

## **Social Work in Europe – European Social Work**

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### *Abstract:*

Social work in Germany and most other European countries is presently in an acutely delicate state. The prime reason for this is that, in the context of the current historical-social situation, the German as well as other national social work systems do not succeed in communicating their productivity satisfactorily anymore.

Solutions for this problem are not found by returning to the respective roots of the systems of social help, and especially not by retreating to the idea of the charitable, social welfare exclusively directed by altruism, which would suggest itself to Germany. Instead, solutions can only be found by further professionalizing, developing academically and thus widening the horizon of social work across the borders of the European countries. Only if such an extensive notice and discussion of different European mindsets, argumentative patterns and practices take place it is possible to achieve a broad establishment and development of social work in general and particularly in Germany.

### *Article:*

#### *Introduction*

Throughout the countries of Europe the status of social work can be described as poor, as on closer inspection<sup>1</sup>, it becomes obvious that the different histories of professions consider themselves to be exposed to a continuous “struggle for recognition”. This struggle is carried out in different ways. While the German social work, for example, tried to manifest itself “morally”<sup>2</sup> through an altruistic-political objective of social justice, the English social work wanted and still wants to win a higher social status with the help of the ideas of “accountability” and “evidence”<sup>3</sup>. The (new) Czech Republican and Slovakian social work, on the other hand rely on a consistent scientification of the occupational group, similar to what Sweden, Finland, and Norway have been doing since the 1990s. Despite the different strategies of the individual nations though, nothing has considerably contributed to an improvement of the status of social work in the respective countries.

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<sup>1</sup> About this and many other examples in the following see the shortly to be published book: Erath, P., Littlechild, B. (eds.) 2010: Social work across Europe. Published by the European Research Institute in Social Work. Ostrava University Press.

<sup>2</sup> See: Thiersch/Grundwald/Köngeter (2002) S. 176

<sup>3</sup> See: Bilson, A. (Ed.) 2005: Evidence-based practice in social work. London. Whiting& Birch

Considering this, today it seems remarkable that the different national practices barely take notice of each other or accept each other and that a documentation of differences, e.g. by comparing job and training profiles, has only been carried out since the 1990s. But a systematic and differentiated discussion of concrete conceptual formulations hardly took place before that, because the different nations were largely occupied with their own practices. Besides, they were not able to see the possible gain of insight that could have taken place by such bi- and multinational comparisons. On top of that the nations would have had to take up a position from which their own theories and practices would have been relativized. This might not have been compatible with the self-confidence with which each nation saw its own theoretical positions.

It is not until now that more and more social work scientists, practitioners and students of social work take part in European interaction and exchange and thus experience alternatives to their own routines, which makes it possible to perceive the national mindsets and practices as different and (seen from the outside) equally valuable interpretations of the “idea” or the “concept” of social work and discuss them according to their specific differences. By this means social work is able to gain important insights and at the same time can increase its options of action and can decrease its dependence on external systems.

In the following a brief statement why social work can today be seen as a key programme of modern societies, as well a theoretical framework that is able to reveal the external and internal aspects or contexts in which social work sees itself integrated, will be given. Then the different national degrees of these contexts and the gain in knowledge will be shown. Finally it will be tried to justify the fact that social work in the different European countries cannot insist on a national identity, but that an increasing Europeanization has to be taken note of. Additionally, it will be suggested which kind of advantage especially the German social work can benefit from through an opening towards Europe.

### **Social work- functions and contexts**

### **Social work as a key programme of modern societies in the treatment of the risks of exclusion**

Viewing the theories and practices of social work in Europe from an exclusively phenomenological position, the apparently major country-specific differences almost totally prevent the assumption that there might also be some similarities.

Regarding, for example, the status and duties of the social workers (with masters degrees) in Finland, then the French, German or French workers merely prove themselves to be vague national counterparts.

It is only if social work is seen as something like an “idea” or “programme” in which similar practices that are each characterized by different political and cultural conditions can come together, that a useful discussion becomes possible. For this a definite definition of social work is not necessary. From this macro perspective it is sufficient that the idea of “being similar” is present. Bommers and Scherr (1996), for example, propose that social work should be assigned to the system of “second security” as an interdisciplinary practice of helping and that the function of inclusion and prevention against exclusion should be given to it. Hajuk Soydan, a Swedish social work scientist proposes that “the basic attitude (of social work as a scientific idea) (...) [comprises] three separate but connected elements: the theory of society and of man as a social being, a programme of how social problems can be handled, and a group of people who carry out the work of social change.” (Soydan 1999, p. 8). According to Staub Bernasconi (1995) social work is activated when individuals are confronted with the problem of a lack of resources in their need satisfaction and fulfilment of desires and they then have to learn how to solve the problems by the means of conflicts or cooperation and within the structures of social systems.

When the similarities of the depiction of the matter are recognized, then the different practices of social work in Europe can be understood as variants of one key concept and the following procedure becomes possible: Firstly, the external aspects of the concept might be named and their influence could be defined. Secondly, different forms of social work might be seen as different solutions to the same problem and thirdly, the variable national solutions might be compared and as far as possible might be evaluated.

## Social work and external and internal contexts

If social work is seen as a universal concept of modern democratic societies with the aim of guaranteeing its members inclusion and protecting them from exclusion (Sing/Erath 2005) then social work seems two-faced. On the one hand it is embedded in global, cultural, judicial, social and economic contexts (Adams 2000) and is thus at the same time dependent on and independent of reference systems as, for example the political system, the social care system, the (social-) legal system, the economic system and so on.



**Figure 1:** Social work and its external and internal contexts

On the other hand social work constitutes itself as a complex construct that is historically differentiated. Its aspects, for example scientific development (theory construction, research, model development) or practice (professional self-concept, methods, praxis, target groups, on so on) influence each other (Erath 2007).

Figure 1 illustrates some of the internal and external contexts that make social work appear as a dynamic concept. Concerning these contexts various communications come about that demonstrate the complexity and disruption of social work.

Now and in the following the priority does not lie in a complete listing of all these contexts. Instead the priority lies in the recognition that social work can be seen as self-referential as well as third party-referential and that in the arising contexts tensions can occur between the elements. These can be interpreted as a gain in importance as well as a loss in importance. So, the processes of globalization and economization might impair the function of social work and at the same time social work can influence global and economic processes- both aspects are dependant on each other. Now it becomes clear that social work does not – as it is sometimes suggested – necessarily take or have to take the role of the “victim” (concerning the state, the economy, the law, and so on), but that it has possibilities to act and react according to its surroundings. Social work manifests itself as an element or subsystem of modern societies whose importance is, just like it is with other elements or subsystems, put into perspective. It is important and unimportant at the same time and there is no reason to up- or downgrade itself in relation to other subsystems.

### **Mutual challenges-different strategies and practices**

Some important internal and external contexts influence the respective character of social work. In the following these contexts will be discussed and their influence on social work will be made clear with the help of different European examples. Like this the simultaneously dependent and independent actions of social work can be demonstrated and the meaning of social work as a whole can be presented.

#### **1.1 Social work and external contexts**

##### **1.1.1 Social work and the welfare state**

Very generally speaking social work is integrated into different welfare state models that, according to Esping/Andersen (1990) can be classified into three ideal types.

These are the social-democratic state (represented by, e.g. the Nordic welfare states), the conservative state (represented by, e.g. Germany, Austria, France, Italy and so on) and the liberal state (represented by especially the UK and partially by The Netherlands).

These welfare state models can be categorized by different criteria that have major effects on the respective politics, the social politics, the social protection system, and the legal and economic systems.

	Nordic model	Corporatist model	Liberal model
Typology of the system	general/ demand-oriented	specific/subsidiary/ generous	general/ minimalistic
Strategy of the satisfaction of needs	institutionalised	monetary	monetary
Financing	tax	mixed financing	tax
Important scientific field	social politics/ public health	social education/ social law	economy/ public health

**Figure 2:** Some aspects of the different welfare state models

Of course, the respective national orientation of the welfare state also has an important influence on the strategies and methods of social work. While social workers in the Nordic countries are authorized and assigned to provide their clients with physical and institutional resources (e.g. financial aid, day care places) and to interlink these aids with other subsystems like health, education and nursing care, in other systems this kind of “dense” and “specific” aid is neither wanted nor possible. Especially in the conservative states, that are oriented towards subsidiarity, e.g. Germany, France or Austria, there are hardly any guaranteed claims under the terms of the principle of “aid to self-help” and the difficulty of the “case by case decisions”, so that the social workers can merely “communicate” aid (which, by the way, led to the accusation that German social workers talk too much and act too little!). Therefore social work in these countries is much more connected to pedagogical and “paternalistic” or “maternalistic” methods and is oriented towards the family and neighbourhood. “Social space orientation” has a completely different meaning than it

does in, for example, Nordic countries, because here it can be organized easily, while in Germany and especially in France it is dependant on the willingness of the citizens to communicate their expectations openly and voluntarily.

In the United Kingdom a sound social work concept of social space does not exist; in the end tasks like these are entirely left to the civil society<sup>4</sup> as they seem too expensive and too inefficient, because they cannot be easily measured. Only those who have the right to get social work aid and those who need it to secure their livelihoods, actually receive it. Youth work has also mostly been moved into free. NGO associations and the “social work with adolescents” is exclusively an intervening entity.<sup>5</sup>

However there are not only differences, but also similarities: The loss of the nuclear family in all European countries leads to the acceptance of state run (prevention-) strategies and to a restriction of the individual rights in the liberal as well as the conservative countries. In Germany this is characterized by an expansion of day care provision, the all-day schools, and of the elementary schools and so on. In England effects are the growing acceptance of social educational thinking, e.g. the attempt to contain the escalating numbers of teenager pregnancies.

### **1.1.2 Social work and political and legal systems**

Despite the fact that in all European countries the legal and political foundations of social work are defined similarly (Kaufmann 2003), the different historical and cultural causes have different effects on the realization of the national strategies. Centralistic states, e.g. England, Finland, Czech Republic, can largely develop and realize practical and management strategies universally. So, especially the United Kingdom is characterized by a strict system of regulations, the local authority provisions are controlled by central government in London and there are strict administrative/regulatory/advisory guidelines for social workers apply nationally.

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<sup>4</sup> This is why for example in the UK there are innumerable para-governmental organisations especially in the domain of public security

<sup>5</sup> While in the long run it will not only be interesting which of the models the European states will join. Only Poland seems to take the subsidiary way, while Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, and so on chose a mixture between the Nordic and the liberal way.

Schooling is also very strict and consistent. In the federal states, such as Germany, Austria and France the state itself only has restricted abilities to govern the politics of the communities. This sometimes leads to totally different standards of social work, depending on the politics that are dominant, the economic situation and the cultural characteristics of the respective region. On the whole, only the rates of the welfare benefits are consistent in these countries, but as soon as additional material or personal aids are involved, a comparison is almost impossible.

Of course in the Nordic countries such severe differences do not exist. Here each citizen has universal rights and each citizen is entitled to receive his or her basic needs from the state, no matter where he or she lives. Norway even goes one step further. The state aims towards a “welfare society”, in which every citizen has the right to participate in the general wealth<sup>6</sup>. The priorities of the liberal states on the other hand do not include the rights of the clients, but the “risk of harm” to the client. Here social workers mainly have to ensure that an omission of help does not lead to a harmful situation. This means that they can neither act too early, nor too late, which brings them into a difficult conflict. In the conservative states it looks very different: families in particular receive diverse provision and assistance whose efficiency is not monitored by local communities.

Of course European similarities are present here, too. According to the theory of the “Third Way” by Anthony Giddens and the “Enabling Welfare State” the demand that a person should only receive assistance if he or she actively works on the root of the problem that causes the need of assistance, is becoming stronger. On top of this, someone who does not try to solve the problem should get additional disadvantages and should be punished. Arrangements like this that are already being carried out in England are demanded by German, Dutch and French politicians now, too. It is possible that this new orientation could lead to a further specification of the professional social work and could help social work distinguish itself from other forms of welfare.

### **1.1.3 Social work and social security systems**

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<sup>6</sup> See: Fauske, H., Lichwark, W., Marhinsen, E., Willumsen, E., Clifford, G., & Kojan, B.H.(2009): A Change of Direction for Child Protection? Norland Research.

The development of social work into a type of “sustainable” and thus effective aid can be taken one step further with the help of a distinction by Bommers/Sherr (1996). According to Bommers/Sherr the social security system of a society can be divided into two subsystems:

In the first security system any form of public or private insurance against the ups and downs of life, e.g. illness, unemployment, disability, nursing care and so on are found. These insurances are based on the idea of solidarity: each human being should be protected against the risks of life that he or she is not individually responsible for. Apart from some minor differences all systems in Europe are similar or are starting to become similar (Kaufmann 2003).

In the second security system people are insured against problems and risks that are not specific, e.g. debt, drug addiction, educational problems and so on. Social work takes care of these issues and approaches the problems very broadly. The procedure takes place as a co-production of social worker and client and is based on a trusting relationship between the two. The role of the state in this process is:

- to guarantee access to the services to all those who are entitled to receive aid
- to relieve the clients of the high costs
- to make sure that there are enough services available
- to protect the clients from interventions into his or her autonomy

Due to this broad procedure there are discussions about the quantitative arrangements of social work in all European countries. While the professionalisation and the expansion of the services are growing in Finland or Norway, other countries (e.g. England, Germany France and so on) are afraid that the professional social work is growing too fast and has to be contained.

At this point it becomes clear that here a third security system might evolve that takes care and develops the classic function of the poor relief. A system like this is now developing in the liberal and conservative states and to some extent in the Nordic model. This approach is held by volunteers, neighbours, colleagues and so on and the aid is thus not so much professionalized but characterized by the commitment of volunteers. It comes into action where formalized aid is insufficient and

unsustainable, either when the possibility of self-help is missing (centre for the homeless, distribution of food to the needy) or when the effects are not really detectable (e.g. the tasks of the “classical” youth work, e.g. recreational activities, vacation activities and so on).

From a European perspective this process of the “commitment of volunteers” and the “marginalization” of social work is very important. But it is a strong threat towards professional social work and might lead to serious consequences for society. Once all the follow-up problems of exclusion processes are privatized, the social factor might not only be devaluated, but might vanish altogether. Social work has to organize constructive ways of working together with volunteers and must draw a clear line between the professional and voluntary forms of intervention.

#### **1.1.4 Social work and market orientation**

A consequent market orientation of social work can be traced back to the 1980s and has been present ever since, especially in the United Kingdom (later in The Netherlands and in Germany and so on). The politics of Margaret Thatcher led to a campaign that neglected the idea of “social” in general and social work in particular and introduced new terms such as “service”, “service user”, “consumer” and so on. This economic orientation was soon adapted by the European Union. Hence the modern society has to and wants to reduce its influence in the social domain- under the pretext of guaranteeing the citizens more individuality and self-determination. Besides that, the modern state promises to keep public responsibilities as low cost as possible and to develop new forms of the distribution of goods within the context of a philosophy of the “New Public Management”. There are limits to this idea, though. Today - especially after the experiences with Thatcher in England - it is strongly believed that neither bureaucracy nor competition are ever able to produce appropriate, efficient and reasonable services. Mixed methods of the contribution to welfare that include professional, individual and welfare actions, on the other hand, seem to be more effective (Kaufmann 2002).

This is why today the municipality increasingly appoints social tasks, offers them as rewards and gives them to the “best” provider of services in service level agreements.

This happens in a new partnership between citizens and state. The high quality and “best practice” is ensured by constant inspections of the performance and quality of the services.

In this regard it is not only interesting that not a single European country has opposed the influence of this philosophy, but also that the Nordic states swear on these new forms of management and that they do not have any problems in connecting their welfare system with this idea (Hämäläinen 2010). For social work a new political strategy could be a rising threat, though. Namely that the term “social work” could be replaced by the term “social services” and that it could be newly defined. A European tendency in this direction can clearly be seen and leads to many formulations of “Service Principles” and “Service Standards” (e.g. in the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and so on). This might result in the fact that social work will lose its political and critical function and will instead gain an affirmative orientation. Finally, the economic sciences might usurp it as a “product” or “good” (Adams 2003). Again, social work in Europe is faced with a very large challenge.

## **1.2 Social work and internal contexts**

So far the paper’s intention has been to show that social work is linked to important external contexts. It has to deal with these contexts, adapt to them and at the same time, when necessary, to oppose them. In order to handle these external communications, social work has to develop its own “system internal” self-conception and has to develop and activate communication zones. Primarily for this reason it makes sense to define social work broadly, as a science and a practice. Many discourses develop from this, for example on the one hand in the domains of theory formation, research, knowledge transfer and professional self-conception or on the other hand in the fields of practical approaches, the use of methods, the client groups, the organizations, the education, the reflection of practice and so on. All these discourses strengthen social work and make it capable of surviving. So it is no surprise that social work holds the strongest position (relatively seen) in those countries in which it is developed comprehensively (theoretically and practically), e.g. in the Nordic countries. In those countries in which social work is merely understood as a practice (e.g. in the United Kingdom, in France), or in those in which it is only

seen as a science (e.g. in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia, and so on), or in those in which it neither has a strong position as a science nor as a practice (e.g. in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and so on) it has to expect losses in its relevance.

### **1.2.1 Theory formation in social work**

Theories of social work offer answers to Soydan's subject matter (see chapter 2.1). Acting on the assumption that such theories develop in the domain of the theory of cognition and have close connections to science, two developmental stages of the theory development in Europe can be distinguished:

1. In the developmental stage that was dominant in the years between 1960 and 1980 two completely different streams of thought could be identified. On the one hand there was the English-pragmatic tradition that was oriented toward the Critical Rationalism and that only accepted social work on the basis of behavioural- and adaptation theories, which led to models such as case work, behavioural social work, task oriented social work and so on. On the other hand there was the German, old European tradition of a hermeneutic critical understanding of a dialogic, individual, unregulated, "everyday-oriented" social pedagogy (summarizing Erath 2006, p. 77ff).
2. Today an intertwining of different theoretical orientations can be observed: According to the hermeneutic-critical and reflexive service and support concept by Thiersch (Thiesch/Grundwald/Köngeter 2002) social work provides aid for any problem of the "risk society". With his/her self-reflexive actions the social worker helps trigger individual and social learning- and developmental processes.

The concept of a science based social work aims towards an evidence based practice, i.e. people are helped with the most direct and efficient means as possible. Priorities are "programmes" and the question are of "effectiveness". In England this concept is the most dominant, but also other countries, such as the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and hesitantly, Switzerland and Germany follow this path.

3. Social work within the framework of an eco-social understanding concentrates on the relationship between the client and her/his environment. The main

concern here is to find the respective resources that are needed to help the client deal with his/her environment better. Important terms such as self-management, resources, household means, coping strategy, illustrate that the main approaches of this concept are ideas of order and of adaptation as well as economic thinking (Wendt, 1990). These approaches are the starting point of the social worker, especially in the framework of Case Management.

4. Today normative theories of social work are increasingly becoming important. These theories ask questions about the distributive justice, about the guarantee of human rights, about gender equity, about discrimination and so on (Dominelli 2004) and they oppose the tendencies that come from affirmative social work. Social work here appears as a critical and regulating entity that contributes to justice and contributes to developments nationally, in Europe, and internationally.

### **1.2.2 Models of social work**

Models of social work combine theoretical with practical thoughts. They mostly originate in practice and develop further from there. Such models are, for example, Case Management, task centred social work, group work, community work, social space oriented work and so on. They give structures but leave scope for the use of methods, so the social worker has a certain autonomy to act according to the circumstances (Erath, 2006, p. 140ff). The following Europe-wide tendencies can be identified:

- The Care Management model has become a basic model of social care with the aim of stabilizing situations of life. With its aspects of planning, contracting, realization and evaluation it corresponds to the demands of modern social work with its idea of the cooperating client in finding resources. In addition, it allows diverse forms of intervention, as the actual “intervention” is flexible, according to the arrangements between client and social worker.
- Social work within the framework of “forced contexts”, in which the client is forced to cooperate in the process of helping (e.g. the family that

exposes its child to dangers, the (former) sex offender that has become a public threat), is steadily growing and with this new theoretical and methodological questions, such as those about risk management or violence against social workers, arise.

- The models of group work are applied in two different forms today. Firstly, groups are motivated to activate learning processes and are trained to act appropriately in diverse situations. Secondly, an awareness of problems and problem solving is developed (e.g. parents of children with disabilities, clients who are in debt and so on).
- The models of the improvement of social cohesion, about the minimization of public violence and so on, are being developed and adjusted increasingly across Europe today, as well. Projects concerning the “social city” act in multimodal form; they actively include resources within civil-society and with these means they try to optimize the effects of the professional social work.

### **1.2.3 Social work research**

The difficulty about social work research is that it is expected “to succumb the theoretical modelling with the help of verifiable data” as well as manage the “technological dimension” by developing and providing “professional action plans (methods, procedures, concepts)” (Sommerfeld 1998, p. 16f). Looking at the circumstances of European social work research, a lack of applied research cannot be detected. In many countries debates about evidence based or research based practice have been going on and the effectiveness of models and procedures of social work have been examined empirically. On the other hand the problem-oriented basic research, in which issues of academic literature are developed and tested empirically, seems to be less developed. Maybe the respective national practices of social work are too weak to address such fundamental questions and a European social work research that has the financial and personal resources has to take care of these issues.

### **1.2.4 Professional self-conception**

According to Oevermann, professionalism and professional practice do not exclusively develop on the basis of the academic excellence of the applied methods but they also come about through constitutive tensions that can be described as “a contradictory unit of the practical mediation of theory and practice, as a tension of the pressure to make decisions and the obligation to explain, of the reconstruction- and subsumption-logic and finally of different facets of a diffuse and particularistic as well as specific and universal relationship structure” (Helsper et al 2001, 2).

In Europe there are indeed different strategies to cope with these tensions. The Nordic countries strongly rely on a scientification of the profession, the United Kingdom counts on the effects of professional standards and the development of a strong organisational structure in the form of the General Social Care Council (GSCC), which all social workers have to be a member of. In Germany professional positioning is not usual for social workers. Obviously they assume that their occupational status is secured through regulations of public services and through charities.

What holds for the degree of organization also holds for the meaning of professional standards and ethical principles. They play very different roles - depending on how social work is organized (through the central government, through charities and so on). But a strong European tendency to define national standards and dictate them can be seen here as well.XX?

### **1.2.5 Methods and techniques in the domain of social work**

Interventions of social work have always been and still are multimodal. They continuously recognize the latest methodological knowledge from the reference disciplines and try to integrate them into their models. In accordance with the various fields of activity numerous methodological tendencies can be identified today, as follows

While the social workers in the domain of individual aid in Europe have formerly followed the models of understanding of a Freudian Psychoanalysis, and later have oriented themselves towards the behavioural and learning theory, today more complex

multimodal settings with accompanying and counselling operations carried out by social workers are dominant. Priorities are mixtures of systemic, resource- and solution- oriented approaches that are complemented with methods like coaching, mediation or crisis intervention. Besides, many methodological tools such as estimation scales have been developed, so that “test batteries” are available for various tasks, e.g. risk evaluation of an assumption of child abuse, and that terms such as “social-diagnosis” are not entirely rejected.

Concerning group work today learning methods that are supposed to help develop competences of the group members are increasingly applied. Methodological flexibility and variability are achieved through the usage of modern and traditional methodological approaches such as experiential education, ‘boot camps’, or anti-aggression training.

Social workers in the social area increasingly make use of social-scientific methods such as network and social area analysis, social planning, lobbying, and the traditional forms of the empirical social research. However, the education of social workers is often very limited in these approaches and instead university graduates of other disciplines are consulted.

## **2. Social Work in Europea – European Social Work**

Although there are many sceptics in Europe who are critical about the idea of the European social work ( e.g. Lyons 2005), this short overview of important external and internal contexts of social work shows that the different national ideas and patterns of action can, in the end, indeed be applied to a core idea – despite their phenomenological differences.

So, the more we look at and compare the different European manifestations, the better a mutual understanding and a common European language of social work can develop. Terms such as Case or Risk Management, Crisis Intervention or mediation, resources and competences, household XX? and niche XX? increasingly provide a focus for orientation, making communication about complex issues all over Europe possible, and help initiate research and compare and improve practice.

This progress will advance even further and - if the excessive Bachelor development under the Bologna Agreement of social work does not set any limits- the European exchange between students, apprentices and universities will increase. An interesting fact about this is that the “new” European countries accept this opening and the arising dialogue in a much more relaxed manner than the old ones. Especially concerning developments of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the Baltic countries and so on, it is obvious that searching and learning processes in the European foreign countries must take place before any social-political and social work- scientific decisions are reached. Here the quest and further orientation toward “best practice” is self-evident, as it has been in the domain of medicine for a long time.

For moral reasons alone social work cannot hide from the opening towards Europe, as with the aim of helping the poor and disadvantaged, and promoting social justice; social work is obliged to learn from others and think in a future-orientated way.

Important elements of this reorientation are:

- Continuous exchanges of models, methods and practices of social work to ensure the “best practice” procedures, which have been necessary in the domain of risk-management (e.g. when there have been suspicions of child abuse) for a long time<sup>7</sup>.
- Regular comparisons and critical discussions about instruments of the management of social services and the organisation of social work, e.g. through the development of control variables, ethical principles and professional standards.
- Ongoing and regular approaches and permanent exchange between governmental authorities and social work organisations with the aim of developing a European identity and quality consciousness.
- The development and stabilisation of regular exchanges on the educational level and the transfer of knowledge.

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<sup>7</sup> As similar cases in England and Germany show

- Consequent Europeanization of theory and research development as a requirement for an international acknowledgement of scientific achievements.

Social work, which promises (and morally speaking has to promise) the best practice for the good of their clients cannot think other than European in the future. The national practice does not dominate the reflection anymore. The professional problem definition has to be the starting point and with the appropriate reflection and evaluation an aspect of social work can be optimized. In this way social work becomes more complex internally, it expands its contingency and it learns to think with alternatives. This means that positive change become possible and a platform for an exchange with other social work systems, for example with the USA, Australia, and China, becomes possible.

According to Ernst-Erich Huster, who has put great effort into a European perspective of poverty research and to whom this article is dedicated, there is a lack of the “social-political meso-level between global exchange relationships and national reactive politics” and “to create this for Europe will be the central problem” (Huster, 1996, p.197).

### **3. A German epilogue**

There can be no doubt that Germany is especially exercised by the Europeanization of social work and that it might benefit from it. Especially for scientific-theoretical reasons (e.g. concerning the ‘Positivismusstreit’) Germany’s pedagogy and social work have been oriented hermeneutic-critically for a long time and for this reason have been isolated from Europe and other international countries. With its distinction between “University” and “University for applied sciences” and the resulting poor research equipment and orientation in the area of social work, the German educational system in this domain is hardly sustainable<sup>8</sup>. Should there be any comparative studies in the field of social work- as there has been PISA<sup>XX</sup>? in school research- then its lack of empirical studies will be painfully displayed and the mediocrity of the

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<sup>8</sup> Here Switzerland has overtaken us in the effort of equipping the “University for applied sciences” for social work adequately

German system might “cruelly” come to the surface, as it has happened with the German school system.

The German social work benefits enormously from the light and shadow of the welfare organisations. Embedded into Christian-altruistic motives, professional thinking and acting are often seen as of secondary importance and “suspicion of motifs, efficiency and stigmatization”, as Baecker has mentioned, cannot be denied (Baecker 1994). So a social work that is not opened towards Europe is threatened to go through a development as the United Kingdom has. Here, since the 1970s there have been the processes of “mediation”, “marginalisation” and the strict governmental “monitoring” (so on the whole a social downfall). On the other side the Nordic countries and the “young members” of the European Union will definitely create their countries and possibly Europe into a “welfare society”. They will have a society that does not merely utilize social work to grant generous or minimalist aid, but that transfers the duty to organise and implement equality and justice rationally, transparently and fairly.

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