

Daniela Luisi, INAPP - National Institute for Public Policy Analysis

# Exploring the Policy Practice of Social Work: Implications for Social Work Education

Bridging Communities: Building Sustainable Futures

International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) - European Regional Conference 2025

Oslo - 7th October 2025



# Contents

Luisi, D. (2025) “Exploring the Policy Practice of Social Work: Implications for Social Work Education”

in Zechner, M. (ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Social Work Education*, Springer Briefs (forthcoming)

1. Key Theoretical Tensions
2. The Policy Engagement Framework
3. “Environments” and Policy Practice Factors
4. How to Strengthen Policy Practice
5. Suggestions for Social Work Education



Source: University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work  
<https://www.crsp.pitt.edu/bell-hooks>



# Key Theoretical Tensions (risks and opportunities)

1. [Decentralization of welfare policies](#) (Pierson, 2001; Seller & Lidström, 2007; Rodriguez-Pose & Ezcurra, 2010).

*In Italian welfare system:*

→ different types of relationships between public administration and private organisations (both for-profit and non-profit) have defined new governance models (Bifulco & Vitale, 2006; Ascoli, 2011; Fazzi, 2023);

→ de-professionalization of social work (Cellini & Scavarda, 2020).

2. [The relevance of social innovation in local welfare policies and the evolution of the social work profession](#)

*In Italian welfare system:*

→ territorialization of welfare has occurred amid innovations and fragmentations (Bifulco, 2015; 2025);

→ governance challenges in welfare and the social work profession (Wilken et. al., 2024; Luisi, 2025).

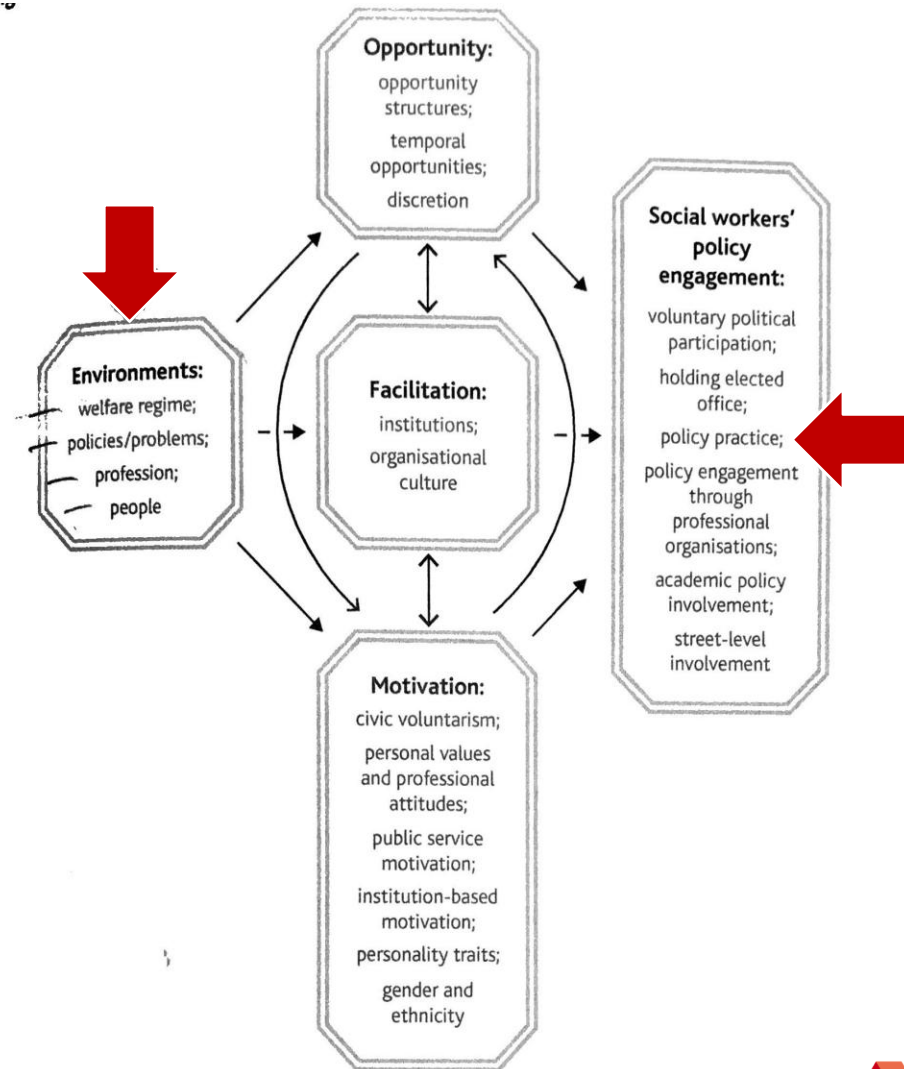
3. [Policy practice as conceptual framework embedded in the dynamics of local welfare](#) (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013; 2024).

→ Policy practice as relevant content area for social work practice, research and education.



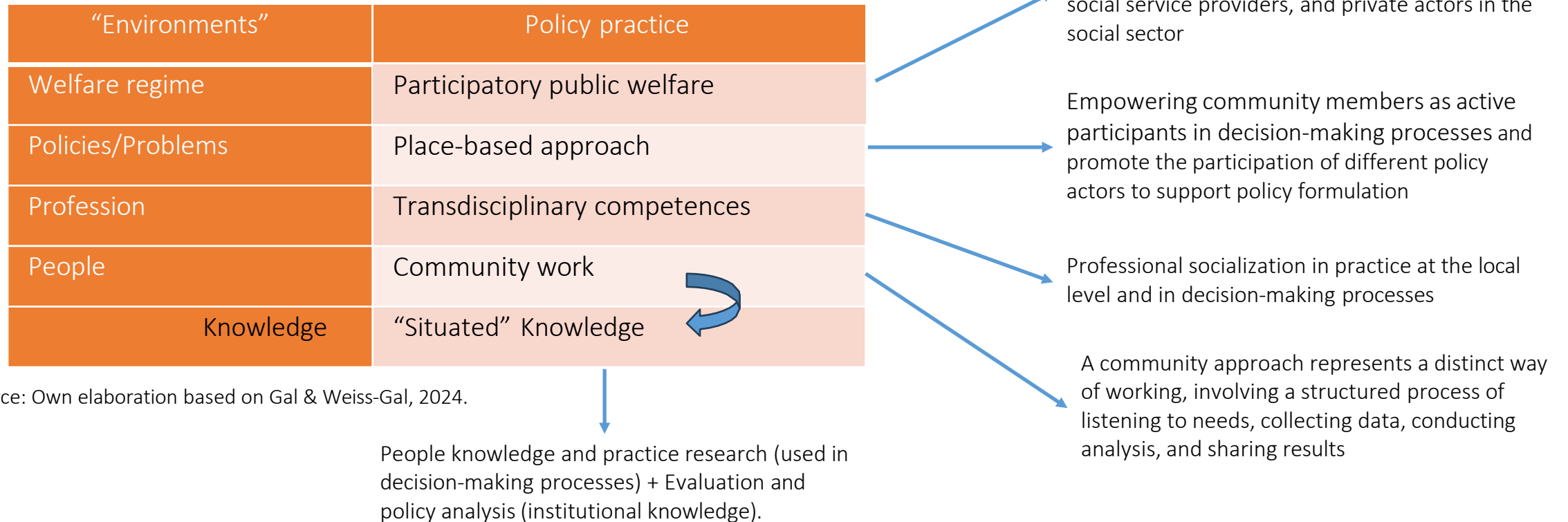
# The Policy Engagement Framework

- **Environments:** the contexts in which social workers practise.
- The theoretical framework identifies four types of environments — welfare regime, policies/problems, profession, and people — that influence the policy engagement of social worker.
- The four types of “environments” can be further analyzed from a territorial perspective, taking into account the spatial configuration of social problems in which policy practices generate mechanisms and strategies to define services and influence policy change.



# “Environments” and Policy Practice Factors

Tab. 1 - The “environments” category of policy engagement conceptual framework and its related policy practice



Source: Own elaboration based on Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2024.



# How to Strengthen Policy Practice

1. The community approach is relevant both as a methodological framework and as a professional discourse for generating radical practices (Ledwith, 2020; Gilboa & Weiss-Gal, 2022):
  - **Community work and community development** are processes of social innovation because they are methods that produce different kinds of knowledge.
  - **The community perspective asks social workers to invest in knowledge of contexts** and in analysis of what is being done.
2. Knowledge is a strategic tool, not only for community assets, but in the decision-making process (Börjesson & Ulmestig, 2023; Driessens. et al., 2024):
  - **Knowledge is theory-oriented, practice-oriented but also results oriented.**
  - **The “situated” knowledge is an interesting field for social work education**, focused on strengthening the ability to politicize social problems in (radical) social work and demonstrate results and changes.



# Suggestions for Social Work Education

Some Implications for Community Practice Education in Social Work

- **Action learning** and action research (Wilken & Narusson, 2024).
- **Community-based participatory research** could be embedded in community practice courses (Malka & Moshe-Grodofsky, 2021).
- **Education through learning communities** as a form of social innovation (Koop et al., 2024).

Situated Knowledge and Social Work Education

- **Improve skills for collective reflexivity** and for developing information bases and data to support social policy (Ferguson, 2018; Finne et al., 2022).
- **Improve fields of study by incorporating evaluation research** and evidence-based practice (Otto et al., 2009).
- **Evaluation research, as positive thinking**, could improve reflexivity about changes in programs and policies (Patton, 2011).

There is a tension between knowledge production and power dynamics,  
as well as a link between policy learning and policy innovation (Dunlop et al., 2024)





[d.luisi@inapp.gov.it](mailto:d.luisi@inapp.gov.it)



[www.inapp.gov.it](http://www.inapp.gov.it)