at social change. In contemporary times, it is also often associated with aspects of social justice, human rights, or challenging the status quo. Although not often associated with social work, in practice or academic discourses, it can be argued that, inherently, activism designates an essential component of the profession due to its commitment to the principles mentioned above (IFSW, 2014, 2018). Scholars such as Abramovitz (1998) and Bent-Goodley (2015) claim that activism represents, in fact, the means through which social work can reach its ethical standards and pledge to a just world. After an increased preoccupation with social work activism in the 1970s, this topic has only recently received further academic attention, especially in English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, USA), and it is viewed as a veritable alternative to the traditional social work informed by the Neoliberal paradigm. Yet, the topic remains under-researched in the British context and unexplored in Romania.

Given the relative infancy of social work as a profession in Romania, a study that compares activism among social workers here with a more well-established situation in the UK offers an opportunity for significant learning around individual and collective factors experienced by social workers and the impact social work activism might have on the profession in both contexts. Considering the global challenges around austerity, bureaucratisation, privatisation of social services, and capitalisation of human problems, this study seems particularly timely. In order to have a more in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon, the main purpose of this thesis is to explore the understanding and practice of social work activism in the two European jurisdictions – the UK (as a representative of the Western context) and Romania (as a representative of the Eastern context). As this type of exploratory work is scarce in the existing studies, this investigation has the merit of illustrating

how different historical, cultural, social, and political contexts might influence the personal and collective interpretation and engagement in social work activism in the two countries, and further, to support the possible reinforcement of the social work profession in society.

Underpinned by a critical realist framework, the present study proposes an original methodological approach aiming to unpack and explain the multiple mechanisms shaping social work activism in both jurisdictions. Using a mixed research method, online surveys and interviews, the findings capture aspects related to conceptualisation and the experience of social workers with activism in practice, emphasising the individual and structural challenges, enabling factors, and personal or collective outcomes. By comparing the two settings, this study has shown that social work activism can have different interpretations and practical implementations, shaped by values, identities and roles undertaken by social workers. It also emphasises the role of Neoliberalism, institutional settings, and lack of resources as restricting factors to social work activism, as well as the enabling impact reinforced by allies, professional networks, or personal motivations. Nevertheless, this investigation invites professionals and scholars to reflect and engage more meaningfully with the essence of social work as a profession.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Overview

This thesis explores a relatively unexplored topic in social work academia, that of social work activism. Through this study, I discuss several theoretical and analytical points that seek to bring a more informed and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of social work activism by comparing two contrasting European jurisdictions and highlighting the main factors that can influence the activism of social workers. This introductory chapter presents an overview of this PhD research, explaining the arguments for developing such a study. Firstly, I introduce the investigation's background, highlighting both my personal motivations and academic justification for researching this topic. I also pinpoint some essential ideas around activism and social work activism, considering some relevant aspects on which this study is based on. The end of this chapter includes an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1. Personal motivations

My interest in the topic of activism, and subsequently social work activism, emerged when I was an undergraduate student back in Romania. It was raised out of curiosity, frustration with *bureaucratized* practices, and a desire to explore a new topic. As a student in social work, I was really active and eager to expand my own horizons about the world. Consequently, I have been engaged in numerous activities, volunteering, and social/humanitarian campaigns, just to get closer to the ideal [or illusion] that brought me to study social work in the first place – to change the world. While my impetus for such ideals has tempered relatively fast, I was still aware that if I cannot really change it, at least I can contribute to making it better. In this process of self-discovery, I had the opportunity to interact with different services, professionals,

contexts, and the aspect that probably impacted me the most in that period was the discrepancy experienced when engaging in activities developed by non-governmental organisations and those undertaken by public institutions. I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm, energy, and courage displayed by the former and less glad when I faced the apathy, frustration, and stress gravitating around the latter. After a few years, I realised that I might have romanticised those initial experiences, and they are not that divergent.

My openness to working with NGOs in Romania introduced me to activism, an identity that I rapidly embraced. Then, with a limited understanding of the concept, my first questions related to the topic arose – why do people in non-governmental organisations appear to be more prone to be activists than those working in public services? What actually underpins these behaviours? At that time, for me, the role of an activist was utterly distinct from a social worker, seeing the former as a distinct title and incompatible with those working in public services. [Meanwhile, my views have changed, though].

My curiosity from the field translated into academic curiosity to explore how the idea of activism corresponds to the social work profession. Based on my knowledge, nobody in Romania had previously explored the topic of social work activism; thus, I considered it a challenge and a reason of pride to be the one who started investigating it. Later, with wider access to information, I discovered that despite its lack of scholarship in Romania, this topic was explored more in Western countries and had its established niche in academia. Exploring the existing literature helped me to understand the context of activism in social work and its potential contribution to social justice. Learning about the tradition of human rights movements and its impact on social work enhanced my curiosity about the factors that might influence and shape activism in social work and, to what extent it might be applied to non-Western countries, such as Romania. Thus, this curiosity inspired me to look for a PhD programme in a country with a well-established social work tradition, such as the UK. I realised that such a programme

would offer me the opportunity to explore the topic and bring something original to the knowledge of social work activism and understand how the Western contexts can inform other settings, such as Romania, with a relatively short period of professional [re]establishment. From my practical experience, I have concluded that incorporating and understanding activism can substantially enhance professional practice and, eventually, improve the lives of those underprivileged.

1.2. The rationale for the research – Conceptualisation and definitions

Activism is a topic that has begun to receive increasing academic attention in the last few decades. In general, in the literature, it refers to an action that aims to engender change at a certain level (individual/ community/local) in a particular area (social/environmental/political) (Bitusikova, 2015; Cammaerts, 2007; Fuad-Luke, 2009). Although it is often related to social issues, such as human rights and social justice, activism has strong connections with adjacent areas, such as politics, environmental protection, economics, or arts. It can also be manifested in different forms, such as street demonstrations, advocacy, lobby, rallies, civil disobedience, campaigns, petitions, donations etc. (Fuad-Luke, 2009; Harrebye, 2016; Roth, 2016). Despite these visible aspects or manifestations, activism is a complex phenomenon shaped by internal and external factors, including psycho-social, cultural, or economic processes (e.g., values, identities, ideologies) (Jordan, 2002; Maxey, 1999; Niblett, 2017).

As scholars have observed, the world lives in times with a high level of activist engagement (Berghs et al., 2020; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Harrebye, 2016). Indeed, since the 1960s, the world has been witnessing something that can be characterised as an “explosion” of social

movements, with individuals expressing their discontent against issues such as war, economic inequality, violation of human rights, or environmental degradation (Buechler, 1995). The emergence of modern technology, like the internet and social and digital media, has made these movements more visible and extended their visibility, impact, and reach on a global scale (Bond et al., 2012).

In contemporary times, activism is fundamentally related to progressive values and positive societal changes (Kluch, 2020). In this context, as a profession that deals with social issues and social change, it can be argued that social work potentially represents a field where activism manifests on a large scale. Moreover, this relation has led to the establishment of an independent concept, *social work activism*, which generally designates practices and proactive positions towards social problems, commitment of social workers to human rights, social justice, and social change (Abramovitz, 1998; Bent-Goodley, 2015).

1.3. The context of social work activism

Academics suggest that social work activism incorporates a robust political component, being associated with both liberal and radical values (Abramovitz, 1998; Gray et al., 2002; Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010). For instance, several studies show that social workers engage in activities that can be viewed as politically and confrontationally oriented, such as lobby and advocacy, protest demonstrations against authorities, encouraging voting and civic participation and so on (Chui and Gray, 2004; Gray et al., 2002; Mary, 2001; Mizrahi and Dodd, 2013). On the other hand, social work activism can be seen as tactics and activities to address the difficult or unjust situations at the workplace generated by oppressive neoliberal systems. Here, a small number of studies (e.g., Greenslade et al., 2014; Mendes, 2007; Smith, 2011) explore the nature of activism within the professional framework of social work. More specifically, they focus on the personal experiences of social workers that engage in activism

and offer some valuable insights to understand how personal features such as identity, values, and motivations influence their activist engagement, as well as emphasise the main challenges that shape their behaviours. Overall, these studies provide an understanding of the phenomenon of activism undertaken by social workers and its importance in fulfilling professional goals. However, these studies are mainly based in English-speaking countries and they do not approach the concept of social work activism directly.

According to Abramovitz (1998) and Reeser and Epstein (1990), activism has been an integral part of social work since its recognition as a professional activity. However, as acknowledged by the authors, its manifestation was especially visible in times of social struggles and crises, such as economic depressions or periods preceding wars. Increased attention to activist principles in social work has been observed starting with the 1970s, with the rise of emancipatory movements (feminism, civil rights, disability) and the groundbreaking work edited by Bailey and Brake (1975) on radical social work, revealing how the profession can take a transformative stance in tackling social injustice. Subsequently, the activist side of the profession has been actively engaged with the contemporary social movements advocating for human rights (Reisch, 2013; Thompson, 2002). Nevertheless, in contemporary times, the activism approach of social work was observed and mentioned as having a pivotal role in dealing with humanitarian crises in armed conflict zones, natural disasters, massive economic restructurations, or forced migration (Lavalette and Ioakimidis, 2011).

In academia, the concept is documented in studies from around the globe, especially in English-speaking countries, such as Australia (Greenslade et al., 2014; Mendes, 2007), Canada (Baines, 2011; Smith, 2011), Ireland (Forde & Lynch, 2014), or the USA (Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010). However, in the UK, the subject is rarely directly addressed but compressed into other professional and theoretical approaches that have an activist creed, such

as radical and critical social work (e.g., Adams et al., 2009; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Payne, 2014), while in Romania, no studies explore this topic. Therefore, this study aims to make a significant contribution to our existing knowledge of this under-researched topic. A study of this nature can be of high significance since it aims to address the humanitarian crises and challenges produced by Neoliberalism, such as austerity, recession, privatisation of social services, and managerialism. These issues subsequently affected the social work profession by impeding the degree of meaningful practice centred around the service users' needs, increasing the level of inequalities, or dramatically decreasing the level of professional satisfaction (Dominelli, 2010; 2020; Dustin, 2007; Ferguson, 2008; 2020; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006, 2013; Rogowski, 2015, 2018). Therefore, arguably, it has never been more important to understand the stance that social workers are taking to challenge these injustices via social work activism. Studying this phenomenon in two different jurisdictions (Romania and the UK) offers the opportunity to bring new perspectives of understanding social work activism shapes and, further, enables the profession to engage with a more proactive approach to addressing social injustice. Particularly, this investigation can provide the opportunity for both countries to exchange information and learn from each other and, eventually, leading to better professional recognition and autonomy in both constituencies.

The different histories of social work in both jurisdictions make the topic of social work activism even more important to study because it provides valuable insights into how activism in social work developed in distinct professional and socio-political contexts. On the one hand, social work in the UK has a long history and is recognised as a well-established profession; while in Romania, social work faced a turbulent past with a promising development (the interwar period), the collapse of the system/profession (during the Communist regime), and its re-establishment (starting with 1990). Additionally, the impact of the political and social climates manifested in both countries, and their impacts on societal dynamics can be brought

into the discussion. In the UK, the practice and engagement with democratic processes led to an acceptance of progressive values and the development of a protest culture. On the other hand, the impact of almost 50 years of political and social repression had a different impact on civic participation and dominant values in Romanian society, and this can shed new light on the experiences and motivations of social work activists.

Despite these differences, theoretically, both countries share a view that acknowledges social work as a profession centred on human rights and social transformation, as pledged by the International Federation of Social Workers (2014), and to an extent, by the national codes of practice. Starting from this point, we can observe that the values and principles promoted by the IFSW are incorporated into what can be considered contemporary activism.

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes 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 knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.” (IFSW, 2014)

Given the common ground of the social work profession, but considering the influence of social, cultural, and political aspects, this research aims to explain why activism in social work manifests differently. In this respect, it explores the socio-structural conditions that shape those influences in jurisdictions such as the UK (characterised as a Western and developed country) and Romania (a country in transition, seen as an Eastern European model). This type of comparative study is very limited in research, primarily when referring to social work

activism. Thus, methodologically speaking, this research also fills a gap by approaching a comparative study that is a further innovation in the use of the critical realist framework.

Further, considering the aspects of professional values (ideology) and professionalisation (the legal framework of the activity) and their interactions with social, cultural, and political norms, I make a distinction between the interpretation of social work activism (how it is theoretically conceptualised) and the practice of social work activism (how it is actually implemented in everyday activities). Surprisingly, this separation of theory/practice of activism in social work has not been given much attention. Therefore, this research brings a new contribution to knowledge by exploring the development and manifestation of social work activism from different levels of interpretation in settings shaped by distinct social, cultural, and political conditions.

Research about social work activism is necessary because it can play a vital role in informing practice, theory, and academic developments of social work, and overall, the dynamics in our societies. As a profession that pledges to both uphold and advocate for human rights, social justice, or social change, social workers need to position themselves and understand their role in society as an agent of change and how to fulfil their mission of improving the wellbeing of people, particularly in times of global challenge and conflict (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2018; Lavalette and Ioakimidis, 2011). For this mission, it is argued that social workers need to take an activist stance in order to empower the powerless, represent their interests, and defend them:

“The social work activist provides a mechanism whereby people can empower themselves and allow their voices to feel like they matter in the broadest societal context. Social workers create a venue for a person who feels powerless to find hope and opportunity to create change.” (Bent-Goodley, 2015, p. 102)

However, being an activist is not something facile for someone engaged in a strongly regulated and bureaucratised profession, as is the case of social work practiced in both Romania and the UK. As existing research in both jurisdictions suggests, social workers often feel overwhelmed and stressed by the amount of caseload or administrative work that they have to complete (e.g., Lazar et al., 2016; Ravalier, 2018). This might directly impact the capacity and willingness of social workers to engage with a practice that can affect more extensive structural and social changes, as well as the more immediate task of promoting the relationship-based practice in the face of an increasing focus on procedural work. Moreover, there is not much research to show *how* these limitations or organisational constraints might affect the activist sphere of the profession. As per Greenslade et al. (2014), some social workers prefer to engage in activism covertly to navigate institutional limitations or openly challenge policies and rules that are not in accordance with ethical practice. Given the limited research on the topic – especially in Romania – exploring the impact of institutional frameworks (and their consequences) and other external obstacles might be seen as another significant contribution to the knowledge of this project.

Despite these points, there are also individual or personal factors that need to be acknowledged in order to understand activist behaviour. Here, we can refer to motivation, personal experiences, social and professional identities – aspects which are explored in studies related to “general” activism and, to some extent, social work activism (e.g., Cortese, 2015; Greenslade et al., 2014; Moyer et al., 2001; Smith, 2011), although previous research has strongly focused on the global north context. Therefore, there is limited literature on the social work domain outside of western societies, and this thesis aims to contribute to such crucial gaps in the literature.

In addition, the impact of the internet and online tools should also be acknowledged with respect to social work activism. The existing literature provides extensive research on the

powerful effects of the internet and digital technologies on social movements, activist organisations, forms of protests and so on (Bond et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2014; Murthy, 2018). Some studies illustrate the adaptation of social services to digital means, such as video-counselling or self-guided online interventions (Reamer, 2013). Although the COVID-19 pandemic context amplified the transition of many social services to digital working (Ashcroft et al., 2020), there are very limited discussions regarding the implications of technology and virtual spaces that influence the activism of social workers. As a result, this investigation will be of some value in understanding the impact of the internet strictly on social work activism in contemporary times.

1.4. Outlining the research questions

Based on the foregoing and considering my personal and academic interests, the aim of this study is to understand the main interpretations and practice forms of activism and social work activism in Romania and the UK, taking into consideration the internal and external mechanisms that influence their manifestations in the social work profession. As such, this study addresses the following research questions:

- How do social workers from the UK and Romania conceptualise and practice activism and social work activism?
- What are the motivations and other personal attributes that encourage the engagement of social workers in activism/social work activism?
- What kinds of structural factors enable or constrain the engagement of social workers in activism/social work activism?
- What is the influence and impact of digital technologies, including social media, on the engagement of social work activists in both jurisdictions?

As each question demanded an intertwined yet slightly different analytical focus, my study adopted a mixed-methods research (online survey and interviews) and used a design inspired by the Critical Realist (CR) paradigm. My analysis is derived from a model elaborated by Danermark et al. (2002), which also comprises Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun and Clarke, 2006), as a method of analysing the data collected, and Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer, 1995; 2010) – to illuminate and causally explain the comparative findings. Although critical realism is rather a marginal or underused theoretical framework in social work research, it has recently gained more popularity (Craig and Bigby, 2015; Houston, 2010). It is argued that critical realism can contribute to a fuller understanding of the social world because it underpins different levels of causal mechanisms and structures acting on a specific phenomenon. This paradigm essentially matches the goal of this thesis in providing a fuller understanding of how social work activism manifests in different contexts. For the critical realist paradigm:

“[...] the ultimate goal ...is not to identify generalisable laws (positivism) or to identify the lived experience or beliefs of social actors (interpretivism); it is to develop deeper levels of explanation and understanding” (McEvoy and Richards, 2006, p. 69).

This PhD research is structured into five further distinctive chapters. *Chapter 1* provides an overview of the key concepts, current debates, and the rationale for this study. *Chapter 2* corresponds to the literature review and is divided into three main parts. The first part explores the concepts of activism as a general term presented in the literature. Here, I analyse several definitions to identify the main components incorporated in this phenomenon, which eventually allows me to elaborate my own working definition. I also engage with an analysis that aims to unpack other aspects of activism, such as its theoretical understandings, manifestations and forms, as well as emphasising the role of activists in this process. The second part of the literature review explores the relationship between activism and social work. Similar to the

previous section, this part engages with unpacking the concept of social work activism, underlining its theoretical interpretations, manifestations within and outside the professional framework, and the role of social workers in developing social work activism. In the last part of Chapter 2 aims to provide some background information regarding the two countries on which this study focuses, offering a comparative historical overview of the social work profession to understand the broader context of the present research and its objectives.

Chapter 3 presents the overall methodology and research design. Here, I discuss research philosophies taken into consideration and justify why critical realism is the most suitable approach for the present study. Further, I describe the research design by indicating the relevance of engaging with comparative studies (Romania and the UK) and mixed-research methods (surveys and interviews) and their utility in addressing the research questions. This chapter also includes a description of the data analysis process, also built upon a critical realist framework (Danermark et al., 2002). The final part of the chapter provides information on key ethical considerations and methodological limitations. As a connecting part between methodology and findings, *Chapter 4* provides a presentation of the participants in this study, namely online surveys and interview respondents. This section also includes some basic analysis in terms of the demographics of both cohorts.

The following chapters offer an analysis of the findings of this research. Firstly, in *Chapter 5*, by using thematic analysis, I present the main mechanisms that influence the manifestation of social work activism in Romania and the UK. Following the critical realist approach, in *Chapter 6*, I analyse the studied phenomenon, emphasising the main similarities, contradictions, and themes in both jurisdictions. In other words, I engage in a process of deconstruction of social work activism, as informed by the findings. The next chapter (*Chapter 7*) explains the findings from a historical, cultural, socio-political perspective through the lens of Archer's Morphogenetic Framework (1995, 2010).

In *Chapter 8*, the discussion part, I explain my main findings in correlation to the research questions, emphasising its contributions to knowledge production within the discipline. I also draw the implications of this study in four main areas, including empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical, followed by a discussion on the limitations of the present PhD research. Finally, *Chapter 9* concludes the main points of this study.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter aims to review the existing literature on the concept of activism and its theoretical interpretations. Based on this review, I advance a discussion on the various classifications of activism and its dimensions (or variations) by considering different perspectives and forms of manifestations. These debates will then provide the basis of a discussion around activism as a concept, which will subsequently build the theoretical background for the next section on social work activism.

The second part of the chapter explains the link between activism and the social work profession, as depicted by established scholars. I then explore the concept of social work activism, its theoretical interpretations and manifestations, and provide a working definition for this study. The last part of the chapter offers some background or contextual insights into the social work profession in Romania and the UK, aiming to provide an understanding of the context in both jurisdictions.

2.1. Conceptualising activism

2.1.1. A general conceptualisation of activism

One of the earliest noted examples of activism dates back to the 16th century, when Martin Luther started a radical religious reformation in response to concerns that the Catholic Church was exploiting people (Calvert, 2007). Some consider that the roots of activism emerged even earlier, and it has been associated with the idea of pacifism as expressed in several religious movements, such as Hinduism, early Christianity, or Buddhism (Calvert, 2007). However, the *study* of activism became popular among academics in the 1960s and 1970s, when social movements, protests, and other collective actions for change began to intensify in the public

sphere, especially in the Western world (Cammaerts, 2007). Currently, the topic of activism has become more popular as a consequence of the exponential increase of social movements emerging around the world. Simultaneously, the phenomenon developed multiple complexities (new forms, dimensions, settings) and, therefore, needs further exploration.

While there is no universally agreed definition of the concept of activism, an analysis of the contemporary literature reveals two broad definitions. Firstly, activism can be viewed as a nominal and identifiable activity, a concrete tool for political and civic engagement (Dumitrascu, 2015; Harris and Schwedler, 2016; Taib, 2006). In this respect, activism can simply be associated with an activity undertaken by politicians or activists, such as a political campaign, demonstration, or *protest*. Secondly, a more prevalent perspective defines activism as an abstract concept, describing a *process of different actions and implications* that aim to achieve change (Bitusikova, 2015; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Koffel, 2003; Maxey, 1999). Since the former interpretation is straightforward, the following discussion focuses on unpacking the components of the latter perspective – *activism as a process*. Therefore, to explore the meanings of those activism components, I will analyse several definitions from the literature addressing the concept.

To begin with, Fuad-Luke (2009) advances the following definition: “Activism is about taking actions to catalyse, encourage or bring about change, in order to elicit social, cultural and/or political transformations. It can also involve transformation of the individual activists” (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. 6). This definition incorporates some critical elements, referring to the *action of change/transformation*, the *area or domain affected* by the action of change (social, cultural, political), and *the magnitude or reach of the impact* involved (societal or individual). Elaborating on the steps of change, it can be stated that they refer to so-called abstract actions, such as empowerment, to more concrete ones, such as organising campaigns and events, volunteering, demonstrations, protests, donations, petitions, fundraising, artistic or educational

activities pledging for social justice and human rights, boycotts, advocacy and lobbying, online campaigns and many others (Corning and Myers, 2002; Dahlberg-Grundberg and Örestig, 2016; Kluch, 2020; Milligan et al., 2008; Nilsson et al., 2011; Pink, 2008).

Although the above definition of Fuad-Luke (2009) provides a fair account of activism as a general term, there are other nuances that can contribute to a better understanding of its entire process. For instance, Koffel (2013) defines activism as “efforts to create changes in the behaviour of institutions or organisations through action strategies” (p. 118). Here, the impact of activism implies a systemic change but is more focused on institutions and organisations, as well as on areas or domains of change. Bringing these definitions together, it can be argued that activism could produce impacts at different levels, involving different magnitude and reach (i.e., affecting change from personal to micro, mezzo, and macro levels; or from individual to institutional and structural levels).

Bitusikova (2015) formulates a similar definition, describing activism as “a range of actions that lead to social, cultural, political, economic or environmental change and are performed by individuals, groups or movements” (Bitusikova, 2015, p. 330). As an addition, this definition brings into the discussion the contribution of *initiators/performers/activists* who are engaged in the process of change. From this perspective, the size and the intensity of action vary according to those involved in the process, from individuals to groups or even organisations and social movements.

Furthermore, Cammaerts (2007, p. 217) conceptualises activism as a “practice of struggling for change and can be fuelled by reactionary tendencies and aims, as well as progressive”, pointing out the roles and the importance of *goals* into activism. According to Franciscus (2015), these goals can support a cause or oppose a certain issue/individual/entity in society. Goals of activism are often defined as progressive, meaning that they are change

oriented and are typically concerned with human rights and other liberal values (Barbera et al., 2013). More nuanced, as per Niblett (2017), activism incorporates *values* of social justice, such as democracy, fairness, or challenging oppression (Kluch, 2020; Niblett, 2017).

In Jordan's (2002) view, the presence of *solidarity*, as an act of mutual support, shared identity, and responsibility for others, is an essential part of activism. Additionally, civil disobedience and collectiveness are also definitory elements in this process. However, the *desire* of people to work for change plays a critical role in sustaining the action, as argued by Jordan (2002). Otherwise stated, contemporary activism indicates an action ideologically motivated by progressive values (Kluch, 2020; Niblett, 2017) because it stands on principles of social justice and is relationally and instrumentally driven (Jordan, 2002) due to its collective character and focus on social change.

Jordan's (2002) perspective emphasises the importance of psycho-social *connections* between individuals doing activism. These connections can allow activists to manage their emotions, keep themselves motivated, and find proper ways to act. Moreover, Maxey (1999) argues that *critical reflection* has a vital role in developing activism. This essential process of reflexivity enables activists to act creatively, empower their position and challenge oppressive power relations. Overall, through these lenses, activism might be seen as a complex sociological process that engages actions and changes/transformations and emotional processes, such as lived experiences and reflections, which eventually enables individuals to express and develop the action of and for change.

Synthesising these insights, I propose my own definition of activism:

Activism, as a process, defines *actions of change* driven by *initiators/activists* (individuals or social groups) that share *common values* (solidarity, identity, desire, progressive values) and are involved in *inter-collective processes*

(reflecting, challenging, empowering), necessary to allow them to impact *a domain* (social, political, cultural) in order to reach (a) *common goal/s* (systemic/organisational/individual changes).

This suggests that activism is a series of internal and external components, the interplay between them. It incorporates personal and relational exchanges between activists that take place at different stages during the process of activism. The starting point of the activism process involves initiators (activists) and causes, as well as their shared values and desired goals, and relational capital that might generate the action of change. This action of change guides the direction of the entire process, although its trajectory might be altered by other internal or external factors (reflective processes of the activists, inter and extra-collective opportunities and challenges).

2.1.2. Theoretical lenses for interpreting activism

There are no dedicated theories to explain activism as a phenomenon in general. However, the literature provides some insights on the various theoretical interpretations for specific types of activism, such as political activism and social activism, collective actions, or social change and they often are used as explanatory frameworks for the emergence of [political/social] movements or collective actions (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Dumitrascu, 2015; Norris, 2002). In fact, when comparing conceptualisations of social movements and activism, they have very similar interpretations and are often used interchangeably. By way of illustration, social movements are defined as actions (engines) that contribute to social changes in a particular society, consisting of a series of elements/situations such as interactions between networks/groups of people, shared beliefs, collective identity, political and cultural conflicts, manifestations of protests, and own ideology and goals (Collins, 2001; della Porta and Diani, 1991; Reisch, 2003). However, some authors differentiate the two phenomena by conceptualising activism as a tool of social movements; or it can describe social movements as

a collectivity, and activism as actions of that collectivity. For instance, Stammers (2009) and Humphrys (2009) view activism as a key feature of social movements that enables activists to reach the desired goals. For this purpose, in the present study, I often use activism and social movements in associated contexts, sometimes as combined terms such as [social/activist] movement.

Among the most popular theories to explain collective actions is the *resource mobilisation theory* suggesting that the emergence of social movements [in this context, contemporary activism] stands on claiming and obtaining access to various types of resources such as financial, skills, platforms of support, or time (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). This theory was complemented by the *political process theory*, which claims that the success of social movements depends on accessing political opportunities, mobilising the existing social and political structures within the movement, and a continuous process of pursuing the opposition (Caren, 2007).

Although these theories offer a good account of some instrumental reasons of rising social movements; however, I consider that *New Social Movements (NSMs) theory* provides a more suitable frame for explaining the contemporary collective actions/social movements [therefore activism] because they are historically linked (emerged in the 1960-70s) and fundamentally related to progressive values. Considered a movement of the “middle class”, NSMs are not necessarily motivated to realise economic/resource redistributions, but they show more concerns for improvement of other qualitative aspects of life such as identity rights, justice, or environment (Buechler, 1995, 2013; Kriesi, 1989; Pichardo, 1997). From a theoretical point of view, scholars such as Buechler (1995, 2013) or Pichardo (1997) claim that NSMs theory emerged as a reaction to the inability of Marxist theories (concerned with working-class emancipation movements and economic distribution) to analyse and explain the

new wave of protests and social movements (e.g., student protests of the 60s-70s from France, Germany, USA, civil rights and feminist movements).

Prior to NSMs, the “old” movements, with a Marxist ideology, were focused on structural roles and economic values in society (Baker et al., 2013). Additionally, the old movements, or workers’ movements, included issues such as social security and military power, as their preoccupations and objectives (Stammers, 2009; Offe, 1985). In contrast, NSMs are particularly connected to identity, gender, race, ethnicity, human rights, the environment, peace, spirituality (Buechler, 1995; Offe, 1985). Scott (1992), Lo (1992) and Little (2012) highlight other major differences between old and new movements. For instance, the old movements, in addition to focusing on economic rights, tended to act formally (through syndicates) and more related to polity; while NSMs are diverse, mostly connected to values, based on non-hierarchical organisational frameworks, and driven by informal actions through grassroots communities or civil networks.

For this reason, the word “new” was ascribed to “social movements” to distinguish them from the labour/Marxist (“old”) movements (Plotke, 1995). Essentially, there was a paradigm shift from an economic and industrial focus to symbolic and cultural concerns. Nevertheless, NSMs are not disconnected from old social movements. As della Porta (2007) states, the roots of NSMs are in old social movements because both were driven by the desire of people, usually belonging to the middle class, to change and challenge power. Still, as previously shown, there are significant differences within their paths and goals.

Several scholars express their criticism towards NSMs (Barker & Dale, 1998; Wier, 1993), claiming that the paradigm of NSMs theories is quite limited in terms of specific characteristics. They argue that social movements with a non-economic goal existed even before the 1960s, or that NSMs are exclusively ideologically linked to the left, and their

political influence is generally weak. On the other hand, Buechler (1995, 2013), inspired by the work of other scholars (Castells, 1983; Klandermans, 1994; Kriesi, 1989; Melluci, 1996; Touraine, 1985), exposes the core attributes that are rooted into NSMs theories. For instance, Buechler (1995, 2013) considers that among the core elements of NSM are collective identity (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, disability, ethnicity etc.), pluralist/progressive values, criticism towards capitalist domination and present social order, concerns for issues such as the environment, animal rights, pacifism, or spirituality; many of which are elements of contemporary activism.

Overall, the discussion above builds a historical and sociological basis of activism and provides a suitable framework to understand the conditions through which contemporary activism might occur; it also unpacks the components that are part of it (e.g., core elements and foci, values, positionality). Moving forward, the subsequent discussion focuses on unpacking activism by analysing its developments and dimensions in practice.

2.1.3. Classification of activism

As illustrated previously, activism has different applications in several sciences and domains; therefore, its classifications are diverse. The first typology of activism can be related to the domain or area of development. For example, in the social spectrum, activism can be associated with terms such as *social activism*, *civic activism*, or *citizen activism*. Terms which, in essence, denominate practices or actions that aim to promote rights, improve individual situations, and society overall (Brashers et al., 2002; Green, 2016; Spencer, 2015). Similarly, in the context of activism in the social area, *advocacy* is often used. In general terms, advocacy describes an action that supports and empowers individuals and groups to overcome their challenges and promote social change (Cumiskey, Fayoyin, 2013; Lee et al., 2013). These two terms are slightly different in formulation and understanding. For example, an advocate is somebody who is dedicated to a cause, has specific knowledge about that issue, and develops

strategies to implement and support their cause. Instead, an activist is viewed as somebody who has a more direct approach to engaging in social justice causes through marches, rallies, demonstrations, and, thus, has higher visibility (Lewis, 2018). However, their general meanings are related to the same goals of social change and participation of people for the benefit of people.

“To be an activist is to speak. To be an advocate is to listen” (Lewis, 2018, n.p.)

Activism can also be related to the political field. In this context, *political activism* refers to challenging political power and policies and influencing political change (Chau et al., 2018). Using the same principle, activism can be associated with culture as a way of engaging art as a means of challenging the status quo or enabling change (Buser et al., 2013; Harrebye, 2016). Another example of this typology could be *environmental activism*, which advocates for the implementation of a series of actions/laws/practices dedicated to protecting and restoring the environment (Læssøe, 2017). Overall, one way to classify activism is, as demonstrated, by associating and applying it to domains of the social world, such as social, political, cultural, environmental and so on.

Another classification of activism results from its association with a specific cause, which comes from the intersection of different domains, but with a narrower focus. For instance, there are activists concerned with the AIDS cause; thus, the domain is referred as AIDS activism (Boesten, 2007); or anti-consumerism activism aiming to tackle the devastating consequence of global capitalism on the environment and communities (Fuad-Luke, 2009; Maxey; 1999). Basically, a diverse range of identities, beliefs, movements, issues can be identified and expressed through activism. For the purpose of diversifying and evidencing the nuances of activism, the following discussion will focus on exploring other conceptual

dimensions, taking into consideration the intrinsic and extrinsic dynamics that can alter the creation and manifestation of activism.

Activism between peaceful and hostile manifestations

Since the beginning of the 1960s, diverse forms of activism, such as protests, demonstrations, rallies have become an ordinary part of society's dynamics (especially in Western societies). Numerous activist movements have emerged and exposed their discontent, using different approaches from more peaceful to confrontational dynamics, and some of them degenerated into violent riots with tragic consequences (Ringmar, 2015). The level of hostility (the risk of violence) is difficult to anticipate in most situations. There are numerous examples of demonstrations that have gathered peacefully and eventually escalated into violent confrontations, such as the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009 (Harrebye, 2016) and, more recently, the incidents during the protests generated by the killing of George Floyd in the USA and alimeted by the disproportioned reactions of the police towards the protestors (Bolsover, 2020). These incidents engaging violent reactions are often associated with radicalism or extremist approaches (Harrebye, 2016; Snow and Cross, 2011), although in other contexts the concept of radical excludes violence (see radical social work) and describes a process of transformation from the roots (alias radical change) (Weiss, 2013).

Activism that includes hostility and violence, or which creates a disruption to people's lives (e.g., Extension Rebellion at tube stations in London) can have negative consequences on activists' image and their allies (Jasko et al., 2019). In this situation, the general audience, who might constitute a potential ally, can question the cause and its adepts, and therefore, people will choose to reject or delimit themselves from the movement. Thinking about advantages, the confrontational and hostile actions can be perceived from another angle as a way of showing passion and commitment to the cause. However, scholars acknowledge that non-violent

reactions are far more successful than those that use violence because of the impact on public support (Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013).

Activism between formal and informal manifestations

The activist movement can be initiated and maintained by different sources. For example, informal networks (grassroots movements), which lack a structure and are not associated with clear leadership, are known as everyday activism (Roth, 2016). This type of activism can be practised in different contexts, such as occasional and ad-hoc demonstrations intending to contribute to a more direct and transparent democracy (Harrebye, 2016; Polanska and Chimiak, 2016). As per Harrebye (2016) and Roth (2016), informal activism might refer to actions of change carried out in families or communities. This *everyday activism* includes simple practices, such as teaching children within their own families about social justice, anti-racism, or feminism to encourage them to participate in protests (Roth, 2016). It could also refer to community projects developed by ordinary citizens (e.g., building a park, encouraging voting) (Harrebye, 2016).

On the other hand, there is formal activism, known as professional activism, organised within a recognised framework, such as NGOs or public establishments, that is developed by experts/professionals involved in activities aiming to reform and produce systemic change by lobbying and challenging those in power (Ana, 2018; Harrebye, 2016; Roth, 2016). Further analysis suggests that professional [formal] activism presents different nuances, as Roth (2016) underlined. One aspect can be related to open and visible actions led by recognised activists (protests, demonstrations led by NGOs), aiming to produce change through mobilising individuals and developing networks outside of the governmental/state institutions – known as *outsider activism* (Pettinicchio, 2012). On the other hand, *insider activism* involves individuals engaged within institutions oriented to obtaining wider access to resources and power positions to achieve their goal of implementing or supporting actions of change. Between these two

forms of activism, institutional activism acts as a bridge to “overcome the dichotomy between outsider and insider activism” and aims to create connections between outside activists and political institutions (Roth, 2016, p. 37).

Further, *occupational activism* denominates actions “conducted and realized through an occupational role or occupational community” (Cornfield et al., 2018, p. 217), involving people who regularly work with or in NGOs, or practice a profession that requires activism, such as teachers, academics, or social workers (Roth, 2016). Because of the nature of their jobs (which overlaps their everyday work with activities of social change and social justice), some people might not perceive themselves as activists. On the other hand, according to Cortese (2015), individuals who work in social movements organisations might reject the identity of an activist because they might attribute negative connotations to the term (aggressive, radical, extreme), and may prefer not to be associated with it. Alternatively, they might refuse the identity of an activist because, in their view, being an activist has a high standard of involvement that may be unattainable through their work. This debate around occupational activism also raises questions about social work, which oscillates its role between activist practice and activity regulated by the state. However, this aspect will be further explored in the next section of the chapter as well as through this study’s findings.

Lastly, *academic activism* contributes to social change by using knowledge production as a tool to perform change, deconstruct unjust narratives, and build new power relations within institutions (Downs & Manion, 2004; Fernandez, 2013; Flood et al., 2013). This can also involve developing innovative and progressive methods of teaching that encourage activism or can lead to the formation of other social movements and activist organisations (Flood et al., 2013; Roth, 2016).

Despite this theoretical differentiation between informal and different forms of professional activism, their manifestation at the individual level is often blurred because professional activists usually share the same progressive values as citizens [outside of their formal role]. In this respect, it can be brought into the discussion the biographical analysis of Roth (2016), who explores activism in different formal and informal contexts. By analysing a case study of a feminist organisation aiming to enable women to develop their own business projects, Roth (2016) argued that activism and professionalisation are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, acknowledging that activism might be an integrated part of both the professional sphere and everyday life can subsequently contribute to the sustainability of activism at the individual and collective levels. According to Roth (2016), building a more robust and sustainable activist movement requires individuals to learn, share knowledge, and compromise, but still stick with their own values and commitments. These actions will help future generations to inherit those values and predispositions to engage in activism.

There are examples of informal activism at the structural levels that have translated into formal or institutionalised work. One of the most sonorous and impactful cases, which changed from a street campaign to a powerful organisation, could be *Black Lives Matter* in the US, uniting the US and international activists to act against the issue of systematic racism (Petersen-Smith, 2015). Also, Podemos in Spain evolved from a group of street and academic protesters of some hundreds who expressed their dissatisfaction towards austerity measures to a political party (Tremlett, 2015). Examples pertaining to those jurisdictions on which this study concentrates might include the Extinction Rebellion in the UK (Taylor, 2020) or the Save Rosia Montana Network in Romania (Velicu and Kaika, 2017).

These transitions are not always viewed positively. For instance, Pant (2017) claims that the professionalisation or formalisation of activism is risky, and it can result in campaigners/NGO members acting in accordance with the requirements of funding bodies.

This fact might reduce the efficiency of activists because they will have to follow processes that are more oriented to “efficient management” than “effective action”. Additionally, Ana (2018) acknowledges that the institutionalisation or NGO-isation of informal networks can create the illusion of increased autonomy and decision power that might confuse the activist movement; for instance, it might give the impression that activist organisations gain more legitimacy as a formalised entity, however, in the long run, its voice on social agenda is still marginal.

On the other hand, Polanska and Chimiak (2016) and Roth (2016) argue that activism developed by the grassroots, which is eventually formalised, is not in discordance with each other. Their arguments suggest that activists can build more vigorous movements by engaging a higher number of people and combining different experiences and expertise to advocate for the exact causes, which could eventually increase the likelihood of the activists reaching their goals, as in the examples above.

Overall, this discussion sets another topic of debate, “activism vs professionalisation”, which further generates questions on the situation of social workers. Although, in their case, social work is a profession that promotes principles of activism (social change and social justice) as pledged by the IFSW (2014), their work is regulated in general by the state, which leaves a limited autonomy to act according to the social work mission (Reeser, 1992). In this respect, there is the question, which is not new, of the degree to which the professionalisation of social work affects the status of social workers, their participation in activism and their capacity to be critical towards the state (to challenge the status quo).

Reeser (1992) underlines two perspectives framing this debate. A first and a more dominant perspective is that the high degree of professionalisation of social work has conservative effects on social workers, and in fact, this serves to maintain the status quo by

supporting and enacting state regulations and social control, and therefore, they are less likely to engage in activism. In this sense, even if their intentions are to oppose unjust policies through diverse activist acts (e.g., protests, demonstrations, petitions), their effort might be hampered because they work for an entity that creates and perpetuates oppression, thus representing a key dilemma.

A second perspective strengthens the idea that enhanced bureaucratic processes and procedures might offer some quality assurance and support professional standards, that it detracts in practice from social workers to engage directly with service users and communities (Reeser, 1992). As per Collins (2017), this approach would mean ignoring the nature of care incorporated into the social work profession and disregarding the human relationships and trust-building that are so necessary to social work. Moreover, it could also mean reinforcing the dependency of service users on organisational procedures and reducing their autonomy and independence (Collins, 2017). Yet, the questions remain, and they still constitute a debate – *How do social workers manage the tension between state employee vs activist (being critical towards the state)? Are there any dividing lines between social workers vs social work activists?* These are some of the questions that will be explored in this study.

Activism between transformation and resistance

In some instances, the concepts of activism and resistance denominate the same meanings, such as acts of contesting power, campaigning, or protesting (Bush, 1999; Rognlien and Kier-Byfield, 2020; Scott, 1992). Despite the fact that they are considered closely related, yet, activism and resistance can denominate two different concepts in some instances. For instance, sometimes activism is framed as a tool for realising resistance through collective actions, protests, advocacy (Jean-Klein, 2001; Chan, 2001). In other situations, resistance is a tactic performed in order to realise activism (social change), such as the “resist movement” or acts of civil disobedience performed by environmental activists (Kyllönen, 2014; Scheer, 2017).

As illustrated previously, contemporary activism is fundamentally related to change, justice, and the challenge of the status quo. Resistance, in addition to protesting and challenging power, can also aim for the opposite – resisting change – such as keeping and maintaining the cultural norms or preserving the power and status quo (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). In other words, the foci of both phenomena can be different in the sense that activism focuses on change, active participation, and challenging oppression – therefore, its orientation is from the bottom (grassroots) to the top (power). On the other side, resistance might seek change, oppose change, or oppose cultural domination [power].

For clarification, I will illustrate these types of resistances with notable examples from history. The movement of Gandhi for the liberation of India or anti-Apartheid resistance in South Africa are examples of resistances (civil disobediences) seeking change. Further, the resistance of the Native Americans against cultural assimilation can be considered a form of resistance opposing a dominant culture/power, but without necessarily seeking a change of status quo (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). In contrast, the resistance practiced by the right-wing adepts aims to oppose the change in order not to lose the dominant position in society, thus, keep the status quo (Jost et al., 2017).

An essential point to underline from this debate is related to the idea that activism always comes together with resistance, but resistance does not always imply activism as conceptualised in the present (social justice, social change). Inspired by the French scholar Foucault (1978), who stated that “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95–96), I argue that this statement is valid for activism as well – thus, *where there is activism, there is resistance*. In other words, the acts of social change/activism (focus on social justice) are always reacted by forms of resistance to keep the social order, cultural norms, and existing structures (Brandt and Reyna, 2017).

This discussion contributes to exploring the dimensions of activism, which, as illustrated, might be framed through and with various paradigms, such as resistance. In addition, this offers further input for exploring the resistance of social workers within their profession and its framing within the activist practice.

Activism between online and offline development

The internet and technologies associated with it, undoubtedly, have a major influence in today's societies, especially when referring to Western societies, where access to these means is extremely wide, although unequal. Whether discussing human interrelations, communication, job activities, or entertainment, these technologies affect many aspects of human existence. Here, I will focus my analysis on exploring the influence of the internet and its tools (e.g., social media) on the development of activism.

To begin with, the internet represents “the worldwide network of interconnected computer networks” that allows the support and circulation of online content (LINFO, 2005, n.p.). Further, social media includes technologies or internet tools/platforms such as mobile apps and websites that are designed to facilitate online social interactions (Bertot et al., 2012; Sui and Goodchild, 2011). Through social media, users can share, exchange, discuss, or create content or information (Fischer and Reuber, 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011). It is presented under diverse forms, for instance, emails (electronic mail), chatting applications (e.g., WhatsApp), blogs, social networks apps or sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), entertainment platforms for gaming, watching videos, or listening to music (e.g., YouTube, Second life) (Manning, 2014). Moreover, the internet and its tools can facilitate the manifestations of various forms of activism, such as sharing knowledge, fundraising for charity, building communities of professionals, experts, or people with a common interest (Akram, 2018; Bond et al., 2012; Gomez and Kaiser, 2019; Lewis et al., 2014; Schardie, 2018). Generally, this type of activism manifested through the internet and its platforms is known as online activism. It also has

different variations, such as e-activism, cyber-activism, and digital activism (activism through the Internet and/or digital network technologies – e.g., SMS) (Gerbaudo, 2017; Joyce, 2010).

The powerful impact of online activism on contemporary social movements is not a surprising fact given the common usage of online platforms (e.g., 61 % of the global population are active users of social media (Dean, 2021)). Additionally, social media offers accessible, fast, and inexpensive ways to communicate, mobilise resources, and promote intervention (Murthy, 2018). For instance, revolutionary social movements such as the Arab Spring (Balci and Golcu, 2013), BlackLivesMatter (Mundt et al., 2018), and #metoo (Manikonda et al., 2018) are attributed to online activism. In these contexts, the contributions of social media and the internet were highly considered critical tools for mobilisation. These technologies primarily facilitate a faster circulation of information (sharing photos, news, videos, messages), which creates the premise of a common identity and awareness, eventually leading to a more significant mobilisation of individuals from the same geographical area and around the globe to participate in the social movements.

Despite the popularity of these campaigns that manifested against oppressive regimes, racism or sexual harassment, there are also risks of rising movements motivated by hatred, which develop on social media/internet. For instance, ISIS used the Internet as the primary channel to promote their propaganda and to recruit young people for their cause (Alfifi et al., 2018). In addition, extreme right-wing supporters in Sweden campaigned and gained in popularity because of social media and internet platforms (blogs, websites, online forums) (Ekman, 2014) as well as spreading fake news (Iacobucci, 2019) or hate speech (Carlson et al., 2017). These are examples demonstrating that online platforms do not necessarily contribute to the goals of activism (social change and social justice), but they can create dangerous premises in society by using aggressive narratives promoting fear and hatred towards people belonging to other cultures and religions, thus creating barriers to activism.

Scholars acknowledge other kinds of limitations of online activism in terms of the results that it actually provides in real life. Authors such as Foreman (2018) and Lewis et al. (2014) claim that often the internet and social media offer the “illusion of activism” rather than contributing meaningfully to a real change. There is a notorious example of a Facebook campaign on Save Darfur “Cause”, which collected 1.2 million supporters, but only a small number of them have actually contributed with a donation (Lewis et al., 2014). Known in literature as “slacktivism”, this form of activism defines “a low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity” (Rotman et al., 2011, p. 3). Although slacktivism is often criticised for its questionable benefits regarding social change, Vie (2014) considers that this form of activism could be effective in raising awareness on a specific issue (e.g., Human Rights Campaign Logo) by the simple fact of showing solidarity and making people concerned about a matter.

Typically, online activism is non-violent. As suggested by Edwards et al. (2013) study, from 1180 cases of digital/online activism across 151 countries, covering the period from 1982 to 2012, only 4 % of cases explicitly facilitated the use of physical violence, and 2 % indicated hacking attacks to the institution. The research included a collection of data from social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), websites, blogs, online forums, and digital maps. However, a more recent study, analysing 25 live events of political protests in the UK and USA, shows that there is a high risk of violent confrontation when groups of opposing views (right and left-wing adepts) meet in real life after they previously had disputes online (i.e., hostile and threatening comments) (Gallacher et al., 2021). This investigation suggests that online activism does not always facilitate a positive engagement; moreover, it becomes risky when the situation involves individuals belonging to different scales of political values.

In summation, the complexity, and simultaneously, development of activism diversified once with the popularisation of internet tools. Despite revolutionary movements created through online means, there are also limitations that question the effectiveness and the goal of this type of activism. In any case, its influence as a tool of social change is recognised in various domains, including social work, an aspect that will be explored further through the literature review and present findings.

As this section focused on providing insights into how activism is generally theorised, its diverse forms of manifestations, the next part of the chapter will discuss some aspects related to the role of activists within activist movements in order to create a transition to further analysis of social workers as activists.

2.1.4. The role of activists within activism

At the most simplistic level, an activist is defined as “an individual who brings about social change” (Barker, 2003, p. 4). Connected to the variety of forms of activism, activists can also develop diverse identities and roles. For instance, activists working on environmental issues are known as environmental activists or environmentalists (Kutner, 2000; Tesch and Kempton, 2004). Those concerned with defending and protecting human rights are associated with human rights activists or human rights defenders (OHCHR, 2004). Essentially, every field of activism creates a specific activist identity; however, this identity is often negotiated as a result of activists’ personal interpretation and labels attributed to activism (Cortese, 2015). For instance, individuals who perceive activism as radicalism might reject that label and, therefore, would prefer not to self-describe as activists; or those who portray themselves as not worthy of the “title”, would also be reluctant to embrace this identity. The same perceptions might influence the identities of social workers, and additionally, as stated by Smith (2011), personal histories and circumstances such as age, gender, race, or class might also affect the identity-making process.

The present review illustrates that activists (as a movement or community) are an essential component of activism or social movements; moreover, neither can exist without activists. Activists are those who initiate the action of change, maintain it, and eventually might realise the change. They are involved in every stage of the social movement or process of activism, but they might perform different roles according to their values, skills, or expertise and based on the activities undertaken, they can be classified into different typologies (Moyer et al., 2001). Activists are individuals who are unsatisfied with the status quo or sceptical regarding the existing political context and are willing to engage in various forms of activism (political, civic, artistic, etc.) dedicated to challenging or changing the established power relations (Harrebye, 2016). In the end, the ultimate goal of most contemporary activists is to change society for the better.

The existing literature provides some common themes around the roles or identities attributed to those engaged in activist movements. According to Moyer et al. (2001), activists can be the ones who empower and support the movement or, in some situations, disrupt or discredit the movement. Activists are required to plan, evaluate, predict, and prepare backup plans (Oliver and Marwell, 1992). Additionally, there are activists that might have little involvement in the activist movement, but they share the core values of the cohort and support the movement in other ways (e.g., legal assistance) without participating directly in actions of civil disobedience or protests (Svensson et al., 2010). Thus, since the development of the activism movement is a complex process, the roles of activists also denominate complex structures and processes.

The literature emphasises different ways of analysing and understanding activists and activism. Those conceptualisations incorporate key elements such as identities, roles, activities and strategies, goals, or values (see Harrebye, 2016; Moyer et al., 2001; Svensson et al., 2010). However, for the consistency of this work, I will approach some activists' types/identities by

correlating them to dimensions of activism discussed previously (e.g., level of hostility, formality). In this regard, depending on the level of hostility involved, activists can be *trouble-makers*, *challengers* (Harrebye, 2016), *rebels* (Moyer et al., 2001), or *contentious activists* (Svensson et al., 2010) if they engage in actions of civil disobedience that are more confrontative and even escalate to hostile acts. Although these activists might negatively influence the outside image of the movement, they can have an important motivating role inside the activist community (Moyer et al., 2001). On the other hand, there are the so-called *citizens* (Moyer et al., 2001) and *Gandhians* (Svensson et al., 2010) that support their causes without getting involved in disruptive actions, and moreover, they confer legitimacy to the movement in the public eye since they have a strong commitment to their own values, but, at the same time, are open to accepting the opinions of others without escalating to conflictual situations.

An essential role in this process is played by the *experts* (Harrebye, 2016), *salon activists* (Svensson et al., 2010), or *reformers* (Moyer et al., 2001) who are concerned with the legal aspects of their claims, such as accessing the right policies, mediating the relations with the institutional representatives, performing legal elements such as lawsuits, lobbying and so on. Sometimes, there are “alternative” activists that engage with creative and artistic methods, such as *entertainers* (Harrebye, 2016), or *academic activists* who could bring additional expertise to the cause (Flood et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the *community activists* (Zanbar and Itzhaky, 2018) and *agents of change* (Moyer et al., 2001) are those who build the networks and make the connection between the grassroots and professional activists.

To summarise, this sub-section aimed to offer some insights into the importance of the activists in the process of activism. In addition to the fact that an activist movement cannot exist without activists, I argued that activists are an essential component in developing the further dynamic and the potential success of activism/movement. As shown, activists can have complex identities and roles assigned. They have the potential to build and promote a strong

network, increase morale and keep the goals alive, and bring diverse expertise, such as legal and artistic skills to advocate for the cause. On the other hand, some disruptive actions of them might affect the overall movement. The subjective position of the activist can also play a relevant role in determining the intensity or the predisposition of the members of the movement to act or participate in the process of social change.

Overall, this first part of the chapter focused on offering some theoretical understandings of activism as a concept and its practical manifestation. It was shown that activism has complex interpretations, and there is no universal consensus about it. However, through this section, I intended to offer some relevant inputs on the nature of activism and its role in society, creating the framework for a further discussion on social work activism.

2.2. Conceptualising social work activism

In this part of the literature review, I explore the concept of social work activism by linking the previous discussion on general activism with other theoretical debates on social work. In the first instance, I explore the relationship between activism and social work before analysing social work activism as a theoretical concept. Further, a discussion of classification and manifestation will follow, and the tension regarding the roles of social workers as activists or agents of the state are considered.

2.2.1 The relationship between social work and activism

Social work is recognised as a profession that has historically been and is engaged in progressive transformations at individual or systemic levels, attempting to solve the tensions between service provision for disadvantaged communities and advocating for social change and justice (Abramovitz, 1998; Jeyapal, 2016; Payne, 2014). Although professional codes or global definitions of the profession do not mention *activism* as a component of social work, the elements of direct action, social change, and social justice are indicated in and implied by these documents (Bott et al., 2016; De Maria, 1997; Mendes 2007; Payne, 2014). The *Global Definition of the Social Work Profession*, advanced by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), suggests that social work has a commitment to social change, empowerment of people, social justice, and human rights (IFSW, 2014), which in essence, are principles attributed to contemporary activism, as illustrated in previous discussions.

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes 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 knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.” (IFSW, 2014)

The role of social workers as social activists, protesters and challengers of social injustice is acknowledged by theoreticians (Abramovitz, 1998; Bent-Goodley, 2015; Bott et al., 2016; De Maria, 1997; Greenslade, 2014). As per Bott et al. (2016), activism contributes to a proactive approach to accomplish the mission of the social work profession:

“Activism and the role of activist are vehicles for social workers to meet their ethical and educational standards as it pertains to social justice” (Bott et al., 2016, p. 151)

Another key component that informs and shapes the understanding of social work activism as a concept concerns the implications of service users and communities as allies analysing and understanding social work activism. In this regard, the involvement of service users and communities in the process of change can also comply with the core values of social work (e.g., self-determination, participation, solidarity, support for people’s agency) and, nonetheless, they may represent an essential resource to activate change and, together, to achieve the broader mission of the social work profession, such as providing social wellbeing.

As noted by the IFSW (2014) definition, among the goals of social work are to empower communities, reinforce collective action, and acknowledge indigenous knowledge. To a great extent, those aspects are connected with the meaning of activism in contemporary days, as illustrated in the previous chapter. In other words, the involvement and insights of people affected by injustices and other allies are important assets of social work activity and, implicitly, social work activism. On the one hand, it can build various levels of understanding

of the lived experiences of service users and, on the other hand, can inform and accomplish some of the key roles of social work when working with communities. In this matter, empowering the communities, as a form of activism, can mean improving the participation of people in the process of decision-making, and further providing opportunities for taking initiatives about contexts that affect their lives, displaying ownership of community circumstances, and mobilising their own resources (Saxena, 1998). Therefore, from a practical point of view, involving service users can enface the impacts of social work activism.

As discussed in the previous chapter, activists, networks, and human relationships are essential for social change, respectively activism. In order to reach that objective in social work, the relationships between professionals and those who need support should be dynamic and based on reciprocity (Cabiati and Panciroli, 2019; Folgheraiter, 2017). In this matter, the interpersonal and relational processes of social work activism should focus on mobilising valuable types of resources available through the communities and service users, such as various types of skills, competencies, or life experiences.

From a historical perspective, the relationship between social workers and service users has always been a part of professional activity since its formal beginning, and even prior to that. Although this relationship can sometimes be seen as a tense exchange, here referring to paternalistic and expert-led approaches undertaken by professionals; however, there are instances of fruitful collaboration when both sides become allies and valued supporters (Stainton et al., 2010). Particularly, a point of reference to illustrate this collaboration can be related to the emergence of New Social Movements. Back then, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, service users were the engine of important social movements, including the disability movement, civil rights movements, and LGBTQ+ movements. All these demands for equal rights, progressive policies, and adequate practice frameworks were enthusiastically supported by the adepts of radical social work, who aimed to challenge the traditional professional

paradigm (Reisch, 2013). In fact, the collaborative practice became one of the hallmarks of radical, critical, and other forms of social work ideologies (e.g., Adams et al., 2009; Leonard, 1975; Payne, 2014).

Unequivocally, the action of service users to stand up for their rights, voice their experiences, and fight for justice had a significant impact on how social work developed. To a great extent, the involvement of service users reshaped the ideological creed of the profession and, naturally, it became a tenet, a goal, and an essential component of social work activism.

2.2.2. Exploring the ideology and practice of social work activism

According to the existing literature, *social work activism*, also referred to in the literature as *activist social work*, implies social workers taking direct actions which are intended to challenge and change individuals, communities, institutions, and social states, such as social injustice or social exclusion; this might designate social work activism as a process (Greenslade et al., 2014; Mendes, 2007). The literature also mentions the notion of activism *in (or by)* social work, a concept used to describe an approach to develop practices or actions of social change (Chui and Gray, 2004; Gray et al., 2002; Mary, 2001).

Abramovitz (1998) claims that social work activism in the Anglo-American context reached its peak in three different periods. The first period, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, often referred to as the Progressive Era, was a period of professional struggles in creating a professional identity. The next – the 1930s – was characterized by the Great Depression, an economic crisis that impelled new reactions and solutions from social workers to address poverty, injustices and their consequences. Finally, another activist period occurred during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s when the social and political movements for the rights of marginalised groups emerged. These were periods when social workers had been addressing intense internal and external “struggles”, such as the

development of professional identity (the ally of the communities in need or the accomplice of the state) or finding proper ways to fight for social reforms in crisis situations (Abramovitz, 1998; Thompson, 2002).

During these periods, social workers reacted by organising a series of actions that intended to support people living in poverty, establishing networks that became the basis of the modern welfare state in the UK and USA, and drafting important welfare programmes (e.g., the USA's Social Security Act in 1935). They also encouraged service users to advocate for their rights and distribution of goods, joining the emerging human rights social movements in the 1960s-80s, or establishing movements within the profession (e.g., radical social work) (Abramovitz, 1998; Bailey and Brake, 1975; Davis, 2008; Reisch, 2013). Particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, social workers became more engaged in public social services, took more vocal positions, and proposed laws and policies dedicated to improving minimum living standards in the UK and US (Abramovitz, 1998; Davis, 2008; Dickens, 2018). Considering the potential impact of the activist approach to improving society, a substantial cohort of social work scholars over recent decades (especially radical and critical social work supporters) have advocated for integrating a more proactive approach into professional practice, as well as social work education (i.e., Abramovitz, 1998; Belcher et al., 2013; Ferguson, 2008, 2009; Ioakimidis, 2016; Gil, 1998, Jones et al., 2004; Mendes, 2007; Palumbo and Friedman, 2014). According to Palumbo and Friedman (2014), engaging in activities that link social work education with more grassroots initiatives will contribute to the deconstruction of the discourse that there is a narrative between the profession and activism, which will eventually enable professionals to work on common causes and “build systems that work for everyone” (p. 97).

2.2.3. Delimitating the concept of social work activism

This sub-section aims to address several dimensions of social work activism, which include intersections of different spheres, such as social, political, professional, and informal practice.

In the end, these insights aim to shape an understanding of social work activism as it is explored in the literature, serving as a framework for the further analysis of the present study.

Social work activism as a political component of the profession

The identity of the social work profession is strongly related to solving social problems (Michailakis and Schirmer, 2014), but as stated in the global definition, equally important should be the aspects of empowerment and social change (Payne, 2014). Social workers should be politically influential in achieving these goals, but the profession is often understood in many organisational contexts and countries as a non-political activity or politically neutral (Pawar, 2019; Reisch and Jani, 2012; Shelton, 2006).

The political engagement of social workers is greatly encouraged by some writers who argue that it is a crucial part of social work practice. This is because it can not only enable systemic change, but can also fulfil the ethical and moral duties of social work, such as challenging oppression, promoting, and ensuring social justice and human rights (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Boone et al., 2018; Ferguson et al., 2018; Gwilym, 2017; Ioakimidis et al., 2014; Lane and Pritzker, 2018; Pawar, 2019; Webb, 2010). In many discourses, political participation is directly mentioned as a form of activist practice that can be undertaken by the social work professionals (Chui and Gray, 2004; Gray et al., 2002; Mary, 2001; Mizrahi and Dodd, 2013; Swank, 2012). More concretely, examples of activities described as political/activist social work are lobbying and advocating with authorities, working on new legislations, organising or participating in protests/demonstrations against political authorities, engaging in a political campaign, participating in political rallies, donating money for a political cause, voting or encouraging voting.

There is no identified statistical data to illustrate the potential political engagement of social workers in the UK or Romania; however, studies conducted in other countries, including

the USA, Australia, South Africa and Hong Kong, suggest that, by far, the most common political activity of social workers resides in voting, with a percentage of between 70% and 95%. The least common actions were those requiring a more confrontational approach, such as protests and demonstrations (under 50%) (Chui and Gray, 2004; Gray et al., 2002; Rome and Hoechstetter, 2010). In this regard, Gray et al. (2002) emphasise that the political activism of social workers is very much influenced by the political climate of the respective country. For example, in Hong Kong, a state with restrictive governance, social workers are less likely to engage in confrontational practices such as protests, advocacy, or lobbying, compared to social workers in more politically liberal countries such as Australia and New Zealand. On a similar note, writing in the USA context, Mizrahi and Dodd (2013), in their study of social work practitioners and students, found that they are often willing to engage in electoral activities, including making a financial contribution to a political party or engaging in a political campaign – approx. 90 % of the participants. Those in Hong Kong are much more reluctant to associate themselves with political parties or campaigns, only 4.3 % of the respondents.

To conclude this point, existing literature demonstrates that in order to engage with meaningful practice, social work should include strong participation in political dynamics and decision-making. As shown, political participation is correlated to a form of activist social work but, as illustrated by studies in different countries, the political engagement of social workers is greatly influenced by the degree of democratic establishment in that specific state. Overall, as this discussion emphasised the importance of political and social context in activist practice, this is something that I aim to explore further in my own study via the critical realist methodology.

The next sub-section will explore other kinds of social work activism.

Social work activism as a transformative approach of the profession

As previously argued, the capacity of the social work profession for transformative practice (social change) is greatly limited by the neoliberal agenda (Jones et al., 2004). However, criticism of social work's failure to address social injustice and change society for the better was expressed even before the rise of Neoliberalism. The revelatory volume edited by Bailey and Brake (1975) brought to attention the radical paradigm as an alternative to professional practice inspired by traditional or casework social work, focused on individual interventions rather than systemic change. It can be argued that radical social work was the first professional approach to openly integrate activism and pledging for transformative practice.

According to Leonard (1975), radical social work encompasses four major objectives designed to change and create a fairer society. The first objective refers to the provision of *education (consciousness-raising)*, as a key element of radical practices. The author argues that education contributes to the development of people, and due to this, individuals (clients) are aware of their oppression, potential, and how to combat oppression. The second goal is *to link people with the system* and encourage them to act in the best of individuals in need. For this purpose, social workers should play the role of a connector; for example, joining a community organisation offers the chance to advocate for individual or community rights and, at the same time, encourage other individuals to join the cause. Additionally, social workers can intervene at a micro or community level to reduce the risk of isolation and lack of civic and social participation of people (i.e., mediating a familial/community conflict).

As per Leonard (1975), another goal of radical social work seeks *to build counter-systems* inside and outside of already existing systems to influence and make changes that will eventually transform or even annihilate the existing faulty systems, which are contributing to increased social inequalities. This goal can be connected to the previous point referring to

additional interventions on different levels (family, community), in order to prevent the emergence of social problems. Finally, radical social workers must be prepared to offer *individual and structural responses*, which essentially means that social workers should be mindful of how to use the existing structures in their favour and be aware of the short-term effects that they can have on society. Alternatively, social workers should engage with curative services (financial and psychological) when their actions face unexpected difficulties (Leonard, 1975). Essentially, the main philosophy of radical social work can be summarised as closely related to the ideology of activism – challenging and changing the systems, which are viewed as the roots of the social problems, and empowering the powerless.

Radical social work emerged in the 1970s, inspiring later activist/transformational approaches such as critical, feminist, anti-oppressive, or structural practices (Payne, 2014). All of these approaches are built around core ideas, such as awareness and acknowledgement of social injustice, the power structure of social oppression, the impact of individual and collective identities, or pluralist/progressive values (as stipulated in the ethical codes of IFSW) (e.g., Adams et al., 2009; Campbell and Baikie, 2012; Dominelli, 2002; Payne, 2014).

Social work activism as a form of resistance

The previous point highlighted forms of activism that can exceed the stereotypical role or “traditional” view regarding social work activity (e.g., participating in political rallies, donations, voting). In this discussion, I focus on exploring the inside-domain practices (practices within the professional framework) that can be framed as forms of social work activism. In this respect, professionals might often face situations of budgetary constraints, rigid policies and regulations, or inadequate working conditions (Gregory, 2010; Strier and Bershtling, 2016). To navigate these undesirable realities, social workers engage in activities that seek a more ethical practice and are beneficial for clients. In this respect, social work activists can use individual tactics, for example, a degree of non-cooperation with managerial

tasks, by avoiding or simulating some of the bureaucratic activities (Gregory, 2010; Greenslade et al., 2014). Evans and Harries (2004) also mention the use of discretion (interpreting or circumventing the rules and procedures in order to achieve their professional goals) as a tool to navigate or overcome the potential impediments engendered by bureaucracy and increased regulations. In this situation, activist social workers adopt a role that can be characterised as a “rule-breaker”, meaning that they engage in activities that are more focused on the ethical aspects of the profession which, in this matter, would mean being less submissive to the bureaucratic apparatus (Parton, 2003). In addition to these discrete or invisible interventions, social workers can also use collective and direct/visible strategies (protests, demonstrations, rallies) to react against decreasing welfare state and austerity measures that affect their domain of practice (Strier and Bershtling, 2016).

These kinds of reactionary actions that essentially oppose neoliberal and managerial practice are known in the literature as *professional resistance*, and it is often associated with an activist approach (Calhoun et al., 2014; Greenslade et al., 2014; Gregory, 2010; Reisch & Jani, 2012; Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010; Strier and Bershtling, 2016). In Romania, the literature on professional resistance is unexplored. In the UK, the topic is not directly addressed, however, the UK scholarship shows an extensive focus on the impacts of Neoliberalism on the social work profession, as subsequent chapters and analysis illustrate (e.g., Rogowski, 2018, 2020; Ferguson, 2008; Harris, 2003).

One of the relevant works that directly conceptualise professional resistance as a form of social work activism in a neoliberal context is the study of Greenslade et al. (2014) on social workers in Australia. The study provides solid evidence that professionals use resistance, which means usually informal activities, as a way to combat managerial practices and the neoliberal agenda, as well as to engage with more meaningful practice, support clients’ interests, and implement wider changes. According to the authors, these types of actions vary from overt

activities (e.g., advocacy, working on policies, public protests) to covert actions (e.g., rule-bending, stretching professional boundaries, manipulating the truth). Linking these ideas to the previous discussion on general activism as a form of resistance, the professional resistance of social workers can be considered an active form that aims to challenge oppression and seek social change and social justice.

Moreover, Forde and Lynch (2014) introduce the concept of *creative activism* in social work, seen as an innovative approach used by activists to show resistance and undertake collective actions. According to the authors, this concept describes the ability of social workers to find innovative, legal, and ethical ways to address individual and community' issues, despite the limits imposed by the professional framework. For example, social workers can engage in a combination of “insider” or “outsider” activities that can be more or less disruptive, for instance, long picket lines. Thus, these activities might exceed the statutory roles of the profession but have beneficial effects on professional practice.

Social work activism inside and outside of the profession

The above two ideas illustrated the fact that social work activism might designate actions that are developed within social work roles or outside of practices that can be considered “standard tasks” of the profession and are not part of the job description. They might also be related to the everyday activism of social workers who struggle to debate and find alternative ways to improve the profession. For example, Sen et al. (2020) discuss ways in which social workers perform acts of everyday activism by raising awareness about injustices and inequalities experienced by different communities and the failure of existing social work systems to address them. They also work to build the social capital needed to activate networks of support, in the community and in academia, to overcome the limitations and challenges of the existing paradigm in professional practice. Such tasks are not part of traditional social work, but as claimed by scholars (e.g., Bent-Goodley, 2015; Baines, 2011; Parton, 2003), they are based on

ethical considerations and seek to contribute to providing social justice and social change (see above). Despite this evidence, some questions still remain. Addressing these can contribute to the understanding of the concept of social work activism.

In addition, it is evident that, as extracted from the literature, social work activism exceeds the reactive individual focus of “traditional social work” and the casework paradigm (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Greenslade et al., 2014). This approach goes beyond merely assessing needs, risks, and responding to individual issues; social work activism is fundamentally related to actions that affect communities and seek to engender structural changes, requiring “planned social change and a readiness to respond to issues” (Bent-Goodley, 2015, p. 102). Based on these considerations, and the commitment to ethical values and mission as mentioned in the Global Definition, social work activism is *more than* activism *in* social work. It naturally includes insider activities, such as advocacy for the service users, that can be related to activism inside of the profession; but it also addresses larger or outside/extra-professional goals, such as the pursuit of social justice and social change, and reaction against or resistance to oppression. Yet, as Mendes (2003, 2007) says, to achieve these goals, the profession should deal primarily with internal tensions and challenge the constraining aspects of the statutory framework. Some of the activities that could lead to the fulfilment or realisation of the professional mission, and intrinsically, the development of social work activism, could include the promotion of social and political engagement in social work education programmes, solving the tension that resides in the employee of the state *vs* advocate of social justice and social action dynamic, and taking action to enhance the visibility of the professional bodies (Mendes, 2003, 2007).

In addition to inside-outside or informal-formal practices, there are also grey areas such as online practices which, as shown in the previous section, can provide suitable complementary activities for activism (Bond et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2014, Schardie, 2018).

Despite the increasing interest in research on “general” online activism, there is also a growing literature on the impact of online means on social work practice. It is acknowledged that online/internet technologies have expanded the field of practice, making possible the delivery of modern social services such as video counselling, cyber-therapy and self-guided online interventions (Reamer, 2013). Social media and the internet have created a platform for professionals to collaborate, exchange information and good practices regarding issues that manifest not only at the community/local level, but globally (Batista, 2013; Boddy and Dominelli, 2017; Caleria, 2018; Stanfield et al., 2017). Although these activities might enhance activist practice, the topic of social work activism online is relatively new and limited but, as observed, with increased practical imperative and application during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ashcroft et al., 2020; Cioarta, 2020; Sen et al., 2020).

2.2.4. Defining the concept of social work activism

Social work activism is rather vaguely defined within extant literature, however, previous discussions around its delimitations provide a noteworthy insight into how this phenomenon might be defined. It was observed that delimitations of social work activism are not fixed, and it might refer to a large set of activities within and outside the professional framework. Based on this synthesis of the literature, another original contribution consists of elaborating the following definition:

Social work activism involves actions of change driven essentially by social workers united under the same professional values (see, IFSW, 2014), who act within and outside of the profession in order to enhance the pledged mission of wellbeing and social justice at the individual and social level.

To some extent, the above definition illustrates overlapping principles of the conceptualisation of activism in general (see the previous sub-chapter), the global definition of

social work (IFSW, 2014), and other definitions of social work activism in the literature as indicated above (e.g., Greenslade, 2014; Mendes, 2007). Some particular ideas were interpreted – such as *actions of social change*, which can imply diverse forms of *political* and *civic participation*, professional *resistance* against the neoliberal agenda and Capitalism, online and offline activities that have the role of contributing to the *mission* of the social work profession to improve the overall social wellbeing, as stipulated by the IFSW (2014). However, there is also a need to explore the role of social work activists. *Who are they? Does the term social work activist refer only to social workers? Is there a difference between a social work activist and a social worker who is not an activist? Can one be a social worker and an activist, but not necessarily a social work activist?* These are some issues that need to be addressed in order to build a better understanding of social work activism. Therefore, the following section explores some ideas around the roles of social work activists that will further contextualise the findings of the present research.

2.2.5. The role of social workers in [social work] activism

After discussing the possible dimensions of social work activism, it is important to also acknowledge the role of those engaged in the phenomenon. Primarily, social work activism is developed and realised by social workers, but could other actors and stakeholders (e.g., other professionals, service users and their relatives) be considered as a part of the social work activist movement if they support social workers' mission for social change and social justice? There is not sufficient research on this aspect to illuminate an answer since not all social workers identify themselves as activists (Sen et al., 2020; Smith, 2011) and, moreover, social work activism is still a vague concept. However, to be in line with the present work, the term social work activists will be used in this study to describe those within the profession, whilst other actors and stakeholders will be used to refer to as allies of the activist social work movement.

Some scholars have engaged in discussions on the role of social work activists, and they are similarly addressed in relation to the professionals. In Smith's (2011) opinion, a social work activist could be considered any social worker who acts in the spirit of progressive values and characterises themselves as "feminist, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, radical and critical" (p. 3). Baines (2011), in addition to the values, advances a set of skills that social workers should have in order to be an activist, such as being resourceful and acting ethically rather than procedurally, as well as being reflective and critical towards their relationship with the state and how it treats the service users.

Reflecting on their role, the discussion inevitably goes to a widespread debate in social work; an agent of change [alias activist] or agent of social control [alias state employee and accomplice]. This is a critical point for many scholars researching social work activism, or other variations of it, such as radical and critical social work (Baines, 2011, Ferguson, 2013; Garthwait, 2012; Ioakimidis; 2016; Moriarty et al., 2015; Nandan et al., 2015; Weaver, 2000; Wenocur and Reisch, 2001). An agent of change might be described as "a social worker working toward change at the micro, mezzo or macro level of practice" (Garthwait, 2012, p. 11), and at the same time, emphasising the tensions between individual/micro practice and more structural/macro practice (Wenocur and Reisch, 2001). As per Ioakimidis (2016), in order to comply with the role of an agent of change, social workers "should always incorporate elements of political action" (n.p.) and activities oriented to challenging inequality, poverty, and managerial practices. Additionally, Weaver (2000) argues that an agent of change should also be aware of cultural oppression and act and think beyond the idea of change. As implied by Weaver (2000), a social work activist has to engage in the process of change, being aware of aspects such as cultural diversity and being critical towards oppressive practices such as forced assimilation.

These are some of the elements considered part of the identity of social work activists; values, skills, and approaches to practice. In addition, motivation was found as an important component of activism engagement in general (Borshuk, 2004; Eccles, 2009; Faver, 2001; Klar and Kasser, 2009; Miller and Krosnick, 2004; Sheldon et al., 2016); and particularly as a critical component for understanding social work activism (Greenslade et al., 2014; Smith, 2011). As argued by Greenslade et al. (2014), and Smith (2011), the main motivations for activist practice are inspired by social workers' desire to maximize the outcomes for their service users. Other motivations for acting in this manner include working to reach their own self-agenda (e.g., complying with their own political ideology, improving job satisfaction, increasing professional reputation), and addressing the work experiences and practices (e.g., dealing with time pressure and incoherent practices).

Considering all of these aspects, it is acknowledged that the social work activist is neither singular nor easy to determine (Greenslade et al., 2014; Smith (2011). It is a combination of perspectives, approaches to social work, and personal determinants, such as a political view and past experiences, or personal characteristics, including aspects such as age, gender, and class. By way of illustration, an activist can concomitantly be a critically reflective (focused on supporting service users despite the statutory limitation), a structural social worker (seeking to challenge the broader injustice), an ethical practitioner, or a feminist, human rights activist and so on.

In this sense, Greenslade et al. (2014) propose a typology of contemporary social work activism, building on the work of Domanski (1998), that attempts to explain the dominant activist approaches of social workers, taking into consideration attributes such as motivations, fields of practice, and activists' predisposition to act overtly and covertly. Thus, Greenslade et al.'s (2014) classification indicates that a social work activist can be variously viewed as a *strategist* (interested in their reputation and uses the documents of the workplace in order to

implement change), a *change agent* (strongly connected to social justice values and left political ideologies, often motivated to find new opportunities for activism, acts openly or covertly), a *quiet* activist (prefers to act with subtle steps, involved in covert activism), a *lawful* activist (engages in activism with a very high precaution not to break the law or infringe the ethical boundaries).

Although this typology offers a fair account of understanding possible approaches of the social work activists in practice, it also presents some limitations. For instance, as acknowledged by the authors, the sample of the participants was relatively small (15). Additionally, the results of the study were based on a single jurisdiction (Australia), therefore it might not have a strong correlation with countries with distinct social and political climates, such as Romania. Although the typology is framed from a political model of participation (Domanski, 1998), it is not explained through a broader political lens or social settings, as I attempt in my study. An analysis based on 15 focused interviews within a single state is difficult to provide enough generalisable input for other contexts. Therefore, there is the need to gain more perspectives on the development of social work activism in other contexts and the sorts of mechanisms impacting upon its manifestation.

2.3. Filling a gap in the existing literature

In general, social work activism and the role of social work activists are very marginal topics in social work research. By way of illustration, Kurten et al. (2021) identified 1406 research papers published (between 2016 and 2020) in three British-based, yet internationally open, social work journals: European Journal of Social Work (EJSW), British Journal of Social Work (BJSW), and the Research on Social Work Practice (RSWP). According to data provided by several reviews of social work research, the investigations published in journals have diverse

foci (Kurten et al., 2021; Shaw and Norton, 2008; Sheppard, 2016). The research topics can refer to *service users and carer groupings* (e.g., families and children, youth, offenders/victims of offenders, people with health problems/disabilities, elderly, drug users); *citizens, users, communities* (e.g., women and men, people as members of the community); *professional and policy communities* (e.g., professionals/managers/students/ university staff in social work, regulations and policies in social work) and *others topics* (e.g., theories of social work, research methodologies in social work etc.). The reviews also emphasise the domination of research topics that belong to the first two categories, and have no direct link to the topic of this study. Therefore, the present study can fill this gap in research and literature.

Overall, my literature search indicated that the majority of articles which directly tackle social work activism/activists have emerged in English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, USA, so they can be the subject of cultural bias (Baines, 2011; Chui and Gray, 2004; Forde and Lynch, 2014; Gray et al., 2002; Greenslade et al., 2014; Mizrahi & Dodd, 2012; Reeser, 1992; Smith, 2011; Swank & Fahs, 2013). Furthermore, it can be argued that the existing studies also present an important methodological limitation because their results are generally based on a single research method, quantitative or qualitative.

In terms of literature published on social work activism in both analysed countries, some gaps were observed. In the UK, there is extensive literature on activist approaches in social work, such as radical, critical, feminist, or structural social work (e.g., Adams et al., 2009; Bailey and Brake, 1975; Dominelli, 2002; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Ferguson et al., 2018; Harris, 2009; Ioakimidis and Lavalette, 2011; Payne, 2014; Turbett, 2013, 2014). However, this literature does not focus on developing an understanding of social work activism per se. On the other hand, In Romania, there are no theoretical or empirical studies approaching the topic of social work activism or activism in social work. Therefore, this study aims to provide a new contribution to knowledge by exploring this concept in different European

contexts. In this regard, this study seeks to investigate more widely the personal, professional, and structural factors influencing the activist conduct of social workers in the two countries, taking into consideration their different social, political, and cultural conditions. For a better understanding of how these aspects manifest in different contexts, it is necessary to outline some historical milestones of the social work profession in both jurisdictions.

2.4. Social work [activism] in Romania and the UK – The Background

In this section, I will present some historical landmarks of the social work profession in Romania and the UK, from its roots to the present time. This analysis has the purpose of familiarising the reader with the historical context of social work in both countries, offering some background information which will later inform the theoretical analysis of data. Having a sense of the historical development of social work in both jurisdictions can illuminate the opportunities and challenges and the contexts, as well as enablements or opportunities that influenced the present situation of the profession in both countries. *Figure 1.3.1* shows the development of the social work profession in Romania and the UK and their different paths, pointing out the historical landmarks of the profession, depending on the political climate manifested in each state.

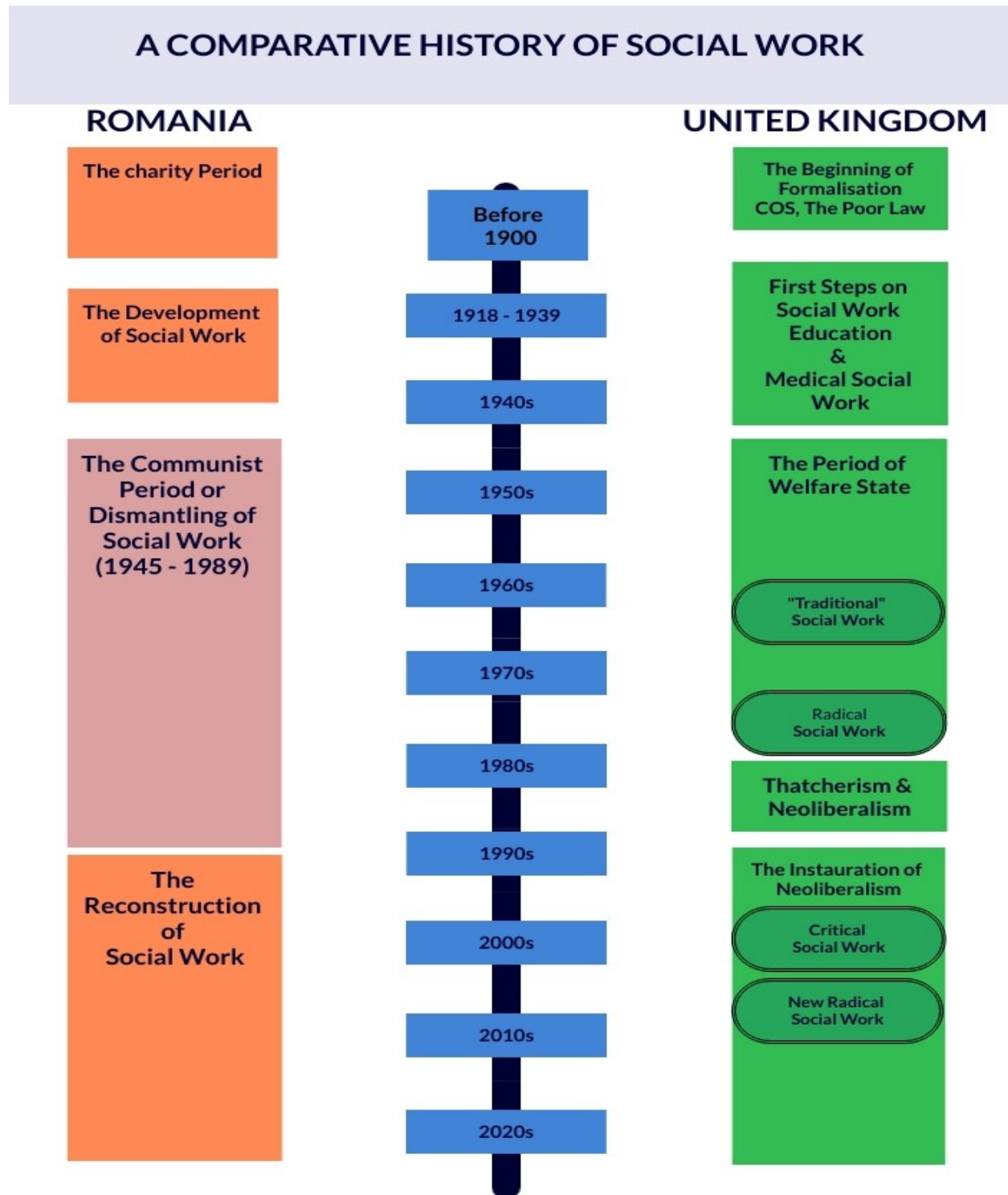
[Illustration on the next page]

2.4.1. Historical background of social work in Romania and the UK

To begin with, the charity period (pre – 1900) describes the social work roots in both countries. It includes a few centuries of working with people in need, developed especially by the Church and private philanthropy, but also assisted by some incipient forms of welfare. The formalisation and recognition of social work as an independent activity, however, happened earlier in the UK. As per Youngusband (1981, p. 11), the starting point of social work as a recognised activity is rooted in “the slums of London in the late XIX century”. Institutional formalisation came as a response to the problems caused by industrialisation and massive immigration from rural to urban areas which exacerbated the problems of poverty, poor sanitation and inadequate housing (Pierson, 2011).

Figure 2.1.

Historical landmarks of social work in Romania and the UK



On the other hand, in Wallachia (one of the Kingdoms that forms Romania today), the first formal measures to regulate the social assistance activity were set up in the 19th century (Manoiu and Epureanu (1996) cited by Lazar (2015a)). Activities such as protecting missing children and orphans were largely extended in rural areas, but still very much dependent on the financial contribution of the Church and private donors (Lazar, 2015a). At this point, it can be argued that, comparatively, social work in the UK had an earlier professional consolidation. However, according to Horner (2009), the early professionalisation of social work in the UK was possible by incorporating a “*medical model* of treatment, control, restraint, and the creation of specialist roles that separated those in need of care and control from their families, neighbourhoods, communities, and societies” (p. 20). This type of management of social problems further moved from institutional control (segregation from the community) to community care control, which according to some critics, is still present in society (Horner, 2009). In this sense, currently, it is argued that, in general, social work in the UK is framed around the idea of care, rehabilitation, recovery, and less focused on supporting and fostering the independence, as the role of social workers should be according to the scholars (Beresford, 2005; Horner, 2009).

Further, in the early 20th century, social work reached important professional and educational milestones in both jurisdictions. In 1903, the first school with a social work curriculum was established in London; and in 1923, the first mental health course was initiated (Younghusband, 1981). This was also the time when professionals have begun to discuss ethical debates in social work. There was a confrontation between the old vision of individualisation of problems and blaming the poor, versus a new movement concerned with understanding and tackling structural and social causes of the problems (Reamer, 1998). Essentially, the latter view, arguably, illustrates the first activist attempt of social work to promote social justice and social reform.

In Romania, scholars often correlate the period between the two World Wars with an important phase of social work development (Buzducea, 2009; Lambriu, 2002; Lazar, 2015a). Under the guidance of the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, the modern social work system was founded in 1920 and integrated as a part of the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Social Welfare. Not long after, the first Romanian School of social work was established in 1929. The period between 1930 and 1945 illustrated a promising development of the social work profession, when both the state and private organisations developed several social programs and reforms with a focus on families, children, or public health (Lambriu, 2002). Despite its novelty as an organised activity, social work incorporated modern principles inspired by the vision of Dimitrie Gusti. According to him, social work is an extension of sociology whose mission should be to solve social problems by engaging in a rigorous process of understanding society and applying techniques of social interventions (Costa-Foru Andreescu (1980) cited by Sorescu (2015)). From this point of view, it can be argued that the profession in Romania developed at a slower pace than in the UK. The professionalisation was realised rapidly, and it was mainly related to a single ethos – the vision of Dimitrie Gusti and his team to intervene to solve social problems.

The following decades after WW2 represent probably the most distinctive periods between the two countries, in terms of social work development. While in the UK, the profession received support and confidence from the political leaders (Davis, 2008), in Romania, the instauration of the Communist regime came with a decline of the social work profession, and the majority of social services were gradually disbanded, including social work education (Lambriu, 2002). The existence of the profession was considered a threat to the legitimacy of communist dogma that pledged to solve the emerging social problems through state mechanisms. During almost 50 years of governing, the most relevant surviving institutions of social services were orphanages and shelters for people with disabilities and the

elderly, but these were functioning in extremely precarious conditions (Lambrou, 2002). This period of political and social oppression had a significant influence on the Romanian people in general and the social work profession, particularly in terms of navigating political and social crises, understanding the role of the state, or exploring structural inequalities. These aspects are explored in the analytical chapter.

In the UK, after the Second World War, the profession received important political support and became one of the main pillars of the welfare state (Davis, 2008). However, later in the 1960s, social work received criticism from the inside (critics of traditional social work) as a result of its failure to address the structural problems of society, such as poverty and inequality. On the other hand, intense criticism came from outside of the profession, adhering to conservative ideologies, claiming that the welfare apparatus is a burden to the state. Encouraged by the collective movements from the 1960s and 1970s, radical social work emerged as an alternative to traditional social work, seeking to address the roots of structural inequalities caused by Capitalism and advance an approach based on collective engagement and human rights (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Ferguson, 2008). From the beginning, the aim pledged by radical social work was to change the paradigm of dealing with social issues from an individualistic focus to wider social agenda, particularly collectivism and community-focused interventions.

While the period of the 1980s represented the last decade of Communism in Romania, in the UK, the politics of the '80s had a powerful impact on social work, being dominated by the neoliberal agenda advanced under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. This political agenda was characterised by constant attacks on the welfare state, implicitly social work, which was accused of being ineffective and costly (Dominelli, 2010; Rogowski, 2015; Payne, 2005). Additionally, as argued by the scholars, the adoption of neoliberal policies led to massive privatisation, marketisation, and bureaucratisation of social services, which essentially

transformed social workers into case managers focused on achieving financial and administrative targets and less concerned about building an authentic relationship with the service users.

In 1990, right after the Communist Fall, the reconstruction of the social work profession in Romania began. The first measures included the introduction of social work degree at the university level and some urgent interventions to address the legacy of the Communist Era (including an extremely high number of children in care, poverty and disastrous living conditions of disabled people) (Lambriu, 2002). The late 1990s meant for the UK the change of political power from Conservative to (New) Labour, but a more solid instauration Neoliberalism in social work, with an increased focus on risk and rationing, and further a stronger accountability of the profession to politicians (Jones, 2014). On the other hand, the emergence of critical social work and the re-birth of radical social work were observed as important ideological milestones in the UK, and globally (Fook, 2003).

2.4.2. Social work in Romania and the UK in contemporary times

From an organisational and legal point of view, social work is a regulated profession in both countries. In the UK, each of the four constituent nations has a regulatory body responsible for the profession, namely: Social Work England, Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), Social Care Wales, and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. In Romania, The National College of Social Workers in Romania (NCSWR) is designated to represent the profession and its interests. These institutions are responsible for elaborating and updating the codes of practice in each jurisdiction, and also have a vital role in protecting and promoting social work and the title of the social worker. They oversee and approve the educational standards and training in social work. It is also important to note that in both countries there are other independent professional organisations aiming to defend and promote the profession: BASW (British Association of Social Workers), along with SWAN (Social Work Action Network) and SWU

(Social Workers' Union) in the UK, and ASproAS (The Association of Social Workers in Romania). These organisations unite many social workers in the UK and Romania, being credited for several activist actions (e.g., 100-mile march against austerity measures (in the UK), demonstrations, campaigns that advocate for social workers' and clients' rights).

The total number of social workers in the UK registered in local authorities and agencies, according to official data, is somewhere around 96000 social workers, with 5000 - 6000 vacancies (NMDS-SC, 2018). In Romania, according to Buzducea (2015), despite over 30000 graduates in social work in the last three decades, there is a deficit of 11000 social workers in the system, and only 5500 are practicing their profession. As per Buzducea (2015), many graduates in social work choose to work in other fields because of the low salaries and precarious working conditions within the system. As the study of Lazar et al. (2015b) reveals, only 30 % of the workers in the social services in Romania have a diploma in social work.

Although the profession is based on distinct premises, meaning that social work in Romania is relatively newly (re)established and the British system is considered one of the most developed systems in the world (Buzducea, 2009), there are many shared issues between and across both jurisdictions. For instance, some aspects relate to the low level of job satisfaction and high level of stress among professionals. According to nation-wide research in the UK, between 55-60 % of social workers consider leaving the profession in the next six to 18 months, mainly due to working conditions (e.g., stress, increased caseloads) (Ravalier, 2018; Ravalier et al., 2020). In Romania, as per Lazar et al. (2016, 2020), around 54 % of social workers declared that the professionals are rather unsatisfied with their job due to working conditions and low payment. Additionally, the stress associated with work is a prevalent condition among the professionals in both states. Lazar et al. (2016, 2020), found out that around 75% of the social workers included in the research presented symptoms of burn-out,

while in the UK, between 73% -76% of the respondents declared they experience a high level of stress associated with their work (McFadden, 2015; YouGov, 2020).

Another common issue refers to high caseloads, which contributes to both low job satisfaction and an increased level of stress (Lazar et al., 2016; Ravalier, 2018; Ravalier and Boichat, 2018; Ravalier et al., 2020). Social workers in both countries share concerns related to the high number of cases attributed, as well as the complexity of these cases; a bureaucratic activity that occupies a significant amount of the professionals' working time. In this regard, around 80 % of social workers in Romania declared they spend a significant amount of time on activities such as screening and assessment or case management (Lazar, 2015b). Data in the UK shows that 62% of social workers experience stress due to a high level of administrative workload (YouGov, 2020).

Finally, as another common point, the image of the social work profession is often inaccurately represented and, therefore, incorrectly projected among the general public. Studies in both jurisdictions reveal that there is a low understanding of social work's role in society (being often confused with other professions), and mass media has an important contribution to building this inaccurate portrait of social workers (Lazar et al., 2018b; Penhale and Young (2015). As Jones (2012) suggested, social workers in the UK are disproportionally portrayed as negative actors in society, rather than in a positive light. Often blamed for situations of injustice, social workers became a target associated with "bad news", seen as power abusers (e.g., "extracting children from families"), and principally responsible for episodes of human sufferings (cases of infantile deaths, kidnapping, assaults, and so on). Jones (2012) claims that this negative and often one-sided portrayal of the profession in the media can further encourage adverse and abusive reactions from service users and their relatives towards social workers, as well as resulting in low confidence amongst politicians and policymakers, resulting in diminished political support. Overall, it can be argued that the media plays an important role

in both countries in how the general public views, values, trust, and support the activity of social workers.

2.5. Conclusion of the Literature Review

This literature review has explored three main areas of inquiry. Firstly, it explained the theoretical interpretation of activism, which in the literature can be conceptualised as a process or as a nominal act of change. The next discussion emphasised some components identified as integrant parts of activism, such as actions of change, initiators/activists, common values, inter-collective processes, level of manifestations, and common goals. Based on these indicators, I advanced my own definition of activism:

Activism as a process defines actions of change driven by initiators/activists (individuals or social groups) that share common values (solidarity, identity, desire, progressive values) and are involved in inter-collective processes (reflecting, challenging, empowering), necessary to allow them to impact a domain (social, political, cultural) in order to reach (a) common goal/s (systemic/organizational/individual changes).

Further, I have engaged with some theoretical debates around social movements in order to explain the emergence of contemporary activism. I argued that although activism can be framed as diverse theories of collective actions, the New Social Movements theory (NSMT) explains best the manifestations and ideologies of today's activism (Buechler, 1995; 2013). Analysing the work of authors such as Cortese (2015), Harrebye (2016), and Roth (2016), I explored the dimensions of activism, taking into account its spheres of manifestation (e.g., informal or formal, peaceful or hostile, active or resistant), as well as engaging with a discussion highlighting the role of activists and their influence to the process.

The second part of the literature review focused on social work activism, following a similar narrative as the preceding section. Initially, I highlighted the strong correlation between activism and the social work profession and explored some conceptual delimitations of social work activism as presented in the literature (Abramovitz, 1998; Chui and Gray, 2004; Gray et al., 2002; Greenslade et al., 2014; Jeyapal, 2016; Payne, 2014; Mendes, 2007), and further, I elaborated a definition developed from a synthesis of the outcomes and arguments advanced in and by the existing literature:

Social work activism involves actions of change driven essentially by social workers united under the same professional values (see, IFSW, 2014), who act within and outside of the profession in order to enhance the pledged mission of wellbeing and social justice at the individual and social level.

The discussion continued by illustrating different forms of social work activism; as a political activity, a form of professional resistance and as a set of formal/informal actions. At the same time, the chapter has acknowledged the role of social work activists and their task to navigate the tension agent of change vs agent of control (Baines, 2011, Ferguson, 2013; Ioakimidis; 2016; Moriarty et al., 2015; Nandan et al., 2015; Reeser, 1992; Weaver, 2000; Wenocur and Reisch, 2001). This section also illustrated the limited empirical research in the field, the research and methodological gaps, as well as the significance of the present investigation.

The third section offered some background on the analysed jurisdictions. It provided a comparative overview of the main historical and contemporary characteristics of social work development and practice in Romania and the UK. Despite evident differences (historically, economically, culturally, politically and socially), which inevitably influenced social work today, there are still shared elements in both jurisdictions. In practical and structural aspects, it can be observed that social workers face similar issues. In practice, social work professionals

face a high level of stress-related work, a high volume of caseloads (bureaucracy), insufficient funding, and a distorted image of the profession in the media and among the public. Overall, this chapter contributes an original discussion on activism, which unpacks the different elements that might constitute it. Similarly, the discussion on social work activism is an original contribution as it brings a new way of engaging theoretically with the main topic of the present study.

As mentioned above, from an ideological point of view, both countries, through their representing professional organisation, have committed to engage with a transformative practice as described by the global definition of the social work profession (IFSW, 2014). In this sense, these theoretical foundations of social work should represent a common ground (the same set of values, mission to promote and advocate for social change, social justice, human rights, empowerment, or societal well-being). However, given the realities in practice (institutional and structural constraints, the neoliberal agenda), these goals are not truly reached in either of the jurisdictions. In other words, the capacity of social workers to act as agents of change, or engage in activism, is drastically limited. Thus, one of the aims of this study is to bring into the light more ground-level perspectives on challenges that obstruct and incentivise social workers' actions of change, considering different experiences and settings, but similar issues.

2.6. Research Objectives and Questions

Despite some existing research, there are significant gaps within the literature in relation to theorisation and empiricism of social work activism, particularly in Romania, and to some extent in the UK. This research aims to contribute to the debate and dialogue regarding this issue by engaging with four major objectives.

In the first instance, this study aims to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of activism and, particularly, social work activism in contemporary society. Taking into account the main ideas depicted within the existing literature, I engage in an exploration of those key concepts, as well as emphasising different nuances underpinned in both jurisdictions. Namely, I investigate the interpretation and practice of social work activism in two countries with different premises – the UK, one of the biggest powers in the Western societies with a long tradition of the social work profession, and Romania, a former communist country strongly affected by the transition period and in which the social work system is still in the process of developing.

Secondly, this investigation aims to foreground the perspectives of social workers in Romania and the UK regarding activism and social work activism. Here, I aim to put forward insights informed by personal experiences and external factors that might enable or obstruct the involvement of the respondents in social work activism. These will help me understand distinctive and similar nuances shaping social work activism in different socio-politico-cultural contexts and, moreover, emphasise the most appropriate approaches to overcome the practical barriers faced by social workers.

Additionally, the literature review shows the great influence but limited experiences of online tools and social media activism within social work. Therefore, with this research, I intend to advance an analysis of the benefits and the risks created by online fora and their conditions to be effective, especially in the current times when numerous social movements start and/or happen online. I believe that this research can contribute to a more empowering approach to addressing social issues. It encourages social workers to reflect, act ethically, and reach the pledged mission of the profession (IFSW, 2014) by assuming the role of activist.

By adopting a critical realist framework, this investigation will address the methodological gap (single method studies) and provide a model of analysing the studied phenomenon by examining the cultural bias through evidencing how different social, cultural, political and historical mechanisms influence its development. Thus, to address the above-mentioned gaps, this study set out to address the following research questions:

- How do social workers from the UK and Romania conceptualise and practice activism and social work activism?
- What are the motivations and other personal attributes that encourage the engagement of social workers in activism/social work activism?
- What kinds of structural factors enable or constrain the engagement of social workers in activism/social work activism?
- What is the influence and impact of digital technologies, including social media, on the engagement of social work activists in both jurisdictions?

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Overview

The main purpose of social research is to explore and explain social phenomena and understand the reasons why they happen. More concretely, the research methodology aims to provide a technical analysis regarding the investigation's design and how the research questions are addressed (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008; Rudestam, 2007). Further, the role of the methodology chapter is to demonstrate the familiarisation and knowledge of the researcher regarding the type of research methodologies and to indicate the most appropriate approach for their own study. In this regard, the following chapter illustrates the stages that were undertaken to conduct the present investigation, using the indications of Crotty (1998) – discussions on ontology and epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology justification, methods choice, and data analysis methods. Therefore, the first part of this chapter provides a discussion on critical realism as a philosophical position upon which the present study is based whilst explaining the exclusion of other possible philosophical views (i.e., positivism and interpretivism). The second part includes a discussion of the existing social work research using critical realism and the potential implication of this paradigm in shaping the phenomenon of social work activism. The next part presents the research design, justification for using mixed methods, details on the target group, recruitment, and sampling, ending with presenting the process of data collection and data analysis, and subsequently, discussing the ethical issues and limitations of the current inquiry.

3.1. Positioning the research within the critical realist paradigm

There are several approaches when referring to research philosophies in social science. The most dominant, according to Bickman and Rog (2009) and Saunders et al. (2012), are positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism. For this research project, I decided to use critical realism since, as demonstrated further, it is consistent with the core nature of the phenomenon of social work activism as well as with the social work profession. In this respect, I argue that critical realism brings a more compelling and complex understanding of the causal factors (mechanisms) that act on social work activism and, therefore, a greater comprehension of how and why the phenomenon of social work activism occurs. However, to make better sense and effectively address the aims of the present study, I also explored other possible research paradigms. As a result, this section underlines the limitations, as well as possible contributions of some other major research approaches (positivism and interpretivism), justifying why they are not an appropriate fit for this investigation.

Positivism

As a philosophy of science, positivism has its roots in the XIX century (work of Auguste Comte), and this perspective acknowledges that the social world is a product resulting from traditional methods such as experiment and observation, which can be systematically replicated (Scott and Marshall, 2015; Travers, 2008). The positivist approach focuses on facts, causality between social events and laws, testing and formulating hypotheses, and objectivity of the observer/researcher (Thompson, 2015; Zaborek, 2009). From a positivist perspective, social reality is reduced to what is observable and measurable, emphasising the validity,

reliability, and representativeness of the data (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Thompson, 2015). As a consequence, aspects such as feelings and emotions do not represent suitable data (Jankowicz, 2005). The most frequent methods in contemporary research using positivism are quantitative methods, based on a rigorous process of concept operationalisation and large samples such as social surveys and structured interviews, which may in some instances, for example, be used to generate official national statistics (Thompson, 2015).

In relation to the present comparative research on social work activism, the positivist view can contribute by providing some generalisable data that informs a descriptive profile of activism/social work activism in Romania and the UK. Additionally, it might allow someone studying social work activism to recruit a much broader sample of social workers across a wider range of institutions belonging to different administrative areas, as is the case of the four constituencies in the UK. Although positivism can provide some explanatory power regarding the studied phenomenon, showing patterns and trends (Creswell and Creswell, 2018); for instance, find out dominant forms of activism in each jurisdiction. Yet, this paradigm offers a limited understanding of the phenomenon because social work activism is more complex than what is observable or measurable. As illustrated in the literature review, activism and social work activism can denote an intricate process, with perceived and unseen dynamics within and outside the phenomenon. It engages personal and collective experiences that necessitate more in-depth exploration, such as identities, views, values, motivations, power and agency. Therefore, considering the nature of the data required, the positivist approach is limited and unlikely to generate the kinds of data required to answer the research questions.

Interpretivism

As opposed to positivism, interpretivism (and more exactly, constructionism) sees social reality not as a given but as a social construct – it is subjective, and the observer is always

part of it (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Zaborek, 2009). According to the constructionist view, “we never know what universal true or false is, what is good or bad, right or wrong; we know only stories about true, false, good, bad, right or wrong” (Galbin, 2014, p. 1). Essentially, constructionism relates to the idea of understanding the social world through the lenses of how others experience it and what significance they attribute to it (Kawulich, 2012). Examples of topics that use social constructionism include gender studies, homelessness, nationalism, LGBT culture – topics oriented to revealing the complexities and deepening understandings of human nature by highlighting the individual, subjective experiences (interpretations) or “lived” realities (Hacking (1999) in Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). For instance, in the case of homelessness, an interpretivist approach would argue that the way political actors interpret and treat homelessness is vital to how it is seen as a social issue (Fitzpatrick, 2005). On the other hand, homelessness can be explained through the lenses of individuals who experience this phenomenon and, therefore, shaping an understanding of human reality.

Although this research paradigm offers good prospects to interpret lived experiences and motivations of the target group, it still presents some limitations. Firstly, it can be discussed that studying the complex nature of social work activism in two countries requires a comparative and quantitative approach in order to make sense of the two national realities. In essence, I acknowledge the influence of social construction in creating the reality of the studied phenomenon (i.e., personal experience of social workers) in both constituencies, but the analysis goes beyond their subjective view of social work activism. In this sense, one of the limitations of the interpretivist view is the inability of providing substantial input on the power dynamics that influences the subjective perspective(s), which, as indicated in the literature review, represents one of the gaps in knowledge that is addressed in the present research. As per Mark (2010), interpretivism tends to overlook the dynamics between power and agency, or other elements that can independently affect and effect the development of social work

activism, such as common practices, laws that govern the social work profession, including historical, political, social, and cultural contexts – which are particularly important in this comparative research. Therefore, to address these limitations of understanding and explaining these unseen dynamics and power, I engage with critical realism (CR), as shown in the next discussion (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Critical realism

While Marxist theories (the roots of critical theories) focus on phenomena at the macro-level (class struggle, mass movement, working-class revolution), such theories do not offer an explanation of how these macro phenomena relate to and shape the actions and interactions of people and between people in their everyday context. By contrast, critical realism provides a framework of analysis for both social structure and social change at a macro level and an analysis of individual and collective actions, focusing on interactions between individuals and social structures and their contribution to social change (Danermark et al., 2002). As per Vincent and O'Mahoney (2018), CR allows us to critically explain social phenomena and explore the factors that influence the nature of, in this context, comparative social work activism.

Ontologically, CR is a philosophy of social science that offers explanations over the matter of the social world. This approach was originally discussed in the 1970s' by Roy Bhaskar and developed further by other theorists, including Archer (1995), Cruickshank et al. (2003), and Danermark et al. (2002), who emphasised its applications to, for example, social sciences, humanities, or economics. Unlike positivism, claiming that there is one single and objective reality that can be observed and measured, or interpretivism which argues for multiple realities based on individual subjectivities, critical realism, as per Archer et al. (1998)

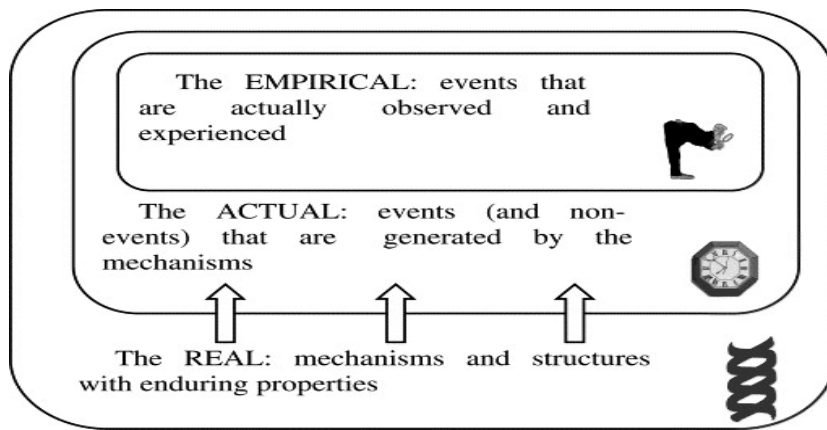
and Bhaskar (1975), proposes that social reality exists, but is always uncertain, negotiated, and independent of our knowledge.

Epistemologically, CR acknowledges the role of the observer and that they cannot be isolated from reality (Bhaskar, 1975). In other words, the researcher is always part of the knowledge process that brings with them own baggage of ideas, beliefs, values and, therefore, offers a limited view of the social world. CR, essentially, comes as an alternative to both positivism and interpretivism, but “borrows” ontological and epistemological elements from both paradigms. In this matter, CR is able to produce two sides of knowledge, as emphasised by Bhaskar (2008) – one knowledge under the form of social product generated by people through observation and experimentation, and another knowledge that is part of the social world and made by “things which are not produced by men at all” (p. 11). In this sense, the social world can be explored and better understood.

According to a CR perspective, the social world is a cumulation of natural aspects, interrelated with social objects and structures that are determined by causes and mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2012). Therefore, social reality becomes a complex result of those elements. To better understand social reality, Bhaskar proposes three domains of ontology (*Figure 3.1*). The first domain, *empirical*, is limited to experiences (events that can be observable and experienced). The *actual* domain is broader and includes, in addition to experiences, events that are determined by external mechanisms, both experienced and unexperienced, which contributes to the understanding of the actual domain. Lastly, the domain of *real* includes mechanisms (structures and causal powers), among events and experiences. In this context, mechanisms are simply defined as actions that can influence or “cause something in the world to happen” (Danermark et al. 2002, p. 55). Mechanisms are not necessarily observable, but their effects are observable and experienced in the empirical and actual domains, which are known as causal or generative mechanisms (Craig and Bigby, 2015; Thapa and Omland, 2018).

Figure 3.1.

Bhaskar's domains of reality (Source: Mingers, 2004)



Before defining the role of mechanisms, an illustration of these domains would be useful. By taking the example of social work activism, we can simply describe the visible part of it as the empirical level of the phenomenon (i.e., social workers protesting on the street, volunteering, signing petitions, or collecting funds). In the second domain, the actual, we might include the experiences, frustrations and struggles of social workers, cooperation and conflicts within the activist movement, efforts of people engaged in organising a specific event etc. Lastly, the real domain refers to all generative mechanisms, which can include, for example, the policies and institutional norms, the influence of media, neoliberal and political pressures that might constrain the activities and so on.

In regard to mechanisms, as per Bhaskar (1998), they can be seen as structures that cause and explain phenomena that exist and happens in the social world. Informed by the work of Bhaskar (1989) and Layder (1997), Houston (2010) classifies mechanisms on several levels, and all of them interrelate and influence social life. According to Houston (2010), there are mechanisms that *act on a personal domain*, which according to the author, might refer to cognitive, physical, genetic, existential mechanisms; for instance, they can refer to everyday

emotional experiences that influence the development of attachment style in children. The next level of mechanisms is included in the *domain of situated activity*, where individuals learn about social meanings and symbols and social order. Further, Houston (2010) discusses about mechanisms that *produce and reproduce formal or informal social relations, positions, or practices in social settings* such as family or institutions. Other types of mechanisms are related to *norms, customs, and other cultural aspects* that can reproduce social cohesion or by contrast, separation. Lastly, according to Houston (2010), there are *political and economic mechanisms* (e.g., consumerism, political ideology, competitiveness, income) that have the strongest influences over the other mechanisms. Together, those mechanisms are interconnected and exert causal effects on certain dimensions of reality.

To simply illustrate these mechanisms, I will use again the example of the core topic of the present research. In this sense, I argue that social work activism can have effects at a personal level (e.g., experiences of frustration, contentment, health conditions, empowerment), but at the same time, some cognitive mechanisms can influence the manifestation of social work activism (e.g., motivation and inspirations as a driver for social engagement). Whether and how social workers engage in activism can also be influenced by the power relations created in a certain community/institution, or by informal relations with colleagues and friends, and social norms. Nevertheless, there are cultural, political, and economic aspects which do influence the social work activism manifestation (where, how, and what forms it takes) or interpretation of this phenomenon.

Further, it is argued that the central aims of CR in social science are to understand deeper mechanisms and structures that are involved in creating knowledge (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Oliver, 2012). To fulfil these goals, we should explore and attempt to understand reality, which together leads us to emancipatory goals because understanding

reality also involves understanding the mechanisms and structures that reproduce domination and oppression (Bhaskar, 1989). Moreover,

“Critical realism examines the different mechanisms which have implications in terms of different effects and events, the forces and characteristics that mechanisms produce, and the intricate connections between different structural levels, that contribute to the complexity of causal forces, and that make possible the treatment of these as single, isolated factors” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 42).

In other words, CR supports the idea that the existing structures and mechanisms of the social world are more or less evident (e.g., applications of laws, norms, relations, positions, beliefs, contexts), and by unpacking them, we can engage with an increased knowledge of the social world.

3.2. Critical Realism and Social Work [Activism]

There is a strong correlation between Critical Realist philosophy, the social work profession, and activism. They all gravitate around the idea of *emancipatory goals*, where emancipation defines structural transformations that are designed to challenge and affect oppression or to create liberation (Hartwig, 2007). As mentioned earlier, CR pledges for human emancipation and changing the world (Bhaskar, 1986), which is explicitly expressed through the term “critical”. In social science, this term refers broadly to the idea of challenging domination/oppression, advocating for the emancipation of the oppressed, and creating a society which is free of control and exploitation of people (Bohman, 2005; Fuchs, 2016).

Subsequently, the social work profession is based on emancipatory values and seeks emancipatory projects such as enhancing social justice, individual and collective wellbeing, and challenging oppression (Houston, 2001; Houston and Swards, 2021; Jordon, 2004; Lishman et al., 2014; Martinez-Herrero, 2017). This can be reviewed with reference to the

global definition elaborated by the IFSW (2014), as well as the literature in the field. Thus, this is further justification as to why this approach is relevant to the present study.

“Emancipatory [social work] values are “anti-oppressive”...social workers have a responsibility to challenge social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatisation or subjugation.” (Lishman et al., 2014, p. 9)

Lastly, activism and particularly contemporary activist movements, as shown in the literature review, might be described as emancipatory reactions to oppression. On the same note, the critical realist dictionary defines them as “collective actions by groups/people in society directed at transforming one or more aspects of social relations perceived by them to be oppressive, undesirable, or unwanted, and/or create alternatives that are perceived to be more desirable” (D’Souza in Hartwig, p. 164).

Drawing on these premises, it can be argued that social work has the mission to understand and explain social behaviour and social phenomena, while social work activism can be used in order to address these mechanisms (at the personal, group, and social levels) that create and perpetuate oppression or encourage emancipation. In this matter, the present research aims to discover diverse types of mechanisms that can elucidate the nature of social work activism and, therefore, contribute to the overall mission of the social work profession.

3.3. Critical Realism and Social Work Research

Social work is a profession and an academic discipline (IFSW, 2014), but scholars disagree on whether social work is a science in itself or is merely informed by disciplines such as sociology, psychology, or social policy (Brekke, 2012; Gehlert, 2015; Sharland, 2013; Shaw et al., 2010). According to Sharland (2013), social work should be considered a science because of its contributions in terms of investigations and research inputs in social work practice and social care. Based on moral and social foundations, social work research seeks to generate new

theoretical and practical developments taking into account the particularities of the specific contexts in which it happens, for example, time and place (Shaw et al., 2010). More precisely, the purpose of social work research is to identify new theoretical approaches to the profession and understand its contextual implications in society, allowing us to generate new practices, influence the policymaking process, and eventually, fulfil social change and human emancipation. However, the existing tension between practice, education, and research might have an impact on considering the performance of social work research (Orme and Powell, 2008; Powell and Orme, 2011). As a result, the conflict between workforce needs, lack of research funding and skills, and limited exposure to empirical work contributes to the creation of “a circle of resistance” in which practitioners and scholars have protected their “territory”, which eventually affected the overall legitimacy of social work research (Powell and Orme, 2011, p. 1569). For instance, as illustrated by MacIntyre and Paul (2012), resistance might come from social workers who view research as something that is not necessarily relevant to their practice, as academia is considered somehow disconnected from the field. Overall, these tensions might also lead to a lack of confidence in social work research and, therefore, undermine its status as an established field of science.

In terms of philosophical approaches in social work research, as stated previously, some authors argue that constructivism is the most common philosophical position in the field, while the application of critical realism among social work scholars is rather uncommon due to its complexity in language and lack of examples in practice and research (Craig and Bigby, 2015; Houston, 2010). However, Craig and Bigby (2015) observed an increase in social work scholarship that engages with a CR approach to explain and understand diverse and complex social phenomena. Among those examples could be mentioned effects on migration (Peter and Park, 2018), women’s participation in employment (Fletcher, 2016), social scapegoating (Houston and Swords, 2021), challenges of social work education (Martinez-Herrero, 2017),

or desistence research (Weaver, 2016). Typically, these studies engage with qualitative research approaches (i.e., interviews, case studies) – or mixed methods (surveys and interviews) as in the case of Martinez- Herrero (2017) – in order to show the types of mechanisms that underpinned their studied phenomena, such as subjective consideration (e.g., individual experiences and identities), but also the influences of wider structures, systems, and processes (e.g., human relationships, group identities, values, and culture, emancipatory interventions).

Despite limited research in social work applying critical realist theory, there are essential elements that make this theory suitable for the present investigation. First of all, critical realism offers an appropriate ontological and epistemological explanation of complex notions of social phenomena; in this case, social work activism and the mechanisms behind it (e.g., social experiences, norms, the impact of the historical and cultural context, laws). At the same time, it offers a suitable theory for the interpretation of the social change as a collective and relational element in society, where human interaction with structures is seen as a natural action or process. In essence, CR is consistent with both, social work research seeking emancipation and “social work’s moral commitments and plural and complex knowledge” (Martinez-Herrero, 2017).

3.4. Research Design Overview

Considering the ontological and epistemic position of CR that the social world is uncertain, and knowledge is negotiated continuously, CR also encourages the usage of diverse and combined methodologies in order to unpack and obtain a better understanding and explanation of social reality and its mechanisms, structures, events, or experiences (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Lawani, 2020; Olsen, 2007; Zachariadis et al., 2013). From this point of view, to explore and expand the current understanding of social work activism, this study engages

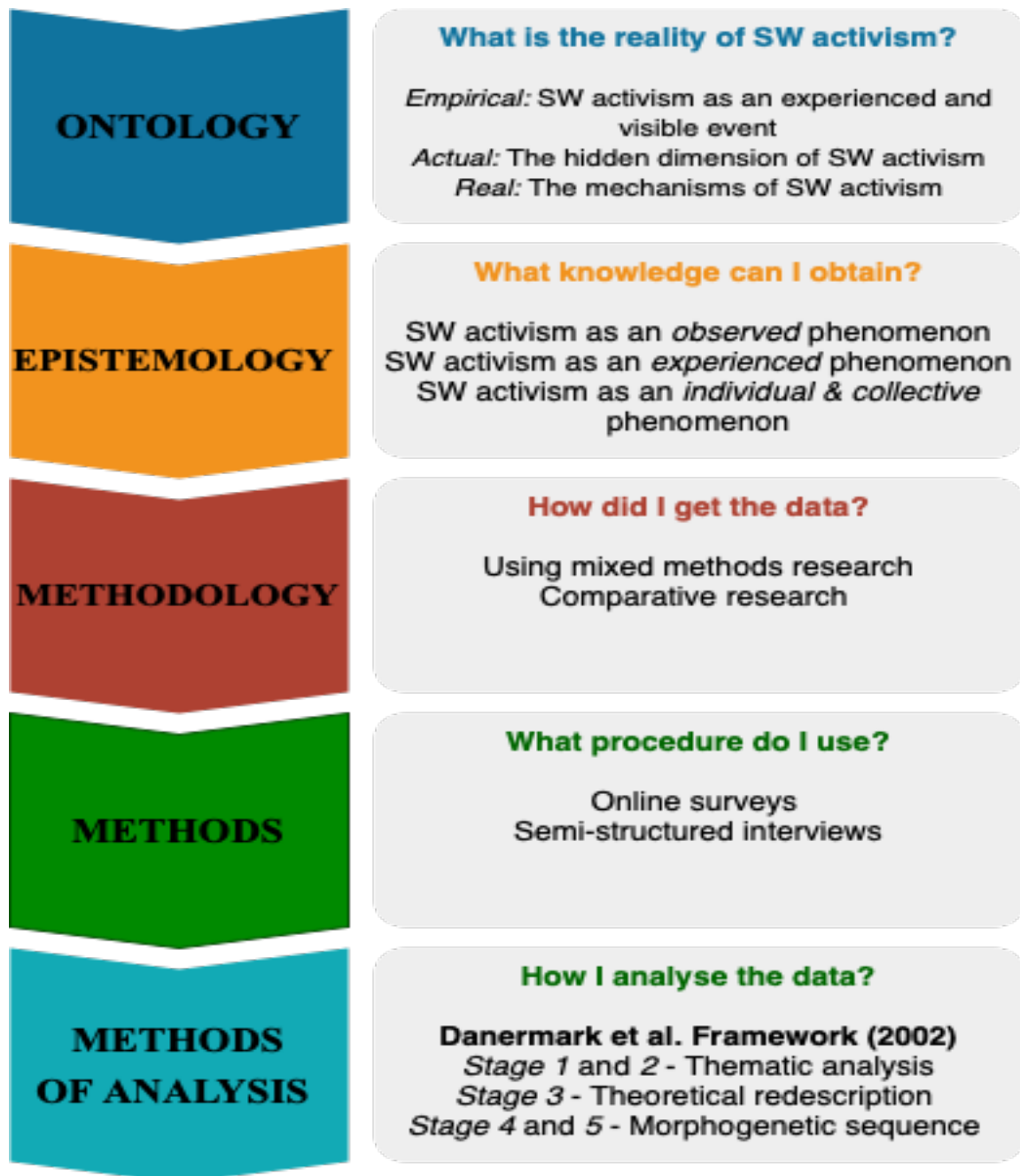
mixed research methods (interviews and online surveys) and a comparative application (Romania and the UK).

Figure 3.2 illustrates the research framework of the present study, in which Critical Realism serves as ontological, epistemological, methodological, and analytical bases. Formerly, I have demonstrated why CR is the most appropriate approach for the present study. As informed by this paradigm, I engage with comparative study (two jurisdictions – Romania and the UK), and mixed research methods (online survey and semi-structured interviews). This would allow me to collect information on diverse and different mechanisms acting upon social work activism and understand the context in which it develops, as well as its influence on the outcomes. Further, I analyse the data obtained by using a CR framework elaborated by Danermark et al. (2002), which subsequently includes other methods of analysis such as Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and another CR analytical framework, Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer, 1995).

[Figure on the next page]

Figure 3.2.

Research Framework Overview



3.5. Engaging with Comparative Research

Cross-national studies seem to have increased in popularity in recent years in domains such as social policy but also social work research, as observed by Obrizan (2012). Scholars claim that engaging in cross-national investigation offers important advantages for the researchers and for the research itself (Salway et al., 2011; Gharawi et al., 2009). For instance, cross-national studies can provide an in-depth understanding and a critical analysis of the phenomenon or issues studied. Additionally, it might equip the researcher with awareness in relation to ideological, social, and political contexts, structures, or influences that shape the knowledge and the understanding of specific phenomena and/or causal mechanisms, as well as enable future conceptual and methodological developments and new directions of potential investigations. Those are methodological aspects that are consistent with the CR approach adopted for this study.

The present study is developed in Romania and the UK, aiming to offer a better understanding of the phenomenon of social work activism by analysing its manifestation in both jurisdictions. As argued by Chui and Gray (2004), political and social contexts can influence the predisposition of social workers to engage in activism, a claim that was demonstrated by comparing countries with different political climates, such as Hong Kong and Australia. Considering the gap in research regarding the European context, this study seeks to provide an understanding of social work activism analysing and comparing the data from two European countries, but with different political past, cultural and social settings.

Quoting Hantrais (1999), cross-national studies “aim to demonstrate the effect of the national context on the objects of study, but with the purpose of determining the extent to which the generalisations can be made from theoretical models and hypothesis that the researcher is seeking to test empirically” (p. 96). In this matter, the cross-national study could provide

meaningful insights to comprehend the shared and distinct underpinnings of social work activism, as it is developed, perceived, and experienced by Romanian and UK social workers. Essentially, from a CR perspective, national comparative studies provide the necessary framework to unpack the mechanisms shaping the phenomenon studied, such as political, cultural, social, and economic environments, and the legal and institutional frameworks of the profession, alongside the prestige of the profession.

Despite these advantages, prior research identified several challenges or risks of using a cross-national approach. One of the key challenges stands in identifying the pitfalls and addressing them, so that the generated results are still rigorous, relevant, make sense together and do not develop as two different research projects (Jowell, 1998; Salway et al., 2011). To minimize this risk of not developing two different research projects, my analysis focused on interpreting the generated data per individual country, contextualising the data, identifying the similarities and differences around the key concepts, and elaborating a final analysis that specifies clearly the main particularities for each jurisdiction.

As per Salway et al. (2011), the inconsistency of the key concepts – in this case, for example “activism”, “activist”, “social justice”, or “Neoliberalism” – and the overall language differences can represent obstacles in providing reliable data. To address this language difference, I adopted two strategies. Firstly, one of the research objectives was to obtain a contextual understanding of social work activism in both countries. In this sense, I included open questions in the online surveys and semi-structured interviews regarding the meaning of “activism”. This allowed me to contextualise and understand whether there are different interpretations of the concepts, activism and social work activism, and how to navigate them in order to ensure conceptual reliability. Secondly, to address the general language challenges that might affect the consistency of the data, I have translated into Romanian the interview and survey questions and externally checked them for accuracy. I also ensured that they are user-

friendly, as suggested by Mangen (1999). External checking and proofreading were conducted after data collection and translation from Romanian to English too.

3.6. Engaging with Mixed Methods

The present research is designed in two phases – a quantitative phase, using online surveys; and a qualitative phase, using semi-structured interviews. According to Zachariadis et al. (2013) and Padgett (2008), engaging with mixed methods research is in line with a CR requirement since it offers the prospect of collecting more diverse data about the social reality as well as increasing the understanding of the studied phenomenon, in this case, social work activism. Moreover, using mixed methods addresses the possible limitations of one methodological approach and, as suggested by McKim's (2017) study of mixed-methods, is a more rigorous approach than quantitative or qualitative methods alone.

It is also argued that a mixed-methods approach is consistent with social work research since it helps the researcher to obtain data holistically, from individual experiences to social contexts (Cowger and Menon, 2001). As per Greene (2007), mixed methods give the possibility of confirming theories or complementing the existing data, for example, by further exploring some preliminary survey results through interviews. Particularly, in this investigation, using both types of methods enabled me to find out, for instance, the most frequent obstacles faced by social workers in Romania and the UK when engaged in activism, and further, to explore the causes that generate those obstacles. Besides, by using mixed methods, I was able to verify and clarify whether particular findings (i.e., different conceptualisations of activism) are prevalent in both types of data.

However, one particular challenge when applying both methods could relate to facing difficulties in managing a large amount of data collected. As argued by Halcomb (2018), engaging with both methods could have some implications in terms of the resources needed

(i.e., a high volume of data requires a longer time for the analysis) and finding the right approach to synthesise and present the most relevant aspects of the research. These challenges were considered and acknowledged during this investigation. The next section focuses on describing both phases of the research design.

3.6.1. Phase 1 – Using online surveys

This stage consisted of conducting online surveys, aiming to collect relevant data that are in line with the main objectives of the study. As illustrated in the survey questionnaire (see Appendices), the questions were informed by the review of literature, sought to identify the various forms of activism undertaken by social workers in both jurisdictions, their perspectives regarding activism and social work activism, the main personal and macro-social features that shape social workers' activist behaviour, and the impact of social media or online activism on their work. Additionally, through online surveys, I was able to obtain some quantitative data regarding demographic profiles, which subsequently provided an explanation for particular data (for example, religion as a prevalent value among Romanian participants). This information contributed to the creation of a preliminary idea and profile of social work activism in the UK and Romania, taking into consideration the aspects mentioned above. It helped me to identify and compare patterns (e.g., conceptual, demographic) at the national level, which eventually helped me to contextualise and support different arguments emerging from the interviews. Nevertheless, this method was also used as the main recruitment tool for the next qualitative phase, discussed further below.

The rationale for online survey

Generally, a survey defines a “means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people” (Pinsonneault and Kraemer (1993, p. 77). The goal of the survey is to generate knowledge about a population, an issue, or an institution to

evaluate and predict situations and it can be carried out in various ways, such as by phone, by mail, in person, or on the internet (Scheuren, 2004). This study opted for online surveys.

An online survey is a result of technological advancement combined with diversification of research techniques (Evans and Mathur, 2005). Used often under the terms of a web-based survey, electronic survey (Andrews et al., 2003), e-survey (Jansen et al., 2007), or internet survey (Evans and Mathur, 2005), it represents a type of survey that is administrated, developed, and disseminated by using software which can be accessed via the internet and can be shared in various ways (web-page, mobile phone applications, email) (Höglinger et al., 2016).

Using online or internet surveys can offer several advantages for the research process (Bell et al., 2019; Evans and Mathur, 2005; Fricker and Schonlau, 2002). One of the most important advantages of this method is related to its flexibility, in the sense that it offers the possibility to be carried out in several formats (email, mobile applications, website) (Bell and et al., 2019). Additionally, given the high number of people accessing the internet, online surveys are more easily disseminated to a large audience and the distance is not an obstacle anymore. Moreover, online surveys are faster to administer than other types of surveys that would require more time such as face-to-face surveys, and also comparatively, offer the advantage of being very attractive from the perspective of appearance and design, and therefore might have the capacity to attract and keep the participant interested (Bell et al., 2019; Evans and Mathur, 2005; Fricker and Schonlau, 2002; Jones et al., 2008). Online surveys offer more convenience for respondents by giving them the possibility to complete whenever they are prepared and have time (Bell et al., 2019; Fricker and Schonlau, 2002). Another important advantage refers to the fact that it is an accessible method of data collection and data analysis and facilitates the coding process because of its capability of storing and encrypting information. (Bell et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2017). Altogether, the above conveniences of the

online surveys allow me to gather data required to address my research aim of exploring social work activism by asking wide-ranging questions to understand trends and patterns regarding the activist behaviour/identity/perspectives of social workers in both constituencies. Nevertheless, by using online surveys I was able to reach wider audiences of social workers in local authorities and NGOs (e.g., dissemination through social media and emails), and as previously mentioned, this tool of recruitment process for the qualitative part of the research.

On the other hand, online surveys can also present several disadvantages (Bell et al., 2019; Heiervang and Goodman, 2011; Jones et al., 2008; Rice et al., 2017). Those scholars also acknowledged that among the most prevalent challenges refer to the low level of responses if the surveys are not disseminated and promoted through the right channels. Equally, a longer survey that requires an appreciable amount of time (e.g., over 10 minutes) might lose the user's full engagement, and further, resulting in incomplete surveys (Heiervang and Goodman, 2011; Jones et al., 2008). Another major disadvantage is related to the fact that online surveys are limited only to individuals with access to the internet and who are literate in using this technology (Jones et al., 2008). Another type of disadvantage that I considered referred to the difficulty in verifying the sample on repeated and ill-intentioned (fake) responses (Bell et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2008).

As mentioned by Evans and Mathur (2005), being aware of these weaknesses helps the researcher to reflect and build a strategy regarding the most effective means of promotion and dissemination of the survey, the length of the questionnaire (around 15 minutes), and utilising a user-friendly platform. I, therefore, decided to use [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). This platform, in comparison to other similar internet tools tested by myself, proved to be easier to create content and use the desired format for the questions. It also provided me with the opportunity to collect, encrypt, store, and transfer data in several formats, as well as have an

adaptive system that supports the transfer of different formats of data such as .xls or SPSS format.

The process of conducting the data collection included several stages. Firstly, several drafts of the survey were presented and intensely discussed with both supervisors and modified accordingly. The process continued with a stage of piloting the survey, including other researchers and social workers. According to Bowden et al. (2002), piloting (pre-testing) the survey is a critical condition for adequate quantitative research because it offers the possibility to identify the key issues in terms of clarity of the questions, allocated time, or logical sequence. Engaging in this stage contributed to addressing aspects of validity (the accurate measurement of a study) and reliability (the consistency of a measure). Additionally, it provided a steer for correcting technical issues, such as interpretation of the questions, proofreading, translations, or the overall design (Bowden et al. 2002). Therefore, the final version of the survey was based on a collaborative process that included my vision and aims, the supervisors' feedback, and recommendations from people with the same characteristics as the target group.

At the beginning of the survey, I attached a short description of the project, highlighting the importance of the individuals' participation. The description also included information about the sections of the questionnaire and the approximate time required to complete it. I tried to create a platform that is attractive and has a user-friendly design. Additionally, a progress bar was permanently displayed. It conveyed how much percentage of the questionnaire was completed after each section. Periodically, there were encouraging messages to inform them about an estimated time needed and to motivate the participants to complete the task.

Other extra measures to maximize the potential reach of the study and the rate of completion included an intensive promotion of the survey among people who have strong connections to non-governmental organisations or public institutions or professional networks.

Thus, the surveys could reach a higher number of potential respondents. The communication with these contacts was realized through means such as email, social media, or face-to-face. When possible, I personally visited organisations and institutions for direct contact with the potential participants. Despite these measures, it did not help to completely achieve my goals within the timescales that I had hoped (100 surveys/per country). Given this situation, together with my supervisors and the reviewer, I decided to start working on the analysis with 100 surveys collected in Romania, and 80 collected in the UK. Since the sample of this stage of the research was non-representative, the impact on the statistical significance of not completing 100 in the UK was marginal. Additionally, I considered that the information collected at that stage generated an adequate input to illustrate relevant patterns for comparison.

3.6.2. Phase 2 – Conducting semi-structured interviews

Phase 2, after the collection of survey data (100 in Romania, 80 in the UK), consisted of in-depth interviews with 15 social workers from each country, of whom 12 (RO) and 10 (UK) had participated in the survey. The interview schedule was designed in line with the objectives of the research, including questions on the participants' interpretation and practice of activism, respectively social work activism, aspects that motivate their engagement in activism, exploration of the other factors that enable and obstruct activism of social workers, and the impact of online tools on the work and activism of the respondents. This phase included a series of consultations with my supervisors, other academics and social workers to ensure the coherency and clarity of the questions. The list of the questions/topics discussed can be found in the Appendices.

The rationale for the interviews

According to Thompson (2016), an interview represents a conversation in which the researcher addresses thematic questions to a participant. In research, the interview is considered a

powerful instrument of communication and a method to obtain personal insights, opinions, experiences and perceptions from the participants (Frances et al., 2009). At the same time, interviews allow the researcher to capture and interpret the reactions and behaviour of people when discussing a specific topic (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

Different types of interviews were also considered. As per Bryman et al. (2012), interviews can be classified as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured; or as named by Babbie (2014) – standardized, semi-standardized, and unstandardized. The structured (standardized) interview is mostly used as a survey approach because of its low flexibility – the questions asked are always the same, in the same order to all participants, reflecting the approach taken in the online survey in *Phase 1*. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews offer greater flexibility and have some core features. For instance, these interviews involve a dialogue, an interactional exchange (Bryman et al., 2012). The structure is quite flexible, it includes topics or issues to be covered, not necessarily a table of questions and “it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee’s responses” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 88). In addition, a semi-structured interview involves adaptability to situations and contexts in which the research develops (Edwards and Holland, 2013). In this respect, an important component of qualitative interviews is the process of exchanging information, “a learning event”, in which both parties involved (researcher and participant) have the potential to learn from each other (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

Given the fact that this research is a comparative process, therefore it does not lend itself to an unstructured approach. As the study engages with a strong emphasis on understanding the contexts, as well as exploring the particular thematic areas, I decided to conduct a semi-structured interview due to its characteristic that allows an engagement in in-depth discussions with the respondents. Complementary to Phase 1 (online surveys), which

focused on finding out some group patterns, demographic profiles, or general perspectives about activism and social work activism, this method allowed the interviewees to focus on the issues that were important for them, while also ensuring I was able to collect data of relevance to the study with the aim of generating meaningful and in-depth insights for the investigation. As argued by Rubin and Rubin (2005), conducting interviews enabled me to explore some of the ideas found in the surveys, such as personal motivations, values and beliefs, the role of structural and institutional factors impacting the participation in activism. From this point of view, conducting interviews is consistent with the CR vision on gaining meaningful knowledge – “good research means we can understand the world better” (Vincent and O’Mahoney, 2018, p. 202).

The interviews were conducted predominantly face-to-face, with some of them held online on Skype or Zoom. Both methods of collecting the data presented certain advantages and disadvantages. As per Neuman (2012), face-to-face interviews had the main strength of facilitating direct human interaction with the participants, allowing me to build a sense of trust, which eventually led to a more direct dialogue. Another advantage was the possibility of capturing the non-verbal communication cues (emotions, reactions) of the participants, which, to an extent, guided me in deciding whether I needed to explore certain topics further.

However, given some constraining conditions, such as lockdown (COVID-19), physical distance with participants from England or Northern Ireland, or schedule constraints, I used the alternative of online interviewing (e-interviews). Although evidently, they offer a different type of interaction with the interviewee, online interviews can still facilitate real-time communication, and are a good alternative to collect the necessary data (Salmons, 2011). Despite some fears related to the challenges and limitations of online interviewing, the overall process went well. To avoid the potential technical issues or the rapid character of online discussions, I included in my prior communication with participants clear information

regarding the topics that I would like to explore (so they would have time to prepare and reflect upon them), the estimated duration of the interviews, and thus, the online discussion was free of distractions during the discussions.

3.7. Information about the target group

A key task for increasing the credibility and validity of the research is to understand the target population included in the study (Asiamah et al., 2017). In general terms, a target group defines “the population about which information is desired” (Upton and Cook, 2014, n.p.). In this sense, referring to social workers in the UK and Romania. The selection of the participants for the study was informed by the particularities of each state, in line with professional and legal frameworks. More specifically, in the UK, the research included social workers recognised by the professional bodies (professional councils in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) – which require a minimum of a degree in social work (BA or MA), or equivalent courses/studies.

The primary target group for the research in Romania focused on including social workers recognised according to Law 466/2004 regarding the regulation of the social work profession. This law acknowledges as social workers only those graduates of three or four-year degrees (BA), so it does not recognise a person with only a master’s degree (MA) in social work and a BA in another discipline. Because of this aspect, and also considering the remarks of Lazar et al. (2015b) and Buzducea (2015), who confirmed that the Romanian social work system suffers a deficit of qualified personnel working in social work services, this investigation was extended to individuals with an MA in social work and working experience in the field of at least two years. *Table 3.1.* illustrates the selection criteria for participants in both countries.

Table 3.1.

The target group for this research

United Kingdom	Romania
ONLINE SURVEYS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a degree (BA, MA) or a complete course approved by the Regulators in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern of Ireland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a BA degree (three or four years) from an accredited university (Law 466/2004). • Hold a MA degree + working experience in social work for at least two years.
INTERVIEWS	
<p><i>The primary condition:</i></p> <p>Social workers who completed the online survey</p> <p><i>The secondary condition:</i></p> <p>Social workers interested in the phenomenon of social work activism</p>	

Initially, this study aimed to include 100 surveys and 15 semi-structured interviews per country. This goal was achieved in Romania; however, given my limited connections in the UK, and despite intense attempts at promotion, I managed to collect 80 surveys and conducted the proposed number of interviews.

3.8. Recruiting and sampling

The sample of the study for both methods was non-representative, and it was based on two strategies of recruitment – purposive and “snowball”. Purposive because this study aimed to include those individuals who were “experts in a particular field in the topic of interest” (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016, p. 328). Secondly, the snowball method refers to finding and recruiting new respondents through former respondents or other people-resources (Vogt, 1999). This method was used in parallel with the previous approach to enhance the promotion of the research project and to boost the data collection process.

In terms of promotion and dissemination of the survey link, and thus recruitment of participants in both countries, several strategies were adopted. One method included dissemination through online means and social media channels, for instance, Facebook, Twitter, emails, and several blogs connected to social work. A second strategy involved promoting my research during academic events, trainings, conferences, and events organized by NGOs or public institutions. Additionally, I personally contacted public institutions (Councils/Local Authorities) and professional organisations from both countries (e.g., NCSWR, ASproAS, BASW, SWAN) to disseminate my recruitment call.

In regard to the interviews, the majority of the respondents were recruited through the online survey by including in the final part of the questionnaire a section asking the respondents to write their email or phone number if they agreed to take part in the next stage of the investigation. Although this method helped me to reach a high number of interviewees, it still did not cover the proposed number (not 15/country, but 12 (RO) and 10 (UK)). Therefore, to achieve my objective, I engaged with other methods of recruiting, such as snowball and direct approaching of social workers during academic events.

To engage with a diverse sample, I tried to include in my selection of interviewees social workers of different ages, work experience, backgrounds, professional expertise, and employment sector (governmental, non-governmental). Doing so, I was able to gain an insight into different views between, for example, those working for charities or working for public institutions, or those with a different working background. While a full discussion of the demographic characteristics of the sample is offered in *Chapter 4*, in sum, the sample was gender-balanced, including participants with work experience varying from a few years to over 30 years, and with different fields of expertise (e.g., children protection, adults, disability, homelessness, refugees).

3.9. Data analysis

This study uses a hybrid model of analysing and interpreting the data but is mainly built on a CR approach. The main analytical framework is informed by Danermark et al.'s (2002) Structurable Research model, in which subsequently, I encompassed other methods of data analysis and interpretation such as Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer, 1995, 2010). As previously mentioned, CR is not typically used as an epistemological or methodological position in social work research. However, in her study on comparative social work education, Martinez-Herrero (2017) overcame the lack of materials on CR in social work research by using literature from other disciplines, such as human geography or information theory. In this sense, the author found the model of Danermark et al. (2002) useful as a methodological framework facilitating a critical realist analysis. Originally, the model consisted of six stages (*Table 3.2*), but according to Danermark et al. (2002), its application can be adapted to fewer stages, depending on the particularities and aims of each study. For instance, Martinez-Herrero (2017) used only four out of six stages

for her study to demonstrate the relationship and relevance of social justice and human right on social work education and profession.

Table 3.2.

The stages of Danermark et al. (2002) Model

Danermark et al. (2002) Structurable Research Method
Stage 1 – Description <i>introduces the event, situation, or phenomenon of the study. It engages with the concrete, grounded insights informed by the data and keeps the focus on the participants’ own interpretations through close reading and re-examining their own accounts.</i>
Stage 2 – Analytical Resolution <i>refers to the analytic processes of sorting, organizing, categorising and separating the components of the analysed data.</i>
Stage 3 – Abduction <i>refers to the components and dimensions of the previous stage that are reinterpreted through the lens of the theoretical frameworks.</i>
Stage 4 – Retroduction <i>means looking for explanations regarding the emergence of different causal mechanisms and answers that might inform the results obtained.</i>
Stage 5 – Comparison between Different Theories and Abstractions <i>involves exploring diverse theories that might explain the appearance of the mechanisms and structures identified in the previous two stages.</i>
Stage 6 – Concretisation and Conceptualisation <i>illustrate manifestations of different mechanisms and structures in concrete situations and their further implications.</i>

For the purpose of simplifying and providing a comprehensible analysis and explanations of the mechanisms influencing social work activism in Romania and in the UK, I adapted this model to three analytical stages as presented in *Figure 3.3*, which essentially followed a logical succession of presenting the collected information in a cohesive way, identifying points of synergies and differences, and explaining them. In this sense, I have kept the (I) first stage of *Description*, as a means to build a first-level analysis (statistical analysis and thematic analysis), continuing with the second stage (II) of *Analytical resolution* to separate the components and dimensions of the obtained data (comparative analysis of social work activism interpretation), and the last stage as (III) combining *Retroduction, Concretisation and Contextualisation* (Morphogenetic Sequence). In line with CR language, in stage I, I identified the main causal mechanisms acting on social work activism in both countries; in stage II, I emphasised and analysed the main similarities and differences between Romania and the UK, in terms of mechanisms impacting social work activism; and in the last stage, I explained the creation of these mechanisms by analysing the influence of historical, social, political, and cultural contexts of each jurisdiction.

Figure 3.3.

The Framework of Data Analysis



In the first stage (I) *description*, I aimed to introduce the basic information about social work activism as underpinned by the data. In this sense, I incorporated the basic statistical analysis of the surveys (quantitative) to provide some initial inputs and patterns on the studied

phenomenon. This process begun with an attentive checking of possible errors, multiple or incomplete responses data, validating the set of responses, transferring the information to SPSS, and assessing the numerical codes. After that, I engaged with a plan of selecting, analysing, presenting (graphs, tables, scales etc.), and reporting the statistical results accordingly (Pazzaglia et al., 2016). As illustrated in the *Findings* chapter and *Appendices*, the information obtained from correlating the variables provided types of descriptive statistics such as those based on frequency, scales, and mean (average).

Further, in the case of qualitative data (responses to open-ended questions in the survey and data collected through semi-structured interviews), I engaged with TA in order to identify generative mechanisms influencing social work activism at different levels, such as personal, structural, and collective. In order to produce this analysis, I followed the six phases of TA as indicated by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step consisted of integral and verbatim transcription of each interview in English or Romanian, using NVivo for transcriptions and organising themes and codes. Reading through the content and taking notes of aspects that seemed significant were essential steps to familiarise myself with and make sense of the data and its initial particularities observed across the two jurisdictions.

Further, I identified sentences, phrases, keywords that led to the production of initial codes/labels. Coding is required to organise the data into groups or similar ideas, which informed further analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). As the present study engages with mixed methods, coding was used for the interviews and interpreting the information obtained through the open questions of the survey. Some interesting inputs were already emphasised in this process; for instance, types of activism that are more prevalent in both jurisdictions, barriers, and motivational aspects that might influence social workers' engagement in activism.

As per Braun and Clarke (2006), the next action involved a process of generating the themes in order to identify patterns among the codes and eventually organise them into broader themes. Due to the comparative approach, these three steps of TA were conducted separately per country, allowing me to initiate the first comparison of data among and inside each jurisdiction. Therefore, I was able to emphasise and understand better the similarities, contrasts, and specific nuances of the findings (Guest et al., 2012). For example, the data illustrated that the motivations of social workers in Romania are based on different values than the respondents in the UK. However, there were also similarities when discussing the impact of neoliberal policies on the social work profession.

After reviewing the themes (fourth step), which consisted of checking the accuracy and relevance of the generated themes in each country, I proceeded to extend my analysis across all data, identifying the common themes between Romania and the UK, but also emphasising the points of difference. Consequently, in the fifth stage, the generated data allowed me to organise them into wider themes in order to understand their relationships (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A more detailed analysis of the themes will be presented later.

(II) The second stage of analysis, based on Danermark et al.'s (2002) framework, includes *analytical resolution*, which refers to the analytical processes of sorting, organising, categorising and separating the components of the data. This stage focused on providing an interpretation and deconstruction of social work activism by comparing the information between the countries and emphasising the main similarities and differences of the mechanisms manifested in the two contexts. Here, using the findings informed by thematic and statistical analysis, I extracted essential themes related to social work activism and social work activists and indicated their variations in each context. For instance, the analysis illustrated the dominant attitudes towards activism and meanings attributed to social work activism adopted by the

respondents in each jurisdiction (e.g., politically or socially oriented), or the scale of values that motivate social workers to engage more meaningfully with their practice.

(III) Finally, the last stage includes *retroduction*, *concretisation* and *contextualisation*, in which I explained the impact of causal or direct mechanisms influencing social work activism, by investigating the influence of macro-mechanisms such as historical, political, social, and cultural contexts in Romania and the UK. To explain these aspects, I use the *Morphogenetic Sequence* framework of the sociologist Margaret Archer (1995). Here, As a theory, *Morphogenetic Sequence* explains conditions that enable or constrain social change in a cyclical process. In so doing, it offered a good account of how socio-structural conditions influenced social work activism. Essentially, this is a theory of social change elaborated in a cyclical process comprising three temporally sequential phases (Archer, 1995; 2010) (*Figure 3.4*). In the first phase, structural conditioning (T1) involves the structural and cultural contexts within which individuals organise and act. This then denotes the political, cultural and social contexts, but on a micro-level. It includes the results of past actions, the accessibility of roles and resources, the prevalence of internalised beliefs and dispositions that guide action.

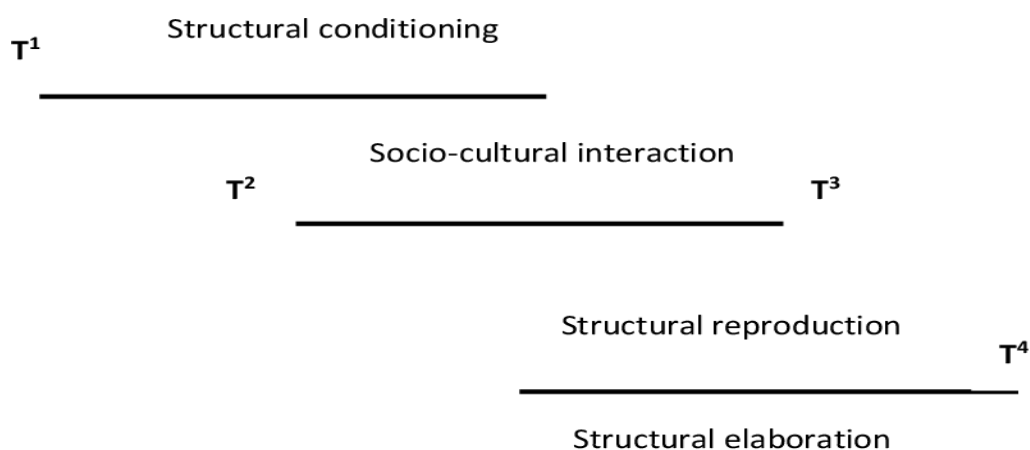
The next stage T2 -> T3 is called socio-cultural interactions. Essentially, this phase involves the interactions of individuals who bear interests (ultimate concerns) and group identities, and who exercise agency to bring about outcomes that favour those interests and identities – which are different between the UK and Romania, because of the different conditioning structures which exercise distinct enablements and constraints. Thus, the conditioning structures are mediated through the application of personal reflexivity, which guides how people act and interact in response to these enablements and constraints, which delimit or permit different courses of action. Based on how people respond at T2->T3, the effects of those actions influence whether or not the conditioning structures stay the same –

reproduction – or change – *elaboration* (T4) and thus advancing a complex of structural and cultural constraints at T1 further down the line.

In other words, I engaged with a historical, cultural, and political retrospective to explain the formation of the current context of social work activism in both jurisdictions, which essentially demonstrates the impact of different conditions on shaping the phenomenon of social work activism. To make sense of these contexts, in each jurisdiction, I analysed three periods with strong political, cultural, and social impacts on social work and, respectively, social work activism. As informed by the previous section on historical background, those periods refer to *Communist Period* (A – 1948-1989), *Transition Period* (B – 1990-2004), and *Contemporary Period* (C – after 2004) – for Romania; and *The Rise of Social Work Activism* (A – 1948-1979), *The Rise of Neoliberalism* (B – 1980-1990), and *the Consolidation of Neoliberalism* (C – after 1990) – for the UK. A fuller discussion of this theory as an explanatory framework for the contexts of social work activism is provided in Chapter 7 [page 189]

Figure 3.4.

Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer, 1995)



3.10. Ethical considerations

Social research should not only serve for scientific purposes, but also for respecting human interests (Kvale, 1996). In other words, research is not only a process of collecting and interpreting the data, but it is a process that should concern with the rights, safety, and dignity of the participants (Stuart and Barnes, 2005). In this matter, reflecting on the possible ethical implications of the research means protecting the respondents, their interests, and avoiding consequences such as exploitation and personal/professional harm or other forms of abuse towards them (Carey, 2012; Cournoyer and Klein, 2000; Padgett, 2009). Moreover, “[it] is especially important for researchers in social work who, by their professional discipline, code of ethics, or research foci, are expected to demonstrate particular sensitivity to vulnerable populations, issues of social justice, conflicts of interest, and respect for dignity and privacy” (Sobočan et al., 2018, p.1).

Particularly for this investigation, discussing activism within the social work field could mean moving social work into a more politicised sphere. This could lead to the situation of exposing social workers to some risks as a result of them disclosing various critiques or “unpopular opinions” regarding the workplace, their employers, or other entities. As Jeyapal (2006) mentions, in some contexts, “activism can be a powerful tool to challenge oppressive structures, but it can also evoke surveillance, control, and punishment” (p. 49). In light of these aspects, careful attention was given to confidentiality, protection of personal data, and anonymity in order to avoid the scenario when participants are professionally marginalized or even victims of abuses of power.

Both confidentiality and anonymity are key principles not only in research but also in the practice of social work. Conceptually, confidentiality refers to any information about a participant that is kept private and is not shared without permission (Oliver, 2003; Wiles et al.,

2006). Anonymity defines the process of collecting and sharing data about individuals without mentioning their personal details or any information that can lead to the identification of the participants (Allan, 2017). To comply with these principles, I developed a plan of ethical conduct during the investigation. This plan included specific steps and documentation in line with Strathclyde University ethics standards.

To be able to conduct my research, I submitted the Ethics Application to the School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde. The application consisted of providing information about potential ethical issues identified, the nature of the investigation and the nature of the participants, and specific documentation (consent form, participant information sheet, sample of the survey and interview format, OHS Risk Assessment (S20)). The process of data collection started only after the application was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee.

As mentioned, for both methods, interviews and online surveys, comprehensive participant information was prepared in English and Romanian to inform and explain the aims of the study, the management of the participants' data, and the methodology underpinning the present research. Additionally, the package included a consent form aligned with University's ethics standards, through which the participants would confirm their agreement to participate in the study. The agreement reflected their voluntary participation, meaning that the participants were free to decide if they were willing to take part in the study without being constrained in any way or awarded with payments that may influence the capacity of refusing and their genuine contribution (Lavrakas, 2008).

Although there were identified only minimal or no threats, I also assured the participants verbally that taking part in his research would not cause them any major risks or harm. Regarding personal information, the participants received assurances on their rights as

part of research as granted by the GDPR¹ policies (e.g., informed consent, confidentiality, privacy). Nevertheless, all types of material produced as a result of interviews and surveys (audio, video, and digital writing) were anonymized, stored on StrathCloud², and accessed only by the researcher.

Documentation informing participants on ethical considerations were part of both methods of data collection, respectively, online surveys and interviews. For the online surveys, the participant information sheet and the consent form were included at the beginning of the questionnaire. In order to proceed to the filling of the survey, the participants had to agree with the terms and conditions, indicating, as mentioned above, their understanding of information presented about the project, the voluntary character of the research, and the usage of their data. For the interviews, the documents were provided via email or hard copy. As above, the interview participants were asked to read the participant information sheet, ask questions if needed, agree with the terms, and sign the consent forms (two copies in the case of hard copies). Versions of participant information sheet and consent forms in English are attached in the Appendix.

Engaging in qualitative research brings into discussion the aspect of researcher bias and positionality. Therefore, it is essential to consider this part as a potential influence on the research process and its outcomes. My position, or my “being-in-the world” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 172) as a social worker and as a self-identified human rights activist, demanded an acknowledgement of potential biases on investigating social work activism. As per Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014), positionality refers to analysing the world view of the researcher and how it relates to the contexts (social, political, cultural) of the particular study. It also relates to the interactions between the researcher and the community or the participants

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>

² Strathcloud is a secure place to store and keep electronic files provided by the University of Strathclyde.

included in the study. The absence of reflection on own positionality can lead to losing ethical commitments, and moreover, the validity of the research might be affected (Jafar, 2018; Sultana, 2007).

Positionality and reflexivity

To avoid the potential risks that might conflict with ethical issues, prior to starting to conduct interviews, I have been involved in a process of critical self-reflection by making notes and having dedicated discussions during the supervision sessions. Also, field notes were used during the data collection and analysis. This process of critical self-reflection involved questioning my own ideas, assumptions and perspectives (Mezirow, 2006); which in my situation implied questioning whether my two correlated identities as a social worker and human rights activist had a significant impact on the way I address the topic, or in regard to the potential bias engaged while conducting interviews with social workers. Additionally, I took into consideration my background as a migrant, when I interviewed social workers from the UK, in order to make sense if some of the discussions and questions might have relevance or not, considering my different cultural and social understandings of the UK context. In this sense, when I addressed the questions, I also encouraged the participants to narrate, not only to answer blandly to my questions. My interventions in their stories were minimal in order to avoid influencing their answers but aimed to explore topics/ideas that could have brought valuable views/contributions to the research. Nevertheless, as an outsider of the British context and migrant, I also considered the relation of power that might occur during the interviewing with the UK participants (Merriam et al., 2001); in the sense, I was afraid that my particular lack of practical knowledge would determine an inconsistent engagement from my interviewees. However, I felt this was not an aspect that interfered or impacted the process of research.

Overall, during this process, I realised that I engaged in a double role situation, as an insider (social worker) and an outsider (migrant). Compelling with these roles, I had the opportunity to fill out the space between the researcher and those researched (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). For instance, as a social worker, I had more awareness of the theoretical and practical implications of activism in social work when discussing it with my interviewees. Yet, as a migrant, I was not completely familiar with the UK context, so this helped me to be more engaged and discuss in detail some answers and ask supplementary questions. Thus, these roles were complementary identities that enriched my experience as a researcher, and also brought more value to the present investigation.

3.11. Limitations of the research

Anastas (1999) notes that analysing the strengths and limitations of the investigation is essential in realising rigorous research. Methodologically, mixed-methods designs (surveys, interviews) are acknowledged for offering fewer limitations than one-method research due to its capacity to involve a higher number of participants and higher volume of data, test theories, and the possibility to compare to the new evidence (Almeida et al., 2017; McKim, 2017). It also offers the opportunity for data triangulation in order to validate the convergence of information from different sources (Patton, 1999). In this case, by using both research methods, I was able to relate and confirm some of the relevant qualitative data by showing themes and trends identified in the online surveys. On the other hand, in general, mixed-method research presents some challenges, such as requiring more time to collect and analyse the data, dealing with potential duplicity or conflicting data (Halcomb, 2018). Moreover, for cross-national studies, some ambiguities in relation to language can appear (Atieno, 2009). Overall, some of those limitations were successfully prevented by reflecting in advance about them, others were also faced and addressed during the present study.

In this context, one major limitation was related to the difficulties of collecting enough data/recruiting participants to complete the online surveys. According to the survey platform used, only 30 % of those who initiated the survey, actually proceeded on to complete it. The reason behind this rate could be related to factors such as length and structure of the online survey and the interest of the respondents on the topic (Saleh and Bista, 2017); which further might suggest that, probably, those with an increased interest on social work activism were willing to complete the survey entirely. To deal with this challenge and increase the possibility of collecting more data, I employed several strategies, as presented by Park et al. (2019). For instance, as mentioned previously in this chapter, I attempted to make the format more appealing with content that is cohesive and clear. Moreover, I engaged with different means of promotion, such as direct contact with institutions, disseminating on social media channels, or approaching professionals during academic events.

In terms of interviews, the challenges of this method are not negligible. Qualitative methods are, in general, time-consuming, and therefore, often they do not involve a large-scale study, the confidentiality of people cannot be completely guaranteed, and as discussed above, there is also a subconscious bias of the researcher that might interfere in the progress of interviewing (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Fontana and Frey, 2000). While the challenges of confidentiality and positionality were addressed through administrative (ethics application, secure storing) and (self)critical reflection processes, the issue of time and scheduling was prevalent and even more hampered by the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues determined me to re-think my strategy for recruiting new participants, conduct the interviews, analyse the data, and therefore, it involved a significant disruption of the research schedule. One important measure was to conduct my remaining interviews via online means. Although there were fears of facing challenges such as internet disruption, lack of visual cues, possible

lack of engagement and distractions (James and Busher, 2009), I feel that the process of collecting the data went smoothly and did not affect the quality of information gathered.

Overall, the disruption of the lockdown due to the pandemic had a major impact not only in regard to academic activity but also in the personal sphere. Some of my personal experiences faced during the lockdown were extensively confirmed by other studies published on this topic. As suggested by numerous investigations, the pandemic collectively affected the mental health and wellbeing of people overall (e.g., Banks et al., 2021; Jia et al., 2020; Millar et al., 2020; Mind.org, 2021). In particular, PhD students and early-stage researchers experienced increased anxieties regarding their work, disturbance in their progress, or losing motivation for their own projects (Goldstone and Zhang, 2021; Gascoigne et al., 2021). These were some factors that also interfered with my activity, which eventually led to the extension of my period of research.

3.12. Key points of the Methodology

In this chapter, I have discussed aspects related to research design. In the first instance, I have highlighted the reasons why Critical Realism is a suitable approach for the present investigation and how it helps me to answer to my research question. Further, I have provided explanations on using cross-national study, mixed-methods research and their consistency with a CR paradigm and social work research. Throughout this chapter, I provided information and rationale on both methods used (online surveys and semi-structured interviews), and I have justified and described the process of data collection and data analysis by using the framework of Danermark et al. (2002). Finally, I offered details on the target group and research participants, reflected upon ethical considerations, and discussed possible limitations of the current study. The next chapter provides some input on the demographic profile of the

participants, followed by the chapters presenting the empirical results of the study in which I expose, explain, and contextualise my findings in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4 – DEMOGRAPHIC

PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Prior to engaging in an analytical discussion of the data, I provide more detailed context on the demographic profiles of the online survey and interview participants. Thus, this section includes comparative information on gender, age, ethnicity, working experience, and field of activity of my participants in Romania and the UK.

4.1. Demographic profile of the survey participants

A total of 180 social workers (100 from Romania and 80 from the UK) participated in the first phase of the present study. Although this research cannot be considered nationally representative of the UK or Romania, there are various similarities between the demographic data collected here and official statistics in both countries. For instance, the majority of participants in this survey were female (79% in the UK and 82% in Romania), and the official data, indeed, indicates an overwhelming percentage of female social workers, with 85-86% in the UK (gov.uk, 2020; SSSC, 2019), and 86-88% in Romania (Lazar, 2015b; Lazar et al., 2016).

Figure 4.1.

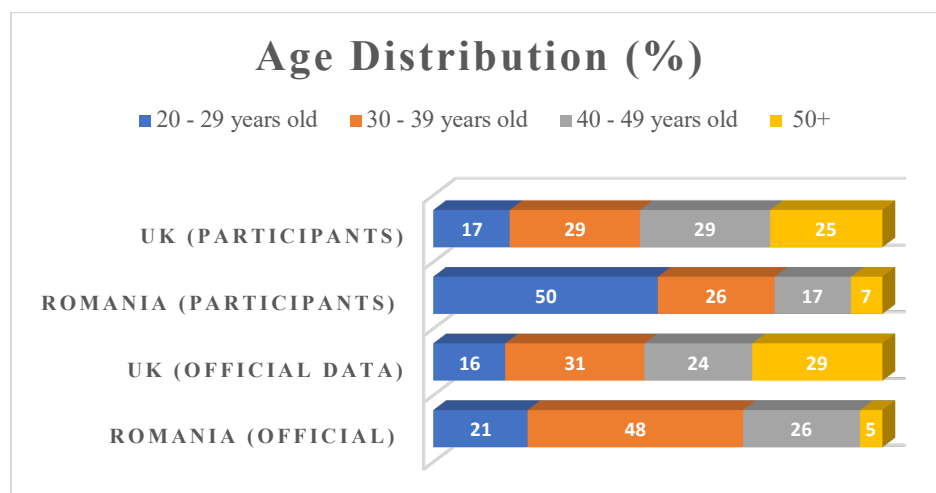
Gender distribution of the participants in this study

	UNITED KINGDOM	
	United Kingdom	Romania
Male (Official Data)	15	13
Male participants	21	18
Female (Official Data)	85	87
Female participants	79	82

Concerning the age of participants, the data shows a high percentage of younger participants in Romania compared to the UK. The average ages were 34 years old for Romanian and 42 years old for the UK participants. Moreover, half of the social workers in Romania were under 30 years old, while the most dominant age group among the UK participants was 31 – 50 years old (58%) (Figure 4.2). This age gap between countries might be explained by the relative youth of the social work profession in Romania (re-established as a profession and educational degree in 1990); an aspect that is also illustrated in the official statistics, where 69% of the social workers in Romania are under 40 years old, and only 47% in the UK.

Figure 4.2.

Age distribution of the participants

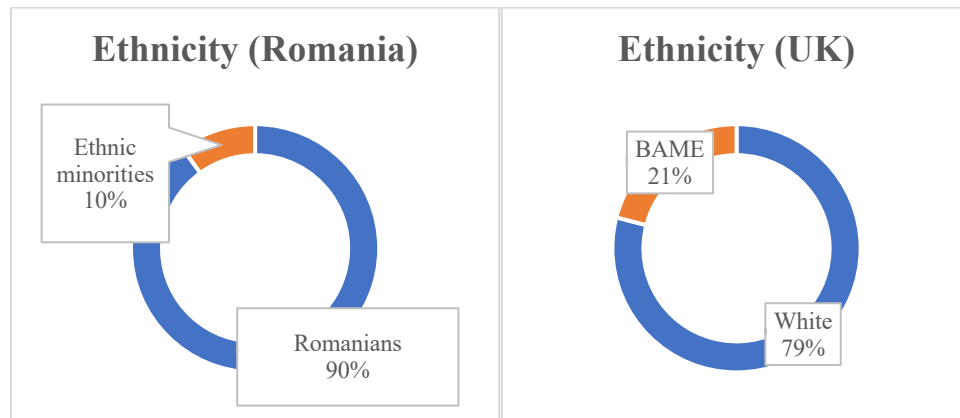


Another similarity between this study and the official data is related to the ethnic diversity of the participants. Two cross-national studies in Scotland and England show that between 76% and 78% of social workers identify as White and between 22% and 24% as BAME (gov.uk, 2020; SSSC, 2018). In this study, the ratio of ethnicities shows 79% of participants as White, while 21% as part of ethnic minorities. Across the Romanian sample, 90% of respondents in this research identified themselves as Romanians (ethnicity of the majority, which can be equivalent to White) and the rest, 10%, as Roma and other minorities.

This is very similar to what Lazar et al. (2016) found; around 91% of social workers in their sample were Romanian (*Figure 4.3*).

Figure 4.3.

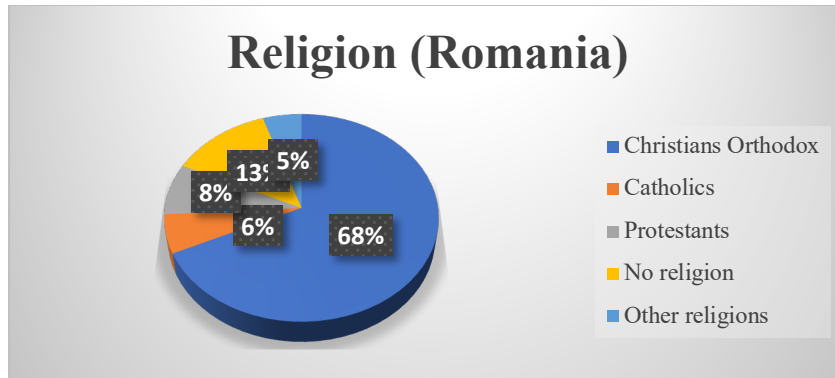
Ethnic distribution of the participants



One component of the demographic profile that is rarely emphasised in cross-national studies is related to religious affiliation. Religion is a cultural mechanism that shapes collective identities (Woodhead, 2011), but it can also significantly influence personal and professional identity (Craft et al., 2011; Kolly, 2018). This aspect is well illustrated in interviews, where I analyse more in-depth its correlation with activism [page 159]. In this sense, the data reveals a considerable percentage of Romanian social workers have self-declared as Christians 82% (68% Christian Orthodox, 6% Catholics, and 8% Protestants), 13% with no religion, and 5% other religious groups (*Figure 4.4*). The high rate of respondents with Christian affiliation is not surprising considering that Romania is seen as the most religious country in Europe, with 55% of citizens declaring that they consider themselves highly religious (Evans and Baronavski, 2018). Moreover, data reveals that 83% of the Romanian population believe in God (European Value Study, 2017), and 82% consider religion an important part of their lives (World Values Survey, 2020).

Figure 4.4.

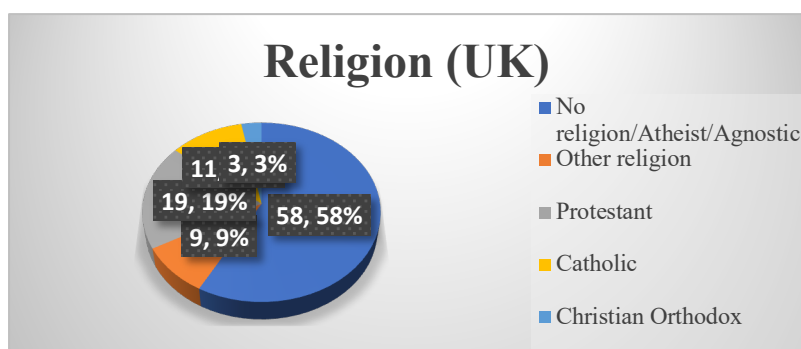
Religion of the participants in Romania



On the other hand, in the UK, 33% of the respondents selected Christian (19% Protestants, 11% Catholics, and 3% Christian Orthodox). The majority of social workers participating in this study (57%) identified as atheists or agnostics. The rest, 9% of respondents, were members of other religious affiliations (Figure 3.0.5). Similarly, at the national level, the British Social Attitudes survey shows that 52% of the UK citizens have no religious affiliation, while 38% have self-identified as Christians, and 9% as other religions (Lurtice et al., 2019).

Figure 4.5.

The religion of the participants in the UK



In terms of work placement, the majority of participants in the UK (86%) are employed in the public sector, while a low rate is employed in the third sector/NGOs (10%), or private companies (3%). Although the highest number of participants from Romania work in the public sector (39%), a similar percentage of respondents work for third sector/NGOs (37%) (Table 4.1). Almost 1 out of 5 qualified Romanian social work participants declared that they are not employed in the social work sector, but they are active in other social services or volunteering or have a direct connection to the sector. As explained in the literature review of this study, due to precarious working conditions and low pay, a considerable number of social work graduates in Romania do not work in the field, and consequently, there is a deficit of practising qualified professionals (Buzducea, 2015, Lazar et al. 2015b)).

Table 4.1.

Work placement of the participants

	Public sector	NGOs/ Charities	Private companies	Not working in SW at the moment
United Kingdom	86%	10%	3%	1%
Romania³	39%	37%	10%	19%

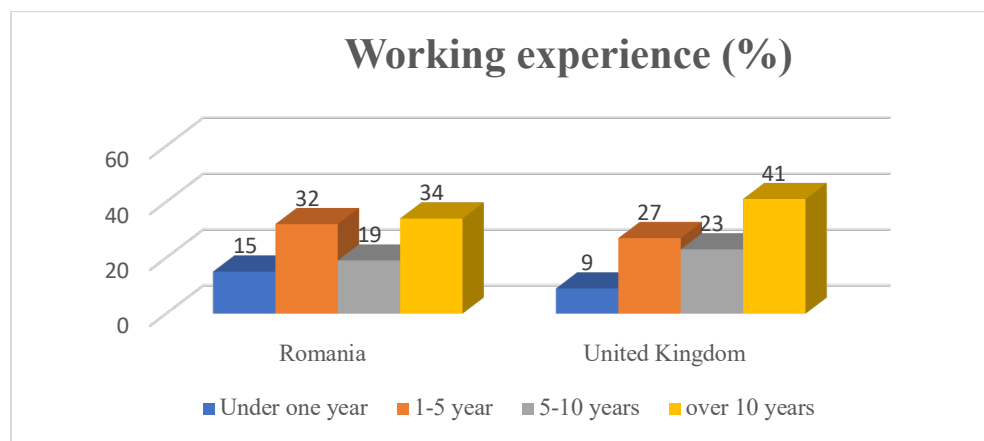
The average age difference between the two cohorts is also revealed through the levels of work experience of the participants (Figure 4.5). In this sense, 64% of the UK participants have at least five years of work experience in social work and 36% have under five years. On the other hand, 47% of Romanian participants have less than five years of work experience in

³ The number exceed over 100 because some respondents answer that they work concomitantly in more than one sector (e.g., working for a public institution and an NGO)

the field, which might also be explained by the relative “youth” of the social work profession in Romania.

Figure 4.6.

Working experience in social work of the participants



To sum up, the demographic overview of the UK and Romanian participants illustrates some interesting aspects. For example, the data obtained in this survey shows a close similarity with the official numbers regarding participants’ age, gender, ethnicity, and religion. It has also shown that respondents in Romania consist of a younger sample, an aspect that might primarily be influenced by the youth of the social work profession in Romania. Although the majority of the respondents work for a public institution, it was observed that a higher percentage of the participants from Romania are employed by NGOs.

4.2. Demographic profile of the interview participants

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the interviews involved 15 social workers per country with different degrees of work experience in the field (from three years to over 20 years in Romania, and from one year of work experience to more than 20 years in the UK). The majority of the interviewees (13 – RO; 10 – UK) initially completed the online surveys, and

the rest of the interview respondents (2 – RO; 5 – UK) were recruited through the snowball method (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). The vast majority of the interviewees considered themselves activists to some extent, with only three declining to describe themselves in this way. Regardless, they acknowledged that sometimes they are involved in actions that can be associated with or attributed to activism, for instance, volunteering, advocacy, or participating in demonstrations. In general, the samples from the two countries are quite similar. For instance, the gender balance displays almost the same distribution of female and male participants (9 F and 6 M in Romania; 10 F and 5 M in the UK), and from both jurisdictions were interviewed people with diverse lengths of working experience in the field of social work. Similar to the survey participants, the interviews with Romanian participants consisted of a larger number of individuals engaged in the non-governmental sector (12 out of 15 social workers have working experience with the third sector); while in the UK, the majority of interviewees (13 out of 15) were engaged with institutions in the public domain.

Table 4.2.*Profile interview participants – Romania.*

Pseudonym	Gender	Length of Experience	Area/s of Activity
Albert	Male	Over 20 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector, Social Work Education and Practice</i>
Eleonora	Female	Over 20 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Alexandra	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution, Non-governmental Sector</i>
Iulian	Male	5 – 10 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Cosmina	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Ciprian	Male	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution, Non-governmental Sector</i>
Miron	Male	Over 20 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Carina	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution</i>
Laur	Male	Over 20 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Alina	Female	10 – 20 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector, Public Institution, Social Work Education</i>
Aura	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Andrei	Male	10 – 20 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector, Public Institution, Social Work Education</i>
Caty	Female	10 – 20 years	<i>Public Institution, Non-governmental Sector</i>
Emilia	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Anemona	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution, Social Work Education</i>

Table 4.3*Profile interview participants – United Kingdom*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Length of Experience</i>	<i>Area/s of Activity</i>
Alexa	Female	Less than 5 years	<i>Public Institution</i>
Richard	Male	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution, Non-governmental Sector</i>
Rudy	Male	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution, Social Work Education</i>
Diana	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution</i>
Lana	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution</i>
Karen	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Public Institution, Non-governmental Sector</i>
Julia	Female	Over 20 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Tanya	Female	Over 20 years	<i>Public Institution, Social Work Education</i>
Rose	Female	Less than 5 years	<i>Public Institution</i>
Amy	Female	Over 20 years	<i>Public Institution</i>
Sophie	Female	Over 20 years	<i>Public Institution, Social Work Education</i>
Ronan	Male	10 – 20 years	<i>Public Institution, Social Work Education</i>
Hellen	Female	5 – 10 years	<i>Non-governmental Sector</i>
Ted	Male	10 – 20 years	<i>Public Institution</i>
Mark	Male	10 – 20 years	<i>Public Institution</i>

This chapter provided a demographic profile of the study participants. There are essential ideas to mention related to the samples. Although this research cannot be considered nationally representative, the data in survey displayed similar characteristics to the official statistics, in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity distribution in both countries. The survey also showed that the Romanian cohort represents a younger sample, which is in line with the fact that generally speaking, social work in Romania is considered a young profession. Among the respondents, more participants from Romania work in charities and declare themselves religious than the respondents in the UK. These aspects have significant relevance when analysing the interviews and social and historical contexts. Finally, the section introduced the profile of the interview participants. The next chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the interviews correlated with the survey data.

CHAPTER 5 – ANALYSIS OF THE DATA (I)

IDENTIFYING AND EXPLORING THE MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL WORK ACTIVISM

This chapter explains the findings by interpreting them through a critical realist lens, informed by the CR framework of Danermark al. (2002). I firstly used thematic analysis (TA) (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and statistical analysis as methods of interpreting the data (online surveys and interviews) and identifying mechanisms emerging from the analysis of the findings. Further, after illustrating the similarities and divergences between the two jurisdictions and deconstructing the notion of social work activism, I will critically analyse and explain these through the lens of the *Morphogenetic sequence framework* (Archer, 1995; 2010). In what follows then, this chapter's structure advances an initial thematic analysis, highlighting how diverse mechanisms shaped the interpretation and practice of activism and social work activism. This discussion is informed by Houston's (2010) classification of mechanisms that are developed as structural powers, socio-cultural norms and relations, or mechanisms that act on the personal level (psycho-social process, values, attitudes etc.). Next, based on the analysis of the mechanisms mentioned above, I elaborated a more in-depth analysis of social work activism's theoretical and practical understandings, considering similarities and differences between countries. Finally, the Morphogenetic sequence of Archer (1995; 2010) illuminates the contexts that influenced the present research findings, illustrating a discussion around broader mechanisms such as political and historical influences.

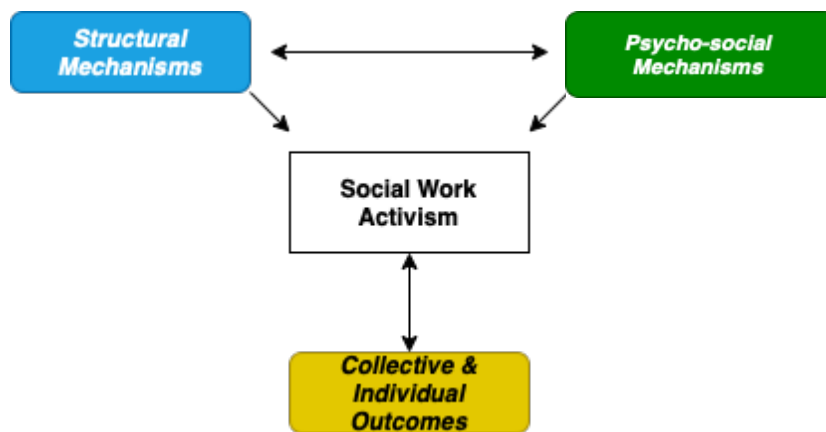
Overview of the main themes

The first part of the findings focuses on providing an analysis of the meaning and practice of general activism and the relationship between the social work profession and activism, as

emerged in both countries. The analysis of the data included an identification of the various mechanisms that shape the conceptualisation and operationalisation of activism and social work activism. According to the thematic analysis (included in the first stage of Danermark et al.'s (2001) model), they can be grouped into three main categories: mechanisms that act at the structural level, at the psycho-social level and at mechanisms referring to individual and collective outcomes (*Figure 5.1*).

Figure 5.1.

Mechanisms Acting on Social Work Activism



5.1. Participant's interpretation of activism and social work activism

Activism as a process

A central theme of this thesis, I focus on the participants' conceptualisation or theoretical interpretation and practice of activism, particularly social work activism. Both concepts are often used interchangeably by the respondents, indicating, in essence, the strong link and

commonality between the social work profession and activism. To begin with, in general terms, activism is interpreted by both cohorts of respondents in a range of ways. From one point of view, *activism is seen as a process* involving actions intended to change society (or other domains), an idea consistent with the literature (Bitusikova, 2015; Cammaerts, 2007; Fuad-Luke, 2009).

“I see activism as a form of involvement in the social domain, or even in other domains, with the intention to produce a positive change.” (Carina, SWRO)

“[Activism] aims for social change around equalities issues and social justice”
(Ronan, SWUK)

Social change, which can include the development of new norms, organisations or structures (Wilterdink and William, 2021), can appear as the result of intense actions which aim to “identify some unmet needs” (Diana, SWUK) and “draw attention towards some causes” (Emilia, SWRO). These actions integrated into activism can be interpreted as forms of advocacy, more particularly *cause advocacy* (Rees, 1991), that encompasses ideas of acknowledging and promoting certain issues and causes at the social level.

Further, the participants also referred to symbolic aspects that fuel and are an integrative part of activism, such as values and motives/goals, as mentioned by Jordan (2002) and Niblett (2017). For instance, in the UK, there are more prevalent references to ideas such as “equality” and “social justice” (Ronan, SWUK), “improving the well-being of humanity” (Alexa, SWUK), and “standing for basic human rights” (Diana, SWUK). According to the Romanian participants, the essential elements mentioned were “solidarity”, “altruism” (Adina, SWRO), “desire to change” (Miron, SWRO) and “compassion” (Eleonora, SWRO). This denotes a difference in views between both countries, with the UK respondents linking their interpretation more to the desired outcomes (goals), while the Romanian participants focus on

attributes that fuel activism (their values). However, it can be observed that the whole process of activism is defined by positive or constructive elements united under the idea of collective participation and social improvement.

Activism as a concrete act

The second interpretation of activism refers to a concrete *act of participation*. Participants conceptualised activism in this vein as “an act of volunteering” (Laur, SWRO), or “participating in political campaigns” (Amy, SWUK); views that are again consistent with the main discussions presented in the literature review, which present activism as a concrete political/civic activity, tool or act of protest (Schwedler and Harris, 2016; Taib, 2006). However, the nuances through which activism, as a process and tool, are portrayed differently in Romania and the UK. For instance, activism in Romania is often associated with “civic participation”, “pro-social attitudes” and “humanitarian acts”, overall, akin to civic activism, while in the UK, activism has a stronger political connotation as illustrated by Richard’s comment (SWUK).

”Activism for me is taking part in certain strategies or tactics that bring us around some form of political ideology [...] For me, activism means practically to be fully involved in a political campaign.” (Richard, SWUK)

Additionally, the political form of activism embodies a more conflictual approach to social change, with a direct purpose of “challenging the power” (Rudy, SWUK), or “challenging the status quo” (Amy, SWUK). These more political views of activism among UK social workers are not only reflected in the interviews. *Table 5.1* illustrates the frequency of themes resulting from the analysis of interpretations of the meaning of activism provided by the survey respondents in both countries. Participants in both countries share similar views of activism as an act of civic participation/engagement or militating and promoting certain ideas

and values. There is, however, a visible difference when discussing the action of change or idea of anti-system attitudes (illustrated in red font); as examples of confrontational actions offered by the UK respondents could be mentioned fighting against state oppression, white supremacy, social injustice or challenging the status quo. On the other hand, Romanian social workers define activism more often as a way of *supporting communities and individuals*. This might suggest that the association of activism in the UK is more “political”, more “conflictual” to an extent, compared to Romania, where activism is seen as a supportive/reparatory action. Other answers received (included in *Other* category) generally consist of short responses which refer to concrete activities such as protests, street demonstrations, or volunteering. In this theme, I have also included responses that were identified as taken copy/paste from the Internet (1 in the UK and 6 in Romania), which to some extent can suggest that activism for some social workers can be difficult to conceptualise.

Table 5.1.

Main themes on activism interpretations (survey)

Romania	Themes	United Kingdom
22	Action of social/political change	28
23	Civic participation & engagement	22
22	Militating/promoting certain ideas/values/raising awareness	19
1	Anti-system attitude	14
7	Lobby/advocacy/representation	13
8	Supporting communities and individuals	4
12	Other	7

So far, some essential elements can characterise the general understanding of activism. Firstly, activism can define an entire *process* that aims for a positive social change. Secondly, it can be seen as a single tool/activity that contributes to a political or social *goal or outcome*. And thirdly, activism can have a more political (prevalent among the UK participants) or social (apolitical) orientation (more common among the Romanian social workers). These aspects are exemplified more concretely further by exploring the meaning of social work activism.

5.2. Interpretations of the relationship between activism – social work

In the literature, the commonality between social work and activism is acknowledged. As some scholars state, activism contributes to fulfilling ethical and educational goals and aligning with the profession’s core foundations of human rights, social justice and social change (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Bott et al., 2016). Those are shared views that are strongly reinforced by both cohorts through the present findings. According to the surveys, 73% (UK) and 78% (RO) of the respondents consider that activism is part of the social work profession.

Table 5.2.

Correlation between activism and the social work profession, according to the participants

<i>Activism is part of the social work</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
United Kingdom	3 %	11 %	13 %	51 %	22 %
Romania	3 %	5 %	14 %	66 %	12 %

The analysis of the interviews suggests that the relationship between activism and social work can have different nuances. A first interpretation explains this connection from a more abstract or theoretical perspective. As such, activism is viewed as “another facet of social work” (Aura, SWRO), or even more, “should be one and the same” (Rose, SWUK), because, essentially, both social work and activism advocate for the same goals and values – for example, social change, social justice, or contributing to people’s wellbeing, particularly those in need (service users). Therefore, there is an *ideological overlapping*, as also concluded by many participants in both samples.

“[...] at least in principle, they have the same scope. I mean, a change for the better. And I believe... they overlap here” (Carina, SWRO)

“I think it should be one and the same, because at the heart of social work and activism is social justice” (Rose, SWUK).

However, despite this ideological overlapping, activism and social work emerged as *two separate entities* due to the disparities between theory (how social work should be) and practice (how social work is actually implemented); an idea that suggests that the practice of social work includes a non-activist component. According to the interview participants, the distinction between activist social work and non-activist social work is mainly determined by the statutory framework, managerialist culture, and neoliberal policies that regulate the profession. Activism *in* social work is therefore considered to be constrained by the neoliberal framework, managerial culture and resource constraints under which social work is practiced, as expressed in the comments below.

“There are some institutional limitations that tell you ‘This is what you have to do’.” (Iulian, SWRO)

“I think the environment we’re living in, in the UK, for a statutory social worker, it’s very easy to not be [an activist], just because you’re driven by such high caseloads. You’re restricted by such bureaucratic systems [...]” (Karen, SWUK)

Activism within social work can be viewed as a concrete “toolbox” used by social workers to reach tangible goals, such as “improving the profession” [e.g., creating adequate services, suitable legislation], or as a method of empowerment:

“to activate, to access resources, to mobilise, to motivate, to make people do something, to have the responsibility and things like that for their lives” (Albert, SWRO).

However, taking into account the acknowledgement of activism as a process of social change oriented towards social justice and, on the other hand, considering social work as a profession aiming for social justice, social cohesion, empowerment and human rights (IFSW, 2014), it can also be argued that social work represents, at least in theory, an engine for activism. As such, social work and activism are two distinct phenomena that overlap in key points such as principles and goals/missions and this common area can be conceptualised as social work activism. While following an analysis of the literature review, I advanced the following definition:

Social work activism involves actions of change driven essentially by social workers united under the same professional values (see, IFSW, 2014), who act within and outside of the profession in order to enhance the pledged mission of wellbeing and social justice at the individual and social level.

The analysis of the data, indeed, confirms the existence of these two dimensions (inside and outside the profession) as “territories” of social work activism. However, through the data

I was able to identify and name them more clearly – *activism in social work* (inside the profession) and activism by social workers (outside of the profession), with the distinction that the former represents a way of thinking about and practising social work, reflected in activities connected to the statutory role (e.g., advocating for the clients or lobbying for a specific legislation in social work), while the latter, *activism by social workers*, may relate to activities outwith the nature of their precise social work role but in keeping with the principles of social work (e.g., campaigning for the environmental issues).

5.3. The role of activists in social work activism

Activism and social work activism are undertaken by activists and social work activists; therefore, a discussion on how participants perceive the image or role of these actors is relevant. As reflected in one of the open questions in the survey and through the discussions in interviews, respondents in both countries have a similar view regarding the image of an activist. By thematically analysing their answers, the following key characteristics that compose activists' identity resulted.

One first aspect of activist identity refers to *frequency* – in other words, how often they engage in activism. The typical reason for not considering themselves activists is “I do not engage in activism very often to consider myself one” (Survey Respondent UK). This point can be related to Cortese’s (2015) work, who indicated that an idealised image of activists might influence the decisions of individuals to reject or to accept the activist label. On the same point, an activist is more often perceived as a person with high visibility and involvement and “comes forwards” (Cosmina SWRO), and some participants typically mentioned that “I consider myself an activist because I frequently get involved in such activities” (Survey Respondent RO). For Tanya, an activist has to hold a high standard of qualities, thus they:

“ha[ve] insight, understanding and commitment to an important issue in society and use their influence, skills and knowledge to try and work on that issue in conjunction with others” (Tanya, SWUK)

This indicates, in fact, the key skills and qualities that a social work activist should possess, according to Baines (2011).

In social work, a commonly shared idea underlines that theoretically, social workers should be seen or regarded as activists “by virtue” of their role (Diana, SWUK) or every social worker should have a “seed of activism” (Iulian, SWRO) because “of fighting for someone’s human rights and just laying on an anti-discriminatory practice” (Diana, SWUK). However, the realities from practice seemingly influenced participants’ perspectives - from both cohorts - to claim that *there is a difference between a social work activist and a “regular” social worker*. As voiced by most of the participants in Romania and the UK, a social work activist goes beyond their statutory duties and job description and, eventually, they engage in activities that are directly related to the social work profession (e.g., lobbying for improving social work legislation, supplementary fieldwork, overtime), so this would be *activism in social work*; or further work to affect structural changes and indirectly support to improve the lives of service users [*activism by social workers*].

“There is a difference, but it should not exist. But in our country, it surely exists! It exists because lots of social workers do exactly what they have in the job description. And this would mean to complete some forms for social support, to complete some maps, to do some paperwork. I don’t consider this as social activism. I don’t even see it as social work. It’s like an activity that should be moved to other practices.” (Adina, SWRO)

In the UK, social work activists are also seen as professionals that extend their activity over the statutory role, but in addition, they are politically aware and engage in a more radical approach to perform systemic changes; an approach which can be correlated to activism by social workers and is more predominant in the UK. For instance, Richard (SWUK) mentioned a concept that is frequently associated with social workers – *agent of change* (Ferguson, 2013; Nandan et al., 2014; Sanders, 1974). In Richard’s (SWUK) understanding, a social worker who is an activist should be an agent of change and focus more on challenging and changing the system than only working on individualised interventions or limiting their activity to the job description.

“You have to look further than your workload, and further than your workplace. [...] Looking at the systemic nature of social work, looking at the structures not just social work profession, but how is welfare formed, democracy and equal representation, community group. That’s what social work activism should be involved in. What is going to give people good and fair democracy. And that is when you see social changes are not individual changes” (Richard, SWUK).

Despite these debates, other particularities of a social work activists’ involvement are influenced by various institutional settings. In this respect, participants in both countries acknowledged that *activist practice is more achievable in the third sector* than in public sector institutions/organisations. According to the participants, the charity/NGO/third sector offers more flexibility and independence as a social worker and allows professionals to “juggle, improvise and be more creative” (Iulian, SWRO) in their activity. On the other hand, for social workers working in the public sector, there is the risk of “institutionalisation”, as claimed by interviewees in both jurisdictions, arguing that being part of the public service would limit their ability to challenge the state and policies, a necessary component to activist practice. Therefore,

working in the third sector facilitates more opportunities to “do social work as it is supposed to be” (Julia, SWUK). To an extent, it can be argued that these institutional settings can also influence how social workers perceive their activist identity. By way of illustration, the institutional constraints social workers to be frequently active and visible, thus their self-image as activists would also be affected. Yet, on the other hand, according to some interviewees, this role of activist for social justice/change can be performed from both positions, as *a professional* or as *a citizen*, if they are within institutional or professional constraints.

”[A]ctivism might be limited by the specific norms of the public sector. So, they cannot manifest their activism as social workers but more as citizens” (Iulian, SWRO)

5.4. Key points on the interpretation of activism, social work activism, and activist identity

This section provided some initial insights on general points regarding activism, its relationship with social work and the individuals involved in these processes. These points are intended to set the stage for a more in-depth analysis of the mechanisms that influence the central topic of this thesis – social work activism. So far, it has been observed that activism, as a general concept, has a positive connotation among the participants of this study and can be interpreted as a process or act for social change, embodying a political dimension (in the UK), or non-political (in Romania). It was acknowledged that there is a strong ideological relationship between activism and the social work profession. Both are domains that overlap, and their intersection can be conceptualised as social work activism, a realm that embodies key principles and goals such as social change, social justice, empowerment or improvement. This can be further nuanced to **activism in social work** (activism implemented to directly affect the

social work profession) and **activism by social workers** (seeking to produce structural changes and indirectly benefit social work).

Further, the discussion on activist identity reveals that despite shared opinions on what constitutes the image of an activist or social work activist, some particularities determine the performance and realisation of these identities. As in the case of conceptualisation of general activism, activists and social work activists might engage more in political actions (in the UK) or in civic engagement activities that are less politically connected (in Romania). Specifically for social work activists, their identity might be determined by their predisposition to engage outside of the statutory role (embrace the activist role) or limit their activity to the job description (non-social work activist/social worker). However, social workers can behave like activists outside of the profession as a citizen if they wish (activism by social workers). The institutional framework or culture might also influence the capacity to be an activist; for example, social workers working in the third sector might have a stronger activist identity and capacity to realise it than those working in public institutions.

To better understand the influences and manifestations of social work activism, the next sections focus on providing an analysis of identified mechanisms that appear to shape the activist practices of social workers in Romania and the UK, including structural mechanisms, psycho-social mechanisms and collective/individuals outcomes.

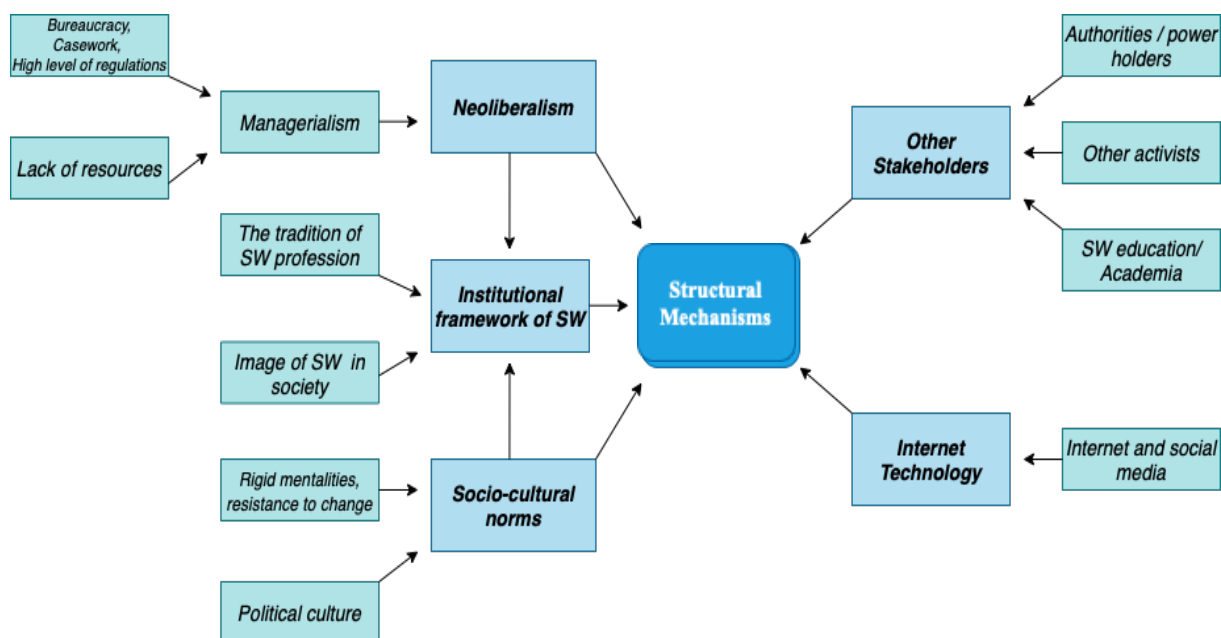
5.5. Structural Mechanisms

Generally, structures as a macro phenomenon can refer to patterns, macro-institutions (economics, politics, religion, culture) and institutionalised relationships (laws, behaviours, norms), manifested and established in society (Bell, 2013; Scott and Marshall, 2009). Deriving from this definition in the present study, I describe structural mechanisms as particular macro-

social factors that have been identified as influencing the conceptualisation and participation of social workers in activism. More broadly, these mechanisms include socio-political and cultural influences in social work, institutional practices, social dynamics and power relations involving social workers, and internet technology. In more concrete terms, structural mechanisms refer to *Neoliberalism*, *Norms and Practices* affecting the social work institutional framework, *Stakeholders* and the *impact of the Internet* on social work practice/activism, which further, are also impacted by other factors. As in the example below, the institutional framework is influenced by both Neoliberalism and socio-cultural norms, as well as aspects that are related specifically to social work, such as tradition and the image of the profession among the general public. The following *Figure 5.2* illustrates the groupings around this central theme of *Structural Mechanisms*.

Figure 5.2.

The distribution of Structural Mechanisms



5.5.1. Neoliberalism

Participants indicated several macro and mezzo mechanisms that limit or encourage their participation in activism. However, those with a more limiting role are mostly mechanisms grouped under the umbrella of Neoliberalism. Broadly, Neoliberalism defines an ideology and a political model whose core beliefs are based on the idea that the accumulation of capital generated by the free market, competition and minimal intervention of the state, leads to economic growth and human progress (Smith, 2019). Despite economic growth and reducing poverty globally, the neoliberal agenda has been intensively criticised for enriching the elites and monopolism, increasing inequality, creating financial crises or degradation of the environment (Bapna et al., 2019; Ostry et al., 2016). In more practical terms, Neoliberalism has led to the substantial privatisation of public services, marketisation of society, increasing competition and individualism, and implementation of a robust bureaucratic/managerial apparatus on welfare services (Roberts, 2014).

Scholars have extensively discussed the effects of neoliberal policies on the social work profession in the UK (e.g., Dominelli, 2020; Dustin, 2007; Ferguson, 2020; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006, 2013; Rogowski, 2011, 2015, 2018, 2020), but in a limited amount in Romania, although the negative effects of the neoliberal agenda in social services are acknowledged (Lazar et al., 2018a). However, none of the Romanian interview participants referred to the concept of Neoliberalism, while in the UK, four respondents explicitly mentioned Neoliberalism as a negative influence over the social work profession and society in general. Both cohorts indicated similar barriers that limit their participation in activism, and they can be framed as direct consequences of neoliberal policies, but as revealed, there is a higher awareness among the UK social workers around the impact of Neoliberalism on their profession.

Firstly, the majority of Romanian and UK participants indicated *managerial practice* as being a dominant obstacle to their activism. It can be translated into a considerable amount of bureaucracy (administrative paperwork), robust procedures, and rigid rules. Essentially, these processes have the effect of creating more distance between social workers and service users, offering fewer opportunities for professionals to connect with their clients and deliver an informed intervention (Rogowski, 2015). It was also emphasised that the solid bureaucracy might be a complex and intimidating process to navigate, especially when referring to the clients, who would eventually be more reluctant to engage and collaborate with social workers; an aspect confirmed by several empirical studies in both countries (e.g., Butler-Warke and Bolger, 2019; Dustin, 2007; Lazar et al., 2018a; Rogowski, 2015). Overall, these impediments and the lack of trust between the service users and social workers would further affect the profession itself because the providers are being portrayed as unrealisable, untrustworthy and patronising. Those aspects go against the key role of social work, which is to engage in therapeutic and transformational interventions by building relationships and encouraging autonomy and cooperation with the service users (Payne, 2005; Dominelli, 2010).

“[...] bureaucracy only makes it difficult for us both as professionals and diminish the beneficiary’s trust in our services and in us.” (Ciprian, SWRO)

“Bureaucracy, I think, is the biggest challenge. People don’t know how to navigate them, people don’t know how to hold themselves, if you like, they either need to argue with bureaucracy or be submissive to bureaucracy” (Karen, SWUK)

Indeed, in line with the literature, participants also recognised the managerial influence on their own practice. This influence is attributed to a *high volume of workload* that social

workers need to perform – a direct consequence of the afferent bureaucracy within the profession. The majority of respondents in both countries referred to *workload* as a negative aspect of their activity, especially those working in public services. Further, the high amount of work is usually associated with increased exhaustion, lack of time and perceptions of inefficacy, making their engagement in activism improbable.

“For example, the load of cases is quite high, and you have a lot of work, you no longer have the resources to do activism; and then, someone else has to do it.” (Ciprian, SWRO)

“Workload is ridiculous and not necessary a lot of times - a lot of duplications”
(Rose, SWUK)

In relation to the managerial and bureaucratic system, respondents also voiced their concerns of social workers being transformed into “*institutionalised*” workers that limit their activity to procedures and an ineffective job description. An aspect that does not contribute to the mission of social work – to provide social justice, ensure respect for human rights and change society for the better (IFSW, 2014). As characterised by radical and critical approaches in social work, this limitation means supporting the social control apparatus of the oppressive state, and in this situation, social workers would be transformed from a desirable position of agents of change to agents of control/oppression or accomplice of the state (Edmonds-Cady and Wingfield, 2017; Kamiński, 2018; Weaver, 2000). As argued by interviewees in both countries, the managerial apparatus of the state is so powerful that it often assimilates social workers, and therefore, their ability as agents of change becomes extremely limited. As a result of the managerial policy, social workers are at risk of becoming “institutionalised” in a very short time, which will make them other “victims” of the system. As Hellen (SWUK) stated:

“When you become so institutionalised that you’re literally just an arm of the State and you’re not challenging internal practices anymore, and you’re not speaking up on behalf of the family that you’re working for, you do whatever makes your caseload easier, then no, you can’t call yourself a social work activist” (Hellen, SWUK)

A significant contribution to this “institutionalisation” might be related to the rules and regulations governing the social work profession in Romania and particularly emphasised in the UK. Ronan (SWUK) voiced that these regulations, which are the result of intense managerialism in the last decades (see Dominelli, 2020; Dustin, 2007; Rogowski, 2020) shifted the focus of social work from assisting to controlling practices.

“I think a lot of the rules, regulations, procedures, processes have all come in, you know, in the last 20 years, were actually making people think differently about the emphasis as on controlling the work.” (Ronan, SWUK)

An adjacent discussion on *the influence of Codes of Practice* on their activist practice illustrated that the respondents had mixed feelings about these documents of conduct. There were opinions in favour of the idea that Codes of Practice encourage, to an extent, activist practice because they refer to “anti-discriminatory practice” (Diana, SWUK), and “stipulate some basic principles and values that can be linked to activism” (Cosmina, SWRO). On the other hand, some participants were sceptical about Codes encouraging a transformative practice, arguing that “these codes could be limiting to a degree” (Eleonora, SWRO). A few participants from the UK were very critical of them, as in the case of Rudy (SWUK), who believes that they represent “a corporate, managerial, neoliberal piece” designed to control people’s activity. For Rudy (SWUK), these Codes are “meaningless” with no real impact on

practice. In his opinion, social work should function based on aspects evidenced by research and incorporating elements of morality and ethics.

“They’re very broad and bland and you could definitely say that activism is a form of meeting every single one of those Code of Practices. But you could also argue it’s so broad and so bland, they’re pretty meaningless, the Code of Practice. I don’t think they’ve impacted upon my practice at all. I think good practice goes well beyond what the Code of Practice says [...] your practice should be based on what is best practice, what is evidence based, what is moral and ethical, what is within your powers.” (Rudy, SWUK)

The key principles of managerialism in public administration are the target-driven policy (efficiency) and economic rationale (reduced expenses on public services) (Reichard, 2010). Thus, these policies have a fundamental role in social work practice, determining the priorities and how resources are invested in the sector (Rogowski, 2011). According to a significant number of participants, transformative practices require different types of resources such as funds to implement and develop services, human resources and community mobilisation to assist with the operationalisation of related activities and development of the proper infrastructure. A shared opinion in both countries claims that limited *financial disposal/resource or funding cuts* constrain more proactive practices in public institutions and the third sector. As per the survey data, 51% of the Romanian social workers and 34% in the UK indicated limited financial resources as one of the main barriers to activist practice.

“Then the financial factor. There are many people who want to be involved, they want to do more, but they do not have money because activism cannot be done without adequate financial resources. This is it. If you want to do activism on the issue of rights and obligations and so on, you have to gather people at a

table, you have to organize a session, maybe a conference, a symposium ... that means having money.” (Eleonora, SWRO)

“Actually, if we’d had the funds to put into this beforehand, they wouldn’t have got there. So, I think, finance and thresholds are huge obstacles” (Lana, SWUK)

The *lack of proper infrastructure* and *operational resources* are discussions more commonly among social workers in Romania. Here, they are direct consequences of the policy of minimal expenses in the public sector and austerity measures, especially in the welfare sector, which seems to negatively affect the activity of social workers in Romania overall (Lazar et al., 2016). The lack of funds leads to restrictions on accessing or providing other resources (space, transportation), as evidenced by Carina (SWRO).

“Maybe when I was involved in a certain project, I didn't find the necessary resources to implement it. Physical resources, such as finding a space to organize a certain event. Or finding transportation to facilitate a certain campaign that involves such an effort. And finding solutions regarding these concrete aspects: space, means of transport.” (Carina, SWRO)

Finally, a prevalent theme around resources refers to *lack of time* that can be the consequence of bureaucratic practice, insufficient support of staff; aspects that occupy a considerable period of the professional activity and do not allow social workers to operate what is considered an activist practice (see Lana’s (SWUK) comments). According to survey respondents, lack of time was indicated as the main barrier to activism by social workers in both countries, with 67% (Ro) and 71% (UK). As implied by many interview participants, being an activist requires a considerable amount of time and energy to be able to accomplish the proposed goals. As Iulian (SWRO) and Karen (SWUK) emphasised, managing their time

is a real challenge and can generate or exacerbate other personal issues, which are explored in the next section referring to psycho-social factors.

“I think, time... because there is a lot of work and not enough social workers for the job that we do.” (Lana, SWUK)

“With us, every day is a challenge, a race. You wake up in the morning, the first phone you hear can be a general alarm [from work] and set you up and leave the house in 5 minutes. That's why I don't even turn on my phone until after ten o'clock because my life as an activist, social worker has no break.” (Iulian, SWRO)

“By the time I leave and get back, I'm just exhausted and I don't have, I feel, the time and energy to necessarily engage in other interests or hobbies.” (Karen, SWUK)

5.5.2. Social and cultural norms

Another sub-theme, more prevalent in Romania, referred to the influence of social and cultural norms at the institutional level and beyond that. In the UK, the culture of resistance to change within the social work system was considered an effect of managerialism and its afferent institutionalisation (see Tanya's (SWUK) comment). On the other hand, in Romania, more than half of the interviews echoed that, to a great extent, the *institutional resistance* (resistance of people working in public services) is just a consequence of the general reluctance to change manifested in society. This resistance in the Romanian context is presented as “rigid” mentalities, lack of confidence in others, scepticism at every level – politicians, employers, colleagues, service users, and the general population. As argued by Laur (SWRO), resistance to change or challenge the existent norms and hierarchies is incorporated into the culture of people and society, and to contest it, might take a considerable amount of time and energy.

“[...] interesting that people who are social workers become managers and then just think differently. And so, that’s all about the coercive nature of organisations...” (Tanya, SWUK)

“I believe that some of these barriers refer to the resistance resulting from the culture or how we understand the culture [...] I know there are some resistances to the new, and I know that in order to make individual change perseverance, inspiration, and a lot of energy.” (Laur, SWRO)

The theoretical analysis [pp. 189-243] explores in more depth the social and historical aspects that contribute to the manifestation of these patterns in each country. However, some additional interesting ideas emerged from the interviews with the Romanian participants. For instance, a few social workers implied that this distrust, scepticism and resistance might be the effects of the relatively short history of the social work profession and its inaccurate image in Romania. For example, five participants mentioned that the social work profession lacks legitimacy because in general, people do not understand it and it is wrongly depicted by media, an argument which is also supported by the study of Lazar et al. (2018b), showing that in mass-media and online, social work is often confused with other professions and negatively portrayed. Consequently, social workers might not be perceived as trustworthy social actors in the eye of the general population or attractive partners of dialogue for the politicians, and therefore, activist social work practice might not be encouraged or receive enough support.

“It’s difficult when our profession is every time confused with other professions.” (Aura, SWRO)

Another sub-theme linked to the public’s reluctance to support or engage in activism in Romania, concerns the *lack of understanding of civic participation*. Here, we can refer to the long history of the Communist dictatorship that suppressed any forms of collective organisation

that might threaten or dispute the country's political authority (Tismaneanu, 1998). The consequences of the Communist regime on activism and collective participation are largely discussed in the analytical framework section [p. 194]. As Adina (SWRO) stated, it is possible that the population might not understand activism and, in general, civic participation, thus the activist practice of social workers might be influenced by this aspect.

“[...] activism is not so well understood in our country. We do not necessarily have such a long and clear history of activism, and then the participation is kind of limited.” (Adina, SWRO)

A similar point of view regarding the influence of the political context on people's understanding of or propensity to engage in social work activism in the UK was expressed by Rudy (SWUK). He argued that the new generations of social workers in the UK are more apathetic towards civic and political engagement compared to older generations because, according to him, they seem to organise and protest less and be more obedient. Again, the wider socio-structural influences and drivers that can explain these findings are discussed in the following theoretical analysis chapter. There, I illustrate how social conditions and periods with different political settings might increase or decrease the predisposition for activism.

“Apathy on behalf of colleagues. We have a generation of people growing up who have never taken part in a strike, have never seen a relative take part in a strike, for example, don't know what a picket line is and so on and so forth.”
(Rudy, SWUK)

5.5.3. Other stakeholders

Preceding sub-themes have illustrated some institutionalised and socio-cultural patterns/mechanisms shaping the practice of the social work profession. The following discussion focuses on the role of *other stakeholders* (representing authorities/power holders,

other activists and professionals, and social work education/academia) and the relational mechanisms and patterns created from the relationships between them and social work activists.

Participants in both countries acknowledged the impact of *political drivers and dynamics* on their activity, but not necessarily in a positive way. In Romania, social workers view political dynamics (the frequent change of political power) as a significant challenge in implementing or developing an effective activist practice and, eventually, obtaining positive outcomes. As they argued, the lack of consistent support from the political class might have a negative impact on their activity (the process), as well as the outcomes.

“[...] we have a political class... at least interesting [smile]. For more than 20 years, we don't have partners to discuss. Or if you have them and you agree upon something, you will discover later that it will not be possible to implement your agreement because that person is not anymore in power, because the party left. In the end, you discover that you worked for nothing for some years. So, the political factor and everything that derives from it, is a huge challenge.”

(Eleonora, SWRO)

Despite their dissatisfaction with the political class, social workers in Romania prefer to engage in a collaborative strategy since “in the end, you work with them to implement change” (Alexandra, SWRO). In this context, this might suggest that changing the political class and the system around it is not possible, but the improvement of it is a more realistic goal. Therefore, instead of engaging in a confrontation that might be ineffective, the Romanian respondents would instead prefer to find ways to work together.

“I am always looking for the best channel of communication. Otherwise, if I focus on misunderstandings and mismatches [it] will take us a lot of time to work something.” (Iulian, SWRO)

The UK respondents were also not enthusiastic about the relationship or support offered by the political class to improve the profession. Moreover, most of the opinions were critical of the political system in the UK. Despite some critique of the Conservative party, the UK social workers were wishful for a radical change in the capitalist system that is considered the root of the social problems. However, there was a perception that “some things will never change” (Karen, SWUK).

A factor perceived as having a positive influence on transformative practice was primarily related to *relationships with other activists*. In this sense, the general impression across participants in both countries was that colleagues and other professionals engaged in activism represent a vital resource in overcoming obstacles and enhancing an activist practice. The respondents indicated that collaborating with other people to implement specific actions can increase the chance of successfully realising the proposed activities (e.g., awareness-raising campaigns, implementing new services, changing the law etc.). In this respect, social work activists view their relationship with other activists as “priceless” since it can involve technical as well as emotional support.

“We depend on other activists. We have a very strong network that helps us to share our solidarity, worries, and enthusiasm.” (Miron, SWRO)

“We are all a collaborative and collective enterprise.” (Ted, SWUK)

Despite this positive characterisation of their relationship with other activists, there were some who voiced the existence of possible conflictual views that might disturb or disrupt the activist community. For instance, some activists/organisations can have different priorities

in relation to a campaign, or there could be some contradictions in relation to the role assigned in common campaigns (e.g., offering support to refugees). In addition, Karen (SWUK) expressed an interesting point, reflecting on her experience in the third sector. She explains that, due to limited funds available and short-term funding provisions, some activists (including social workers) might focus on building alliances and engage in so-called competitive activism to fight for resources and prestige with other similar groups (Ghita, 2016). These fights for funds and reputation might distract the activist movement and even affect the service users.

“I feel like different organisations can be quite territorial [...] And you kind of think, well, at what point are you affecting the service users because you’re focusing on alliances rather than what’s best for the individual.” (Karen, SWUK)

Educational SW institutions/academia is another stakeholder that can potentially impact social workers and their activism. A common idea among participants in both countries reflects that activism is not a practice promoted explicitly by universities as institutions or through the social work curriculum. However, it was generally agreed that activism was “intrinsically” promoted by some lecturers who organised dedicated events such as conferences, workshops, or providing opportunities for internships and practice placements within activist organisations. In Romania, some interviewees (the most recent graduates) viewed activist lecturers as those who were also engaging with organising thematic courses, inviting activists or service users to talk about their experience during the lecture.

“The faculty organises various events. Lecturers were also encouraging this by bringing examples of activist organisations or inviting guests from different backgrounds.” (Alexandra, SWRO)

“I had quite a few lecturers who were passionate and seemed like they were active and would do things and would definitely challenge people’s opinions and make them think about why.” (Hellen, SWUK)

Five of the respondents in Romania mentioned that their first contact with what they interpreted as activism happened during the university period when they were exposed to this kind of practice. A few of the respondents in the UK pointed out that their appetite for activism developed during the studentship period due to a better understanding of social problems. Richard (SWUK) acknowledged that one of his lecturers had a “great impact” on developing his ideology as a social work activist.

“Professor [name] influenced me on social work. I learned so much from him in terms of ideology. He enabled me to navigate and understand social work.”

Richard (SWUK)

Overall, there was an agreement that social work education should promote and/or integrate activism more explicitly through the curriculum. In the UK, few participants referred to the importance of political education for social workers. For example, Rudy (SWUK) argued that social work students should be more exposed to politics – “as a social work student, we do not hear enough about Marxism, we did not hear enough about globalisation and Neoliberalism” (Rudy, SWUK).

5.5.4. Internet and social media

Without a doubt, the internet and social media have dramatically impacted many aspects of our society. They have become an essential means of sharing information, fighting for social causes and reinterpreting classical activism, as exemplified in the literature review (Bond et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2014, Schardie, 2018). The influence of online tools is also acknowledged within the social work sector (Boddy and Dominelli 2017; Caleria, 2018; Reamer, 2013), and among

the participants in the present study. According to the survey data, 89% (UK) and 87% (Romania) of social workers declared that *social media is a reliable source of information* on issues that matter to them. Moreover, social media is a popular platform for finding opportunities for activism. A proportion of 56% of the UK respondents indicated *Facebook as a means of finding information about activism*, while in Romania, the per cent was even higher at 76%. Additionally, 83% of the UK social workers and 71% of the Romanian social workers agree and strongly agree that social media/internet influences the development of activism. Also, in the surveys, 66 % of the Romanian participants and 54 % of the UK participants acknowledged that social media had become an important tool for social workers.

Interview respondents in both countries acknowledged the powerful impact of the internet and social media on society, but their views on online/social media activism are mixed. On the one hand, respondents in both countries see online activism as an excellent resource for mobilisation, sharing information or advocating for specific causes. On the other hand, they advance a critique of the limitations of online activism.

First of all, *online platforms can connect people effortlessly* regardless of place and time. For social workers, as for other activists, this refers to the opportunity to discuss, share and test their own ideas, as Ted (SWUK) mentions. Through online platforms, *activists can mobilise themselves and motivate other individuals* to join their causes and form a community of activists. All these can happen with minimum costs of time and funds than in actions “real” life. In addition, online activism can overcome geographical barriers easily.

“I think there still is a good group of people there and so I find, you know... there’s a lot of ideas shared on there, there’s a lot of expertise and also, it’s a good ground for testing your own ideas. “(Ted, SWUK)

"You can engage a lot of people. Their number may be higher than in-person activities. It's a much bigger opening. In a shorter time, you can make yourself known, or your idea, to reach other people much faster." (Carina, SWRO)

On the other hand, SW activists had a critical view of this approach, insofar as *activist manifestation can be trapped online* without having a meaningful impact in the "real world". From these participants' perspective, as long as online activism is not moved out of the platform by taking "real actions", it is not meaningful or useful. Some participants indicated that sometimes there is too much discussion online without concrete action, which can demotivate people to engage in real activity.

"One risk would be that all this online fuss could just stay there. That is, we talk, and it only stays there, and there is not really a working group." (Cosmina, SWRO)

"Some of these petition stuff, especially with parliament, they don't go anywhere. But organising things to happen in the real world is better." (Rudy, SWUK)

Like Cosmina (SWRO) and Rudy (SWUK), other interviewees referred to a concept presented in the literature review as *slacktivism* (Lewis et al., 2014; Rotman et al., 2011; Vie, 2014). Defined as a low-cost and low engagement type of activism, or "lazy activism", slacktivism manifests in online spaces and can include examples such as giving "likes" and "share" for a cause, but without taking action offline (Rotman et al., 2011). However, the research respondents acknowledged that online is a good starting point for activism in creating an initial consciousness-raising, which could lead to a more significant movement of people supporting the cause.

As illustrated earlier, online tools offer opportunities for social work activists to connect faster and to share expertise and, consequently, shape an *online community of activists*. In the literature, an online community is defined as groups of individuals who share the same goals, have similar interests and interact or connect via internet platforms (Roy, 2010). As resulted from the interviews, social workers (with few exceptions) are part of dedicated online communities, especially on Facebook, where they discuss issues related to social work, promote, or organise campaigns. A significant advantage of online communities is that they exceed national borders. Therefore, social workers can stay connected with what is new in the profession and wider issues, independently from their geographical area.

“Online activism can make a difference. Making international connections with other people and also sharing experiences in a way you would never have done without social media. So, our networks and community are much, much wider now” (Julia, SWUK)

Despite these apparent advantages, some social workers highlighted online activism’s potential limits and dangers. For instance, two social workers in the UK who consider themselves from the “older generation”, suggested that social media/internet activity might *create a generational gap* between them and the new generations, who are more connected to technological innovations. Alexandra (SWRO) supports this point, arguing that “you can’t reach everyone online because certain age groups or specific social categories are not online”; and therefore, social media can be exclusionary in this regard. This idea is also supported by the literature. For instance, George and Leidner (2018) suggest that marginalised communities (older people, people living in poverty, disabled persons) might have limited success with online engagement because it requires access to the Internet and digital devices (smartphones, computers) – access which in disadvantaged communities, for example, is restricted by the high financial costs of these technologies. Additionally, the authors indicate that there are some

limited digital literacy skills among marginalised groups on how to use these tools and create content on specific online platforms. Therefore, the exclusivist side of online activism is a valid point for social work activists to consider, primarily when their work focuses on supporting digitally excluded groups. From these points of view, digitally excluded individuals can be even more excluded from any kind of engagement if these actions are mostly developed online.

At the same time, some respondents in both jurisdictions pointed out that there is a risk of creating an online “*bubble*” – generated through social media algorithms. Social work activists suggested that these algorithms connect people with the same interests. Consequently, some essential information sometimes does not reach other groups of individuals outside of activist groups. Nikolov et al. (2015) indicated that this formation of an online bubble exposes individuals to less diverse information. Sometimes it can even exacerbate polarised opinions, foster the spreading of misinformation and fake news, and can create the illusion that everyone shares the same views as yourself. In this sense, the point made by Anemona (SWRO) comprises this weakness of online activism:

“There is a tendency to create a kind of bubble. As long as you are up to date with as many as possible opinions, but in reality, you don’t reach them [opinions] because you don’t have them with friends or recommendations. These algorithms are the cause of always being connected with people with the same opinions.” (Anemona, SWRO)

Another downside of the internet and social media is represented by the *inappropriate content* shared on the platforms, including hate speech and fake news. Participants in both countries raised concerns about the amount of hateful and false messages circulating on social media and their potential impact on society, particularly on service users. Indeed, as highlighted

by the literature, online platforms create a favourable context to propagate hatred and fake news (Carlson et al., 2017; Ekman, 2014; Iacobucci, 2019).

“It is a lot of fake news out there and [...] that’s why I think social media is a negative in that. It could spread information that’s not necessarily true, and it’s not exactly real reports from a situation, so that’s dangerous.” (Diana, SWUK)

“If we get the example from 2015 with refugees, the information that we got from social media was simply terrible. And it is not only individual cases... this wrong information influences groups and political decisions that are sometimes based on it.” (Albert, SWRO)

In spite of these similarities, there were particular sub-themes that were more prevalent in each particular country. For instance, in Romania, social media’s influence on the social work profession was considered from two perspectives. Firstly, four participants reflected on *social media as a tool to promote and improve the image of the social work profession*, which aligns with the goal of their social work activism. Secondly, and conversely, as a recurring theme, social workers in Romania are concerned about the fact that online means can perpetuate the inaccurate representation of the profession in the media (Lazar et al., 2018b).

“It increases the image of social work profession. Generally, I would say that social media has a positive impact because it promotes the profession.” (Andrei, SWRO)

“I know many examples of articles when social workers are confused with personal carers, and they appear there like “social worker has abused the person he cared for” and so on.” (Cosmina, SWRO).

In the UK, some respondents expressed worries regarding possible negative effects that social media can have on the professionals; here, referring to ethical aspects that can emerge

when exposure (posting) of personal life can be interpreted as a violation of *professional integrity*:

“You are worried about somebody making a comment. Worried about somebody posting a picture of you on a night out. Things like that.” (Rudy, SWUK)

Indeed, professional bodies in the UK show concerns about professional integrity. In this respect, organisations such as BASW or SSSC elaborated guides reflecting the usage of social media for job purposes and personal use. In these handbooks, social workers are advised about “professionally appropriate behaviour”, the type of information that should not be posted on online platforms, and instructions on how to maintain boundaries and not to bring the social work profession/own professional integrity into disrepute. As a result, the professional and personal dimensions should be carefully considered because they might interfere with each other, as stipulated in the guides. Although these regulations aim to protect the image of social work, to some extent, they can also be interpreted as obstacles to being critical to or of the authorities or sharing political beliefs that other colleagues or team-leaders might not easily digest and therefore, it might limit engagement in activism.

5.5.5 Key points on structural mechanisms

The first part of the findings chapter highlighted the influence of structural mechanisms on social work activism. Those factors were grouped into four sub-themes: Neoliberalism, social and cultural norms, other stakeholders, and the influence of the internet and online tools. The discussions around Neoliberalism indicated many common views regarding the barriers that limit the transformative practice even more. According to the data, social workers in both countries experienced neoliberal policies and their implications as restrictive factors for the profession in general. The participants strongly voiced against the high level of bureaucracy,

regulations and afferent workload limiting their activism. It was acknowledged that a high level of institutional managerialism could change people's behaviour and transform social workers into "institutionalised" professionals who engage in a controlling rather than transformative activity.

Additionally, the lack of resources (financial, operational, infrastructure, time) in social work represents another essential obstacle to activist practice in both countries, especially in Romania. These findings are consistent with other studies emphasising the adverse effects of these limitations on social work practice. For example, in Romania, some investigations have illustrated the dissatisfaction of social workers with the statutory framework, high level of workload, and lack of resources impeding an effective intervention (Lazar, 2015b; Lazar et al., 2016; Lazar et al., 2018a). Similarly, in the UK, UNISON (2019) and older studies (Gupta and Blewitt, 2007; Le Grand, 2007) exemplified that social work activity, as claimed by professionals, is negatively impacted by increasing funding cuts, bureaucracy and workload. In conclusion, Neoliberalism has negatively disturbed the profession, its identity, and the transformative practice related to it.

Correlated to neoliberal policies (but also influenced by the political, cultural and social contexts), socio-cultural norms were identified as mechanisms shaping social work activism, especially in Romania. As the findings suggest, the patterns formed at the institutional and societal level, such as resistance to change, rigid mentalities and distrust, might have a restrictive role in developing a transformative practice. The Romanian respondents acknowledged that institutional or societal resistance and reluctance to change might result from people not understanding the role of the social work profession. Additionally, a few participants in both countries suggested that the limited history of exposure to social activism might also influence how people (professionals, authorities, service users) perceive and accept activism.

The discussion has also focused on how other stakeholders shape activist practice. There were identified themes such as political drivers, the influence of other activists or professionals, and the role of academia and social work education as an impulse for activism among social workers. The findings suggest that the political dynamics are often an obstacle in developing activist and sustainable practices or other measures that can be framed as activism. Although among both cohorts, there was a dose of resignation about the possibility to change the current system, attitudes towards challenging the existing order were different. In Romania, participants were more accepting of trying to collaborate with the political power, while in the UK participants expressed a more prevalent stance of challenging the status quo and changing the capitalist system, seen as the roots of most social problems, as argued by radical and critical social work scholars (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Ferguson, 2008; Payne, 2005).

In terms of other activists and their role, participants from both jurisdictions recognised the invaluable contribution that other activists can bring in developing their activism. The instrumental support for engaging in common causes/actions, sharing experiences and the emotional benefits of being part of an activist community were identified as positive influences of other activists on social work transformative practice. However, some aspects were also identified that could negatively impact the relationships between different groups of activists, such as the competition for resources and prestige.

Further, another stakeholder found to impact the predisposition of social workers to participate in activist practice is social work educational institutions/academic environment. The findings suggest that the social work academic environment had a role in encouraging and developing activist values among the interview respondents. It was argued that, as an institution, Social Work Schools/Faculties do not promote activism explicitly; however, the nature of the activities organised by the staff (conferences, thematic sessions, inviting activists to talk) encourages activism among the students. However, it was generally agreed that social

work courses should include aspects of activism in their curriculum. Moreover, participants in the UK empathised with the need for political knowledge among future professionals. Overall, this argument straightens the need of specifically educating social work students about activism, human rights and social justice discussed by other scholars (e.g., Greenslade 2014; Martinez-Herrero, 2017; Mendes, 2007)

Finally, as evident from both surveys and interviews, internet tools such as social media seem to significantly influence the social work profession and its activist side. On the positive side, social media and online activism can help the profession by creating a platform for sharing information fast and at low cost. It also enables social work professionals and activists to communicate and mobilise faster, create a community around shared goals that exceed the local/national borders or promote the profession's role among the general population. On the negative side, online mediums, especially social media, can obstruct or disturb the work of social work activists. The participants of this study have indicated that online activism can be discouraging and less effective since many activities are not concretised in real life.

Additionally, the internet algorithms can form so-called online bubbles, making information circulating among similar groups of individuals, not accessible to people with different interests (Nikolov et al., 2015). Inaccessibility can also be a subject when marginalised communities do not have access or skills to connect to internet devices. Online platforms such as social media could be engines of spreading content that conflict with social work activists' values, such as hate speech and misinformation about particular communities of service users. Nevertheless, it was found that social workers in Romania use internet platforms as a form of activism to promote the social work profession and its role in society.

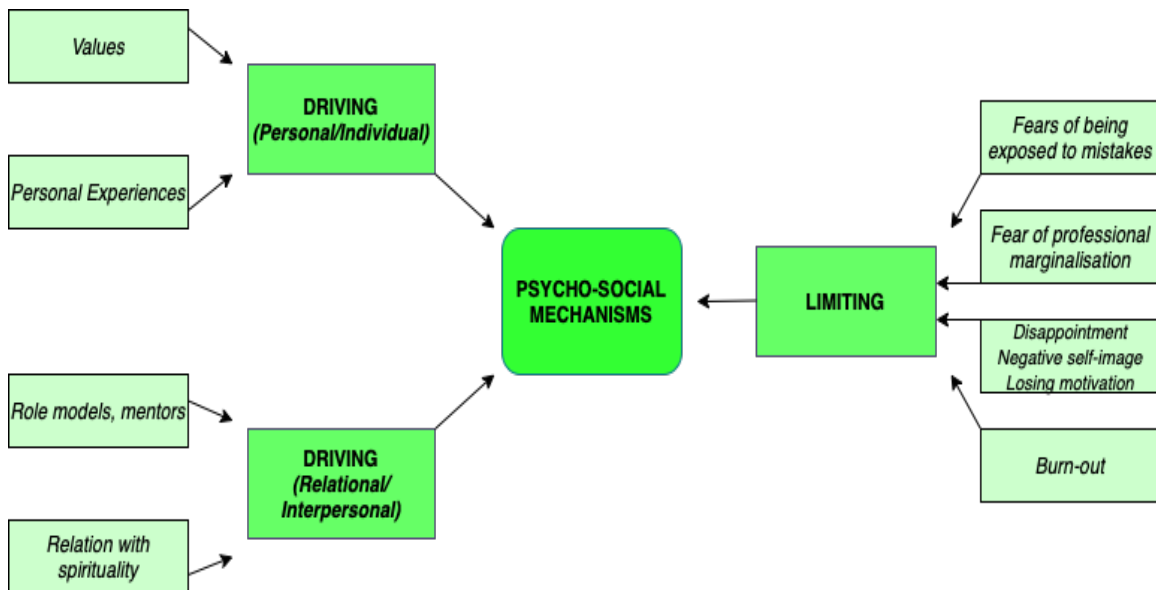
For a more comprehensive understanding of social work activism and influences, the next section will approach the theme of psycho-social factors.

5.6. Psycho-social mechanisms

As a concept, psycho-social means “pertaining to the influence of social factors on an individual’s mind or behaviour, and to the interrelation of behavioural and social factors” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). In other words, the psycho-social level is related to the effects of environmental and social factors reflected at the personal level. In the literature, psycho-social factors refer to a range of attributes such as emotional and mental characteristics, personal beliefs, circumstances, experiences, relational and behavioural qualities of individuals (Egan et al., 2008; Vizzotto et al., 2013). For this study, I use the term psycho-social mechanisms to define aspects manifested at the personal level that can influence social workers’ engagement in activism. In this respect, I refer to driving personal/individual and relational/interpersonal mechanisms as factors that can encourage or enhance activism; and secondly, to refer to limiting mechanisms in order to describe factors that inhibit or obstruct social workers’ activist participation in Romania and the UK. More precisely, as illustrated in *Figure A1* in Appendices, personal or individual driving mechanisms include values and past experiences; relational or interpersonal driving mechanisms refer to the influence of role models and mentors on the activist behaviour of the respondents, and additionally, the relationship of some respondents to spirituality and how this can lead to activist practice. In terms of limiting mechanisms for activism, I have identified specific fears and consequences experienced by participants at the personal level, but in general, generated by their interactions within the workplace settings.

Figure 5.3.

Psycho-social mechanisms influencing the engagement in activism



5.6.1 Driving mechanisms at the personal level

Values

In most simplistic terms, values can define ideas or principles that offer a sense of right and wrong (Oyserman, 2015; Strom-Gottfried, 2008). Values can also guide individual actions by enhancing motivation and directions to have priorities and perform their duties (Schroeder et al., 2019). Social work is a value-based profession, meaning that its practice is guided by ethical and professional principles stipulated in the Codes of ethics and practice, and further, shaped by common knowledge and cultural context. As stated in the global definition of IFSW, social work stands on values that support and empower people who are marginalised or in a situation of vulnerability (IFSW, 2014). In the context of the present study, values were identified as factors that can regulate and influence the activist practice of social workers in Romania and the UK. According to the surveys, 57% (RO) and 59% (UK) of participants practice activism

in order to comply with and reflect or express their values and beliefs (*Figure A1* in Appendices.)

Values can be linked to personal and professional spheres. However, the respondents' reflections in both jurisdictions revealed an overlap between personal and professional values, meaning that their professional values are also assumed in private life. Although both cohorts expressed similar goals around improving society, their discourses were focused on different guiding principles that motivate them. For instance, the UK respondents referred more often to *social justice or tackling social injustice* (and other values associated with it, such as *fairness, equality, and equity*) as a set of values that govern their professional work/activism as well as their personal lives. In Romania, the dominant discourse was connected to *support and solidarity, altruism or respect for human dignity*. Overall, these views reflect a recurring theme of this research, suggesting that the UK activists based their ideology on an active and confrontative approach (aka tackling, challenging), while in Romania, the main narrative focuses on a restorative approach (aka repairing, supporting). Intrinsically, social work activists in the UK seem to pursue structural and systemic change at levels (micro, mezzo, macro levels), while Romania, their focus is on the pursuit of individual change, and thus at a more local or micro level.

“I have a common agenda [personal and professional] – to support and to improve the life of people in vulnerable situations.” [Miron, SWRO)

“A sense of fairness drives me... and inequality and equality. I think they're very much personal values that mirror social work values as well.” (Mark, SWUK)

Other particularities that stand out for each country are some sets of *values connected to religion* (in Romania) and *politics* (in the UK). For some Romanian social workers (4)

religious values seem to influence their activism (see Alexandra's (SWRO) comment). Here, some potential ethical dilemmas might arise due to the fact that religious beliefs, arguably, can contradict some progressive values of social work activism (LGBTQ+ rights, abortions etc.). Although, sometimes in the literature, activist practices (informed by progressive values) and faith-based interventions are presented as contradictory (Hodge, 2011, 2016), the Romanian respondents are aware of their professional responsibility, ethics, and personal beliefs – "I try to combine my Christian values with professional values" (Emilia, SWRO). This confirms that these approaches are not, by Romanian participants, perceived to be in opposition, but can be combined to empower and enable social justice and the wellbeing of service users (Bellamy et al., 2021). As illuminated by the survey data analysis, more than 86% of participants in Romania identified themselves as religious [page 110]. Therefore, the emergence of religious values/beliefs as a stimulus for activist work is not necessarily a surprise. Religion can be considered an important cultural characteristic in society since 55% of Romanians declare themselves as highly religious (Evans and Baronavski, 2018).

"First and foremost, I can't ignore this part of me... God. I mean, if I care about people, it's not so much because I'm good, but because I also received kindness from Him." (Alexandra, SWRO)

In the UK, there were a few participants (5) who openly expressed their political views, such as Richard (SWUK) wishing for a "socialist revolution", or Rudy (SWUK) aiming "to get the Tories out... at any cost". Additionally, other participants made references to their left or central political values, which indicates a more political orientation of social workers in the UK again. This confirms the views of some radical and critical scholars who argue that the social work profession itself contains a political essence of socialist ideals (Duarte, 2017; Ferguson, 2009, 2013; Gray and Webb, 2013), bringing into collective spotlight needs and well-being, before capital and elites.

Among the UK respondents, there were a few who declared that their activist perspective extends the anthropocentric focus of social work and social work activism, consistent with the concept of activism *by* social workers, as a subset of social work activism. In this regard, four respondents indicated their preoccupation with *environmental justice* and two of them mentioned *animal rights* as relevant values of their activist identity. The presence of this theme among social workers in the UK suggests a more accentuated connection to progressive values and new debates in social work, such as environmental justice, green or eco-social work (Dominelli, 2013), arguably contributing a more refined definition of what it means to be a social work activist, in the UK.

Personal experiences

As with values, personal experiences were identified as a mechanism driven by emotional power with motivating effects for activist practice in social work. For instance, in both countries, there were participants who justified their engagement in activism as an empathetic way of addressing something that they experienced in the past. This could be related to managing or responding to similar difficulties experienced as in Mark's (SWUK) case or creating educational opportunities for others that were not in place in the past, as Andrei (SWRO) revealed.

“I think it’s going back to what I said earlier about having quite strong memories of sort of family struggles” (Mark, SWUK)

“One trigger is related to something I missed in my past and would love to see happening now [opportunities for learning]” (Andrei, SWRO)

To an extent, activism among or by individuals who have *experienced difficulties/social injustice* at first hand is explicable because it involves a solid emotional bonding, as argued by

Aiken (2018); and therefore, it represents a substantial influence on activism. This can also be related to a specific kind of altruism called *altruism born of suffering* (ABS), which defines the desire of individuals to help others as a result of their life suffering experience (Staub and Vollhardt, 2008).

It was also observed that personal experience could influence social workers in the UK regarding their political views and participation and implicitly engender a predisposition to engage in activism. In this respect, some respondents mentioned their *family history* of civic participation as another driver – “I grew up in a very political family. I have always been involved in political action. So, I haven’t lived my life in any other way to be fair” (Julia, SWUK).

Another interesting sub-theme identified among social workers in the UK combined both values as well as experiences. It reflects the *acknowledgement regarding the existence of privileges* in society. Although the participants did not discuss in-depth the concept of privilege, it denotes, on the one hand, as Amy (SWUK) indicated, advantages that some people might benefit from in society, which is in line with Black and Stone (2005), who define privilege as unearned social advantages shared by some society members who belong to a group considered dominant or in a position of power. As claimed by Amy (SWUK), being mindful of this aspect would help activists keep the path and adhere to the social work profession’s mission. On the other hand, the notion of privilege was also linked to the position of social workers as professionals who have an in-depth understanding of the running of society, the emergence of social problems and how to address them (see Mark’s (SWUK) comment). According to Mark (SWUK), using this “privilege” would only mean engaging with the transformative practice of the social work profession, (IFSW, 2018; Payne, 2014)

“Recognition that, you know, there are people who are very advantaged and people who are not and, you know, that’s what I think brings most people in to social work and, you know, I think sometimes that’s lost somewhere along the way. But, you know, that’s something that I hope I’ve kept with me [...] it helped me remember why I came into social work in the first place and, you know, just put me in mind of what the international definition of social work actually is, which is about human rights and social justice and supporting people who are disadvantaged.” (Amy, SWUK)

“Social workers should reflect a bit more about their work, about their role and privilege because social work can be very transformative.” (Mark, SWUK)

5.6.2. Driving mechanisms at the relational level

This subtheme offers a thematic analysis of external or interpersonal influences, which appear to exert strong emotional effects on social work activists and their predisposition to engage in the activist practice. In this sense, they are classified as *relational or interpersonal driving mechanisms*. Thus, the purpose of this section is to explain the importance of entities that encourage and inspire the activist attitudes of social work respondents, such as role models, mentors and inspirations. As illustrated several times in this analysis, there are some significant recurring themes observable also in this discussion.

To begin with, respondents from both countries declared that they feel inspired by *role models* from their professional proximity, such as colleagues, community leaders, teachers, or members of their families. In fact, according to the respondents, these role models are people who make a difference in their everyday life and profession and encourage others to make a difference. They may have created new services and laws that influenced policies and despite

the challenges encountered, they have managed to produce a positive change. Role models appear to be admired for their ability to connect to other people (especially to clients and policy makers), adapt to new situations, and their energy, integrity and enthusiasm in general.

“I feel inspired by people I work with; my colleagues, some community leaders. I believe I am inspired by people with strong values who build strategies with sense.” (Laur, SWRO)

“[...] some colleagues who are uncompromising in their views.” (Ted, AWUK)

Secondly, participants referred to the motivational and ideological influences of *members of their families and friends*. They represent an important emotional and moral support, as well as a source from whom they have inherited values and passion for helping other people.

“My partner is really inspiring because she is always fighting for the underprivileged and she is really strong in her beliefs to make a difference.” (Sophie, SWUK).

“The first person that I saw as an activist and who inspired me was my mother. She would never leave somebody suffering. I think she was my first model of activism, but not how we understand the concept today. She was my first role model that inspired me to socially engage.” (Aura, SWRO)

“There are people in my proximity or outside, that I keep them in my mind, people that helped me and gave me strength when I needed it. Including my family here.” (Miron, SWRO)

Thirdly, for some respondents, service users and “*ordinary people*” were identified as sources of inspiration for their activism.

“Great people around. People with whom I work and for whom I work.”

(Eleonora, SWRO)

“[Ordinary people] who are not doing this because they are paid or because they are famous.” (Mark, SWUK)

A significant difference between the two cohorts, illustrating again the political connotation of activism identified among the UK respondents, is implied by the UK social workers who identified *political figures* and *activists* as role models or inspirational people. In this sense, they mentioned some political personalities with breakthrough achievements, such as Nelson Mandela (anti-Apartheid icon and the first black president of South Africa); Barack Obama (the first black president of the USA); and Mary Robinson (the first female president of the Republic of Ireland). Moreover, the UK respondents mentioned other politicians (e.g., Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Sanders, Corbyn) who are known as progressive and supporters of working-class people and are openly against policies favouring the elites/big companies.

Additionally, social workers in the UK nominated artists as their inspirations who are acknowledged as activists, such as Angela Davies or Frida Kalo, scholars that stand for liberal/progressive/socialist values (Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, Iain Ferguson) and famous social activists such as Martin Luther King Jr and Michelle Obama. As Rose (SWUK) stated, she finds inspirational “people that have a real voice. A real message”. The overall answers among the UK cohort indicate a strong commitment to values such as civil/human rights, feminism, anti-racism, anti-classism or environmental justice (in the case of the most frequently mentioned name – Greta Thunberg).

In Romania, there was no mention of political figures or other recognised activists. However, on a particular note, the theme of religiosity emerged again from a few participants,

who mentioned *God as an inspiration* - “Again, I feel inspired by Him [God]” (Alexandra, SWRO).

5.6.3. Limiting psycho-social mechanisms

In this sub-section, I present psycho-social aspects that were identified as possible obstacles to social work activism. In this sense, a few participants in each jurisdiction mentioned that fear of exposure and making mistakes might limit or discourage social workers' engagement in activist practice or activism in general. Usually, the role of an activist calls for leadership as stated by Bent-Goodley (2015) – “not only be at the table, but also have a collective agenda that advances social change” (p. 102). This image of somebody who is visible in taking the initiative is often associated by participants with an activist [see page 126; Cosmina's comment], yet this aspect can conflict with the personal traits of more introverted individuals. However, the study of Greenslade et al. (2014) has shown that activism could also be developed by “quiet activists” who can act under the shadow and “undertake[s] small, subtle forms of covert and overt activism”.

“On the one hand, activism means exposure, exposing yourself, being very dynamic, and I am not a very dynamic person, or at least I haven't been for a while. I didn't like to expose myself, to come forward... you have to have some leadership qualities somehow.” (Cosmina, SWRO)

As a consequence of the influence of structural mechanisms on a personal level, I have identified some factors that might negatively influence and inhibit the participation of social workers in activism. A prevalent theme in both jurisdictions refers to the *fear of professional marginalisation* that can impede the capacity and willingness of social workers to challenge the authority and the “rules of the place”, or express their political views. Engaging in these kinds of conflictual situations also suggests “taking a stand, choosing a side and being constant

with it” (Anemona, SWRO). This might imply taking a higher risk and responsibility for one’s actions, but in the case of mistakes it might have negative consequences for those involved. In a larger context, this fear of mistakes and taking risks might be created by the culture of blame widespread in public institutions and big organisations, as stated by Tanya (SWUK) and confirmed by the literature (Vince and Saleem, 2004). Although taking risks and making mistakes is an integrated part of social work practice (as per Tanya (SWRO)), professional practice has become even more focused on the protection of harm and risk assessment (Gupta and Blumhardt, 2016). This context can cultivate overwhelming pressure and fear on social workers, who will essentially avoid taking risks associated with their activity. The survey seems to confirm that fear of professional marginalisation as a possible obstacle to activism is more typical among the UK respondents (38%) – only 7% in Romania. However, the same percentage of social workers in both countries (20%) considered fear of negative attitudes from society as a barrier to their activism.

“Fear of being blamed and like the easy thing to do when things go wrong, which they always will in social work because of the human nature of it and the difficult things that people do to each other in society. You can’t control that. You can only do the best you can, you know, to support these people involved and hope that nothing goes terribly wrong.” (Tanya, SWUK)

Possible negative consequences of professional marginalisation included *the risk of being stigmatised and labelled* as “those who come and accuse” (Ciprian, SWRO), becoming “unpopular” and “suspicious” (Amy, SWUK), “blacklisted” (Mark, SWUK), or “criticized in whatever you do, and your actions or interventions being minimalised or mocked” (Miron, SWRO). These kinds of stigmatisations or marginalisations represent some of the most frequent forms of harassment or bullying at the workplace and evidently can have negative consequences on social workers’ activity, as stated by van Heugten (2018).

In addition, the respondents indicated some other aspects generated by the work environment that might be experienced at the personal level and have negative effects on both professional activity and personal well-being. These might include *disappointment* – “when you engage yourself in something, maybe you will not manage to change what you have proposed... and then, you might be disappointed” (Carina, SWRO). And this frustration can result in a *negative self-image* or *low self-esteem*, as a few social workers concluded. For some interviewees, experiencing disappointment can also lead to *losing motivation* for activism. In relation to the latter aspect, my survey suggests that 17% (Ro) and 20% (UK) of the respondents identified losing motivation as one of the general barriers to practicing activism.

Additionally, being an activist requires a considerable amount of work (more than usual working hours), which can cause “losing of equilibrium, problems with the family members, less attention to your own needs” (Cathy, SWRO) or *burn-out*. A few of the respondents emphasised the need for proper supervision to address this issue.

“I think if you expect to do lots of activism on top of that, there’s a real risk, I think, you’re going to burn out very, very quickly” (Ronan, SWUK)

“I realised that we are not some machineries [...] and at some point, we need professional supervision and therapy [...] We accumulate a lot of worries from our work and clients.” (Iulian, SWRO)

As suggested by some respondents and confirmed by the literature, burn-out is an issue that affects both spheres, social work and activism. Studies suggest that social work is a profession with a very high risk of stress and burn-out (Hussein, 2015; Lloyd et al., 2011), and as illustrated above, some respondents expressed their feelings of emotional and physical exhaustion, frustration with their life and job and in need of (self)care. Generally, activists of

all kinds face burn-out because of their exposure to overwork and stress, and consequently, this can affect the overall functioning of activist movements (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019).

5.6.4. Key points on psycho-social mechanisms

This section offered a thematic analysis of the personal/individual and relational/interpersonal factors that might stimulate or inhibit the activist work of the respondents. As illustrated, under the themes of driving/encouraging factors of activism were identified personal experiences and values, role models and inspirations. In regard to inhibitory aspects, fear of marginalisation, stigmatisation, labelling, bullying or burn-out emerged as possible prevalent barriers to activist practice.

There were some points of similarity in both jurisdictions. For instance, the desire to improve people's lives in vulnerable situations emerged as a common value and stimulus for activism. To an extent, participants have similar sources of inspiration, referring to other colleagues, members of their families, or service users. Nevertheless, both cohorts identified the same psycho-social factors limiting their engagement in activist practice (e.g., marginalisation, stigmatisation, workplace bullying, burn-out).

The analysis also revealed some particular points of departure for each country. The first difference refers to a prevalent theme among the UK respondents – the awareness about privileges and more discourses around the idea of social and environmental (in)justice. Secondly, the theme of the political dimension of activism emerged again. In this context, most interviewees in the UK made references to political figures as role models and inspirations for their activism. At the same time, in Romania, no participant mentioned political figures as their own role models, implying a disassociation of social work from politics. Ultimately, religious values seem to have a relative impact on the activist behaviour of (4) social workers in Romania. These political and cultural aspects will be further explored in the following chapter

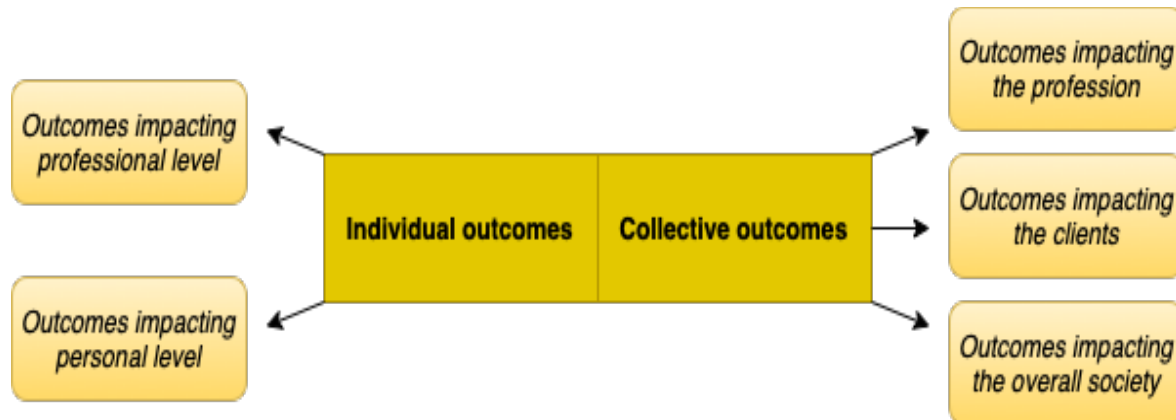
through the lens of Archer's Morphogenetic schema as a mechanism for explaining the differences and similarities that emerged in this section by attending to the socio-structural and cultural conditions that precipitate them. The next section discusses mechanisms that are related to the idea of individual and collective outcomes.

5.7. Individual and collective outcomes

Social work activism is directly linked to potential outcomes (or changes) resulting out of its manifestation. In the literature review, I discussed that the pursuit of social changes are critical components of the process of activism with regard to the intended outcome, as well as social work activism. In this respect, this section aims to elucidate and underline the main themes regarding the role of activist practice and its effects at different levels – individual and collective – and how they relate to structural and psycho-social mechanisms, as represented in the *Figure 5.4*. As influenced by these mechanisms, outcomes are essentially the result of different reflections such as motivations, potential benefits and goals at individual and collective levels. Although to a great extent, the outcomes can also be classified as driving psycho-social mechanisms, their realisation depends on the process and practice of activism, not only resulting from the interactions of structural and psycho-social mechanisms, therefore, the outcomes are analysed in a separate section of the findings.

Figure 5.4.

Individual and collective outcomes



5.7.1. Individual outcomes

This discussion focuses on the outcomes at the individual level (outcomes for self) in which social workers identified changes that might have occurred at *the personal* and *professional* level. A common theme identified in both jurisdictions suggests that an important reason to engage in transformative practice is that it can bring certain *socio-emotional benefits*. It was often mentioned that activism might help social workers *discover a bigger mission, purpose and meaning of life*. The latter concept, meaning of life, was popularised by the psychiatrist Frankl (1984), describing the main power that motivates an individual to self-actualise. As the author acknowledges, the meaning of life can be found anytime in everything; in the case of social workers, the meaning of life could involve working to improve the life of other people or simply engaging in altruistic behaviour for the benefit of others. However, this altruism can further result in obtaining personal benefits. As numerous studies illustrate, altruistic behaviour correlates to increased happiness, personal well-being or life satisfaction (Baka, 2019; Fechter, 2016; Montague and Eiroa-Orosa, 2017).

“It is easier to find your meaning of life because now you are working with other people...” (Anemona, SWRO)

“The biggest benefit is, first of all, that you do feel doing something, and secondly, you feel alive” (Andrei, SWRO)

“It helps maybe give meaning, give purpose to your beliefs and to some people, that’s their life, isn’t it? It gives meaning and purpose to their life [activists]” (Helen, SWUK)

Being an activist can engender the feeling of participating in or contributing to something meaningful in the world. In this context, social work activism can be perceived *as a form of active citizenship*, generally defined as civic involvement aiming to promote the common good and respect for human rights (Sadowski et al., 2018). Moreover, active citizenship could also refer to understanding the individual and collective life experiences of marginalised communities (e.g., people experiencing mental health difficulties), empowering and promoting their independence (MacIntyre et al., 2021; Rowe, 2015). This aspect can be connected to the findings from the interviews, confirming that through activism, social workers can *better understand their clients*. A proportion of 56% (Romania) and 53% (UK) of the survey respondents shared this opinion too. As an effect of their activist practice, social workers can improve their reflecting, evaluating and wider understanding of social problems. Also, activism can help professionals *become more authentic* and create a meaningful connection to service users, which eventually can facilitate a better awareness of clients and their experiences. The authenticity in this process can be viewed as an equilibrium element that allows activists to comply with both roles, as an expert and “as a symbol of the struggle for human basic rights” (Fish and Sprague, 2020, p. 226). Overall, being authentic helps the social work activist to identify the problems and develop a more informed approach to addressing them, informed by the reality at the grassroots level.

“I think you have a much better understanding and an authentic understanding of what people experienced because you share your skill and knowledge equally with each other [...] You also get to understand people's experiences directly from those people who experience [them] not only try to put a story or an explanation of somebody's experience.” (Julia, SWUK)

“Referring to my professional experience, it is important [to engage in activism] because when you do this with everything you mean as a social worker and with all your soul, then you are authentic. And then, when you are authentic, you create that link between you and your client which can lead to what a social worker desires – to empower the client's resources in order for them to overcome the moment that they live.” (Iulian, SWRO)

Another meaning of active citizenship can relate to the idea of promoting a sense of belonging, building relationships and feeling part of a community (MacIntyre et al., 2021), which was identified as a possible outcome/benefit. As suggested by the interviewees, being part of a community with similar values and goals can further enhance motivation and personal well-being or a sense of moral support.

“One aspect of activism is you can feel you are part of something bigger, and then it does not matter what opinion you have as an individual, but what matters is that you are in a collectivity and you fight for it or together with it.” (Anemona, SWRO)

“[I]t is a great way for people to meet and sustain relationships with like-minded people” (Julia, SWUK)

“[...] that kind of collective project of coming together and meeting and talking, sometimes celebrating, sometimes being angry together and all of that can be quite affirming and there can be - strong feelings can flow from that.” (Ted, SWUK)

Some of the outcomes have a strong impact in both spheres, personal and professional. In this sense, engaging in activism can create *opportunities for learning/knowledge* and *developing certain skills*; otherwise stated, participating in activism can contribute to *personal growth* as well as *professional development*. As indicated by the respondents being an activist improves one’s own self-confidence, especially if the activists achieve the desired goals. This benefit is confirmed by several studies revealing that activism/civic participation can have positive effects at the personal level, including the improvement of self-confidence of the activist (Stake and Hoffman, 2001; Vestergren et al., 2016). As stated by Diana (SWUK), being an activist can offer another perspective on the world and the possibility of understanding society in more depth and act upon emerging social problems.

“Activism brought me many privileges. I mean, I interpret them as privileges. Because I am an active person, I have access to information to access lifelong opportunities [...] (Caty, SWRO).

“If you achieve or you are close to achieving what you aimed, then your self-confidence is up. So, you can convince other social workers that activism is positive and helps, solves, prevents” (Eleonora, SWRO)

“[A]nd then it’s only through experience and learning that you actually do develop more – I suppose it does come – knowledge is power and then you develop ways of how you can challenge, make wrongs right” (Diana, SWUK)

Some benefits were strictly connected to the professional sphere, such as gaining particular *expert skills* and *professional respect/recognition* in the field, and even becoming a voice that can influence others. Further, as per Martin and Coy (2017), individuals can build their own professional skills by being involved in activism because it creates a context of constant practice of these abilities. For instance, in the context of social work, it can refer to managing one's own activities or coordinating activities and collaborating with other professionals, as indicated by participants in both jurisdictions.

“If you are active, you can be acknowledged in your field, and therefore a model for other professionals” (Laur, SWRO)

“[I]t's quite good for learning, I think, to manage yourself, to manage others. It's quite – it's a learning, continuous learning thing, I would say.” (Tanya, SWUK)

“You learn by interacting with other people how to communicate, how to take decisions... I mean you develop from a professional point of view.” (Carina, SWUK)

Social workers can also derive relational benefits from activism by connecting themselves with other professionals. Here, in addition to the socio-emotional benefits identified above (i.e., sense of belonging, maintaining motivation), they can also improve their own professional activity by creating *a common space for sharing experiences*.

“Professionally speaking, activism helped me to create a network of professionals” (Ciprian, SWRO)

“It's about having - building allegiances and networks and learning” (Tanya, SWUK)

5.7.2. *Collective outcomes*

The collective outcomes of social work activism can be viewed from three perspectives. For instance, outcomes can benefit service users, outcomes that improve the profession and outcomes that contribute to overall societal well-being. The first benefit of activism for service users can also be disaggregated into different outcomes. One might be deduced from the above discussion that acknowledges activism as an effective *method of understanding the clients*, their contexts and improved support to recognise and respond to their difficulties. Therefore, as a result of improved awareness of social workers about the people they work for, there are better chances to positively impact them. Another outcome can be connected to the fact that activism can enable individual change as well as the *self-empowerment of service users*. Thus, by supporting them to discover and access their own resources, they can take ownership “for their lives, for what they are doing, for sorts of solutions related to their problems” (Albert, SWRO). Additionally, social workers can engage in different types of advocacies for service users through activism. For example, one form of *advocacy* could be to raise awareness and reduce the stigma around people who use social work services and the various issues that bring them into contact and are negatively viewed by the general public. Another form refers to engaging in campaigns that advocate for supporting clients’ rights and making sure their voice is heard.

“We do what we do to influence the way in which the citizens of our country are treated.” (Laur, SWRO)

“[...] changing the society perspective regarding some marginalised groups of people.” (Aura, SWRO)

“I think for me, young people and the families that I work with, I think naturally you’re wanting to be an advocate for them. So, one of the things that I’m quite passionate about is the latest campaign standing up for siblings, so siblings who are placed in care but separated.” (Karen, SWUK)

Further, the participants discussed the outcomes related to the social work profession itself. In both countries, participants agreed that activism could improve the profession, in terms of developing/introducing new services or introducing specific legislation and policies. Basically, this kind of activism can be seen *as a form of advocacy for the profession* itself, which could eventually, positively affect both service users and overall society.

“[...] changing the law, yeah. I would like to see social work taking a view on the criminalisation or decriminalisation of drugs, for example, acknowledging that it should be viewed as a health issue rather than a legal issue.” (Rudy, SWUK)

“I would like to introduce a new service in the harm-reduction sphere” (Iulian, SWRO)

“I aim to develop new programs and projects for social work in hospitals” (Ciprian, SWRO)

Some aspects related to outcomes impacting the profession were based on different rationalisations. It was observed that social workers in Romania aim to improve the profession by *introducing and developing new [or missing] services* and *advancing new regulations* to build a more substantial professional legitimacy. On the other hand, in the UK, the tendency was *to change the regulatory system*, dominated by policies and procedures, and challenging neoliberal policies affecting social work, especially privatisation.

“I’ve become interested in over the last couple of years around privatisation of children in social care, so private providers of residential homes and the way in which private capital has interfered with some of the provision of public children and family services. So, I want to shine a spotlight – I mean, I would like to change that.” (Ronan, SWUK)

As already emphasised through this study, social workers in Romania have shown an increased preoccupation with or predisposition to *advocate for and improve the image of the profession* among the general public and other professional sectors (e.g., health system). Therefore, for some of them, promoting the profession and its role in society represents a form of social work activism.

“I work now in a system that does not have a clear idea about social workers and their role. There are some contradictions and misunderstandings about the role of social work. So, I believe [it] is our responsibility to promote our profession, our work.” (Ciprian, SWRO)

“I do this to promote and improve the image of the social work profession in society” (Laur, SWRO)

In terms of outcomes impacting the overall society, there is a shared belief that social work activism *can contribute to societal well-being* through its activity. However, as already illustrated in the previous discussions [page 156], participants in Romania and in the UK have different approaches. In Romania, there is an intense interest in improving and fixing the vulnerabilities and existing issues in current society, such as lack of awareness, resources and services. In the UK, the prevalent attitude among the respondents was related to addressing

current social problems by challenging and seeking to radically change the capitalist/neoliberal system that perpetuates social injustice, according to the participants. Therefore, the UK respondents have shown an increased preoccupation for “recognising social injustice [imbalance]” (Tanya and Lana, SWUK) “challenging unfair practices” (Amy, SWUK), or “achieving social justice” (Mark, SWUK).

5.7.3. Key points on individual and collective outcomes

This section has provided relevant insights into how social work activism can impact on social work activists, the profession and society, as perceived by both cohorts. It was revealed that there are common effects in terms of individual outcomes. Both social work cohorts indicated that activist practice could bring personal and professional benefits, such as finding a purpose, being part of a group or enhancing particular knowledge and skills. These aspects can contribute to satisfying essential human needs (i.e., psychological comfort, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualisation), as described by Maslow (1954).

In a larger context, being social work activists could contribute to a better understanding of the world and people in vulnerable situations. Through activism, they can advocate and fight for the causes related to their services users (promoting rights, empowering the clients, raising awareness about social causes) and can therefore contribute to better social work practice. Further, outcomes can refer to benefits brought to the profession by improving legislation and services, challenging unjust practices (more prevalent in the UK), or improving social work and social workers (as claimed by the Romanian respondents).

Finally, the outcomes impacting overall society refer to possibilities to address social problems/injustice, provide social justice and contribute to the progress of society by engaging in actions of improving and fixing the system (reflected by Romanian participants) or radically

challenging and changing the status quo (as resulted from the discussions in the UK). Taking into consideration these findings on outcomes, structural and psycho-social mechanisms and their particularities in both countries, the following section focuses on emphasising the aspects that define the common and distinct understanding and practice of social work activism in Romania and the UK.

CHAPTER 6 – ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

(II) DECONSTRUCTING SOCIAL WORK

ACTIVISM

Previous sections involved the first stage of Danermark et al. (2002) theoretical framework – ((I)*description*). It illustrated a set of mechanisms shaping the understanding and practice of social work activism. The following discussion focuses on exploring more nuances and offering an in-depth explanation of the phenomenon by considering similarities and differences between the two countries studied ((II) *analytical resolution*), involving the identification of core objects or components of the phenomenon of social work activism. Firstly, I analyse the positionality of social work activism from different perspectives and secondly, I expose various forms of it, as interpreted from the data. Finally, I provide an original typology of social work activism informed by the results of this study.

6.1. Positionality of social work activism

6.1.1. Social work activism between non-political and political orientation

Similar to general activism, a first observation is that social work activism is conceptualised and practiced differently in the two jurisdictions. The form often expressed by the respondents in the UK incorporates an accentuated political and conflictual manifestation, aiming for a broader systemic and radical change. A form of activist practice that has less political and conflictual connotations, was more commonly observed among the Romanian respondents, where the focus was on seeking to improve the existent conditions. These ideas were confirmed by data from the survey indicating that 54% of the UK respondents were involved in political issues, compared with only 14% in Romania (*Figure D* in Appendices). Consequently, social work activists in the UK were more prone to be part of political parties or professional

syndicates/unions (eight out of fifteen interviewees) or engage in activities that are more politically correlated, such as advocacy and lobbying (75%) or petition and open letters (71%) as indicated by the surveys (*Table A1* in Appendices). On the other hand, Romanian social workers were more willing to participate more frequently in organising charitable events (68%) or volunteering (78%). More in-depth insights on contextual factors or causal explanations of these different social work activism orientations are provided in the next chapter.

6.1.2. Social work activism between traditional and progressive values

Despite the general idea, emphasised by the existent research more broadly, that activism/social work activism gravitates around progressive values (Cammaerts, 2007; Kluch, 2020; Roth, 2016; Smith, 2011), the findings suggest that this is not always the case. As indicated by the data, social work activism in Romania can be shaped by values classified as conservative (for example, values inspired by religion). Other aspects, such as a low predisposition to challenge authority and existing cultural norms, are not necessarily included in the set of values acknowledged by activists, but they seem to have a strong influence on developing activist practice. This idea is illustrated by emerging themes among social workers in Romania, evidencing religious values as an influence on activist behaviour and a reserved attitude to challenge authority.

In regard to progressive values, the concerns of social work activists rely on providing social and economic justice as well as ensuring human rights (Barbera et al., 2013) – a standard narrative among respondents in the UK – or even advancing a potential post humanist⁴ approach as suggested by Mark (SWUK), who transferred elements “from environmental activism into social work”. The interests and values motivated by ecological matters

⁴ Posthumanism is a philosophical approach focused on deconstructing the notion of “human” beyond its biological and social construction and extends its meaning in relation to ecology/nature and technology (Ferrando and Braidotti, 2019). In this sense, posthumanism opposes to the human centered perspective.

(environmental and animal rights) emerged as a theme in the UK, but not in Romania. The results of the surveys also show that 33% of the UK respondents indicated they are involved in environmental issues, compared to 20% in Romania.

Overall, as suggested by the analysis of findings, this spectrum of values in social work activism is the result of a cultural and political difference between Eastern and Western Europe. Evidently, the balance is inclined to progressive values since activism itself calls for these values and lately, social work is also portrayed as a progressive profession itself (Barbera et al., 2013; IFSW, 2014; Noble and Briskman, 1998); however, as shown, the influence of traditional/conservative values are still relevant and can shape activist behaviour. The next chapter will explore more in-depth the roots of these interrelating values.

6.1.3. Social work activism between formal and informal practice

Different work settings can enable or constrain different ways of engaging in activist practice. For instance, social workers in the public sector are often constrained to engage in a more transformational practice by the institutional norms and effects of the neoliberal agenda. On the other hand, those working in NGOs can have a higher degree of autonomy to develop their activist practice, as suggested by the participants. Depending on the nature of the activity and the role assumed by social workers, their activism varies between formal and informal practice. In these conditions, it is difficult to indicate the borderline between the two dimensions. Usually, formal or “professional activism” is related to activities developed by professionals within an institutional framework such as governmental or non-governmental organisations (Costa et al., 2021; Harrebye, 2016; Roth, 2016). As claimed by Iulian (SWRO), he self-identified as a formal activist only after starting to work in an NGO.

“Once I started working for this organisation, I would say that formally, I also put on my activist coat” (Iulian, SWRO).

On the other hand, informal social work activism is more difficult to locate or define. Sometimes, professionals can perform hidden activism within their usual job [*activism in social work*] or outside of their work as ordinary citizens [*activism by social workers*]. It also can be related to *everyday activism*, when promoting progressive values in the immediate environment (family community) (Roth, 2016), or when engaging with social work mission of enabling social justice (Sen et al., 2020). As revealed in the interviews, professional and personal activism can often overlap. In this context, the borderline between personal and professional identities are blurred, an idea which is congruent with Greenslade et al.'s, (2014) and Smith's (2011) findings. According to the authors, this merging of identities and values is an essential asset for pursuing their own activist and social work agenda.

Additionally, activists can manifest in different settings, such as online or offline and moreover, other individuals than social workers (e.g., service users, relatives of service users) can engage in activism with an impact on the social work field. These allies can organise themselves and contribute to giving voice to marginalised communities and moreover, being part of social justice movement that social workers could aspire to.

“There was a group of parents that meet regularly to discuss about their experience of poverty and the impact of being assessed by a child protection system, and about the possible changes needed.” (Ted, SWUK)

Although the action of empowering service users [or in the above example, their relatives] to mobilise themselves and be autonomous can be seen as formal activism, as indicated several times during the interviews, these actions can also be classified as a form of informal activism, or active citizenship as partly described by MacIntyre et al. (2021). This indicates again the complexity of the social work activism domain, determined by diverse

nuances, including values, beliefs and contexts. Further discussion will explore different forms of activism, as characterised by participants in the interviews.

6.2. Forms of social work activism

The findings demonstrated that there are different understandings of social work activism both between and within the two jurisdictions and, therefore, different operationalisations of it. In the subsequent discussion, I delineate the types and forms of activism that can be framed as social work activism, as derived from an analysis of interview data. For instance, within the data, there are some key concepts associated with social work activism, such as “identifying social issues”, “recognising social injustice”, “advocating for the clients and their rights”, “supporting/empowering service users”, “confronting Neoliberalism”, “improving the profession” “improving lives of people” etc. These actions represent forms of social work activism, as identified by the literature (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Bott et al., 2016), which further contribute to fulfilling ethical and professional goals and its mission, such as performing social change, and ensuring social justice and respect of human rights. Therefore, it can be inferred that the findings are merely confirmatory with the literature review. Essentially, the findings illustrate that social work activism encompasses an ideological creed (humanitarian/ progressive values and goals), but also addresses instrumental foci, such as contributing to professional improvement and challenging its limitations. The interactions between these two areas of ideological creed and instrumental focus add an important contribution to the existing knowledge and understanding of social work activism. Further, the next points of discussion show an in-depth deconstruction of these activities as interpreted from the participants’ responses.

In this sense, chronologically, social work activism can represent a *form of identifying social issues or social injustice*, as interviewees in both jurisdictions claimed, and moreover,

as advanced by participants in the UK, *acknowledging social injustice* [imbalance] and being aware of the privileges that exist in society (see Amy (SWUK); Lana (SWUK); Tanya (SWUK)). Further, to achieve social justice, there is a condition of *addressing social injustices or the social problems* generated by them. While social justice [or social well-being] might be an abstract concept, social injustice is largely experienced, visible and easier to identify, as reflected in the interviews. As per respondents, injustice includes aspects of exploitation, discrimination in all forms, poverty and inequality, unfair distribution of resources, lack of opportunities and services, or limitations of rights.

As emerged from the analysis of data, addressing social injustice can include different types of actions, such as endorsing the human dignity of service users by providing them “opportunities to be valued as people” (Sophie, SWUK), “to protect the vulnerable” (Richard, SWUK) or “restoring the dignity of people I work for” (Andrei, SWRO); thus, representing one of the key principles of the Codes of Practice in both countries, including the Code of Ethics provided by IFSW (2020).

The next point is more focused on explaining *active citizenship* as a form of activist practice. In the literature, *active citizenship* or *participation* encompasses a large palette of activities from voting, volunteering, advocacy, donations, etc. (Bassel, 2020), to activities of empowerment and granting of civil rights for individuals and communities (MacIntyre et al., 2021). As understood by some respondents, *active citizenship* means any social work activities “contributing to changing the society for the better” (Laur, SWRO), including activities of social work. More specifically, it can refer to “going to a protest or march” (Lana, SWUK), “organising educational programs for young people” (Cosmina, SWRO), “fundraising campaigns” (Ciprian, SWRO), with the mention that these activities can be carried out from both roles as citizens and social workers. Thus, both forms of social work activism (activism in social work and activism by social workers). These insights are in line with van Ewijk’s

(2009) concept of citizenship-based social work, which “aims at the integration of all citizens and supports and encourages self-responsibility, social responsibility and the implementation of social rights” (p. 174). Overall, this idea illustrated that, at a theoretical and practical level, social work activism, by engaging in transformative practice, integrates a component of active citizenship too.

With a very similar meaning to active citizenship, some participants also mentioned *advocacy* as a form of activist practice, associating this term with activities dedicated to service users that include “promot[ing] their human rights” (Rudy, SWUK), “to empower[ing] and activat[ing] [service users]” (Albert, SWRO), or “developing campaigns against social exclusion and marginalisation” (Eleonora, SWRO). These actions can be encompassed into the concept of *cause activism* (encompassing ideas of acknowledging and promoting certain issues and causes at the social level) (Rees, 1991), often undertaken by social workers in their practice (Cox et al., 2021).

The second form of advocacy identified referred to *advocating for the social work profession*, being mentioned as a form of activism in social work. In this respect, participants expressed their wish to develop and introduce new services, change policies and legislations. There was a common belief that improving the profession would contribute to the well-being of service users and society overall.

“A better legislation, better services lead to better community and benefits for service users.” (Alexandra, SWRO)

In Romania, *promoting the social work profession’s values and its role* in society was also considered a form of social work activism. This particular focus reveals a need for recognition of social work, “which is often misunderstood” (Aura, SWRO) and “not valued accordingly” by the general public, politicians and inaccurately represented in the mass media

(Lazar et al., 2018b). Accordingly, this perspective provides a wider understanding of social work activism that has an indirect approach to social change and social justice.

In the UK, social work activism is associated with a form of *resistance and challenging Neoliberalism* and its practicalities, as indicated in the literature (Calhoun et al., 2014; Greenslade et al., 2014; Gregory, 2010; Reisch & Jani, 2012; Rome & Hoehstetter, 2010; Strier and Bershtling, 2016). It can be manifested under a form of professional resistance or “sabotage” of the system in order to achieve what is considered a good purpose.

“I believe in a bit of sabotage, and I know many managers and all that sabotage their organisation. They go under the radar, they make decisions or they allocate resources by, you know, making the needs appear a little bit more than they are,” (Tanya, SWUK)

This type of social work activism/professional resistance is also conceptualised in literature as *covert activism*, motivated by a moral social work duty to support service users (Greenslade et al., 2014). Moreover, fighting Neoliberalism is an assumed objective of radical, critical, and new radical social work scholarship (Jones et al., 2004).

In conclusion, this discussion around social work activism aimed to illustrate the complexity of social work activism, its influences and forms manifested across the two jurisdictions. Essentially, social work activism seeks to address existing aspects of imbalance in society in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the social work mission that seeks, among other purposes, societal wellbeing (IFSW, 2014). The discussion also exemplified that social work activism is a unique interaction between traditional and progressive values, combined with professional identity, both being influenced by the organisational, social, and political contexts. In the following sub-section, I provide a classification of social work activists by

considering the central debates around the positionality of social work activism and its possible ways of development.

6.3. Typology of social work activism and activists

As illustrated above, social work can have different orientations: political or non-political, conflictual or non-conflictual. Moreover, it can be developed in formal or informal circumstances and be motivated by more conservative or progressive values. As a result of these positionalities, I have developed a scale of social work activism that gravitates between apolitical, conservative and non-conflictual activism (activism seen as an act of goodness), which I called CHARITIVISM (Charity + Activism); and a second type that incorporates a more political dimension, progressive and conflictual/fighting view, named FIGHTIVISM (Fight + Activism). This scale helped me to build on a typology of contemporary social work activists that extends the view of Greenslade et al. (2014), which is focused on the Australian context. Compared to the classification of social work activism elaborated by Greenslade et al. (2014) (strategist, change agent, quiet activist and lawful activist – see page 50), the present typology includes an analysis of a context which is not limited to what is typically understood as the ‘western world’. In doing so, the current typology offers a more nuanced image of social work activism across different political and social contexts (Western and Eastern). While Greenslade et al. (2014) typology has a strong focus on political ideologies (being inspired by Domanski’s (1998) typology of political participation), it is also directly connected to the field of practice. As observed by the authors, each field of practice (e.g., child protection, adults, mental health, income support) inclines to a specific type of activist. Nevertheless, the classification was based on the values informed by AASW. Comparatively, the typology that I advanced here includes a non-political dimension, reflecting Eastern European cultural divergencies, as well as the influence of wider socio-cultural mechanisms on social work

activism. It also brings into discussion an important dichotomy between social work activism in the public and non-governmental sectors.

As illustrated in *Figure 6.1* below, this continuum/scale comprises four major categories of social work activists. Firstly, **formalists** – define a type of activist concerned with professional and legal boundaries, those who prefer to avoid any potential conflicts and practice their activism inside of the professional framework. Essentially, they are focused on doing an excellent job as a social worker, without being very visible in expressing their values or political values. Arguably, their activist behaviour might be more influenced by conservative values since they tend to respect the authority; yet, at the same time, do their best to support the service users taking into account the resources, knowledge, and availability that they dispose of.

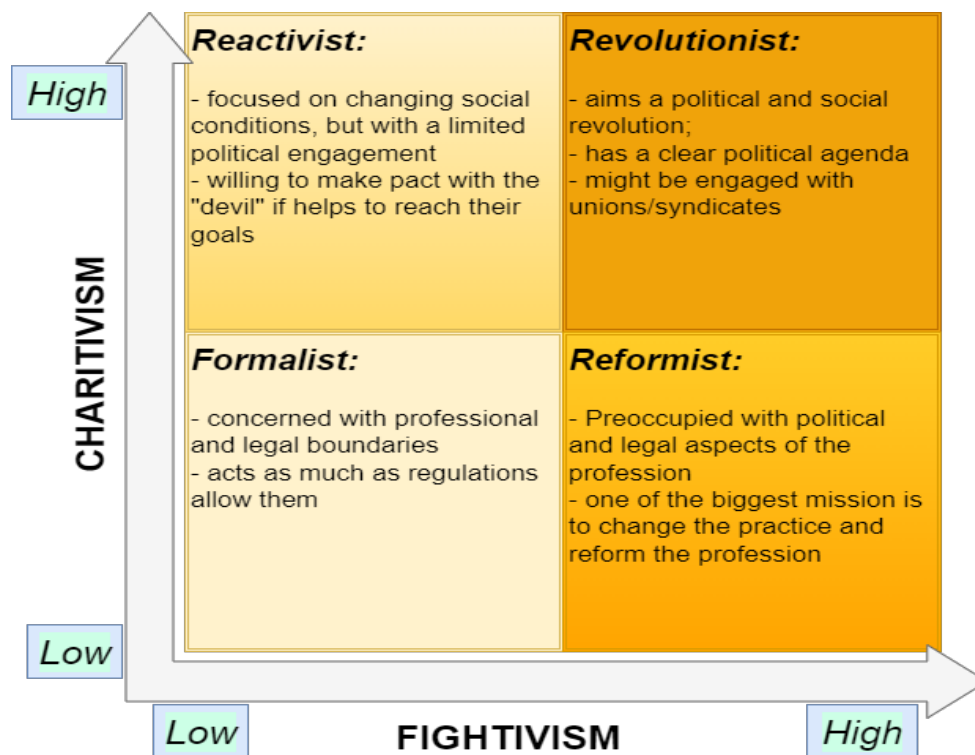
Secondly, **reactivists** have a more pragmatic approach, preferring to act outside the professional regulations if required to reach their goals. At the same time, they would prefer not to engage politically or enter into conflict with the political sector and other authorities. They are vocal about signalling potential issues within the sector, but at the same time, they are open to collaborating with the political sector to fulfil their mission if necessary. They are focused on “repairing” the system, not necessarily changing it because changing the system might seem an unrealistic mission for them. Typically, the reactivists would engage in activities of social campaigns such as volunteering, donations, or raising awareness.

The third type of activists (**reformists**) show a deep concern with legal aspects of the profession and aim to reform or challenge the practices and other legal/regulatory aspects of the profession. They are often engaged in activities such as lobby and advocacy. Finally, the **revolutionists** – are characterised by social workers who seek a radical change (ideologically and systemically) of the social work profession as well as of the political, economic and societal system (especially Capitalism). They openly express their political view and criticism towards

the political and social work system and are not afraid to enter into conflicts with the authority. Their activity is mainly led by what they consider ethical practice, not limited to professional boundaries. Given these identities, however, it is essential to mention that although social work activists might have a dominant approach to activism, they can also be framed into other types. For example, a revolutionist is closely connected to a reformist; or a reformist might also be a formalist.

Figure 6.1.

Typologies of Social Work Activism/sts



6.4. Key points of the chapter

In this section, I engaged with an *analytical resolution* of the findings, explaining how social work activism can be interpreted in both jurisdictions. Firstly, I deconstructed the concept of social work activism by indicating its dimensions as depicted by the comparison of both countries (political – non-political; formal – informal). I also indicated the possible forms that social work activism can have in practice (e.g., active citizenship, advocacy, professional resistance). Finally, based on these discussions, I have proposed a typology of social work activism and social work activists, to explain the contemporary phenomenon as it is manifested in Romania and the UK. This typology is an original contribution that provide new lenses to understand the phenomenon of social work activism developed in two different contexts, as well as understanding the effects of these setting on the engagement of the social work activists in both constituencies. The last part of the findings chapter explains the influences of macro-mechanisms that have influenced social work activism and how they underpin the differences highlighted in this chapter.

CHAPTER 7 – EXPLAINING THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL MECHANISMS

7.1. Introduction

The preceding sections presented the findings in both analytic phases, *description* and *analytical resolution*. As suggested by Danermark et al's. (2002) model, these stages were necessary to identify potential mechanisms and to analyse their potential contributions, influences, and effects in shaping the relevant components and dimensions of activism and social work activism. This final section follows the subsequent phase of the data analysis – *retroduction* and *concretisation and contextualisation*, in which I compare and explain my findings and their synergies and differences through the critical realist lens of Archer's (1995, 2010) *Morphogenetic Sequence*.

This section aims to provide an understanding of social, political, and cultural climates, contexts or conditions that have impacted the social work profession. By doing so, it illuminates how these characteristics have shaped social work activism in the last decades and informed the different trajectories and present circumstances in Romania and the UK. Additionally, the role of this chapter is to show how different historical stages of social change in a sequential process influence and interrelate with each other and, eventually, inform the findings of this study. For instance, in relation to the Romanian context, there are dedicated sub-sections to illustrate the powerful impact of the Communist period on society and, implicitly, the social work profession. Further, the analysis shows how those outcomes relate and correlate to the findings of the current research.

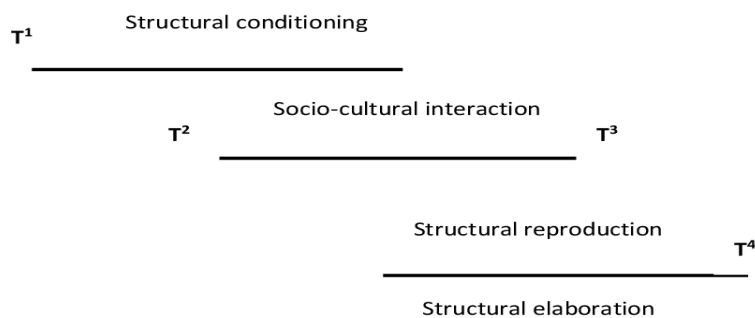
Prior to engaging with the explanatory discussion of the Morphogenetic Sequence applied to social work activism, some key comparative findings are restated. As previously depicted, these findings illustrate essential differences and similarities that frame the theoretical and practical comprehension of social work activism among professionals in the UK and Romania. These essential differences refer to the *association (or disconnection) of the social work profession with the political dimension*, the *discourses around social work as a profession to ensure social justice and societal wellbeing (i.e., improving vs changing the system)*, *perspectives regarding professional regulations as a means of improving or destabilising social work*, and the *variety of values* that can shape activists behaviour among social workers in both jurisdictions.

In regard to similarities, it seems that the *impact of Neoliberalism* on the social work systems has led to a comparable set of obstacles that impedes participation in social work activism. Social workers, both in the UK and Romania, are constrained by the volume of workloads, lack of resources or austerity measures, rigid regulations and procedures, and the managerial and hierarchical structure of the system, which is consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Jones et al., 2004; Lazar, 2015a). Additionally, in both countries, social workers indicated similar psycho-social mechanisms that might enable their activism (e.g., finding meaning, the need for a sense of belonging, and self-actualisation) or restrict their activist practice (e.g., fear of not being negatively labelled or professionally marginalised by their colleagues or other professionals/stakeholders). Finally, *social media and online activism* generated almost identical debates, where the participants in both jurisdictions identified the risks and benefits associated with the new online tools. This might indicate that the fast circulation of information in the Technology Age has similar impacts on professionals in both countries of comparison.

Given these key findings on social work, and particularly, the conceptualisation and practice of social work activism, the following discussion, as illustrated in the *Figure 3.4*, engage in a cyclical process comprising three temporally sequential phases (Archer, 2010): namely, structural conditioning (T1), involving interaction between structural conditions and cultural context; interactions in networks (T2->3), and outcomes (T4), in the form of observable effects of interactions, which may result in the cycle of social reproduction restarting, or in structural elaboration (T4>T1) [See page 98-99].

Figure 3.4.

The Morphogenetic Sequence (Archer, 1995)



Based on critical realist thinking, the Morphogenetic approach elaborates how socio-cultural conditioning structures influence human behaviour and how people can exercise agency to effect changes in the environment they exist in; a relationship between *agency* and *structure* mediated by *reflexivity*. In basic terms, *agency* refers to the capacity of individuals to take actions that reflect their personal/professional priorities in response to the enablements and constraints that inhere in the conditioning structures (Schlosser, 2019). *Structure*, on the other hand, denotes constructed patterns in society that might influence and constrain individuals' actions, such as power or class but are not limited to it (Martin and Lee, 2015). *Reflexivity*, according to Archer (2013) refers to a mental or cognitive process when people “consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa” (p. 9). As per Archer

(1995), there is a dynamic relationship between structure and agency, and both have their essential roles in shaping processes of social change. Essentially, conditioning structures enable or constrain individual action (agency) at some point in time, and in turn, the exercise of agency can influence those conditioning structures as an outcome of personal and relational reflectivity, resulting in a cycle as illustrated by the model above.

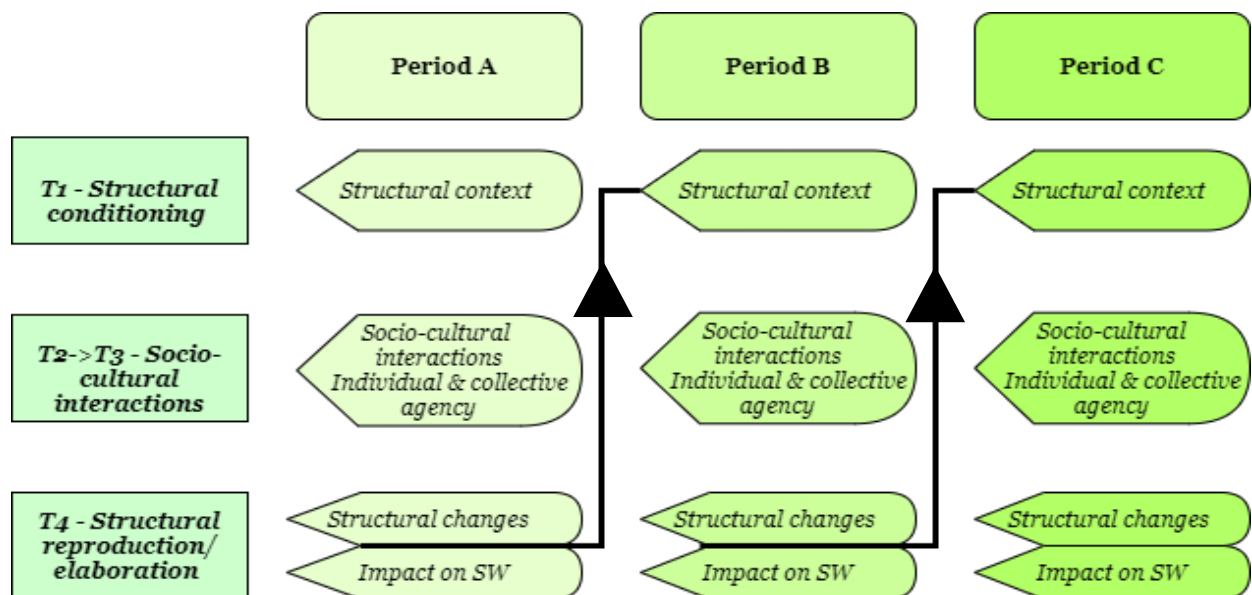
To elaborate on how all these mechanisms have influenced the understanding and practice of social work and social work activism in Romania and the UK, I will focus this discussion on providing an individual analysis of each country, through the lens of Archer's Morphogenetic Sequence. Firstly, I will present how various social-structural and cultural conditions can be used to explain the emergence and trajectory of social work activism in Romania. A similar analysis of the UK situation will follow. Due to their different structural conditionings, socio-cultural interactions, and outcomes, the analysis of both contexts will have distinct foci. One relevant difference concerns the impact of the communist period in Romania, when the social work profession was an absent component of Romanian society; given the long period of time (over 40 years) and the very restrictive rules that it imposed on society in general, the Communist legacy has had a strong influence on how the profession developed after the collapse of the regime (Lambru, 2002, Lazar, 2015a, Sorescu, 2015). To unpack the impact of this legacy, the analysis of the Romanian context will focus on the historical aspects that have influenced socio-cultural behaviours, values, and conditions, which eventually shaped the social work profession and social work activism, as resulted in the findings of this study. The analysis of the UK context will follow a parallel analysis on how the nature of the socio-political dynamics and cultural aspects have impacted social work development and social work activism in the Kingdom.

The discussion on each jurisdiction will be organised around significant time periods with strong social, political, and cultural impacts, illustrating the way in which conditioning

structures have changed over time, and further their influence in shaping new norms of the systems and beliefs within social work and social work activism. To differentiate distinct epochs derived from a historical-socio-cultural analysis of each jurisdiction, through the lens of Archer's model (T1, T2->T3, T4), the Periods are noted with letters (A, B, C), representing the critical impacts of social, cultural, and political structures on the social work profession and, therefore, social work activism. The following figure shows an abstract illustration of the analysis.

Figure 7.1.

Adaptation of Morphogenetic Sequence to explaining contexts of social work activism in Romania and the UK



7.2. Morphogenetic Sequence applied to the Romanian context

This section will be divided into three sub-sections based on three distinct *Periods* as indicated above. Generally, when scholars refer to social work history in Romania, they mention four periods: the charity period (before 1918), the development period (1920 – 1945), the falling period during the communist regime (1945 – 1989), and the reconstruction period (after 1989) (Buzducea, 2009; Lambriu, 2002; Lazar, 2015a). For the purpose of this research, my analysis will focus on the periods with the most significant impact on the situation that informed my investigation on the social work profession and social work activism, as referred in the literature review. Therefore, the periods analysed for the Romanian context are the following: the Communist period or the dismantling/falling period (*Period A*) (1945-1989) reveals the great impact of the regime on the social work profession and Romanian society overall. Further, *Period B* refers to the first part of the transition after the collapse of the Communist regime (1990-2004), recognised as a period of reconstruction for social work, when the system is formally rebuilt on the legacy inherited from the previous period. These two periods (A, B) undertake a historical perspective that contributes to the understanding of the present context and conditions, which informs the findings of this research, including the development of social work activism among Romanian social workers.

The third and last, *Period C*, from 2004 to the present – defines the period of regularisation of social work as a profession and continuous institutional development. In this period, some social transformations can be observed in terms of civic engagement as a result of a generational shift, direct interaction with Western societies, the development of internet

tools, and much faster and wider access to information. Essentially, *Period C* describes explicit aspects that are contemporaneous with the present research context.

7.2.1. Period A (1945 – 1989) *the Communist Period*

Structural conditioning (T1)

The instauration of the Communist regime in Romania came after WWII and after a few years of political and social tensions in the country. Between the liberal parties, monarchy, and the Romanian Communist Party, the latter managed to win power with large support from the Stalinist Regime. The almost five decades of Communist ruling were dominated by totalitarianism, tyranny, and control. A report conducted by the Presidential Commission for Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania (PCACDR, 2006) noted that these were times of “[...] enslavement which included, in addition to the control of economic, political and social life, a mental conditioning of the subjects of the totalitarian state” (p. 10). The undemocratic governance manifested through one-party rule, political oppression of those outside the party, economic scarcity, inflation, censorship, or high engagement of secret services in people's lives; which naturally, have had a considerable impact on how people saw themselves in relation to each other and with polity, in general.

In the context of social work, the period of professional development between the two world wars (see the historical background of social work in Romania – Chapter II) was stopped since the presence of a social work profession meant, in a way, admitting that social problems existed in the state, a fact which was seen to contradict the political doctrine of the Communist Party (Lazar, 2015a; Sorescu, 2015). Moreover, as indicated in T2->T3, the Communist Party focused their influence on gaining more power and giving the Romanian people and foreign

countries the impression of a secure and solid system that effectively addressed social issues; social work could not exist in such a context.

Sociocultural interaction (T2->T3)

This phase illustrates how the communist dictatorship shaped and influenced values and behaviours within Romanian society, aspects which persisted even decades after the falling of the regime. Those influences have a direct impact on how people engage with activism and political structures, and therefore, the nature and form of social work activism (see *Period B* and *Period C*).

Socially, under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu, the leader of the Communist Party, Romania was dominated by repression, corruption, and poverty (Tismaneanu, 1998). Moreover, the Party created a narrative around the effectiveness of the regime, which spread the illusion of solving social problems through its own administrative and bureaucratic apparatus, especially because of the portrayed “competence” of its leader (Sorescu, 2015; Ghimisi, 2020). Ceausescu created and demanded that the entire nation adhere to his cult of personality, simultaneously promoting a nationalistic agenda based on fake competency propaganda and the demonisation of foreign countries (Ghimisi, 2020).

As per Ghimisi (2020), to reach his political goals and personal ambitions, Ceausescu implemented restrictive and intrusive policies that redefined the notion of private matters. For example, religion, culture and political preferences, as well as abortion became political issues dedicated to accomplishing the proud purpose of the socialist nation. To ensure his success, Ceausescu engaged (and had the support of, for a period) with the secret services. This move proved effective since, as Kligman (1998) argues, the popular understanding of respect and power become associated with the Party, the state, and the secret services. In the following, I

will discuss several ways in which Communism impacted Romanian society by emphasising characteristics that shaped and influenced people's behaviours, beliefs, and values.

One of the most important elements that ensured Ceausescu's long-ruling was the involvement of Secret Services in people's lives. *Securitatea*, as known in Romania, was one of the main pillars of power in the state mechanism, during the Communist era. This was defined as an exaggerated image of an all-controlling force that induced a "[...] state of psychological terror which paralysed the population" (Gilberg (1990) cited in Gallagher (1991), p. 555). *Securitatea*, was essentially one of the main instruments of state terrorism in Romania, characterised by repressive and illegitimate actions of the state against its own citizens to consolidate, maintain, and impose the power of the state over its people (Gallagher, 1991). This would justify every oppressive action towards liberty as an act in favour of the common good, a fight for "the people" (PCACDR, 2006). The fear of security was additionally justified by the brutalities committed towards anyone who dared to contest the regime. Such abuses included arrests happening at any moment of the day or night, falsification of investigations, physical torturing, and even killing people suspected of conspiring against the Party. Although these acts of terror were evident, ordinary people were "too preoccupied with mere survival to find the energy to challenge those responsible for their misery" (Gilberg (1990) cited in Gallagher, 1991, p. 555). Instead, the news about the operations of the Secret Services were deliberately spread to amplify fears of the authority, power and the regime, in general. As suggestively characterised by Jens Reich (1997), the similar practices of Secret Service's in the German Democratic Republic cultivated fear and obedience in the face of authority, and at the same time, a coerce to behave and act accordingly – "[...] a mixture between obedience and the reflex of pretending to be dead" (cited in PCACDR, 2006, p. 172). In this context, it is unsurprising that people were reluctant to organise and oppose resistance or engage in political and civic activism. In fact, the long history of produced fear of authority

enduringly affected Romanian society and was transmitted to future generations, discussed further in *Period B* of this analysis.

Securitatea enabled Ceausescu's regime to implement oppressive policies in order to take control of people's lives – all in the name of a so-called “strong national and socialist state”, or as shown above, for the sake of Ceausescu's megalomania. In this regard, for the Party, private matters such as family, religion, freedom of thinking, and culture became enemies of, but also means for their political aims. As numerous official reports reveal, *Securitatea* had loyal people infiltrated in every domain of social life such as schools, churches, factories, cultural institutions etc. Any intentions to criticise or contest the Party as the supreme authority were quickly identified and annihilated; in the end, the country became a land led by a unique, omnipotent and totalitarian political elite with no opposition. Some attempts to contest the Party (or their leader) were initiated by solitary dissidents or workers' movements who protested against the precarious labour conditions (1977 and 1987), but they were not successful; these resulted in countless abuses from the state against the so-called “agitators”, as the Presidential Commission for Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (PCACDR, 2006) reveals.

Intellectuals, artists, and high-profile professionals who dared to dispute the activity of the Party were also persecuted and jailed. Any work of science or piece of art which opposed the political dogma became the object of censorship rapidly; instead, the propaganda apparatus intensively promoted other cultural or research elements which were in line with Ceausescu's purpose (PCACDR, 2006; Szabo, 2012). The instauration of censorship was an effective strategy to promote the system's creed, but also to hide the misery created by the system and the division of people, as the Nobel-winning writer, Hertha Muller, acknowledges below.

“Censorship did not just affect art. It was just present in our everyday lives as state-planned poverty. Basic foodstuffs such as bread, milk, sugar, flour, oil and butter were only available via ration cards. Anyone who bought anything had to show an ID card and was registered. People stood for days in queues for food. In this system, anyone could keep an eye on anyone else, and the state could keep an eye on everybody. This is how the state broke people in.” (Muller, 2018, p. 69).

Naturally, this long period of censorship and political abuses affected the post-Communist Era (see *Period B*).

Although the social work system was essentially dismantled, there were important implications in regard to social problems. Despite the evident poverty and corruption in the country, Ceausescu managed to stay in power for 25 years, using his most robust tools: propaganda, censorship, and induced collective fear. He also managed to maintain high popularity among the Romanians for most of his leadership. And, despite many other social issues such as high levels of mortality, the increasing number of abandoned children and a high number of people with disabilities lacking proper infrastructure and care (PCACDR, 2006), still, Ceausescu decided to stay devoted to the ideological creed – that the communist state can solve all types of social problems. Accordingly, the profession of social work was ignored and systematically dismantled (Lazar, 2015a). Moreover, the dictator continued to chase his political ambitions at any cost. As shown below, one of his tyrannic aspirations had tragic national consequences and exerted a massive impact on post-communist social work.

For Ceausescu, having a strong state meant a densely populated state. In his view, having an increased population would ensure that enough individuals were available to engage in the workforce and contribute to the country’s industrial progress. To cultivate a desired level

of natality, he implemented the infamous law 770/1966 against abortion, which provoked disastrous consequences for thousands of women, children, and families. Official data advances a number of 9452 women who lost their lives trying non-medical and illegal methods of abortion, at the time, but many more women are estimated to be victims of this policy (PCACDR, 2006). From 10 million children born between 1967 and 1989, an astonishing number of 340.000 babies died before the age of one year, and around 20% of the children presented severe malnutrition and did not meet the physical development milestones (Trebici, 1991). These are important facts to discuss since they directly influence communist institutional care and post-communist social work.

Structural reproduction (T4)

Looking over the discussion at this stage of the analysis, it can be argued that the capacity of people to react and take action (exercise agency) was drastically restricted by the oppressive patterns manifested and created within the society (conditioning structures), which engendered collective fear, obedience, and manipulation. This, in turn, affected the reflexivity of people or their capability to view themselves as important capable of change actors in relation to the socio-politico-cultural contexts. The long history of terror and undermining of human dignity and rights had devastating effects on Romanian society's psychological, social, and health conditions in the long term. For instance, the drastic consequences of criticising the authority in any manner determined people to be more obedient with those in power, as argued by David (2015). In addition, the permanent fear of the infiltration of Secret Services into every sector of public and private life engendered attitudes of circumspection and distrust among individuals, aspects that may have impeded open engagement in forms of political and civic organisation for a long period even after the fall of the Communism. These points are essential to remember for a correct understanding of the findings in Romania presented in this thesis,

which overall have shown an obedient and mostly non-conflictual attitude towards authority, when engaging in activism.

The long series of repressions faced by Romanians combined with the fall of the communist regimes in other East European states created the opportune context for challenging and ending the Ceausescu Era in 1989. The clash of “exasperations”, as noted by Dirdala (2011), between “exasperated Romanians” and an “exasperated President” led to a violent revolution in which, according to the official statistics, 1290 protestors lost their lives and many other thousands of people got injured as a result of (presumably) military intervention (Marin (2010) cited in Ursu et al. (2018)). Despite the installed fear around political/civic protests, people found the collective and personal resources to stand up and activate their agency in order to produce social change, going against the authority.

Through a critical realist lens, this violent clash between the power (structure) and capacity of people to act and react (agency) against a repressive regime could have pejoratively impacted the understanding of people and their attitudes towards political activism, in terms of reinforcing the risk of adverse consequences of challenging the authority; an attitude cultivated during the long dictatorship. This change of regime (T4) was not, however, what we can call a radical transformation (from the roots). As follows in Period B, many of the elements of the collapsed system were reproduced in the new capitalist society (T1).

7.2.2. Period B (1990 – 2004) – *Transition Period*

In this section dedicated to the Transition period, I will explain the process that characterised Romanian society right after the fall of Communism and before joining the European Union. This Period underpins the emergence of new forms of social activism/resistance, the dictatorship’s impact on the collective Romanian mentality and its effects on social and cultural

norms and collective behaviours. Further, I explain the re-establishment of the social work profession and its adaptation to the legacy of Communism and to the new challenges generated by globalisation.

Structural conditioning – T1

Following the fall of Communism, Romania began a period of transition, a reconfiguration from several points of view – economically, socially, politically, and culturally. Access to democracy, the free market, and free elections were significant signs of progress for a society that for half of a century was shaped by totalitarianism; however, the communist legacy was still deeply impregnated in the Romanian society (see T2->T3 below).

After the popular revolt, social work went through a reconfiguration stage in an attempt to repair the damage suffered in the previous regime. At that point in time, the newly re-established profession (but without a regulated status) had to deal with an impossible mission – to manage the “social inheritance” from the Communist period. In addition to increasing poverty reflected in the low standard of living of Romanian people, and correlated with the lack of proper infrastructure for children, disabled and older people, the previous regime also left, as UNICEF estimates, around 200 000 children in institutional care living in horrific conditions (cited in Stepheson and Badea, 1992). These were some of the desolate, but urgent, conditions that characterised the re-emergence of social work and its task.

Sociocultural interactions (T2->T3)

The clash between 45 years of dictatorship and the new world of democracy resulted in a crisis for Romanian society. On the one hand, the nostalgia for Communism and the old order was still installed and remembered in the collective mentality (Bardan, 2020; Morariu, 2012). On the other hand, the prospects of liberalisation, a free market, and a better life were also desirable and justifiable goals. Despite the efforts made by the civil society of that time to replace the

old political class with one modern and “clean”, this switch was not possible because of the lack of political opposition in the previous regime (PCACDR, 2006). In fact, the revolution meant a crisis of authority and a society in collapse, where the old political elite was replaced by a group of politicians who were former members of the Communist Party (Negoita, 2012). Moreover, the old Securitatea was reactivated under a democratic face and it is believed to have had a critical contribution to establishing the new leadership of the country (PCACDR, 2006).

Contesting the new-old political power (the Government of Ion Iliescu, a former member of the Communist Party) was the main reason for the emergence of the first visible forms of resistance/political activism in the Romanian society of the post-communist era. Demonstrations organised primarily by students and a newly-reformed civil society lasted for 52 days but were brutally stopped by miners’ and workers’ intervention, who attacked any potential political/civic opposition to the transitional government, the National Salvation Front. The violent intervention of miners to repress the student movement (known as Golaniada⁵) is believed to have been orchestrated by Ion Iliescu, the first president of Romania after the popular revolution (Arun, 2022). The brutal action enacted against the protests, generically called Mineriada⁶, led to six death and 746 injured, according to the numbers advanced by the Romanian Parliament (1991). Unofficially, it is estimated that the number of deaths exceeded over 100 victims⁷. Symbolically, this repressive episode, coming a few months after a violent revolution, could have substantially impacted people’s confidence to challenge authority, even more so when this happened in a new and theoretically democratic society.

⁵ From the word “golan” (hooligan). A term addressed by Ion Iliescu to the protestors.

⁶ The violent intervention of the miners against protestors in Bucharest.

⁷ Data from the article, consulted at (June 2021): <https://romanioliberal.ro/special/investigatii/minerii-au-terorizat-capitala--30479>

Socially and economically, the first part of the transition period was characterised as a steady process to democratisation, including some institutional and economic reforms (Marginean, 1997). On the flip side, some problems were even more exacerbated than before 1989, including high levels of unemployment, inflation, and a low standard of living. A national survey conducted in 1995 illustrates that 65% of Romanians appreciated that their living conditions were worse than in 1989, when Ceausescu was still in power, according to Marginean (1997). The end of the dictatorship and the prospects of a better life promised by democracy, but unfulfilled, led to a *scepticism around the political class and, probably, to less interest in politics in general*; an idea that might be reflected by/in an exponential decreasing of people's participation in elections, from 86 % in 1990 to 58 % in 2004, and 39 % in 2008 (Tatar, 2011). This might also reflect a perceived loss of agency or capability to influence change. In this sense, a simple act of political participation (e.g., voting) might be perceived as a derisory effort with little impact on personal and collective interests/needs. This act of individual disenfranchisement as a citizen might also had effects on the likelihood of engaging in activism.

One important aspect that should be mentioned in this discussion relates to the role of civil society after 1989. After the fall of Communism, the third sector began a process of consolidation and liberation. The first years, however, were challenging for civil society because of a lack of financial resources and an inadequate legal framework (Saulean, 1999). Moreover, the militant civil society was negatively perceived and openly contested by the president, Ion Iliescu, and most political parties, as emphasised by Nimu et al. (2016). The scepticism around the third sector might have been accentuated when some prominent NGO leaders engaged with the central administration in 1996, without having the expected impact on people's lives (Nimu et al., 2016). In addition, other aspects that might be related to the limited impact of NGOs in the 1990s, for instance, the lack of trust between people (cultivated

in the previous regime), or the limited confidence and understanding of democratic institutions' functioning (Badescu et al., 2004). Overall, it might be argued that the inability of the third sector to make its presence visible in a positive way in the first decade of post-communism, could have contributed to the low level of interest in civic and active participation which was maintained in Romanian society for long after communism's fall.

Across the first few years of transition, Romanian civil society can be characterised in terms of an ideological clash between views inspired by western values and more traditionally/conservative-oriented values (Stoiciu, 2001). These circumstances paved the way for a slow process of civil society development in the first period of transition. However, as per Caba-Maria and Munteanu (2020), at the beginning of the 2000s, under external EU pre-integration support (financing, expertise), correlated with a fast digital/informational development, Romanian civil society became a stronger voice on the public agenda and it was often the main engine of and for main social protest movements that emerged later in the country.

Another important factor in this social change process in Romania can be related to the Romanian Orthodox Church, which exercised a stronger influence than civil society. After a long relationship of control and cooperation with the Communist regime, the Orthodox Church claimed its position as a symbol of "Romanianism", using nationalism and the discourse of ethnic identity as tools to win popularity and legitimacy (Stan and Turcescu, 2007). The involvement of the Church in both spheres, civil society and politics, was evident from the first years of the transition. A survey conducted in 1996 by the Foundation of Civil Society Development illustrated that the Church was the highest recipient of voluntary work. At the same time, many political formations are associated with Christian values and engaged in a religious discourse (Stan and Turcescu, 2007). The Orthodox Church and other Christian denominations rejected political neutrality; contrary to the separation of state and religion

stipulated in the Romanian Constitution, the Church had an important role in politics and social life.

According to the analysis advanced by Stan and Turcescu (2007), the influence of religion in politics could be related to priests or members of other religious denominations who were running for local and central offices. Moreover, their influences were illustrated by the evident support offered to specific politicians that would favour religious friendly legislation or would use religious symbols to win the elections. This support plays a critical role in the political field since, overall, the confidence of people in the Church remained quite high – 72% in 1990, 83% in 1999 (Atlas for European Values cited in Stahl, 2016), and more than 86% declared themselves as being Orthodox (Public Opinion Barometer (2005) in Marinescu, 2006)

The Church was also active in shaping the social life and values of Romanian society. Turcescu and Stan (2010) explain that the high clerks of Orthodoxy have shown and openly promoted adverse views against homosexuality, abortion, or sex work. These lead to strong clashes between Church authority and civil society promoting liberal values in these matters (Stoiciu, 2001). The significant influence of religion in the social and political life of Romanians, in that period and now, can be attributed to the fact that the Church managed to define, in a relatively short time, its own “social sense” and to fulfil the expectations of a better life projected by a society that escaped from a repressive system (Flora and Szilagly, 1999). Of course, the nationalist card played by the Church, where Romanian identity = Christian Orthodoxy should not be ignored.

In contrast to civil society, the Orthodox Church and other religious denominations managed to mobilise and install their strong influence in society. Infiltrated into politics and viewed as a moral authority, the Church managed to become a benchmark institution for many Romanians (See *Period C*). This might be the reason why, as clarified by this study, values

based on religious/Christian beliefs were prevalent in both surveys and interviews conducted among Romanian social workers. This theme is analysed further in *Period C*.

Concerning social work, in this period (1990 – 2004), many changes occurred. The heavy burden left by the Communist system required urgent and suitable interventions. In addition, the openness to globalisation brought new challenges such as drug use, sex work, and human trafficking. The first important starting point was the reintroduction of social work degrees in university studies in 1990; however, professional regulation came as late as 2004, when the National Collegium of Social Workers was established. This period was characterised by numerous limitations in terms of resources (financial, personnel, and institutional) (Lazar et al., 2015a). To overcome these challenges, some external/international support was engaged, but as Sorescu (2015) highlights, rather more sporadically and isolated than systematically and organised. At the same time, there was a continuous attempt at professional reconstruction, the organisation of social services at the local and central level, and an increased interest in scientific evidence to inform reforms in the social sphere (Lazar et al., 2020). Although some essential improvements in the social work system occurred, Buzducea (2008) argued that the profession was far away from offering quality services centred on the individual or community. Despite the clear necessity for social work in the country, the profession was isolated or ignored by political actors, and the most revealing proof is the sector's low financing or austerity measures.

Structural reproduction (T4)

This period of transition was dominated by a battle of what was left after the Communist fall and the prospects of a new democratic society. This fight generated several social/political/economic crises that eventually were sufficiently managed to allow the much-desired accession of Romania to the EU in 2007. During this time, Romanians could freely

exercise some democratic rights, such as voting, protesting, free association, engagement in activism. However, their disappointment with the political class had a strong social effect. Overall, the civic and political participation of Romanians decreased gradually as a consequence of *political alienation syndrome*, a concept characterised by:

“A reduced sense of civic duty, distrust of politicians, feelings of political exclusion, lack of interest in politics, perceptions of politics as irrelevant to people’s lives, feelings of helplessness and political ineffectiveness, citizens’ diminishing expectations with the solutions offered by the political sphere and lowering expectations regarding the quality of the political class in general” (Tatar, 2016, pp. 106-107).

These features, which with some exceptions, also characterised the following years.

On the other hand, civil society had slowly become a stronger voice as a result of access to democracy and western values. Concomitantly, the Orthodox Church managed to maintain a significant political influence and become a strong value-sharper during this period. Finally, social work received the necessary acknowledgement to become a regulated profession in 2004, but without an impact on the political agenda (Lazar, 2015a), and therefore, its impact in society was marginal. The short period of time between its (re)establishment in 1990 and professional regulation in 2004 appears to be insufficient for the profession to create a proper infrastructure, align its professional standards accordingly, engage with theoretical and ideological debates, and nevertheless build its own identity. Therefore, it can be argued that this period was just a phase of understating, accommodating, and slow development of the social work profession.

7.2.3. Period C (after 2004) – *Contemporary Period*

In this part of the discussion, the analysis focuses on the new challenges faced by Romania as a new member of the EU, the impact of the economic crisis following the post-Communist era and its implications, and nevertheless, the increased access to technological development and information. The discussion considers the context of a society that is still today in process of transition as a former Communist state. It is in this context that I chart the development of social work and identify further implications. This part consists of direct correlations to the present research findings, illustrating influences on the current understanding and level of participation in activism among social workers, the values that influence social work in Romania, and the adaptation of the profession to new settings of neo-liberalism and technologisation.

Structural conditioning – T1

This stage finds Romania in the process of joining the EU, and therefore with greater access to the free market, technological advancements and migration. At the same, the EU accession meant that the Romanian state had to prove its commitment to the Union's values and prove they are willing to undertake positive action for achieving them. For Romania this meant improvements needed to be brought in areas such as reforming public administration, addressing corruption, improving the conditions in the mental healthcare system, tackling human trafficking, and improving the situation of the Roma minority (European Commission, 2005). Aspects that, as observed, have a direct or indirect correlation to social work, reinforcing the need for strengthening the sector.

Although a few decades passed since the communist fall, Romanian society still seemed to feel its effects. Communist nostalgia was and is a constant presence among older and middle-aged citizens currently (INSCOP, 2013; Marin, 2019). The political environment seemed to

have some stability; however, the level of poverty was still high (over 20 % according to Eurostat (2010)), and the confidence of the population in politicians was quite low even before 2007 (Tufis, 2013). The access of Romania to the EU community was fast proceeded by the world economic crisis, and Romania was one of the most affected countries in the block, with a considerable decrease in GDP, employment, and public debt, which eventually led to some harsh austerity measures (Duguleana, 2011; Stoica, 2012).

Social work, now as an established profession, was in search of professional identity and continuous institutional, practice, and educational development. Additionally, it had to face the new challenges of neoliberal politics and the unpleasant consequences of the economic crisis of 2008.

Sociocultural interaction – T2 -> T3

In this phase, I introduce a discussion on the dynamics of civic and political activism in Romania, which will bring in more clarity and allow for a better understanding of the preceding *Findings* chapter, especially linked to the political engagement (or disengagement) among social workers in Romania. Subsequently, I will also engage with an analysis of the religious context to illustrate once more the common prevalence of religious values among the respondents of this investigation. Finally, I will make a link to the influence of online tools and their effects on the activity of social workers/activists.

The economic and social progress of Romania due to the new resources available (external funds) was fast interrupted by the economic crisis from 2008, culminating with the implementation of strong measures of austerity in 2011. As a consequence, great demonstrations against the Government emerged in 2012, which can be linked to a rebirth of political activism since the beginning of the transition in the 1990s (Margarit, 2016). The event brought together members of civil society and people affected by austerity measures such as

unemployed people, civil servants, pensioners, academics and students (Stoica, 2012). The aims of the protests from Bucharest's University Square in 2012 can be associated with the more notorious Occupy and Indignados Movements, but they presented some particularities.

At their starting point, the protests from University Square were motivated by social problems generated by the economic crisis, such as austerity, poverty, and social exclusion (Stanici, 2017). As the movement evolved, the activists took the opportunity to voice their own values and address other discontents that Romanian society faced, including corruption, environmental issues, gender inequality, and abuses by police (Ana, 2017). For instance, this represented a good opportunity for the feminist movement to remark itself and express alternative views and concerns within the revolt. Ultimately, these demonstrations led to the change of Government and renunciation of some disapproved measures such as privatisation of the health system and the cuts to public salaries and pensions.

The civil society activity and its contribution to the public agenda increased as well in this period. Because of technological and informational advancement, NGOs had the capacity to be more visible and gained more support and recognition. Civil society was a loyal and strong supporter/contributor of the Colectiv protests⁸ (2015), Save Rosia Montana movement⁹ (2013 - present), and when protesting against government ordinance¹⁰ (OUG13 – 2017-2018). Although these demonstrations made a great impression at international level, they were not an accurate image of Romanians participating in activism or political engagement because, broadly, the biggest part of the population remained uninvolved in such forms of protests. A study conducted among protestors in 2017 suggests that the demonstration against OUG13 referring to the decriminalisation of corruption was principally comprised of individuals

⁸ Protests emerged due to a fire explosion in night club in Bucharest with tragic consequences – over 60 deaths and many other injured. The movement was a reaction against the political class and high level corruption.

⁹ Save Rosia Montana is a protest movement against the project of gold exploitation in a mountain area with disastrous social and environmental risks.

¹⁰ Demonstrations against the governmental initiative to decriminalise some acts of corruption.

belonging to generation “Y” (Millennials) (under 40 years) with higher education levels (Chis et al., 2017). Moreover, 70% of Chis et al.’s respondents had participated in previous protests such as anti-austerity (2012), Colectiv (2015), Save Rosia Montana (since 2013). This shows that, in fact, these movements in the last decade in Romania are representative of a specific segment of the population, namely, young people belonging to the middle class and with a higher educational degree. Otherwise, the general apathy around political engagement is reflected by the low turn-out in local and general elections; for example, a presence under 32% in the last parliamentary elections (Sandu, 2020). These numbers confirm to a great extent the result of a large study according to which more than 74 % of Romanians do not find *politics* as an important aspect of their life (World Social Survey, 2020 in Haerpfer et al. (2020)). This might explain the lack of political preoccupation among social workers in Romania, as revealed in my study – only 14 % of the surveyed participants declared that they are involved in political issues, and all of them are under 37 years old, which is consistent with the analysis put forward here.

Moreover, Gubernat and Rammelt (2017) argue that these protests should not be viewed as a type of classical political activism since their political ideologies are not clear; instead, they can be considered a form of “recreative activism”, which is organised outside of the regular working schedule and does not require a constant attendance. The *recreative activism* in Romania is characterised by the creation of collective identity, common discontent against the political elites, internal solidarity, and non-violent activities (Gubernat and Rammelt, 2017). They are also consolidated by technological advancements such as the internet and online social networks. Theoretically, the nature of the Romanian social movements in recent years can be related to an extent to the New Social Movements manifested in Western societies, as described by Buechler (1995, 2012). These are described as movements organised by middle class and educated individuals who form their protest ethos around aspects of collective

identity, the creation of social networks and are not necessarily focussed on materialistic aims, as supported by Buechler's analysis.

Although the last decade has witnessed the rise of some new social movements that are the results of political activity in the country, they are not based on political ideologies. These movements are not united around a political party, but they are formed, as argued above, around the values of solidarity and collective struggles. It can be argued that, in a way, this is a form of social and civic engagement but politically disassociated. The political disassociation might be a direct effect of low confidence in the politicians that have led the country in the last three decades. In fact, confidence in politicians has decreased constantly, the voting turnout of citizens has fallen too, compared to the first years of transition. If in 1990, the Romanian population have shown a high degree of confidence in the leading state institutions (70%), between 2010 and 2012, the level of confidence of the population in Government, Parliament, and political parties was under 20% (Tatar, 2016). In 2020, according to a national barometer, the Government (13.7%), Parliament (9.5%), and political parties (9.1%) scored lowest in a ranking of popular confidence in public institutions (LARICS, 2020). The voting presence in the national elections followed a similar trajectory, from a turnout of 86% in the 1990's, the voting presence decreased to 41% in 2012 (BEC in Cosma (2015)), which might suggest that the ineffective activity of politicians to satisfy the population's expectations translated into less confidence invested in them and low interest in voting. Therefore, one reason why participating social workers do not resonate with or do not see any politicians as role models might be justified by the general political detachment (or disinterest) and low confidence in politicians.

Another argument that is relevant to understanding the larger context of social values influencing civic participation is related to the confidence of Romanians towards their fellow citizens. In a national study referring to the psychology of Romanians as a nation, six out of ten respondents declared that they do not trust other people outside their family (David, 2015),

an idea reinforced by World Value Survey (2020) (Haerpfer et al., 2020), which, arguably, is characteristic of the former communist states from Easter Europe. As David (2015) claims, without trusting other individuals, people cannot collaborate; therefore, this can have a direct influence on participation in activism, since it embodies, as discussed in the literature review, collaborative processes such as finding common identity and desire, or collective reflection.

In the treaty mentioned above, David (2015) highlights other aspects that can offer essential insights for the present research. For example, in a typology of trait patterns, David (2015) implies that Romanians have developed particular group psycho-social characteristics because of their historical/political/social context. Compared to the United States of America, viewed as a typical western psychological profile, Romanians tend to be more suspicious and trust other people less, accept authority and traditions more easily, have reduced autonomy, and are resistant to change. As the World Social Survey (2020) shows, 65% of Romanians believe that greater respect for authority is important, which might be correlated with the fact that social workers from Romania are less likely to challenge authority/the installed “old order” in the work environment.

As in previous *Periods*, religion seems to be a significant aspect of Romanian society. A proportion of 82 % of Romanians believe that religion is an important part of their life (World Values Survey, 2020). This is correlated with a high level of public confidence in the Church, although less than in previous years, it is still high and 71% of Romanian have trust in their religious institutions (LARICS, 2020). The influence of the Church/religion is also visible among the respondents of this study. As revealed in the analysis of survey data, 82% of participating social workers in Romania identified themselves as religious (Christians), and for some interviewees, religious values are an important driver for their professional activities.

“I can’t ignore this part of mine. I care about people not because I am a good person, but I have received kindness from Him.” Alexandra (SWRO)

Some important implications for social work, respectively social work activism emerge from these social and cultural contexts. As a regulated profession since 2004, but without real professional recognition and with an inaccurate image among the general public and political actors (Lazar et al., 2018a), social work has the difficult mission of addressing the prevalent social issues in Romania in the context of adverse effects of neoliberalist policies. These include the privatisation of services, increased control over professional activity, overcrowded bureaucracy, and funding cuts (Lazar et al., 2018b). Although the ASproAS and NCSWR have set as their goals to promote social work as a profession and a mission, the impact on the political agenda remains marginal.

The lack of political engagement is also evident among social workers, who prefer or at least profess, a more apolitical attitude, as resulted from the present study. A more activist approach is common in the non-governmental sector where hierarchisation is more flexible, and the mission of NGOs is to advocate for matters that are ignored or poorly managed by the state – “activism in Romania is generally referred to those in the NGOs” (Ciprian, SWRO).

On the other hand, access to the free market and globalist/liberal economy comes with advantages and disadvantages for the social work profession. Firstly, social work in Romania developed faster in terms of practice and education, compared to other former communist states, due to external support and guidance from western countries (Rogers et al., 2018). At the same time, social work in Romania felt deeply the effects of Neoliberalism, such as the adoption of strong managerialist cultures and subsequently a consistent increase in the workload for social workers (Lazar et al., 2018a). The implementation of austerity measures for social services further exacerbated the negative effects of Neoliberalism on the profession,

as argued by Lazar et al., (2018a). These aspects seem to minimise or constrain the transformational potential of the profession, according to the social workers in this study. Many indicated that the increased volume of bureaucratic work impedes them from engaging with activism.

“And it seems to me that this legislative apparatus can be a real obstacle and that’s why I don’t think there are so many initiatives in our country in terms of lobbying and advocacy, especially in social work.” (Aura, SWRO)

“[...] bureaucracy only makes it difficult for us both as professionals and diminish the beneficiary’s trust in our services and in us.” (Ciprian, SWRO)

However, as in the case of the social movements referred to earlier, social workers take advantage of other means to engage in activism, such as online tools and social media. Essentially, as elaborated in the previous findings chapter, in order to avoid the constraints of the system, social workers tend to engage in informal activist practice as those available through the internet.

“In terms of information campaigns such as co-opting activists, the online environment at the moment seems to me to be much better and more receptive to such a thing than other media.” (Alexandra, SWRO)

Although they offer a good alternative for some activities correlated with their work, participants also recognise the limitations of these online means.

“One risk would be that all this online fuss could just stay there. That is it, we talk and it only stays there. And there is not really a working group.” (Cosmina, SWRO)

Structural reproduction T4

As a result of these sociocultural interactions, it can be argued that Romanian society is a consequence of two intersecting timelines and socio-cultural/political structures/contexts: the communist past and the capitalist/neo-liberal present. Although major progress towards democratic values has been achieved, the Communist nostalgia manifests especially when referring to the institutional organisation, socialisation, and interactions between people and state institutions/authority. This might explain why social workers are less critical of institutional authority or why their political involvement is low. The general dissatisfaction and distrust towards political representatives might be another reason for social workers' limited political engagement.

Despite some solid social movements that have emerged against governing bodies, the overall level of engagement or identification with the political dimension is quite low. A significant influence on Romanian society is related to cultural factors. For instance, religion has retained its influence on politics and still continues to shape moral and social values, although there are clear indications that their power is on a downward trend (see the Family Referendum 2018). It can be argued that the strong pronouncement of conservative values might have an effect on how people conceptualise activism. As reflected in this study, the activism of social workers has the meaning based on the Abrahamic philosophy of “doing good”.

Overall, it can be argued that social work in Romania is still a profession that is searching for its own identity, despite regulations and recent developments in the field. Social work professionals need strong figures and role models to associate with them. It needs leadership figures as well as a strong and visible professional identity. Also, an expansion of ideological principles and values of social work is required. These will contribute to a more robust voice that would, indeed, be more vocal on the social agenda and therefore enhance capacities to affect change.

7.3. Morphogenetic Sequence applied to the UK context

The *Periods* analysed in the context of the UK focus on different timelines than Romania since the political, social, and cultural contexts followed a different path and, therefore, exerted a different influence on social work development. Although British social work has a longer history than social work in Romania; however, to align with the purpose of the present study, I will only discuss the most significant periods and recent influences on the profession. Firstly, **Period A** (1945 – 1979), or Embedded liberalism (Hill, 2018) (I will call it *The Rise of Social Work (Activism)*) illustrates the social and economic tensions that resulted from the Second World War and the instauration of the welfare state, followed by the emergence of the new social movements. This period had a powerful influence on different approaches in social work practice and theory, with substantial advancements in professionalisation and acknowledgement of activism/social change as key ideology. The second phase, **Period B** (1979 – 1990) (or *The Rise of Neoliberalism*), marks the instauration of the Thatcherist Era and Neoliberalism and their social/political/economic impacts on the British society – a period which fundamentally changed the nature of the profession of social work. Lastly, **Period C** (after 1990 – *The Consolidation of Neoliberalism*), reveals the continuation and consolidation of the neoliberal state, with an accent on managerialism and privatisation of social services.

Note: Although I acknowledge different dynamics between the UK devolved countries, these aspects are not part of my analysis or highlighted in my research. Therefore, this investigation will discuss the UK situation holistically.

7.3.1. Period A (1945-1979 – *The Rise of Social Work Activism*)

Structural conditioning (T1)

Following WW2, the UK dealt with critical socio-political and economic challenges. First of all, as with the majority of the countries involved in the war, the UK had to confront considerable economic problems, including high levels of unemployment and poverty, blockage of industry, as well as restrictions over imports; these concerns led eventually to an unexpected election won by the Labour Party in 1945, who promised a more socially oriented agenda.

In relation to social work, Davis (2008) claims that after the war, the profession had a positively enhanced image among the general population and politicians. Social workers were those offering support to individuals and families affected by the negative consequences of the war – homelessness, poverty, distress and so on. Contrary to Romania, in the first years after the war, the political support created a favourable framework for social work in the UK to develop as a profession and academic discipline. Moreover, social work became one of the main pillars of the welfare state implemented in the country (Davis, 2008).

Sociocultural interaction (T2->T3)

The first elections after the war resulted in the Labour Party's victory, despite the popularity of the Conservative Leader, Winston Churchill. The victory of the new government was possible because, in the view of the people, the Conservative Party failed to deal with the economic problems and unemployment before and during the war (Addison, 2010). As per Childs (2006), the Conservative Party was seen as “party of privilege, wealth, stuffiness, and nostalgia” (p. 4), while Labour was perceived as the party of ordinary people, representing the hope for a better life for those many unprivileged. The new leadership advanced a political

program based on the Beveridge Report (1942), which is essentially recognised as the origin of the modern welfare state (Childs, 2006).

The social reforms under the auspices of William Beveridge (1879-1963) were considered, at the time, radical and progressive measures since their supreme aim was to offer a subsistence living standard to all citizens and therefore to eliminate poverty (Whiteside, 2014). Among other services provided by the state, the NHS was founded in 1948. As mentioned in the Rowntree Foundation's Report, a study conducted in 1950 has shown that poverty in the UK at that time was extremely low thanks to the welfare state reforms (Glennister et al., 2004). However, this study was "limited in conception" when referring to the poverty line and standard of living, as argued by Townsend (1979, p. 160). Later in time, the implementation of welfare measures received more criticism. As Veit-Wilson (1992) argues, the calculations on minimal subsistence were not in accordance with the real needs of people, and therefore, the elimination of poverty was not accomplished. In addition, Whiteside (2014) highlights some critics of the right-wing sympathisers who claimed that the welfare state, based on the Beveridge policy, led to unjustified spending of money, which in the end, meant an economic stagnation and an over-reliance of British citizens on social welfare. Overall, the period after the Second World War finds Britain internally and internationally with a "remarkably enhanced reputation" (Glennister 2020, p. 3). The UK impressed externally by its fast economic recovery and social reforms such as a national state-funded healthcare system and a social security benefits system based on contributions. Addison (2010) claims that the welfare state emerged as a more economically egalitarian society thanks to the war, suggesting that every major crisis creates new opportunities for more progressive policies.

In regard to the social work context, the first few decades after WW2 were quite dynamic for social work development. In the first phase, as mentioned above, social work activity enjoyed a good reputation among the general population and politicians. Moreover, the

Labour Prime minister, Clement Attlee (a social worker himself), actively advocated for the profession and integrated it as one of the main pillars of the welfare state (Dickens, 2018). Despite the fast economic recovery and high hopes that this partnership between the (welfare) state and social work would effectively address the social issues of that time, regrettably, that did not happen. Over decades, the welfare state consistently failed to reduce the growth of social and economic inequality (Glennester, 2020), and later, it could not work or compete with the increasing economic domination of transnational corporations (Robinson and Harris, 2000).

Meanwhile, for social work, some progress in terms of training and casework activity was recorded, but the practice itself remained superficial and ineffective. As characterised by the iconic figure in the field, Eileen Youngusband (1978), social work in the 1950s was performed by untrained individuals, “supervision and consultation were almost unknown and co-operation rare and sporadic”, and aspects such as confidentiality were “little regarded” (pp. 22-23). This attracted a wave of critics for the profession and emphasised the need for a more standardised professional identity and operational activity.

Then, the growing research and scholarship in the field-oriented their efforts to consolidate casework, which eventually became the dominant paradigm and the usual practice of social work. At that stage, a set of seven values were acknowledged as the core of the profession. According to Biestek (1961), the values that constitute what we know as “traditional” social work, with a strong influence even in the present, are individualisation, purposeful expression of feelings, controlled emotional involvement, acceptance, non-judgemental attitude, user self-determination, and confidentiality. The work of Biestek had an important impact on social work in the UK but also in the US; however, not far in time (end of the 1960s), this paradigm was strongly criticised by the emergence of the radical social work movement. The criticism of these values has continued even today, mainly because they are based on European, capitalist, and Christian fundamentals, do not address the issues created by

the system/welfare state, are not applicable in non-European societies and traditions, and because they do not offer space to address ethical and moral dilemmas encountered in practice (Chun-Sing Cheung, 2015). Additionally, if compared to ethical principles incorporated into the Global Definition of Social Work (IFSW, 2014), Biestek's values fundamentally differ by focusing on individual issues in a specific cultural context, while the IFSW's definition extends the mission of social work more collectively and is more oriented to social change and justice. This latter framing is ideologically much closer to the first assumed contestant of "traditional" social work, which appeared early in the '70s – radical social work.

Returning to the 1960s, while the communist dictatorship was already well instated in Romania, Western societies (including the UK) experienced "waves of awareness" regarding the injustices in society that practically were concretised in revolts against the oppressive state apparatus and the dominant social norms. Individuals and communities who could not enjoy their democratic rights fully, became more visible, part of the foundations of the rise of new social movements (Buechler, 1995, 2012). These new forms of protests, described by Pichardo (1997) as forms of "middle-class radicalism", were concerned with the core of identity and culture, and were less preoccupied with class and economic motivations. In this sense, the feminist movement tended to be more vocal, and the student rebellion of the 1960s set up the territory for large-scale social demonstrations that occurred during the 1970s. Then, during the second wave of feminism, individuals belonging to sexual and ethnic minorities, and disabled people reclaimed their place in the society and challenged traditional values and the conservative social order. This was also a favourable period for environmental protests to occur more often and to gain attention. Although these actions faced counter-reactions from political authorities (Joyce, 2016; Reiner 1998), they were not as repressive and violent as in former communist Romania. Unequivocally, the nature of liberal democracy that developed in Western societies (the UK and others), enabled and encouraged a culture of protest among their

citizens to contest political power and consolidate a public awareness around democratic values and human rights, which inevitably, influenced social work development. In essence, the New Social Movements laid the foundations for radical and (later) critical social work to emerge (Payne, 2005), both integrating social justice and social change as core values of their theory.

In parallel with this, the entire politico-socio-economic scene of the 1970s in the UK was quite hectic. The economic crisis hit, the economy collapsed, the unions became more vocal, the welfare state was attacked and discredited (especially by politicians from the right), and the party in power shifted from Conservative to Labour. These crises, correlated with the decline in popularity of Labour, seemed to create some political advantages for the Conservatives, who eventually came into power in 1979.

Structural reproduction (T4)

At this stage, the emergence of radical social work is an important outcome to discuss. According to Ferguson (2009), radical social work appeared as a result of three main factors. First, *political factors* – the failure of the welfare state to tackle poverty, inequality, and unemployment (T1). The second factor was linked to the manifestation of *social and political protests* in the '60s and '70s, from which radical social work incorporated their key philosophy against advanced Capitalism. Thirdly, radical social work appeared *as a reaction to the traditional social work paradigm*, which was incompatible with the vision of the new generation of social workers (T2->3). Therefore, the radical approach in social work brought a new ideology (progressive values such as feminism, anti-racism), political and community action, and willingness to address structural/social and economic problems (T4->1).

The new professional paradigm aimed to address structural inequalities promoted and maintained by the system by transforming how social work is practised, treating issues of

poverty and injustices from the roots (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Ferguson, 2008). In contrast to the casework model, this approach encourages social workers to take a political stance and challenge the status quo. The call of Corrigan and Leonard (1978) claimed that for social workers, political engagement is the way to counterattack the unjustified funding cuts on services, defend the profession from the politicians and media attacks, and nevertheless, reconceptualise the role of the social worker from agent of the state to an agent of change. Essentially, it can be argued that the origins of social work activism described and understood by the UK participants in the present study has their roots in that time. Both, surveys and interviews, illustrate that political and confrontational spirit, as well as a strong motivation and predisposition to address social injustices perpetrated by the system are defining elements of their activism.

“Activism is political I guess, and some kind of political engagement, political activities, understanding of social issues, social justice and trying to take a role in perhaps challenging unfair practices maybe.” (Amy, SWUK)

Although it has never been a dominant approach of social work practice, radical social work has had some powerful impacts and influences on the profession and its professionals. For instance, the number of social workers in trade unions considerably increased in the ‘70s (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009). Further, as claimed by the authors, radical social work led to the development of other approaches in anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices, as well as the rise of critical social work theory. Indeed, there is further evidence of the influence of radical social work on community work. Although it has its origins in the ‘50s, community work made important progress from the ‘60s to ‘80s, and at the same point was considered a method of social work (Kuenstler (1961) cited by Popple (2015)). As per Turbett (2020), community work offered an alternative to social work focused on assessment, risk and production care plans. Instead, Turbett argues that this approach advocated for a practice based

on relationships and partnerships between people, institutions and other stakeholders, prevention, flexibility, and empowerment. However, the radical approach of community work (collective action and social solidarity) did not match with the individualistic state-provided social work services, and in the 1990s, it became an independent activity/discipline that addresses community issues (Popple, 2015).

Overall, it can be argued that the democratised social and political conditions in this period of time encouraged a climate of public and critical expression, which created the possibility for social and political movements to flourish, and implicit for social work to engage with different ideological debates. As per Sev and Avci (2016), social movements have an important educational role – they can shape behaviours (be more politically active), increase critical consciousness (be able to analyse perspective and contexts), or shape values that can lead to transformative processes; an idea proposed by Tanya (SWUK) too. This might explain the more accentuated political engagement of UK social workers compared to their Romanian counterparts. As my research shows, UK social workers appear to have a higher predisposition to participate in political debates or protests.

“I think you can learn a lot by being an activist because, to be an activist, you have to be quite active in, you know, looking at issues and trying to understand them and trying to, you know, think about different arguments and debates and I think you have to develop” (Tanya, SWUK)

To conclude, in this period defined by social “awakening” and agitation, social work recorded essential advancements in terms of practice, scholarship, or debates around the professional ideology, an essential part that is absent from the history of social work in Romania.

7.3.2. Period B (1979 – 1990: *The Rise of Management*)

For this phase, I will shift the discussion from radical social work to Thatcher's governance and its impact on the profession. There are critical social and political factors that led to a profound transformation of social work, quite visible in today's professional practice. This marks the beginning of Neoliberalism and the rise of bureaucracy and managerialism in social work.

Structural conditioning – T1

Regardless of the incredible flair and energy expressed by the adepts of radical social work in the 1970s, in practice, its impact was rather marginal. As stated by Ferguson and Woodward (2009) "the gap between such radical rhetoric and the realities of social work practice is frequently huge" (p. 4). The exception might be community work, which later separated from social work (Popple, 2015). Instead, the progressive values continue to this day within a dedicated but comparatively small community of practitioners and scholars. However, their voices were even more ignored and counter-attacked when Thatcher and the Conservative Party came into power.

Sociocultural interactions (T2->T3)

Margaret Thatcher is well known for stating "there is no such thing as society", an idea which was characteristic of her governmentality. The former Prime Minister pledged for the personal responsibility of each individual as a central political and social creed, advocating that state intervention should be marginal in solving social problems. Under Thatcher's leadership, the state-owned industries were largely privatised, and the welfare state was considerably diminished. Her politics favoured the instauration of Neoliberalism, an ideology whose main pillars are, according to Martinez and Garcia (1997), the rule of the free market, profit deregulation, privatisation, and rejection of the notions of *public good* and *community*.

Thatcher's constant attacks on the welfare state also had direct consequences in the social work field. The idea that social work was costly and ineffective was a dominant discourse of the party in power, which eventually served as an argument to reduce public funding for social services (Dominelli, 2010; Payne, 2005). These cuts in public expenditure gave rise to a "more conditional" social work (based on rationing of services and eligibility criteria), with professionals engaging in "authoritarian" and "punitive" practice, as characterised by Rogowski (2015).

Another significant change is related to the privatisation of social services when at that point in time ('80s), social work reached a level of "deprofessionalisation", or dilution of social work's role and task, with an increasing number of activities being carried out by unqualified social work assistants or other professionals (Payne, 2005). It is important to mention that in the context of social work, "professionalisation" and "deprofessionalisation" are not necessarily opposite concepts; to some extent, they have similar meanings. In the above example, the "deprofessionalisation" of social work in the period of Thatcher refers to the devaluation and marginalisation of social work as an activity that deals with social issues. For Rogowski (2020), deprofessionalisation signifies the increasing regulations and domination of managerialism and control over practitioners' activity. On the other hand, the professionalisation of social work was especially critiqued by radical social work supporters (1970s) because of its target-driven character and less relationship-based. It also increased the worker-client power disparities and reduced the value of clients' knowledge and their own experience (Ferguson, 2008). The same idea of increased professionalisation is also used in the context of increased managerialism, translated into an inability to work directly with service users and imposing "inappropriate claims of superior power and expertise" (Daniel, 2013, p. 396).

Overall, the period of the 1980s seems to be less vibrant in terms of social movements (compared to the 1970s). One of the main causes might be internal conflicts that destabilised the movements; for example, black and/or lesbian women inside the feminist movement, or the different views between the Labour's supporters in relation to political ideals etc. (Nehring, 2007). Thatcher's policy to undermine and demonise trade unions can also be considered a strong tool that minimised collective actions (Jones (BBC), 2013; Towers, 1989). These situations might constitute the reasons behind Thatcher's political hegemony and the less transformative impact of the social movements. In all this political gaming, social work became a collateral victim since it was an easy target of constant political and media discreditation and interference to some extent. Consequently, social work "become increasingly defensive and sought to play down its radicalism" (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009).

Structural reproduction (T4)

The use of neoliberal policies during the Thatcher Era clearly impacted social values, political life and economics. Thatcher was viewed as a reformist and revolutionary leader by some because of the implementation of neoliberal economic policies and encouragement of public enterprise (Bolick, 1995; Letwin, 1992), but she was also criticised for inducing other socio-cultural trends such as a "revolution of home-owners" and increased individualism among British citizens (Hilton et al., 2017). Additionally, critics focused on her economic policies. For instance, the analysis of Albertson and Stepney (2019) shows that, despite her promises and claims, the application of Neoliberalism did not improve the lives of ordinary people (socially or economically). Thatcher was also viewed as a leader that fought to gain social control. For example, her social and economic structures (the infusion of part-time or temporary jobs, decline of manufacturing sectors, restrictive legislation) led to a considerable decline in union membership and influence (Towers, 1989); therefore, in a way, obstructing the creation and consolidation of organised unions meant undermining the capacity and

opportunities of people to protest. No matter what, Thatcher remained one of the most influential political figures of the last century in the UK, with an immense impact on social work and its practice today. Even among the respondents of the present study, her image is negatively depicted:

“[t]hen Thatcher came in, cut [*place*] down, cut the priorities, cut the funding and community education workers hardly exist in [*town*] anymore” (Rudy, SWUK).

In this matter, the turn of the new decade (the 1990s) found social work almost completely transitioned into care/case management, followed fast by the adaptation of university programmes to these new forms of practice (Davis, 2008). Essentially, every sector of social work (working with older people, children, adults, offenders etc.) was aligned to care or case management, which implied a strong focus on reaching indicators and minimising the risks (Harris and White, 2018; Phillips and Waterson, 2002).

7.3.3. Period C (after 1990 – *The Consolidation of Neoliberalism*)

This last *Period* of the UK analysis, building on the foregoing, seeks to provide explanatory context to the results of the present study. Despite the social, political, or economic dynamics from the 1990s until the present, I argue that the main aspects of social work activism, (e.g., activism interpretation/theorisation/practice and core values of social engagement), fundamentally originated in and were shaped by the previous two *Periods*. This *Period* is primarily an extension of what was built previously during the New Social Movements period and Thatcherism, but it also presents its own particularities.

Structural conditioning – T1

The socio-cultural conditions shaping this final *Period* are circumscribed by the outcomes (T4) in the preceding era. At this stage, the beginning of the 1990s, we find Neoliberalism embedded as a core of the political and economic framework of the UK, which stands on an ascendent economic trend, but with Thatcher leaving office before her mandate finishing, due to the continuous and increasing political and social discontent addressed to her (Alderman and Carter, 1991). As claimed by one of my interviewees, “*Lots of historians have said that demonstrations led to the eventual resignation of the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher*” (Mark, SWUK). Eventually, the Conservative legacy was carried on by a new leader, John Major, who subsequently won the parliamentary elections in 1992.

In relation to social work, as shown in the previous phase, the profession had become an integral part of public management, with little capacity to affect change.

Sociocultural interaction – T2 -> T3

Although Margaret Thatcher left office in 1990, her political legacy continued to influence British society. Arguably, the subsequent Governments (including New Labour Party) were considered an extension of her policy, namely the consolidation of Neoliberalism – characterised by a commitment to free-market, intensive privatisation, maintaining a low rate of public expenditure and low inflation (Jessop, 2003). Additionally, the period of the 1990s is marked by some major and accelerated socio-cultural changes. As Childs (2006) observes, the secularisation of Britain ascended, more women became engaged in public life and all economic sectors (but the maternity benefits and lack of nursing are still not very consistent), homosexuality became more visible and accepted in the mainstream, the personal usage of personal computers increased rapidly. The same period witnessed an increase in environmental activist movements and youth civic organisations (Nehring, 2007). These are some of the aspects that illustrate the acceptance of progressive values and orientation to civic engagement

within British society – a process of consolidation of democracy that happened more organically and earlier than in Romania, a state which shows more resistance and less receptiveness towards such progressive values. Another example on this matter can be related to views on homosexuality, which was legally decriminalised in Romania only in 2001, compared to the UK, decriminalised in 1967.

In terms of social work changes in the 1990s, after a lengthy public silence, a new social work activist approach emerged – critical social work. Rooted in radical social work, critical social work appeared as a reaction to the hegemony of Capitalism, the consolidation of managerialism, economic rationalism, and conservative values (Mullaly, 2002). Compared with its predecessor, critical social work aimed not only to address class oppression, but also acknowledged the structural formation of oppression, which encompasses economics, culture, race, gender and so on. The ideology of critical social work is informed by critical, structural, feminist and postcolonial theories (Herz and Johansson, 2011).

The next important event on the UK political scene was related to the electoral success of the New Labour Party in 1997. Initially, it was viewed positively by the social work community, with hopes that the Party's promises to tackle poverty and inequalities would also lead to the opportunity for reform, namely, to challenge and change the current managerial and neoliberal paradigm (Jordan, 2001). Unfortunately, the Government continued the previous regime's policy to consolidate Neoliberalism, and therefore, it had a direct impact on social work. As Jordan (2001) argues, the situation "relegated public-sector social work to a limited role in assessing and managing risks" (p. 527). Therefore, the much-desired reform in the public sector did not happen, even under a Labour administration. Thus, managerialism continued to remain the main professional approach, which meant an accentuated focus on bureaucratic skills rather than professional expertise and a priority on quantifiable outputs rather than on personal and contextual experience or outcomes (McDonald, 2006).

Related to this context, Dustin (2007) makes reference to the concept of the ‘McDonaldisation’ of the social work profession. Developed by Ritzer (1993), McDonaldisation refers to “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world” (p. 1). This translates into social work as a profession prioritising economic efficacy and reducing its activity to service provision, in which social workers are providers of goods (“care”, for instance) and service users become consumers of care (Dustin, 2007). This discussion can also be linked to the idea and the process of (de)professionalisation that begun in the 1970s (see *Period B*), indicating increased managerialism, economic rationalism, and control over the profession.

During the (New) Labour governance, another landmark of professionalisation can be identified, namely, the formal regulation of the social work profession, which started in 2001 with the establishment of regulatory bodies in all four nations of the UK. It culminated with the registration of “social worker” as a protected title, which means individuals cannot legally use the title or work as social workers unless they are qualified, graduated from an approved training/education programme, and are registered with a regulatory body (SWE, n.d.). As per Banks (2012) and Jones (2018), the regulation of social work aims to protect service users and professionals or, arguably, to respond to the lack of trust surrounding social work and gain a better image of the profession among the general population (Banks, 2004). On the one hand, it sets the professional standards of practice (roles, professional conduct, professional standards), ensures the protection of the status and professional identity, and also makes sure that qualified people are engaged in the activity. On the other hand, it is argued that these regulations restrain practice, and by pushing professionals to “play by the book” in complicated life contexts, potentially resulting in less desirable outcomes for their activity or service users (Meleyal, 2014).

There are also other points of criticism towards the impact of regulation. One of them refers to the difficulty to act ethically or deal with ethical dilemmas when the reality of everyday practice requires careful consideration, more complex than solving them as the Codes imply (Hugman and Carter, 2016; Shdaimah and Strier, 2020). An additional point relates to concerns that strong regulation leads, in fact, to more managerialism, bureaucratisation, and oppressive measures to control and reduce the activist character of the profession (Payne, 2002), a view that is common among the U.K. social workers interviewed in this study.

“I do think there’s this overarching feeling that sometimes the Code of Practice you’ll see are actually like policing you, so watching you and I think we’re conscious of things that we do in case it’s brought up in a practice question”
(Lana, SWUK)

“The Code of Practice, in my mind, was brought in as a managerial tool so that if they want to get rid of somebody, they can. They’re so broad, they can find a way to get rid of you.” (Rudy, SWUK)

The next event that should be mentioned in *Period C* is the hit of the economic crisis. Subsequently, strong austerity measures were implemented with significant negative consequences for the social work profession. Here, can be mentioned the implementation of drastic funding cuts for social services, but also the overall impact on people, such as increasing social and economic inequality, effects that have added even more pressure to the social work sector, due to the increasing demand for social work input. The implementation of austerity measures in the sector during the economic crisis continued with repeated years of funding cuts to services, leading to a professional crisis. For one, the cuts affected the quality of services. As revealed by UNISON (2019), 63 % of social workers believe that the local councils do not have the capacity to deliver proper services. The workload increased, and only 17 % of

professionals affirm that they can manage their tasks timeously. However, 80 % of the respondents work over their contracted hours. Nevertheless, according to the same source, the stress among professionals is prevalent, and more than half of the social workers consider leaving the job.

Even before the economic crisis, the (new) radical social work re-emerged, but this time, the movement is globally active (not just in the English-speaking countries as in the previous wave in the 1970s). The *Manifesto for a New Engaged Practice* elaborated by the Social Workers Action Network (SWAN), pledges to challenge the neoliberal view and asks for a more progressive and anti-oppressive social work (Jones, Ferguson, Lavalette, and Penketh, 2004 – re-stated in 2011). In fact, there is a common ground between critical and radical social work scholars advocating for reforming the profession. However, their advocacy for a more anti-oppressive, client-empowerment, anti-bureaucratic activity seems to have little effect within statutory social work, as the need for professional regulation increased, and therefore, bureaucratic practices and workloads expanded as well. A more independent practice, including engagement with activism, has been observed among professionals working within the non-governmental sector (Jordan, 2001). As stated by the UK respondents, people working in the third sector might face fewer institutional pressures and enjoy a more autonomous practice, as perceived by both, those working in non-governmental organisations (Julia, SWUK) and public services (Diana, SWUK):

“I decided to work in the voluntary sector because there is the only place where I will be able to challenge” (Julia, SWUK)

“I’m not going to put my career on the line for the sake of a protest or something like that, so we have to remain quite guarded, but I think that goes for a number of people in the organisation.” (Diana, SWUK)

Structural reproduction T4

This phase (the last three decades) registered some crucial landmarks in UK social work. Firstly, and arguably the most important, the engulfment of social work by and in Neoliberalism, followed by professional regulation commencing in 2001. These processes had strong impacts on the profession; although some things have changed since 2011, the practice of social work has still strong ties to managerialism.

“In the extensive reforms that have shaped today’s work environment, the professional account of social work practice in which relationships play a central role appears to have been gradually stifled and replaced by a managerialist account that is fundamentally different. The managerialist approach has been called a “rational- technical approach”, where the emphasis has been on the conscious, cognitive elements of the task of working with children and families, on collecting information, and making plans.” (Munro, 2011, p. 36).

Secondly, the (re)emergence of two major activist approaches – critical social work and (new) radical social work, which demonstrates that social work activism is still alive and an assumed facet of the profession.

The first point is highly prevalent in my research. As the interviews and surveys illustrate, social workers are feeling overwhelmed by their workloads generated by administrative/managerial activity. Many affirm that the system itself (shaped by neoliberal practices) makes the work more bureaucratic and time-consuming, and therefore, does not allow a meaningful engagement with transformative/activist social work. Over 70 % of the respondents recognised that they do not have enough time for activism, and just about 50 % consider that the institutional framework is a significant obstacle in this matter. More

problematic is that social workers are also encompassed by the system and subsequently become part of the problem. One of the participants evocatively claims that “you’re literally just an arm of the state” (Hellen, SWUK), and basically an accomplice of managerialism.

However, social workers find ways to express their activism and develop anti-oppressive tactics informed by critical and radical social work, including activism in social work as well as activism outside of the profession, but with an impact on the social work field. Some are part of unions and syndicates, some are “*sabotaging*” the system (as per Tanya (SWUK)), many engage in lobbying and advocacy as shown in the survey (75%). These are types of actions characterised by Greensalde et al. (2014) as covert (underground) and overt (open) activism. However, they seem insufficient to activate the real transformational potential of the social work profession.

7.4. Key points of the chapter

The objective of this chapter is to explain the main findings of this mixed-method research through the lens of critical realism. This framework particularly explains how social change occurs, taking into account how structures and human agency interact and how individual and collective reflexivity mediate these processes (Archer, 1995, 2010). Contextually, this investigation provides an account of different mechanisms and factors that influence how social workers in Romania and the UK conceptualise, understand, and practice activism. As illustrated by the findings, social workers in Romania tend to engage in activism that is more associated with *an act of doing good, making a positive change in society*. In the UK, on the other hand, the activism of social workers is more oriented to political aspects, albeit *to change and challenge the system*, which has a direct effect on the interpretation and practice of social work activism.

Also, the theoretical model allowed me to explain the influence of contexts and structures on the individual and collective behaviour of participants. In line with Archer's (1995; 2010) theoretical model, it should be considered that the outcomes T4 (i.e., interpretation and practice of social work activism and its effects), are created by the interactions of the structural and psycho-social mechanisms, T2->T3 (socio-cultural interaction), which in turn, are influenced by the pre-existent socio-politico-cultural contexts T1. Further, I expose a comparative discussion on contexts that illuminate the findings of the present research.

Firstly, the past *political context* was an essential factor that shaped the predisposition of social work activists and their behaviour, and nevertheless, led to the construction of other social and cultural factors and norms, especially in Romania. As has been shown previously, the instauration of the communist dictatorship in Romania (*Period A*) suppressed, at societal and individual level, the ability and willingness of people to organise, criticise, or challenge the authorities by implementing state terror, social control, or censorship (Gilberg (1990) cited in Gallagher,1991; PCACDR, 2006, Szabo, 2012). To a great extent, this attitude was transferred to the younger generations even after the collapse of the regime (David, 2015) (see *Period B* and *C*). Naturally, social workers in Romania were affected, too. This resulted in the non-conflictual approach to activism (or the absence of it), or/and hesitation to confront the authorities and to be political. As resulted from the surveys and interviews, it became clear that social workers in Romania are more likely to engage in activities that are less political and conflictual, for example, volunteering or organising charitable events.

On the other hand, the UK was exposed to a long and continuous democratic regime (over 130 years, according to Boix et al. (2018)), including a strong tradition of trade unions, free elections, and political freedom. The political climate also made the rise of the new social movements possible (*Period A*), which eventually enhanced a culture of protest among the

British citizens, and more particularly influenced the development of a more politically oriented social work profession (*Period A, B, and C*). Consequently, the UK social workers who participated in this research (surveys, interviews) have shown a more accentuated predisposition to engage in politically-connected activities, such as lobbying, demonstrations, and protests and were also open to challenging the authorities (the status quo). This transition happened despite the negative impact of Thatcherism on collective actions and the social work profession (*Period B*), but still with a strong ethos of radical and critical social work.

Another discussion related to this political context, which is more prevalent in Romania, refers to the inconsistency of the political class. After the fall of Communism, the political elites who proceeded failed to fulfil the people's aspirations for a better life (*Period B and C*). This was revealed through a gradual decrease of trust in politicians (LARICS, 2020; Tufis, 2013), which eventually developed into a political alienation syndrome as proclaimed by Tatar (2016) – manifesting as a lack of interest in politics, reduced hopes in politicians and detachment from the political spectrum. It might explain why only 14 per cent of the Romanian respondents declared that they are involved in political issues. Moreover, this detachment from politics might be a reason why, when discussing their own inspirations for activism, the Romanian interviewees have not indicated any political figure.

In contrast, although at the societal level in the UK, the citizens' trust in the government oscillated in the last few decades (BSA, 2020), there is a stronger political culture than in Romania. This becomes clear when only comparing the voting turnout in elections. However, there are a few other essential differences reflected in this study, too. A proportion of 54% of the UK survey respondents declared that they are involved in political issues, and moreover, eight out of 15 interview participants are members of political parties, syndicates, or radical professional organisations (i.e., SWAN). The political culture and interest are also reflected through the fact that UK social workers nominated political figures as inspirational role models.

Basically, the overall predisposition towards political engagement in both societies explains the greater and lesser political engagement or political influence of social work activism in both jurisdictions.

Further, I discuss *social contexts* that shaped social work activism in terms of its understanding and practice. In my view, the manifested contributions of social movements in western countries such as the UK since the 1960s (*Period A*) led to the cultivation of a culture of protest, and essentially, encouraged people to stand up for the causes they care about (*Period A, B, and C*). According to Sev and Avci (2016), exposure to social movements can increase critical consciousness, which can be understood as an ability to analyse different perspectives and views. In this sense, with the rise of new social movements, there was also an opportunity to reflect and spread more awareness about injustice and oppression, which essentially was echoed by the main narrative among the UK participants, who described activism/social work activism through the concepts of social (in)justice and challenging the oppression.

“Activism is about recognising that there’s an imbalance and trying to and using yourself, your voice to address it and make it right.” (Tanya, SWRO)

This “commodity” was possible for Romania only after the fall of Ceausescu (*Period B and C*); and even then, the free mass demonstrations faced hostilities instrumentalised by those in power (see *Period B* about the protests right after ‘90s). The short and (sometimes) unpleasant history of civic and political participation might be a reason to consider that there is not a clear understanding of activism on a societal level, as indicated by Adina (SWRO).

“[...] activism is not so well understood in our country. We do not necessarily have such a long and clear history of activism, and then participation is kind of limited” (Adina, SWRO).

If in the UK, the experience of social movements created a favourable context for nurturing progressive values and the culture of protest (Sev and Avci, 2016). By contrast, the lack of exposure might have opposite effects in terms of participation and values. A general overview across Europe shows that western countries (including the UK - 17%) are less likely than Eastern European countries (including Romania - 66%) to oppose gay marriage, abortion or people of other religions (Pew RC, 2018). In the same study, the Eastern European countries are described as more religious than the Western European countries. This brings to the fore of the influence of the cultural aspects on social workers' interpretation and practice of activism.

In this respect, the findings around *religion* (or religious factors) were a noticeable topic in Romania. As argued above, the former Communist countries in Europe are generally more prone to embrace conservative and religious beliefs. In the particular case of Romania, highlighting the generally high level of religiosity and the overall influence of the Church in society, was primarily exposed in the *Period B* and *C* of the analysis of the Romanian context. This influence was revealed in the interviews, where *God* and *faith* were identified among the motivations, inspirations, and values of activism. To another extent, the fact that religious values are prevalent in Romanian society might be the reason why activism is often associated with *an act of doing good* in society or an *act of goodness for people*, as suggested by the Abrahamic philosophy. In essence, this encompasses the non-conflictual narrative on activism as well as the pro-social character of it. In contrast, the UK view on activism is defined by a more conflictual and political narrative.

Another critical influence on social work activism in both countries is connected to the *history of the social work profession*. As presented, in the UK, the political support invested in the profession through the consolidation of the welfare state after the WW2 was essential in developing social work education and practice (*Period A*). Following, the emergence of radical and critical social work (*Period A* and *B*) – despite little influence in practice – seems to have

a relevant ideological impact in the present (*Period C*). As an effect, the findings of the present study show a high tendency of the UK respondents to challenge the present practice paradigm and urge for a more transformative and political approach of the profession, as pledged by radical and critical social work (Ferguson 2008; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Jones et al., 2004).

“[...] Looking at the systemic nature of social work, looking at the structures not just the social work profession, but how welfare is formed, democracy and equal representation, community groups. That’s what social work activism should be involved in. What is going to give people good and fair democracy. And that is when you see society changes and not an individual agent of change”
(Richard, SWUK)

In contrast, in Romania, the political power suppressed the profession for a period of almost 50 years (*Period A*), and therefore, there were much fewer opportunities to engage with ideological debates and practice approaches in social work. After the fall of communism, the re-establishment of the social work sector had the difficult mission of addressing the urgent issues inherited by the communist legacy (*Period B*), and moreover, to develop its professional structure and build its identity (*Period B and C*). The desire of Romanian social workers to develop the social work profession was frequently expressed through this research. For instance, 51 % of the survey respondents indicated improving the social works system as a reason for their activism. Additionally, the interviewees also suggested introducing new services and promoting the image of the social work professions among the most important enthuses of their activism.

“[...] to introduce a new service in the harm-reduction sphere” (Iulian, SWRO)

“[...] to develop new programs and projects for social work in hospitals”
(Ciprian, SWRO)

“[...] to promote and improve the image of social work profession in society”
(Laur, SWRO)

A significant element of the social work profession’s history is the instauration of Neoliberalism. Appearing at different times because of the distinct political regimes, Neoliberalism emerged in the ‘80s in the UK and in Romania after the collapse of Communism (*Period B*) with devastating effects on social work, leading to funding cuts, privatisation of social services, and increased managerialism (Davis; 2008; Dominelli, 2010; Harris, 2014; Payne, 2005; Rogowski, 2015). In the next *Period C*, the penetration of Neoliberalism into social work led to an increased professionalisation (regulations) and maintained managerialism, reinforcing casework as the central and accepted practice paradigm of social work (Rogowski, 2008, Lazar et al. 2018a). The effects of Neoliberalism in obstructing activism were highlighted by both cohorts of social workers. As an illustrative example, crowded workloads and bureaucracy were invoked.

“[...] bureaucracy only makes it difficult for us both as professionals and diminish the beneficiary’s trust in our services and in us. (Ciprian, SWRO)

“Bureaucracy, I think, is the biggest challenge” (Karen, SWUK)

Resulting from these, other issues appeared to impede participation in activism, such as lack of time, fear of professional marginalisation, high level of stress and burn-out. Overall, the impact of managerialism seems to be primarily reflected through the reduced time of social workers to practice activism. In this sense, the survey reveals that 67% (SWRO) and 71% (SWUK) declared that they could not participate in activism because of a *lack of time*.

In addition, as mentioned by participants in both countries, the rigid institutional setting of social work might encourage individuals to cultivate a resistance to change. Although this might be an effect of the cultural/social norms, a significant number of social workers in both countries emphasised the mentalities of people working in the public sector as a significant barrier to activism. It was also emphasised that as a social worker working in a highly regulated environment, might face reduced autonomy and a high risk of becoming assimilated in the system. Overall, all these impediments might limit the capacity of individuals to participate in forms of social work activism, whether inside of the profession or outside of it (e.g., advocacy, active citizenship).

“When you become so institutionalised that you’re literally just an arm of the state and you’re not challenging internal practices anymore” (Hellen, SWUK)

Despite these obstacles to social work activism produced by Neoliberalism, there is an evident discrepancy between the countries regarding the awareness and criticism towards managerialism and neoliberal ideology. As illustrated by the findings, social workers in the UK referred more often to the devastating effects of Neoliberalism in social work and how managerialism and casework can affect their engagement in social work activism, and moreover, create distance between social workers and the core of the profession that gravitates around values such as social justice and social change. This may be a direct influence of radical and critical social work that encompasses an anti-capitalist/anti-neoliberal philosophy (Jones et al., 2004). On the other hand, this aspect might be explained by the lack of political awareness among SWRO exposed in this study.

“Social work is becoming more and more bureaucratic and administrative and technical. Whereas the underlying social work values, which one of them is social justice. I think you’re seeing that less and less now and I think, you know,

you are having fewer social work activists actually taking on board that role of seeing social work as something that we can do to transform society. I think it's very much now...on that individual case by case, family by family role.”

(Mark, SWUK)

To sum up, this analytical chapter aimed to explain how different social, cultural and political contexts and factors in different periods have influenced the social work profession and, subsequently, social work activism in both jurisdictions. As indicated, there are direct correlations and implications of political climates in terms of supporting or dismissing the social work profession and its further developments. Understanding cultural and social contexts are also essential in unpacking the personal and collective motivations and values that shape the activist behaviour of social workers in both countries. Finally, comparatively reviewing the history of social work provides strong insights to understand the ideological particularities that underpin each country.

CHAPTER 8 – DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the present study's findings, emphasising its empirical, methodological, and philosophical contribution to the fields of social work, activism, and social work activism. In the first part of the chapter, I revisit the existing gaps in the literature and research and emphasise the relevance of studying and exploring social work activism. Further, I present the stages of the analytical framework and how it facilitated the process of answering the research questions. Then, I discuss the possible implications of this study in terms of ideology understanding, research, and practice of social work [activism], policy practice, and research implications. In the end, I point out the limitations of the present study.

8.1. Situating this study within existing research

As depicted in the literature review, it is clear that activism is a complex concept with no universally agreed definition. However, based on the analysis of the literature, I identified two main understandings of the concept of activism. On the one hand, it can mean a concrete and identifiable act/event of social and political protest (Dumitrascu, 2015; Harris and Schwedler, 2016; Taib, 2006). On the other hand, more commonly, activism can denominate a broader phenomenon – a process that engages diverse actions and implications contributing to social change (Bitusikova, 2015; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Koffel, 2003; Maxey, 1999). As the analysis has shown, this latter view on activism includes essential components that form the process of activism, such as initiators, ideological elements (values, motivations, identities, goals) and instrumental actions and transformations that take place within this process (Bitusikova, 2015; Cammaerts, 2007; Kluch, 2020; Maxey, 1999; Niblett, 2017).

Additionally, activism has diverse applications and, therefore, diverse classifications. It can be associated with a domain (e.g., social, political, environmental, cultural), or a cause (AIDS, disability, ethnic minorities, feminism, LGBTQ+ and so on). As the existing research shows, activism can also be

rooted and developed in everyday life. For instance, scholars such as Harrebye (2016) and Roth (2016) provide an in-depth analysis of contemporary activism, arguing that there are diverse informal and formal ways of engaging with activism and enabling social change. These discussions helped me to understand the apparent dichotomy between professionalisation [formal] versus everyday [informal] activism, and further, link and develop my analysis around social work activism.

The literature review reveals that the study of social work activism has a dedicated niche, especially in the English-speaking countries (e.g., Greenslade et al. (2014) and Mendes (2007) in Australia; Baines (2011) and Smith (2011) in Canada). In the UK, the topic is indirectly approached via discussions around critical and radical social work (e.g., Bailey and Brake, 1975; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Ferguson et al., 2018; Harris, 2009; Ioakimidis and Lavalette, 2011; Payne, 2014; Turbett, 2013, 2014). In addition, research in the UK context has also produced a substantial amount of data regarding the effects of the neoliberal agenda on the social work profession (e.g., Ravalier and Boichat, 2018; Ravalier et al., 2020; Rogowski, 2015, 2018; 2020). On the other hand, in Romania, only a few studies illustrate the social work profession's challenges with Neoliberalism (e.g., Lazar, 2015a; Lazar et al. 2018a), but there is a lack of research approaching the activist component of social work.

The existing research explores theoretically and empirically the social workers' experiences as activists around topics such as motivations for activism, personal or professional values and identities, and further, how these factors influence their activist behaviour. However, these works offer limited insights into the collective aspect of social work activism or broader historical, social, cultural, and political influences – a gap that was addressed through this research. This is a significant addition to the existing knowledge because it provides different perspectives and understandings of social work activism and activism in two European contexts. Therefore, this inquiry adds another layer of understanding of the complexity of social work activism as a process resulting from social, cultural, and political interactions and reproductions. Further, this research provides an analytical framework for professionals and scholars to enable actions of social change to inform by their particular contexts. Given the circumstances of the social work profession in regard to increased regulations, austerity

measures, and exacerbation of injustices, the activist engagement of social workers should be primordial.

As social workers are part of a recognised profession that advocates for human rights, their work might be classified as a type of formal [professional] activism (Roth, 2016); however, as illustrated by research, they also act outside of their professional field (Gray et al., 2002; Greenslade et al., 2014; Mizrahi and Dodd, 2013; Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010; Smith, 2011). In that context, their activism can vary from simple acts, such as voting, to organising protests or working on legislation in the social domain. As depicted in the present research, social workers in Romania and the UK choose to engage in formal forms of activism (e.g., advocacy and lobbying, picket lines), as well as informal activist practices which are not directly related to social work, such as volunteering, political campaigns, or environmental demonstrations.

Moreover, social workers are in a challenging position to balance their roles and responsibility within the professional work, which to an extent, can determine their positions as activists (agents of change) or non-activists (agents of control/state employee) (Reeser, 1992). It is acknowledged that the state, controlled by neoliberal objectives and practices, is not congruent with the social work profession's mission as pledged by the IFSW (2014). As mentioned, numerous studies have emphasised the negative effects of Neoliberalism on the social work field, including increased managerialism, bureaucratisation, marketisation of social work services, lack of meaningful engagement with the service users, and involvement in activism and systemic change (e.g., Rogowski, 2015, 2018; 2020; Lazar, 2015a; 2018a). To overcome these obstacles, the literature suggests that social workers should engage in radical practices, which, as suggested by Baines (2011), would mean thinking critically, being resourceful, and acting ethically.

Despite these insights, there is a limited discussion about how social workers reflect on their role as activists and change-makers, especially in Romania. This topic was a prevalent theme discussed by the respondents of this research, indicating that although, theoretically, social workers should be activists by default due to the fundamental nature and purpose of their role; however, in practice, there is a distinction between those roles due to the fact that many of them are not able or prefer not to engage

in activism because of the organisational constraints or fear of negative consequences such as professional marginalisation, lack of support, frustration. This point proves that despite the practical limitations and negative consequences, there is a high awareness among social workers in both jurisdictions regarding the potentially transformative role of their profession.

Another important aspect explored in this study referred to the impact of the internet and online tools on social work activism. As discussed in the literature review, new technology has made it possible for any individual, depending on their interest, to engage in activism and contribute to potential social transformations (Akram, 2018; Bond et al., 2012; Gomez and Kaiser, 2019; Lewis et al., 2014; Schardie, 2018). However, online activism has its own limitations since it can facilitate repressive reactions such as manipulations, fake news, or hate speech (Alfifi et al., 2018; Carlson et al., 2017; Ekman, 2014; Iacobucci, 2019). In social work, online media has enabled the diversification of social services, such as online therapy or e-consultations (Reamer, 2013), but it also facilitated the creation of online professional communities and a platform of sharing experience at a global scale (Batista, 2013; Boddy and Dominelli, 2017; Caleria, 2018; Stanfield et al., 2017). Yet, the literature does not provide many insights on the activism of social workers mediated by digital means. In this respect, looking through the activism lenses, this study shows that internet tools play an essential role in organising the activist actions undertaken by social workers in both countries. Additionally, it was shown that online offers the necessary platform to inform, build alliances, and promote initiatives and causes supported by the social workers.

Overall, the analysis of prior theoretical and empirical research has identified several gaps in knowledge in regard to the ideological exploration of social work activism, its collective component, interactions of individual/collective social work activism with other macro-dimensions such as cultural and social settings or online means. In this respect, this research advances the current scholarship on the topic by (1) exploring the cross-national interpretations and manifestations of social work activism; (2) engaging with an analysis of the internal and external mechanisms that might shape the understanding and practice of social work activism in Romania and the UK.

Utilising a critical realist research design, this study incorporated three stages of analysis in order to unpack the mechanisms interpreted from the data. As per McEvoy and Richards (2006), a critical realist approach engages a broader understanding of personal experiences and collective processes. In other words, these causal mechanisms experienced at the individual, collective, or structural levels are not usually observable, but they are experienced and directly responsible for the visible effects in the social world. According to Bhaskar (1986), the scope of understanding these mechanisms and processes is to lead to the emancipation of humanity, which concretely refers to challenging oppression and engaging with social justice. Therefore, this investigation explores a progressive phenomenon through an innovative research paradigm developed for this study.

8.2. Answering the research questions

While the existing literature, outlined above, highlights the complexity of the concept and practice of activism and social work activism, it does not offer an explanatory framework that emphasises the individual, collective, and structural factors that facilitate those phenomena in different settings. By adopting a critical realist approach that situates social work activism in two different political, cultural, and social contexts, the current study aimed to address this gap. The following discussions comprise the main findings and original contributions.

Starting from the objective of *exploring and explaining the contexts and dynamics of social work activism phenomenon in Romania and the UK*, the first question had a high relevance since it directly approached the aim of this thesis – *How do social workers from the UK and Romania conceptualise and practice activism and social work activism?* It also included sub-questions, such as *indicating the difference between being a “regular” social worker and being a social work activist*. As depicted from the literature, the findings also have shown that activism, and subsequently social work activism, are complex concepts. Yet, some new ideas emerged from the data. Firstly, in both countries, activism refers to an act of positive

change in society. It can have a political charge (the UK) or more pro-social [apolitical] meaning in Romania. In this sense, the surveys revealed that social workers in Romania are more prone to engage in activities such as volunteering and charitable work, while the UK professionals are more inclined to participate in lobbying and advocacy or demonstrations. This provides evidence that, on the one hand, social workers activating in a context with a history of increased political freedom are more willing to engage with political matters, while on the other hand, in countries with a certain history of political restriction, the involvement of social workers in political issues is lower (Chui and Gray, 2004). Further, as illustrated in the present work, the political context can have a significant impact on how social workers interpret activism, the role of social workers, and moreover, can determine individual social workers' predispositions and motivations to be activists.

In terms of social work activism, both cohorts recognised the activist dimension as a part of the social work profession. However, the separation between the two entities was acknowledged, in the sense that social work activism was associated with operations underpinned by progressive values (empowerment, social justice, human right), while the non-activist part of social work was connected to the administrative side of the profession (e.g., working on caseload). Yet, some actions undertaken at the individual level (e.g., working overtime, individual resistance to the regulatory framework) are still considered as a part of social work activism because their goal is to challenge norms, institutions, and provide beneficial outcomes for the service users. These aspects, further, determine the tension regarding the activist identity and role of social workers [aka agent of change vs state employee] and draw a clear line between how social work should be (following the IFSW global definition), and the present practice with increased restrictions imposed by the neoliberal agenda.

Another essential insight that emerged from this study shows that a spectrum of values can influence the activism of social workers, from ideas inculcated by religion (e.g.,

compassion, doing good, altruism) to what are characterised as new progressive and posthumanist ideas, such as care for the environment and animal rights. Yet, most of the participants share an appreciation for the values incorporated in the professional codes of ethics and practice – for example, respect for human dignity, confidentiality, equality, and equity; confirming that, in fact, the social work profession has a core set of values aiming for a fairer society.

The findings reveal the complex relationship that exists between professional identity as a social worker and individual identity (Smith, 2011), suggesting that those who engage in activism as social workers might be more pre-disposed to activism outside of the profession. However, it is important to note that someone may be an activist as a citizen, but because of institutional obstacles, their activism as a social worker is restricted. These findings are highly significant since they emphasise the complex relationship between social work, personal identity, and the structural context in which they develop.

Overall, the analysis suggests that social work activism is a domain complicated to locate because it depends on different indicators and contextual factors. For instance, as evidenced by the findings of this study and confirmed by the literature, social work activism has different levels of understanding. It could relate to *activism in social work* indicating actions that are fundamentally related to the professional field; and *activism by social workers*, extended to activities that can be undertaken outside of the social work area that may be indirectly beneficial for the profession and/or service users because social workers act to comply with an agenda focused on social change and social justice. In essence, both forms of social work activism align with the pledge of global definition (IFSW, 2014) and its scope and mission exceed the regulated professional area. By using these analytical lenses, the present study provides a novel and holistic way of understanding and conceptualising social work activism, which is not discussed in the existing literature.

In regard to the second question, *What are the motivations and other personal attributes that encourage the engagement of social workers in activism/social work activism?* The findings illustrate that the motivations of social workers in both jurisdictions stand on similar pillars – (1) to comply with personal beliefs and values; and (2) to obtain personal, professional, and societal outcomes. For the first point, (1) beliefs and values – life experiences and educational background played an important role in developing values that encourage engagement in activism by the social workers interviewed. This is a new piece of knowledge for the European context that, for instance, is only discussed in studies related to Australian and Canadian contexts (Greenslade et al., 2014; Mendes, 2007; Smith, 2011). More specifically, in this category, obtaining *benefits for the self, profession, and society* were essential motivators. The findings of this thesis have shown that the participants referred to personal and professional benefits, such as finding meaning and a sense of belonging, improving skills, or understanding the world better. The benefits for the profession were more frequently mentioned by the Romanian participants. They often referred to developing better legislation and services and improving and promoting the image of the social work profession. These different nuances in perceiving the benefits of activism, in fact, are significant because they demonstrate the desire of Romanian social workers to contribute to the consolidation of the social work profession in their country; while in the UK this was not necessarily a strong motivation since the profession has been established for longer, although it does not enjoy a positive image in the eye of the general public, as shown in the literature (Jones, 2012; Penhale and Young, 2015). Nevertheless, the benefits for society are seen as a direct or intended consequence of the activist behaviour that is characterised by actions in pursuit of social transformation, which essentially represent the main motivation for people to pursue a career in social work (Stevens et al., 2012).

Subsequently, the third question, *What kinds of structural factors enable or constrain the engagement of social workers in activism/social work activism?* found out that the limitations imposed by the professional framework, underpinned by the neoliberal agenda, represent an important barrier to the activism of social workers in both countries. Examples can be enumerated: bureaucracy, high volume of caseloads, rigid legislations, and policies that restrict social workers' decisions. The consequences of these administrative requirements resulted in a lack of time, and as indicated in the survey (67% (Ro) and 71% (UK)), one of the main obstacles restricting their participation in activism. This data is consistent with the existing literature, which points out the limitations created by the Neoliberalism, in terms of activist practice (Greenslade et al., 2014; Mendes, 2017) or negative impacts on social workers and service users, including burn-out, reduced interaction practitioner-client, or the low trust of people in social service (e.g., Calhoun et al., 2014; Hussein, 2015; Jordan, 2001). Overall, these findings illustrate that despite cultural, political, and social differences, social workers face the same institutional pressures and challenges, rooted in Neoliberalism.

Other structural obstacles identified relating to cultural and institutional norms developed in the professional settings. The participants in both jurisdictions indicated the rigidity (resistance to change) that defines the work environment in the public service, which subsequently coerces social workers to be submissive to the state apparatus, and therefore, less likely to challenge the old order or engage in more transformative approaches to practice. Some participants in Romania emphasised the rigid mentality and resistance to change of people as common characteristics of overall society or culture. As illustrated through the critical realist framework analysis, this might be the consequence of the long history of political and social oppression under the Communist dictatorship [pages 194-209].

Despite these constraining factors, some stakeholders were identified as positively influencing activist participation among social workers. For instance, several participants in

both countries suggested universities (academic environment) as places of initiation into and encouragement for activism. Additionally, the activists' networks and collaborators were seen as important resources for consolidating and enabling social workers' activist behaviours. This is another added knowledge that proves the importance of academic institutions and the involvement of the university staff in shaping the values and vision of the future social workers by encouraging a practice aligned with the social work mission of IFSW (2014, 2018), and inspiring and interest/passion for critical and radical social work and activism.

Finally, the findings on the last question – *What is the influence and impact of online settings on the engagement of social work activists in both jurisdictions?* – prove the relevance of online and internet tools on the activity of social work professionals, but also on their activist initiatives (Boddy and Dominelli 2017; Caleria, 2018; Sen et al., 2021). As revealed from both methods of data collection (online surveys and interviews), social workers use online means to gain information that influences their priorities and practices, collaborate with other professionals, and develop and promote their own campaigns. The respondents are aware of the powerful impact (as benefits or/and risks) that online/social media can have not only on the profession but on society as a whole. However, there was a common opinion that the internet and its innovation can serve as a crucial tool to foster social transformation, as the existing literature suggested (Bond et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2014; Murthy, 2018).

The following section provides some relevant discussions concerning the present study's empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. It also offers meaningful insights on the topic of social work activism in general, as well as advancing some debates regarding particular layers of the phenomenon.

8.3. Empirical and theoretical contributions

The findings show that the phenomena of activism and social work activism do not have a linear meaning or interpretation, confirming the existing narrative about these concepts (e.g., Baines, 2011; Greenslade et al., 2014; Mendes, 2007). However, by investigating different influences and mechanisms that shape the manifestation of activism and social work activism in Romania and in the UK, this research has revealed different aspects of how they impact the social work profession, as well as social workers. Referring to prior research, social work activism was mainly characterised as a radical and critical reaction to the neoliberal hegemony or associated with activities with a political purpose (Greenslade et al., 2014; Mendes, 2007; Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010; Smith, 2011). Yet, this study revealed that, in fact, social work activism can exceed these above perspectives, which can be considered as “western view”, and additionally, through the lens of critical realism, it was shown that various, political, and social-cultural contexts and conditions shape and influence the nature of social work activism. The significance of this is that it illuminates some variables that can lead to a better understanding of the studied phenomenon and, subsequently, a better instrumentalisation of it, especially in the case of Romania, with little research into this topic.

8.3.1. The interpretation of activism

The exploration of activism in the literature has shown that its existing definitions are incomplete, and they do not comprise whole definitory elements. For instance, these definitions often refer simply to activities or set of activities seeking to impact and produce changes at the individual, collective, or structural level, and elide the processual dynamics such as the roles of activists, values, and internal and external process that happens inside of the activist movement such as solidarity, critical reflection, and psycho-social connections between activists (e.g., Bitusikova, 2015; Fuad-Luke; 2009). In this respect, as an original contribution

of this study, I elaborated a definition [page 36] incorporating the parts of the process of activism as reviewed in the literature. This definition provides a framework of analysing and understanding activism, which also integrates a critical realist view of internal and external mechanisms that might impact the process of creation and development of this phenomenon. Thus, activism can be defined as:

actions of change driven by initiators/activists (individuals or social groups) that share common values (solidarity, identity, desire, progressive values) and are involved in inter-collective processes (reflecting, challenging, empowering), necessary to allow them to impact a domain (social, political, cultural) in order to reach (a) common goal/s (systemic/organisational/ individual changes).

In addition to previous definitions, this definition illustrates the complexity of the phenomenon and invites an exploration of different nuances to describe and understand activism. This is highly important since in the last few decades activism has exponentially developed and remained a relevant phenomenon in the present societies.

As a core concept of the present study, activism in general terms was a topic of discussion in both online surveys and interviews. The findings around this topic suggest similar conceptual views as in the literature. It is associated with activities specific activities (civic engagement, promotion of ideas and values, lobby, and advocacy) or a set of actions that lead to changes and transformations in social, political, or environmental spheres (Cammaerts, 2007; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Kluch, 2020; Niblett, 2017). Yet, as stated in this thesis, one essential difference between the cohorts shows that activism can be perceived as a more confrontative and political activity (prevalent in the UK), or can be interpreted as a pro-social act (prevalent in Romania). In other words, activism can include actions that challenge and aim to implement

radical change, and on the other hand, it might refer to activities that attempt to repair and improve the existing conditions. Thus, this suggests that the nature of activism can vary in different socio-cultural and political contexts, and therefore, activism might be understood or conceptualised based on specific conditions. This is important to acknowledge because how activism is interpreted might further influence the nature of its development in practice. To an extent, this finding provides a complementary view of the meaning of activism to the contemporary discourse, as it is most often linked to radical and disruptive change and challenge of the status quo (e.g., Fuad-Luke, 2009; Harrebye, 2016).

8.3.2. The interpretation of social work activism

According to the existing literature, social work activism has social justice as a core component (Abramovitz, 1998; Bent-Goodley, 2015; Bott et al., 2016; De Maria, 1997) and as argued in the literature review [page 46], it overlaps with the ethical principles and global definition of the social work profession (IFSW, 2014). Yet, social work activism does not only comprise the traditional framework of the profession but encourages activists to exceed their professional remit in the pursuit of social justice. In this sense, the most frequent forms of social work activism include professionals taking a political stand, as argued or advanced by radical and critical scholars (e.g., Bailey and Brake, 1975; Ferguson et al., 2018; Ioakimidis et al., 2014), as well as opposing or expressing resistance to neoliberal practices (e.g., Gregory, 2010; Greenslade et al., 2014; Strier and Bershtling, 2016). Some empirical studies included actions of civic engagement, such as voting, political rallies, donations as forms of social work activism, which proves the outside professional manifestation of the phenomenon (Chui and Gray, 2004; Gray et al., 2002; Rome and Hoechstetter, 2010).

The present study confirmed these analyses, and it extends existing knowledge by emphasising the influence of socio-cultural factors. As the analysis advanced in this thesis demonstrates, the historical past, cultural and social contexts can shape different narratives on

how social work activism can be interpreted and influence its conceptualisation, nature, or form. Further, I developed two concepts to describe the stance of social work activism and a typology of social work activists [See *Figure 6.1*]. Firstly, as already standard in the literature, including in the UK, it refers to a form of social work activism seeking radical change, engaging a conflictual approach, and progressive values empowering its drive – this was named Fightivism (fight + activism). The second form defines a more collaborative approach that employs traditional values, seeking to mediate and repair the social issues without necessarily conflicting with system/power – this was called Chartivism (charity + activism). Yet, it is essential to mention that, in practice, these forms are not entirely separated, but in fact, they describe only individual and circumstantial situations, which of course, are determined by the structural dimensions and individual reflection of activism in a given context.

In addition, this research adjusts the types of social work activists to the European context, by extending a more nuanced focus on the influence of the cultural and social conditions and collective or personal values, as well as by incorporating a spectrum of both Western and Eastern European models. Building on the two approaches mentioned above, my study contributes with a typology of understanding the identities of social work activists by indicating their dominant style of engagement, depending on their interests, goals, and activities undertaken.

As illustrated, (1) a *reactivist* might be more prone to engage outside of the professional framework, but not much in activities that are considered as typically political. (2) A *formalist* would try to contribute to social wellbeing but within the professional framework. (3) A *reformist* is more preoccupied with the profession's political aspects and legal aspects. Nevertheless, (4) a *revolutionist* takes a radical stance, wishing for a switch of power and ideological paradigm in the political and professional spectrum. Again, these activist identities are not separated in practice, thus there might be a crossover depending on the particular

situations of each social worker; yet social workers might have a higher predisposition to adhere to a specific type of activity or activism, again underpinned by structural circumstances and personal preferences. Overall, this classification provides a significant illustration of the complexity of activist identities in social work and how they are constructed by elements such as personal values and structural settings.

8.3.3. Social work activism as a form of New Social Movement

Numerous scholars have recognised the influence of social movements in the 1960s on the emergence of radical social work theory (e.g., Bailey and Brake, 1975; Ferguson and Woodward, 2009; Reisch, 2013; Thompson, 2002). These social movements were considered by some academics as distinct from the previous movements since their main focus shifted from a motivation of change based on economic reasoning to increased attention on identity and cultural rights – movements that generically were called New Social Movements (Buechler, 1995, 2013; Kriesi, 1989; Pichardo, 1997). As presented in this study through the historical exploration, social work activism has been considerably influenced by the NSM theory, and moreover, I also argue, as another contribution to knowledge, that social work activism can be classified as a *form* of NSM since it complies with the specific characteristics, as elaborated by Buechler (1995, 2013). In this sense, social work activism aligns with Buechler's (1995, 2013) criteria of differentiating NSM from preceding social movements, including aspects such as a commitment to progressive values (as stated in the international pledge (IFSW, 2014. 2018)), a collective identity gravitating around the social work profession (the global networking of IFSW), or a strongly critical view against capitalist domination and the present social order (Spolander et al., 2014). This framework might underpin further implications of exploring and unpacking the phenomenon of social work activism as a sociological and historical occurrence, and moreover, understanding its development can

contribute to building a stronger, visible, and sustainable social work identity, as a community/movement.

8.3.4. Social work activism and online activism

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data related to social work activism manifested online was a gap in the literature. Further, as a result of the lockdown and the practice shift to online, the preoccupation with this topic has increased in terms of debates and empirical studies (e.g., Apgar, 2021; Sen et al., 2021). Although a high proportion of the data for this thesis was collected prior to the global pandemic, it adds some relevant insights. For instance, the surveys reveal that social workers in both jurisdictions used online tools (social media platforms, websites) as the main sources of information even before the lockdown. It also shows that social workers (66 % - Ro; and 54 % - UK) acknowledge the significant impact of social media on their profession (*Table A4* in Appendices).

Despite social and cultural cross-national differences, this study, especially through interviews, suggests very similar views between cohorts in relation to the influences that online media has on activism, their profession, and contemporary societies. For instance, the respondents in both countries are aware of the advantages online tools can bring to the activism domain (fast communication, mobilisation and support, campaigning at a low cost, creating communities of experts), but also its limitations (“illusion of activism” – *slacktivism*). The participants expressed valid concerns about the potential risks of social media, such as hate speech, fake news, and exclusivity of using online tools, which essentially might be harmful to some marginalised communities (e.g., LGBTQ+, older people, Roma). These aspects indicate that in spite of their stance and contexts, online activism has become a common practice across the countries and engages similar applications, confirming other works in the literature (e.g., Cammaerts, 2015; Harp et al., 2012).

8.4. Methodological contributions

This research provides a range of methodological advancements to the field of social work activism by employing a critical realist approach. Although the application of this paradigm in social work research has increased in popularity recently, critical realism is still an underdeveloped methodological approach in the field (Craig and Bigby, 2015). Thus, this study contributes further methodological developments by applying a new innovative theoretical framework to social work research. In so doing, it provides an analytic framework and illustrates how both phenomena (activism and social work activism) can be interpreted through a critical realist lens, as well as advancing a method of analysis of interpreting comparative data. In this respect, this section will provide some insights into evidence of the innovative methodological aspects of this present work.

8.4.1. Critical realist research and social work activism

This study represents a new and in-depth exploration of the phenomenon studied. A few comparative studies have investigated the political participation of social workers in different states, such as Chui and Gray (2004), Gray et al. (2002), who used quantitative methods to identify the prevalence of social workers involved in different activist actions in Australia, Hong Kong, or South Africa. Another comparative and mixed methods research developed by Martinez-Herrero (2017) provides new visions of social work education in England and Spain, yet based on an extensive review of the existing literature, there are no studies exploring social work activism per se in two European countries (with distinct social, cultural, and political climates), using mixed research methods. Moreover, no studies into social work activism have applied a critical realist framework, most of the studies being based predominately on the constructivist paradigm (qualitative studies), which have the limitation to focus on individual reasoning and experience. For instance, the study of Greenslade et al., (2014) offers an in-depth

analysis of lived experiences of social workers engaging with overt and covert activism, but there is limited analysis of how structural factors might influence their activism. On the other hand, in those studies using a positivist approach (quantitative methods) (Chui and Gray, 2004; Gray et al., 2002), there is a lack of evidence of personal factors shaping activist behaviour. Thus, this study, by using a critical realist perspective, comes to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative evidence and provide a more holistic view regarding the internal and external processes that impact the activism of social workers.

As per Bhaskar (1986), we can understand a phenomenon if we unpack the mechanisms, structures, and causal factors that produce it. In line with this, by applying a critical realist design, I identified and analysed mechanisms impacting different levels of understanding and manifestations of social work activism in both countries. As indicated by Houston (2010), I identified psycho-social mechanisms that act on (1) personal level of activists (values, personal experiences, fears, motivations, relational, or spiritual), (2) collective level (professional and group outcomes), and (3) structural level (Neoliberalism, cultural and institutional norms, social media, other stakeholders).

Using a comparative investigation helped me to comprehend and provide social, ideological, and cultural influences, which further allowed unpacking the particularities of the phenomenon studied (Salway et al., 2011; Gharawi et al., 2009). Additionally, utilising a mixed-methods research design enabled a collection of diverse types of data (numeric and experiential) (Zachariadis et al., 2013, Padgett, 2008), which further allowed me to consider and follow a set of views and behavioural patterns comprising social work activism across countries. As a result, I was able to show that there is a prevalent political orientation of social workers in the UK in relation to their understanding and practice of social work activism, or the influence of traditional values among the Romanian social workers and their activist

practice. These findings confirm the validity and potential fruitful insights that a critical realist design can contribute to social work research.

8.4.2. Model of data analysis

The critical realist framework of Danermark et al. (2002) served as a guide for data analysis. Its initial structure of six stages was adapted to a three-stage model, more suitable for the present research since it provides a simplified and comprehensible method to unpack and explain the causal and generative mechanisms influencing social work activism in Romania and in the UK. As a result, the critical realist design for data analysis consisted of (I) *description*, (II) *analytical resolution* and (III) *retroduction, concretisation and contextualisation*. These stages were related to (1) identifying the types of mechanisms influencing social work activism through thematic analysis and interpretation of statistical data, (2) analysing these mechanisms comparatively, and (3) explaining the differences and similarities between the two jurisdictions through the *Morphogenetic Sequence* framework, elaborated by Archer (1995). Applying this model as an analytic framework enabled me to engage with multidimensional approaches over a phenomenon; for example, from capturing individual (personal experiences, motivations, reasoning) and structural perspectives (professional framework, support network, educational influence) to a more in-depth historical, political, cultural and sociological exploration. In other words, critical realism provides an opportunity to analyse the effect of various structures, over time in order to fully understand what shapes and influence a complex phenomenon such as social work activism.

8.5. Practice and policy implications

This research underpins some important points of reflection and potential practical implications. The findings suggest that social workers in both jurisdictions engage in diverse

forms of activism, including out or inside of the professional framework, online or offline, in charitable or political activities, actions of protest, rallies, resistance etc. Despite some contextual differences, these activities stand on a common core – the desire to positively affect the lives of those assisted and to contribute to social wellbeing and social justice. The shared impression of the participants reveals that an activist practice brings numerous personal and professional benefits, yet they also acknowledged potential risks or disadvantages of being an activist. Thus, this study offers an informative perspective for social workers who might be willing to engage more actively in their work, by developing new thinking around personal and professional values, goals, and motivation.

Secondly, this might represent an opportunity for social work practitioners, students, and scholars in Romania and the UK to learn about their own and others' views on activism, and potentially gain new insights into the different ways of being and doing social work activism, as well as encouraging a vision inspired by the social work values as encompassed in the IFSW (2014) definition. Specifically, this might be a chance for social workers in Romania to employ a more political dimension in their work and become more aware of the effects of Neoliberalism in their practice. On the other hand, UK social workers can have a broader perspective on the activist practice and be encouraged to reclaim more firmly their transformational position in society by being more visible and involved in the decision-making and political process that affects the profession. In particular, these learning outcomes would contribute to a more meaningful and improved practice, based on humanitarian values of social justice, human right, social change, offering the opportunity to improve outcomes for service users, and eventually, contributing to a better professional image and identity.

Thirdly, as acknowledged by several participants in each country, the activist stance can be inspired by lectures and events organised during their social work course/education. However, the majority of respondents echoed their wish for more meaningful engagement of

social work education with activism, meaning to include activism into social work curricula, organise specific events, and encourage collective actions of the students as often as possible. These thoughts are reinforced by previous research (see Greenslade 2014; Martinez-Herrero, 2017; Mendes, 2007), claiming that an activist approach promoted during the educational phase might encourage more reflective practice, an attitude toward challenging the neoliberal agenda, and consolidation of meaningful relationships with service users. Thus, this study advances a recommendation for social work educators to consider activism as the core of their teaching since, as voiced by the participants and scholars, it can offer a better perspective about the role of their profession, their relationship with the service users, and about the world in general.

Further, from a policy perspective, this research encourages the professional bodies to take a more activist stance, and pledge for a more activist identity. Being in the position of leadership, professional organisations have the legitimacy and recognition to influence other social workers and promote an image of a profession that holds the necessary knowledge and expertise to understand and challenge oppression, injustice, and social problems and address them. As Bent-Goodley (2015) claims, social work must be on the front line fighting for a more just society, pursuing radical change a shift of paradigm on how the institutions act.

“Social work must lead. Social workers are called to not only be at the table, but also have a collective agenda that advances social change. Using core interpersonal skills, communication skills, and coalition-building skills, social workers are called to bring interdisciplinary leaders together to confront social and economic justice issues.” (p. 102)

Another practical recommendation for professional organisations could relate to organising thematic workshops on activism with different actors, including practitioners, students, academics, and other professionals. Additionally, a continuous process of building activist alliances and networks between different stakeholders can have a meaningful impact on professional practice, as well as the

development of an activist ideology that could shape social work activity. Nevertheless, in order to contribute to a stronger activist identity, professional bodies could elaborate policies, codes, and guidelines that specifically encourage and promote the activist core of the social work profession.

8.6. Limitations

This research comes with a few limitations. Firstly, given this study only include two different jurisdictions and is relatively small scale, the extent to which these findings can be transferred to other contexts may be limited. However, I argue that the rigorous empirical and theoretical exploration undertaken during this study provides a solid account to validate the findings. Yet, it would be interesting to carry out further research to test the transferability of the present design to other contexts, including countries from other continents.

In terms of methodological aspects, I have evidenced the challenges in the afferent chapter. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge that samples of the participants, although demographically similar to official statistics (in online surveys) and oriented to diversity (interviews samples), are not nationally representative for either of the countries. Essentially, because the samples are proportionally too small compared to the total number of social workers, and secondly, due to the fact that the research attracted predominately participants who tend to have a personal interest in the topic. Consequently, my investigation focused more on identifying patterns, views and experiences, and the statistical significance was not a priority.

Subsequently, using critical realism might also be seen as a point of discussion here since it relies on the subjective judgement and interpretation of the researcher in regard to identifying and analysing the causal mechanisms (Martinez-Herrero, 2017). As well pointed by the author mentioned above, the interpretation of mechanisms might vary from researcher to researcher. For instance, a personal option was to group the mechanisms into three different

groups (structural, psycho-social, and individual-collective outcomes) because that typology seemed more appropriate from my point of view to unpack the phenomenon of social work activism. However, other researchers might position themselves differently and propose another way of analysing the phenomenon.

Finally, I had to confront my own cultural bias concerning the manifestation of social work activism in both countries. As in the case of many Romanians, it happened to me to have a positive perception and increased expectations about “the West” (here referring to the UK) (Oehler-Sincai et al., 2017; Stoleriu et al., 2011). In this sense, my initial perceptions [or hypotheses] were that activism among social workers in the UK is much more prevalent in practice, and overall, the UK professionals have fewer limitations in doing it than their counterparts in Romania. However, through this research, I have discovered that according to the subjective experiences and opinions of the UK respondents, it is not the case. Fortunately, as I engaged with reading, personal reflections, and informal discussions prior and during collection and data analysis, I overcome this bias. Also, I realised relatively fast that the intensive regulation of the social work profession in the UK created comparable barriers in practice to the situation of social workers in Romania. This process of reflection on my role as a researcher with limited knowledge of the UK context determined me to be more conscious in my journey of developing and undertaking the investigation.

Comparatively, the social work sector in Romania disposes of much less resource (infrastructure, funds, recognition) than the UK, yet the dissatisfactions expressed by the respondents in both jurisdictions are very similar. In the end, it is difficult to argue that one side is much more activist than the other [as I initially thought], yet it is clear that the UK social workers are more interested and engaged in political matters (being part of syndicates, political parties etc.); In contrast, the preoccupation of social workers in Romania focuses not on an apolitical approach, but they prefer to engage with other forms of informal activism (e.g.,

working overtime, being an activist outside of the profession). Although in practice is not very much visible, social work activism does exist in Romania and the UK.

8.7. Further research and considerations

In this chapter, I discussed the empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of my thesis. Further, I will provide some thoughts informing potential directions for future research.

Firstly, I consider the present work an initial step to “deep dive” into the topic in Romania. The research has shown a relatively reduced awareness among social workers in relation to the global perspective of the profession, its values and principles. It also suggested a low political engagement among professionals, which might be related to an apolitical understanding of and orientation within the social work profession or, as supported by the evidence, a lack of interest in political issues (political alienation). In this sense, further research could develop knowledge in adjacent topics, such as mapping global social work values, the perception of neoliberal agenda in Romania, or political ideologies and participation among social work students, practitioners, and scholars.

Secondly, given the long history of activism in the UK, potentially some research on transgenerational activism among social workers could offer valuable insights on how people engaged in activism in the past and how they do it now. A small number of participants mentioned that social workers in contemporary times are more reluctant and apathetic to participate in protest actions, yet the young generation seems to be in charge when referring to activism developed online. At the moment, it is difficult to consider if a generation is, indeed, more or less active than another generation; some further studies could answer this inquiry. Also, concerning the situation in the UK, it might make sense to compare the phenomenon of

social work activism manifested in different states of the United Kingdom, especially between Scotland and England. The different political stances (see views on Brexit) might also suggest a different approach concerning activist participation amongst social workers.

Thirdly, new research documenting content analysis on social media and online on the subject could potentially add some new perspectives and underpin new understandings of the phenomenon. And since this study was carried out mostly prior to the global pandemic, similar research can offer new insights into whether social workers perceived their intense and brave intervention during the crisis as activism or only as a part of their job. If activist participation increased during this period [and it probably did], it could only confirm the point of Abramovitz (1998), who claimed that social work activism reached its peaks in times of crisis. Otherwise, I can only hope my thesis will inspire and encourage social work actors to employ a more critical and reflective approach in their practice and teaching (by dedicated curriculum) to fulfil the real mission of the social work profession.

Conclusion

This research aimed to provide a comprehensive exploration and explanation of contexts and dynamics that influence the social work activism phenomenon in Romania and the UK. In this regard, I have engaged with an explorative approach of building up the existing knowledge in the field, addressing the identified gaps in research, and comparing the points of divergence and synergies in the two analysed jurisdictions. As shown, there is limited evidence in regard to different mechanisms (structural, social, individual, and collective) acting and affecting the development of social work activism in different circumstances or contexts. Engaging with a critical realist framework, I was able to deconstruct these factors (mechanisms) and illustrate how these various socio-structural and cultural mechanisms shape and influence the nature, form and outcomes of social work activism in different contexts. In so doing, this has reconceptualised social work activism as a situated phenomenon that is historically, socially, politically and culturally contingent.

In this study, I advanced a new conceptual definition of social work activism, a typology of types of social work activists, and a new typology of forms of social work activism. In this sense, the present research evidenced that there is a different understanding of social work activism, and therefore, its practice can also have distinct variations and orientations. For instance, social work activism can be connected to activities that are fundamentally related to the social work profession (activism in social work), and can extend to structural actions (activism by social workers), which are aligned with the mission of the social work profession (IFSW, 2014), namely pursuing social justice, challenging injustice, or defending human rights. Also, the study showed that, for instance, social work activism has a more political connotation that is often correlated with more confrontative activities that aim for radical changes (e.g. protests, demonstrations, rallies) [Fightivism], while in Romania, social work

activism is associated to activities that are more supportive and reparatory to the existent contexts and conditions (e.g. volunteering, donations, or organising charitable events) [Charitivism].

My research suggests that social work activism can also be viewed as a means of countering Neoliberalism and its undesirable consequences on social work practice (Greenslade et al., 2014, 2105; Smith, 2017), but at the same time, it can serve as a form of addressing social justice and engaging with social change more broadly (Abramovitz. 1998; Bent-Goodley, 2015; Bott et al., 2016). Despite some structural impediments that make social work activism challenging to implement, there are also enabling factors (e.g., activists' network, academic support) to allow the implementation of social work activism. In line with the literature, it also demonstrated that despite distinct formations, personal values, motivations, and inspirations/role models represent important incentives for activist practice. Yet, regardless of jurisdictions, the tools Internet-based reinvented ways to develop new forms of social work practice and activism. Altogether, the contributions of this thesis are meant to inform and inspire social workers, social work educators, and professional bodies to reflect on the status and the role of social work and its potential impact on improving societies for the better.

APPENDICES (electronic versions)

Consent Form

Personal Information Sheet

Online Survey – Questions

Interview – Topic Guide

Supplementary survey answers

Table A1.

Have you ever participated in activities such as (multiple choice)?

ROMANIA	ACTIVITIES	UK
52 %	Advocacy/ lobby/ representation activities	75 %
52 %	Anti-discrimination/ humanitarian/ human rights campaigns	63 %
31 %	Artistic performances linked to human rights issues or social justice (e.g., theatre of the oppressed)	13 %
12 %	Boycotts	30 %
68 %	Organising charitable events	48 %
53 %	Demonstrations, rallies, marches, protests	61 %
55 %	Media and internet campaigns on social issues	58 %
25 %	Participation in think-thanks	17 %
60 %	Petitions, open letters to politicians/institutions	71 %
40 %	Providing education/trainings on human right issues	34 %
41 %	Regular donations	50 %
78 %	Volunteering	61 %
5 %	Other activities	1 %
6 %	None of the above	3 %

Figure A1.

Why do you engage in activism?

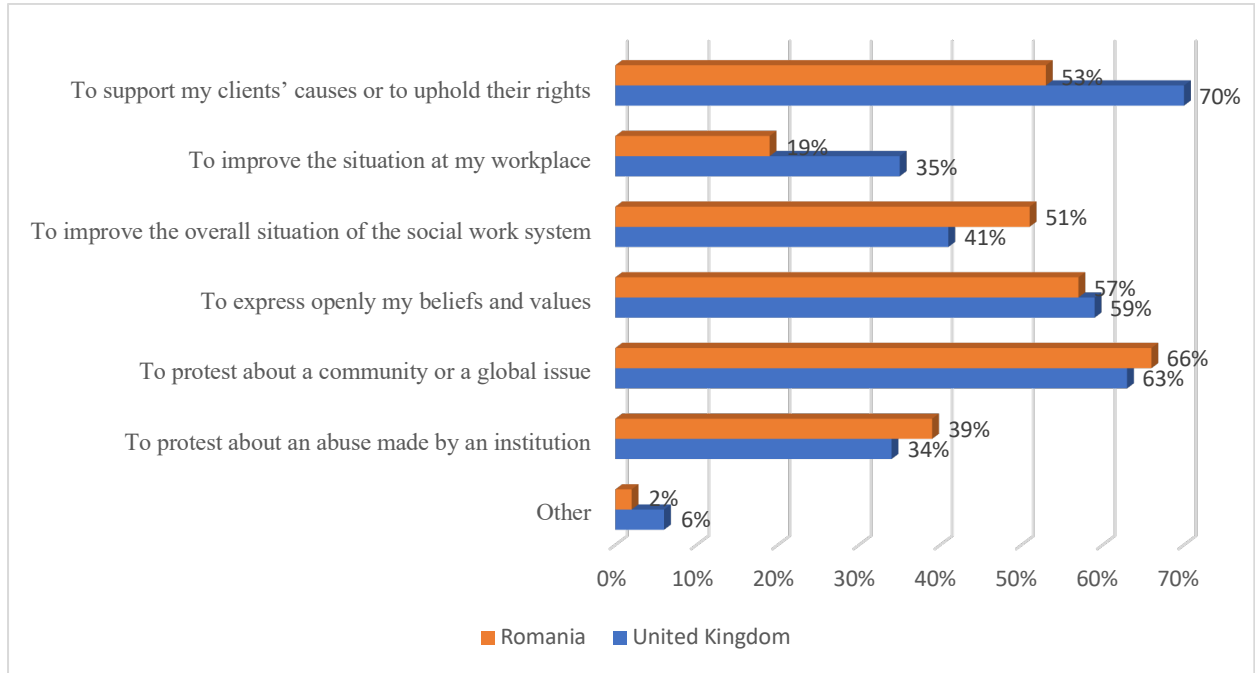


Figure A2.

In general, how often are you involved in these activities?

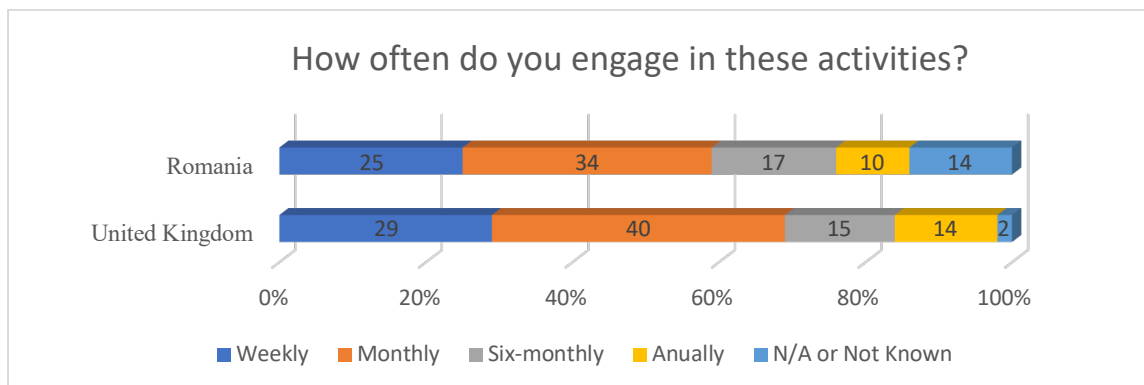


Table A2.

The perception of social workers regarding the correlation between activism and social work profession

<i>Activism is part of social work, but not all of it</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
United Kingdom	3 %	11 %	13 %	51 %	22 %
Romania	3 %	5 %	14 %	66 %	12 %
<i>Doing social work is doing activism</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
United Kingdom	1 %	20 %	26 %	43 %	10 %
Romania	6 %	12 %	32 %	43 %	7 %
<i>I believe that doing activism is effective in accomplishing my professional goals</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

United Kingdom	4 %	21 %	29 %	35 %	11 %
Romania	2 %	5 %	21 %	51 %	16 %
I believe that my duties as a social worker can be easily done without involving activism					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
United Kingdom	14 %	45 %	20 %	16 %	5 %
Romania	13 %	37 %	23 %	25 %	2 %
Activism helps me to understand my clients better					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
United Kingdom	4 %	14 %	29 %	36 %	17 %
Romania	3 %	8 %	33 %	43 %	13 %
I feel my activism has an impact on my social work practice					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

United Kingdom	1 %	10 %	23 %	34 %	32 %
Romania	6 %	16 %	36 %	30 %	12 %

Figure A3.

Why do you get engaged in activism?

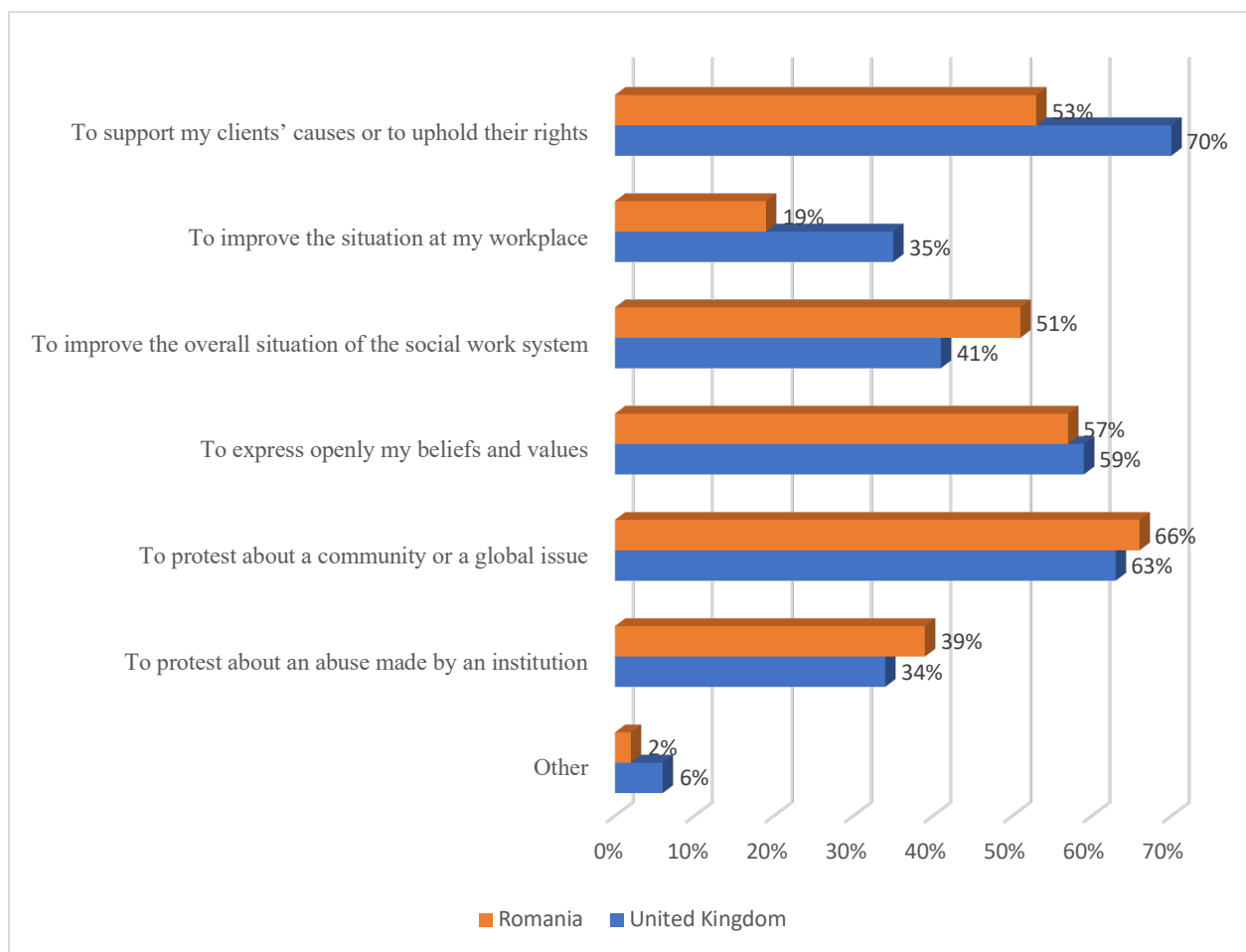


Figure A4.

In which kinds of issues are you involved in?

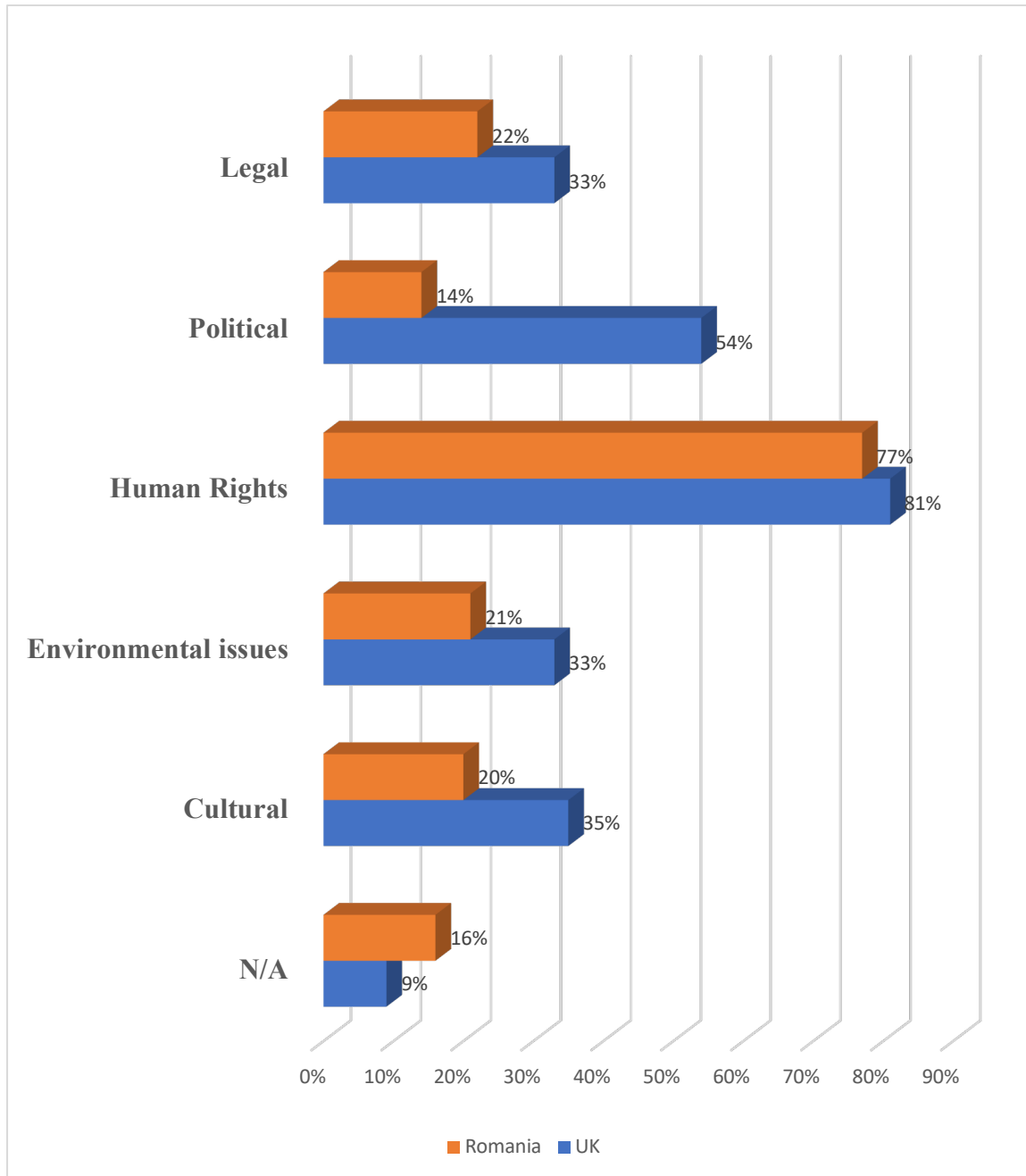


Table A3.

The main barriers that obstruct activism

	Romania	United Kingdom
Lack of time	67 %	71 %
Lack of support from other colleagues	10 %	21 %
The employer does not support the cause	11 %	45 %
Lost motivation	17 %	20 %
Organisational/ Institutional obstacles	30 %	49 %
Limited financial resources	51 %	34 %
Fear of professional marginalisation	7 %	38 %
Personal barriers	24 %	19 %
Fear of negative social attitudes	20 %	20 %
Other	1 %	9 %

Figure A5.

How do you find opportunities about activism?

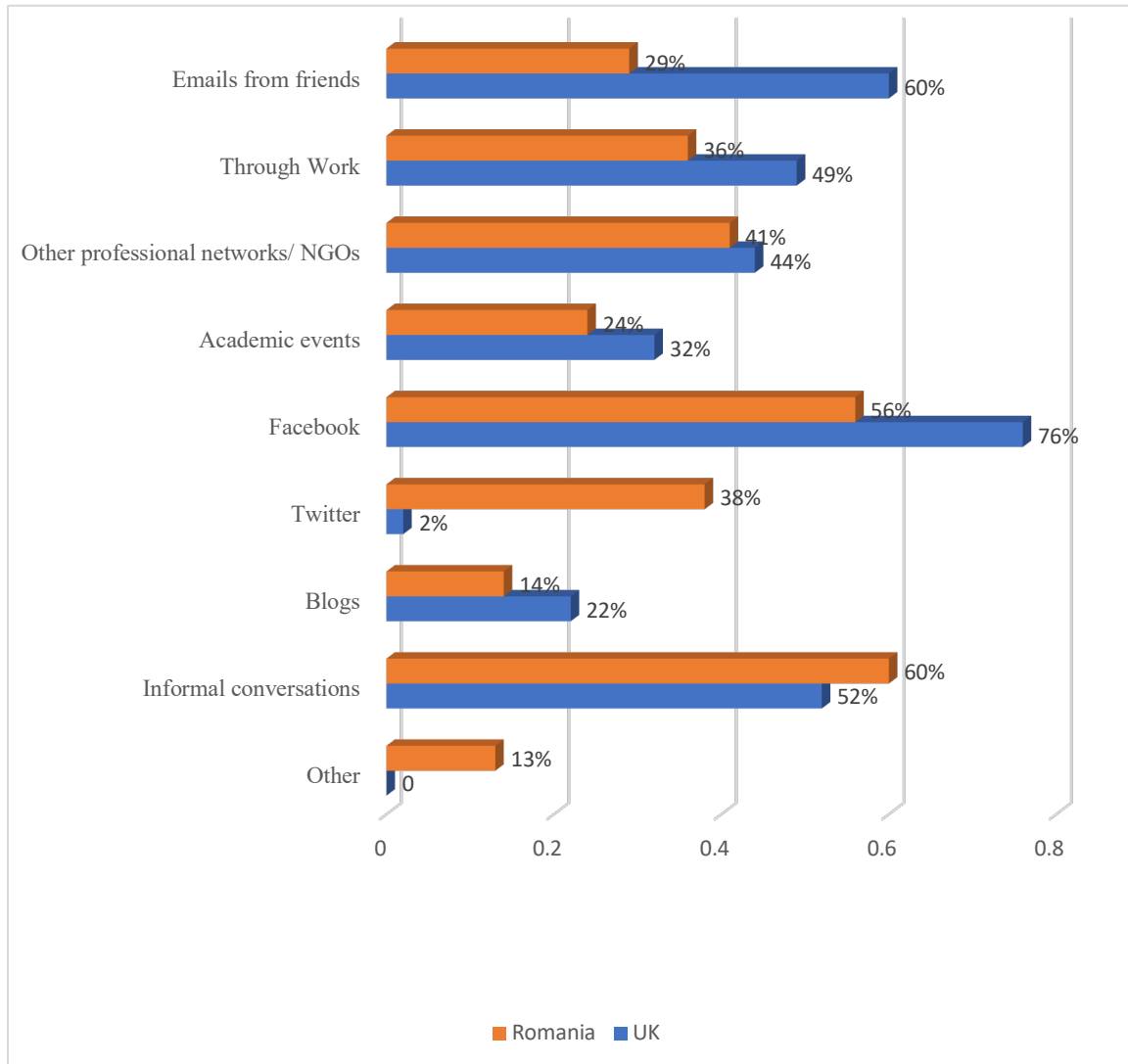


Table A4.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements

<i>I think that social media has a big influence on the activists' work</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Romania	1 %	4 %	24 %	45 %	26 %
United Kingdom	1 %	1 %	11 %	54 %	33 %
<i>I believe that activism through social media in the field of social work is effective</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Romania	1 %	4 %	40 %	38 %	17 %
United Kingdom	3 %	15 %	25 %	44 %	13 %
<i>Social media has become an important tool for social workers</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Romania	1 %	1%	32 %	45 %	21 %
United Kingdom	5 %	20 %	21 %	41 %	13 %

REFERENCES

- Abramovitz, M. (1998). Social Work and Social Reform: An Arena of Struggle. *Social Work, 43*(6), 512–526. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/43.6.512>
- Adams, R., Dominelli, L., & Payne, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Critical practice in social work*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Addison, P. (2010). Clement Attlee, 1945–1951. *From New Jerusalem to New Labour*, 9–22. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-29700-5_2
- Aiken, M. (2018). Tales we tell, speaking out loud: understanding motivations of social movement activists through auto-biography and story. *Interface: A Journal on Social Movements* . 10. 170-195.
- Akram, W. (2018). A Study on Positive and Negative Effects of Social Media on Society. *International Journal of Computer Sciences and Engineering*. 5. 10.26438/ijcse/v5i10.351354.
- Albertson, K., & Stepney, P. (2019). 1979 and all that: a 40-year reassessment of Margaret Thatcher’s legacy on her own terms. *Cambridge Journal of Economics, 44*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bez037>
- Alderman, R. K., & Carter, N. (1991). A Very Tory Coup: The Ousting of Mrs Thatcher. *Parliamentary Affairs, 44*(2), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pa.a052289>
- Alfifi, M., Kaghazgaran, P., Caverlee, J., & Morstatter, F. (2018). *Measuring the Impact of ISIS Social Media Strategy*. https://snap.stanford.edu/mis2/files/MIS2_paper_23.pdf

- Almeida, F., & Faria, D., & Queirós, A. (2017). Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods. *European Journal of Education Studies*. 3. 369-387. 10.5281/zenodo.887089.
- Alshenqeeti, H. (2014). Interviewing as a Data Collection Method: A Critical Review. *English Linguistics Research*. 3. 10.5430/elr.v3n1p39
- Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive methodology* (2nd ed.). London: Sage
- Ana, A. (2017). The Role of the Feminist Movement Participation during the Winter 2012 Mobilisations in Romania. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69(9), 1473–1498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1395810>
- Ana, A. (2019). Precarious Locations: Feminist Co-optation and Strategies of Resistance in the Neoliberal Age. *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, 30(4). <https://doi.org/10.14746/prt.2018.4.6>
- Andrews, D. & Nonnecke, B. & D Assistant, Ph & Preece, J. (2003). Conducting Research on the Internet: Online Survey Design, Development and Implementation Guidelines. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*. 16. 185-210.
- Archer, M. (1998). *Critical realism: Essential readings* (Critical realism--interventions). London; New York: Routledge.
- Archer, M. (1995). *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Archer, M. S. (2010). Routine, Reflexivity, and Realism. *Sociological Theory*, 28(3), 272–303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01375.x>

- Archer, M.S. (2013). Collective Reflexivity: A Relational Case for It. In: Powell, C., Dépelteau, F. (eds) *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137342652_9
- Arun, G. (2022). Iliescu nejudecat pentru sângele vărsat [Review of Iliescu unjudged for the blood shed]. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/ro/iliescu-nejudecat-pentru-sângele-vărsat/a-62112080>
- Ashcroft, R., Sur, D., Greenblatt, A., & Donahue, P. (2021). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Social Workers at the Frontline: A Survey of Canadian Social Workers. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 52(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab158>
- Ashcroft, R., Sur, D., Greenblatt, A., & Donahue, P. (2021). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Social Workers at the Frontline: A Survey of Canadian Social Workers. *The British Journal of Social Work*.
- Asiamah, N., Mensah, H., & Oteng-Abayie, E. F. (2017). General, Target, and Accessible Population: Demystifying the Concepts for Effective Sampling. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(6). <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2674>
- Atieno, O.P. (2009). An analysis of the strengths and limitation of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 13, 13-18
- Atkinson, R., & Flint, J. (2001). Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Snowball research strategies. *Social Research Update*, 33.

- Bădescu, G., Sum, P., & Uslaner, E. M. (2004). Civil Society Development and Democratic Values in Romania and Moldova. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*, 18(2), 316–341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325403259915>
- Bailey, R., & Brake, M. (1975). *Radical social work*. Arnold.
- Baines D. (2011) *Bridging the Practice-Activism Divide in Mainstream Social Work*, University of Victoria
- Baka, K. (2019). The Impact of Altruism on Overall Happiness and Compassion. Project: *The Impact of Altruism Increasing Overall Happiness and Compassion*. 10.13140/RG.2.2.26436.58246.
- Baker, M. (2013). Translation as an Alternative Space for Political Action. *Social Movement Studies*, 12(1), 23–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.685624>
- Balcı, Ş. & Gölcü, A. (2013). The Role and Impacts of Social Media in Social Movements: Example of the Arab Spring. *Conference: The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2013*. Osaka/ JAPAN
- Banks, J., Fancourt, D., Xu, X. (2021). *Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. [online] Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/WHR%2021_Ch5_3.18.pdf.
- Banks, S. (2004). Professional integrity, social work and the ethics of distrust. *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 11(2), 20–35. <https://doi.org/10.1921/17466105.11.2.20>
- Banks, S. (2012). *Ethics and values in social work*. 4th ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barbera, R., Bricker-Jenkins, M., & Joseph, B. (2013). Progressive Social Work. *Encyclopedia of Social Work*

<https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-312>. [accessed Nov 01 2018]

- Bardan, A. (2020). *Nostalgia waves: a media framing of post-communist nostalgia in Romania*. [online] Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356170933_Nostalgia_waves_a_media_framing_of_post-communist_nostalgia_in_Romania.
- Barker, C. and Dale, G. (1998). Protest Waves in Western Europe: a. *Critique of New Social Movement. Theory, Critical Sociology*, 24(1-2), 65-104.
- Barker, R. (2003). *The social work dictionary*. Washington, DC: NASW Free Press
- Bassel, L., Monforte, P., & Khan, K. (2021). Becoming an active citizen: The UK Citizenship Test. *Ethnicities*, 21(2), 311–332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796820966360>
- Belcher, J. R., & Tice, C. (2013). Power and Social Work: A Change in Direction. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 24(1), 81–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2013.740403>
- Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Harley, B. (2019). *Business Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Bent-Goodley, T. B. (2015). A Call for Social Work Activism. *Social Work*, 60(2), 101–103.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swv005>
- Beresford, P. (2005). Developing the theoretical basis for service user/survivor-led research and equal involvement in research. *Epidemiologia E Psichiatria Sociale*, 14(1), 4–9.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s1121189x0000186x>

- Berghs, M., Chataika, T., El-Lahib, Y. and Dube, K. eds., (2019). *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Activism*. Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781351165082.
- Bertot, J. & Jaeger, P. & Grimes, J. (2012). Promoting Transparency and Accountability through ICTs, Social Media, and Collaborative E-Government. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*. 6. 78-91. 10.1108/17506161211214831.
- Bevington, D., & Dixon, C. (2005). Movement-relevant Theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism. *Social Movement Studies*, 4(3), 185–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830500329838>
- Bhaskar, R. (1989). *Reclaiming reality: A critical introduction to contemporary philosophy*. London; New York: Verso.
- Bhaskar, R. (1998). Critical realism and dialectic. In Margaret Scotford Archer (ed.), *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*. Routledge. 575--640.
- Bhaskar, R. (2008). *A realist theory of science*. Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R. (2012). *The philosophy of metareality : creativity, love, and freedom*. Routledge.
- Bickman L. and Rog JR. (2009). *The SAGE Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
- Biestek, F. P. (1961). *The casework relationship*. Chicago: Loyola University Press
- Bitusikova, A. (2015). *New Urban Activism in Slovakia: The Case of Banska Bystrica*. 10.1057/9781137524492_7.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Boddy, J., & Dominelli, L. (2016). Social Media and Social Work: The Challenges of a New Ethical Space. *Australian Social Work*, 70(2), 172–184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2016.1224907>
- Boddy, J., & Dominelli, L. (2016). Social Media and Social Work: The Challenges of a New Ethical Space. *Australian Social Work*, 70(2), 172–184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2016.1224907>
- Bohman, J. (2005). From *Demos* to *Demoi*: Democracy across Borders. *Ratio Juris*, 18: 293–314. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-9337.2005.00300.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9337.2005.00300.x)
- Boix, C., Miller, M., & Rosato, S. (2018). A Complete Data Set of Political Regimes, 1800–2015. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(12), 1523–1554.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012463905>
- Bolick, C. (1995). Thatcher's Revolution: Deregulation and Political Transformation. *Yale Journal on Regulation*, 12, 6.
- Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D. I., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature*, 489(7415), 295–298. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11421>
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, participation, and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*, 146801731876078. doi:10.1177/1468017318760789
- Borshuk, C. (2004). An Interpretive Investigation into Motivations for Outgroup Activism. *The Qualitative Report*, 9(2), 300-319. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2004.1930>

- Bott, C., Chavez, K., Clark, A., Dwyer, K. T., & Sontz, H. (2016). A is for Activism: Or Not. *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 21(1), 151–164.
<https://doi.org/10.18084/1084-7219.21.1.151>
- Bowden, A., Fox-Rushby, J. A., Nyandieka, L., & Wanjau, J. (2002). Methods for pre-testing and piloting survey questions: illustrations from the KENQOL survey of health-related quality of life. *Health policy and planning*, 17(3), 322–330.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/17.3.322>
- Brandt, M. J., & Reyna, C. (2017). Individual Differences in the Resistance to Social Change and Acceptance of Inequality Predict System Legitimacy Differently Depending on the Social Structure. *European journal of personality*, 31(3), 266–278.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2100>
- Brashers, D. E., Haas, S. M., Neidig, J. L., & Rintamaki, L. S. (2002). Social Activism, Self-Advocacy, and Coping with Hiv Illness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 19(1), 113–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407502191006>
- Braun V. & Clarke V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101, DOI: [10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)
- Bryman, A., Bell, E. A., & Teevan, J. J. (2012). *Social research methods*. Don Mills, Ont: Oxford University Press.
- Buechler, S. M. (1995). New Social Movement Theories. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36(3), 441–464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1995.tb00447.x>
- Buechler, S. M. (2013). New Social Movements and New Social Movement Theory. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (eds D. A. Snow,

D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans and D. McAdam).

doi:10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm143

Buser, M., Bonura, C., Fannin, M., & Boyer, K. (2013). Cultural activism and the politics of place-making. *City*, 17(5), 606–627. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2013.827840>

Bush, B. (1999). *Imperialism, race, and resistance : Africa and Britain, 1919-1945*. Routledge.

Butler-Warke, A., Yuill, C., & Bolger, J. (2019). The changing face of social work: social worker perceptions of a neoliberalising profession. *Critical and Radical Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986019x15633629305936>

Buzducea, D. (2009). *Modern Social Work Systems. Global Trends and Local Practices*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași.

Buzducea, D. (2015). *Interview: Cum Arata Profilul Asistentului Social In Romania in stiri.org* <https://www.stiri.org/ong/educatie/cum-arata-profilul-asistentului-social-i>

Cabiati, E., & Panciroli, C. (2019). Service Users as Collaborators in Social Work Practice, Research, and Education. *Socialinē Teorija, Empirija, Politika Ir Praktika*, 19(0), 95–105. <https://doi.org/10.15388/STEPP.2019.14>

Caleria, E. (2018). *How the Internet and Social Media Is Impacting Social Work*. SWHELPER. <https://swhelper.org/2018/09/18/how-the-internet-and-social-media-is-impacting-social-work/>

Calhoun, A., Wilson M., Whitmore E. (2014). Activist resistance in neoliberal times: Stories from Canada. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 2, 141–158.

- Calvert, J. (2007). Pacifism. In G. L. Anderson & K. G. Herr (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of activism and social justice*. 1. 1167-1078. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd
- Cammaerts, B. (2007). Reclaiming the Media: Communication Rights and Democratic Media Roles. *Activism and Media*. Bristol.
- Campbell, C., Baikie, G., Critical Social Work, 2012 Vol. 13, No. 1, *Beginning at the Beginning: An Exploration of Critical Social Work*, Dalhousie University
- Caren, N. (2007). Political Process Theory. In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, G. Ritzer (Ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosp041>
- Carey, M., (2012). *Qualitative research skills for social work: Theory and practice*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate
- Carlson, B. L., Jones, L. V., Harris, M., Quezada, N., & Frazer, R. (2017). Trauma, Shared Recognition and Indigenous Resistance on Social media. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v21i0.1570>
- Castells, M. (1983). *The city and the grassroots: a cross-cultural theory of urban social movements*. University Of California Press.
- Chan, S. C. K. (2021). Resistance, activism and ordinary life: an editorial introduction. *Cultural Studies*, 1–14.
- Chau, N. H., Liu, Y., & Soundararajan, V. (2018). Political Activism as a Determinant of Clientelistic Transfers: Evidence from an Indian Public Works Program. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2998478>

- Chenoweth, E., & Lewis, O. A. (2013). Unpacking nonviolent campaigns. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(3), 415–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312471551>
- Cheung, J. C.-S. (2015). A letter to the late Felix Biestek: Revisiting the seven principles of The Casework Relationship with contemporary struggles. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 9(1), 92–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2015.994980>
- Childs, D. (2013). *Britain since 1945: a political history*. London: Routledge.
- Chis, T., Nicolescu, V.Q., Bujdei-Tebeica, V. (2017). *Coruptie si contestare – Piata Victoriei 2017*. Centrul de idei in studii politice
- Chui, E. and Gray, M. (2004), The political activities of social workers in the context of changing roles and political transition in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 13: 170-180. doi:10.1111/j.1369-6866.2004.00310.x
- Cioarta, I. (2020). Short reflections on the activism of social workers in times of Covid-19. *SW2020-21 Covid-19 Magazine* <https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/sw2020-21-covid19/editions/3rd-edition-18-may-2020/short-reflections-on-the-activism-of-social-workers-in-times-of-covid-19>
- Claus Offe. (1985). *New social movements : challenging the boundaries of institutional politics*. Graduate Faculty Of Political And Social Science, New School For Social Research.
- Coffelt, T. (2017). Confidentiality and anonymity of participants. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The sage encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp. 228-230). SAGE Publications, Inc, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n86>
- Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (2014). *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research* (Vols. 1-2). London: SAGE Publications Ltd doi: 10.4135/9781446294406

- Collins, R. (2001). Social movements and the focus of emotional attention. *Social Movements and the Focus of Emotional Attention*. 27-44.
- Comsa, M. (2015). Turnout Decline in Romanian National Elections: Is it that Big?. *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Sociologia*. 6. 10.1515/subbs-2015-0010
- Cornfield, D. B., Coley, J. S., Isaac, L. W., & Dickerson, D. C. (2018). Occupational Activism and Racial Desegregation at Work: Activist Careers after the Nonviolent Nashville Civil Rights Movement. *Research in the Sociology of Work*, 217–248.
doi:10.1108/s0277-283320180000032014
- Corning, A. F., & Myers, D. J. (2002). Individual Orientation toward Engagement in Social Action. *Political Psychology*, 23(4), 703–729. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792364>
- Corrigan, P., & Leonard, P. (1978). *Social work practice under capitalism : a Marxist approach*. Macmillan.
- Cortese, D. (2015). I'm a 'good' activist, you're a 'bad' activist, and everything I do is activism. *Interface: A Journal For and About Social Movements*, 7(1), 215-246.
- Costa, A. L., Vaz, H., & Menezes, I. (2021). Exploring the meanings of professional activism. *Community Development*, 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2020.1866049>
- Cournoyer, D., & Klein, W. (2000). *Research methods for social work*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Cowger, C. D., & Menon, G. (2001). Integrating qualitative and quantitative research methods. In B. A. Thyer (Ed.), *The handbook of social work research methods*: 473-484. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

- Cox, L. E., Tice, C. J., & Long, D. D. (2021). *Introduction to social work : an advocacy-based profession*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Craft, C. M., Foubert, J. D., & Lane, J. J. (2011). Integrating Religious and Professional Identities: Christian Faculty at Public Institutions of Higher Education. *Religion & Education*, 38(2), 92–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2011.579547>
- Craig, D. & Bigby, C. (2015). Critical Realism in Social Work Research: Examining Participation of People with Intellectual Disability. *Australian Social Work*. 68. 1-15. 10.1080/0312407X.2015.1024268.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Cruickshank, J. (2003). *Realism and sociology: Anti-foundationalism, ontology, and social research* (Routledge studies in critical realism; Oxford: Routledge.
- Curtice, J., Clery, E., Perry, J., Phillips M. and Rahim, N. (eds.) (2019). *British Social Attitudes: The 36th Report*, London: The National Centre for Social Research
- Dahlberg-Grundberg, M., & Örestig, J. (2016). Extending the local: activist types and forms of social media use in the case of an anti-mining struggle. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(3), 309–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2016.1268955>
- Danermark, B., Ekstrom, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J.C. (2001). *Explaining Society: An Introduction to Critical Realism in the Social Sciences* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203996249>
- Daniel, B. (2013). Social work: a profession in flux. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 25(6), 394–406. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jwl-06-2012-0048>

- David, D. (2015). *Psihologia poporului român: profilul psihologic al românilor : într-o monografie cognitiv-experimentală [The psychology of the Romanian people: the psychological profile of Romanians: in an experimental cognitive monograph]*. Polirom.
- Davis, A. (2008). *Celebrating 100 Years of Social Work University of Birmingham*.
<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/IASS/100-years-of-social-work.pdf>
- De Maria, W. (1997). Flapping on clipped wings: social work ethics in the age of activism. *Australian Social Work*, 50(4), 3-19.
- Dean, B. (2021). *Social Network Usage & Growth Statistics: How Many People Use Social Media in 2021?* [online] Backlinko. Available at: <https://backlinko.com/social-media-users>. [accessed 17 Dec 2021]
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Dickens, J. (2018). Clement Attlee and the Social Service Idea: Modern Messages for Social Work in England. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 48(1), 5–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx025>
- Dirdala, L.-D. (2011). The end of the Ceausescu regime – a theoretical convergence. *Buletin Stiintific - Scientific Bulletin*, 20, 81–90.
- Domanski, M. D. (1998). Prototypes of Social Work Political Participation: An Empirical Model. *Social Work*, 43(2), 156–167. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/43.2.156>
- Dominelli, L. (2002). *Feminist social work theory and practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

- Dominelli, L. (2010). Globalization, contemporary challenges and social work practice. *International Social Work*, 53(5), 599–612.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872810371201>
- Dominelli, L. (2013). Environmental justice at the heart of social work practice: Greening the profession. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(4), 431–439.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12024>
- Downs, J. & Manion, J. (eds) (2004). Taking Back the Academy! History of Activism, *History as Activism*, Routledge, New York.
- Duarte, F. (2014). Social Workers towards Human Rights: A Critical Approach. 10.13140/RG.2.1.3022.5041. Conference: 2014 *Joint World Conference in Social Work, Education and Social Development* At: Melbourne, Australia
- Duguleană, C. (2011). Effects of the economic crisis in Romania. *SEER*, 14(1), 17–25.
<https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2011-1-17>
- Dumitrascu, M. (2015). Social activism: theories and methods *Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy*. <http://www.sociologiecraiova.ro/revista/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/9.-VERONICA-DUMITRAȘCU-SOCIAL-ACTIVISM-THEORIES-AND-METHODS•-PP.84-94.pdf>
- Dustin, D. (2007). *The McDonaldization of Social Work*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 54–63.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>

Eccles, J. (2009). Who am I and what am I going to do with my life? Personal and collective identities as motivators of action. *Educ. Psychol.* 44, 78–89.

10.1080/00461520902832368

Edmonds-Cady, C., & Wingfield, T. T. (2017). Social workers: agents of change or agents of oppression? *Social Work Education*, 36(4), 430–442.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2017.1291802>

Edwards, B. and McCarthy, J.D. (2004). Resources and Social Movement Mobilization. *In The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (eds D.A. Snow, S.A. Soule and H. Kriesi). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470999103.ch6>

Edwards, F., Howard, P. N., & Joyce, M. (2013). Digital Activism and Nonviolent Conflict. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2595115>

Edwards, R. and Holland, J. (2013). *What is qualitative interviewing?* London, GB. Bloomsbury Academic

Egan, M., Tannahill, C., Petticrew, M., & Thomas, S. (2008). Psychosocial risk factors in home and community settings and their associations with population health and health inequalities: a systematic meta-review. *BMC public health*, 8, 239.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-8-239>

Ekman, M. (2014). The dark side of online activism: Swedish right-wing extremist video activism on YouTube. *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 30(56), 21. <https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v30i56.8967>

Ekman, M. (2015). Online Islamophobia and the politics of fear: manufacturing the green scare. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(11), 1986–2002.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1021264>

- European Values Study (2017). Integrated Dataset (EVS2017). *GESIS Data Archive*, Cologne. ZA7500 Data file Version 5.0.0, [doi:10.4232/1.13897](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13897).
- Evans J., Baronavski C. (2018). *How Do European Countries Differ in Religious Commitment?* Pew Research Centre. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/
- Evans T., Harris J. (2004). Street-level bureaucracy, social work and the (exaggerated) death of discretion. *British Journal of Social Work*. 34(6). 871–95.
- Evans, J. R., & Mathur, A. (2005). The value of online surveys. *Internet Research*, 15(2), 195–219.
- Evans, J., & Baronavski, C. (2018). *How do European countries differ in religious commitment? Use our interactive map to find out*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/>
- Faver, C. A. (2001). Rights, Responsibility, and Relationship: Motivations for Women’s Social Activism. *Affilia*, 16(3), 314–336.
- Fechter, L. (2016). *Altruism and Well-Being Altruism and Well-Being*. Western Oregon University https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=honors_theses
- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446212110>

- Ferguson, I. (2009). Another Social Work is Possible! Reclaiming the Radical Tradition. In V. LeskoÅ¡ek (Ed.). *Theories and methods of social work, exploring different perspectives* (81-98). Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana.
- Ferguson, I. (2013). Social Workers as Agents of Change. *The New Politics of Social Work*, 195–208. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-32712-3_12
- Ferguson, I. (2020). Neoliberal Social Work and COVID-19. In M. Lavalette, V. Ioakimidis, & I. Ferguson (Eds.), *Social Work and the COVID-19 Pandemic: International Insights* (pp. 25-30). Bristol University Press. doi:10.46692/9781447360377.004
- Ferguson, I. and Woodward, R. (2009). *Radical social work : making a difference*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ferguson, I., & Lavalette, M. (2006). Globalization and global justice. *International Social Work*, 49(3), 309–318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872806063401>
- Ferguson, I., & Lavalette, M. (2013). Crisis, austerity and the future(s) of social work in the UK. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 1(1), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986013x665992>
- Ferguson, I., Ioakimidis, V. and Lavalette, M., (2018). *Global Social Work in a Political Context Radical Perspectives*. Policy Press.
- Fernandez, R. (2013). Nine reflections for academic activists http://sites.uci.edu/transcripts/files/2014/10/2013_03_16.pdf [accessed 23.08.2019]
- Fischer, E., & Reuber, A. R. (2011). Social interaction via new social media: (How) can interactions on Twitter affect effectual thinking and behavior? *Journal of Business Venturing*, 26(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2010.09.002>

- Fish, J. N. and Sprague, J. (2020). Authentic Activism: Domestic Workers as Global Development Agents. In *Gender and Development: The Economic Basis of Women's Power* by Samuel Cohn and Rae Lesser Blumberg, London, SAGE Publications.
- Flood, M. G., Martin, B. and Dreher, T. (2013). Combining academia and activism: common obstacles and useful tools. *Australian Universities Review*, 55 (1), 17-26
- Flora, G. & Szilagyi, G. (1999). Biserică și societate. [Church and Society] *Romanian Sociology Review*. 1-2. 83-100.
- Folgheraiter F. (2017), The sociological and humanistic roots of Relational Social Work, in *Relational Social Work*,1(1), 4-11.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2000). The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 645-672). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fook, J. (2003). Critical Social Work: The Current Issues. *Qualitative Social Work*, 2(2), 123–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325003002002001>
- Forde, C., & Lynch, D. (2014). Critical Practice for Challenging Times: Social Workers' Engagement with Community Work. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 44(8), 2078-2094.
- Foreman, A. (2018). *Digital Collections @ Dordt Faculty Work Comprehensive List Slacktivism: Social Media Activism and Its Effectiveness*. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/214236115.pdf>
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality, vol. 1: an introduction* (trans. R. Hurley). New York, NY: Vintage.

- Ryan, F., Coughlan, M., & Cronin, P. (2009). Interviewing in qualitative research: The one-to-one interview. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 16(6), 309–314
- Franciscus, A., (2015). Advocates and Activists Needed! - *HCV Advocate*,
http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/activist.pdf [accessed Nov 01 2018]
- Frankl, V. (1984). *Man's search for meaning* (3rd ed.). NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Fricker, R. D., & Schonlau, M. (2002). Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet Research Surveys: Evidence from the Literature. *Field Methods*, 14(4), 347–367.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/152582202237725>
- Fuad-Luke, A. (2009). *Design activism: Beautiful strangeness for a sustainable world*. Sterling, VA: Earthscan.
- Fuchs C. (2016). Critical theory. In G Mazzoleni, K Barnhurst, K Ikeda, R Mai, H Wessler (eds.). *International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Galbin, A. (2014). An introduction to social constructionism. *Social Research Reports*, 26, 82-92
- Gallacher, J. D., Heerdink, M. W., & Hewstone, M. (2021). Online Engagement Between Opposing Political Protest Groups via Social Media is Linked to Physical Violence of Offline Encounters. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1), 205630512098444.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120984445>
- Gallagher, T. (1991). Romania's communist Dystopia. *Journal of Communist Studies*, 7(4), 552–557. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523279108415120>

- Garthwait, C. (2012). *Dictionary Of Social Work School of Social Work BSW and MSW Programs*.
https://health.umt.edu/socialwork/Master%20of%20Social%20Work/Curriculum/SocialWorkDictionary_booklet_updated_2012_Oct23.pdf
- Gascoigne, J., Anand, A., and Kim, Y. (2021). *Blog: The Covid-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Academic Research*. University of York. from
<https://www.york.ac.uk/igdc/news/news/2021/blog-covid-19-impact-on-academic-research/>
- George, J., & Leidner, D. (2018). Digital Activism: a Hierarchy of Political Commitment. *Proceedings of the 51st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.24251/hicss.2018.288>
- Gerbaudo, P. (2017). From Cyber-Autonomism to Cyber-Populism: An Ideological History of Digital Activism. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 15(2), 478-491
- Gharawi, M. & Pardo, T. & Guerrero, S. (2009). Issues and strategies for conducting cross-national e-Government comparative research. *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series*. 163-170. 10.1145/1693042.1693076.
- Ghimiși, A. (2020). Minority groups in Romania during the Communist regime. *Journal of Research and Innovation for Sustainable Society*, 2(2), 151–156.
<https://doi.org/10.33727/jriss.2020.2.19:151-156>
- Ghita, C.R. (2016). *Competitive Activism. An Investigation of the activists and volunteers in the 2015 refugee crisis*. Lund University.

<https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=8894736&fileId=8894737>

- Gil, D. (1998). *Confronting Injustice and Oppression: Concepts and Strategies for Social Workers*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Glennerster, H., Hills, J.W., Piachaud, D., & Webb, J. (2004). *One hundred years of poverty and policy*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Glennerster, R., (2020). *The post war welfare state: stages and disputes*. Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1695826/the-post-war-welfare-state/2427474/>
- Goldstone, R. and Zhang, J. (2021). Postgraduate research students' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and student-led policy solutions. *Educational Review*, pp.1–22.
- Gomez, E.M., & Kaiser, C.R. (2019). From pixels to protest. *Confronting Prejudice and Discrimination*. In *Confronting Prejudice and Discrimination: The Science of Changing Minds and Behaviors*. Edited by Mallett, R.K., Elsevier, MJ., 319-335
- Gorski, P. C. (2019). Fighting racism, battling burnout: Causes of activist burnout in US racial justice activists. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(5), 667–687. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1439981>
- Gorski, P. C., & Chen, C. (2015). “Frayed All Over:” The Causes and Consequences of Activist Burnout Among Social Justice Education Activists. *Educational Studies*, 51(5), 385–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2015.1075989>

- Gray, M., & In Webb, S. A. (2013). *The New Politics of Social Work*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan
- Gray, M., Collett van Rooyen, C., Rennie, G., & Gaha, J. (2002). The political participation of social workers: A comparative study. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 11(2), 99-110. doi:10.1111/1468-2397.00204
- Green, D. (2016). *Citizen Activism and Civil Society*. In *How Change Happens*.: Oxford University Press.
- Greene, J. C. (2007). *Mixed methods in social inquiry (1st ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Greenslade, L., McAuliffe, D., & Chenoweth, L. (2014). Social Workers' Experiences of Covert Workplace Activism. *Australian Social Work*, 68(4), 422–437.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2014.940360>
- Gregory, M. (2010). Reflection and Resistance: Probation Practice and the Ethic of Care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(7), 2274–2290.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq028>
- Gubernat, R., & Rammelt, H. P. (2017). Recreative activism in Romania How cultural affiliation and lifestyle yield political engagement. *Socio.hu, Special issue*, 143–163.
<https://doi.org/10.18030/socio.hu.2017en.143>
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M. & Namey, E. E. (2012). Comparing thematic data. In *Applied thematic analysis*: 161-186. SAGE Publications.
<https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781483384436>

- Gupta, A., & Blewett, J. (2007). Change for children? The challenges and opportunities for the children's social work workforce. *Child & Family Social Work*, 12(2), 172–181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2006.00469.x>
- Gupta, A., & Blumhardt, H. (2016). Giving poverty a voice: Families' experiences of social work practice in a risk-averse child protection system. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 5(1), 163-172. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/204674316X14540714620166>
- Gwilym, H. (2017). The political identity of social workers in neoliberal times. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 5(1), 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986017x14835297465135>
- Haerpfer, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano J., M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen (eds.). (2022). World Values Survey: Round Seven - Country-Pooled Datafile Version 4.0. Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WWSA Secretariat. [doi:10.14281/18241.18](https://doi.org/10.14281/18241.18)
- Halcomb, E. J. (2018). Mixed methods research: The issues beyond combining methods. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 75(3), 499–501. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13877>
- Hantrais, L. (1999). Contextualization in cross-national comparative research, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2:2, 93-108, DOI: [10.1080/136455799295078](https://doi.org/10.1080/136455799295078)
- Harrebye, S.F. (2016). *Social change and creative activism in the 21st century: the mirror effect* / [internet resource]. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire Palgrave Macmillan.

- Harris, J. (2003). *The Social Work Business*. London: Routledge
- Harris, J. (2009). *Modernising social work: Critical considerations*. Bristol University Press.
- Harris, J., & White, V. (2018). *A dictionary of social work and social care* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Hartwig, M. (2007). *Dictionary of critical realism* (Critical realism--interventions). London: Routledge.
- Heiervang, E., & Goodman, R. (2011). Advantages and limitations of web-based surveys: Evidence from a child mental health survey. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 46(1), 69-76.
- Herz, M., & Johansson, T. (2011). Critical Social Work – Considerations and Suggestions. *Critical Social Work*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v12i1.5843>
- Hill, D. (2018). The historical development of social work: Making links from the past to the present. In *Exploring and Locating Social Work: A Foundation for Practice*, Macmillan Education
- Hilton, M., Moores, C., & Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, F. (2017). New Times revisited: Britain in the 1980s. *Contemporary British History*, 31(2), 145–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2017.1306214>
- Hodge, D. R. (2011). Using Spiritual Interventions in Practice: Developing Some Guidelines from Evidence-based Practice. *Social work*. 56. 149-58. 10.1093/sw/56.2.149.

- Hodge, D. R. (2016). Spiritual Competence: What It Is, Why It Is Necessary, and How to Develop It. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 27(2), 124–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2016.1228093>
- Höglinger, M., Jann, B., and Diekmann, A. (2016). Sensitive questions in online surveys: An experimental evaluation of different implementations of the randomized response technique and the crosswise model. *Survey Research Methods* 10(3):171–187
- Hollander, J. A., & Einwohner, R. L. (2004). Conceptualizing Resistance. *Sociological Forum*, 19(4), 533–554.
- Horner, N. (2009). *What is social work? : contexts and perspectives*. Learning Matters.
- Houston, S. (2001). Beyond social constructionism: Critical realism and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31(6), 845–861. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/31.6.845>
- Houston, S. (2010). Prising Open the Black Box. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, 9(1), 73–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325009355622>
- Houston, S., & Swords, C. (2021). Critical realism, mimetic theory and social work. *Journal of Social Work*, 146801732110088. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173211008806>
- Hugman, R., & Carter, J. (2016). *Rethinking Values and Ethics in Social Work*. Palgrave/Macmillan Education.
- Humphrys, E. (2009). Thinking and theorising about activism: who and how? *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 1(2), 166–179. <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v1i2.1113>
- Hussein, S. (2015). Social workers' job strain and burnout: reflections on recent research and policy developments. Conference: *JSWEC*

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281614252_Social_workers%27_job_strain_and_burnout_reflections_on_recent_research_and_policy_developments

Iacobucci, G. (2019). Vaccination: “fake news” on social media may be harming UK uptake, report warns. *BMJ*, 1365. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.1365>

IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) (2014). *Global Definition of Social Work*, available: <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/> [accessed 12.04.2018]

INSCOP (2003). Barometreul Adevarul despre Romania <http://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/INSCOP-noiembrie-ISTORIE.pdf>

Ioakimidis V., and Lavalette, M. (2011) “International social work or social work internationalism?: Radical social work in global perspective”, in Lavalette M., *Radical Social Work today*, Policy Press.

Ioakimidis, V. (2016). *A guide to radical social work*. The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2016/may/24/radical-social-work-quick-guide-change-poverty-inequality>

James, N., & Busher, H. (2009). *Online interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Jankowicz, A.D. (2005). *Business research projects*. 4th ed. London: Thomson

Jansen, K. & Corley, K. & Jansen, J. (2007). *E-Survey Methodology*. Pennsylvania State College of Information Sciences and Technology. 10.4018/978-1-59140-792-8.ch001.

Jasko, K., Szastok, M., Grzymala-Moszczynska, J., Maj, M., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2019). Rebel with a Cause: Personal Significance from Political Activism Predicts

Willingness to Self-Sacrifice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(1), 314–349.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12307>

Jean-Klein, I. (2001). Nationalism and Resistance: The Two Faces of Everyday Activism in Palestine during the Intifada. *Cultural Anthropology*, 16(1), 83–126.

<https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2001.16.1.83>

Jessop, R. D. (2003). *From Thatcherism to New Labour: neo-Liberalism, workfarism, and labour market regulation*. (H. Overbeek, Ed.). Eprints.lancs.ac.uk; Routledge.

<https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/25769>

Jia, R., Ayling, K., Chalder, T., Massey, A., Broadbent, E., Coupland, C., & Vedhara, K. (2020). Mental health in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic: cross-sectional analyses from a community cohort study. *BMJ Open*, 10(9), e040620.

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-040620>

John Michael Roberts. (2014). *New media and public activism : neoliberalism, the state and radical protest in the public sphere*. The Policy Press.

Jones, C., Ferguson, I., Lavalette, M., and Penketh, L. (2004). Manifesto for a new engaged practice [‘The Social Work Manifesto’], reprinted in M. Lavalette and I. Ferguson (2007) (eds) *International Social Work and the Radical Tradition*, Birmingham: Venture Press.

Jones, D. (2018). *Social Work Regulation: Contexts and Questions Reflections on the Development of Regulations of Social Work and Social Workers in the United Kingdom*. British Association of Social Workers

<https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/Social%20Work%20Regulation%20-%20Contexts%20and%20Questions.pdf>

- Jones, N. (2013). Viewpoints: How did Margaret Thatcher change Britain? *BBC News*.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22076774>
- Jones, R. (2012). Child protection, social work and the media: doing as well as being done to. *Research, Policy and Planning*, 29(2), 83–94
- Jones, R. (2014). The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: Social Work and Its Moment. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(3), 485–502.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs157>
- Jones, S., Murphy, F., Edwards, M., & James, J. (2008). Doing things differently: advantages and disadvantages of web questionnaires. *Nurse Researcher*, 15(4), 15–26.
<https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2008.07.15.4.15.c6658>
- Jordan, B. (2001). Tough Love: Social Work, Social Exclusion and the Third Way. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 31(4), 527–546. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23716220>
- Jordan, B. (2004). Emancipatory Social Work? Opportunity or Oxymoron. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 34(1), 5–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719980>
- Jordan, T. (2002). *Activism! Direct Action, Hacktivism and the Future of Society*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Jost, J. T., Langer, M., Badaan, V., Azevedo, F., Etchezahar, E., Ungaretti, J., & Hennes, E. P. (2017). Ideology and the limits of self-interest: System justification motivation and conservative advantages in mass politics. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 3(3), e1–e26. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000127>
- Joyce, M. E. (2010). *Digital Activism Decoded. The New Mechanics of Change*. New York: International Debate Education Association

- Joyce, P. (2016). *The Policing of Protest, Disorder and International Terrorism in the UK since 1945*. London Palgrave Macmillan Uk.
- Kamiński, Tadeusz. (2018). Social Workers - Change Agents or System Conservatists.
Project: *Social work and social welfare in the context of democracy and human rights*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332633421_Social_Workers_-_Change_Agents_or_System_Conservatists
- Kawulich, B. (2012). Selecting a research approach: Paradigm, methodology and methods. in *Doing Social Research: A global context*. Editors: C. Wagner, B. Kawulich, M. Garner, 51-61
- Kietzmann, J.H., Hermkens K., McCarthy I.P. (2011). Social media? Get serious!
Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons* 54(3): 241–251.
- Klar, M., & Kasser, T. (2009). Some Benefits of Being an Activist: Measuring Activism and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being. *Political Psychology*, 30(5), 755–777.
- Kligman, G. (1998). *The politics of duplicity: controlling reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania*. University Of California Press.
- Kluch, Y. (2020). “My Story Is My Activism!”: (Re-)Definitions of Social Justice Activism Among Collegiate Athlete Activists. *Communication & Sport*, 8(4–5), 566–590. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519897288>
- Koffel, A., (2003). *Behavioral Change and Building Performance: Strategies for Significant, Persistent, and Measurable Institutional Change*
https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2014/06/f16/change_performance.pdf
[accessed Nov 04 2018]

- Kolly, M. (2018). Professional identity and religious identity. Inter-minority solidarity among future social workers. *Brussels Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/brussels.1648>
- Kriesi, H. (1989). New Social Movements and the New Class in the Netherlands. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(5), 1078–1116. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780467>
- Kurten, S., Brimmel, N., Klein, K., & Hutter, K. (2021). Nature and Extent of Quantitative Research in Social Work Journals: A Systematic Review from 2016 to 2020. *The British Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab171>
- Kutner, L.A. (2000). Environmental Activism and the Internet. *Electronic Green Journal*, 1(12).
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Kyllönen, S. (2014). Civil Disobedience, Climate Protests and a Rawlsian Argument for “Atmospheric” Fairness. *Environmental Values*, 23(5), 593–613. <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327114x13947900181671>
- Læssøe J. (2017). Environmental Activism. In: Peters M.A. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-588-4_443
- Lambro M. (2002). Asistența socială în România. Două secole de evoluție instituțională, in Livadă-Cadeschi L. (coord./ed.), *Sărăcie și asistență socială în spațiul românesc (sec. XVIII-XX)*, *New Europe college*, 61-81, Available at <http://www.nec.ro/fundatia/nec/publications/saracie.pdf>

- Lane S.R., Pritzker S. (2018). Consider Yourself Asked: Introduction to Political Social Work. In: *Political Social Work*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68588-5_1
- LARICS (2020). *Barometrul Vieții Religioase din România- decembrie 2020*
<https://larics.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Barometrul-vietii-religioase-LARICS-CCSL-16.12.2020.pdf>
- Lavalette, M., & Ioakimidis, V. (Eds.). (2011). *Social work in extremis: Lessons for social work internationally* (1st ed.). Bristol University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qgkhn>
- Lavrakas, P. J. (2008). *Encyclopedia of survey research methods* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412963947
- Lawani, A. (2020). Critical realism: what you should know and how to apply it. *Qualitative Research Journal, ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print).
- Layder, D. (1997). *Modern social theory : key debates and new directions*. Ucl Press.
- Lazar, F. (2015a). *Patimile asistentei sociale din Romania* [The sufferings of Romanian social work]. CNASR
- Lazar, F. & Csaba, D. & Iovu, M. B. (2016). *Renașterea unei profesii sau despre cum este să fii asistent social în România* [Rebirth of a profession or what is like to be a social worker in Romania]. Project: National College of Social Workers in Romania - Research Commission
- Lazar, F. & Marinescu, V. & Branea, S. (2018b). *DINCOLO de SENZAȚIONAL* – CNASR

- Lazar, F. & Rosu, L. & Cristea, D. & Iovu, M. B. (2020). *Perspective asupra sistemului și serviciilor de asistență socială din România* [Perspectives on the social work services and system in Romania]. Project: National College of Social Workers in Romania - Research Commission
- Lazăr, F., Mihai, A., Gaba, D., Ciocănel, A., Rentea, G., & Munch, S. (2018a). Romanian social workers facing the challenges of neo-liberalism. *European Journal of Social Work*, 22(2), 326–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1540405>
- Lazar, F. (2015b). *Profilul asistentilor sociali din Romania* [The profile of social workers from Romania]. CNASR
- Le Grand, J. (2007). The Politics of Choice and Competition in Public Services. *The Political Quarterly*, 78(2), 207–213. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-923x.2007.00848.x>
- Leonard, P. (1975) 'Towards a paradigm of radical practice in Radical social work' in (eds.) Bailey, & Brake, M. (1975). *Radical social work*. Pantheon Books
- Letwin, S.R. (1992). *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (1st ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351294485>
- Lewis, E. (2018). *What's the Difference Between an Advocate and an Activist? Have You Been Mislabeled?* Adobe Blog; Adobe Corporate Communications.
<https://blog.adobe.com/en/publish/2018/02/09/whats-difference-advocate-activist-mislabeled>
- Lewis, K., Gray, K., & Meierhenrich, J. (2014). The Structure of Online Activism. *Sociological Science*, 1(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v1.a1>

- LINFO (2005). *Internet definition by The Linux Information Project*. [online] Available at: <http://www.linfo.org/internet.html> [Accessed 15 Jan. 2022].
- Lishman, J., In Yuill, C., In Brannan, J., & In Gibson, A. (2014). *Social work: An introduction*. SAGE Publications Ltd
- Little, D. E. (2012). Explanatory Autonomy and Coleman's Boat. *THEORIA. An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science*, 27(2), 137–151. <https://doi.org/10.1387/theoria.3016>
- Lloyd, Chris & King, Robert & Chenoweth, Lesley. (2011). *Social Work, stress and burnout: A review*. 11. 10.1080/09638230020023642.
- Lo, C. (1992). Communities of challengers in social movement theory. In: *Frontiers in social movement theory*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- MacIntyre, G., & Paul, S. (2012). Teaching Research in Social Work: Capacity and Challenge. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(4), 685–702. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs010>
- MacIntyre, G., Cogan, N., Stewart, A., Quinn, N., O'Connell, M., & Rowe, M. (2021). Citizens defining citizenship: a model grounded in lived experience and its implications for research, policy and practice. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13440>
- Mangen, S. (1999). Qualitative research methods in cross-national settings. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2(2), 109–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/136455799295087>

- Manikonda, L., Beigi, G., Kambhampati, S., & Liu, H. (2018). #metoo Through the Lens of Social Media. *Social, Cultural, and Behavioral Modeling*, 104–110.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93372-6_13
- Manning, J. (2014). Social media, definition and classes of. In K. Harvey (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of social media and politics*. 1158-1162. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Margarit, D. (2016). Civic Disenchantment and Political Distress: The Case of the Romanian Autumn. *East European Politics*. 32, 1.
- Marginean, I. (1997). *Social Indicators Research*, 42(3), 353–366.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1006868605688>
- Marin, L. (2019). How to Think Critically about the Common Past? On the Feeling of Communism Nostalgia in Post-Revolutionary Romania. *Annals of the University of Bucharest - Philosophy Series*, 68(2), 57-71. [4].
<https://philarchive.org/rec/MARHTT-6>
- Marinescu, V. (2006). Religious Affiliations as Predictors of the Romanians' Attitude Towards the Country's Integration into the European Union. 2. *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 2(1)
- Martin, B., & Coy, P. G. (2017). Skills, training, and activism. *Reflective Practice*, 18(4), 515–525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2017.1323730>
- Martin, J.L., Lee, M. (2015). Social Structure. In: James D. Wright (editor-in-chief), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edition, Vol 22. Oxford: Elsevier. 713–718

- Martinez-Herrero, M. I. (2017). *Human Rights and Social Justice in Social Work Education: A critical realist comparative study of England and Spain*. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.
- Martínez-Mesa, J., González-Chica, D. A., Duquia, R. P., Bonamigo, R. R., & Bastos, J. L. (2016). Sampling: how to select participants in my research study?. *Anais brasileiros de dermatologia*, *91*(3), 326–330. <https://doi.org/10.1590/abd1806-4841.20165254>
- Martinez, E., & Garcia, A. (1997). What is neoliberalism? A brief definition for activists. National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, 1, 1-3.
- Mary, N. L. (2001). Political activism of social work educators. [Article]. *Journal of Community Practice*, *9*(4), 1-20.
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. Harpers.
- Maxey, I. (1999). Beyond boundaries? Activism, academia, reflexivity and research. *Area 31*: 199–208
- Maxey, I. (1999). Beyond boundaries? Activism, academia, reflexivity and research. *Area*, *31*(3), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.1999.tb00084.x>
- McEvoy, P., & Richards, D. (2006). A critical realist rationale for using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *11*(1), 66–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987106060192>
- McFadden, P., Mallett, J., Campbell, A., & Taylor, B. (2018). Explaining Self-Reported Resilience in Child-Protection Social Work: The Role of Organisational Factors,

- Demographic Information and Job Characteristics. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 49(1), 198–216. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy015>
- McKim, C. A. (2017). The Value of Mixed Methods Research: A Mixed Methods Study. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 11(2), 202–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815607096>
- Meleyal, L. (2014). *Social work regulation: help or hindrance?* Guardian Newspaper. <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/55216>
- Mendes, P. (2007). Social Workers and Social Activism in Victoria, Australia. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 18(1), 25–44. https://doi.org/10.1300/j059v18n01_03
- Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M.-Y., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G., & Muhamad, M. (2001). Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(5), 405–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370120490>
- Mezirow, J. (2006). An overview of transformative learning. In P Sutherland and J Crowther (Eds), *Lifelong learning: Concepts and contexts* (pp 24-38): New York: Routledge
- Michailakis, D. and Schirmer, W. (2014), Social work and social problems. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23: 431-442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12091>
- Millar, R. Quinn, N. Cameron, J. Colson, A. (2020). Considering the evidence of the impacts of lockdown on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people within the context of the individual, the family, and education. Glasgow: Mental Health Foundation.

- Miller, J. M., & Krosnick, J. A. (2004). Threat as a Motivator of Political Activism: A Field Experiment. *Political Psychology*, 25(4), 507–523. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00384.x>
- Milligan, C., Kyle, R. G., Bondi, L., Fyfe, N. R., Kearns, R., & Lerner, W. (2008). From Placards to Partnership: the changing nature of community activism and infrastructure in Manchester, UK and Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. In *dspace.stir.ac.uk*. Institute for Health Research, University of Lancaster. <http://hdl.handle.net/1893/12919>
- Mind (2021). Coronavirus: the consequences for mental health. London: Mind. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/8962/the-consequences-of-coronavirus-for-mental-health-final-report.pdf>
- Mizrahi, T., & Dodd, S. J. (2013). MSW students' perspectives on social work goals and student activism before and after completing graduate education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49, 580–600.
- Montague, A. C., & Eiroa-Orosa, F. J. (2017). In it together: Exploring how belonging to a youth activist group enhances well-being. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1), 23–43. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21914>
- Morariu, M. (2012). From condemnation to melancholy: alternative meanings of post-communist nostalgia in Romania beyond the official anti-communist discourse. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 12(2), 289–308. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-446281>

Moriarty, J., Baginsky, M., & Manthorpe, J. (2015). *Literature review of roles and issues within the social work profession in England*. Kings College London and Social Care Social Research Unit

Moyer, B., McAllister, J., Finley, M-L., and Soifer, S. (2001). *Doing Democracy. The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers

Mullaly, B. (2002). *Challenging oppression: A critical social work approach*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford.

Müller, H. (2018). “Censorship of the word does not end on paper, but on the skin of human beings”: The Nobel prize-winning novelist and poet on the curious words that were banned in Romania and being threatened by the secret police. *Index on Censorship*, 47(3), 67–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306422018800404>

Mundt, M., Ross, K., & Burnett, C. M. (2018). Scaling Social Movements Through Social Media: The Case of Black Lives Matter. *Social Media + Society*, 4(4), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118807911>

Munro, E. (2011a). *The Munro Review of Child Protection Interim Report: The Child's Journey*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-interim-report-the-childs-journey>

Murthy, D. (2018). Introduction to Social Media, Activism, and Organizations. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), 205630511775071. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117750716>

Nandan, M., London, M., & Bent-Goodley, T. (2015). Social Workers as Social Change Agents: Social Innovation, Social Intrapreneurship, and Social Entrepreneurship. *Human Service Organizations Management, Leadership & Governance*, 39(1), 38–56.

- Negoita, M. (2012). State Weakness in Post-Communist Romania and the Legacy of Communism, *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*, 6(2).
- Nehring, N. (2007). “Everyone’s Given Up and Just Wants to Go Dancing”: From Punk to Rave in the Thatcher Era. *Popular Music and Society*, 30(1), 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760500453176>
- Neuman, W. L. (2012). Designing the Face-to-Face Survey. *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences*, 227–248. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3876-2_14
- Niblett, B. (2017). *Social justice education : stories and strategies for teachers*. Bethany, Ok: Wood N Barnes.
- Nikolov, D., Oliveira, D. F. M., Flammini, A., & Menczer, F. (2015). Measuring online social bubbles. *PeerJ Computer Science*, 1, e38. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj-cs.38>
- Nilsson, J. E., Marszalek, J. M., Linnemeyer, R. M., Bahner, A. D., & Misialek, L. H. (2011). Development and Assessment of the Social Issues Advocacy Scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 71(1), 258–275.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164410391581>
- Nimu, A., Pîrvulescu, C., & Todor, A. (2016). *Societatea civilă, democrație și construcție instituțională : transparență și participare publică în România contemporană*. Polirom.
- NMDS-SC (2018). *Headline Social Worker Statistics* www.skillsforcare.org.uk/NMDS-SC-intelligence/Workforce-intelligence/documents/2Social-Worker-headline-data.pdf
 [accessed 21.06.2019]

- Noble, C., & Briskman, L. (1998). Workable ethics: Social work and progressive practice. *Australian Social Work*, 51(3), 9–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03124079808411227>
- Norris, P. (2003). Young People and Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?, Paper presented to the Council of Europe Symposium, *Young People and Democratic Institutions: From Disillusionment to Participation*, Strasbourg, 27–28 November.
- Obrizan, M. (2012). Exploring cross-country variation in government shares: what can we learn from relative productivities? *Macroeconomic Dynamics*, 17(2), 356–372.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s1365100511000150>
- OED Online. (2012). Oxford University Press. Dictionary on line <http://www.oed.com/>. Retrieved 20120429.
- Oliver P., Marwell G. (1992). Mobilizing technologies for collective action, published in the conference volume *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory*,
<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/PROTESTS/ArticleCopies/MobTechOliverMarwell.pdf>
- Oliver, C. (2012). Critical Realist Grounded Theory: A New Approach for Social Work Research. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(2), 371–387.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr064>
- Oliver, P. (2003). *The Student's Guide to Research Ethics*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

- Olsen, W. (2007). Critical Realist Explorations in Methodology. *Methodological Innovation Online*, 2(2), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.4256/mio.2007.0007>
- Orme, J., & Powell, J. (2008). Building Research Capacity in Social Work: Process and Issues. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(5), 988–1008.
- Ostry, J. D., Loungani, P., & Davide Furceri. (2016). *Neoliberalism: Oversold? - IMF FINANCE & DEVELOPMENT June 2016 • Volume 53 • Number 2*.
<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2016/06/pdf/ostry.pdf>
- Oyserman, D. (2015). Values, *Psychology of. International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. 10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.24030-0.
- Padgett, D. K. (2008). *Qualitative Methods in Social Work Research (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 304.
- Palumbo, E., & Friedman, M. (2014). Occupying Social Work: Unpacking Connections and Contradictions in the Social Work/Activist Divide. *Journal of Critical Anti-Oppressive Social Inquiry*, 1(1).
<https://caos.library.ryerson.ca/index.php/caos/article/view/101>
- Pant, S., B., (2017). *Why grassroots activists should resist being 'professionalised' into an NGO* in Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/jul/07/why-grassroots-activists-should-resist-being-professionalised-into-an-ngo> [accessed 10.08.2018]
- Park, K., Park, N., Heo, W., & Gustafson, K. (2018). What Prompts College Students to Participate in Online Surveys? *International Education Studies*, 12(1), 69.
<https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v12n1p69>

- Parton, N. (2003). Rethinking Professional Practice: The contributions of Social Constructionism and the Feminist “Ethics of Care.” *British Journal of Social Work*, 33(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/33.1.1>
- Patton M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health services research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189–1208.
- Pawar, M. (2019). Social Work and Social Policy Practice: Imperatives for Political Engagement. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, 1(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2516602619833219>
- Payne, M. (2002). The Politics of Systems Theory within Social Work. *Journal of Social Work*, 2(3), 269–292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146801730200200302>
- Payne, M. (2005) (2014). *Modern social work theory* (3rd ed.). Lyceum Books, Inc.
- Payne, M., Adams, R., & Dominelli, L. (2009). On being critical in social work. *Critical Practice in Social Work*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-36586-5_1
- Pazzaglia, A. M., Stafford, E. T., & Rodriguez, S. M. (2016). Survey Methods for Educators: Analysis and Reporting of Survey Data (Part 3 of 3). REL 2016-164. In *ERIC*. Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED567753>
- PCACDR (2006). *Presidential Commission for Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania*. Final Report. Wilson Center
- Penhale, B., & Young, J. (n.d.). *A Review of the literature concerning what the public and users of social work services in England think about the conduct and competence of social workers Final Report*. UEA Consulting Ltd, Norwich Research Park

- Peter, S., & Park, L. S.-C. (2018). Changing research methodology: Two case studies of Critical Realism informing social work doctoral research. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 30(1), 65.
- Petersen-Smith, K. (2015). Black lives matter – a movement takes shape, *ISR International Socialist Review*, Issue 96
- Pettinicchio, D. (2012). Institutional Activism: Reconsidering the Insider/Outsider Dichotomy. *Sociology Compass*, 6(6), 499–510. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2012.00465.x>
- Phillips, J., & Waterson, J. (2002). Care management and social work: A case study of the role of social work in hospital discharge to residential or nursing home care. *European Journal of Social Work*, 5(2), 171–186.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/714890030>
- Pichardo, A. (1997). New Social Movements: A Critical Review, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, 411-430
- Pierson, J. (2011). *Understanding social work [internet resource]: History and context*. Maidenhead: Open University Press
- Pinsonneault, A., & Kraemer, K. (1993). Research Methodology in Management Information Systems. *Journal of Management Information Systems - Special Section: Strategic and Competitive Information Systems Archive*, 10, 75-105.
- Plotke D. (1995). What's So New About New Social Movements?. In: Lyman S.M. (eds) *Social Movements. Main Trends of the Modern World*. Palgrave Macmillan, London

- Polanska, D. V., & Chimiak, G. (2016). Organizing without organizations: on informal social activism in Poland. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 36(9/10), 662–679. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijssp-11-2015-0120>
- Popple, K. (2015). *Analysing community work: Theory and practice*. Milton Keynes. Open University Press
- Powell, J., & Orme, J. (2011). Increasing the Confidence and Competence of Social Work Researchers: What Works? *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(8), 1566–1585.
- Ranganathan, M. B., Mountford, H., and Ranganathan, J. (2019). *The environment beyond neoliberalism: Delivering sustainable growth*. Brookings.
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-environment-beyond-neoliberalism-delivering-sustainable-growth/>
- Ravalier J.M. and Boichat C. (2018). *UK social workers: working conditions and wellbeing*. Bath: Bath Spa University
- Ravalier, J., Wainwright, E., Clabburn, O., Loon, M., & Smyth, N. (2020). Working conditions and wellbeing in UK social workers. *Journal of Social Work*, 146801732094936. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017320949361>
- Reamer, F. G. (1998). The Evolution of Social Work Ethics. *Social Work*, 43(6), 488–500. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/43.6.488>
- Reamer, F. G. (2013). Social work in a digital age: Ethical and risk management challenges. *Social Work* 58(2), 163–172. doi:10.1093/sw/swt003
- Rees, S. (1991). *Achieving power: practice and policy in social welfare*. Allen & Unwin.

- Reeser, L. (1992). Professional Role Orientation and Social Activism. *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 19(2). <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol19/iss2/7/>
- Reeser, L.C., & Epstein, I. (1990). *Professionalization and activism in social work : the sixties, the eighties, and the future*. Columbia University Press.
- Reichard, C. (2010). New Public Management. In: Anheier, H.K., Toepler, S. (eds) International Encyclopedia of Civil Society. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4_89
- Reiner, R. (1998). Policing, Protest, and Disorder In Britain. In Donatella della Porta and Herbert Reiter (eds.), *The Policing of Mass Demonstrations in Contemporary Democracies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 35– 48
- Reisch, M. (2013). Social Movements. *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.366>
- Reisch, M., & Jani, J. S. (2012). The New Politics of Social Work Practice: Understanding Context to Promote Change. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1132–1150. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs072>
- Rice, S., Winter, S. R., Doherty, S., & Milner, M. (2017). Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Internet-Based Survey Methods in Aviation-Related Research. *Journal of Aviation Technology and Engineering*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.7771/2159-6670.1160>
- Ringmar, E. (2015). Violent Protest, Contentious Politics, and the Neoliberal State. *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, 44(4), 552–554. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094306115588487ss>

- Robinson, W. I., & Harris, J. (2000). Towards a Global Ruling Class? Globalization and the Transnational Capitalist Class. *Science & Society*, 64(1), 11–54.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40403824>
- Rognlien, L., & Kier-Byfield, S. (2020). Everyday Activism and Resistance by Minority Women in Denmark. *Conjunctions. Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.7146/tjcp.v7i1.119854>
- Rogowski, S. (2011). Managers, Managerialism and Social Work with Children and Families: The Deformation of a Profession? *Practice*, 23(3), 157–167.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2011.569970>
- Rogowski, S. (2015). From Child Welfare to Child Protection/Safeguarding: A Critical Practitioner’s View of Changing Conceptions, *Policies and Practice, Practice*, 27:2, 97-112, DOI: [10.1080/09503153.2015.1014337](https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2015.1014337)
- Rogowski, S. (2018). Neoliberalism and social work with children and families in the UK: On-going challenges and critical possibilities. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, [online] 30(3), pp.72–83. doi:10.11157/anzswj-vol30iss3id519.
- Rogowski, S. (2020). *SOCIAL WORK: the rise and fall of a profession*. Bristol, Policy Press
- Rome & Hoechstetter, S. (2010). Social work and civic engagement: The political participation of professional social workers. *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 37(3). 107-129.
- Roth, S. (2016). Professionalisation and precariousness: perspectives on the sustainability of activism in everyday life. *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*, 29-59.
- Rotman, D. Vieweg, S, Yardi, S., Chi, E., Preece, J., Shneider-man, B., Pirolli, P., & Glaisyer, T. (2011). From slack-tivism to activism: Participatory culture in the age of social media. *In CHI '11 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing*

Systems (CHI EA '11). ACM, New York, NY, 819-822.

DOI=10.1145/1979742.1979543

Rowe, M. (2015). *Citizenship and mental health*. Oxford University Press

Roy, A. (2010). Online Communities and Social Networking. *Social Computing: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Application* Chapter 1.4: 45-54

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2007). *The method chapter: Describing your research plan*. *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*, 87-117.

Sadowski, P., de Bonfils, L., and King, L. (2018). *Active Citizens for the Common Good: The Active Citizenship Footprint*. Volonteuropa <https://volonteuropa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Active-Citizenship-Footprint-FINAL.pdf>

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd Ed.). Sage.

Salway, S. M., Higginbottom, G., Reime, B., Bharj, K. K., Chowbey, P., Foster, C., Friedrich, J., Gerrish, K., Mumtaz, Z., & O'Brien, B. (2011). Contributions and challenges of cross-national comparative research in migration, ethnicity and health: insights from a preliminary study of maternal health in Germany, Canada and the UK. *BMC Public Health*, 11(1).

- Sanders, D. S. (1974). Educating Social Workers for the Role of Effective Change Agents in a Multicultural, Pluralistic Society. *Journal of Education for Social Work, 10*(2), 86–91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23038402>
- Sanderson B., A., Furness, E., Nicol, P., Pitt, H., & Taherzadeh, A. (2021). Shaping more resilient and just food systems: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Ambio*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-021-01532-y>
- Sandu, D. (2020). *Contextul de votare la parlamentarele din 2020 (Romanian Parliamentary Elections 2020: a Context Analysis)*. Project Public Sociology
- Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research methods for business students*. Harlow, England: Pearson.
- Saxena, N. (1998). What is meant by people's participation? *Journal of Rural Development, 17*(1), 111–113.
- Scheer, L., (2017). 'Resistance' and Liberal Activism The problems with using the word 'Resist' on *Public Seminar* <http://www.publicseminar.org/2017/04/resistance-and-liberal-activism/> [accessed 07 Jun 2018]
- Scheuren, F. (2004). *What is a Survey*. American Statistical Association https://cpbusw2.wpmucdn.com/voices.uchicago.edu/dist/7/1236/files/2018/07/pamphlet_current-27f9swt.pdf
- Schlosser, M. (2019). Agency In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/agency/>

- Schradie, J. (2014). Bringing the organization back in: Social media and social movements. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 58.
- Schradie, J. (2018). The Digital Activism Gap: How Class and Costs Shape Online Collective Action. *Social Problems*, 65(1), 51–74. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spx042>
- Schroeder D., Chatfield K., Singh M., Chennells R., Herissone-Kelly P. (2019) The Four Values Framework: Fairness, Respect, Care and Honesty. In: *Equitable Research Partnerships*. SpringerBriefs in Research and Innovation Governance. Springer, Cham
- Schwedler, J., & Harris, K. (2016). What Is Activism? *Middle East Report*, 281, 2–5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44578534>
- Scott, J. (1992). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Scott, J., & Marshall, G. (2009). *A Dictionary of Sociology*. : Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199533008.001.0001/acref-9780199533008>.
- Sen, A. & Avci, O. (2016). Why social movements occur: Theories of social movements, *Journal of Knowledge Economy and Knowledge Management*, 11(1), 125-130.
- Sen, R., Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Kerr, C., MacIntyre, G., & Quinn-Aziz, A. (2020). Reflections on social work 2020 under Covid-19 online magazine. *Social Work Education*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.182336>

- Seulean, D. (1999). *Sursele sociale ale vietii asociative si filantropiei în contextul tranzitiei* [Social sources of associative life and philanthropy in the context of the transition]. Open Society Foundation
- Sharland, E. (2013). Where are we now? *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 16(2), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1921/300316206>
- Shaw, I., Norton, M. (2008). Kinds and Quality of Social Work Research, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 38(5), 953–970.
- Shdaimah, C., & Strier, R. (2020). Ethical Conflicts in Social Work Practice: Challenges and Opportunities. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 14(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2020.1718848>
- Sheldon, K. M., Wineland, A., Venhoeven, L., & Osin, E. (2016). Understanding the Motivation of Environmental Activists: A Comparison of Self-Determination Theory and Functional Motives Theory. *Ecopsychology*, 8(4), 228–238.
- Shelton, E. (2006). *A Study of Political Activity among Social Work Students A Study of Political Activity among Social Work Students*. https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=3145&context=utk_gradthes
- Sheppard, M. (2016). The Nature and Extent of Quantitative Research in Social Work: A Ten-Year Study of Publications in Social Work Journals. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1520–1536. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcv084>
- Smith, K. (2011). *Activist Social Workers in Neoliberal Times: Who are We Becoming Now?* Tspace.library.utoronto.ca. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/29875>
- Smith, N. (2019). Neoliberalism. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neoliberalism>

- Snow, D., & Cross, R. (2011). Radicalism within the Context of Social Movements: Processes and Types. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(4), 115–130.
<https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.5>
- Sobočan, A. M., Bertotti, T., & Strom-Gottfried, K. (2018). Ethical considerations in social work research. *European Journal of Social Work*, 22(5), 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1544117>
- Sorescu, E.,M. (2015). Învățământul românesc de asistență socială – istoric, standarde și perspective [Romanian Social Work Education – History, Standards and Perspectives], *Romanian Social Work Review*, 1/2015. 23-34.
- Spencer, B., (2015). *About Civic Activism* <http://civicactivism.buildingchangetrust.org/about>
[accessed 10.08.2018]
- Stahl, I. (2016). Has Romania become a secular society? *Revista română de sociologie*, 1–2, 135–149.
- Stake, J. E., & Hoffman, F. L. (2001). Changes in student social attitudes, activism, and personal confidence in higher education: The role of women's studies. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 411–436. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038002411>
- Stammers, N. (2009). *Human rights and social movements*. London; New York, NY: Pluto Press.
- Stan, L., & Lucian Turcescu. (2007). *Religion and politics in post-communist Romania*. Oxford University Press.

- Staub, E., & Vollhardt, J. (2008). Altruism born of suffering: The roots of caring and helping after victimization and other trauma. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78(3), 267–280. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014223>
- Stephenson, P., Wagner, M., Badea, M., & Serbanescu, F. (1992). Commentary: the public health consequences of restricted induced abortion--lessons from Romania. *American journal of public health*, 82(10), 1328–1331. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.82.10.1328>
- Stoica, C. (2012). Fatetele multiple ale nemulțumirii populare: O schita sociologica a protestelor din Piata Universitatii din ianuarie 2012. *Sociologie Romaneasca*, 10, 1.
- Stoiciu, A. (2001). Making civil society work – Romania, *IDEE report on civil society*, available online at: <http://www.idee.ro/public%20affairs/civilsoc/civilsoc.htm>
- Strier, R., Bershtling, O. (2016). Professional Resistance in Social Work: Counterpractice Assemblages, *Social Work*, Volume 61, Issue 2, Pages 111–118.
- Strom-Gottfried, K. (2008). Values and Ethics for Professional Social Work Practice. *Comprehensive Handbook of Social Work and Social Welfare*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470373705.chsw001010>
- Stuart, J., & Barnes, J. (2005). *Conducting ethical research*. <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/support/GuidanceReports/documents/165.pdf>
- Sui D., & Goodchild M. (2011). The convergence of GIS and social media: challenges for GIScience, *International Journal of Geographical Information Science*, 25:11, 1737-1748, DOI: [10.1080/13658816.2011.604636](https://doi.org/10.1080/13658816.2011.604636)

- Svensson, J., Neumayer, C., Banfield-Mumb, A., & Schossboeck, J. (2012). What kind of activist are you? Positioning, power and identity in political online activism in Europe. In N. Edelman, & P. Parycek (Eds.), *CeDem2012. Conference on E-Democracy and Open Government*. 165-177. Donau-Universität-Krems
- Swank, E. W. (2012). Predictors of political activism among social work students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 48(2), 245–266. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41705862>
- Szabo, V. (2012). *Youth and politics in communist Romania (1980-1989)*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh.
- Taib, M. I.M. (2006). '(de)Meaning of Social Activism' *The Reading Group* available at <http://thereadinggroup.sg/articles.htm#articles01> [accessed 09.01.2018]
- Tatar, M. I. (2011). Votetz, deci exist? Un studiu longitudinal al participării la vot în alegerile parlamentare din România. *Sociologie Românească*, 9(3), 90–120. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-454578>
- Tatar, M. I. (2016). Democratization and political alienation: the legacies of post-communist transition in Romania. *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 10(2), 85-108. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-49385-7>
- Taylor, M. (2020). The evolution of Extinction Rebellion. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/04/evolution-of-extinction-rebellion-climate-emergency-protest-coronavirus-pandemic>
- Tesch, D., & Kempton, W. (2004). Who is an Environmentalist? The Polysemy of Environmentalist Terms and Correlated Environmental Actions. *Journal of Ecological Anthropology*, 8(1), 67–83. <https://doi.org/10.5038/2162-4593.8.1.4>

- Thapa, D., & Omland, H. O. (2018). Four steps to identify mechanisms of ICT4D: A critical realism-based methodology. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 84(6), e12054. <https://doi.org/10.1002/isd2.12054>
- Thompson, K. (2015). *Positivism and Interpretivism in Social Research*, <https://revisesociology.com/2015/05/18/positivism-interpretivism-sociology/> [accessed from 16 Jul 2019]
- Thompson, K. (2017). *Interviews in Social Research: Advantages and Disadvantages*. ReviseSociology. <https://revisesociology.com/2016/01/23/interviews-in-social-research-advantages-and-disadvantages/>
- Thompson, N. (2002). Social Movements, Social Justice and Social Work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 32(6), 711–722.
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>
- Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Communism and post-communism in Romania: challenges to democratic transition. *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, University of Maryland
- Towers, B. (1989). Running the Gauntlet: British Trade Unions under Thatcher, 1979–1988. *ILR Review*, 42(2), 163–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001979398904200201>
- Travers, M. (2008). Understanding Comparison in Criminal Justice Research. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 18(4), 389–405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057567708324592>

- Trebici, V. (1991). *Genocide and Democracy*. Bucharest Ed Humanitas.
- Tremlett, G. (2015). *The Podemos revolution: how a small group of radical academics changed European politics* in Guardian:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/31/podemos-revolution-radical-academics-changed-european-politics> [accessed 23.08.2019]
- Turbett, C. (2013). *Radical Social Work in the Front Line: a Survival Toolkit for the UK. Critical and Radical Social Work* 1, 225-32
- Turbett, C. (2014). *Doing Radical Social Work Basingstoke*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Turbett, C. (2020). *Rediscovering and mainstreaming community social work in Scotland*. Iriss. <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/rediscovering-and-mainstreaming-community-social-work-scotland>
- Turcescu, L., & Stan, L. (2010). The Romanian Orthodox Church and democratisation: twenty years later. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10(2-3), 144–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225x.2010.493753>
- UNISON. (2018). *Social work at breaking point*.
<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/06/Social-work-at-breaking-point.pdf>
- Upton, G., & Cook, I. (2014). *target population*. In *A Dictionary of Statistics*. : Oxford University Press
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199679188.001.0001/acref-9780199679188-e-1617>.
- Ursu, A., Hodor, M, Thomasson, R.O. (2019). *Studiu asupra vinovățiilor pentru victimele Revoluției Române din decembrie 1989 ["Who shot at us after 22" Study on the guilt*

- for the victims of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989]. *Revista Drepturilor Omului*
- van Ewijk, H. (2009). Citizenship-based social work. *International Social Work*, 52(2), 167–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872808099728>
- van Heugten, K. (2018). Social Work and Workplace Bullying, Emotional Abuse and Harassment. *Special Topics and Particular Occupations, Professions and Sectors*, 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5154-8_12-1
- Veit-Wilson, J. H. (1992). Muddle or Mendacity? The Beveridge Committee and the Poverty Line. *Journal of Social Policy*, 21(3), 269–301. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279400019954>
- Velicu, I., & Kaika, M. (2017). Undoing environmental justice: Re-imagining equality in the Rosia Montana anti-mining movement. *Geoforum*, 84, 305–315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.10.012>
- Vestergren, S., Drury, J., & Chiriac, E. H. (2016). The biographical consequences of protest and activism: a systematic review and a new typology. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(2), 203–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2016.1252665>
- Vie, S. (2014). In defense of “slacktivism”: The Human Rights Campaign Facebook logo as digital activism. *First Monday*, 19(4). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i4.4961>
- Vince, R., & Saleem, T. (2004). The Impact of Caution and Blame on Organizational Learning. *Management Learning*, 35(2), 133–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507604043022>
- Vincent, S. & O'Mahoney, J. (2018). Critical realism and qualitative research: an introductory overview. In Cassell, C., Cunliffe, A. L., & Grandy, G. *The sage handbook of*

qualitative business and management research methods, 201-216, London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Vizzotto A.D.B., de Oliveira A.M., Elkis H., Cordeiro Q., Buchain P.C. (2013). Psychosocial Characteristics. In: Gellman M.D., Turner J.R. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine*. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1005-9_918

Vogt, W. P. (1999). *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences*, London: Sage

Weaver, B. (2016). *Offending and desistance : the importance of social relations*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Weaver, H. N. (2000). Activism and American Indian issues: Opportunities and roles for social workers. [Article]. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 11(1), 3-22.), 62(1), 45-52

Webb, S. A. (2010). (Re)Assembling the Left: The Politics of Redistribution and Recognition in Social Work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(8), 2364–2379. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq070>

Weiss, P. (2013). Getting to the Roots; or, Everything I Need to Know About Radical Social Change I Learned in My Garden. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 41(3/4), 131–150. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23611510>

Wenocur, S. & Reisch, M. (2001). *From charity to enterprise: The development of American social work in a market economy*. Illinois: First Illinois Paperback

- Whiteside, N. (2014). The Beveridge Report and Its Implementation: a Revolutionary Project? *Histoire@Politique*, 24(3), 24. <https://doi.org/10.3917/hp.024.0024>
- Wiles, R., Crow, G., Heath, S., & Charles, V. (2006,). Anonymity and confidentiality. Paper presented at the *ESRC Research Methods Festival*, University of Oxford, UK.
- Wilterdink, N. and William, F. (2021). *Social change*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>
- Woodhead, L. (2011). Five concepts of religion. *International Review of Sociology*, 21(1), 121–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2011.544192>
- YouGov. (2020). *A report on the social work profession*. <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/3326/yougov-the-social-work-profession.pdf>
- Younghusband, E. (1981). *The newest profession: A short history of social work*. IPC Business P.
- Younghusband, E. L (1978). *Social work in Britain, 1950-1975: A follow-up study*. London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- Zaborek, Piotr. (2009). Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods in *Management Science*. 10.13140/2.1.1413.4725.
- Zachariadis, M. & Scott, S. & Barrett, M. (2013). Methodological Implications of Critical Realism for Mixed-Methods Research. *MIS Quarterly*. 37. 855-879. 10.25300/MISQ/2013/37.3.09.

