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## RESEÑA

# Antonio López Peláez (coord.). *Social Work Challenges in the XXI Century: Perspectives from the USA / Retos para el Trabajo Social en el siglo XXI: perspectivas desde los Estados Unidos de América*, 2015. Pamplona: Thomson-Reuters Aranzadi

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### Reseña:

“According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), social work is one of the fastest growing careers in the United States. The profession is expected to grow by 25% between 2010 and 2020. More than 650,000 people currently hold social work degrees” (<https://www.socialworkers.org/press-room/features/general/profession.asp>). Social work as an academic discipline and as a profession has, from its origins, been closely linked to the United States. Moreover, many of the debates currently taking place in academic and professional circles in the US have a direct bearing on the Spanish welfare systems, like outsourcing strategies, incorporating new technologies, or expanding the scope of the professional activity of social workers beyond that of mere services managers typical of social work in Spain today. In this line, the Koinonia ([www.koinonia.org.es](http://www.koinonia.org.es)) research team led by Professor López Peláez of the National Distance Education University (UNED) is taking important steps to create opportunities for academic debate between American and Spanish researchers. Examples of such efforts include international seminars, whose lectures are posted and freely available on the UNED website (such as *Future Trends in Social Work* held in 2013 with speakers from UC Berkeley and the universities of Jaen, Murcia, Huelva, the Complutense University of Madrid, and the UNED); international conferences co-sponsored by the University of Maryland, like the APPAM International Conference 2014, *The Decline of Middle Classes in the Developed World?*, ([www.appam.org](http://www.appam.org)), or more recently, March 2015, the first monograph dedicated exclusively to social work to be published in the scientific journal *ARBOR* of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), with articles

by professors from the School of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley and social work professors at the universities of Huelva, Jaen, Murcia and the UNED (<http://arbor.revistas.csic.es/index.php/arbor/issue/current>). Yet another line of work focuses on Mexico, with seminars such as *Social Work in the USA and Mexico: Perspectives from the Border* (<https://canal.uned.es/serial/index/id/1280>). Specifically in the sphere of mediation, some research results have been published by Thomson-Reuters Aranzadi<sup>1</sup>.

The publication reviewed here, in which the numerous challenges facing social work in the US are examined, goes one step further in this debate. First, it should be noted that 20 professors from four American universities (University of Michigan, Western Michigan University, University of Alaska Anchorage and Syracuse University) and a Spanish one (the UNED) collaborated in the book, in itself a fine example of teamwork. The chapters of the book are all organized around a single concept: "challenge." As the coordinator, Professor Antonio López Peláez, explains: "we refer to conditions or situations that demand new and innovative responses and to situations that may demand time, knowledge and/or resources we may not currently have. Examples of challenges faced by our profession of social work may include: the incorporation of new technologies in our professional practice, the persistence of social exclusion, or the need to provide effective and culturally sensitive interventions in rural as well as urban environments" (p. 17). But what exactly are the main challenges addressed in the book? The use of new technologies (in which the concept of "e-social work" and an online intervention model—an innovation in the social work field—are defined), leadership, research and professional practice, empowerment, social work in rural areas, the particular characteristics of social work in specific settings such as Alaska (an aspect that has been given scant attention in academic publications), and concrete problems such as those affecting elderly Latinos, corporal punishment in schools or issues related to minors.

The book is structured into nine chapters. Chapter 1, titled *Social work challenges in the 21st century: Citizenship, technology and e-social work* by Antonio López Peláez and Hector Luis Díaz, explores the challenges facing social work in 21<sup>st</sup>-century US. A significant contribution of this chapter is the concept of e-social work as a method of intervention to reach out to the digital native population and foster social inclusion processes in a society dominated by technology and globalization.

E-social work can be defined as the use of communication and information technologies in the social work and social services field, which aims to enhance feedback between social workers and users in all the processes in which they are involved. Taking as a starting point the results of research projects conducted by Professor Antonio López Peláez's research team, the different phases or stages of an e-social

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<sup>1</sup> Gorjón, F, López Peláez, A. (Coords.) 2013. Estado del Arte de la Mediación [The State of the Art of Mediation]. Pamplona: Thomson-Reuters Aranzadi.

work-based intervention project are presented. Users' needs are also analyzed and the appropriate dynamics for intervening in the online context are designed. Undoubtedly, this is an original chapter and of enormous added value for the field of social intervention.

In chapter 2, *Leadership development and social work: past, present and future challenges*, Dee Ann Sherwood introduces us to the concept of leadership in social work. The overall purpose of the chapter is to examine the historical foundations and challenges of leadership development in social work, highlighting the fundamental role of leadership in processes of social intervention, as well as in education and social movements.

In chapter 3, titled *Getting to what works: Using research to inform direct practice in social work in the United States*, Jennifer Harrison provides insight into how to use research to inform the public about social work practices in the US. To do so, she highlights the importance of engaging clients and other community stakeholders in the process by increasing knowledge and enhancing the decision-making capacities of those involved through evidence-based practice. Research can inform best practices with clients by involving social workers, social work students, teachers, clients and community members in both the US and internationally. In other words, it attempts to bridge the gap between experts' knowledge and make it available to the clients and professionals involved in social work.

In chapter 4, *Supporting vulnerable community organizations: A model of university-community empowerment*, Linwood Cousins, Earlie Washington, Teresa Bingman, Lloyd Bingman and Gisele Tchamba present a model of university-community empowerment, the University-Community Linkages for Child Survival Empowerment Center (U-CEC). Community organizations are widespread in the US and have as their ultimate aim to address the social, economic and political needs of individuals and families, which often go beyond what the individual and the family can afford. The chapter discusses the history of this community, the same people they serve, their guiding principles and their work. Finally, a summary of lessons learned is presented, which can help other professionals in this line of work. Specifically, the authors highlight some general implications arising from the experience for community practice and empowerment, understood as the implementation of the theory and always aimed at improving neighborhoods and communities that need it most.

In Chapter 5, *Beyond the city: The necessity for rural social work practice in the United States*, Donna M. Aguinaga immerses us in the rural life of the United States, which is often overshadowed by cities, but where the demand for social workers in small communities and isolated regions can be observed. Social workers in rural areas need to understand the idiosyncrasies of social work practice in these settings and to do so it is essential to transmit best practices by addressing the needs and

changes in rural life. The chapter begins with an overview of the challenges involved in defining rural areas and subsequently reviews the rural context in the US, providing a basis for understanding how demographics, poverty, changes in social structure and industry have affected rural communities. Finally, the content of the social work profession in a rural context, from education to the use of technology, is examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the challenges and opportunities that distinguish rural practice.

In chapter 6, *Social work practice in Alaska: Challenges and opportunities in the last frontier*, author Kathi R. Trawver explores social work practice in Alaska, a land characterized by very different geographical and climatic features that give rise to disparate health behaviors among its people and where social workers have historically had different characteristics and deficits than in other areas of the United States. The chapter shows how its inhabitants have responded in a collaborative and innovative manner to meet the challenges of social work practice in Alaska, and concludes with a discussion of the challenges of social work practice and innovations in providing meaningful and culturally relevant interventions and services to the people of Alaska.

In chapter 7 titled *Elderly Latinos in a Changing Society*, Alejandro García focuses on the elderly Latino population in a changing society, the United States. The author notes that social scientists sometimes ignore the distinctive life experiences of this group, which may be useful in understanding how they and their families survive. The ultimate goal of the chapter is to examine a variety of aspects of elderly Latinos, and bring to light their formal and informal support systems and way of life in the United States.

In chapter 8, titled *Corporal punishment in the United States: Social work students' attitudes towards the discipline of children and the implications for social work education*, Linda Cherrey Reeser and Susan Weinger address an issue of ongoing interest: corporal punishment in the United States, the attitudes of social work students towards the discipline of children and the implications for social work education. The authors highlight the lack of research on social workers' attitudes towards the corporal punishment of children and try to shed light on the issue. They are aware that social workers have an important influence on families, making it crucial to know their feelings about whether their values are compatible with social work ethics. The chapter provides a thorough analysis of the cultural context of corporal punishment in the United States with a view to gaining a better understanding of the attitudes and behavior of social workers.

In chapter 9, the final chapter of the book, titled *Strengthening trauma-informed systems and child welfare services: Cultural humility, transformative complicity, and empowerment in interdisciplinary teams*, Roxanna Duntley-Matos, Robert M. Ortega, Elizabeth Latón, Cindy Newberry, Marrit Shiery and Sarah Beu examine trauma-

informed systems (TIS) in the United States and discuss how such systems have developed optimal models to improve the socio-psychological and behavioral situation of youth services and other populations affected by violence and social conflict. In turn, they delve into the importance of empowering interdisciplinary teams working in such services to transform situations and realities affected by violence and social conflict and show how such empowerment facilitates the successful recovery of young people. The authors also reveal the serious consequences of ignoring, neutralizing or creating cultures of pathologization, leading to erroneous, stigmatized and harmful diagnoses of traumatized youth. Finally, the chapter concludes by pointing out the importance of how changes in the support system can be achieved, thereby achieving the goals of humanizing TIS but always within a framework and a community setting, something that can be very difficult task due to their disconnected structures.

After reading this book, this review would be incomplete without congratulating the coordinator and the authors of the various chapters, and encouraging them to both expand on the challenges facing social work in the United States in future publications and to compare and contrast professional experience in other parts of the world such as Europe or Asia. As occurs in the economic sphere, in coming years we will experience global trends that affect us all, such as outsourcing or population aging, while our local experiences can teach us new strategies of adaptation, change, resistance or resilience. In all cases, social work as an academic discipline, and social work professionals, constitute one of the key aspects of welfare systems. And we need more and better comparative studies that will allow us to develop new strategies for social intervention. In this sense, we must thank Thomson-Reuters Aranzadi,<sup>2</sup> a prestigious Spanish- and English-language publishing house for publishing research on this scale in the field of social work.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Scholarly Publishers Indicators (SPI, <http://ilia.cchs.csic.es/SPI/index.html>), Thomson-Reuters Aranzadi ranks No. 1 in quality of scientific publishers in the Spanish language in the field of law (out of a total of 67 publishers analyzed in 2012), and No. 1 in the ranking of quality of scientific publishers in the Spanish language in general (out of a total of 201 publishers analyzed in 2012). In 2014, Thomson-Reuters Aranzadi ranked second in law (out of the 61 publishers evaluated), and seventh in the overall ranking of scientific publishers (out of a total of 273 publishers). In the same ranking, Thomson-Reuters Editorial ranked seventh out of 258 publishers evaluated in 2014 in the category "international publishers". In all cases, Thomson-Reuters Aranzadi is in the first quartile of these rankings of editorial prestige, and in the top of the first quartile.

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