

Paradigm Recovery: The Social Workers of Freedom.

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A sociologist by profession, he has trained several generations of social workers in Madrid, where he lives. He has been president of Hogar Si <https://hogarsi.org/>, the Spanish initiative to fight against the social exclusion of homeless people and promoter of several works that critically reflect on the professional work of those who work in the field of social intervention.

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The work *Paradigma Recovey* comes to my hands at a key moment to reflect on the recovery that not only concerns people in a micro dimension, but also institutions and countries after two and a half years of pandemic with its effects on the worsening of social inequalities. The works on this paradigm are usually limited to Anglo-Saxon models, so we rarely have access to a book that presents in depth the constitutive elements of this paradigm, while critically discussing its scope and possibilities in Spanish.

The subtitle of this book, “The Social Workers of Freedom”, may be somewhat contradictory for those of us who work in contexts of subsidiary or neoliberal states, since freedom in our cases is promoted as an “exit from the state” or competition, entrepreneurship and weakening of welfare schemes. However, the notion of libertarianism that Vidal seeks to recover in this work alludes to the principles of autonomy and determination that are part of the values of international social work and hence its relevance as a critical liberationist perspective. At the same time, it is very much in tune with other paradigms that promote Latin American approaches such as liberation pedagogy and the movement of reconceptualization of social work itself.

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But what is this paradigm about? Recovery is part of liberationist approaches to intervention and as such liberates the stereotypes and constructions that have been made about people and their contexts. This is especially relevant in the case of the worst forms of exclusion, where subjects are forced into a non-person condition with no rights or autonomy over their lives. The Recovery paradigm does not act on the subjects who have been pushed aside, but on the interveners and the care systems, freeing people from the conditioning factors of the interventions and assumptions that impose ways of doing and being intervened with their respective labels, so typical of the conditional transfer schemes in force in Latin American countries.

I call them approaches of the three Rs, because it restores lost or denied rights. It repairs the damage caused, hence the concept of victim of those who suffer situations of poverty and exclusion, in the sense proposed by Bauman (2022). And it reconciles what we as a society have violated as a result of a system that structurally reproduces and generates exclusions. What this paradigm seeks is to recover the right to live, in direct harmony with Victor Jara's song (1971), which in Chile, almost fifty years later, became the anthem of a movement for the dignity of people.

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This paradigm dialogues and reinstates the debates on otherness approach that the author himself has previously worked on including some approaches for the Chilean case such as those developed in the works of Rubilar (2013), Castro-Serrano (2018) and Castro-Serrano and Gutiérrez-Olivares (2017). The Philosophy of Liberation, emerges as a critique of the traditional philosophical discourse and is born strongly rooted in the history and culture of Hispanic America. As formulated by Enrique Dussel, recognized as one of the most representative exponents of this current, "The original institution of the philosophy of liberation was born rooted in the Heideggerian critique of modern reason and the Cartesian subject (...) it was also inspired by the first Frankfurt school (...) which helped to understand the political sense of this anthology" (2013, p. 34).

The Recovery paradigm has its roots in the emancipatory mental health movements (anti-psychiatry movement) and its effects on deinstitutionalization in the 60s and 70s of the last century. Therefore, it has a historical substrate that is worth recognizing and analyzing in the light of contemporary transformations. This paradigm emerges as a recovery from the political and institutional oppressions that impact the models of social intervention and hence the relevance of this book that shows the origin and deployment of this paradigm (Chap. 1), which can also be considered a perspective or approach to social intervention.



Given its conceptual foundations and its internal plurality, this paradigm unfolds in a matrix (Chap. 2) that has expressions as visible and heterogeneous as the Housing Firsts intervention model <https://hogarsi.org/housing-first/> that has been applied in several countries since the late twentieth century with orientations adjusted to the contexts, but under principles that are common to them, “since it not only seeks to recover the status that was subtracted or that potentially belonged to a person, but also tries to recover the type of society that should be” (Vidal, 2022, p. 71).

It is from this viewpoint that one of the first possible criticisms of this approach and the perspectives that underlie it arises, which implies thinking that recovery necessarily implies the transformation of systems and structures with their consequent resistance. What is recovered in some cases are rather symbolic realities, especially in contexts where rights are not guaranteed or where their realization is impossible. This is especially visible in contexts of historical violation of rights, such as the link that has been maintained with indigenous peoples or with people deprived of liberty and criminalized because of their gender, race or social class.

In this sense, the contribution and contribution that this book offers readers is to move the boundaries of what is possible and the pre-designed institutional frameworks, which adapt and adjust interventions to what social services can provide. What this paradigm recovers is the human condition of the assisted persons, recognizes their rights and acts accordingly. A measure that is certainly demanding and painful when one observes the quality standards of the offer of our social protection system and the professional modulations to adjust and adapt programs that are not accessible or focused on pre-determined profiles.

A text full of provocations, given that the Recovery movement that arises as a result of the reaction to oppressive segregation systems remains an urgent need, which demands and promotes confrontation on interests, on ways of life and visions of change. The main contributions of this work lead precisely to that path of questioning where not only to act by eliminating abuses and discriminations, but also to positively reinforce capacities and strengths in a collective empowerment, which differs from the individual managerisms of management of oneself and for oneself.

And yet in our neoliberal societies we always face the risk of meritocracy and free choice as a market issue, taken to the extreme in the catalog of social programs and outsourced services that compete for the same users and resources, applying for funds



whose amounts do not cover the costs of producing quality services. This is especially evident in the phenomenon of homelessness in Chile, without a public policy that addresses this phenomenon in an integrated manner, existing programs are precisely the source of those insecurities that the Recovery paradigm seeks to address: i) their temporality maximizes risks by understanding that the phenomenon is only visible in the winter, ii) the segmentation of users between migrants and non-migrants generates new discriminations and exclusions, and iii) outsourcing reproduces logics of indignity among its workers, who face precarious working conditions and low wages.

The professional skills needed to carry out actions under this approach are lost whenever a bidding process awards the implementation of the standard program to another actor, and there is no transfer of legacy, nor accompaniment after the referral. Professional skills are reduced to a singular experience that is captured in the best case individually in a more or less successful work trajectory, but is not transferred to agencies and institutions that have few elements to cooperate or work together.

The book concludes with six case studies that present collaborative models of Recovery under the slogan “recovery in the care society” (Vidal, 2022, p. 195). Some of them have already been anticipated by the author in the previous chapters, while others present their main contributions at the end of the text, in line with the perspectives discussed above and reinforcing the idea of plurality of expressions within them. We can also recognize elements of this paradigm in the interventions and processes developed by social workers in the different countries of the region, assuming, as in the book, a broad conception of social work that groups together the set of disciplines and professions aimed at liberating people suffering from social exclusion (2022, p. 15).

In summary, the Recovery paradigm in contexts of neoliberal and highly unequal societies becomes a provocative challenge that is one of the effects that this book seeks to generate in its readers. Promoting thought, debates and forms of action that recover the social life of our societies and the transforming sense of the processes that are promoted from liberationist approaches such as the one proposed here.

It has undoubtedly been a hopeful reading of green shoots in this complex springtime for Chile, a country that advances in transformation processes, at the same time that unveils the deep tensions and contradictions of the neoliberal inheritance of these almost fifty years.



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