# Introduction

## Günter J. Friesenhahn, Friedrich W. Seibel, Walter Lorenz, Oldřich Chytil

The European Centre for Community Education – ECCE – has been in existence for 25 years now. This is an occasion for founders, partners, friends and associates to look back over and take account of a quarter century of contemporary history.

Twenty-five years do not make an era, but they mark a time span in which considerable social, political and economic changes occurred. Sociological diagnoses of this period indicate that social change during these twenty-five years has accelerated and deepened. The numerous attempts at giving this change a name bear witness to this importance although the terms proposed to capture the spirit of these times, terms like risk society, fun society, multicultural society or knowledge society belong more to the realm of feuilletons rather than that of empirical-analytical analysis. These labels reveal that the chosen perspective can always only capture a segment of society and construct a particular version accordingly – this may well also apply to the perspective adopted in this book.

This last quarter century was characterised by events which had momentous consequences: the fall of the Iron Curtain, the political re-structuring of Europe, the invention of the internet, the introduction of a uniformly structured higher education system all over Europe, the introduction of a common currency in Europe, the rise of neoliberal economic models, the renewed growth of resentments against marginalised groups, the restructuring of welfare arrangements - all this had an immediate effect on the social professions and causes transformations in their role and function. Not all of these concur with the established self-image of a profession which has chosen social justice and the pursuit of human rights as its core objectives.

The three tier university structure, accompanied by demands on each university, faculty and study programme to give itself a distinct profile, has also contributed in no small measure to new structures in the social professions. Where once a 'generic approach' in training and education prevailed, this has almost dissolved. New professional profiles emerge, such as social care in the UK as a version of social pedagogy, and put the question of the professional identity in a new light. In this context it is less likely that clear answers will emerge. This means also that the painstakingly built consensus on a universal Social Work Code of Ethics cannot simply be enforced in view of divergent professional identities. The social professions are under more pressure than ever to clarify what their specific professional properties are in relation to particular practice challenges. This then determines also the knowledge components for the curricula and other didactic elements.

An important change concerns a new approach to the relationship between theory and practice. The praxis of social work consists of an ever growing number of different fields which each require a basis in theory and scientific enquiry and a greater reliance on research to widen the theory base and to improve practice. This logic of scientific disciplines, derived from the classical enlightenment ideals of scientific endeavours, finds itself increasingly in conflict with a utilitarian notion of education, favoured by the EU commission, which emphasises employability. Scientific knowledge needs to be legitimated by its usefulness for specific professional demands. But where to gather such knowledge for the analysis and advancement of practice?

Depending on the perspective on social work different images emerge, different demands and different claims. Social sciences have always been characterised by a plurality of approaches to the construction of realities and their interpretations. The European context accentuates the complexity as different intellectual traditions can be drawn upon for the development of concepts and forms of practice in social work. This impacts on the achieved and yet to be achieved degree of professionalization in the social field.

In **Section I** of this book authors address these questions from different perspectives. Lorenz emphasises that social work has always to do also

with partially unresolved questions of power and posits the principle of justice as the basis for all interventions of the social professions.

Sander and Hirschler in their contribution present a comprehensive research project conducted at the University of Mainz which documented the training patterns of the social professions in 46 European countries to highlight the existing differences and commonalities.

Kühne's paper describes 'the 20 years long process of internationalisation of the school of social work at the Bernese University of Applied Sciences BFH. ECCE initiated, accompanied and strongly supported this development'. Based on the examples of staff and student mobility and curriculum development he analyses 'which factors contributed to the broad and sustainable implementation of the international dimension'. The article closes with general strategic aims for the internationalisation of a University.

Chytil illustrates from a Czech perspective the fundamental topic of how social work can address social policy issues and deal with the given structural framework in which it operates. Volpin and Pacetti take the situation in Italy and the emergent professional profile of 'social educators' as an example for the ambivalent social recognition afforded to the social professions.

Hatton trains our view on the difficulties which arise with the transfer of concepts from one national context into another. Social pedagogy in Great Britain attracts more attention but this approach, which in Germany has emancipatory and critical connotations, in the British context gets easily reduced to aspects of interpersonal relationships and serves the social services instrumentally: 'The key to implementing social pedagogy in the UK is to develop an approach which draws on best practice but which is designed to meet the challenges of UK social welfare services'.

Marynowicz-Hetka analyses the 'phenomenon of social associations' and in particular 'communities of people sharing similar ideas and values'. She poses 'the question of the dimension of selflessness » la gratuité « in social relations taking place in the public area and the essence of the ambiguous

(dual) normative category and its meaning in the perception of the complexity of social work'.

In **Section II** the authors deal with a further aspect of European developments. In parallel with the transnational structure of European Institutions and organisations other social networks with varying degrees of organisational density developed an important role for the social professions. ECCE is a prime example for such networks which define their purpose both in terms of the themes they pursue and in terms of personal relationships which they nurture.

It becomes evident that the intensification of contacts between universities, faculties and persons has led to a process of multiple European cooperation and thus to one of reflection on the nature of the diversity which characterises the social professions in Europe. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the constructive debate on the varying theoretical, methodical and social policy traditions and contexts of social work in Europe constitutes a considerable potential for recognising the nature of these disciplines and their manifestations more clearly and profoundly.

Romano in this sense describes the origins of the European Centre for Community Education and highlights the ensuing projects that have been carried out.

Friesenhahn/Kniephoff/Seibel exemplify how the activities of ECCE have clearly enhanced the opportunities of students at member universities to participate actively in mobility programmes. The department of Social Studies of the University of Applied Studies Koblenz illustrates best the success of practising an orientation towards European dimensions in the training of the social professions.

Cross-border networks also enable the encounter with personal conflicts and divergent fields of discourses which are always difficult to handle, because questioning the accustomed way of viewing the world and of acting professionally requires intercultural competences. Here Hoffmann reflects on these very experiences with regard to the so-called VIENNET, which developed out of activities of ECCE. Groterath widens the perspective to international organisations as potential places of work for graduates of social work where those skills are particularly required.

Chytil and Seibel present the responses to the questions distributed among young colleagues in the Central- and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), in which they impressively report about their positive experiences with and the support they gained from ECCE.

Wieler rounds off this section with a contribution which emphasises the importance of international networks as an element of professionalization. For him 'the impact of personal experiences' remains the distinguishing feature of transnational engagements.

Theories in the social sciences take up these experiences and need to be related to them in the respective historical and social contexts. This means also, that they respond to changes in social practices. The results of research in relation to issues of gender and anti-racism as well as new aspects of sociological theory have made it clear that plurality, diversity and the response to differences have become core themes of social work in Europe. This has brought about a change in the treatment of such differences in contemporary societies. To simplify, one could say that previous theoretical versions of society regarded differences as deviations from a norm and gave them predominantly negative connotations. By contrast, the term diversity refers to the positive dimensions of a plurality of life styles, world views and life worlds which enhance social developments productively. This diversity of life worlds, life styles and life concepts brings for some the chance to develop individuality at the personal and developmental level and to participate more actively in society. At the societal level processes of differentiation always touch on issues of power, discrimination and exclusion. It is therefore clear in this group of topics, as in the previous ones, that differences relate intrinsically to political, economic, sociological and practical dimensions and can only be interpreted and compared from the viewpoint of their respective disciplinary origins.

The lines along which these differences manifest themselves assume however varying significance and classification. Alongside the 'classical' categories of differences expressed in the terms 'race, class, gender' today rank also sexual orientation, age, religion, marginalisation, physical/ psychological disability, health and geographical space. At issue is always how material and/or cultural inequality and differences can be made thematic, analysed and resolved. As means of overcoming inequalities can

be considered the redistribution as part of specific social policies on one side, and the ethical demand for socio-cultural recognition on the other. The competence of members of the social professions in the areas of youth and social work depends largely on their ability to develop perspectives which recognise these differences and translate them into practice skills.

This is the scope that the authors of **Section III** pursue. Here Jaschke/ Zilfout emphasise the importance of processes of dialogue in international seminars based on the premises of 'thinking together new thoughts', 'listening to oneself and others', 'participate', 'articulate', 'observing our thinking'. Cozărescu describes a transnational project which aims at the establishment of intercultural perspectives and the fostering of intercultural competences in communities in Romania in situations characterised by social and political tensions between minorities and majorities. Büsch/Le Breton turns to an issue where the connections and mutual effects of different dimensions of inequality are particularly evident. They diagnose a progressive 'feminisation of migration' which also leads to an intensified trade in sexual services often accompanied by violence. As a result of the fact that the legal context prioritises the security of the state over the assistance to individuals via the securing of basic rights to victims, sex-workers with a background in migration frequently become victims of violence without being able to take recourse to legal protection measures. Their illegal residency status and their perception of the way in which bureaucracies and the forces of law and order function mean that they cannot take recourse to legal defence measures.

Bolognari notes with alarm the 'disappearance' of the anti-racism perspective in Europe. Her fundamental question is how it could be explained that at a time when transnational work and cooperation is increasing in many social contexts and is also gaining affective acclaim, nationalist and racist tendencies simultaneously increase. She diagnoses a connection between capitalist modes of production and their inherent processes of exclusion on the one hand and racist ideologies on the other but ends in the hope that political measures can correct this trend.

Filtzinger in his contribution deals with another aspect of social work. He describes the development of the project 'Intercultural Pedagogy in Primary Education' over a 20 year period and the evident success in terms of the

sensibilisation for intercultural themes and forms of practice in this area. He cites progress with this project for instance in the professionalization of the occupational group of educators through the networking of scientific knowledge and its transfer to concrete intercultural contexts which has been achieved.

As the contributions in **Section IV** indicate social work has developed not only a helping, educating, nurturing and facilitating professional identity, but also a political one. However, in relation to politics social work frequently gets stuck in normative assumptions. This was the topic of intense discussions on occasion of the world conference of IASSW, IFS and ICSW in Hong Kong on 10-13 June 2010. The demand was voiced that social work should articulate its commitment to the respect and application of human rights, to the reduction of poverty, the fight for justice, should strengthen its various forms of showing concern for the well being of individuals and its solidarity with marginalised groups. This should be raised not just in specialised professional and academic circles but also in society at large and in relation to politicians. This demand is based on the realisation that various efforts like the formulation of an international definition of social work (http://www.dbsh.de/html/hauptteil_wasistsozial-arbeit.html), or the global standards for education and training in social work (http://www.ifsw.org/p38000255.html) as well as the intention of profiling social workers as agents of social change have not had any real impact on the political sphere. The former president of IASSW, Abbey Tassé of Ethiopia, said in an internal working paper: 'We collectively agree that social work practices, social work education, social workers and social work educators remains marginalised both in their country (in our universities and in the helping professions in general) and in relevant international organisations (e.g., for some years we have been trying without much success, to be present in different international and regional organisations to influence meaningfully the setting of their agendas and to have them include a social work perspective (for example, different UN agencies, regional agencies like European Union, African Union, and others).'

The aim of the debate was to initiate (a renewal of) political action in social work which however will take different forms inside and outside of Europe. In many countries of the South there exists no effective welfare system in the European sense and social practices are conceptually characterised by

the notion of social development which aims at social investment and the fostering and activation of human capital in the interest of sustainability, and this in contrast to Europe, where 'activation' and the notion of the 'activating state' have become a parody of critical social work approaches.

In a European context it can be observed that 'activation' assumes the function of classifying certain groups of people as being in need of activation in distinction from those which are capable of doing this for themselves. A comparative view beyond Europe can reveal whether the problem lies with the concept of activation per se or whether it is the context which gives it a negative connotation. Representatives of the social professions need to take position in and towards this context. They take on the role of navigators who guide the users of social services through the welfare system to better use those services – or they see themselves as 'agents of social change' and question points of the welfare system per se in order to develop alternatives to existing arrangements and provisions.

Elsen draws on these thoughts with an historical example and places the documentation on social economy initiatives, made by Jane Addams more than a hundred years ago, in the contemporary context of social work. 'Hull House' is to this day a paradigm for social and socio-political innovation based on research and for social work which operates in a participative, community and life world oriented way. 'Local action always has a global context and social problems imply the need for sustainable development and eco-social transformation of world society'.

Vahsen in his contribution analyses current theoretical frameworks which make reference to the terms of 'agency, capability, nudging' to illustrate that these can only be understood against an international background. These are variations on the theme of 'self-determination – determination by others' or rather, the question which form and characteristics can interventions have in the life world of people. How can actors be authorised to intervene in the life of others within a given social framework? Is it necessary; is it legitimate to 'nudge' people in a certain direction in order to stimulate their capacity to make decisions? This kind of 'nudging' or 'libertarian paternalism', in the view of the author, must not be confused with paternalist models of education, but takes shape and leads to purposeful actions by means of

movements and network activities in communities which expand potentially to a transnational sphere.

Gojová also addresses critically the conceptual challenges of social work and their translation into practice. Empowerment and participation are among the guiding themes of social work. But in view of the societal frame within which they operate, professionals in this field find themselves engulfed in paradoxes. Their possibilities to remove structural limitations on the lives of their clients are constrained and this calls for empowerment and participation, although these principles are hard to put into actual practice. The author analyses this dilemma in relation to the situation in the Czech Republic.

Aluffi Pentini's contribution reports on a quality initiative by a group of non-state organisations in Italy and their search for reliable, participatively defined criteria by means of an action research approach.

Stathopoulos deals with the relationship between and the special features of state and non-state social services with reference to the example of Cyprus. From a Greek perspective he points to the difficulties which have to be overcome when states become new members of the European Union which necessitates often an adjustment and reorganisation of their social services. Specific services need to be guaranteed and this necessitates a change also in social service structures which so far had proven successful but are at odds with EU regulations 'aiming at the transfer of funds and responsibilities for the provision of social services from the Central to the Local Government.' Non-governmental services are being subjected to equivalent changes.

The contribution by Friesenhahn similarly details the changed framework conditions and corresponding possibilities for political action. He refers to the historical development of social work in relation to industrialisation and nation state building and concludes that the core task of nation states, which was to guarantee social security, is no longer being addressed comprehensively. Under present political and economic conditions we experience a transformation of the function of social work. It is becoming 'disembodied' from its welfare state place as well as from other frameworks and needs to anchor itself in new contexts. The welfare state principle of

inclusion in particular is being questioned and social work has little energy to oppose this trend. Friesenhahn on the one hand refers to the advancement of transnational activities, but on the other hand advocates a stronger European orientation of social work, particularly with regard to theory formation which is still too much confined within national boundaries and needs to orient itself internationally. This confirms the necessity for transnational activities in social work which today can be facilitated also by new technologies.

This volume is therefore not just a celebration of the achievements by members of ECCE over the last 25 years but points very clearly to the challenges and tasks lying ahead. We can conclude that the themes identified through the various exchange and collaboration projects of ECCE have not lost their actuality and have helped to raise the profile of the social professions in Europe. Only by maintaining the creative tension between a dedication to specific local, regional and national issues on the one hand, particularly with regards to the 'right to be different', and international exchanges on the other in order to focus on issues of equality and social justice can this professional field make a contemporary contribution to the integration of societies and a sustainable global development. A critical look at history opens new perspectives on the future and the social professions have begun to take a leading role in this regard. We are convinced that future scholars and practitioners of our disciplines will take up this challenge in the spirit pioneered by ECCE.

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