

Social Work and Services in the Context of the Social and Solidarity Economy in Bulgaria: A Multimodal Approach through PsySoc Dynamics

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2025.5710>

IJMSSSR 2025

VOLUME 7

ISSUE 4 JULY – AUGUST

ISSN: 2582 – 0265

Abstract: This conceptual and theoretical article explores an innovative multimodal approach to the social and psychological analysis of participators engaged in the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), with a particular focus on the Bulgarian context of social work and social services. The approach integrates contemporary technological tools under the framework of PsySoc Dynamics, combining behavioral analytics, narrative methodologies, and systems-based social network mapping.

Given the specific institutional and socio-economic conditions in Bulgaria—including a fragmented social services system, reliance on NGO-driven interventions, and ongoing reform of national policies—the need for advanced interdisciplinary methodologies becomes particularly urgent. The proposed model features three interconnected modules: (1) psychosocial diagnostics through non-invasive behavioral tracking (including micro-expressions and vocal sentiment analysis), (2) narrative analysis of personal and professional motivations, and (3) mapping of communication flows and support structures using PsySoc Dynamics platform tools.

This multimodal analytical framework contributes to the enhancement of social services planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes, while also offering tools for supervision and capacity building in professional social work. The article argues that the integration of such technologies enables a more dynamic, context-sensitive, and human-centered understanding of SSE participants in Bulgaria, with potential transferability to other transitional welfare contexts.

Keywords: Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE); Social Work in Bulgaria; Multimodal Analysis; PsySoc Dynamics; Psychosocial Diagnostics; Social Services; Interdisciplinary Methodology

Introduction

The increasing complexity of social challenges in the 21st century—such as persistent poverty, demographic decline, migration, and marginalization—demands new approaches to the design, delivery, and evaluation of social services. In many European countries, including Bulgaria, the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has emerged as a complementary sector that offers innovative solutions to unmet social needs. Characterized by principles of democratic governance, participation, and reinvestment of surplus for social aims, SSE includes actors such as social enterprises, cooperatives, community-based organizations, and informal support networks.

In Bulgaria, the provision of social services is still undergoing systemic transformation. The adoption of the Social Services Act (2020) has set a new legal framework that seeks to decentralize and professionalize the sector, but the implementation faces challenges related to underfunding, lack of interdisciplinary capacity, and insufficient mechanisms for evaluation and supervision. Social work, as a profession and practice, is often constrained by administrative burdens and limited access to diagnostic tools that allow for a nuanced understanding of beneficiaries' needs and the broader social ecosystems in which they operate.

This article proposes a multimodal analytical approach, supported by PsySoc Dynamics technologies, to address some of these challenges. It aims to bridge the gap between practice and knowledge production in social work by introducing a conceptual model for psychosocial analysis that is sensitive to context, emotion, identity, and

interactional dynamics. The model is designed to assist social workers, policymakers, and researchers in assessing the motivations, behaviors, and relationships of SSE participators and service users through three complementary modalities: behavioral analytics, narrative inquiry, and social network mapping.

The central research question guiding this conceptual paper is:

How can a multimodal psychosocial approach, supported by digital technologies, enhance the analysis and effectiveness of social work and services in the Bulgarian context of the Social and Solidarity Economy?

By exploring this question, the article contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary literature at the intersection of social work, psychology, and digital social science. It also responds to the practical need for innovative and context-specific tools that can improve the design, delivery, and evaluation of social services in transitional welfare systems such as Bulgaria's.

Theoretical framework

2.1. The Social and Solidarity Economy: Key Principles (European Commission, 2021; Laville, 2010).

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has gained international recognition as a sustainable and inclusive model for socio-economic development. Rooted in principles such as democratic governance, social utility, collective ownership, and reinvestment of profits for social goals, SSE offers an alternative to both state-centric and market-dominated approaches. It includes a wide range of actors—social enterprises, worker cooperatives, mutual associations, non-profit organizations, and informal solidarity networks—that operate at the intersection of economic activity and social mission.

The European Union, through policy instruments such as the Social Economy Action Plan (2021) and the European Pillar of Social Rights, increasingly supports the integration of SSE into national development strategies. SSE initiatives are particularly relevant in marginalized communities and transitional economies, where conventional public services are insufficient or inaccessible. Their participatory logic and community-based nature allow for bottom-up solutions and foster social cohesion.

In this framework, SSE is not merely a sector but a dynamic ecosystem of values and practices that challenge individualism, exclusion, and economic inequality. Its hybridity—simultaneously economic and social—makes it a rich field for psychosocial exploration, particularly when analyzed through interdisciplinary and technologically supported lenses. (European Commission, 2021; Laville, 2010).

2.2 Social Work and Social Services in Bulgaria: Institutional and Practical Specificities

The Bulgarian system of social services is characterized by a dual transformation: a gradual professionalization of social work and a shift toward decentralization and pluralism in service provision. Following the adoption of the Social Services Act in 2020, Bulgaria has committed to a rights-based and person-centered approach. However, the operational environment remains fragile.

Key challenges include:

- Institutional fragmentation between national, municipal, and non-governmental providers;
- Chronic underfunding and high staff turnover in social care institutions;
- Insufficient integration of psychosocial methods in the assessment, planning, and monitoring of services;
- Lack of context-sensitive diagnostic tools adapted to vulnerable groups such as children at risk, persons with disabilities, elderly people in isolation, Roma communities, and refugees.

Moreover, while social workers are legally recognized as professionals, they often lack access to interdisciplinary methodologies that combine clinical insight with social systems analysis. Many interventions remain reactive, paper-based, and disconnected from technological or data-informed approaches.

SSE organizations (e.g., social enterprises or community centers) frequently act as informal safety nets in these gaps, providing services where public structures cannot. However, their psychosocial dynamics, motivations, and networked interactions are rarely studied in depth, especially in Bulgaria.

2.3 Psychosocial Perspectives and the Need for Multimodal Tools

Traditional approaches to social work assessment—such as interviews, case reports, or surveys—offer valuable insights but are often limited by subjectivity, static frameworks, and low adaptability to complex social realities. Psychosocial theory emphasizes the dynamic interaction between individuals and their social environments, recognizing that identity, behavior, and emotion are embedded in relational, cultural, and institutional contexts.

A growing plexus of interdisciplinary research advocates for the use of multimodal methodologies that combine:

- Behavioral analysis (e.g., micro-expressions, vocal tones, gaze patterns);
- Narrative approaches (e.g., life stories, motivational accounts, identity construction);
- Systems and network analysis (e.g., social graphs, community mapping, information flows).

The proposed integration of PsySoc Dynamics technologies enables the operationalization of these dimensions into an analytical model suited for applied social work. Such tools are particularly promising in transitional welfare contexts like Bulgaria, where flexibility, human-centered design, and innovation are necessary to respond to evolving social needs.

By embedding multimodal tools into practice, social workers and service providers can access a richer, more layered understanding of individuals and groups—an understanding that goes beyond checklists and institutional protocols. (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000).

Methodological Design

This article proposes a conceptual and integrative methodological framework for analyzing the psychosocial dynamics of participants involved in social work and services within the broader scope of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Bulgaria. The proposed approach employs multimodal analysis through the technological platform PsySoc Dynamics, developed to bridge psychosocial theory and applied digital diagnostics.

The methodological design rests on the assumption that human experiences, behaviors, and interactions in the field of social services are not only observable through verbal accounts but are also embedded in non-verbal behavior, emotional expressions, and relational patterns. Thus, a triangulated, multimodal model is proposed, consisting of three interconnected modules:

3.1 Psychosocial Diagnostics through Behavioral Tracking

This module utilizes non-invasive digital tools to gather data on subtle behavioral and emotional indicators that are often overlooked in traditional assessments. Among the technologies integrated into the PsySoc Dynamics environment are:

- Voice sentiment analysis – detecting emotional tone and stress patterns during conversations or interviews;
 - Micro-expression recognition – identifying involuntary facial expressions that reveal underlying affective states;
 - Gaze tracking and response latency – measuring cognitive-emotional engagement with visual or verbal stimuli.
- These tools enable social workers and researchers to capture latent emotional and psychological responses that are context-sensitive, culturally embedded, and particularly relevant in work with vulnerable populations such as trauma survivors, institutionalized children, or individuals with disabilities.

3.2 Narrative Analysis of Identities and Motivations

This module draws from the qualitative tradition of biographical and narrative inquiry. It focuses on collecting and analyzing personal stories of service users, social workers, and SSE participants, aiming to identify:

- Motivational patterns behind participation or avoidance of services;
- Identity constructions (e.g., “helper,” “excluded,” “resistant,” “community builder”);
- Moral and emotional drivers that guide actions in complex social environments.

3.3 Systemic Mapping of Social Networks and Interactional Dynamics

The third module applies tools for social network analysis (SNA) to map formal and informal relationships between actors in social service ecosystems. It visualizes:

- Flows of support and trust;
- Patterns of referral and collaboration;
- Presence of bottlenecks or isolated nodes within care networks.

Anticipated Results and Applications

The implementation of a multimodal psychosocial approach supported by PsySoc Dynamics technologies holds significant potential for both micro- and macro-level improvements in the Bulgarian social work and services ecosystem. While this article is conceptual in nature, the anticipated outcomes are grounded in the synthesis of existing empirical evidence, practitioner needs, and systemic gaps observed in the Bulgarian context.

4.1 Enhanced Diagnostic Precision and Personalization of Services

One of the primary benefits of the proposed framework is the capacity to generate context-rich, layered diagnostics of service users. By combining behavioral indicators, emotional cues, and narrative data, social workers will be better equipped to:

- Identify unmet or hidden needs;
- Tailor interventions to specific motivational and emotional profiles;
- Avoid reductionist or overly bureaucratic assessments that obscure complex realities.

4.2 Strengthening the Reflective Capacity and Supervision of Social Workers

Social work in Bulgaria often suffers from a lack of structured professional supervision, limited access to reflective spaces, and weak integration of interdisciplinary perspectives. The multimodal model provides tools not only for analyzing clients but also for self-reflection and professional development. For example:

- Narrative feedback loops can reveal unconscious biases or role tensions;
- Behavioral data can inform supervision sessions or peer learning processes;
- Network visualizations can help social workers understand their own position within service ecosystems and collaboration chains.

4.3 Improved Service Design and Interagency Coordination

At the systems level, the proposed approach supports adaptive and data-informed service design. The integration of network analysis allows for:

- Mapping resource flows and service overlaps;
- Identifying systemic blind spots and underserved populations;
- Enhancing coordination between municipalities, NGOs, state agencies, and community actors.

4.4 Contribution to Research, Policy, and Training

The multimodal approach also contributes to the production of academic and policy-relevant knowledge. Its conceptual and technological components can be:

- Integrated into research agendas in social work, psychology, and public administration;
- Used as a teaching and training platform for students and professionals;
- Scaled up through pilot projects, cross-national comparisons, and collaborative networks.

Discussion

The multimodal approach proposed in this article offers a significant departure from conventional assessment models in social work by integrating behavioral science, narrative inquiry, and systems thinking through the use of PsySoc Dynamics technologies. However, several conceptual, practical, and ethical considerations must be

addressed to ensure its successful application in the Bulgarian context.

5.1 Potential and Added Value

The added value of this approach lies in its ability to:

- Generate holistic, multidimensional insights that go beyond binary classifications;
- Capture the emotional and relational texture of service interactions, which is often invisible in paper-based reports;
- Encourage participatory, co-constructed knowledge between service users, practitioners, and researchers;
- Bridge the gap between research and practice by offering dynamic, technology-enhanced tools adaptable to real-world settings.

In Bulgaria, where case management is frequently reduced to procedural compliance, and where outcome-based measurement is underdeveloped, this model introduces a much-needed epistemological shift: from control and standardization to understanding and responsiveness.

5.2 Limitations and Risks

Despite its strengths, the model also presents several limitations:

- Technological access and readiness: Many social service providers in Bulgaria lack the digital infrastructure or training necessary to fully implement PsySoc Dynamics tools.
- Data privacy and ethics: Behavioral and emotional data must be handled with strict adherence to ethical standards, including informed consent, anonymization, and secure storage. The risk of over-surveillance or pathologization must be mitigated by clear ethical guidelines.
- Interpretation complexity: Multimodal data requires interdisciplinary competence to analyze and contextualize. Without adequate training, there is a risk of misinterpretation or over-reliance on technological outputs.
- Cultural sensitivity: Emotional expression and social behavior are culturally mediated. Tools must be validated in the Bulgarian sociocultural context to avoid misdiagnosis or bias.

5.3 Directions for Future Development

To address these limitations and strengthen the approach, the following strategies are recommended:

- Pilot implementations in selected Bulgarian municipalities or NGOs to evaluate feasibility and contextual adaptability;
- Interdisciplinary capacity building, including training programs for social workers, psychologists, and data analysts on the use and interpretation of multimodal tools;
- Development of ethical protocols tailored to the Bulgarian legal and social environment, with input from users, practitioners, and ethicists;
- Collaborative innovation between universities, local authorities, and SSE actors to co-design context-appropriate applications of the model;
- Cross-national learning through partnerships with countries that have implemented similar technological innovations in social service systems.

Conclusion

This article has outlined a conceptual framework for the application of a multimodal psychosocial approach—enabled by PsySoc Dynamics technologies—to the field of social work and social services in Bulgaria. Grounded in the realities of a transitioning welfare system and embedded within the broader paradigm of the Social and Solidarity Economy, the proposed model offers an integrated method for understanding the identities, behaviors, and relationships of actors in complex service environments.

Through the combination of behavioral diagnostics, narrative inquiry, and systemic mapping, the model addresses long-standing challenges in Bulgarian social work, including limited diagnostic depth, fragmented service delivery, and underdeveloped reflective practices. It also provides a platform for innovation in supervision, training, evaluation, and service design.

While the implementation of this model requires careful consideration of ethical, cultural, and infrastructural factors, its alignment with interdisciplinary and human-centered values positions it as a viable tool for transforming how social services are understood and delivered in Bulgaria.

By bridging the gap between theory and practice, and by promoting dynamic, multimodal, and participatory approaches, the model contributes to a more responsive, ethical, and sustainable future for social work within and beyond the Social and Solidarity Economy. (Laville, 2010).

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to the academic and professional communities engaged in social work and social economy in Bulgaria. Special thanks are due to colleagues at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” for their valuable insights and continuous support for interdisciplinary research and innovation in social services.

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