

Book review

Erath, P. (2012): *Sozialarbeit in Europa. Fachliche Dialoge und transnationale Entwicklungen.* (Social work in Europe. Professional dialogues and transnational developments). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. – Price 29,90 €.

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This study addresses international and comparative social work in the European context with a special focus on the concept of European social work dealing with inter-, intra- and transnational aspects of social work in the frame of societal development. The analysis how social work is shaped by legal, policy, economic, and administration factors enlightens how social work as a modern professional system is connected with diverse societal orders, processes and structures. Social work is considered as a subsystem of the changing modern society. Common elements of European social work are sought by paying attention to transnational tendencies of societal conditions such as Europeanization, modernization, individualization and economization.

Strivings for the development of the concept of European social work is introduced as a research program dealing with epistemological and methodological questions of comparative research of social work. Attention is paid especially to the importance of the varieties of societal conditions and development of social work as a science, a field of research, a profession, and a system of practice in Europe. Using selected countries – France, England, Finland, Germany, and Italy – as examples, five types of social work profession were identified. Transnational tendencies were considered through the Czech Republic, Sweden, England, and Germany. Some other selected countries were also used as examples for illustrating some aspects of the diversity and developments of social work in Europe.

Providing a lot of examples and scenarios, the book sets out the ways in which social work can develop as a modern professional system in theory and practice. The book explores the tendencies to develop social work in different European countries, identifies common trends, and indicates key elements of professional progress.

Evidence-based orientations, case management, risk management and increasing bureaucracy, as well as managerial approaches and modern information and communication technologies were considered as common elements of the professional development of social work in Europe in the midst of the diversity of country-specific traditions, policies and practices. Balance between evidence-based, reflexive and critical aspects were emphasized in the development of social work as a modern professional system. From the epistemological and research methodological points of view of comparative research of social work strivings for a common theory building instead of only a set of descriptions of individual countries were highlighted and demonstrated. The prerequisites of the development of social work as a modern professional system were examined in terms of research-based profession based on an adequate academic education.

The subtitle of the book *Professional Dialogues and Transnational Development* is appropriate to name the contents of a clear explanation of the objective of the work. The aim is to bring into view the issues of evolution of social work in a relatively short time, but with significant differences on several levels. As a key to understanding the differences, related topics are created and divided into chapters in order to gradually bring to light the international perspectives on social work.

The relationship of social work and international environment is associated with the monitoring of individual differences in education and the relationship between social work and social policy environment. Education systems in different countries provide the key to understand the different roles and positions of social work in different countries. Erath creates an environment for defining the tasks of social work in selected countries by clearly putting it under the heading of social work position and differences in perceptions of roles in different countries. The "types" of social work are transparently distributed rooting from education in different countries.

The discussed topics related to the definition of social work as a scientific discipline is evaluated from several perspectives. On the one hand, social work is seen as an independent science on the other hand, it is important to perceive the inseparability of social work environment, social policy, law and economics. Despite this, social work is perceived as an autonomous discipline in a multidisciplinary environment.

Beneficial for studying are chapters that explain the social work practice in Europe through a very practical development environment of social work in different countries. Selected countries are very carefully considered because they represent typical models such as social work and social policy. The last chapter is a great tool for education, provides a summary of information about social work with the logic of unity and purpose to bring about social systems work.

The book is beneficial in raising the bar for publications in social work which are increasingly becoming more and more international, to create an environment for the international perception of social work. It bears clear features of the works of its author Peter Erath, a logical division of the exact naming of chapters with a clear evaluation of the results focused on theory, methodology and practice of social work.

Dealing with the fundamental questions of development of social work as a modern professional system in the midst of diverse traditions and societal environments, this book is valuable for providing the chance of understanding social work in different welfare systems, social orders and legal frameworks in Europe. It will be useful for a wide range of scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners, as well as for students for the overview provided for different theoretical aspects and for different research methodologies playing an important role in the international comparison.