

THEORIES AND METHODS OF SOCIAL WORK

Exploring Different Perspectives

Edited by Vesna Leskošek



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VESNA LESKOŠEK

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Vesna Leskošek, September 2009

Introduction

Vesna Leskošek

Social work as a profession, while originating from different traditions, was closely connected with social movements at the beginning of the twentieth century, as is evident from the work of Alice Salomon, Jane Adams, Ilse Artl, Helena Radlinska and others that contributed to its first conceptualisations. Since then, social work has gone through different phases and has acquired local interpretations that, in many cases, reflect differences in the development of welfare regimes. Its common roots were lost not just as a result of these developments, but also in the collective memory. Selective memory has its own economy; in the case of social work, the profession's collective memory became detached from the grassroots ideas that distinguished it from the charitable activities of the church. Reading the texts of women pioneers, we can see that the origins of social work were closely connected with social movements that contributed to the development of the basic principles of welfare states: equality, social justice, well-being and solidarity.

The need for a book with such a broad, yet basic title is a result of global processes that have influenced or provoked social changes pertaining to all three basic principles. These changes are reflected in many books and articles on social work from the last few decades, and especially in recent years. They can be summarised as follows:

- *The change in language.* 'Social justice', 'equality', 'well-being' and 'solidarity' are being replaced with 'social inclusion'. Instead of challenging an unjust society that produces social inequalities, we have begun to think about the inclusion of excluded groups.
- *A focus on efficiency and effectiveness.* A new set of theories and practices has been developed which tends to instrumentalise complex social relations: task-centred, solution-focused, evidence-based approaches incorporating the managerial logic of new economies.
- *Many policies (including those of the EU) aim to enlarge the profit-focused competitive markets and boost economic growth and new fiscal measures.* These policies have incorporated neo-liberalism, which actually applies more to social than economic changes. Welfare regimes are being called into question and,

in many cases, deconstructed to the extent that social policies deal only with problems that result from the economic aspects of our lives (which has an impact on social work).

- *Changing work relations.* Re-evaluating labour rights; constant pressure on unions to reduce their role as democratic institutions and to turn into interest groups; changes in working time; strategies of active employment; and the reduction of unemployment by any means possible... Ideologies of employability aim at reducing access to social rights because they were founded on neo-liberal propaganda against welfare recipients. All of these changes have an impact on welfare regimes throughout the world, and thus on social work as a profession closely connected, on the one hand, with social and human rights, and, on the other, with welfare politics of various kinds.
- *A growing interest in the history of welfare reflects these changes, there is a need to turn to the past in order to reflect on the present.* The historical dimension proves that social work is not a single uniform discipline, but a diverse science capable of both serving and criticising welfare regimes. It can go along with them or go against them.
- *Professionalism itself has undergone an important change.* Being professional in the past is not the same as being professional in a present where people no longer accept the authority of 'the professional' and want to make their own decisions.
- *Changes are often so unnoticeable and so rapid that science cannot trace them other than by following people's lived experience.* This experience becomes a source of evidence of processes and changes and their impact.

The issues listed above define the need to rethink theories and methods and to explore and research social work, both past and present. In this book, we will examine some of these issues through the lens of theory with the aim of contributing, through our views, research and practical experiences, to the scientific and professional debate that is already taking place in different parts of the world.

The book is divided into three parts. The **first part** includes four chapters on the theoretical, methodological and historical development of social work. They reflect the variety and the plurality of social work science and practice, focusing on issues that are, on the one hand, diverse, and, on the other, interconnected by the fact that they are all highly relevant in today's world. The first chapter offers a consistent and in-depth debate on the theoretical bases of social work. It includes a historical perspective through a focus on two pioneers of social work, Mary Richmond and Jane Adams, who represent two different origins of social work – the first focuses on the individual and the second on society. This debate is continued in the third chapter, which is dedicated to Ilse Arlt, an Austrian pioneer of social work who contributed to the development of social work theory and practice from her own

perspective. Arlt emphasised that effective social work cannot only deal with individuals, but has to consider the environment. The relevance of the work of these three pioneers to the present situation is demonstrated by the issues raised in the fourth chapter, which features a debate on the position of action research and community social work. Both concepts focus on approaches to human needs and problems that demand social change as opposed to changes in the individual. Through its emphasis on the importance of the radical social work tradition, this chapter also provides a segue into the second part. The second chapter is also a continuation of the debate from the first chapter, which posits the importance of the use of theories in social work. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks enable us to move away from particularities and to link the local level with global processes.

Silvia Staub Bernasconi discusses current differences between countries and the extent to which social work is an academic degree and is understood as a science or, conversely, is placed outside academia and treated as a profession. Her argument includes the theoretical contributions of two pioneers of professional social work, one of which focuses on the individual in its social environment, and the other on the close interrelation between the individual and society and on society itself. One can say that, in a way, these two approaches were an important starting point for the theoretical pluralism that exists today. This pluralism is described and discussed as partial theories which diagnose, explain and aim to change selected features of social problems in a specific way. The last section is dedicated to four theoretical approaches which try to integrate the different traditions without homogenising them, that is, without forcing them into a unitary approach. The author concludes that, seen under these premises, social work has a triple mandate: one dimension is constituted by the client; another by society represented by welfare organisations; and a third by the profession itself.

Claudia Schneider discusses how conceptual frameworks can be utilised as a methodological and theoretical tool to study the structure-agency link in social investigations. The aim of this chapter is to present a strategy for the investigation of the structure-agency link which should be useful for social work researchers and also for practitioners who are interested in the construction, maintenance or change of social structures. The theoretical discussion is illustrated by examples of comparative immigration policy and its relevance to social work. The concluding part of the chapter discusses the importance of conceptual frameworks and the structure-agency link in the context of social work theory and social work practice.

Maria Maiss and *Peter Pantucek* analyse the work of Ilse Arlt, an Austrian pioneer of social work. This social work thinker's approach is based on national economic concerns, and contains questions about how to improve the individual and society. Her work emphasises the interdependency of economic and individual freedom. Taken as a whole, her philosophy includes

many elements that are central to the question of the quality of life in current debates. Current criticism of specialised social services corresponds to Arlt's philosophy, which points out that specialisation reduces the potential for cooperation with other helping services. Arlt's concept of need and consumerism offers differentiated and expandable categories and concepts, on which useful instruments for the timely recognition, analysis, coding and avoidance of poverty are based. We can use these categories to analyse social problems as well as their multi-causal conditions and interdependencies.

Reima Ana Maglajić and *Mark Baldwin* discuss the shift in social work from case work to community work. They emphasise the new definition of social work that was adopted by the International Association of the Schools of Social Work, which promotes social change, empowerment and the liberation of people in order to enhance their well-being in line with the principles of human rights and social justice. There is evidence of a widening interest in radical perspectives following the perceived attacks on social work values from a variety of globalised initiatives, including the continued focus on commodified individual consumers in a market of care, the progressive privatisation of services and the de-professionalisation of traditional social work tasks. The authors emphasise the relevance of action research in their discussion of contemporary community social work. To underscore its relevance, they present two case studies from the UK and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and conclude with a discussion of the lessons and challenges for implementing action research in social work.

The **second part** of the book addresses globalisation and its impact on social work theory and practice. All three chapters focus on neo-liberalism and its effects on social work and the welfare state. The first chapter focuses on the effects of the free market ideology on social work theory and practice, and claims that the radical tradition in social work offers a good foothold for resistance. The second chapter continues the debate with a clear and concise example of how the same neo-liberal ideology that influences nation states has a devastating impact on the social position of citizens. This debate is continued in the third chapter, where the global and the local form the subject of a debate focusing on the role of racism and hatred towards foreigners and on how discriminative practices support the free market ideology.

Iain Ferguson claims that for more than two decades, the notion that 'there is no alternative' to the free market as a basis for organising both economy and society has exercised an extraordinary influence over almost every aspect of social life and thought – economic, political and academic. Social work, like other social professions, has been profoundly affected by this neo-liberal onslaught. The specific manner in which these ideas and policies have shaped social work services and forms of practice has varied from country to country. This dominance of neo-liberal ideas, policies and practice has not gone unchallenged. Within the narrower field of social welfare and social work,

while resistance to neo-liberal ideas, values and policies has been less than one might have hoped, there is, nevertheless, evidence of growing resistance to the ways in which these ideas and policies have driven social work further and further away from its core values. Some of the specific forms of that resistance are considered in this chapter.

Maria Donevska and Svetlana Trbojevik present a case study of Macedonia, a country where neo-liberal ideas and policies have been implemented and influenced by multilateral organisations, specifically the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Although processes of globalisation may seem slow, they cause swift tectonic movements that disproportionately affect the underdeveloped world and those that are, in many aspects, considered to be disadvantaged. Owing to insufficient qualitative and quantitative data, the authors could not confirm their hypothesis on the influence of global financial institutions on social work practice in the South Eastern Europe (SEE) region. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the analysed effects on social work can be identified in multiple factors of influence.

Vesna Leskošek connects a traditional understanding of racism and other forms of discrimination with the idea of a new world order that relies on a neo-liberal understanding of the market as a form of democracy and contributes to the disappearance of the welfare state. She develops the thesis that neo-liberalism supports racism, despite the fact that it publicly rejects it. Both racism and neo-liberalism are based on the belief that there are two (or more) kinds of people: deserving and undeserving, 'ours' and 'theirs'. Racists connect these divisions with 'race', ethnicity or culture, while neo-liberals refer to differences in the market. The chapter's conclusion explores the effects that these changes have on social work theory and practice.

The **third part** of the book is about methods and participatory approaches in social work. It includes case studies and presents research results. All three chapters focus on the participation of service users from different perspectives. The first emphasises the importance of developing the social model in a traditionally medicalised residential setting for the elderly. The social model ensures their participation, which in turn influences their physical and mental health. Similarly, the second chapter claims that the respect and recognition of immigrants builds trust and enables participation, thus generating social capital as a relational value. The last chapter claims that participatory research which involves service users as researchers enables their active participation. It is a move that empowers them to demand the same position in other relations with professionals.

Jana Mali uses a case study of older people with dementia to discuss the use of a social model in residential settings where the medical model still prevails. She claims that in institutional care, it is possible to develop a social model of care for persons with dementia which is based on an individual approach and the equal cooperation of health and social care services. Through

the more intensive engagement of social workers in programmes of treatment for persons with dementia and through the support provided to their family caregivers, social work can be expected to develop new professional roles in this challenging new field of practise. She supports her discussion with the results of research conducted in Slovenia in 2003 and 2004.

Kati Turtiainen writes about refugee policy in Finland. She focuses on refugee resettlement and on the issue of recognition as a concept for constructing normative criteria for a good society. The principle of recognition is based on the notion that the possibility of identity formation depends on the development of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, and that this development also affects trust. She supports her claims with findings from a qualitative research project that is still taking place in Finland.

Petra Videmšek focuses on user-led research and explores how it contributes to social work practice. Two issues are discussed in detail: user-led research *per se* and the purpose of user-led research in social work practice. The discussion is based on her experience of coordinating participatory user-led research in Slovenia in partnership with six trained user researchers. This experience forms the basis of a discussion about the advantages of the involvement of service users as researchers in social work practice, while at the same time acknowledging that user-led research poses a challenge to both the social work profession and the service user.

The aim of this brief introduction to the content of the book is to elucidate connections between the chapters that may not be obvious at first glance. Although they represent different countries, the contributors have a shared view on the current political and social situation that frames our lives and choices. They bring specific views and approaches to problems. I sincerely hope that you, the reader, will find the book stimulating and enjoyable.

PART I

Theories, Methods and the History of Social Work

Chapter 1

Social Work as a Discipline and Profession

Silvia Staub-Bernasconi

Introduction

In some countries, social work is a scientific enterprise, with up to four or even five years of doctoral studies; this is the case in the Scandinavian countries. In other countries, such as Germany and Austria, there is still a debate about whether social work can be considered a science (Staub-Bernasconi 2007b, 2009b). This article will begin with a discussion of the main approaches to this question. It will then present the theoretical contributions of two pioneers of professional social work, one of which focuses on the individual in its social environment, and the other on the close interrelation between the individual and society. In a sense, these two approaches can be viewed as an important starting point for the theoretical pluralism which exists today and which, taking into account a number of textbooks, can be called '*ad hoc* pluralism'. This pluralism is then described and discussed under the headings of 'individual', 'interactional', 'societal' and 'systemic' approaches to social work. The criteria used to select these partial theories is that they describe (diagnose), explain and aim to change selected features of social problems according to professional values in a more or less coherent way. They fulfil the disciplinary criteria of scientific description and explanation and the professional criteria of introducing values and the scientific requirements for the formulation of action guidelines. This is why methods or approaches dealing mainly with values are not included. The different theoretical approaches described under these headings are viewed as partial theories which can be integrated into a transdisciplinary theoretical framework. This can be done according to the systems theory of the system philosopher and theoretician Mario Bunge (1974–84). This author's systems theory aims at integrating different theoretical traditions without homogenising them, that is, without forcing them into a single, one-sided approach. The way in which this is achieved can be called 'integrated pluralism'. The last chapter is dedicated to different systems theory approaches *within* social work which have roughly the same goal¹.



¹ An in-depth discussion of this framework is beyond the scope of this article, for which see Staub-Bernasconi 2007a, Obrecht 2001, 2005.

Different positions on the possibility of a 'social work science' in the heterogenous field of social work practice

Social work is often understood as referring to a complex, heterogeneous field, and this is in fact the case. Yet the ramifications of this aspect of social work for theory building have been interpreted in a number of very different ways. One of the first to emerge, and one which is still present today², states that this heterogeneity makes theory building impossible. According to this position, social work is merely a context for a practice which should (at least potentially) selectively refer to a professional discipline, such as law, pedagogy/educational science, or economy/management, as a 'leading science' (*Leitwissenschaft*). This implies that social workers must become 'mini' legal experts, 'mini' educators, 'mini' social engineers/managers, 'mini' psychotherapists, or all of the above. And many current curricula in social work do in fact concur on this point. However, this position fails to take account of the fact that every profession, without exception, has, and indeed *must* have, a transdisciplinary explanatory base if it is to claim to be a profession. More importantly, it fails to recognise that such a disciplinary, professional base has – according to the findings of one cross-national study – existed in social work for a fairly long time (Weiss and Welbourne 2007). A second position understands social work as a set of social practice models: psychodynamic, behavioural, task-centred, interactional, ecological, communication, radical Marxist, anti-oppressive, advocacy/empowerment, postmodern models etc. (Payne 1991, see also Howe 1998, 1987, Stepney and Ford 2000, Healy K. 2005). These 'models' are presented in a disconnected, cumulative way, often without a precise definition of the problems they are supposed to be able to solve. Many assume that they are the best or even the only way to solve all the problems that arise in social work. But because, as it turns out, this assumption is at least partially wrong, new models that make the same promises are constantly being developed. Thus, in order to be 'up to speed' as a professional, one has to keep up with 'fashion' and the 'seasonal cycles' of concepts dominating current discourses. A third way to conceptualise social work is to define it as a 'moral profession' or 'ethical career' (Jones et al. 2007: 201–202) with an orientation towards humanitarian, social justice and/or democratic values. Practice derived from this notion must therefore ensure the 'right' ethical conviction and behaviour as well as the criticism of societal ideologies, that is, those underlying capitalism, paternalism, patriarchy, neo-liberalism etc. The risk here is that of replacing sound basic knowledge with values and morals. This view provides social workers with the empirically incorrect belief that they are always on the 'good' side of history. The fourth position represents the recurrence of macrotheoretical approaches referring to 'grand social theories' resting on general, abstract concepts: Parsonian structural-functional



² For a discussion of the German-speaking context, see Staub-Bernasconi (2006, 2009b).

theory, Marxist theory, or newer theories such as the critical theories of the Frankfurt School (Habermas), Beck's risk society, Luhmann's social systems theory, Foucault's concept of governmentality etc. For most of these authors (Bourdieu is an exception), social work – if anything – is just a tiny, marginal, negative (*ergo* subject to criticism) example of social practice. Furthermore, these theories lack a complex theoretical view of human beings. Even for Marx, the clients of social work – although partially mentioned – might have been a negligible part of the *Lumpenproletariat*, not suitable or interesting enough as subjects for revolutionary social change. Also, for many of these approaches, professionalisation is 'pragmatic, technocratic, mechanistic, dehumanising', and therefore hinders political action. Support for this view is found in the tradition of ideal philosophy, *Geisteswissenschaften* (Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger), which specialises in interpreting meanings as opposed to explaining facts. According to this dualism, all 'negative' effects come from the natural and engineering sciences, right up to the tragic consequences of the misuse of 'science' in the eugenic debate and the holocaust industry of the concentration camps. A fifth approach to the heterogeneity of the object base of social work states that the only possible approach to theory building in social work is an eclectic one, in the sense that 'anything goes' as long as it 'works', a position reinforced by some postmodern, epistemological theories which rely on a consensual theory of truth, but also by neo-liberal approaches.

In short, all of these 'solutions' are shortcuts that lead to dead ends. Either they miss parts of the object base of social work, which is an ontological fallacy, or they fail to clarify the epistemological questions arising from a professional theory which refers to a combination of descriptions, explanations, valuations, definitions of subjects of change or action systems, necessary resources and – last but not least – action guidelines for promoting change.

The conceptualisation of social work as a 'discipline and profession'

In their contribution to this debate, Lovelock et al. (2004) present an alternative, or rather integrative, approach to the views presented above by introducing the notion of 'social work as discipline and profession'. Their point of departure is an 'open triangle' consisting of theory as the interrelation of conceptual systems, research and practice, or 'applied social science plus social work values and skills' linked in a dynamic way (*op. cit.*: 3). Various loosely connected articles taking 'political theory' as an example of critical reflection on 'political and social relationships at the widest possible level of generality', but also involving ethical and moral issues (such as those discussed by Rawls) and the dual methodological and practical concern of social work with individual well-being as well as with social structures which contribute to this well-being (*op. cit.*: 9–16), reveal how this approach looks in practice. Soydan

(1999) follows these lines of thought in a more systematic way in stating that the core of social work as a scientific discipline and profession is 'in its striving to integrate theory, programmes of change, and agents of action' (*op. cit.*: 7). It is thus a basic scientific undertaking aimed at connecting the following elements: a theory of the individual as a biological, psychical and social being and, as such, as a member of different social systems; a theory of society and culture and the relations between the individual and society/culture; a policy or programme as a scheme for changing problematic situations; and a set of people, including professionals, involved in various forms of social organisations (social services, social movements, networks etc.) committed to carrying this change through with the help of specific methods.

Yet here as well, very different positions on the connection between the scientific discipline as a base of social work and professional practice appear. One position focuses on the dualism of objective explanations and hermeneutic (subjective) understanding (Oevermann 1996), often claiming that mental processes of interpretation can't be explained. A second position holds that science and practice, organised as social systems, follow different, incompatible logics (Stichweh 1994, see also Winkler 1995): the former is searching for truth, the latter for effectiveness. Thus a practitioner is bound by the system-logic of effectiveness, which implies that he or she isn't able to transform scientific explanations into an effective means of guiding actions and/or knowledge and principles for changing reality and solving problems. Yet, this transformation of descriptive/phenomenological, explicative and normative knowledge into guidelines for action is the core task of all professionals, whether they be therapists, architects, physicians, managers or social workers (Bunge 1995, see also Bormann 2005; Schön's [1983] 'reflective practitioner'). This approach provides – joining Soydan (1999) – a way of looking at social work which doesn't separate scientific theory from practice methods or – what is even more problematic – legitimise the opposition between practice and practice theory and scientific theory, possibly dismissing the latter as unreliable, unnecessary or inefficient.

Mary Richmond and Jane Addams: Paving the way for the two main theoretical traditions of social work theory

Any examination of the history of theoretical ideas in social work (Soydan 1999) must begin with the contributions of two classical theorists. Mary Richmond (1917) focuses on the individual, his or her personality and unmet needs and the social environment upon which the individual depends for the satisfaction of needs. Seeking the main causes of social problems within the individual, her change programme is oriented towards the individual in order to remedy social problems. Thus social casework became the principal method for change. Jane Addams' theoretical focus (1902, 1960, see also Lasch 1982)

was basically on the structure and culture of society and their influence upon the individual and vice versa. She had a relatively precise conception of American society in early capitalism and of its mostly devastating consequences for many working people, and especially for migrants looking for a better life and asking for better working conditions. She developed a normative vision of integral democratic structures which would promote freedom and participation as well as social justice and care in *all social systems* (social welfare, family, economy, education), and not just in the political sphere. In addition, she realised that it was essential to develop social change policies based on genuine research – that is, scientific knowledge – on children and youth and the health, life and working conditions of migrants, battered women, prostitutes etc. For Addams, the causes of social problems are to be sought in societal structures and their cultural legitimation base. Social work intervention must therefore be directed mainly at these conditions. One must fight – together with citizens, political parties, other organisations, professions – for the *enactment of new laws* and regulations for social security, and especially for those governing the protection of children and women in abusive, exploitative work conditions. Another aspect of her approach involves *changing social rules or ideologies* which allow exploitation at the work place, discrimination against women, and the legitimation of wars on nationalistic grounds which makes heroes out of soldiers. This combined approach to individual and social change was reflected in a multilevel concept of social work activities: direct help for individuals and families; social, educational and leisure/cultural activities within the community; the development of an infrastructure of health, counselling, social and cultural services; socio-political reforms on the local, state and national level; and engagement for peace activities on the international level, especially during the First World War. The much-debated question of whether Jane Addams was a sociologist (in light of her teaching at various universities, especially the University of Chicago), a social reformer, or a social worker doesn't make sense once one places the emphasis on the interconnection of social problems on all social levels as the main object base of the profession and its corresponding theory, research, values and practice.

Jane Addams and Mary Richmond knew each other. Yet, instead of agreeing that their theoretical and practical approaches were complementary and seeking to establish a concept of concerted action, they criticised each other's views on social work. This split into a purely micro and broader social meso and macro approach is not unique in the history of human and social sciences (where it is defined as the theoretically unresolved micro/macro link). It is also reflected in the definition of professional functions and methods. As the presentation of key theories which follows will show, it is still present in social work. However, there are also intermediate positions, the most prominent of which is to be found in the consensual international definition of Social Work:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. *Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments* [author's italics]. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.' (Supplement 2007: 5–6)

Theories and methods in the context of a discipline and profession of social work

This chapter will attempt to present a brief overview of different theories and methods of social work, with a focus on their respective characteristics as outlined above: individuals, interactions between individuals and relationships between individuals and society.

Theoretical and practical approaches focusing on individuals

One can trace all of the following theoretical models to the tradition of Mary Richmond and her work with individuals. On the other hand, most of them are conceptually narrower than her contribution. They focus almost exclusively on intra-psychoic mechanisms and do not take account of social and cultural influences (Payne 1991):

- *Psychodynamic concepts and psychoanalytic theory*: Following the pioneer contributions of Richmond (1917) in the US and Alice Salomon (1926) in Germany, concepts and theories of this kind became the first strong explanatory theory for many practice concepts (Hollis 1964). Their common base was Freudian psychoanalytic theory, with its assumption of drives or the libido as instrumental to satisfying basic physical and sexual needs and the developmental stages of the id, ego and superego. The problems which can occur in this process are conflicts between the id and the superego. The resulting anxiety generates defence mechanisms which distort perceptions of reality. Florence Hollis (1964) adapted psychoanalytic theory to social work practice in developing the notions of sustaining relationship, techniques to reduce anxiety, low self-esteem and lack of confidence. She also added some lines of action for environmental work with people relevant to the client (family members, employers, landlords). But her main focus was the individual. The role of the social worker is that of an interpreter of feelings, a promoter of insight, a provider or creator of resources, and a mediator or protector (of children). Society may not be perfect, but its main task is to help the individual to cope with his/her problems in developing a realistic – anxiety-free – perspective of his/her situation and adapting to it. The professional seeks social reform as a separate activity. The following aspects of psychoanalytical/dynamic theory were highlighted by different theorists: agency function

giving form and direction to practice (Robinson 1930, Smalley 1967); problem solving (Perlman 1957); differentiation between ego-supporting and ego-modifying intervention (the works of Goldstein). Humanistic approaches focusing on Maslow's theory of human needs and operating with client-orientation, positive regard, warmth, respect, unconditional acceptance, and techniques of empathic understanding (Rogers 1951) should also be included under this heading. Further developments arose mainly from dissatisfaction with long-term psychodynamic, non-directive, insight-giving methods of casework which were not appropriate for clients from the underclass.

- *Behavioural theories* and social work methods derived from the work of experimental behavioural psychologists who criticised the diffuse, untestable conceptions of psychoanalytic theory (Howe 1987: 82–95). The behaviour of clients is seen as coping with frustration and aggression in different role settings. Action-oriented concepts include classical conditioning by stimulus-response, the techniques of operant conditioning and social learning. The social worker has to manage contingencies which affect the relationship between the behaviour of an individual and its social consequences and which strengthen the desired or weaken the unwanted behaviour. The main goal is adequate role behaviour as a parent, pupil, employee etc.
- *Cognitive theories* (Goldstein 1981) work with the assumption that people construct their own versions of reality and problems through what they have learned. Stimuli are transformed by a process of awareness, attention, description and interpretation into overt behaviour influenced by the concept of the self. There can be conflicts between self-conceptions, with the self perceived through others and the intentional self. The task of the social worker is to support strategies of learning, such as discrimination, concept formation, value finding and problem solving, which are sustained using a diary and assignments (homework and exercises). The social worker confronts the client with divergent thinking in showing him inconsistencies, alternative modes of thinking, and even faulty thinking. One of the main aims is to show that reactions to adverse conditions and problems can be irrational, and thus have to be corrected by a rational, empirical orientation.
- *Task-centred social work* (Reid and Epstein 1972) sought to replace psychodynamic social work based on a 'time-consuming' supportive relationship with rationally planned 'short-term therapy' with a clear time limit. It rejects any specific psychological or sociological base for its methods, because no theory can adequately explain the range of problems that social work has to deal with. Of central importance are those aspects of his/her life which the client presents or accepts as a problem and wants to change. It takes the problems of individuals as a given, to be resolved

pragmatically. Its focus is therefore on performing practical tasks which will resolve particular problems. This method comprises an assessment of the main difficulties regarding which the client wants a change to occur; challenging undesirable solutions to problems; identifying action requirements and obstacles to action as well as unchangeable constraints; establishing a contract about the desired outcome and the amount of contact and time limits; planning tasks and, if necessary, providing training for the skills required for their implementation; and finally, arranging rewards and incentives for success.

- *Strength development* (Saleebey 2002) and solution-oriented approaches. Strength or resilience is seen as a product of facing and overcoming adverse life events and traumatic situations, and can be used as a resource for actual problem solving. Thus the 'schizophrenic' who was once seen as a victim is now defined as a 'survivor of schizophrenia' who has developed exceptional capacities for survival. The premise behind practice is unlocking problems through small changes in thinking and behaviour. Strengths-focused listening is the main method, and entails observing until, through a process of mutual discovery, events and themes can be found which mobilise hope and the courage to try new behaviour.

The problem with these 'models' is that theory and practice define a specific psychological problem to be worked on (anxiety, negative self-conception, inadequate behaviour etc.); if only one problem is identified, the social worker runs the risk of overlooking serious psychological, social, economic, or structurally induced problems of the individual. In other words, it should be the other way round, namely, the defined problems should determine the choice of the method. But to do this, one needs a more integrated theoretical model of human beings.

Another related problem is the cumulative and, in some ways, arbitrary aspect of these approaches. Without a doubt, each deals with a central aspect of human beings. Yet individuals are psychobiological systems with psychic processes such as emotions, cognitions, valuations leading to interpretations – in short, with perceptions of themselves and their social environment, society and the world, including visions, values, hopes and goals. And these are all interrelated in specific ways and influence behaviour and the way individuals cope with life tasks, role expectations and especially problems stemming from social structure and culture. They also influence what is called 'strength' or 'resilience'. This points to the need for a combination of different theory- and action-oriented approaches.

The last two models listed above are – also from a professional point of view – problematic in a special way: they represent 'quick fix' versions of social work marked by the absence of explanatory theories and, partially, differential diagnoses (James, in Lovelock et al. 2004). Their appearance on the 'market of methods' coincides with the beginning of the hegemony of neo-liberalism

in the US, UK, Australia and Europe, a development which culminated in the invasion of social (and health) services by neo-classical economic discourses and their vocabulary rooted in the market and management concepts. They demand freedom from the welfare state and its paternalism, and thus freedom of choice for consumers of social services, assuming mostly symmetrical, power-free interaction between the social worker and user and the full self-determination of the latter. Dismissing diagnoses and explanations, these notions are in many cases just ascriptions with a poor empirical base, if any. And, what is just as important, they have led to de-professionalisation processes and the replacement of professional social workers with organisational and administrative case managers in many areas of social welfare.

Theories and methods focusing on interaction, communication, or networks between individuals

These theories try to expand the notion of the individual by focusing on his/her social relations and interaction and communication with relevant others – back to the conceptual approach of Mary Richmond, one might say. The main areas of theory and practice are social work with families and (small) groups, including (working) groups as subsystems of organisations. Some theoretical approaches draw on psychodynamic theory, while others refer to behaviour/role theory; in most of them, the focus is on symbolic interaction and role expectations, especially in relation to processes of labelling, stigmatisation, scapegoating and exclusion (the works of Mead and Goffmann). However, there is also a focus on stigmatisation and marginalization effects produced by social workers and other professionals in ‘people-processing organisations’.

Transaction analysis is a prominent approach in *social work with families*. It relies on psychodynamic theory and focuses on the interaction between the ego states of a single person (as child – parent – adult) and those of another person (Berne 1961, 1964): when transactions involve different ego states, problems, misunderstandings and negative labelling occur. The role of the social worker is to analyse and change communication patterns which make the other person feel bad, incompetent, or inferior and make him/her powerless. Another approach focuses on problematic, double-bind, paradox communications in content and social transactions between family members; these have to be uncovered by paradox interventions or by deconstructing the family myths which have grown around a problematic family member. Further techniques include reframing, family sculpturing, role playing, videotaping, homework assignments, mediation etc. (Kirst-Ashman and Hull 1993).

Social work with groups also bases its interventions on the interactions between group members, but views these as a result of group and/or organisational structure and culture (Kirst-Ashman and Hull 1993: 82–113). The roles of group members can all be the same, with a very small power differential, or the group may have some kind of division of labour and a greater power

differential. According to the goal of change, one has to learn to share feelings, different interpretations of a common issue, know-how, support and solidarity; further learning processes deal with group and especially power structures in a participatory, democratic way. The role of the social worker can be task-oriented, more supportive/therapeutic, or action-oriented. The last of these possibilities can lead to economic, social and cultural activities in the broader community.

Constructing social networks and cooperatives. This is another set of theories that conceptualises the resources of social and cultural environments in order to construct supportive social networks for supportive, reciprocal neighbourhood relations or cooperatives in a community. One example is the development of new jobs suited for long-term unemployed, disabled, or minority community members with little chance of finding work in the mainstream economy (Elsen 2007).

The problem with many 'interaction-' or 'communication-oriented approaches' is that they adhere to an analysis of the 'exchange relation', with little concern for an articulated theory of the individual and the socio-cultural context which influences his/her psyche and, consequently, interaction and communication (Bourdieu 1983). These approaches are often reduced to the exchange of meanings, which represents a further theoretical reduction. It follows that there is no need to explain the development of stereotypes, labels, prejudices and their 'products'— classism, racism, sexism etc. — by referring to socialisation, relative position in social stratification, or other factors.

Focusing on the theoretical concept of exchange relations, one could systematise and integrate these approaches according to their media of exchange: this can be socio-economic resources (gifts, money or other material assets); emotions and/or cognitions as psychic processes; knowledge/values/rules; know-how and social competences; or a combination of these. But what happens if the exchange is asymmetrical, that is, if it doesn't fulfil the implicit or openly shared norm of reciprocity? And what if it is (mis)used to build upon a stable power relationship?

Theories and methods focusing on power relationships and social change by and for individuals, groups and communities and within social agencies

This theoretical tradition can be traced to Jane Addams and the women of Hull House, who were members or active supporters of feminist, pacifist political movements and were involved in the organisation of trade unions with female workers. Today, the general label applied to these theories is *radical social work*, which encompasses structural, feminist, neo-Marxist, and anti-racist/-oppressive/-discriminatory social work. These theories rose to prominence from the 1960s to the 1980s (Fook 1993, see also Lavalette and Ferguson 2007). They criticised selective psychological explanations of social

problems, specifically how they made these problems a private matter instead of transforming them into public issues; how society placed the blame on the victims; and how social work cut off service users from collective action by treating them individually. These arguments were accompanied by a radical critique of the social welfare system, which pointed out the overspecialisation and funding restrictions of social agencies; the fact that the management and most professionals at these agencies shared the views of mainstream society; bureaucratic rigidity; and the 'creaming of the poor'. Frankly speaking, they revealed that the welfare system was basically a lackey of the ruling class, and not really helping the working class and marginalized people. A cadre of academics drew on Marxist philosophy to reorient social work towards its 'true' purpose: radical social change (Hollstein and Meinhold 1973, see also Leonard 1975, Galper 1980, Lavalette and Ferguson 2007). The general theoretical hypothesis was that service users – poor people, the unemployed, women (especially single mothers), blacks etc. – would act rationally in their best interest once they understood that the true origins of their problems lie not in themselves, but in discriminatory, exploitative and oppressive social structures and cultural codes. Social workers, on the other hand, shouldn't waste their energy changing the behaviour of clients to make it conform to the standards of so-called normality.

Structural theory and social work extended this approach beyond mere economic factors to include all overlapping and mutually reinforcing dimensions of injustice, discrimination and oppression (Alinsky 1971, see also Moreau 1990, Mullaly 1997). Its general theoretical claim is that capitalist macro-societal structures and cultural codes shape the social position, life and action space and relationships of individuals, both within and between families, groups, organisations and societies. To an enormous degree, they also determine the life chances of members of social categories such as class (the haves and have-nots), gender, 'race', (dis)ability, sexual orientation, religious belief, ethnic belonging etc. Each category has its 'vulnerable individuals and groups', who constitute the potential and factual clients of social work. Furthermore, the power relationships between social agencies, social workers and their clients were made a target of critical reflection.

The role of social work in relation to these different vulnerable groups is seen in three different ways: firstly, very critically, as a part of the oppressive capitalist system which has to control the working class, single mothers, blacks etc. and make them fit for work; secondly, as an advocate of social change, promoting consciousness raising and supporting community organisation and collective action; thirdly, as both an agent of a capitalist, patriarchal and racist society as well as an intentional or unintentional bearer of change through the transmission of new perspectives, knowledge, know-how and sources of power that the working class, communities and marginalized people require if they are to organise themselves and achieve their goals.

Some general action guidelines for social change within the framework of structural social work include:

- *Critical consciousness raising* and the active *linking of reflection with action* (Freire 1972) is a key theoretical practice approach which lays the foundation for all further processes of social change.
- *Democratic community work or community organising* (Ross 1967, Beresford and Croft 1993) is the oldest theoretically conceived strategy for dealing with community structures. It involves the process of organising the members/citizens of a community to identify needs and build platforms where goals are formulated and the material, symbolic, and personnel resources required to achieve the set goals are identified. By doing this, the community members learn to transform private troubles into public issues in a democratic process. But here, one must keep in mind that community work does not necessarily lead to the integration of stigmatised, marginalized groups: democratic procedures don't always produce fair decisions regarding minority groups. It is therefore possible for community members to democratically decide that they don't want blacks, homeless people, or ex-prisoners in their neighbourhood. Also, in today's multicultural societies, refugees and many migrants don't have the status of full citizens. It is in this constellation that structural social work has its place and non-violent action against discrimination, oppression and cultural colonisation is required.
- *The organisation of shelters or meeting places, giving a voice to victims and assessing sources of power*: In what appears, at first sight, to be a paradox, structure-oriented practice first requires *shelters* and opportunities for victims of exclusion, discrimination, oppression, rape, displacement, torture etc. to meet. Social workers doing 'structural work' can't disregard the suffering of the victims. To do so would be to run the risk of misusing them as objects for abstract, long-term goals of structural change, from which the users might not benefit at all. The shelter creates the possibility for the client to critically reflect on his/her experiences and reactions of strength and/or helplessness to them, and also to receive assistance in restoring his/her dignity. Further assessment concerns the actual and potential sources of power of the individual, including those of the social worker and agency, with the goal of attaining for the user that to which he/she is entitled.
- *Empowerment* in this context means enabling individuals, groups or communities to use sources of power to achieve the satisfaction of human needs and get what they are entitled to when prevented, sometimes against their will, from doing so by power holders³. A newer line of ac-



3 For black empowerment, see Simon Levy (1976), Alinsky (1971); for feminist empowerment, see Dominelli (1988); for empowerment of the poor in international social work, see Cox/Pawar (2006). For a general discussion, see Staub-Bernasconi (2007a: 409–418).

tion in empowerment is the consumer rights discourse focusing directly on the personnel of social services. It criticises them for considering their users passive objects of social diagnosis and interventions and questions the labels of 'normal' and 'abnormal'. Compared to the action theory of empowerment, it has a narrow focus, limited to the fields of medicine, psychiatry and mental and physical disability and their corresponding organisations (Moreau 1990, see also Healy K. 2005: 70–82).

- *Individual and organisational advocacy* (Taylor 1987, Mattaini et al. 1998, Staub-Bernasconi 2007a). If the direct involvement of clients in an empowerment process is not possible or very difficult because of their age (small children), serious illness, disability, or status (prisoners, refugees, bonded labourers etc.), social workers can become *advocates* for their clients. They can do this on an individual basis, or they can opt for more complex involvement in the form of organisational advocacy. For example, this could mean analysing data from an agency that conducts daily work with individuals and families to elucidate common characteristics of problems and their causes and consequences (eviction as a frequently occurring factor in the homelessness of families, for example). This data then becomes the basis for a search for partners within the community (companies/banks, churches, the state, social movements, other welfare organisations) to plan a joint project; continuing the example from the previous sentence, this could be a plan for providing affordable housing (Taylor 1987).
- *Introducing the values of dignity and human rights, and especially social justice, into the social agency* (Staub-Bernasconi 2008, 2009a, 2009b, Wronka 1995, 2008, Mattaini et al. 1998, Healy L. 2001, Ife 2001, Reichert 2003). A focus on changing the structure of social agencies would mean introducing issues pertaining to the concepts of human rights, social justice and anti-discrimination found in the international code of professional ethics into the goals, policies, methods, diagnostic or assessment criteria and documentation of social welfare organisations. In terms of service users, this implies a need to minimise power differentials between users and professionals in line with the principle of 'minimal legitimate intervention', which means intervening in the least intrusive and least constraining ways possible.

David Gil is right when he writes that social workers – and also many social work theoreticians – who claim to be doing 'structural' work or working towards 'social change' lack a precise, comprehensive diagnosis of societies and their societal differentiations and power structures. An integrative look at society would first entail describing it as socially differentiated along many axes – class, gender, age, 'race'/ethnicity/religion, socio-ecological regions (city/country), organisations, nations etc. Each of these differentiations and its corresponding social systems can then be analysed in terms of their power

structures, that is, the social rules which regulate the horizontal and vertical social relationships between individuals as members of social systems and socio-cultural categories (Staub-Bernasconi 2007a: 374–418).

It follows that rules exist which regulate the *distribution of socio-economic resources* and, consequently, the type of social stratification (caste, class, education, occupation and/or income); these are either fair, that is, based on the assessed needs and performance of individuals, or discriminatory, meaning that they secure privileges according to the societal position of one's family, gender, 'race', immigration status etc.

Another set of rules regulates the *distribution of social positions* and, consequently, the type of hierarchy that governs the division of labour and functional authority within families, communities, and social organisations. These can be repressive and colonising, favouring rights at the top and prescribing duties at the bottom, or fair, which means a balance between rights and duties.

A third set of rules organises the *ranking of 'first ideas'* or values as well as the procedures *for the legitimisation of social stratification and hierarchies*. These rules can rely on immutable references such as the laws of God, nature, history, family dynasty, or on man/woman-made laws referring to human reason, human dignity and human needs.

Finally, one must also look at the rules and means for *sanctioning power*; these can either be constructive and exclude violence or destructive and endorse it.

Each type of social power structure requires a different action strategy. For example, strategies aimed at combating discrimination can – at least in European countries – be based on the anti-discrimination laws of the European Community, but can also use lobbying or scandalisation; the fight against oppression must strive for the introduction of democratic rules and procedures (Addams 1902); changes in inhumane legitimisation practices/structures demand the initiation of public discussions, the mobilisation of the expertise of lawyers etc.

'Empowerment' and 'advocacy' alone don't change the social rules underlying the power structure. Empowerment in particular has become a 'rhetorical refrain employed in virtually all contexts' (Cox and Pawar 2006: 78), and must therefore be seriously criticised when it merely implies capacity building, self-organisation and self-help. In such cases, it is misused to give people the 'illusion' of power; one must call it a 'placebo'. Empowerment in the sense of real *power* is a strategy for getting what individuals, groups and communities are entitled to through the mobilisation of sources of power and the imposition one's will in order to overcome blockades set up by stigma, discrimination, and the oppression of power holders (*op. cit.*: 79). Either way, even though it has many merits and can look back on many successes (Addams 1902, see also Alinsky 1971), empowerment doesn't change the social rules constructing and maintaining the power structure. It is only appropriate

to speak of (collective) 'structural social work' in cases where one can contribute to a change in the dehumanising social rules of a discriminating and/or oppressive social system – be it a family, group, community, organisation, or the state⁴.

**The search for the integration of partial theories:
Four waves of systems theory (in: Healy K. 2005)**

The existence of many (partial) theories of social work has led to a number of conclusions: one is to live with this *ad hoc* pluralism and let social workers make a subjective choice; another involves finding an integrating theoretical framework for the discipline and profession which would be able to respect the specialised contributions of the different 'models' and allocate them to the solution of specific social problems. As Specht and Vickery (1979) pointed out, this means that 'the unitary approach' as a definitive statement (*op. cit.*: 16) is an illusion. These authors' attempt at integrating social casework, group work, and community work ends with a chapter entitled 'The Incomplete Profession' (*op. cit.*: 219–232). Other endeavours aimed at finding a theoretical base that would be able to integrate theories about the individual, social interaction and society can be defined as 'systems theories'. Four such theories are:

- *General systems theory* (Bertalanffy 1968, Hearn 1958; later Pincus and Mihanah 1973, Goldstein 1973). Systems theory challenged a profoundly individualistic focus during the middle part of the twentieth century. Yet, the first systems theorists in social work (Hearn 1958) used biological and cybernetic concepts such as homeostasis, entropy, equifinality and feedback to describe individuals and explain their needs and situation and the purpose of social work practice. The maintenance of a 'steady state' or balance between the individual and social system, together with efforts to avoid entropy (disorder), was said to be essential for growth.

The critique of this approach states that the concepts it uses reflect a mechanistic, non-human nature of man and a narrow focus on the individual and its immediate environment; it therefore fails to address macro structures and overemphasises system maintenance and functioning as a positive goal. A family system, for example, can have a steady state because of patriarchal domination or parental violence.

- *Complex systems theories* (Bolland and Atherton 1999, Warren et al. 1998, Luhmann 1984). While general systems theorists share the premise that functioning systems are stable, complexity theorists argue that change



⁴ For changing laws concerning the 'legal', that is, unsanctioned, corporal punishment of children in Canada, see Watkinson (2004); for changing the rules governing Australian detention centres for asylum seekers see Briskman (2008), both in: Staub-Bernasconi (2009d); for a discussion of the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), see Pogge (2005).

– as a form of ‘deterministic chaos’ – is the normal feature of systems; it is amplified by self-reinforcing feedback with possible snowballing effects, and moments at which the system switches from one pattern of complexity to another occur. Social workers have to assess and use these moments to help the system to switch in the direction of the goals of social work. Again, critiques of this approach point out that chaos theories originally emerged in mathematics, physics, thermodynamics and cybernetic engineering and therefore have – with the exception of the concept of change – limited application in human and social sciences.

Building on the idea of self-organising and self-sustaining – autopoietic – systems found primarily in biology and cybernetics (the works of Maturana and Varela), the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann has advanced a sociological theory of differentiation in modern societies in the tradition of Parsons and Durkheim. Proponents of this theory in social work (Baecker 1994, see also Merten 2000, Bommers and Scherr 2000) claim that social problems are generated by the exclusion of people from social systems, such as family, educational, economic, political, and cultural systems. A new (semi-)autonomous social welfare system has been instated which works with the excluded for re-inclusion or, if this is not successful or possible, for their management/administration.

One criticism of this theoretical approach is that individuals are only addressed in terms of the stabilising function they have in social systems. Their subjectivity, their individual interpretations of their situation and life, are of no theoretical interest. In line with Durkheim, the aim of this theory is to explain ‘the social’ with ‘social facts’. Theoreticians of social work following this tradition point out that this approach is of very little relevance for social work practice; it only provides orientation about the social conditions under which social work takes place. So they add, quite arbitrarily, other theories to their concepts. The reality is that it inspires authoritarian top-down models of social management – rigid plans and procedures which are able to dismiss any concern for the well-being of individuals or for the rules and actors of organisational discrimination and oppression. It indirectly legitimises an efficient type of case management which claims that building a trust relationship in the helping process is superfluous.

- *Ecosystems perspective* (Germain and Gitterman 1996, Bronfenbrenner 1979). These theoreticians use the notion of ecosystems partly as a metaphor to focus on transactions within and across systems and to seek sustainable, and not only short-term change. For them, problems arise when there is a poor fit between a person’s environment and his or her needs, capacities, rights, and aspirations. Main concepts include non-linearity, satisfaction in meeting needs, and responsiveness of environments that support human growth and health. Change endeavours focus on transactions instead of on the isolated improvement of the social functioning of individuals. The

life model of social work practice (Germain and Gitterman 1996) emphasises an active partnership based on 'mutuality and reciprocity' and the assessment of 'life stressors' in passing from one system to another (family to school, school to work) as well as strengths and capacities using, for example, an 'ecomap' as a tool to pictorially represent micro, meso and macro systems as concentric circles (Bronfenbrenner 1979) which can be discussed with the client. The social worker's role is to promote change at the micro, meso and macro levels, with a focus on transactions between the individual and social environments and identifying or creating supportive community networks. At the organisational level (school, work, social service institutions etc.), advocacy should be aimed at changing policy if it works against the client's interests. This requires skills such as coalition building, positioning, lobbying, testifying etc. Although much closer to social work issues than the first two, these processes entirely lack what was referred to above as 'structural social work'.

- *Systems philosophy and systems theory as a scientific base of social work* (Bunge 1974–84, Bunge and Mahner 2004, Obrecht 2001, 2005, Staub-Bernasconi 1991, 2005, 2007a, 2009b, 2009c, Geiser 2009, Klassen 2004, Borrmann 2005, Hollstein-Brinkmann and Staub-Bernasconi 2005). This approach sees systems theory as a chance for an integrating theoretical framework for social work as a discipline and profession. Firstly, it acknowledges that the reduction of systems theory to physics, biology, cybernetics etc. was a highly problematic form of theoretical reductionism and thus a mistake, but one that paved the way to a more adequate, non-reductionist, evolutionary systemic view. In terms of social work as a discipline, systems theory focuses on the transdisciplinary description and explanation of the structure and dynamics/transactions of biological, psychobiological, psychic, psychosocial and social/cultural systems (including economic and political systems). In terms of the partial theories presented in sections 4.1 to 4.3, this means that social work deals with individuals with needs, feelings, cognitions, valuations, wants, hopes, plans and learning capacities who are facing (un)responsive, discriminating and oppressive social systems and cultural environments. These individuals are members of social systems – from the family to the world society. The transactions between individuals as members of social systems can be cooperative, competitive, conflictive, exploitative or destructive. Class, gender, 'race', minority status (based on religion, ethnicity, physical appearance/disability, and/or sexual orientation) and criminality/violence in any form are the most prominent *social problems* that social work deals with. They imply vulnerable individuals and groups deprived of resources, power, justice and dignity beneath an overarching perspective of unfulfilled human needs and the violation of human rights (Staub-Bernasconi 2008). Historically, the population segment with which so-

cial work works consists mainly of individuals, families, and communities with a low position in the societal stratification system who are more often than not kept away or refused as clients by the established professions and/or not taken seriously as voters by politicians. As a profession, social work relies on transdisciplinary descriptions and explanations of social problems for the development of scientifically based action guidelines (methods, strategies), along with common-sense and intuitive judgements. Its actors are/should be guided by the values of well-being, emancipation, social justice and, on the meta-ethical level, human rights. Once one focuses on implementing these values into practice, the question of whether social work has a political mandate above and beyond its professional mandate no longer makes sense. The selection of special action theories (methods) should be guided by the problems that need to be solved, and not the other way around. But this is a topic that is dealt with elsewhere (Staub-Bernasconi 2007a: 271–418). Historically, social work and social policy was integrated into a multilevel conception of social action (see the writings of Jane Addams). In today's highly differentiated modern societies, one must theoretically define the interface between social work and social policy (Ramon 1998), but the basic issue stays the same: finding solutions to social problems. Social workers as 'science-based, reflective practitioners' and clients with their own view of life and problems share diagnoses and work together to seek explanations, set values and negotiate goals, look for resources and choose ways of action. This can be done in a democratic-participative way (Addams 1902). And together, they evaluate the outcomes of their decisions in order to make better decisions to achieve their goals.

Social work as a discipline and profession not only has a *double mandate* mediating between clients and society represented by an agency (Böhnisch and Lösch 1973). It has a *triple mandate*, with the third dimension coming from the professional body itself and consisting, as I have tried to show, firstly of scientifically based action guidelines, and secondly of a specific professional ethic.

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Chapter 2

The Use of Conceptual Frameworks to Investigate the Structure-Agency Link in Comparative Immigration Policy and its Relevance to Social Work

Claudia Schneider

Introduction

This chapter discusses how conceptual frameworks can be utilised as a methodological and theoretical tool to study the structure-agency link in social investigations. The specific case of comparative immigration policy and its relevance to social work will be discussed. Several authors in social work have highlighted the importance of looking at the relationship between structure and agency to analyse social work (Kondrat 2002, see also Houston and Campbell 2001). Although authors emphasise structure and agency in social work, they are less concerned about the methodological and theoretical strategies for studying the *link* between structure and agency. The aim of this chapter is to outline a strategy for the investigation of the structure-agency link which should be useful for social work researchers and/or for practitioners who are interested in the construction, maintenance or change of social structures (in particular those related to immigration policy). The strategy which will be presented is a conceptual framework approach which incorporates Archer's morphogenetic sequence to investigate the 'elaboration' of social structures.

The chapter begins by outlining the methodological and theoretical principles of a conceptual framework approach and Archer's morphogenetic sequence and highlighting why conceptual frameworks – as opposed to deterministic approaches – can better fulfil the needs of a study of the structure-agency link which does not *a priori* favour one over the other. In the second section, the theoretical discussion will be illustrated by looking at the example of comparative immigration policy and its relevance for social work. The conclusion of the chapter discusses the importance of conceptual frameworks and the structure-agency link in the context of social work theory and social work practice.

The conceptual framework in the context of methodology and social theory

Conceptual framework approaches are increasingly being used as an instrument for structuring qualitative research. Miles and Huberman provide the following definition:

A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationships among them. Frameworks can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven or commonsensical, descriptive or causal. (1994: 18)

The above quotation highlights that strategies of developing conceptual frameworks are manifold and fulfil the objective of a methodological framework for a theory-building or inductive approach which is developed during the research process: 'As qualitative researchers collect data, they revise their frameworks – make them more precise, replace empirically feeble bins with more meaningful ones, and reconstruct relationships' (*op. cit.* 20).

These principles show that a conceptual framework is capable of dealing with multiple explanatory factors which are *potentially* relevant for the investigation process; concrete assumptions about explanatory relationships are made *a posteriori* (rather than *a priori*, as in quantitative research). The web of explanatory factors developed for social research can – and, as some would argue, should – be viewed along the lines of structure and agency and the relationship between the two. Houston and Campbell (2001), for example, have used critical social theory to develop a conceptual framework for comparative social work. They differentiate between micro, meso and macro domains. The macro domain relates to 'large-scale international social processes directly affecting nation-states and indirectly affecting local social work practices within them'; the meso domain is 'the site where relationships between the nation state, welfare regimes and social professionals are played out'; and the micro domain 'alludes to the specific activity of everyday social work practice' and 'acknowledges the importance of human agency in that social workers will use their creative skills to both absorb and transform professional, social policy and academic discourses' (*op. cit.* 68). They suggest that the macro and meso domains are more likely to emphasise 'wider social structures and institutional prerogatives', while the micro domain deals with agency. Using the example of immigration policy, the conceptual framework presented below will offer a more concrete strategy for the investigation of the structure-agency link on all levels of investigation. The next section will take an in-depth look at how conceptual frameworks are suitable theoretical devices for studying the structure-agency link without the *a priori* prioritisation of structure over agency or vice versa.

Mouzelis (1993) discusses conceptual frameworks in the context of social theory, arguing that social structures and actors should be investigated on the basis of conceptual frameworks rather than substantive statements or hypotheses:

...The chief aim of modern sociological theory is not to fashion substantive statements that can be tested against reality, but to construct what Althusser calls Generalities II, and what non-Marxist sociologists call

conceptual frameworks or paradigms: i.e. sets of logically interrelated conceptual tools for looking at social phenomena in such a way that interesting questions are generated and methodologically proper linkages established between different levels of analysis. In this sense, sociological theory does not consist of, and does not aim directly at establishing empirically testable hypotheses, it is merely meant to prepare the ground for an empirical investigation of social structures and actors. (*Op. cit.*: 676)

Mouzelis' concern about the way social structures and actors should be investigated relates to the established structure-agency debate in sociology and its critique of reductionism (Archer 1996, see also Bhaskar 1989, Giddens 1984).¹ Below, an outline why deterministic approaches cannot deal with the structure-agency link in an ontologically flexible manner will be presented; this will be followed by a discussion of Archer's morphogenetic sequence as a possible strategy for studying structures and actors without falling into the 'trap' of reductionism.

Conceptual frameworks as a strategy for analysing the structure-agency link

Similar to Mouzelis, Archer argues that deterministic or hypothesis-testing approaches restrict the empirical investigation of social structures and actors.² She argues that deterministic approaches conceptualise the structure-agent link through *upwards* or *downwards* reduction, which inevitably leads to epiphenomenalism and ontological rigidity (1995). Reductionism is inherent in deterministic theory because the ontological basis of the latter is formulated in the framework of deductive hypotheses. The main characteristic of hypothesis formulation is the identification of *one* major determining factor from which several 'inferior' concepts are derived (Kumar 2005, see also Sarantakos 1998). This identification of a key variable leads to an *a priori* decision by the researcher/theorist to *either* place the variable within the realm of structure (by reducing agents to *Träger* or bearers of structures) *or* within the realm of agency (thus ignoring the significance of structural conditioning). By viewing either structure or agency as the determining concept, deductive hypothesising is unable to deal with structure and agency in an ontologically flexible manner, and the investigation and explanation of structure and



- ¹ Downwards reduction neglects agency in favour of structure (holism), while upwards reduction reflects the opposite, that is, focusing on agency and neglecting structure (individualism) (Archer 1995: 6).
- ² Structure should be understood as both macro factors, such as the economy and politics, and normative and interactive structures which govern society in general and organisations such as political parties in particular. Agency is defined as a 'stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world' (Giddens 1979).

agency become constrained by the initial hypothesis. In order to overcome the problems of deterministic theory, supporters of conceptual frameworks renounce the use of deduction as a framework for formulating an ontological base. In its place, they suggest a multi-dimensional network of related conceptual tools which would allow for ontological flexibility.³

Once it is accepted that structure and agency need to be investigated in a flexible framework, the question of *how* the interplay between the two should be investigated arises. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory offers an elaborated analysis of the structure-agency link.⁴ However, his approach has been criticised for being less applicable to empirical investigations (Archer 1995). Therefore, this paper will provide a detailed outline of Archer's model for studying the structure-agency link. Archer presents a systematic and pragmatic strategy for studying the interplay between structure and agency which can be incorporated into a conceptual framework approach. By advocating 'analytical dualism', she treats structure and agency as 'irreducible constituents of social reality' (1996: 679).⁵ She has developed a so-called morphogenetic sequence which distinguishes, in temporal terms, between agency and structure: structure is understood as the unintended outcome of past actions that *pre-dates* and *conditions* present action. Equally significant, present action is viewed as *elaborating* (maintaining or changing) this structure. In this sense, analytical dualism provides conceptual tools for researching the interplay between social structures and agency which can be applied to a concrete context of social analysis.

By using the concept of conditioning as opposed to that of determination, Archer allows for a voluntarism which is limited or enhanced by the surrounding structures. In a later publication, Archer (2000) elaborated the role of agency within her morphogenetic sequence, in particular the 'powers which ultimately enable people to reflect upon their social context, and to act



- 3 It should be emphasised that this chapter does *not* prioritise the use of qualitative over the use of quantitative methodology. It argues that, in the context of a wider *theoretical* framework which investigates the structure-agency link, a conceptual framework approach offers the necessary ontological flexibility, while a hypothesis-testing approach does not. This does not imply that specific dimensions and relationships within the conceptual framework could not be studied using a quantitative or a hypothesis-testing methodology.
- 4 The study of structure and agency is an 'old dilemma', and was a major concern of classic sociology. The structure-agency link is also a central issue for theoretical debates in other social science disciplines such as social policy and political science.
- 5 The notion of analytical dualism can be traced to the work of Lockwood (1964). Archer (1982, 1995, 1996) bases her critique of synthetic solutions to the structure-agency problem on Bhaskar, who argues that '...people and society are not related "dialectically". They do not constitute two moments of the same process. Rather they refer to radically different things' (Bhaskar 1989 in Archer 1995:79).

reflexively towards it, either individually or collectively' (*op. cit.* 308). Without the possibility of viewing people as the 'active shapers' rather than just 'passive recipients' of their structural contexts, the elaboration of structures (as outlined in her morphogenetic sequence above) would not be possible:

The very notion of morphogenesis is predicated upon such active agents, otherwise there is no legitimate source to which structural or cultural elaboration can be attributed. This means that human beings have the powers of critical reflection upon their social context and of creatively redesigning their social environment, its institutional or ideational configurations, or both. (*Ibid.*)

Archer (*op. cit.* 317) highlights the general failure of sociological theory to engage with both the 'inner' and 'outer lives' of agents and to 'explore the interchanges between the two'. She emphasises the need to investigate the 'inner conversation' of agency to understand the overall link between structure and agency.

From the above it follows that a conceptual framework approach is, in methodological and theoretical terms, more appropriate than deterministic theories for dealing with the interdependent relationship between structures and agency. Archer's morphogenetic sequence offers clear methodological guidance for the empirical investigation of social structures and social actors and their interaction (1995). Conceptual frameworks avoid upward or downward reduction by providing a platform for addressing a variety of explanatory factors (arising from country-specific scenarios) without exhibiting an *a priori* preference for one factor at the expense of others, and in this respect they are especially suited to comparative studies. Before developing a possible conceptual framework which would acknowledge the structure-agency link in the context of (comparative) immigration policy, an overview of existing approaches in this field will be presented, with a focus on the following questions: How have authors dealt with structure and agency in their studies? To what extent did they make use of conceptual framework approaches in their investigations?

The use of conceptual frameworks for the analysis of structure and agency in studies of comparative immigration policy

Immigration policy relates to both *settlement* and *admission* (or immigration control) policies (Hammar 1985). This chapter will focus on the area of admission policy to illustrate the use of conceptual frameworks in the context of an investigation of structure and agency. A large number of studies dealing with immigration policy are comparative, in the sense that they highlight the discrepancies and similarities between the immigration policies of different nation states. The comparative aspect of the studies helps to identify important nation-specific factors which have an impact on immigration policies and the experiences of migrants in a given country. Authors such as Joly (1996)

and Castles and Miller (1998) refer to multiple examples from a variety of countries to illustrate the variables they have identified; a greater number of authors (Brochman 1999, see also Castles and Kosack 1973, Freeman 1979, Joppke 1999, Schuster 2003) offer in-depth comparisons between a smaller set of countries using more or less flexible frameworks of investigation.

Until the late 1980s, many comparative approaches to immigration policy focused primarily on structural factors using hypothesis-testing or deterministic approaches⁶. Typical structural factors relating to the capitalist economy, political party systems, or nation states' conceptions of citizenship were applied to gain an understanding of immigration policy. Since the 1990s, authors have been increasingly acknowledging structure and agency as independent items of analysis, but have not explicitly dealt with theoretical discussions of structure *and* agency; as a result, the structure-agency *link* remains unclear at times (Brochmann 1999, see also Joly 1996, Joppke 1999, Geddes 2003, Guiraudon 2001, Schuster 2003).

To what extent do authors utilise conceptual framework approaches for investigations of immigration policy? Although none of the authors listed above explicitly uses the term 'conceptual framework', authors such as Faist (2000), Freeman (1979), Joly (1996) and, to a certain extent, Brochmann (1999) and Guiraudon (2001) present conceptual framework approaches but do not explicitly use them to coordinate their investigation of structure and agency. For example, Joly uses the three parameters of foreign policy, domestic policy and ethical concerns and develops a range of sub-dimensions to analyse and compare (admission) policies for asylum seekers. Within these parameters, she looks at factors such as demography, economic cycles, housing, social services, national cohesion, national identity and shared values. The same author develops a different set of indicators for settlement policy, addressing a wide range of factors such as the refugee's position in the society of origin, group characteristics, collective consciousness, conflict in the country of origin and the role of imagined communities. In a similar manner, Brochmann's analysis of immigration policy identifies a 'web of factors', with the following identified as most central: historical precedents and traditional patterns of behaviour (traditions in terms of humanitarian values and cultural openness towards the outside world); labour unions, parliamentary parties and non-governmental organisations; international forces, such as other states' policies; and the character of the international migration flows themselves. Freeman develops two layers to analyse immigration policy: 'external constraints on policy' (economic, demographic and historical conditions) and 'proximate determinants' (party systems, political styles and belief systems of decision makers) (1979: 311). In her study, Guiraudon highlights how a 'de-nationalization of control'



⁶ Some examples include Castells (1975), Castles and Kosack (1973), Freeman (1995) and Parekh (1994).

has taken place and how new actors (such as employers, local social services, security agencies) who cooperate on the local/regional, supranational and societal/private levels have been included in the implementation of immigration policy (2001: 34). What all of the above approaches have in common is that they produce flexible frameworks which avoid determinism (either in the form of upward or downward reduction). Instead, they offer a variety of factors which could be potentially relevant for a specific case study. Although the authors are in most cases not explicit about the structure-agency link, their identified factors are often situated within the realms of structure *and* agency.

Guiraudon and Joly explicitly mention the role of social services in their frameworks. Guiraudon (2001) shows that local social services are part of the wider immigration structure, and therefore relate to the construction, maintenance and change of immigration policy (both for admission and settlement). Joly (1996) further highlights the position of social services within a wider framework of pressure groups, the economy, culture and ideology and social costs. The social work profession is especially involved at the micro level, working directly with a variety of migrants including, for example, more established migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors and migrant workers.⁷ Different approaches in social work, such as those which follow critical theory or an ecosystems framework (Kondrat 2002), acknowledge the relevance of structure and agency in social work and the role social workers play (or should/could play) at the meso and/or macro level of policy making (Houston and Campbell 2001, see also Kondrat 2002). As members of governmental organisations and non-governmental or voluntary organisations, social workers are linked to the wider national and international environment of admission and settlement policies. They are (or could/should be) therefore involved in the *elaboration* of wider socio-political structures. It cannot be denied that social workers are significantly limited and constrained by structures governing immigration, such as legislation, economic structures, citizenship laws etc.; however, Archer's (1995, 2000) morphogenetic sequence highlights the opportunities available to social actors to be 'active shapers' of their surrounding structures.

A conceptual framework for the study of (comparative) immigration policy

Figure 1 provides an overview of a possible conceptual framework for the study of (comparative) immigration policy (Schneider 2006). As mentioned above, conceptual frameworks are influenced by the specific point of view and purpose of a given study; different authors/researchers might emphasise different



⁷ See, for example, Christie (2002), who looks at the social work profession in the context of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the Republic of Ireland, or Moyo (2007), who is researching the parenting perspectives of immigrants and refugees in Northern New England.

areas of immigration policy and, consequently, develop different frameworks. Both settlement and admission policies constitute immigration policy, as noted above. The conceptual framework presented below relates specifically to admission policy. I argue that distinct conceptual frameworks should be developed for the areas of admission and settlement policy to avoid theoretical unification 'at a highly abstract and possibly vacuous level' (Portes 1997: 810). Although a conceptual framework for immigration policy which focuses on settlement policy will display some overlap with a framework which looks at admission policy, it would incorporate different actors and organisations involved in the decision-making process. For example, immigrants themselves (and their values, language, 'imagined communities' etc.) and pressure groups play a much more explicit role in settlement policy, as reflected in Joly's approach outlined above.

The first layer of the framework investigates the extent to which politicians' decision making on immigration policy is enhanced or limited by the wider national and international environment. Relevant variables (such as the economic structure, the legal context, the demographic structure, domestic policy, historical context) identified by previous research (for example Joly 1996, Joppke 1999 and Geddes 2003) are integrated into this layer. However, as in Freeman's (1979) study, special emphasis is placed upon politicians as 'mediators' of the wider environment who interpret and perceive the situation from a particular point of view; rather than correlating macro data, such as economic and political developments, with developments in immigration policy, this outline emphasises that the wider environment needs to be analysed in its own terms *and* in the context of policy makers' perceptions of the wider environment to highlight any differences of interpretation (thereby drawing a link between levels 1 and 3).

The second layer of the conceptual framework provides information about the closer context of the political party system and provides the most in-depth analysis of the link between agency and structure by applying Archer's morphogenetic sequence. This model is amended to accommodate an investigation of the role of politicians and close party structures in the development of immigration policy; depending on the focus of the study, different organisations in the national and international context could have appeared in the centre of the investigation. The investigation would start at time x (T1) by analysing the structures (normative and interactive, for example) existing at that point in time⁸; it would proceed with a closer investigation of the extent to which politicians (in different hierarchical positions and with different 'ideological' characteristics or belief/value systems) elaborated (changed or maintained) these structures between T2 and T3, and conclude with a change or maintenance of structures at T4.



8 Normative structures related, for example, to institutional rules and guidelines and interactive structures referring to established frameworks of communication within and between organisations and groups (see also Mouzelis 1995).

Figure 1 A conceptual framework for the study of immigration (control) policy

Layers	Conceptualisation
<p>1</p> <p>The wider national and international Environment</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>→</p> <p>Economic structure The political system Legal context (e.g. citizenship laws/rights) Domestic policy Foreign policy Demographic structure Role of organisations and institutions Historical context</p> </div> <div style="width: 45%; text-align: right;"> <p>→</p> <p>Perception and interpretation of the wider environment by agents (Link to level 3)</p> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">Immigration policy</p>
<p>2</p> <p>The closer context of the political party system</p>	<p>Archer's (1995: 76) morphogenetic sequence (amended)</p> <p>Organisational structures of the political party system (normative and interactive)</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">T₁</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Interaction by politicians (ideological and hierarchical background)</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">T₂ T₃</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Structural elaboration (change or maintenance of structures)</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: right;">T₄</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Decision making by politicians</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Politicians' decision-making processes</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Goals</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Normative principles</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Perception of environment</p> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">(Link to level 1)</p>

The third layer of the conceptual framework focuses on the politicians' justification and explanation of immigration policies and advocates a grounded theory analysis of their justification schemes. This layer borrows analytical tools from (procedural) rational choice approaches that have dealt with individual decision-making processes. The three indicators of goals, normative principles and perceptions of environment are utilised to structure the investigation of decision-making processes (Sen 1982, see also Simon 1985). These concepts serve as a broad analytical structure for the content analysis of politicians' justification schemes, whereby the particular themes and linkages relating to these concepts will emerge from the empirical investigation (for example, by applying a grounded theory approach as developed by Strauss and Corbin [1998]).

Although the conceptual framework presented above focuses on level 2 (the central level for the application of the structure-agency link), that is, on politicians and political parties, it highlights interstices where social workers are part of the interplay between structures and agency in the context of immigration policy. Social workers can be viewed as being limited and directed by political decision-making processes. However, opportunities to intervene in these decision-making processes (represented at level 3 of the framework) also exist. As social workers are in direct contact with migrants, they will have insights into the effects of policies such as dispersal strategies, voucher schemes (instead of benefits), or the accommodation of accompanied minors in detention centres (currently debated in the UK) on migrants. Opportunities exist for social workers to filter this knowledge through at level 3 of the framework by influencing politicians' perceptions, goals and, possibly, normative principles on these issues. The political party system at level 2 offers another domain where the social work profession can (potentially) take part in the elaboration of the normative and communicative structures of party politics. Level 1 indicates the role of organisations and institutions (governmental and non-governmental, national and international). The elaboration of structures within these organisations offers another 'window' for social work practice to take part in the elaboration of immigration policy.

Conceptual frameworks and the structure-agency link in the context of social work theory

The above discussion on the structure-agency link and a conceptual framework approach emphasises that agency issues need to be discussed in the context of structure and vice versa. With regard to its direct involvement with migrants, social work first of all focuses on the local level; accordingly, it could look at the structure-agency link between local organisations and social work activities. However, the conceptual framework approach presented in this paper suggests that it is also important to link the local level with wider processes at the national and international level. In the case of immigration policy, the structure-agency link at the national and international level is linked to developments at the local level, both in terms of structural constraints and opportunities for agency which goes beyond the local level. In general, publications on social work theory have not systematically dealt with the structure-agency link. Although structural explanations and agency perspectives are mentioned in some works (Healy 2005, see also Payne 2005), only a few, such as Kondrat (2002), applied a structure-agency discussion to a specific case study. Kondrat (*ibid.*) opted for Giddens' structuration theory which, as argued above, offers a less pragmatic model for researching the structure agency link, a shortcoming reflected to a certain extent in the fact that the study does not clearly illustrate Giddens' concept of 'duality'.

Approaches such as systems theory and ecological theory address the relationship between individuals and larger social systems. Although systems theory does not explicitly offer a strategy for investigating the structure-agency link, it does address several issues which are important for researching this link. It clearly moves away from agency approaches (which use upward reduction) such as psychodynamic theory and incorporates the *social* dimension into the analysis of social work (Payne 2005). Systems theory offers a relatively flexible framework which can integrate several perspectives. Although it focuses on 'wholes', it does not reject agency and can incorporate psychosocial studies which emphasise agency. The political engagement systems theory offers an approach which reflects that social work can/should intervene at different levels in society (Kabadaki 1995, cited in Payne 2005: 147). In the sense that it can incorporate different approaches (as outlined above), systems theory resembles a conceptual framework approach in a methodological sense. But to what extent does it fulfil Mouzelis' (1993: 676) criterion of a conceptual framework that is 'meant to prepare the ground for an empirical investigation of social structures and actors'? Systems theory in social work has been criticised for taking existing orders and structures for granted, especially by those who represent a critical theory point of view (Payne 2005). A conceptual framework which incorporates an explicit focus on the structure-agency link (as represented by Archer's approach) focuses on the 'elaboration' of structures to highlight how these are constructed, maintained or changed through social interaction. The conceptual approach presents a neutral and unbiased approach, neither identifying structures as a given order nor (necessarily) sharing critical theory's imperative of changing the existing structures. In this respect, the conceptual framework approach is 'value free': it merely investigates the interplay between structures and agency, identifying how social interaction has elaborated social structures in a given case and, at the same time, showing how this elaboration was only one possible (intended or unintended) outcome among many other possibilities of elaboration. In this way, a conceptual framework approach highlights how structures are influenced (intentionally or unintentionally) by agency and vice versa, and also highlights how alternative actions might have developed different structural outcomes. By analysing the interlinks between structures and agency, possible alternatives that could provide insight for criticism regarding the processes which constructed the existing structures may become apparent and (missed) opportunities for agency to elaborate social structures in a different way may be highlighted.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that conceptual frameworks, as opposed to hypothesis-testing (deterministic) approaches, can offer an appropriate theoretical basis for a study of the structure-agency link which avoids reductionism, that

is, a situation where agency *sinks* into structure or vice versa (Archer 1995: 65). The incorporation of Archer's (1995) 'morphogenetic sequence' within a wider conceptual framework provides co-ordination for an analysis of structure and action which follows a temporal order, thereby providing a pragmatic model for the investigation of the structure-agency link in a specific empirical case study. The second part of the chapter shows that approaches in immigration policy have only utilised the conceptual framework approach to study the structure-agency link to a limited extent. A possible conceptual framework for the specific area of admission policy or immigration control policy (as opposed to settlement policy) is developed, and serves as a basis for a discussion of the opportunities and limitations for the social work profession to elaborate structures in the context of immigration policy. Lastly, the conceptual framework approach in the context of social work theory is discussed. Especially in the context of critical social theory and systems theory, social work has looked at social structures and agency. However, theories have been less occupied with the *systematic* investigation of the structure-agency link in the particular context of social work. In response, this chapter has presented a methodologically and theoretically flexible tool for researchers and/or practitioners in social work who are investigating the structure-agency link in their specific field.

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Chapter 3

Theory with Passion: Ilse Arlt and Current Questions in Social Work¹

Maria Maiss, Peter Pantucek

Introduction

In 2007, the Ilse Arlt Institute for Social Inclusion Research was founded at the University for Applied Studies in St. Pölten, Austria. The institute's namesake, Ilse Arlt (1867–1960), was a pioneer of scientific social work. On the occasion of the opening of the institute in October 2007, a colloquy was held where her thoughts and works were discussed and parallels were drawn between her work and current questions in social work science. The discovery of the works of this important theorist of social work science by a broader audience is long overdue. In the coming months, contributions to the colloquy will be published; new editions of Arlt's main works, *The Basic Principles and Foundations of Social welfare and Care* (1921) and *Ways to a Social Welfare and Care Science* (1958), are also being prepared. A translation of the new edition of *Ways to a Social Welfare and Care Science* is being planned as a reaction to the recently emerging interest in her work, and will serve as a basis for further scientific response in international professional discourse. To date, the renaissance of her work has been restricted to the German social work science discourse, because so far only one of her texts has been published in English: 'On the Way to the Scientific Analysis of Poverty', an article published in 1934 in *The Charity Organisation Quarterly*². This text is the transcript of the third Sir Charles Loch Memorial Lectures, delivered by Ilse Arlt at the Hall of the Worshipful Company of Grocers on Tuesday, October 17, 1933, and gives information on Arlt's international scientific contacts, an aspect which has yet to be sufficiently investigated. Another indication of her international connections is the presentation she gave in 1910 at the International Congress for Public and Private Work and Welfare in Copenhagen, where her concept of the profession of a welfare and care worker, an occupation she considered women to be especially talented for, attracted international attention.



¹ This chapter is an expanded version of an article first published in the German professional journal *Soziale Arbeit* (2008, 6: 202–211).

² *The Charity Organisation Quarterly*, 1934, 8: 1, 2–21

At a time when the German social work community (among others) is discussing with ever greater rigour the necessity of, possibilities for, and limits to establishing social work as an independent scientific discipline, one must not dismiss the thoughts already developed by Ilse Arlt from the 1920s to the 1960s. Arlt, the founder of the first welfare school in Austria–Hungary³ and the author of several essential works about welfare theory and textbooks, had been more or less forgotten and ignored in relevant discussions and in the curricula of practical educational settings for social work. Then finally, over a period of about ten years, a slow rediscovery of Arlt’s wealth of ideas began. In 1995, the reappraisal of the life and work of Ilse Arlt was initiated by Ursula Ertl’s valuable thesis. Silvia Staub-Bernasconi’s contribution about Arlt’s theory of needs followed in 1996; then in 2005, after a long break, a publication by Cornelia Frey portrayed Arlt as the forerunner of systemic thinking in social work.

Life and work

Ilse Arlt (May 1, 1867 – January 25, 1960) was born the third of four children in an upper class family. In her unpublished autobiography, which is in the possession of the Austrian Academy of Science, she states: ‘To write an autobiography is only a joy when one’s preferences and intentions agree, when one wants life repeated as it was and not any other’ (Arlt date unavailable: 1).

This statement may seem confusing once one learns that Ilse Arlt⁴ was forbidden from publishing under the Nazi regime because of a Jewish grandparent, and that she had to witness the closing of her school and the destruction of her writings and substantial collections, which were intended to be the foundation of a planned welfare and household museum.



³ The school, called United Subject Courses for People’s Care (*Vereinigte Fachkurse für Volkspflege*), was founded in 1912. ‘Volkspflege (People’s Care) is a certain kind of care for people, which after careful inquiry and thorough assessment offers help after considering both assessment and basic needs, properly developed and placed within the political-economic structure; cultural heritage and local customs are highly considered in the process’ (Arlt 1937: 4) (see below). In a letter to Anna Rosenfeld, director of the School For Social Care in Vienna, Ilse Arlt wrote, on October 28, 1957: ‘I want to mention that the “United Subject Courses For People’s Care” were not, as it was customary to call them in Vienna, the first Austrian School of Social Care, but actually the first in the world that focused on the duty to educate its students for all forms of care and welfare that existed in that time, so that these students would intervene supportively, and would also be able to develop and manage every newly required way of care and welfare. At that time, all other ways of social work education were geared toward comprehending only a single special branch of the welfare field’ (Arlt 1957 in Ertl 1995: 29).

⁴ Arlt’s maternal grandfather (Dr. Benedikt Hönig Edler von Hönigsberg) was of Jewish origin and was baptised Catholic on February 17, 1848 (Ertl 1995: 69).

The quotation is also confusing in light of the fact that Ilse Arlt had to close her school just four years after its re-opening following the war (1950) because of illness and substantial financial difficulties. She was provided for in her old age by a modest pension and an additional income obtained by renting out rooms in her home.

Lastly, the quotation is confusing because Ilse Arlt never enjoyed the proper acknowledgement of her theoretical work. She was convinced, however, of the eventual recognition of its significance⁵, and thought that it would be properly placed in the curriculum of Vienna's future schools for social work⁶ and Caritas. Almost half a century passed before this happened. And a great deal of time passed before social work schools in Austria achieved the status of university programmes and received a public research mandate.

How did Arlt's deepest inclination and her life's work make it possible for her to look back at her life and call it a success, worthy of repetition? 'Already, at five years of age, her agonizing over the poverty of others is evident, as well as her passion for learning' (Arlt date unavailable: 1). Both were to remain characteristic throughout Arlt's life. '...As much as I learned from newspapers and books, as seriously as I thought about the national economy and social sciences, it took me until the beginning of my twenties to realize, not only I, but everyone, was ignorant about how to treat abused children, abandoned old people, and poor women. This knowledge about the "how and why" was altogether lacking' (*ibid.*). Arlt's critique addressed, on the one hand, the deficiencies of the national economy and of the social sciences of her day, which 'did not look closely enough at the empirical details', and, on the other hand, the often ineffective and inefficient volunteer care organisations. Arlt clearly recognised that a good heart alone cannot solve social problems, and that these problems need to be addressed through thought and research. This research should include the measurement of poverty, the critical reflection of the helping process and the ability to teach the art of



⁵ According to Arlt, the future of people's care should be based on systematic research into the manifold causes and effects of poverty and social problems, in connection with other scientific branches. Later research could be based on practical experiences, including the insights gathered during the process. All this should benefit the education for and utilisation of social care. All professions connected with the care of human life (teachers, doctors, directors of institutions, social care workers) would be interconnected and, in opposition to highly specialised care, would be concerned about individual and societal development (*Gedeihen*) as a whole (Arlt date unavailable: 4). This was a progressive thought, considering that even today, Austria persists with specialisation (for example, social work versus social pedagogy, versus educational pedagogy). Even in the 1980, there was a lack of scientific social work education and social work research.

⁶ During her lifetime, Arlt donated her remaining collections and writings to the School for Social Care of the City of Vienna.

care. Arlt tirelessly worked on this self-determined goal until the end of her life. In her second key work, *Ways to a Social Care Science*, which was published in 1958, Arlt defined her thoughts even more precisely and systematically, expanding on her previous works, the textbooks *The Basics of Social Care* (1921) and *The Formation of Helping* (1923).

In this text, Arlt was able to work on her central concern, namely the complex and manifold causes of poverty and the potential for self-improvement. At the same time, she followed her inclinations in making learning and researching the basis of her work, thus harmonising a personal joy of learning with a lifetime of altruism. This is why she was able to say that she would have repeated her life exactly the way it was. Ilse Arlt's life and her feelings of self-worth illustrate her theories about meeting individual needs and using consumption creatively and productively.

Her knowledge, which was rich in experience and reflection about the possibilities of the prosperous (*gedeiblich*) conduct of life, was the basis of her respectful interaction with her students: 'We do not drill, but we lead every student to herself and her innermost possibility' (Arlt 1937: 16). Arlt's first publications dealt with vocations for women outside the home. Liberal and humanistic in thought, she considered the profession of welfare worker⁷ one which corresponds to the emancipatory demands of her time. She welcomed it as a combination of the traditional desire of women to be helpers, the new desire of women to educate themselves and the new duty of women to be gainfully employed.

Arlt's welfare and social care theory

Arlt's welfare and social care theory is aimed at the advancement of the individual and societal development (*Gedeihen*), and is based on the concepts of need and the creative act of consuming. Central to her work is the need to base a self-contained social care science on poverty research. Nevertheless, her interest is not only directed towards poverty, but also towards the relationship between poverty and self-development (*Gedeihen*). With this in mind, she points out that poverty is not a fixed fact, a destiny, but the result of multi-causal deprivation, which thwarts human well-being or *Gedeihen* in many ways. Because poverty represents an absence of desirable elements, it cannot be the basis for social work, which accentuates the positive and the human *Gedeihen*. In this sense, welfare should not be limited to the diminishment of suffering, but must also enhance the joys of life (Arlt 1958: 38).



⁷ Arlt introduced her ideas about the profession in 1910, in Copenhagen, at the International Congress for Public Work and Private Welfare.

Research on poverty, according to Arlt, has to start with an exploration of basic human needs and the preconditions for *Gedeihen*, detected through the absence of positive social outcomes (Arlt 1958: 60). This led Arlt to choose an anthropological perspective, and to examine the preconditions and attributes of a healthy and flourishing life. Her perspective is important in that it compels one to consider what would be an acceptable life for a human being and to formulate human rights and needs. Central to Arlt's thinking is the question of how poverty and *Gedeihen* interrelate on the micro- and macro-level and how the art of creating an effective lifestyle and satisfying basic needs can improve this relationship. She conceived the concept of creative consumption – the conscious, autonomous, and responsible regulation of desires – which has to be learned in early childhood and practiced throughout life.

But what exactly did she mean by this? Arlt turned a critical eye to the perception that consumerism is the primary motor of production, a view which is still dominant today. Instead, for her, consumerism (the consumption and enjoyment of products) meant the satisfaction of basic needs, development, and self-actualisation. Her consumerism inextricably ties want to understanding and judgment: 'Consumerism is a creative power only if freely chosen and autonomous' (Arlt 1958: 74). One can either submit to a consumption primarily directed by others – controlled by bureaucracy, politics, or commerce – or he/she can make consumption an act of self-determination, satisfying basic needs and self-development reasonably and creatively (and thereby contributing to the growth of a personality). This choice is crucial in any social work intervention or service. In line with Arlt's argument, orientations in social work would focus on the needs and the actual and potential strengths or resources of various interrelated people of different social standing. Having renounced a focus on deficit, Arlt asserts that the goal of professional social work is nurturing a joy for life rooted in an individual's awareness of his/her strength, rather than the mere reduction of suffering. In her theory of needs, Arlt distinguishes 13 categories of needs:

1. Air, light, warmth and water
2. Food
3. Living quarters, shelter
4. Corporal hygiene
5. Clothing
6. Health care
7. Prevention of accidents and first aid
8. Vacation and relaxation
9. Family life
10. Education
11. Legal rights
12. Education for economic proficiency
13. Spiritual development (morality, ethics, and religion)

It is easy to see that these basic needs for human life⁸ overlap in various ways, in that satisfying one need affects the satisfaction of others and, consequently, human *Gedeihen* as a whole.

In Arlt's view, the satisfaction of basic needs depends on economic factors and the abilities and knowledge of the individual and others. It is also important to have command over one's own and other people's time (Arlt 1921: 32).

In satisfying basic needs, one runs the risk of transgressing into luxury on the one hand and into impoverishment on the other. The satisfaction of basic needs can take place above or below the so-called deprivation level (*Notschwelle*). According to Arlt, poverty is a deprivation of basic needs which should not be undercut any further, because this would cause significant damage to the individual and his or her environment (Arlt 1921: 33).

From the fact that the 'deprivation level' (*Notschwelle*) can be observed and empirically determined, Arlt develops the central duty and responsibility of the professional welfare worker: it is an art that consists mainly of differentiating between an adequate solution that doesn't meet all needs and an optimal outcome. This makes it possible, on the one hand, to locate deprivation, and, on the other hand, to recognise the available resources for the satisfaction of basic needs around which professional intervention is to be planned (Arlt 1931: 42).

For Arlt, a systematic science of needs which attempts to incrementally improve human well-being constitutes the basis for professional welfare service. Taking this as a starting point, one can determine the direction and the extent of welfare services. However, the science of needs also justifies the social rationale for such services. In the following quote, Arlt clarifies that social work based on empirically derived needs not only serves the disadvantaged of society, but also contributes to the social and cultural development of a given society in general: 'The cultural condition of a country is not just determined through its highest achievements, but through "*Grenznot*" (the deepest form of deprivation)... While caring for the individual, one needs to not only address immediate needs, but also to satisfy all needs' (Arlt 1958: 80).



⁸ Basic needs for human life, according to Arlt, are 'occurrences in the soul that precede their satisfaction. They developed because of occurrences in personal life or in the environment. They can be conscious (e.g. likes or dislikes) or unconscious. They can motivate an individual to eliminate the irritant. Satisfying these needs can be postponed or they can be suppressed if they get in conflict with other needs. The individual is guided by learned ways of satisfying needs, which can be subordinated to ethical principles. The satisfaction of these needs can be achieved in the short term or over the course of years; it is submissive, as a desire, to morally-ethical judgment, and it can cause short actions towards the satisfaction of needs, or actions that stretch over years (Arlt 1921: 37)'.

Legal measures of help

Ilse Arlt begins *Ways to a Social Care Science* with a detailed chapter on legal measures for help. Here, she comments on the inadequacy of organised social work and sounds an implicit call for more adequate social work sciences.

- 1) 'Even the best establishment produces inevitable unwanted side effects' (Arlt 1958: 10). This sentence prompts the reader to focus not only on positive characteristics, but also on deficiencies. Academic colleagues research papers from various perspectives, whereas colleagues in the field see only one-dimensional expert opinions and yearly reports, which act as propaganda or planned measurement. Such opinions and reports show only the good, not mentioning the risks or possible side effects. And some people are easily convinced. However, such people have only a pre-scientific understanding of social work – or are dilettantes. What does this mean for research and theoretical design in social work science? The focus on undesirable aspects, failures, and side effects has to be self-evident. The disappointments and side effects need to become the source of new knowledge in order to overcome dilettantism. One needs to look critically at oneself, rather than trusting in oneself. To return to Arlt's sentence: social work science has to be the knowledgeable, critical authority for social help in general and professional social work in particular.
- 2) 'Most of the time we know the number of those who were helped, not those who were left behind' (Arlt 1958: 15). Ilse Arlt understood social work as a social duty which has a general impact upon society. She would have agreed that social work is a necessary part of society. For her, it is not enough to judge services by looking at success stories. Rather, it is important to look at everyone, especially those still in need. A reference to the whole population is certainly not the standard in evaluatory research. During an evaluation of addiction counselling agencies, a team from the University of Applied Studies in St. Pölten questioned the reported success, asking how many potential clients within the area were reached. They compared the number of clients reached with the number of those not reached to determine the agency's efficacy. The results were disappointing. The question of whether programmes or agencies are reaching their intended population effectively and/or exclude various people in need is always relevant. From the perspective of systems analysis, case management must first look at the population in need. Ilse Arlt's first principle, pertaining to unwanted side effects, advises concentrating on that which one does not want to see. Her second principle, about clients left behind, demands that the invisible be made visible.
- 3) 'The enforcement of good institutions is often faulty and inadequate. There is always a lack of accountability and a blindness to the individual' (Arlt 1958: 16). Ilse Arlt cites examples where the 'person in environment' is disregarded. And her critique is still valid. Assistance must be measured by

juxtaposing the need and life of each and every individual. If one takes her assertion seriously and understands it scientifically, he/she will seek out problems. Clients' life stories are not as readily accessible as objective data; they are harder to evaluate, and the success of the help provided is not always obvious. At the Arlt Institute, we have begun to establish a database for cases which have yet to be evaluated. Evaluation would require systematic case study and financing. We are convinced that such studies are necessary. 'When will the person, the one with specific needs and opportunities, be the focus, rather than social work as an institution?' (Arlt 1958:17)

- 4) 'In the absence of an established intellectual forum, false assertions can remain for decades without being disproved. Laws can be enacted without planned study, testing their efficacy in real life' (Arlt 1958: 23). This 'established intellectual forum' is still lacking. Social work is a profession which is tied to individual institutions. It lacks an organisational structure which could formulate and implement standards. Its degree of standardisation is embarrassingly small. Different authors label the same work methods differently; diagnostic achievements cannot be assessed without standards for evaluating them. There isn't even a forum for discussing standards. International comparison is difficult, not just because of a number of differing legal systems, but also because of differing definitions.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, to date, standardisation in social work has mainly come from politics, law, or medicine. The ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health) classification system increasingly includes demographic variables, the determination of which should have been conducted together with the social work science. So far no solution is in sight. However, social work will not achieve its potential if no steps are taken in this direction. Social welfare and care, as Ilse Arlt calls social work, is a profession and a science which focuses on providing assistance to the needy in society.

Bureaucracies, even those employing social workers, should not determine professional standards. By allowing this to occur, one forfeits the standing of a scientific profession. Just as every social worker has to follow professional ethical standards, an 'established intellectual forum' has to take charge of the development of professional standards.

Joy of life

We now leave Ilse Arlt's legal framework for social work and turn to something happier – the joy for life. 'Joy for life is an important focus for help. It is the criteria, the ultimate goal rather than the simple reduction of suffering. The second focus is called service in return – not for payment, but for preventing humiliation by giving the client the opportunity to give back in some way' (Arlt 1958: 38).

One has to come to terms with this initially irritating sentence. It is relatively easy to spell out what this means for practical social work, and it won't bother colleagues in the field. But what does joy for life mean for science? Rarely does one hear about joy for life in state social programmes or in law. Arlt is in fact writing of a criterion for evaluating social practice. Enabling joy for life requires the practitioner to see the client from a different perspective, rather than simply as someone who must cooperate and conform to an institution. Joy for life requires the practitioner to recognise the full potential that life offers.

This can be taken a step further. Joy for life seems to also be a prerequisite for good social work science. Without it, there are no meaningful measurements. The possibilities of life need to be emotionally appreciated, and ways to achieve joy in impoverished circumstances must be identified. Social work science needs to address joy in all its manifold manifestations. This 'joy' alone makes it possible to grant joy to others and to recognise a life's full potential. And it is needed not only in frontline social work, but also in research. The basis for analysing social organisations lies in the clients' activities, in what they are doing, how they are doing it, how they are dealing with the organisation, and how they are dealing with their own lives. In other words, to understand how to help, one must look at the client, not at the help.

The science of social work is not technocratic. It needs to be rooted in the joy of those involved. The worker should celebrate the joy for life in his/her clients, even though it might be rudimentary, and even though that joy can be problematic. Let us turn to the second part of the quotation: to avoid making the help demeaning, one should value the client's reciprocation. Preventing humiliation is one of the two core elements in proper help, because it is not only possible, but also foreseeable in the helping process. Humiliation is widespread throughout social organisations. In general, to rely on social services is humiliating. It is humiliating to wait, to be sent from one place to another, and to answer embarrassing questions. Sometimes this humiliation is intentional, and sometimes it is unintentional.

In the meantime, social workers have to grant clients the ability to help themselves. This could even mean withdrawing support if the client is considered 'not motivated', which is a dangerous label, given that it could be part of a domination strategy. Social workers basically trust that the clients are capable of determining their own lives, and social workers know that they need to use their skills to accompany clients on the path to a mindset where they could take action.

Arlt goes a step further. She does not just see the person as creating his/her own opportunities. In this age of progressive individualisation, the meaning of this sentence is all but lost – but not the attitude behind it. Arlt also recognises the client as a person who gains self-respect by reciprocation. Assistance demands a gift in return to avoid humiliation. Respect means offering

the opportunity for a return gift and accepting this return gift or forwarding it to a third person – only in this way can we truly ensure respect.

This is first and foremost practical advice, and as such represents a practical demand, thus widening the scope of practice. How can it be integrated into science? For one, by defining the criterion to investigate. Helping programmes which do not consider the client a contributor tend to be humiliating. When looking at a more inclusive picture of the client⁹, the focus is on his/her connection to his/her social environment. Clients are viewed as partners in a social exchange, as givers and takers, as fellow citizens in a society where they are considered in relation to their environment. Social work science can never only be seen as a science of deficits and their elimination; it must also be viewed as a science that benefits from the contributions of the poor, the vulnerable, and the oppressed in society and that enables these contributions¹⁰.

Once again we are dealing with science: in *The Basic Principles and Foundations of Social Welfare and Care* (1921), Arlt writes of the 'inadequacy of the response to affliction', since 'misery can sometimes be the effect, and other times the cause'; '...from each misery other woes occur' (Arlt 1921: 27). Arlt depicted this cycle using a graph. One affliction can cause another, and another after that. Help, which only arrives in the wake of afflictions such as unemployment or addiction, is therefore always inappropriate.¹¹ As Arlt repeatedly points out in this work, poverty and neediness are not conditions, but processes. The client's situation becomes clear only once his/her story is known.

Specialisation in helping institutions is inappropriate for the clients. While not condemning specialised helpers, Arlt does view qualified welfare workers as those professionals who can comprehend the whole person in his/her individual situation. These concepts appear once again in modern case management. In terms of social work science, this means that social workers cannot ignore the causes of an individual's situation or the client's life as a whole.

In her writings, Arlt demands a consideration of the social setting and the effects of the economy on lives, well-being and affliction. One should look, on the one hand, at the individual, in whose life the social dynamics manifest themselves, and, on the other hand, at the involved social institutions that try to help the individual. This is a demanding endeavour.



⁹ See, for example, Pantucek 2007.

¹⁰ This triad can be found in the preamble to the NASW Code of Ethics in the US: '... people, who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty.'

¹¹ This statement is provocative because the political perception and definition of social problems necessarily stigmatises certain 'forms of affliction'. Therefore, 'social care' problems are always associated with the afflicted. If one follows Arlt's arguments (as we are glad to do), social work programmes have to exceed the defined mandate, as they cannot restrict themselves to the social ill for which they were developed.

Her approach to this endeavour entails judging support by measuring the efficacy of the intervention – and effective intervention is always individualised. Actually, that's not quite right: anyone who has read Arlt closely knows that help can be effective even when it is bureaucratic and impersonal, but only to a certain degree. A number of potential clients cannot be reached through standard measures; instead, individual help has to be offered to them. Arlt was interested in the borders between conventional and individualised help. From her argument, a thesis may be formulated: Social work begins to become effective where standardised help ends. And social work science is the science of the borders between standardised and individualised help.

Current connecting thoughts

Arlt developed her approach on the basis of national economic concerns, including questions of how to improve the individual and society. She emphasised the interdependency of economic and individual freedom. Seen as a whole, her philosophy includes numerous elements which are central to the question of the quality of life in current debates. In their analyses concerning the quality of life, the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen and the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum list general human characteristics and capabilities. As material 'substantial freedoms' which have to be constantly supported when speaking about the unjust distribution of public goods, human development, emancipation, empowerment, help for self-help, and non-intervention, these partially overlap with Arlt's classification of basic needs. Also, some aspects of Arlt's criticism of a reductionist approach in poverty research are reminiscent of the modern socio-philosophical ideas of Sen and Nussbaum.

Whereas Arlt was trying to define the basics of an independent science of welfare through her theory of needs, Sen and Nussbaum have tried to determine criteria that could be used to measure the quality of life in different nations. Their research proceeds from a critical rejection of an approach that seeks to express the level of development and quality of life using the per capita gross domestic product. With this method, it is only possible to calculate average rates. It gives no information about the distribution of a nation's wealth. Sen states that the value of public goods cannot be estimated correctly as long as they are seen as separate from the human abilities and skills which serve for their development and execution. Political concepts of distribution and quality of life analyses should therefore ask which opportunities for the development of core human skills and abilities are achieved for each individual through the distribution of goods (Nussbaum and Sen 1993: 1–6).

Martha Nussbaum described these human skills and abilities and tried to show the connection to general characteristics of human lifestyle. This led her to design a philosophical and developmental – but also ethical – theory

of a good life in which the necessary conditions for an individual lifestyle are described. These conditions include the adequate development of and education for the following skills and abilities: being able to live one's full lifespan; the chance to have physical and psychic health and integrity, and the unimpaired use of cognitive, sensory and emotional abilities; the ability to enter into relationships with people and things outside of ourselves; the ability to develop one's own ideas about what is good and how to plan one's life (including work, recreation, and social and political engagement); the ability to live for and with others, and to have a social basis of self-respect; the ability to have contact with other species and nature; the ability to enjoy recreational activities; and the ability to choose one's way of life in one's own environment and one's own context (Nussbaum 1986: 145f.).

For both Arlt and Nussbaum, a mere theoretical description of a good life is not enough. Nussbaum views potential abilities as values *per se*, as inalienable rights, basic rights for development. By viewing individual basic abilities as an immeasurable value for a fulfilled life, her list of skills and abilities becomes a critical standard for determining the quality of life. It exceeds Arlt's list of basic needs in some ways, and is therefore significant for social work planning and interventions. Both Arlt and Sen conceptualise their approaches against a backdrop of economic concerns, issues of welfare economy and the improvement of individual and social opportunities for development. Both emphasise the interdependency of economic and individual freedom. Sen identifies abilities as 'substantial liberties', thus pointing out the material conditions that must be included in discussions of emancipation and empowerment. Sen's suggestions for a differentiated description of human development, for which he received the Nobel Prize in Economics, are integrated in his Human Development Index (HDI). His success stands in sharp contrast to the silence which surrounded Arlt's deliberations for the past fifty years.¹²

Today, some social workers' calls for considerations of diversity come as no surprise to those familiar with Arlt's writings: her basic advice to her students was to 'recognize diversity as opposed to conformity, uniqueness as opposed to uniformity, in order to give consideration to each individual case' (Arlt date unavailable: 4). In connection with this, Arlt emphasised that effective social work cannot only deal with individuals, but also has to take into consideration the environment. This means that, for example, regional differences have to be recognised and accepted. Therefore, social work activity should be developed at the grassroots level, rather than by the leadership.



¹² For further details, see Maria Maiss (2007), *Soziale Arbeit im Dienste der Ermöglichung substanzieller/ materieller Bedingungen von Freiheit und Wohlleben*. This presentation was given at the first Ilse Arlt Colloquy, at the Ilse Arlt Institute in St. Pölten, Austria on October 6, 2007. It and other presentations from the Colloquy were published in Pantucek and Maiss (2009).

Both urban and rural populations will relate better to programmes that are sensitive to environmental and cultural differences.

Parallels can also be drawn between current criticisms of specialised social services and Arlt's philosophy, especially when the former note that specialisation reduces the potential for cooperation with other helping services. Arlt reminds us that we must view social work as part of a comprehensive programme serving not only the disadvantaged individuals, but also society at large, both culturally and economically. According to Arlt, poverty research has a duty to not only recognise current problems, but also to understand both their immediate and distant causes as well as their continuous damaging effects on individuals and their environment in order to anticipate potential problems (Arlt 1958: 51). Social work must include 'the analysis of various advantageous or deleterious facts, the knowledge of possible and available ways of helping, ways to start the process, and the reappraisal of its efficacy' (Arlt 1958: 51).

Arlt's concept of need and consumerism offers differentiated and expandable categories and concepts, on which useful instruments for the timely recognition, analysis, coding and avoidance of poverty are based. These categories can be used to analyse social problems as well as their multi-causal conditions and interdependencies.

Arlt also asks what part non-comprehensive social work could play in the controversies over standards of justice for social support systems. Central to Arlt's thinking, advocacy in social work should oppose a state social support system that ignores special needs and excludes individuals who might in fact need very diverse programmes to encourage their participation. The state system favours the influential, both in terms of individuals and corporations. The need-oriented principles that Arlt espouses as central to her philosophy challenge the existing governmental social services model and attempt to steer it towards a more just policy that would accept and support diversity. Therefore, one must ask, again and again, Arlt's critical question: 'When will the individual, with his known needs and potentials be the focus of attention, instead of the welfare system?' (Arlt 1958: 31) With this quotation, one can make a connection between Arlt's welfare theory – which focuses on the ethics of a virtuous and fulfilled life, and on the promotion of the joy for life – and its implementation in the teaching and research at the *Vereinigte Fachkurse für Volkspflege* (United Subject Courses for People's Care).

The school's organisational principles for teaching, learning and research were designed to train future social workers not only in practical skills, but also in cognitive skills – perception, sensation, recognition, understanding and reflection – that they will need in their future career if they are to 'positively intervene, using all existing resources and formulating new interventions as well' (Arlt 1957, cited in Ertl 1995: 29). According to Arlt, this requires the ability to apply the ideals of 'speed, human dignity, kindness, freedom, accuracy, appropriate conformance and efficiency – achieving the most with minimal resources'

(Arlt 1958: 3). In 1937, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the opening of her school, Arlt remarked: 'In this way we can look at our continued existence as confirmation of People's Care's (*Volkspflege*) validity. I have to admit that, if there had been a single situation for which our students were unprepared, then I would have closed the school immediately, because it would have called the entire system into question' (Arlt 1937: 15). Arlt demanded that 'every student [be led] to herself and to her unimaginable inner possibilities' (Arlt 1937: 16). Through a focus on needs and potentials, future social workers should be prepared to find and foster a fulfilling and joyful life for themselves as well as for their clients. This is a lot to ask, and her demand can be viewed as a standard to aspire to. But it is of great relevance at a time when educational trends in the field of social work are in danger of ignoring the various forms of thinking and acting necessary for responding to diversity due to the dominance of one form of help, that is, the managerial approach.

Reading Ilse Arlt today

Ilse Arlt remained unknown in Austria (cf. Simon 1995), even though some of her students went on to be highly recognised. Her concepts barely entered the mainstream, and her vision for a comprehensive scientific foundation of social work remained a dream. One can only guess what potential she could have realised as a scientist had she been connected with a supportive scientific community. Nonetheless, today, her works inspire the reader and strengthen the hope that social work, as a complex science, will not only utilise other relevant sciences, such as economics and social ethics, but also contribute to and challenge them.

Some aspects of Arlt's thinking and works could not be addressed or fully developed in this chapter. Her didactic achievements as the founder, teacher and director of a social work school, for instance, merit an additional paper. Similarly, her home economics (*Haushaltskunde*) project deserves re-examination in light of the current situation. Interested readers are urged to seek additional, as yet unpublished works or, better yet, to study Arlt's original texts. It is our hope that these will again be made widely available in the near future. We conclude our writing with the saying (uttered by Arlt's grandfather¹³, a man who never denied his modest origins and who gave free medical care to people in need) with which Arlt concluded her autobiography: *Primum humanitas!*

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¹³ Arlt's paternal grandfather, Dr. Ferdinand Karl Ritter von Arlt, was the son of a mountain farmer. He grew up in bitter poverty and was later ennobled because of his great achievements as a professor of ophthalmology.

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Chapter 4

From Reflection to Action within Community Social Work: The Role of Action Research as a Method for Social Work Education and Practice

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Community work in contemporary social work

Social work theories and methods are traditionally explored through a set of 'social work triplets' (Brandon and Atherton 1997) – casework, group work and community work. Of these, casework has dominated the nature of social work intervention in the Western world and, therefore, has come to define what we perceive as mainstream social work. This is mainly due to influential changes in policy and practice in the US and the UK, two countries which have influenced, and continue to influence, the nature of social work practice not just in Europe, but across the globe. The most recent dominant forms of casework in these two countries are managed care in the US and care management/unified assessments in the UK.

On the other hand, the 21st century began with the first worldwide definition of international social work, created by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of the Schools of Social Work (IASSW). With its emphasis on the promotion of social change, intervention 'at the points where people interact with their environments', and empowerment and liberation of people in order to enhance their well being according to the principles of human rights and social justice (IASSW 2001), community work would seem to be the prescribed future of mainstream social work. There are also close parallels with 'community social work' (Barclay 1982), with its focus on the inter-relationship with and support for formal and informal networks in order to address individual and group problems and to prevent problems from arising in the first place.

But the IASSW definition does seem to ignore one of the main tensions within international social work: that between remedial practice at the individual or family level and activist or developmental social work at the community or wider societal level (Midgley 2001). Potentially, it also ignores the role community work once had within our profession:

...It cannot be claimed that social activism has been popular in social work or that it has inspired many social workers. In fact, few social workers pay much attention to these activities and some even regard them as inappropriate. In turn, social workers who are committed to social action often regard

therapeutic practice as little more than a tool for perpetuating entrenched inequalities and supporting the vested interests of elites. (*Op. cit.* 29)

While this tension continues to divide activists and sceptics, there is evidence, at least in the UK, of a widening interest in radical perspectives in the wake of perceived attacks on social work values from a variety of globalised initiatives, including the continued focus on commodified individual consumers in a market of care, the progressive privatisation of services and the de-professionalisation of traditional social work tasks¹.

In the UK at least, the problem for mainstream social work is that community work was effectively detached from social work education by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, the body that validated the professional qualification. Community work has since become marginalised within social work education and has been hived off, in practice, to the youth work arena and to short-term government projects such as the Action Zone policies of New Labour.

Similar tensions are also in evidence in the current policy, education and practice context in some European countries, and are reflected in ambivalence as to whether community work should be part of the social work toolkit or the remit of other professions. While social workers across Europe are increasingly implementing community-based support systems due to the prescriptions in relevant policies², community social work itself is not evident to a corresponding degree within our practice and organisational framework; this is especially true of the statutory sector.

For example, while the National Occupational Standards for Social Work (Skills for Care 2002) do promote group work as one of the relevant social work methods, they seem to omit community work. And yet, through poverty action programmes across Europe and, more recently, New Labour's Health and Education Action Zones in the UK, community social work has received the most financial support from the central government and the European Community (Hill 1991), thus revealing its relevance in the wider, European context.

It has managed to maintain its relevance for two reasons. The first one relates to how social work knowledge has been created through social work research. In the UK, social work research in the 1970s was marked by the initiation of a number of studies that vocalised the experiences of people who use social care services (Lyons 2000). The most famous example is Mayer and Timms' (1970) study, *The Client Speaks*. The expressed view was that casework had failed to improve the lives of service users due to the individualisation of



¹ For more information, see the Social Work Action Network site, www.socialworkfuture.org.

² See Department of Health (2006) for a UK example or Social Inclusion Policies in southeast Europe.

problems and a lack of attention to structural barriers and related collective problems which exist within the community. Throughout the world, social workers sided with this argument, particularly in the context of their inability to address widespread poverty through work with individuals or families (Midgley 2001). Collective approaches such as community work were promoted as the only meaningful method for addressing these structural barriers by both people who use services and (radical) social workers (Ferguson 2008, see also Maglajlic-Holicek 2009). Hence, once social workers sided with and aimed to address the concerns expressed by people who use their services, community social work rose to its now enshrined international relevance.

The second reason is related to the relationship between human rights – particularly citizenship rights – and community work. The period since the 1970s has seen the emergence of the identity movements of people who use social services, with some social workers and academics playing a vital role in ensuring this development. Such movements helped shift the locus of the experiences of people who use social care services (as the most marginalised members of society) from the oppressive grasp of social care to the wider human rights and citizenship agenda. Community work is perceived as a relevant tool 'for the promotion of the active citizenship of marginalised individuals, groups and communities' (Lister 1998: 14), not just within the profession, but also within wider European forums.³

These two reasons highlight the relevance of a collaborative social work identity and the collaborative creation of its knowledge. The term 'collaborative' has been used to date to indicate collaboration and partnership both with other professionals and people who use social care services (the partnership-based model of professionalism developed by Thompson [2002], or collaborative professionalism developed by Healy and Meagher [2004]). This brings us to the relevance of action research when discussing contemporary community social work.

Origins and types of action research and its relationship to community work

The inter-relationship between community work and action research has been hinted at by authors such as Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001). These authors' emphasis is on 'the mutual learning and the organisational change that can take place when academics, practitioners and service users collaborate in ways which draw fully and creatively on their different forms of knowledge' (*op. cit.* 32).

Action research is an 'inquiry as a means by which people engage together to explore some significant aspect of their lives, to understand it better and to



³ See, for example, the Budapest Declaration by the Combined European Bureau for Social Development 2004.

transform their action so as to meet their purposes more fully' (Reason 1994a: 1). This definition highlights the transformational role research can play in everyday social work practice and in the lives of people who use social services. Furthermore, this methodology underpins a participatory worldview. As Heron (1981) asserts, 'for a science of persons as agents, my considered view of your reality without consulting you is a very different matter from our considered view of our reality' (*op. cit.* 27). This worldview, unlike that offered by positivism or relativism, highlights the relevance of the co-creation of social work knowledge, particularly in conjunction with service users as experts on their own lives.

This type of inquiry acknowledges and generates four types of knowing: propositional, experiential, presentational and practical (Heron and Reason 1997). Propositional knowing is 'knowing in conceptual terms that something is the case... It is expressed in statements and theories that come with the mastery of concepts and classes that language bestows' (*op. cit.* 281). Social work's professional knowledge base would be one example of this type of knowing. Experiential knowing stems from direct experience. Presentational knowing is grounded in and emerges from this experience, and is to be shared with others. The presentation of social work knowledge through case recording and the presentation of cases at, for instance, resource decision-making panels are two examples of this form of knowledge in practice. Finally, practical knowing is 'knowing how to do something, demonstrated in a skill or competence' (*ibid.*) and holds primacy over the other types of knowing (Heron 1996). To date, research has tended to feed into propositional knowing, with aspirations to inform and develop practical knowledge in social work. While most research of this kind explores the experiential and presentational knowing of practitioners, decision makers and service users, there is often a misconnection between the different versions, enabling actors to disassociate themselves from the findings of research⁴. Participatory action research, in contrast, enables us to define and address the inter-relatedness of all four ways of knowing through a single process.

Much of the output of social research remains outside the realm of the knowing of the communities social workers live and work in. It is usually relegated to print and published in volumes not unlike the one that contains this chapter. While action research can be – and is – promoted through similar, professional outlets, its main asset lies in its engagement with either peers or community members (people who use services and/or community members) to address issues they share a stake or interest in. 'The emphasis on wholeness also means that we are not interested in either fragmented knowing or theoretical knowing that is separated from practice and from experience' (Reason 1988: 11). This is highly relevant, in light of the criticism that 'researchers, like social workers, live off the social problems they are supposed to ameliorate if



⁴ See Baldwin (2000) for an example.

there are no mechanisms making them accountable to those with 'the problem', and if their working conditions force them to perpetuate the problem rather than develop a commitment to its resolution' (Reinharz 1981: 423).

The process of action research involves six to eight cycles of action and reflection, with both the researchers and the relevant community members acting as co-researchers. Its methodology creates research *with*, rather than *on*, people. Today, the designation 'action research' embraces a variety of research traditions which emerged in different contexts. Carr and Kemmis (1986), for example, initiated action research as a method for improving teachers' own educational practices. Co-operative inquiry emerged in the UK as 'a strategy more likely to be successful with a group of people who experience themselves as relatively empowered and who wish to explore and develop their practice together' (Reason 1994b: 335); Participatory Rural Appraisal emerged within the context of development studies and practice (Chambers 1994). Participatory Action Research (PAR), which emerged in Latin America (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991), seems to be the most relevant approach for social work. It entails:

...Developing knowledge through empowering dialogue, initially between an animator and a community of people...It appears to be most appropriate when the inquiry involves a relatively large number of people who are initially disempowered. PAR also draws our attention to the political issues concerning ownership of knowledge, and to the need to create communities of people who are capable of continuing the PAR process. (Reason 1994b: 335)

This definition links PAR to the types of action and knowledge generation most relevant for social work practice and, in particular, community work. Such an approach to research enables people to take part in all parts of traditional knowledge production through research – from the phrasing of the questions to be explored or analysed and the manner and content of data gathering, to sense-making (analysis) and, finally, the promotion and ongoing implementation of research findings. The action part of the cycle also makes it possible to view this type of research simply as a particular type of methodological discipline (in both the practical and research meaning of the term 'method') that is applied to everyday practice.

Below, two examples of action research in social work from two European countries will be presented in order to illustrate this point more clearly.

Examples of action research in social work practice

Participative Action Research: Hearing the voice of people with learning difficulties in the process of organisational change. An example from the UK.

About twelve years ago, I was asked by managers at a local day centre for people with learning difficulties to help in the development of their day services

with the aim of making them more in line with the expressed needs of those attending the day centre, rather than reflecting only professional and managerial understandings of what constitutes effective services for people with learning difficulties. Specifically, I was asked to take part, as an external ally, in the 'changeover' process they were engaged in, and also to evaluate the whole process. The research process is charted in the article 'Day Care on the Move' (Baldwin 1997).

I already had some understanding of PAR as a method, having engaged in co-operative inquiries with social work professionals exploring their professional development (Baldwin 2000, 2001). I felt that what was being proposed was both an example of a generally participative approach to service development and one which would lend itself to a more specific PAR evaluation opportunity.

The 'changeover' process (Scottish Human Services date unavailable) was a consultancy package bought by the centre to facilitate change at the centre. It was designed to be a process that involved the participation of centre users and family carers to the highest degree possible, with O'Brien's five accomplishments serving as a value base (O'Brien and Lyle 1987). No change should happen as a result of the process that did not meet the value base, which stipulated that all people using such centres should:

- Have a right to share ordinary places with everyone else;
- Be able to make real choices that affect their lives;
- Be given chances to develop their skills and abilities;
- Be treated with respect and have a valued role in society;
- Be able to grow in relationships.

(adapted from O'Brien and Lyle 1987)

Our adaptation of the changeover process involved a process of co-operative reflective learning. A core group of centre users, staff, parents and allies met to co-ordinate the process of reflection and action, but the bulk of the work happened in changeover groups and networking groups. These two groups gave people with learning difficulties the opportunity to have their voices heard, firstly in the process of deciding where change could happen (changeover), and secondly in the process of putting that change into practice (networking).

A key aspect of being disabled for many people with learning difficulties has resulted in their voice and opportunity to make choices being denied. The participatory action research process provided people, individually and collectively, with a voice. Most of the active research cycling took place in the networking groups. The self-advocacy group, to take one example, studied what self-advocacy was through reading and visits to key people with expertise in this field and then discussed their learning in cycles of action and reflection. The fieldwork did not just accumulate information; it was an active process in which members of the group improved their self-advocacy skills

through engagement in the process. In another group, centre users interested in pursuing their catering knowledge and skills actually set up an emergent business, developing their knowledge and skills by planning menus, purchasing food, and preparing and marketing a high-quality product. Through the core group, this learning was then fed back to the whole of the centre so that the new knowledge and skills could be shared among all centre users.

One of the principle barriers that we came across was that many centre users did not understand what a choice was. It is a facet of disabled lives that, if people have always had key decisions made for them because it is believed that they do not have the capacity to make them themselves, then they are unlikely to understand the concept of choice. A great deal of work was done, through cycles of action and reflection in the changeover groups, to establish a better understanding of this concept. The result was the creation of new knowledge and understanding for this group of disabled people, often together with new practical skills for putting their knowing into action. The connection between the principle of the extended epistemology and its realisation in a practical sense is clear. There was a principle (propositional knowledge) that participation would lead to new ways of knowing; there was the practical expression of this knowing (practical knowledge) through the facilitation in the changeover groups and the acquisition of skills in the networking groups; there was the very important phase of feedback presentations (presentational knowledge), in which centre users made sense of their learning for the additional learning of other centre users; and then there was the culmination of this learning in the experience (experiential knowledge) that centre users, staff, family carers and allies developed, individually and collectively, to make the necessary changes.

*Supporting a mental health system survivor-run policy initiative.
An example from Bosnia and Herzegovina*

This section will present a brief overview of a study that explored ways of enabling mental health system survivors to improve local mental health policies and practices in one of the local authorities (Cantons⁵) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tuzla. It is worth mentioning that this work wasn't conceived



⁵ The Dayton Peace Accords in 1996 created a complex governance structure for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The whole country is separated into two entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. In parallel, there is also one District, Brčko, following the US local governance structure (as the inclusion of this region in either of the two existing entities proved to be politically difficult). The Federation is further split into 10 Cantons (mimicking the Swiss local governance model). Responsibility for health and social care rests with the two entities and the District (on the state level) and, in the Federation, also with the Cantons. This means that there are 13 different Ministries of Health and 13 Ministries for Social Welfare, each with its own decision-making, legislative and funding obligations.

as action research, despite the fact that it had all the elements of Participatory Action Research.

The study was part of the Hamlet Trust initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During its nearly twenty-year history, this (now defunct) organisation supported the development of organisations which were either run by mental health system survivors or based on collaborative activities between mental health system survivors and mental health professionals. At the beginning of the decade, this UK-based voluntary organisation supported nearly seventy programmes in seventeen different countries in central and eastern Europe and southeast Asia. Their collaboration with mental health system survivors in Bosnia and Herzegovina started in 2000. In the period 2000–2005, a total of five survivor-run organisations were initiated across Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a National Network of Survivor Initiatives⁶. In 2002, Hamlet Trust initiated a Pathways to Policy programme⁷. The programme aimed at enabling mental health system survivors to take part in bottom-up mental health policy creation and implementation. It was implemented in BiH, Estonia, Romania, the Kyrgyz Republic and India⁸. Selected local organisations in each of the countries were mandated to support the initiative, with additional training and support provided by the Hamlet Trust. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the programme was implemented by *Fenix*, a survivor-run organisation in Tuzla, an industrial town in northeast Bosnia. A representative of the National Survivor Network was the co-ordinator for the programme; I volunteered technical (research and policy) support for the co-ordinator. The structure of the programme was simple. A local policy forum was initiated, with a total of twenty members, a third of whom were mental health system survivors (*Fenix* members), with the remaining two thirds being representatives of carers, the local governance structure (a representative of the municipality, of the Cantonal Parliament etc.), local services (the employment office, the local centre for social work, the community mental health centre), local business and commerce, other local civil society organisations and the media. These forum members were not selected on the basis of their status within their organisations. Instead, members of *Fenix* and the local co-ordinator for the programme approached each organisation and invited those interested to join the work. The forum met a total of ten times over a period of two years. The work of the group was structured using the methods developed for Participatory Rural Appraisal⁹. Outside of the group



⁶ Unfortunately, as of 2006, only a couple of organisations were still active; one of these is the focus of the study presented in the article.

⁷ For further details, see Hayward and Cutler (2007).

⁸ See Hayward and Cutler (2007) for reviews of the Romanian experiences of this programme.

⁹ See, for example, Chambers (2002).

(between the meetings), the work consisted of a series of follow-up meetings and activities.

Prior to the initiation of this programme, *Fenix* had conducted the first survivor-run study in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on the experiences of mental health service users in the Canton. *Fenix* members devised the survey to be used, carried it out, analysed the data (with support from a professional 'ally' who offered advice on research methodology), and chose to address the findings through the work of the local policy forum. A survey was conducted on a representative sample of 300 service users throughout the Canton. The findings highlighted problems that are faced by mental health service users/mental health system survivors throughout the world – poverty, unemployment, loneliness, lack of social status, as well as dissatisfaction with the local health and social care services.

The work of the local policy forum began by reviewing the survey findings in order to enable the 'non-survivor' members to relate them to their own experiences and expertise. Based on this reflection, the group initiated its first plan of action. This was subsequently addressed through the work within the group and outside it (between the two meetings).

The programme ensured a variety of actions, which continue to be implemented and expanded upon. In terms of employment, the partnership between *Fenix* and a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) resulted in the creation of an employment project for people who use mental health services. Ten or more people who use mental health services were regularly employed at a variety of jobs offered through this project. Since the programme's conclusion, further joint employment initiatives have appeared as a result of the project. The programme also helped initiate sales exhibitions for arts and crafts created by *Fenix* members.

In terms of the political visibility of the survivor organisation, a number of relevant actions were initiated and maintained. The president of *Fenix* addressed the Cantonal Parliament Assembly, raising concerns expressed by people who use local mental health services. Overall, the programme enabled the establishment of a strong mental health survivor lobby within the local government. Another achievement has been the establishment of a good working relationship with the local media. Over a two-year period, a total of thirty-three interviews were given to the media. The Forum also held a total of six press conferences.

The Forum facilitated a number of social care outcomes. *Fenix*, as a survivor-run organisation, took over the management of a local sheltered housing facility for people who use mental health services and initiated the development of an additional sheltered accommodation programme. This action is particularly relevant because of a lack of this type of facilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many people who use mental health services lack alternatives to life on their own and with their family on the one hand and periods of

hospitalisation on the other. Sheltered, community-based, services were said to be lacking but, at the same time, of great value to people who use mental health services. The survey results also helped initiate a comprehensive review of benefit payments for people who use mental health services (conducted by the local benefits office).

Lessons and challenges when implementing action research in social work

To summarise, why is this methodology useful for the process of empowering people disabled by their experiences within health and social care? Based on a reflection on our experiences to date, we wish to put forward four answers which are relevant for overall social work practice and contemporary community social work. Firstly, action research (particularly participatory action research) is in itself an anti-disablist methodology, in so far as, if practised appropriately, it may strengthen and change the nature of the relationship with people who use health and social care services and, through joint reflection and action, help us to change the culture within organisations involved in this process. Its anti-disablist and transformational potential is best utilised if equal attention is paid to the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (Freire 1972) as well as the 'pedagogy for the powerful' (Chambers 2006: 107) or the 'pedagogy of the privileged' (Reason and Bradbury 2001: 10), that is, if differential power dynamics are explored and reflected and acted upon within the action research process.

Secondly, it offers an ethical and rigorous structure for the increased emphasis on 'citizen participation' in health and social care services. Thirdly, the validity requirements for action research echo the requirements for best practice in social work. Finally, it helps merge commonly dichotomised concepts and practices in social work, such as learning and doing and research and practice, by enabling both 'research minded' practice and 'practice minded' learning and research.

Anti-disablism and promotion of the social model

Our experiences suggest that the action research methodology is anti-disablist in that it can offer people who use social care services (for example, people with learning difficulties in the English example) an opportunity to learn about choices and then to make them. The English study is also anti-disablist in that it did not accept difference as an excuse for non-involvement. There were day centre users with profound difficulties that made it much harder to facilitate their inclusion in the learning process. This was seen, however, as a practice issue – as a challenge to the skills of facilitators rather than as undermining the basic principles of inclusion within a participatory worldview (everyone's voice counts). In the example from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the

structure of the group, proposed by the Hamlet Trust, enabled mental health system survivors to steer the process, but also to collaborate with relevant stakeholders. All of the participants were accountable and had to refer to and engage with the organisations and groups they represented. Representatives of the survivor organisation had to report back to other members and include their views in their further group participation. The same applied to other, professional, members of the Forum. The methodology also enabled co-researchers to address the structural and social barriers to inclusion, thereby enabling the work to be concluded in line with the social model of disability.

The UK study demonstrated that, given the opportunity, people with learning difficulties can develop autonomy and make real choices that affect their lives. Hence, 'need' was a useful concept in evaluating the effectiveness of the process, if autonomy is viewed as a basic universal need (Doyal and Gough 1991). The participatory approach therefore replicated the needs-led approach that is a fundamental aspect of care management and assessment. In the case of the Bosnian study, the research process was guided by the needs identified within the survivor research project conducted prior to its inception and didn't explicitly follow the PAR process. The research process enabled mental health system survivors to be active stakeholders in addressing these needs in a manner that enabled a stronger relationship with other community members, who, in turn, enhanced their understanding of mental health issues. This also highlights the relevance of relationships in enabling people who use services to achieve greater autonomy and social integration. The crucial value of relationships with the members of the wider community (including, but not at all limited to, relationships with relevant professionals) has been highlighted by people who use services ever since Mayer and Timms' study in the 1970s. If offered an opportunity to co-create social work knowledge, service users still stress the importance of relationships in the support offered within their local communities (Maglajlic Holicek 2009).

Furthermore, the participatory ethos in principle and in practice not only changes individual staff practice, but also has an effect on the culture of the overall organisations involved. In the study presented by Mark Baldwin, this pertains to the day centre. Routine ways of doing things were more readily questioned, service users were actively encouraged to express opinions and their voice was listened to, and changes were made. One of the most important knowledge developments in this study was a shift from old, disabling attitudes to a more empowering ethos. In the case of the Bosnian research, a number of prejudices and misconceptions about the nature of mental health problems were tackled and ameliorated due to the collaborative nature of the methodology. A review of social benefits indicates that the benefits centre now saw *Fenix* as a partner and collaborator in its work with people who have mental health difficulties/mental health system survivors.

Participation

Current policies, both on the European level and in individual countries, stipulate the requirement that people be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

At the EU level, for example, the Commission promotes so-called inclusive participation in its action plan for people with disabilities (Commission of the European Communities 2007). However, much of the contemporary activity aimed at involving service users in service development has been described as tokenistic (Baldwin and Sadd 2006). It often remains a paper-based rhetoric, without much impact on the lives of people who use services. Practised as a token, it can actually further erode the relationships people have with the services that should support them. The risk is that of creating 'professional service users' co-opted into existing professional structures.

In both studies, the process of participation was a true challenge. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the challenge wasn't just about the co-ordinator ensuring that the work of the local policy forum was conducted according to particular participatory requirements. The co-ordinator, himself a mental health system survivor, frequently felt disheartened and didn't trust the community members involved. This was due to years of bad experiences when needing support, reflected in low expectations as to whether a change would be achieved. Such issues can hamper meaningful involvement in initiatives of this kind, as new practices have to counteract all prior bad experiences. Our (the co-ordinator and R. Magajlic) ongoing relationship in a variety of initiatives was the key to overcoming these issues. In the UK, the requirement was that the staff reflect upon and change the values from which they practised and develop their skills in putting the new culture into action.

Tenets for best practice in social work

Looking back on both projects, the parallels that can be drawn between the research method and good practice in social work are clear. As noted above, the emphasis in the IASSW/IFSW definition of social work is on the promotion of social change. That is what the aims and (at least partial) outcomes of our illustrative research processes were – a challenge to disabling attitudes and a mechanism for facilitating the increased control of marginalized people over decisions that affect their lives. Another aspect of the definition speaks of intervention 'at the points where people interact with their environments'. This is a fundamental aspect of the PAR approach, with its emphasis on collective knowledge creation within people's daily lives and environments. In the two studies discussed here, this was the day centre for people with learning difficulties (UK) and the mental health survivor organisation and its role within the city and Canton (wider administrative and service unit) of Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

'Empowerment and liberation of people in order to enhance their well-being according to the principles of human rights and social justice' (IASSW 2002) is possibly too grand a claim for research projects; nevertheless, it was a clear aim of both studies. Both studies enabled people who use services, their community 'allies' and the staff to co-create knowledge, thus enabling them to understand their experiences better and to initiate change. Because the process was engaged at the level of experiential knowing, a claim for the high level of validity of this method can be made. Both processes were conducted within participants' environments, made sense to them within their experience, and, consequently, were more likely to be owned by all involved in their future understanding and development. This makes both projects valid in relation to learning from inquiry, and therefore enabled effective social work practice.

Ferguson (2003) stresses that the best practice in social work should not be determined solely by the agencies in which social workers are employed or by the wider system of rules and regulations. Instead, it should be defined by a range of stakeholders, including service users. Such a perspective on best practice is aligned with the participatory worldview promoted within action research. This type of inquiry also enables social work practitioners to embrace the recent emphasis on evidence-based practice by co-creating knowledge with people who use services and other community stakeholders. Fortunately, in social work the term 'evidence based practice' does not have the narrow, positivistic, connotations that it does within the health sciences. Instead, its elements can be perceived as research and theory, practice wisdom and values, practitioners' own personal assumptions and values, and, finally, what people who use services bring to an encounter with a practitioner (Gilgun 2005). Such an understanding echoes the differentiation and verification of different types of knowledge offered by authors who helped shape the action research epistemology (Heron and Reason 1997).

These parallels between action research and best practice in social work are also encapsulated in the validity requirements for action research. Action research demands that the co-researchers meet a set of requirements (Bradbury and Reason 2001), which differ from those found in traditional social research. Firstly, co-researchers need to achieve quality as a relational praxis; this implies that the researchers focus on the interactions and relationships developed during an inquiry and, specifically, that these promote democratic values. Within this tenet, co-researchers need to reflect on the implications these relationships have on the infrastructure and political structures. This requirement is particularly relevant if the professionalisation of service users in practices that aim to enable their proactive participation in health and social care is to be avoided. Support for their citizen agency should not result in their co-optation by the existing professional norms and structures. Secondly, quality has to be ensured through reflexive and practical outcomes.

A balance needs to be achieved between the co-researchers' reflections on their experiences and subsequent actions, which should result in practical outcomes. This requirement relates to the current trend in social work practice, which emphasises the need for the practice of social work to ensure relevant outcomes aimed at improving service users' lives. It also challenges the sole reliance on reflection as a tool for improving practice and the relative mistrust of intellectual knowledge which exists in some countries (the UK in particular). Thirdly, quality has to be achieved through the plurality of knowing, as all four types of knowledge have to be addressed and achieved through the study process. Fourthly, the inquiry has to be significant and worthwhile for the co-researchers and their communities. This is related to the final requirement, which is the need for the co-researchers' inquiry to result in enduring consequences and infrastructures. These five requirements describe the path to transformational knowledge generation and practice and constitute another reason why action research should be viewed as a relevant methodology for social work practice.

The non-dichotomised view of social work learning, research and practice

Jeffries (1996) has noted the tendency in social work to develop arguments by setting up dichotomies. Examples include the dichotomised relationship between theory and practice (Lyons 2000) and between social work practice and research (Berger 1997). Such dichotomies are still omnipresent, and have possibly become more deeply entrenched by the narrow interpretation of the requirement for practitioners to become 'research minded' (Everitt et al. 1992). Action research methodology enables these dichotomies to be merged within a single practice; it enables practitioners to generate evidence from their (transformational) practice while working collaboratively with people who use services and other relevant stakeholders. In this respect, counterpartal role inquiry (Heron 1996) is particularly relevant as a type of action research which enables people who usually hold different power positions in relation to each other to jointly explore and co-create new knowledge and practices. The structure of the Bosnian forum certainly echoes such an approach to action research. Both experiences, but the Bosnian study in particular, highlight another dimension where the dichotomy between research and practice is blurred. While utilising the structure and methods of action research, the experience itself was labelled as an initiative, rather than research. Until we fully appropriate the term 'research', in the minds of many practitioners and people who use services, it will remain a one-off encounter with a researcher aimed at extrapolating their experiences and using them for a purpose the practitioners and service users will not be engaged in. Action research can easily be 'packaged' as both practice and research. It has the potential to transform our relationships with relevant community members, develop local alliances and

transform the lives of local community members by working and co-creating knowledge through collaborative reflection and action.

However, a few words of warning are in order. Practice of the kind highlighted in the previous paragraph requires time; a great deal of it, as a matter of fact. It takes time to re-establish or establish relationships. It takes time to reflect and implement actions with other co-inquirers. Time is a precious luxury in a social work practice governed by the managerial requirements of value-for-money and time-limited interventions focused on the individual. This may be one of the reasons why inquiries such as the two presented in this chapter are usually initiated within the voluntary sector or academic social work contexts. Frequently, such activities don't label the facilitators or 'research technicians' as social workers. That being said, social does not mean individual; on the contrary, it has more meaning within a community context, in collaborative work with the people who use social care services and other community members that aims to ensure that local community services are meaningful for their members. This is why we believe that action research is a relevant methodology if we are to practice in accordance with the international definition of our profession.

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PART II

The Impact of Globalisation on Social Work Theory and Practice

Chapter 5

'Another Social Work is Possible!' Reclaiming the Radical Tradition

Iain Ferguson

Introduction

For more than two decades, the notion that 'there is no alternative' to the free market as a basis for organising both economy and society has exercised an extraordinary influence over almost every aspect – economic, political and academic – of social life and thought. Such market fundamentalism, or neo-liberalism, as it is usually known, has become a kind of global 'common sense', reinforced on the one hand by 'end of history' theories of the sort advanced by US State Department official Francis Fukuyama in the wake of the fall of communism in 1989 (Fukuyama 1992), and on the other by postmodern analyses which dismiss all attempts to make sense of this 'new world order' as antiquated 'grand narratives'; at best, these are written off as misguided, at worst, they are decried as the harbingers of a new totalitarianism (Lyotard 1984).

Social work, like other social professions, has been profoundly affected by this neo-liberal onslaught. As one would expect, the specific forms in which these ideas and policies have shaped social work services and forms of practice have varied from country to country and have been, to some degree, 'contingent on context' (McDonald et al. 2003). In the Global South, the context has usually been one of Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund, which have required governments to privatise whole swathes of the public sector. By contrast, in the West, 'neo-liberal social work' has mainly been the product of the twin processes of marketisation and managerialism, underpinned by theories of New Public Management. Despite these regional variations, however, the global prescriptions of the Washington Consensus have left few countries – and few welfare regimes – unaffected (Ferguson et al. 2005).

This dominance of neo-liberal ideas, policies and practice has not gone unchallenged. At a global level, the anti-capitalist (or global justice) movement which came into existence following the protests against the meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999 has sought, through regional and global social forums over the past decade, to offer an alternative model of globalisation, based on a rejection of markets and militarism (Calinicos 2003). Within the narrower field of social welfare and social work,

where resistance to neo-liberal ideas, values and policies has been less than one might have hoped, there is, nevertheless, evidence of growing resistance to the ways in which these ideas and policies have moved social work further and further away from its core values. Some of the specific forms that this resistance has taken will be considered in the final section of this chapter.

Until recently, however, the resistance to neo-liberalism was hampered by two factors. Firstly, while there is widespread consensus on the weaknesses and limitations of the 'pure' form of capitalism which neo-liberalism represents, there has been much less agreement on what form (or forms) an alternative might take. As Wilkinson and Pickett note in their ground-breaking discussion of the effects of inequality, *The Spirit Level: Why more Equal Societies almost always do Better*, 'for several decades, progressive politics have been seriously weakened by the loss of any concept of a better society' (2009: 240). That lack of clarity was reflected in the message of a placard seen at an anti-WTO demonstration: 'Smash capitalism – and replace it with something nicer'.

The second factor has been the apparent capacity of the neo-liberal form of capitalism for indefinite expansion and its seeming ability to have overcome the tendencies to crisis inherent in classical capitalism first identified by Marx over 150 years ago. According to Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert Lucas in his presidential address to the American Economic Association in 2003, for example, 'the central problem of depression-prevention has been solved, for all practical purposes' (cited in Krugman 2008: 9), a view shared until recently by many leading economists and politicians, including British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. In the face of this apparent success, any criticism levied against neo-liberal globalisation (most obviously the huge inequalities it has generated) could be met with the response that 'it works', at least for a section of the world's population.

Until now. In 2007 a crisis began in the US sub-prime housing market. It has since led to the unravelling of the entire global financial system, the collapse or *de facto* nationalisation of some of the world's biggest banks, and the development of what is now generally recognised to be the deepest crisis of capitalism since at least the 1930s¹. While different writers offer alternative explanations for the roots of the crisis, what can be stated unequivocally is that its effects will be felt most strongly by the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society, both directly, through the effects of rising unemployment, house repossessions and cuts in services, and indirectly, through, for example, the increased racism and xenophobia to which the crisis is already giving rise. And this relates to the first factor noted above.

At a societal level, the collapse of the neo-liberal certainties of the past two decades makes the need to develop alternative notions of 'the good society'



¹ For an in-depth discussion of the roots and causes of this crisis, see: Krugman 2008, Turner 2008, Choonara 2009.

much more urgent. The same holds true of social welfare and social work. Many of those affected by the crisis will be forced to seek support from a range of social professions, including social work. However, as I have indicated above and shall argue in more detail below, the forms of social work practice that have developed over the last twenty years are often woefully inadequate in their ability to address people's needs, and will be of even less help in responding to the much greater levels of need that we are likely to see in the near future. Faced with this situation, in this chapter I will argue that we need to look afresh at the tradition within social work which does not shy away from addressing these wider political and economic realities and which seeks to place issues of social justice at the heart of what we do: namely, the radical social work tradition.

The radical kernel

Radical social work, as a distinct and consciously articulated model or approach within social work, only really emerged in the 1970s, above all in Britain, Canada and Australia. The reasons for its emergence at that time and in these places, as well as the specific forms that it took, will be explored in the next section. Since its earliest beginnings, however, social work has mirrored wider ideological conflicts and debates within society regarding the roots of social problems and how to best address them. Not surprisingly then, alongside the dominant models of theory and practice, which, reflecting Marx's dictum that 'the ruling ideas in every age are the ideas of the ruling class', have often been fairly conservative or at best reformist in content, there have also been more radical conceptions of the role of social work, as a brief discussion of the early British and American experiences will illustrate.

Social work in Britain 1870–1914

The earliest social work organisation in Britain was the Charity Organisation Society (COS), founded in 1869. COS displayed all the prejudices of the English middle-classes of the late Victorian era. Thus, its members' primary concern was less with addressing the factors producing the poverty and squalid housing conditions which affected so many people in the poorer areas of Britain's largest cities (described so powerfully by a young Frederick Engels almost thirty years before [Engels 1844/2009]) than with ending 'the scandal of indiscriminate alms-giving', which they saw as undermining individual character and self-sufficiency. The main aim of the 'scientific' casework method which they developed, therefore, was to distinguish between the 'deserving' poor (those whom they judged would use the financial help given in ways that were felt to be appropriate) and the 'undeserving' poor (those who they felt would not). Not surprisingly, many applicants went away empty-handed. Consistent with this individualist and often punitive approach, COS was also opposed

to any measures by government which were seen as undermining individual character, including, for example, the provision of free school meals and old age pensions (Stedman-Jones 1971, see also Jones 1983, Lewis 1995).

Such a harsh ideology, however, was not without its critics. Opposition to the ideas and practices of COS came from three main sources. Firstly, there were those within the organisation who had reservations about its approach. These included individuals such as Maude Royden, a volunteer in the 1890s with the Liverpool Central Relief Society. The Liverpool Society shared many of the ideas as the London-based COS. Despite coming from a wealthy background, Royden seems to have struggled with the philosophy and practice of the Society. She hated, for example, the class superiority which underpinned its 'friendly visiting', and wrote to a friend that 'I shouldn't be grateful if Lady Warwick, e.g., came to see me every week, to get me to put a few shillings into a provident fund... I should be mad' (cited in Pedersen 2004: 86). While it is difficult to quantify the extent of such dissatisfaction with COS ideology on the part of volunteers like Royden, the fact that, according to Jones, a major reason for the introduction of professional social work training in the early 1900s was to prevent the 'contamination' of friendly visitors by those with whom they were working (in the sense of becoming too friendly) suggests she was not an isolated case (Jones 1983).

A more significant challenge to COS came from the settlement movement, which is usually seen as the second major source of contemporary social work in both Britain and the US. Like COS, its aim was to promote social harmony through active citizenship, an aim which was to be achieved by persuading the educated middle-class young from universities to spend a period of time living and working among the poor, assisting them through education and example and promoting social reform on their behalf (Powell 2001: 38–40). In the UK, it was initiated by Canon Barnett in the wake of the rise of mass unemployment in the early 1880s and reflected his growing conviction that state aid, rather than the 'scientific philanthropy' practised by COS, was necessary to eliminate poverty. While it would be wrong to exaggerate the differences between the views of the leaders of COS and individuals like Barnett, it is probably fair to say that, in general, the approach of the settlement movement was more humanistic and less punitive than that of COS, and it is often seen as the precursor of later community development approaches (Mullally 1997, see also Powell 2001).

The third source of opposition to the ideas and approach of COS came from socialist and feminist campaigners, whose concerns often went beyond the immediate amelioration of hardship (though they were also involved in activities that sought to do just that) and envisaged wider structural and economic change. In that sense, they were often explicitly political (though hardly less so than the leadership of COS, one of whose leading members described the theory and practice of casework as 'the antithesis of mass or

socialistic measures and...proving that there is still much that can be described as individualism' [Milnes, quoted in Walton 1975: 150]).

Campaigners such as Clement Attlee, Sylvia Pankhurst and George Lansbury often made little distinction between their political agitation and their social work activities. These activities included the establishment of communal restaurants providing cheap and nourishing food; the organisation of soup kitchens for the families of striking dockers; the creation of hostels and meeting places for the poor, where they were given help and support with their individual problems; and the establishment of co-operative dressmaking businesses for young women. Alongside such communal activities, they were also frequently involved in individual casework and advocacy. As we have argued elsewhere:

Atlee, Pethick-Lawrence, Hughes, Pankhurst, and Lansbury are relatively well known as political activists from the east end of London. Yet they are not viewed as part of any social work tradition. The demarcation of a 'professional history' has led to their campaigning, social and voluntary work being excised from a broader social work history. But there is no doubt that they (and many of their followers) offer a glimpse of another, more radical, social work past. Their committed advocacy and community action strategies to address the needs of local communities and poor working class 'clients' prefigures developments often associated with the next period of social work radicalism in the 1970s. (Ferguson and Lavallette 2007: 19)

'The Road Not Taken': Social work in the USA

Social work practice in the United States of America is often assumed to be inately conservative, limited to individualistic, clinical approaches carried out in private practice settings. While much contemporary practice undoubtedly does take this form, it is very far from being the whole picture, either now or in the past. Not only does such a portrayal fail to address the activities of social workers within the public sector, but it also ignores the rich tradition of community organising in the US, much of which was based on the ideas of the radical writer and activist Saul Alinsky (1971). Moreover, as Reisch and Andrews have shown in their important study *The Road not Taken: A History of Radical Social Work in the United States* (2002), at particular points over the last 100 years, radical ideas have exerted an important influence on both social work education and practice, often in the face of fierce opposition from the state and from more mainstream social work colleagues and organisations. One example is the settlement movement in the period before the First World War.

While the inspiration for the settlement movement in the US came from the British experience, in practice, US settlements, including the most famous one, Hull House in Chicago, developed in a much more radical direction than their British counterparts. They developed, for example, a progressive

education system, concerned not only with helping immigrants integrate more easily into American society, but also with helping them challenge sweatshop and child labour systems. According to Reisch and Andrews, the settlements were regarded with suspicion by more traditional social workers, including the American counterparts of COS:

Perhaps this was because they were not engaged in social service in the traditional sense. In a manner reflected in the late twentieth century by proponents of empowerment theory and practice, radical social workers did not work for their clients and constituents but with them... They recognised the strengths of low-income groups and the potential to establish mutual interests and mutual goals. This clearly represented a threat to traditional conceptions of charity. (Reisch and Andrews 2002: 27)

The 1970s: The emergence of radical social work

As the examples cited above suggest, social work has always harboured a radical potential or kernel, which has manifested itself at different times and in different places. It was not until the 1970s, however, that radical social work really began to emerge as a distinct approach to practice. The first part of this section will explore some of the reasons why this new form of theory and practice should have emerged at this particular time. Next, the key elements of radical social work will be discussed, along with examples of the forms of practice to which they gave rise. Finally, some of the reasons for the decline of radical social work in the early 1980s will be considered.

'Be realistic – demand the impossible!' The experience of the 1960s

Several factors contributed to the emergence of more radical forms of social work practice in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Within the UK, these included the 'rediscovery of poverty' by researchers in the mid-1960s; the re-organisation of social work services based on new legislation in both Scotland and England, which led to the creation of large, generic teams, giving workers a stronger sense of their collective strength and professional identity; and the appearance of influential studies of service users' views. The most important of these was Mayer and Timms' study, *The Client Speaks: Working Class Impressions of Casework* (1970), which was highly critical of the then dominant psychosocial approaches for their failure to address problems of material poverty.

However, the fact that radical social work movements appeared at the same time in Canada, Australia and, to a lesser extent, the US suggests that other, more global forces were also at work. Foremost amongst these were the end of the 'long boom' (the period of sustained economic growth which followed the Second World War), which led to the re-emergence of economic crisis in many parts of the world, and the growing global movement of resistance

to America's long war in Vietnam. These factors helped bring about the most radical decade in world history since the years immediately following the First World War. The period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s saw the emergence of social movement after social movement. These movements fed into and inspired each other, partly through the influence of television (Harman 1988, see also Kurlansky 2004). Thus the black civil rights movement in the US in the early 1960s was followed by the appearance of the women's liberation movement (and also inspired the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland); the Gay Liberation Front took its name from the National Liberation Front in Vietnam, and so on. These movements in turn were linked to and fuelled by the emergence of a global student movement, with students playing a key role both in the Prague Spring of 1968 in Czechoslovakia and in reigniting the French workers movement in May of the same year, leading to the largest general strike in history, which caused the country's President, General de Gaulle, to flee in panic to a military base in Germany.

The radicalisation of social work

Social work was profoundly affected by these global convulsions, particularly in the countries mentioned above. At an ideological level, the growing popularity of sociology as an academic discipline meant that prospective social workers were often exposed to new and radical ideas about the family, mental illness, the impact of structural factors on individual behaviour, and the socially constructed nature of 'deviancy'. At the level of practice, the recognition that many clients' problems were rooted in their material circumstances and experience of oppression, rather than in alleged personal inadequacies, alongside the daily evidence of the effectiveness of collective struggle, led to a growing critique of casework approaches and to a greater appreciation of the potential of community work and community action to bring about change. The more radical approaches that emerged in this period were extremely diverse and reflected a wide range of ideological positions – socialist, feminist and libertarian/'hippie' (Pearson 1989). The socialist critique was most clearly articulated in *Radical Social Work*, an influential collection of writings edited by social work academics Roy Bailey and Mike Brake which appeared in 1975 (Bailey and Brake 1975). The book addressed such issues as the potential of systems models to be a basis for more radical practice; the limits and potential of community development approaches; the relationship between sociological theories and social work practice; and issues of gay rights and social work. The connecting thread, however, was a concern with the way in which the then dominant casework approaches individualised and pathologised clients and ignored the structural factors contributing to their problems (a concern also reflected in the title of the main radical social magazine of the period, *Case Com*). By contrast, radical social work was defined as 'essentially understanding

the position of the oppressed in the context of the social and economic structure they live in' (Bailey and Brake 1975: 9).

Other elements of radical social work articulated in the *Case Con Manifesto* attached as an appendix to the book included its critique of the oppressive and controlling aspects of the welfare state; its call for a different relationship between workers and clients, both at the individual level (predating current models of user involvement) and in respect of alliances between social workers and collective user organisations; its emphasis on collective approaches to addressing clients' problems, including community work and community action, which contributed to the rise of movements such as the disability movement in the 1980s; and its insistence that social workers involve themselves in trade unions and build links with other groups of workers.

It is difficult to quantify the impact of these arguments on day-to-day social work practice, whether in the UK or elsewhere, though a subsequent volume edited by Bailey and Brake did provide examples of what such radical practice might actually look like (Bailey and Brake 1981). What is certainly true is that the 1970s saw much greater interest in collective approaches in social work, reflected both in the increased adoption of group work and community work approaches as a means of responding to clients' problems and in the rapid expansion of trade union organisation amongst social workers. Where the impact was perhaps greatest, however, was in social work education and training, where welfare rights and community work teaching became core elements of the curriculum in many training courses, and radical or Marxist texts, such as Corrigan and Leonard's *Social Work Practice under Capitalism* (1978) or Simpkin's *Trapped within Welfare: Surviving Social Work* (1979/1983), were standard texts on many reading lists (with the latter going into a second edition within four years).

The 1980s: Radical social work in decline

Radical social work, both as an approach to practice and as an informal social movement, suffered a decline in the early 1980s. There were two main reasons for this. The first, and by far the more important of the two, was the shift to the right in all areas of social and political life following the election of a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in the UK in 1979 and a Republican government under Ronald Reagan in the US the following year. Social work in particular became a synonym for all that New Right politicians and ideologues such as Charles Murray perceived as problematic about the welfare state, and above all for its alleged encouragement of 'dependency' (Murray 1990). In such a climate, defending social work in any form, let alone radical social work, was a considerable challenge.

The second reason for the decline of radical approaches was a rather different, albeit related, one. The defeat of the class-based trade union struggles of the 1970s in Britain, France, Italy and elsewhere (with the low point in the

UK being the crushing of the 1984–5 miners' strike by Mrs Thatcher and her allies) led to widespread disillusionment with class-based politics. That disillusionment took different forms.

In France, for example, it was expressed in the rise of the *nouveaux philosophes*, a group of philosophers (some of them former Marxists) whose disappointment over the failure of the struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s to overthrow the existing order led to a profound pessimism concerning both the possibility and the desirability of radical social change which was articulated in a worldview which became known as postmodernism (Callinicos 1989). In the UK, the US and other English-speaking countries, an emphasis on class was increasingly replaced by an emphasis on *oppression*, *identity* and *difference* (Williams 1996). Within social work, the radical movement of the 1970s was increasingly criticised for having over-emphasised class at the expense of a range of oppressions, notably women's oppression and oppression on the basis of 'race'. Consequently, some radicals within social work began to prioritise issues of 'race', gender and disability (Dominelli 1988, see also Dominelli and McLeod 1989). Some measure of their success in this respect can be seen in the prominence given to anti-oppressive practice within the new Diploma in Social Work, introduced in the UK in 1989. While this was in almost every respect a real step forward, the fact that the Diploma also ushered in a much more mechanistic, competence-based approach to social work education, in keeping with the market-based approaches to social welfare being introduced at the time, suggests that the inclusion of anti-oppressive practice was to some extent a fig-leaf concealing the generally much less radical implications of the new qualification². Nevertheless, the greatly increased awareness of a range of oppressions which developed within social work in the 1990s (and was reflected in the growing popularity of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive perspectives [Thompson 2006]) was one of the few gains of this period.

Neoliberalism, managerialism and social work

At the same time as adherents of postmodernism were proclaiming the 'end of grand narratives', in the sense of theories which seek to explain the world as a totality, a new and very powerful 'grand narrative' of neo-liberal globalisation was establishing its dominance – ideological, economic, political and social – in almost every corner of the globe. Its origins lay in the world economic crisis of the mid-1970s and the confidence which that crisis gave to that (hitherto marginal) section of the ruling elite which argued for a return to the 'pure capitalism' of the pre-Keynesian period. In practice, this neo-liberalism, as it became known, involved governments in seeking to remove all perceived



² For a discussion of the critical social work approaches which also emerged in Australia and Canada during the 1990s, see Ferguson 2008, chapter 7

barriers to the free operation of market forces, primarily through privatisation of previously state-owned utilities, such as electricity, water and rail services, and the weakening of trade unions (Harvey 2005, see also Harman 2008).

Such policies were given a huge boost by the collapse of the communist regimes of the former USSR and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. The following decade was characterised by the dominance of the Washington Consensus, implemented through the mechanisms of the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund, which emphasised, *inter alia*, privatisation, financial deregulation and fiscal discipline as the basis for economic growth in every country, regardless of its particular situation (Hubbard and Miller 2005).

Unsurprisingly, welfare regimes, including the provision of social work services, were profoundly affected by these changes. A study of social work in nine different countries published in 2004, for example, showed that it had been left unaffected in none of them (Ferguson et al. 2005). In countries of the Global South such as India and Senegal, policies of trade liberalisation had often destroyed local industries, such as the fishing industry in Kerala, while a reduction in state support for social work had led to increased reliance on NGOs often funded by foreign donors. Meanwhile, in advanced capitalist countries such as Britain and France, the push for labour market flexibility was undermining the traditional roles of social workers and contributing to 'de-professionalisation', in the sense of the creation of new layers of less skilled, poorly paid workers.

Within the UK, the main vehicle through which neo-liberal ideas, policies and practices were introduced into the public sector generally and into social work in particular was New Public Management (NPM), or, as it became popularly known, managerialism. Broadly defined, managerialism is the idea that 'managers should be in control of public organisations and that they should run those organisations in line with business principles and concerns' (Evans 2009: 146). More specific elements of NPM approaches identified by McDonald include an emphasis on generic management skills rather than professional expertise; an emphasis on quantifiable performance measurements and appraisal; the break-up of traditional bureaucratic structures into quasi-autonomous units dealing with one another on a user-pays basis; market testing and competitive tendering instead of in-house provision; strong emphasis on cost-cutting; and limited-term contracts for state employees instead of career tenure (McDonald 2006: 69).

In his study of the development of the 'social work business' in the UK, Harris (2003) has provided a convincing account of the ways in which professional social work practice, organisation and education were subordinated to and transformed by the imperatives of managerialism (with a more recent publication highlighting some of the nuances and contradictions of this process [Harris and White 2009]). Three separate studies from the past decade

have vividly highlighted how these changes have made an impact on the actual practice of social work.

In the earliest of these studies, conducted ten years after the passage of the NHS and Community Care Act of 1990, which laid the basis for more market-based approaches, Jones interviewed forty highly experienced frontline workers (minimum eight years post-qualification experience) across the North of England to see in what ways, if any, their jobs had changed as a result of these reforms. He found a group of highly stressed workers, unhappy at the way in which their jobs had changed and frustrated by their inability to work in the ways which they believed were in the best interests of their clients. Importantly, at the root of these workers' frustration was not the content of their interactions with their clients, but rather the nature of the agencies within which they worked and the highly procedural forms that their work now took:

We are now much more office based. This really hit home the other day when the whole team was in the office working at their desks. We have loads more forms which take time to complete. But we social workers also do less and less direct work with clients. Increasingly the agency buys in other people to do the direct work and we manage it. (Jones 2004: 100)

As this last point suggests, at the core of social work reform in the UK has been the introduction of a purchaser/provider split, meaning that local authorities now purchase care from private or third sector organisations rather than providing it directly. In the process, social workers have primarily become care managers, co-ordinating care rather than working directly with clients – the reason, of course, why many came to social work in the first place. One worker summed up the frustration to which this gave rise:

I feel so deskilled because there are so many restrictions over what I can do. Yes I go out and do assessments, draw up care plans, but then we aren't allowed to do anything. I can't even go and organise meals on wheels for somebody without completing a load of paperwork, submitting a report to a load of people who would then make the decision as to whether I can go ahead and make the arrangements. I just wonder why I am doing this. It's not social work. Many of my colleagues in the adult team are looking to get out of social work altogether. They say they don't want to take this garbage any more. That's how they feel. The will to do social work is still there. They are still committed to work with people in distress. That heartfelt warmth has not gone away, but the job is so different. (*Op. cit.*: 102)

As noted, Jones' study took place at the end of the 1990s. More than six years later, however, the authors of *Changing Lives*, a major report into the state of social work in Scotland commissioned by the (then) Scottish Executive, came up with very similar findings:

Working to achieve change is at the heart of what social workers do. Identifying needs and risks through assessment and developing and

implementing action plans to address these will achieve nothing without an effective therapeutic relationship between worker and client... Yet social workers consistently told us that it is this very aspect of their work which has been eroded and devalued in recent years under the pressure of workloads, increased bureaucracy and a more mechanistic and technical approach to delivering services. (Scottish Executive 2006: 28)

Finally, similar findings have emerged from a survey of 369 children and families' social workers carried out in 2009 by the trade union UNISON as part of its submission to an official enquiry following the highly-publicised death of a child in London, 'Baby P', at the hands of his carers in 2007. Alongside discontent about the size of caseloads and the lack of resources, workers also complained about the level of bureaucracy associated with managerial systems and approaches:

The focus of social work has become entirely procedural and the meaning of the work has been lost. The needs of children have become secondary to the needs of agencies responsible for protecting them. The contents of assessments appear insignificant as agencies are far more concerned about whether they are completed on time. (UNISON 2009: 9)

'I didn't come into social work for this': Reclaiming social work

As the studies cited above show, the direction taken by social work over the past two decades has left many social workers feeling dispirited and demoralised. Nor is such despondency confined to the UK, even if the development of social work as a business has gone further there than in most other advanced capitalist countries (with the obvious exception of the US). In the past few years, however, there have been encouraging signs of resistance to the dominance of managerial values and priorities in social work. Here, I shall mention three of these.

The first is a growing re-assertion of social work as a value-based profession. Central to the neo-liberal transformation of social work has been the minimisation or excision of values and an emphasis instead on social work as a largely *technical* process, based on skills, knowledge and a concern with 'what works'³. 'What works', at least in the sense promoted by New Labour governments in the UK, has tended to involve a focus on prescribed behavioural change, to be achieved through pre-packaged programmes which can be bought and 'rolled out', with little concern either for the relationship between the workers and service users involved or for the factors, structural or otherwise, that give rise to the unacceptable behaviour. In contrast, social workers have begun to emphasise the ethical content of their work. An obvious example is the rightly celebrated inclusion of the statement that



³ The last item in this list, that is, a purely pragmatic approach, is closely linked to the evidence-based practice movement (Webb 2001, see also Sheldon 2001).

the 'principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work' in the 2001 Definition of Social Work issued jointly by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (quoted in Ferguson et al. 2005: 207). Another is the work carried out in defence of asylum seekers, refugees and 'erased' groups by social workers and social work academics in Britain, Australia and Slovenia, often in direct opposition to the racist and scapegoating policies of their national governments (respectively: UNISON/BASW 2006, Briskman et al. 2008, Zorn and Lipovec-Čebon 2008). Finally, social work academics at Nottingham Trent University in England have been involved in organising a biennial, 2,000-strong, conference entitled *Affirming our Value Base in Social Work* (Barnard et al. 2008).

Secondly, resistance to dominant trends has also come from organisations and movements of service users who have challenged not only medicalised, paternalistic modes of service and practice, but also the narrow consumerist, and often tokenistic, forms of involvement which officially approved forms of 'user involvement' have created for them (Oliver 1996, see also Beresford 2007, McPhail 2007).

A third source of resistance (in which the current writer has been directly involved) seeks to incorporate both the value-based critique of managerialism referred to above and the active involvement of service users as participants in a collective movement into a new, or revitalised, model of practice. Its origins lie in a meeting which took place in Glasgow, Scotland in late 2004, entitled 'I didn't come into social work for this!' The basis for the meeting, at which Chris Jones presented the research findings discussed earlier, was that it was necessary to move beyond simply lamenting the current crisis of social work and to begin to actively challenge current trends. The meeting, attended by around sixty social workers and social work academics, adopted a manifesto entitled *Social Work and Social Justice: a Manifesto for a New, Engaged Practice*. The Manifesto was made available online, and within a very short space of time, more than 700 people had added their names to it (Ferguson and Lavalette 2007: 197).

Out of these humble beginnings, the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) was born. The Network does not seek to compete with or replace existing organisations of social workers, be they professional associations or trade unions. Rather, it is a radical, campaigning voice within social work, made up of social workers, academics, students and service users. Since 2006, the Network has organised three major national conferences, each attended by over 250 participants. In addition, there have been major local SWAN events in Bristol (where 300 people attended a conference on radical social work) and in Liverpool and Glasgow (both attended by over 200 people and organised around the case of Baby P, a child whose death in one of the poorest areas of London in 2007 at the hands of his carers was the occasion for a new bout of scapegoating of social workers). SWAN also organised an online petition against

such scapegoating, and the Network's website has hosted a lively debate over how social workers can best help to protect vulnerable children⁴. Evidence that concern over the impact of neo-liberal policies and ideas on social work as discussed in the Manifesto is not confined to the UK is provided by the fact that, to date, the Manifesto has been translated into several languages, including Spanish, Greek, Slovenian, Cantonese, Japanese and Bangla.

Conclusion: Radical social work in the 21st century

Like similar organisations and social movements that have emerged over the past decade, SWAN often seems clearer on what it is opposed to – the marketisation and managerialism of social work – than what it is for, other than a fairly broad belief that 'another social work is possible' (mirroring the slogan of the global anti-capitalist movement: 'Another world is possible'). To address this imbalance, two of us have recently sought to summarise what we would list as four key elements in a new, radical practice for the twenty-first century (Ferguson and Woodward 2009: 153–163). It seems appropriate to end on these points.

Radical practice is retaining a commitment to good practice

Collective approaches, such as group work and community work, have not been the only victims of the budget-driven managerial approaches which have dominated social work for two decades. The same fate has also befallen good casework practice, which, at its best, can provide individuals with an empathic, trusting relationship in which they can explore issues that may be troubling them. 'Someone to talk to' was identified by service users with mental health problems as the most important component of a social crisis centre in East Scotland (Stalker et al. 2006). The fact that traditional features of social work, such as an emphasis on relationship, process and values, have also been undermined by neo-liberal practices means that many workers who would not otherwise have seen themselves as 'political' have also been radicalised in recent years. In a climate of managerialism and technocratic approaches, humane and holistic value-based approaches can also be radical.

Radical practice is 'guerrilla warfare' and small-scale resistance

Good social workers have always sought to find ways within the rules and regulations that govern their practice to get the best deal for their client, even if that means 'bending' the rules on occasion. For that reason, one writer in the 1970s referred to social workers as 'middle-class bandits' (Pearson 1975)



⁴ Visit the website at www.socialworkfuture.org.

and, in a much-cited study, Lipsky sought to demonstrate the ways in which 'street-level bureaucrats', including social workers, exploited the discretion available to them to obtain resources for their clients (Lipsky 1980). In a more recent study which explored the views of experienced frontline workers, some respondents felt that, even though some of the 'spaces' previously available to them had been curtailed or even closed down by managerial practices, there was often still scope for imaginative and creative practice:

Our team has very strong social work values...We're unafraid to challenge the internal system and we have an excellent manager as well so we can see ourselves as a force...insisting on creating that kind of dialogue.
(Kathryn', quoted in Ferguson and Woodward 2009: 74)

*Radical practice is working alongside service users and carers,
but not when they do not need social workers*

Working alongside and learning from the experience of service users and carers has to be at the heart of any new radical practice. The ideas and practices of new social welfare movements, such as the disability movement or the mental health users' movement, have underpinned many of the most progressive developments in service provision over the past decade (Oliver and Campbell, see also Beresford and Croft 2004, Tew 2005). That does not mean there will not be tensions and debates from time to time over the best ways to achieve the end goals of increased autonomy, for example, in relation to approaches such as individualised budgets; but these issues need to be addressed in a spirit of open and friendly discussion. It also means recognising that social workers need to know when to back off – most people prefer to live their lives without a social worker around!

Radical practice is collective activity and political campaigning.

As noted above, individual approaches can be radical in bringing about changes in people's personal situations and in the way in which they see themselves. However, collective approaches have a qualitatively greater potential for change at the community and structural level, a potential which has been almost completely lost over the past two decades (Ferguson 2008). Collective approaches are relevant for social workers at three levels. Firstly, there is the use of community work as a method of practice. In the UK at least, community work theory and practice has fallen off the curriculum of most social work programmes and has also disappeared from many agencies (other than in the very narrow, top-down form of 'consultation' with service users). We need to apply pressure to restore radical, campaigning community work to its rightful place within social work. Secondly, there is the issue of the collective organisation of social workers, primarily through trade union

involvement. Radical social work practice cannot take place in a vacuum. On the one hand, it needs resources; on the other, those involved in it will, from time to time, need protection from managers who are less than enthusiastic about workers who are active in advocating on behalf of their clients. Strong workplace-based trade union organisation continues to provide the best means of achieving both these goals. Finally, social workers need to be involved with wider social movements. In the past, social work benefited enormously from the energy and ideas of the women's movement, the disability movement and so on. In the early years of the twenty-first century, the real critique of neo-liberal globalisation came not from politicians, but from the activities of the anti-capitalist or global justice movement, a social movement born out of the demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999. Similarly, social workers who wish to see a real alternative to the neo-liberal models of social work which currently dominate need to be involved in and learn from such wider movements for social justice.

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Chapter 6

The Influence of Global Financial Institutions on the Development of Welfare in South Eastern Europe and Their Impact on Social Work

Maria Donevska, Svetlana Trbojevik

Introduction

Living in an era when the world is becoming more globalised presents a challenge not only for politics, but also for those called on to cope with the outcomes of globalisation. Although processes¹ of globalisation may seem slow, they cause swift tectonic movements (Draxler 2006) that disproportionately affect the undeveloped world and those that are, in many aspects, considered to be disadvantaged. The consequences of globalisation have penetrated all aspects of human organisation, affecting the balance of political, economic, social and cultural life. The neo-liberal economic policies bound to globalisation have made a deep impact on both the welfare state and social work (Ferguson et al. 2005).

Globalisation poses a multilevel threat to the social security of individuals, groups, communities and nations, and the constant social changes it instigates endanger the accomplishments of the welfare state and social work practice², which were the result of a long, hard-fought struggle (Dominelli 2008). Also, the phenomenon of globalisation is closely connected with the development of new risks, requiring new approaches for their assessment, prevention and treatment. Coping possibilities depend on the tradition of organising social protection and the available resources on the national and international levels. In an attempt to reduce risk impact, the international community is engaging its institutional infrastructure and developing global strategies. The extent to which a country utilises international resources is inversely proportionate to the level at which it has maintained its independence in organising social policy. Furthermore, globalisation has had an intensive influence on the development of democracy (Conteh-Morgan 2008) and has had a two-pronged effect on human rights. On the one hand, it has enhanced discussions on human rights, and on the other, it has provoked social work to defend its fundamental principles³ on human rights, social justice and individual freedoms.



¹ This refers in particular to economic liberalisation measures and political liberalisation requirements (Conteh-Morgan 2008).

² Feminists, unions and other activist groups.

³ Set out in the IFSW international ethical document for social work.

This paper explores the effects of global financial institutions on the welfare state and social work in South Eastern Europe, with a special focus on Macedonia. At the outset, it is necessary to state that the authors were confronted with an insufficiency of qualitative and quantitative research that would prove their hypothesis about the influence of global financial institutions on social work practice in South Eastern Europe. This problem is made even more complicated by the fact that the analysed effects on social work can be identified in multiple factors of influence.

Global financial institutions

The term 'global' was first introduced by Marshall McLuhan in 1962, in a work entitled *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. McLuhan connected the term with the idea of the 'global village', a term mostly used to describe the cultural connectedness of people enabled by electronic technology. Since then, the word has gradually penetrated the social sciences, reaching its peak in the late 1980s, when it was popularised by economists and journalists. Nowadays, globalisation is used in connection with economic challenges (Draxler 2006) and refers to multi-dimensional processes affecting politics, economy, ideology, law and culture. There are a number of competing definitions of globalisation. According to Nobel Prize Laureate Joseph Stiglitz, globalisation is 'a closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reductions of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) of people across borders' (2002: 9). According to the definition given by Gunter and Van der Hoeven, globalisation is a 'gradual integration of economies and societies driven by new technologies, new economic relationships, and the national and international policies of a wide range of actors, including governments, international organisations, business, labour and civil society' (2004: 7).

Gunter and Van der Hoeven's definition points out the role of different actors, among which multilateral institutions are probably the most significant implementers of international policies and provide the most evident manifestation of globalisation. They have become an inevitable factor of change, influencing significant reforms in the realm of their activities. Internationally operating global financial institutions (GFIs) are considered to be managers of the global financial architecture (Calomiris 1998). They wield significant influence over national and regional politics, as well as over policy making that directly affects private individuals, social groups and communities.

The most influential GFIs are generally known as the Bretton Woods Institutions, owing to the fact that their origin can be traced to the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, held at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire,

USA, in July 1944. The three week Conference⁴ was an attempt to rebuild the international economic system in the wake of World War Two, and resulted in the signing of a system of rules, institutions and procedures to regulate the international monetary system, known as the Bretton Woods Agreements, and the establishment of the International Monetary Fund⁵ (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, better known simply as the World Bank⁶. Today, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development is part of the World Bank Group⁷. The IMF and the World Bank are considered the 'twin intergovernmental pillars supporting the structure of the world's economic and financial order' (Driscoll 1997), and were established to complement one and other in promoting economic stability and growth.

The stated goal of the IMF and the World Bank is to support policies of macroeconomic stabilisation in the developing countries. Through their neo-liberal⁸ orientation, they promote liberal society, a free market economy and the reduction of budget expenditure resulting from social transfers. And they have done a good job persuading many that their ideologically driven policies are necessary if countries are to succeed in the long run (Wolf 2004). In their different roles, both institutions strive to fulfil the vision of an inclusive and sustainable globalisation. Besides their stated economic mission, over the years, they have invested significant interest in complementary domains, such as promoting social interventions (support for programmes to combat poverty; the protection of human, social and minority rights) (Gerovska 2001).

Despite their significant role in globally promoting economic and social stability, the IMF and World Bank are persistently subjected to harsh criticism. The reputation of the IMF and the World Bank, especially among radicals and anti-globalisation activists, is not a very favourable one. They are



⁴ The United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference.

⁵ The IMF is an organisation of 185 member countries, established with the following primary goals: (1) to promote international monetary cooperation and exchange rate stability; (2) to facilitate the balanced growth of international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth; and (3) to secure resources to assist members in balancing payment difficulties or to assist with poverty reduction (International Monetary Fund 2009).

⁶ The World Bank is a UN specialised agency with 184 member countries. World Bank centres its efforts on reaching the Millennium Development Goals agreed upon by UN members in 2000 and aimed at sustainable poverty reduction (www.worldbank.org).

⁷ Apart from the World Bank, the institutions that have been added are: the International Development Association (IDA); the International Finance Corporation (IFC); the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA); and the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) (Bretton Woods Project 2009).

⁸ The term neo-liberalism was coined by Frederich August von Hayek, Wilhelm Röpke, Walter Eucken, and others at a conference in Paris in 1938 (Stark 2008, see also Yergin and Stanislaw 1998).

often accused of promoting and protecting the interests of the G8 or, specifically, of the US. The IMF is probably the most hated of all multilateral economic institutions. It is known as being conservative, arrogant, demanding and incompetent. Over the past decades, the IMF has been blamed for causing considerable damage to developing countries and criticised for applying a one-size-fits-all policy of austerity to all countries (Wolf 2004: 288).

The contested welfare state: GFIs vs. social policy and social welfare

The welfare state 'is a framework of government policies and programmes designed to ensure that citizens have an acceptable level of economic welfare and access to necessary services regardless of their wealth or income – all in a democratic framework' (Jain 2008: 1). It was created in a capitalistic system in which most employees worked in the industrial sector. Primarily, welfare provision implies protection from risks connected to the loss of work, sickness, motherhood, old age, injuries and death (Ruzin 2004, see also Draxler 2006). Alongside protection based on contributions, non-contributory benefits were designed for the unemployed (mostly the poor) and socially deprived persons (the disabled, underprivileged persons).

The demand for a labour force in the industrial sector was fairly stable from the end of World War Two⁹ to the oil crisis of the 1970s, when a series of big economic and social changes, including globalisation, demographic pressure, individualism, increased unemployment, high degrees of social diversity and budget deficits, necessitated a reconsideration of the sustainability of the welfare state (Leiberfried and Mau 2007). This period is also characterised by the renaissance of neo-liberal thought, primarily among thinkers from the Chicago School of economics¹⁰ (Hindess 2004). These economists contested the legitimacy of the welfare state and inspired public debates on high budget expenditure¹¹ for the expensive social policy practiced under social democracy. The main elements of neo-liberal thought include the economisation of all areas of life; limitation of the public sector for the benefit of the private sector; the endorsement of globalisation as the encouragement of free trade between states; deregulation¹² by supporting competitive economic performance and



⁹ Typical clients in the industrial welfare state after the World War Two were unskilled or semi-skilled workers who had lost their jobs. The risk of poverty was connected to large families and people in old age. Therefore, policies aimed at providing family allowances and pensions (*ibid.*).

¹⁰ In particular Milton Friedman and Frederic von Hayek.

¹¹ Neo-liberalism is a manifestation of the inability to see social spending as an investment.

¹² Supposable regulations are obstacles for foreign investments and limit the freedom of the market, whereas the reduction of taxes and deregulation in the area of health care and safety is seen as boost for the market (Stark 2008).

profit from capital; and a perception of social policy (Stark 2008) as an unnecessary public intervention for self-induced social problems.

The political and social changes in member countries of the IMF and World Bank caused by the crisis in the 1970s led to a shift in the institutions' perspective. Since the second half of the 1970s, both the IMF and World Bank recognise the importance of social issues. In the 1970s, they became more actively involved in social protection through the incorporation of safety nets in labour markets and, since the 1980s, of safety net components in structural adjustment programmes (World Bank 2008, see also International Monetary Fund 1995). The policy shift of the late 1980s – from a macroeconomic mandate to involvement in social development issues – was above all a consequence of the geopolitical transformation that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall. The IMF's role in social policy advice is for the most part indirect and limited, whereas the World Bank is more directly involved in social protection. The World Bank's involvement in social protection started long before the establishment of its social protection sector group in 1996 in the framework of the Human Development Network (*ibid.*). The climax of this shift came at the Global Social Summit in Copenhagen, where the World Bank identified social policy and social protection as cornerstones of development.

Despite these developments, these GFIs did not back down from their neo-liberal agenda of promoting economic management logic in the field of social protection. The World Bank devised the objective of reconceptualising social protection (Holzmann and Jorgensen 2000: 3) in order to transform it from an inelastic safety net, which traps and holds people in certain positions, into a springboard; redefine social protection as an investment in the formation of human capital, as opposed to a cost; and address the causes of poverty, as opposed to its symptoms. The *World Development Report 1990* states that 'safety nets were observed as reactive instruments dealing with the consequences of poverty rather than its causes. Safety net programmes represented a cost to be minimized as opposed to an investment for which impact should be maximized' (World Bank 2001).

Reforms of the welfare state, for the most part supported by GFIs, represented serious attacks on the principle of universality¹³. It was felt that, by applying the principle of universality, the state was unnecessarily confronted with a high level of public spending and displayed a lavish attitude toward taxpayer money (Abel-Smith 1983). Therefore, through a neo-liberal strategy of structural adjustment programmes (especially in the transitional



¹³ Universality refers to a broad application of rules and laws and their generalisation to most, if not all, people. Universality in the context of the welfare state refers to the universal right to protection for the citizens in a given country. This principle was introduced by Lord Beveridge.

countries)¹⁴ (Dominelli 2008), GFIs promote the reduction of budget expenditure in the area of social transfers. These structural adjustment programmes are offered as a remedy for poverty and a trigger for economic growth.

Nevertheless, some authors argue that 'structural adjustment and related policies in many developing countries spawned social instability...intensified inequalities related to higher levels of unemployment, and even contributed to a drastic reduction in delivery of social services (health, education, transportation etc.)' (Conteh-Morgan 2008). Limiting social transfers leads to the weakening of state social protection mechanisms, thus eroding the social justice traditionally guaranteed by the state and compelling citizens to rely on more primary forms of social solidarity (Puljiz 2008).

The shift of competency from the national to the supranational or international level leads to the acceptance of rules that are not always beneficial for individual states. This negative aspect of membership in the international institutions is associated with the inability to create individual legal acts that would be adaptable to a large number of offered programmes and reform solutions, in line with the economic and social capacities of a given country. These changes are often accompanied by a lack of coordination and knowledge about programmes being implemented by the international organisations and the state (Gerovska 2001). By their nature, the welfare policies are such that, if governmental interventions are focused on a reduction of services and benefits, they will cause social reactions and will destabilise the government's position. Therefore, governments have been unwilling to hand over their sovereignty¹⁵ in the social policy sphere.

The influence of GFIs on social policy in South Eastern Europe

According to Anderson, the concept of region is used not only to depict units of geography, but also to describe 'imagined communities' that commonly surpass the borders of the nation state (quoted in Deacon and Stubbs 2007 and Stubbs and Lendvai 2008). The South Eastern Europe region (SEE) encompasses the countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. Despite the heterogeneity of the SEE countries, prior to the 1990s, they all shared the common charac-



¹⁴ These programmes encompass measures for lowering trade barriers and opening economies up to multinational companies, encouraging direct foreign investments, welfare retrenchment and privatisation of state owned companies, abolition of subsidies and price controls, and the withdrawal of controls on capital movements (Ferguson et al. 2005).

¹⁵ Diminution of sovereignty comes as an effect of globalisation and its effects are more acutely felt in poor developing countries because they now occupy the same economic space as wealthy nations (Conteh-Morgan 2008).

teristic of a state-planned political and economic system¹⁶. Two thirds of the SEE countries came out of the Yugoslav Federation¹⁷, which, in the process of disintegration, was submerged in a decade-long series of armed conflicts which slowed down the expected development processes. This major setback led to the devastation of national economies, a decline in living standards, increased unemployment and the displacement of people and communities.

Apart from armed conflict, over the past two decades this region experienced a painful political, economic and social transition. The political transition took the form of the development of democratic institutions that were supposed to initiate the acceleration of the economic and social development of the region. Throughout the region, a lack of political consensus on reform and a weak democratic tradition have also produced devastating consequences.

Analyses of the social and economic conditions in SEE countries depend on various factors. Problems connected with data comparativeness occur due to the different methodologies used by the national statistical offices. Another problem pertains to the interpretation of data for countries such as Serbia, Montenegro or Kosovo. And in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, for example, the fact that the most recent census was conducted in 1991 poses an additional problem for researchers.

The SEE has a combined population of 52.8¹⁸ million and an average per capita income of approximately US\$ 2,200 (World Bank 2000). Regional developmental indicators show that the war and transition had dramatic effects on the entire region. The unemployment rates in some countries of the region, such as Kosovo (43.4%)¹⁹, Bosnia and Herzegovina (41%)²⁰ and Macedonia (33.7%)²¹, are the highest in Europe. This has been a constant concern for the SEE region because the failure to reduce unemployment to an acceptable level results in sizeable economic and social costs.



¹⁶ On the other hand, one should not generalise the political systems in the region. The socialist system of Yugoslavia was less rigid, and included elements of self-management and market economy as well as openness to the western world (Puljiz 2008).

¹⁷ The countries of the former Yugoslavia have inherited the Bismarck social insurance model (Donevska et al. 2007, see also Aranderenko and Golici 2007).

¹⁸ Calculation made using the most current data available on the World Bank website.

¹⁹ Data refers for 2007, Source: World Bank Country Brief 2009, update April 2009. <http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/countries/ecaext/kosovoextn/0,,contentMDK:20629286~menuPK:297777~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:297770,00.html>

²⁰ Data refers to 2005, Source: World Bank.

²¹ Data refers to last quarter of 2008, Source: World Bank Country Brief 2009, update April 2009. <http://www.worldbank.org.mk/wbsite/external/countries/ecaext/macedoniaextn/0,,contentMDK:20630587~menuPK:304480~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:304473,00.html>

The breadth of the social and economic crisis in the SEE countries can be seen in comparisons with indicators of the real GDP from the 1990s. In the year 2000, the greatest decline of real GDP growth compared with 1989 was to be found in Serbia and Montenegro (−42.3%)²²; a similar trend could be noted in other countries, albeit in a milder form: Macedonia (−17.1%); Bulgaria (−6.6%); and Croatia (−2.2%). On the other hand, Albania and Romania²³, two countries which were not directly affected by the conflict, recorded significant growth of the GDP index (44.1 % in the case of the latter, 5.1 % in the case of the former). In 2000, the annual GDP indicators for a number of countries in the region began to change; by 2007, many countries had achieved constant growth: 10.7 % for Montenegro; 7.7% for Macedonia, 6.8% for Bosnia and Herzegovina; and 4.4% for Kosovo.

The road to social and political stability is a perilous one, and its successful navigation depends on steadfast reforms, intra-regional cooperation and successful accession to the EU. Thus, according to the World Bank (2001), social inclusion policies and cohesion in the region are essential for providing sustainable peace and stability.

By fitting them into the category of transforming post-communist countries, GFIs expanded the scope of their policies to include the SEE countries. During the transitional period, SEE countries were exposed to two-sided pressure. On the one hand, growing unemployment and poverty rates generated internal pressure for social justice; on the other hand, the international community – or, more precisely, GFIs – was demanding cutbacks in the role of the government and budget reductions (Puljiz 2008).

It was mostly through the intervention of GFIs in transitional social and economic reforms that the SEE countries were exposed to the neo-liberal model. According to Stubbs and Lendvai (2008: 57–58), the World Bank has a strong effect on the ‘structural regulation’ of key domains of social policy, such as pensions, social protection (including assistance and social services) and health care. These authors point out the position of the World Bank regarding its insistence on ‘the importance of absolute poverty lines’.

In this region, both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were confronted with fiscally unsustainable welfare states which had assumed total risk management and ensured cradle-to-the-grave security (Gerovska 2001). The World Bank and IMF focused on transfers to vulnerable groups affected by adjustment measures and broader social safety nets that were supposed to cushion the effects of transition.



²² One should keep in mind that the economies of Serbia and Montenegro functioned as one until 2002. This economy was not only involved in the war, but was also subject to UN sanctions in the period from 1992 to 1995.

²³ Both Albania and Romania had highly centralised economies and a dictatorship prior to 1989.

Table 1: South Eastern Europe: Key indicators

Country	Population in millions		GDP growth in millions of US\$		Real GDP growth in millions of US\$	Unemployment rate IFS	Annual population growth	Population in poverty \$PPP 2.15 per day, percent
	2000	2007	2000	2007				
Albania	3.08	3.18	7.3	6.0	144.1	10.0	0.3	24
Bulgaria	8.08	7.66	5.4	6.2	93.4	5.71	0.5	4
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3.69	3.78	5.5	6.8	n/a	41	-0.1	4
Kosovo ²		2.20	0.6 ³	4.4	n/a	43.4	1.5	48 ⁴
Macedonia	2.01	2.04	4.5	7.7	82.9	33.7	0.0	4
Montenegro	0.67	0.59	3.1	10.7	57.7 (& Serbia)	n/a	-0.3	n/a
Serbia	7.56	7.38			57.7 (& Montenegro)	18		6
Croatia	4.3	4.44	2.9	5.6	97.8	13.5 ⁵	-0.1	n/a
Romania	22.44	21.55	2.1	6.0	105.1	6.0	-0.2	12

Source: World Bank available data

- 1 According to World Bank data, unemployment in Bulgaria dropped from 12% in 2004 to 5.7% in 2008. Source: World Bank Country Brief 2009. <http://www.worldbank.org/wBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/bulgariaext/0,,contentMDK:20149551~menuPK:305446~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:305439,00.html>
- 2 Data for 2006.
- 3 Data for 2005.
- 4 Not comparable, based on \$2 per day, 2003 data UNDP (2004: 18).
- 5 Data for 2005.

An overview of interventions in the welfare states of SEE countries²⁴ is shown in Table 2, which presents an analysis of the outcome goals of World Bank projects. It can be noted that the thematic outcome goals are closely connected to the socio-economic and political problems in the countries in question. The most prevalent target thematic outcome goal of the World Bank projects is improvement of the labour markets (31 projects). The second most prevalent goal refers to social risk mitigation, and appeared in 27 cases. If one adds the component of 'other social protection and risk management' (13) to the social risk and mitigation component, it is possible to conclude that, through its programmes, the World Bank imposes policies on the national level that focus on confronting social risks²⁵. The absence of a social safety network in the region prompted the World Bank to implement 18 projects with this component. In 13 cases, it instigated projects for participation and civic engagement. This came as a result of a number of regional analyses that showed a lack of the social capital necessary for a functional community.

GFI is also seen as the new architects of social policy (Puljiz 2008) in the area of pension reforms. In the late 1990s, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania used pension reforms to facilitate the switch from a pay-as-you-go to a three-pillar system. In Macedonia, similar reforms became compulsory for all persons who were first employed in 2003 (Gerovska-Mitev 2008). In 2001, the World Bank applied enormous pressure on Serbia to shift to a three-pillar system. Alongside the compulsory pay-as-you-go scheme, the Serbian government partially placated the Bank by agreeing to develop voluntary pension insurance (the so-called third pillar) (Aranderenko and Golici 2007). Kosovo, on the other hand, is unique in its universal pension system: (admittedly modest) Basic Pension benefits are paid to all citizens regardless of their work history. As one observer noted, 'it is assumed that it will become a safety net of last resort for the elderly poor' (Cocozzelli 2007). Another characteristic of GFI intervention in the pension systems of SEE countries is the changing of retirement age parameters. In the case of Albania, instead of reconstructing the pay-as-you-go system with private saving schemes, the Bank, through its 3rd Poverty Reduction Support Credit, introduced in 2002, only imposed a gradual increase in the retirement age (Ymeraj 2007). Almost all SEE countries increased the age for retirement, even though in certain cases this reform was introduced gradually, such as in Macedonia.

A lower GDP in comparison to the 1990s was also connected to a reduction of social rights, and was worsening the position of large numbers of people (Puljiz 2008: 77). High social expenditures (as a proportion of the GDP



²⁴ Due to international sanctions, international organisations did not participate in economic and social policy reforms in Serbia prior to 2000 (Aranderenko and Golici 2007).

²⁵ Coping with social risks is imposed as one of the goals of social work.

Table 2. Targeted thematic outcomes in World Bank implemented projects in the period from 1995–2013

Thematic targeted outcomes	Macedonia	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Montenegro	Albania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Kosovo	Total
Improving labour markets	6	5		5	7	1	2	4	1	31
Social analysis and monitoring	3	2		2						7
Social risk mitigation	3	6		6	4	2	2	3	1	27
Law reform	1		1	1						3
Social safety nets	1	4		4	4	1	1	2	1	18
Conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction	2	2		1		1			3	9
Participation and civic engagement	2	1		4	3	1		2	2	15
Vulnerability assessment and monitoring	1			1	2		1			5
Other social protection and risk management	2	1		4	2	1		1	2	13
Access to urban services and housing				2	2					4
Administrative and civil service reform	1	2	1	5					2	11

Source: The table was developed from the available data about World Bank projects in each SEE country.

in the whole region) instigated the direct intervention of GFIs in the area of social assistance benefits. Thus, increasing rigidity of payments, reduction in the length of the period of entitlement, means-tested social support allowances and conditional transfer measures were supposed to improve the social assistance users' motivation for work (Gerovska 2001, see also Gerovska-Mitev 2007, Stubbs and Zrinščak 2007). The monthly amount of the social assistance benefits in most countries of the region is insufficient, and does not protect poor people from social exclusion. Potentially, the amount of social assistance benefits could reduce access to services necessary for breaking the cycle of poverty, such as education. Through this move, GFIs have managed to reorganise 'egalitarian social welfare' into a 'safety net' model (Gerovska-Mitev 2007, see also Donevska et al. 2007).

Through their programmes, GFIs have evolved active measures and additional training and retraining programmes (Leiberfried and Mau 2007) that are intended to enhance employment possibilities and improve integration in the labour market. The activation of social assistance users contributed to a reduction in the previously existing minimum social standards and diminished the prevalence of universality and solidarity, which are the main principles of the social protection system (Gerovska-Mitev 2007).

In line with their neo-liberal ideological orientation, GFI programmes stimulated the development of small and mid-size companies and brought about a reduction of employees in public administration, thus significantly affecting union negotiation power. Transformations in the organisation of public administration and the privatisation of some service units, such as maintenance, accounting etc., weakened the unions and discouraged workers from joining them. Nevertheless, today, the most powerful and influential unions in SEE countries are unions in the public sector, such as those in education, law enforcement and, to some extent, defence²⁶. In most cases, therefore, the government not only became a mediator between social partners, but also a direct negotiator with its employees. The depreciation of negotiating power through the dissection of both public and market sectors can be seen as a direct attack on unions as the historically most prominent banner and instigator of the welfare state: 'Neo-liberal ideologies have shaped the welfare state for the past 25 years, eroding hard-won gains by feminists, black activists, disabled activists and working class people' (Dominelli 2008).

Case study: Macedonia

Social policy practice in Macedonia prior to 1991 can be characterised as bureaucratised and non-transparent. Its system involved universal social services²⁷ and did not include social partners and the civil sector in the planning and administration of welfare (Gerovska-Mitev 2007).

Today, social protection in Macedonia comprises services and benefits provided by the tax-financed social welfare system²⁸ and the contribution-based social insurance system²⁹. The tradition of egalitarian social welfare and Bismarckian social insurance has slowly given way to more residual and individualised social protection, mainly as a result of the impact of GFIs in general and the World Bank in particular (Donevska et al. 2007).

In its aspirations to reach European standards, the Macedonian welfare system faces challenges presented by the principles of pluralisation, decentralisation, de-institutionalisation and social inclusion. The social protection programmes in Macedonia aim at alleviating the growing occurrence of poverty and a persistently high unemployment rate during the transition.



²⁶ National armies were supposed to reduce their numbers as a requirement for Euro-Atlantic integration.

²⁷ Non-contributory provision for citizens in need.

²⁸ Social prevention which, according to the Law on Social Welfare, includes educational and advisory work, the development of forms of self-assistance, volunteer work, institutional care, non-institutional care and monetary assistance (Donevska et al. 2007:9).

²⁹ Including pensions and disability and health and unemployment insurance (Donevska et al. 2007).

The impoverishment of the population, the widening of classic social problems, the appearance of new social risks and the demographic deficit are the main threats to the sustainability of the Macedonian welfare system. According to the Macedonian State Statistical Office, the proportion of the GDP represented by social transfers rose from 13.6% in 1995 to 15.3% in 2004, and then decreased to 12.2% in 2005. According to the available data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the number of beneficiaries of social financial assistance had been increasing from 1998 to 2002, from 49,955 (year average) to 78,654 (year average). Since 2002, this figure has been fluctuating, but has tended to decline; the monthly average for the first 10 months of 2007 was 64,143. In October 2007, 62,997 households, or 219,063 individuals, received social financial assistance. Therefore, these benefits cover over 10% of the Macedonian population (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2008). There was an evident decrease in the number of unemployment beneficiaries, which peaked in August 2002 at 53,373 individuals and had declined to 26,938 beneficiaries by 2007. As a percentage of the GDP, total expenditure on social benefits declined from 2.9% in 1998 to 1.6% in 2007. As a percentage of government expenditure, it declined from 13.4% in 1998 to 4.9% in 2007. In terms of these last two parameters, Macedonia is, to a large extent, now in line with other European countries (*ibid.*).

Macedonia began establishing relations with important international organisations immediately following its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Membership³⁰ in the international institutions was supposed to speed up reconstruction and the adaptation of a legal framework and administrative procedures and approaches according to internationally adopted standards (Gerovska 2001). It also led to increased accessibility of grants, loans and credits essential for the country's development in the process of transition.

Alongside the government, GFIs have a significant role in shaping Macedonian social protection. The impact of GFIs on social policy in Macedonia is characterised by coerciveness and conditionality in the process of developing national social policy goals, contents and instruments (Gerovska-Mitev 2007). As in other countries in the SEE region, GFIs play a crucial role in suggesting changes in the areas of employment, the labour market, payments, social benefits and pension insurance.

The activities of the IMF³¹ in the area of social policy are indirect and limited. Its main interventions in Macedonia were focused on the reduction



³⁰ Macedonia became a member of the IMF in 1992, and in 1993 became a part of the Dutch constituency of the World Bank.

³¹ In 2007, Macedonia paid off a previous IMF loan of 32 million Euros. Since then, the government, regardless of the current global crisis, has been reluctant to turn to the Fund again. Nevertheless, the current global crisis will bring the IMF back to the SEE region. Serbia has already negotiated a US\$ 4.5 billion loan and Bosnia and Herzegovina announced a US\$ 3 billion standby arrangement over 3 years.

of the percentage of the total GDP spent on education, science, health care and social protection. In response to the needs of laid-off workers, the IMF proposed more efficient targeting of a social security net. The most visible sign of the IMF's involvement in social dimensions and its attempts at more serious interaction with social policy was probably the renaming of the ESAF³² arrangement programme into the Arrangement for Poverty Reduction, a move conditioned by the development of national strategies for poverty reduction.

Reconstruction of the pension system is probably the most significant achievement of the IMF and the World Bank. The Bank offered the same model as in other post-communist countries. Changes in the age limit and the replacement of the pay-as-you-go system with a three-pillar system³³ were the result of the actuarial conclusion that the old system was unsustainable. As a result of a campaign for pension system reforms, public opinion gradually accepted the reform. The second pillar commenced on January 1, 2006, according to the Law on Mandatory Fully Funded Pension Insurance³⁴. Mandatory fully funded pension insurance covers persons who started working for the first time as of January 1, 2003, that is, younger generations, thus providing a gradual introduction of this system (Donevska et al. 2007). The current global economic crisis will be a true test of the sustainability of this reform.

The Bank played a vital role in the reform of the payment of social benefits. The World Bank's influence took the form of the following interventions: the development of objective criteria for the evaluation of poverty; the revision of the model for the delegation of services of social assistance; improved targeting of social benefits and effectiveness of social protection programmes; solvency of social programmes; the equalisation of rural and urban levels of social assistance based on the newly established unique national poverty line; and the stimulation of employment through the introduction of limits on the length of social protection. Under the guidance of the World Bank, the government adopted criteria for acquiring the right to social assistance which are revised on a yearly basis in order to adjust them to the socio economic status of the country.

In the segment of social benefits, the World Bank 'pushes' elements that are endangering the universal character of human needs. Namely, its strategy pleads for the selective provision of social needs of people, which limits the fulfilment of basic human rights and social justice. Also, the targeting of social benefits is just another way in which the state limits the provision of universal social protection (Gerovska 2001).



³² Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility.

³³ Consisting of pillar I, compulsory pension and disability pension based on intergenerational solidarity, pillar II pillar, compulsory capital-funded pension insurance, and pillar III, voluntary pension insurance.

³⁴ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia nos. 29/02, 85/03, 40/04 and 113/05.

In the period from 1998 to 2000, the World Bank's operations were conducted in accordance with the 1998–2000 Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). The World Bank's assistance under the 2004–2006 CAS programme focused on promoting the efficient management of public resources and tackling corruption; promoting job creation through sustainable private sector-driven growth; building human capital; and protecting the most vulnerable (Government of Macedonia 2006).

Within the 2004–2008 CAS, technical assistance for implementing reforms in the health care and social sectors was provided by a loan in the framework of the Social Protection Implementation Project (SPIL) in the amount of US\$ 9.8 million. SPIL is supposed to advance the effectiveness and efficiency of the social protection system through improved administration and long-term sustainability of the pension system as well as improved targeting and administering of social cash benefits. The Bank contributed by supporting the institutional infrastructure in the social sphere. SPIL measures included the computerisation of national and local employment agencies (concluded in 2005) and centres of social work. The implementation of the new software at centres of social work is supposed to improve the administration of various benefits. The outcomes of this programme are intended to provide the necessary control over the work of centres of social work as well as the impartial distribution of social benefits in targeting vulnerable groups. The idea behind this programme is to promote conditional social assistance transfers by investing in the younger generation as human capital. More precisely, connecting social transfers with compulsory school attendance of children of beneficiary families, it is intended to improve the social inclusion of future generations. Within the programme, an actuary pension unit was also established in 2006.

The activities for social inclusion presented in the World Bank's goals are emphasised in the country's policies. The programmes for social inclusion were designed according to a classification of exclusion based on economic, social and legal factors as well as gender.

According to Gerovska (2001), in terms of the implementation of GFI directions in social policy, Macedonia does not differ much from other post-socialistic countries. Efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes remain relatively low; in order to increase their effectiveness, there is a need for greater adaptation to the country's socio-economic conditions. The programmes are generally not well targeted, and the frequency of inclusion errors is high, often necessitating additional transfers from the budget.

Changes from top to bottom: The influence of agents of neo-liberalism on social work practice

'Social work's theories and practice reflect the times in which they live. In a deep sense, social work is defined by the evolving relationship between the state and the individual.' David Howe (2000: 77)

The above quotation summarises the topic that will be covered in this section. Social work practice is closely connected to and conditioned by ideological changes and broader social transformations³⁵. Historically, the establishment of professional social work coincides with the emergence of the welfare state, for which social work provided legitimacy (Parton 2000). If one accepts the premise that the state is shaped by social ideologies, then the welfare state as a product of the state is a manifest form of the dominant ideology and represents an arena where social work is practiced. Social work is therefore conditioned by the implemented model of the welfare state (Hämäläinen and Sing 2009). Also, every critical remark made about the welfare state leads to the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of social work practice, resulting in its transformation. As a consequence of neo-liberalism, social work is prompted to complement social science knowledge with knowledge from management and financial management science (Hopkins 2000).

Social work practice is girdled by the neo-liberal reactions to social actions and state interventions of solidarity and universality. These value components are one of the most important elements of social work practice. The value dimension of social work is connected to the universality of human rights, social justice and needs which are common to all individuals, as well as to the concept of diversity that originates from the essential uniqueness of individuals *qua* individuals (Trbojevik 2008).

Under the influence of neo-liberalism, rapid changes in welfare policies and, consequently, social work theory and practice have occurred over the past two decades (Hämäläinen and Sing 2009). Ironically, through globalisation, neo-liberalism promoted the social work profession beyond the borders of the western world³⁶ (Flaker 2009) and opened up a space in which activists, scholars and radical practitioners were able to reform the structure of the system based on the principles of human rights and social justice (Jamieson and Yates 2009). Social work experienced changes in the competencies and approaches required of practitioners. Instead of skills for diagnosing problems, programmes for treatment and changes in social systems, the emphasis was placed on knowledge for the classification and identification of clients as well as the introduction of management skills in social work (Hopkins 2000, see also Dominelli 2008). As a result of the penetration of management logic in social work, a number of evaluative skills were introduced with the aim of quantifying and measuring the effects of social work (*Ministarstvo rada i socijalne politike Republike Srbije* 2009). This insistent request for knowledge related



³⁵ It is worth noting the statement of Hämäläinen and Sing (2009): '...The society is a product of a permanent self-construction and at the same time of a permanent "self deconstruction" ...'.

³⁶ Social work was practiced in the countries of the Western Europe, Yugoslavia and Poland, both Americas, Australia and New Zealand, India, Japan etc.

to management imposed changes in the curricula of the schools for social work in the SEE region. The new programmes emphasise the importance of capacity building, the management of human resources, social management, evaluation and case management.

Areas of change

Social centres

Traditionally, in the countries of former Yugoslavia, professional social work was predominantly practiced in centres of social work. These were established as the main units for social provision (Donevska et al. 2007) with the intent of distributing assistance on the local level (Žganec 2009).

Over time, the centres became highly centralised and bureaucratised and overburdened by administration (*ibid.*). Their traditional preventive and counselling roles were suppressed by the enlarged demand for immediate social protection. Social workers were overloaded with administrative procedures connected to the approval of social benefits. In assuming this role, they used 'technologies of control' (Dominelli 2008) and became identified as 'agents of oppression' rather than 'activists for human rights'. The power component allowed social workers to divide clients into those who deserve assistance and those who do not (*ibid.*). Also, the role of social workers was expanded by the need to manage new social risks and problems that emerged in the SEE region in the period following the 1990s, such as human trafficking, children on/of the street, family violence, drug abuse and juvenile justice.

The logic of management is practiced not only in the private and civil sector; it is also being pushed through a big door in the public sector of social provision. For example, the current reforms in the centres for social work in Serbia are connected to the government's decision to introduce case management as a main approach to work with individuals (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 2008–09). One aspect of this reform is connected to the replacement of the medical model of social work with the strategic model. These reforms are attacking the previously accepted model of teamwork and aim to increase the work efficiency of the case manager (Pokeržnik 2009). This is causing resistance among the employees, who are expected to take complete responsibility for the measures undertaken (*ibid.*). Their complaint is related to the blatant blending of the profiles of employees within the social work centres, with psychologists and pedagogues performing the roles of social workers and only in special cases engaging in the scope of their professional expertise. Finally, the promotion of case managers could jeopardise the existence of social work as a profession in the future, and might lead to its fragmentation into different types of services, such as child protection, family services, youth and community work etc. (Clarke 2000).

Decentralisation and pluralisation

Another structural transformation which led to changes in social work practice in the SEE region and which was to some extent inspired by GFIs is decentralisation. In its broader sense, decentralisation refers to easier access to services that will allow better insight into individual cases. In the beginning of 2000, the Ministry of Social Affairs in Croatia initiated a reform of the social care system with the aim of raising its level of efficiency. Decentralisation and de-institutionalisation were among the main principles of this reform. However, the 'proclaimed principles of decentralisation and de-institutionalisation did not show almost any results by now' (Žganec 2009). In accordance with the specific procedures of the World Bank, the Government of Serbia is implementing a project called Provision of Improved Services at the Local Level. The first project component focuses on fiscal decentralisation that will increase the efficiency of service provision; the second component focuses on the principle of pluralisation by stressing the role of the local government and non-governmental organisations³⁷; the third component refers to regulation, supervision and quality provision; and the fourth component focuses on enlarging the capacity of local communities and other local institutions as providers of services. The focus of this last component is on widening the knowledge of service providers through skills and knowledge pertaining to management decision making, strategic planning, the estimation of needs, budgeting, service provision and monitoring and evaluation (*Ministarstvo rada i socijalne politike Republike Srbije* 2009). At least in the case of Macedonia³⁸, decentralisation was achieved in the area of mobilising local communities to plan their social development and to organise social protection, mostly for marginalized groups. The employment of social workers in the role of community planners was another noticeable trait of this process.

A negative outcome of this process is the engagement of non-professional workers who are not always qualified to work in service provision. This development is due to a lack of human capital in local communities, as well as partisanship³⁹ in employment. Another possible negative outcome of decentralisation is the expected uneven distribution of services pertaining to universally recognised rights. Communities are organised differently in different countries on the basis of their size and density; in order to be recognised as decentralised, they should be guaranteed (at least) legal and fiscal sustainability by the central government. Another indicator of their de-



³⁷ This also led to involving new providers of services that were seen as more responsive and rights-based than the public sector (Aranderenko and Golicin 2007).

³⁸ The process of decentralisation has not yet resulted in the transfer of the responsibilities of the Social work centres to the local level (Donevska et al. 2007).

³⁹ This is a serious problem for the whole public sector, but has a devastating effect on the work of CSWs in Macedonia.

centralisation is connected to securing the principle of providing local access to services. The combination of the provision of local services and the fiscal independence of communities creates the possibility for the violation of principles of social solidarity and universality. Namely, due to differences in the socio-economic power of citizens, decentralised communities are more than a potential stimulator of social inequities, as similarly observed in the rural-urban division.

Alongside decentralisation, pluralisation as a new trend in social policy is another element of change in social work practice (Donevska et al. 2007). Pluralisation in social security attempts to provide sustainability of service provision through the construction of a parallel commercialised system. The development of the civil sector, the inclusion of faith-based organisations and private providers and the development of corporative social responsibility are becoming the pillars of welfare provision in the region. It is important to note that the pluralisation of social work improved the social consciousness and sensitivity to and awareness of non-traditional social phenomena (issues pertaining to social rights, inclusion/exclusion and vulnerable groups). The process of the multiplication of social providers enhanced the vocabulary of the general population, as well as of those directly involved in social protection activities. The pluralisation of welfare services allowed clients to choose from different service providers. Also, pluralisation enabled greater possibilities for the field practice placement of social work students.

The shortcomings of the achievement of the goal of engaging NGOs in the activities of local communities are connected to the phenomenon of 'urbanisation of the civil sector', which entails a lack of the civil sector in undeveloped, mostly rural areas. Therefore, an insistence on NGO engagement is not universally applicable to all communities. Despite this, in the implementation of projects, state institutions insist on maintaining the pluralistic principle, although, in reality, this principle is violated by its monopolisation by the NGO sector. In most cases, certain NGOs have established agreements of cooperation that give them exclusive rights on implementing projects, which are often based on nepotistic relationships and partisanship. This is becoming a key problem in discussions of the importance and meaning of the NGO sector. Another negative aspect of involving the NGO sector in the system of social welfare is connected with the fact that this sector is money-driven and therefore unsustainable and dependant on donors (Trbojevik 2007). Unfortunately, the NGO sector is becoming an arena for practicing 'fake voluntarism', that is, this sector absorbs a significant segment of the population which engages in a certain field not out of enthusiasm and altruism, but as a way of securing a basic means of existence.

One of the main features of civil society is the way it executes its mission goals through projects. Thus, civil society becomes a promoter of managerialism in social welfare. One could conclude that this phenomenon is the

result of the rather indirect influence of GFIs as donors and supporters of civil society. One shortcoming of promoting project management is the inconsistency of implementing reforms through projects. The time dimension of projects is especially problematic due to the short life of project cycles (Maglajlic-Holicek and Kenan-Rasidagic 2007).

Social exclusion

The notion of social exclusion, especially in a European context, has been in use since the 1970s, and has aimed at informing the analysis and planning of social policy (Atkinson 2000). Social exclusion is a political acronym linked to poverty and is often used as a synonym for poverty and deprivation. Nevertheless, exclusion goes beyond poverty and unemployment and includes factors such as education, health, income, housing, quality of life, dignity and autonomy that are in interaction with the different forms and degrees of social exclusion (Shukur 2008).

Inclusion is the offered solution to exclusion. Inclusion is understood as a synonym for social integration, redistribution and total participation in a society (Donevska and Saveska 2002). This concept has been strongly criticised both in the academic circles and among activists. According to Dominelli (2008), 'creating dyads of inclusion and exclusion' is one of the commonalities in the process of oppression. Activities for social inclusion are well represented in the World Bank's goals and have been emphasised in its policies. It is possible to conclude that programmes for social inclusion were designed according to a classification of exclusion into legal, economic, social, gender and disability aspects.

The World Bank has supported and monitored projects in the area of social inclusion, such as the National Strategy for Roma in Macedonia. Social inclusion policies assume significant changes regarding the quantum of knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed by social workers and other helping professions in the field of social protection. Social inclusion requires specific knowledge regarding the relational model in social work due to the specific needs that the socially excluded have. In this context, it is expected that empowerment as a process and goal of social work will experience a revival. Empowerment generally refers to an increase in the power people have over their own lives. Accordingly, the work of helping professions should be focused on utilising the abilities, resources and power of the socially excluded. Attempts to promote socially inclusive policies through placing emphasis on secondary rather than primary social work are therefore ineffective. Socially excluded young persons in Macedonia in the 15–19 age group who have been excluded from the process of education, employment, or training provide one example. According to the State Statistical Office, youths in this situation made up 33.9 percent of their age group (Novkovska 2008: 52).

Until recently, this group had not been targeted by any governmental⁴⁰ or non-governmental programmes; it is expected to be a problem in the future.

Pension system

Although the intervention of GFIs in the pension system is not directly connected to social work practice, it is expected that they will have an indirect influence on it in the near future. The SEE countries that have accepted⁴¹ the three-pillar system might experience a big gap in their social stratification in the future due to differences in the accumulated amounts and the number of pillars (some might never invest in the third pillar) where individuals have invested their savings. But social stratification should not be the only concern related to this change in the social protection system imposed by GFIs. Another alarming dimension is the inability to predict fluctuations in the market where savings from the second and third pillar are invested. Currently, their instability is connected to the global economic crises. This represents a risk for smaller countries, such as those in the SEE region, because, unlike the US, they do not have the capacity to protect their investments outside their domestic borders. This instability of pension savings will most likely jeopardise the once guaranteed security connected to the risk of old age and could violate the principle of social justice. Apart from demographic reasons, the pension reforms could be a reason for the unnecessary involvement of social work with this age group. Finally, it should also be noted that the concept of the three-pillar system implies a direct attack on the intergenerational social solidarity that has been nurtured for over a century.

Conclusions

Global financial institutions played a crucial role in shaping or adjusting social policy in the SEE region. Yet the future development of social policy, social welfare and social work in the SEE countries depends on their level of integration in the European Union. This integration will determine the extent of the influence of global financial institutions.

Global financial institutions make an impact on social work through:

- Stressing countries' need for social development;
- Increasing activation of the population, affirmation and the activation of social services on the local level;
- Enriching social work with new contents or, more precisely, stressing the importance of management of social risks, the development of social



⁴⁰ In 2008, the Macedonian Government introduced a new law for compulsory secondary education.

⁴¹ See p. 11–12.

networks, the development of civil society and the inclusion of the NGO sector in implementing social work;

- Institutional capacity building.

On the other hand, the awareness of the constant presence of experts and the developed syndrome of dependency on foreign funds have negative effects on mobilisation for sustainable development in the SEE countries and also set limits to independent developmental concepts.

Finally, it is worth noting that, many times, changes requiring a great deal of planning, such as the preparation of strategies, analyses and other documents, are not implemented in practice.

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Chapter 7

The Construction of the 'Deviant Foreigner' and its Impact on Social Work

Vesna Leskošek

Introduction

Racism, hatred towards foreigners and other types of discrimination have been extensively addressed by social workers in theory and in practice. The treatment of ethnic minorities, foreigners, homosexuals, women, the handicapped, the elderly and other groups with low or no social power is a mirror of society, reflecting prevailing mentalities in a specific geographic or cultural context. It is informed by dominant beliefs, which shape everyday human relationships and everyday practices of various institutions that determine people's destinies. The more everyday practices and lives are swayed by mentalities resting on questions such as 'Who is outside and who is inside?' and 'Who belongs among "us" and who does not?', the stronger the conviction that we are special and that our uniqueness should be protected, and the greater the fear that it could become contaminated by foreignness. When such fears turn into social actions (including public speech) directed against the foreign, we can speak of racism, sexism, nationalism and other kinds of discrimination¹.

This chapter places a classical understanding of racism in relation to the new social order that is a result of the neo-liberal understanding of market domination and of the vanishing welfare state. Our thesis is that racism supports neo-liberalism (and vice versa), even though the latter professedly denounces racism. Racism and neo-liberalism are based on the belief that there are two (or more) kinds of people: the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving', 'ours' and 'theirs'. Racism transposes this idea onto ethnicity and culture, while



¹ Racism is a belief that race (and ethnic body at present) determines culture from which claims to racial superiority are derived. Culture refers to the unified thinking, behaviour and operations and national unity which represent a demarcation line between various cultures and nations (Cashmore 1996: 308–311). In this sense, cultures are hierarchised, and this is maintained through the production of Other – unwanted, deviant, barbaric. Racism and nationalism complement each other in such a way that the former produces otherness and the latter excludes those who are contaminated by that otherness, thus preserving the purity of a nation. Naturally, this exclusion has its economy. It creates groups of people which serve various purposes. The largest group is that which serves capital by being available for exploitation without causing a 'bad conscience' among the owners of capital.

neo-liberalism discriminates by restricting access to the market. In the conclusion, the implications of global changes and growing social inequalities for social work will be considered.

Global neo-liberalism and local neo-conservatism

Interpretations of exclusive or oppressive concepts, which are the most common results of xenophobic or discriminatory measures, depend on how we understand the global and local processes which, over the past decades, have played an important role in sanctioning the oppression of minorities and turning it into a socially acceptable practice. One of these processes is undoubtedly neo-liberalism as a dominant global ideology,² which, through the use of 'newspeak'³, has made the cultural imperialism of the West, and of the US in particular, seem completely acceptable, although in reality it is a form of symbolic violence which also includes gender domination (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2003: 57). It is a matter of inequality-based simplifications of the lifeworld elevated to the level of a universal truth through generalisations; they obscure reality and, at the same time, affect the living conditions of those who are oppressed.⁴ From this perspective, the market appears as the only genuine form of democracy and, accordingly, the curtailing of social rights, dwindling employment opportunities and growing inequalities appear as the acceptable consequences of endeavours to maximise market efficiency. Social rights discourse has been replaced with discourses that encourage consumer demand and consumer rights and that are increasingly driving people away from being political. The increase in consumer demand and the growing uncertainty have provided a convenient foundation for the production of various fear-mongering ideologies which obscure the source of feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty by redirecting attention from the real enemy (capitalism) to fictitious ones (foreigners, foreignness).

The language of fear goes hand-in-hand with the language of security, which has recently come to dominate contemporary discourses on the international,



- 2 Reality is too complicated to be comprehended or wholly embraced without leaving something out. Accordingly, when thinking or speaking, we inevitably simplify social reality. Our everyday world is also composed of simplifications. Simplifications differ; in our understanding, an ideology consists of 'untruthful, verifiable and dangerous simplifications'. For more on this, see Dragoš and Leskošek (2003: 9).
- 3 'Globalization', 'flexibility', 'governance', 'employability', 'underclass', 'exclusion', 'new economy', 'zero tolerance', 'communitarianism', 'minority', 'ethnicity', 'identity' and 'fragmentation' are the most frequently used terms of neoliberal Newspeak; they have been driving out namings such as 'capitalism', 'class', 'exploitation' and 'inequality' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2003).
- 4 What some think, others experience. Such generalisations affect their everyday life, their choices and opportunities.

national and local level. Security issues are eliciting ever more drastic responses. However, close scrutiny of these responses shows that security is restricted to protecting capital and the government rather than the general population. Let us mention several examples in support of this statement. When securing an American nuclear ship on a short visit to Koper (Slovenia), local policemen were preoccupied with chasing away inquisitive locals who steered their boats too close to the ship. During the Bush-Putin meeting in Slovenia, the police cordoned off the streets and kept local protesters – their fellow citizens – within a confined area. A similar scenario designed to protect statesmen is in place during every international meeting attended by the wealthiest countries, with security measures aggravating, obstructing or even endangering the normal everyday life of local citizens. The rhetoric that criminalises the new social movements and activists obscures the fact that they are fighting against the power of capital, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, xenophobia, racism and other phenomena that increase social inequalities. Police measures and imprisonment hint at changes in the operation of western states in the direction of the exclusion of everything that is not conducive to the new global order. The police and courts have become new state regulators, functioning as the surrogates for waning social justice, which enables them to reassert the need for security.

Wacquant (2003) has predicted the emergence of a new liberal-paternalist social order. It will be liberal with regard to those at the top, the privileged ones, and will therefore endorse greater social inequalities and marginality; and paternalistic with regard to those at the bottom who, faced with the narrowing scope of social rights and unemployment, will become ever more exposed to surveillance and punishment. The neo-liberal ideology derives its power primarily from the weakening of the economic and social state and the strengthening of the penal state. The 'invisible hand' of the market and the 'iron fist' of the state are complementary (*op. cit.*: 68). This strategy has already been put into practice: prisons, asylum centres and centres for foreigners are packed with powerless, poor people. Having fallen victim to well-organised networks that cash in on destitute humans, these individuals eventually end up confined as foreign criminals in inhospitable countries, and even poorer than before. Although their confinement may increase the feeling of safety among the local population, it is overlooked that the police are fulfilling the role of the EU's gatekeepers, and are not in fact protecting anyone in particular. Wacquant describes this phenomenon as 'the penalisation of poverty' (2003: 65).

Although most theoreticians designate neo-liberalism as a global ideology, it is still possible to recognise local peculiarities arising from dominant local mentalities. In Slovenia, these are expressly neo-conservative. In traditional Slovenian society, not only are people who come from foreign countries and who do not have Slovenian citizenship or a residence permit perceived as

foreigners – some Slovenian citizens are perceived as more foreign than foreign citizens. Similarly, certain foreigners who acquired Slovenian citizenship or who have been living in Slovenia for several decades have never been recognised as locals.⁵ For example, a heterosexual, middle-aged executive from the west who is a Catholic and a well-situated family man is more readily accepted and deemed more socially desirable than a (Slovenian) woman who lives with her lesbian partner and wants to conceive a child through artificial insemination. At the same time, African Slovenians (some of them Catholic) who are employed and well-situated are perceived as foreigners because of their skin colour, even if they are, for example, heterosexuals and Slovenian citizens.

These seemingly straightforward formulations conceal complex social processes that are difficult to identify and expose before it is too late, that is, before they can produce detrimental effects for various marginalized groups. Even less obvious are their effects on the majority population in circumstances in which the number of behaviours and beliefs labelled as undesirable and deviant is constantly increasing, making practically everyone vulnerable to exclusion.

Below, we will take a closer look at xenophobia, foreignness and divisive mentalities using selected examples that illustrate how these phenomena affect everyday institutional practices and public opinion about foreigners.

Mentalities vs. identities

Mentality is a specific manner of thinking and feeling among a group of people. It is a manner of understanding, experiencing, evaluating and reacting (Sruk 1980: 211). Different groups in a society think differently and develop different mentalities; those that are supported by the majority become the dominant ones. The traditionality of Slovenian society is possible, among other things, because of a traditional organisation of thought that is still entrapped in a binary understanding of the differences nature/culture, body/mind, private/public, civil/political, emotional/rational and biological/social, with the first member of each binary pair representing the positive pole, and the second the negative one. This kind of thinking does not recognise the spectrum between the two poles, and places oppositions in a hierarchical, rather than a horizontal relationship (Leskošek 2002: 5).

This is a kind of thinking that is based on mass simplifications and is incapable of comprehending the complexity of meanings situated somewhere between two extremes. Let's take the perspective on gender as an example.



⁵ Tonči Kuzmanić lists five currently observable dominant signifiers of the excluding majority: gender: male; sexual orientation: heterosexual; religion: Catholic; nationality: Slovene, geopolitics: western (Kuzmanić 2003).

Gender has been constructed as a fundamental opposition, particularly by the Catholic Church as the protagonist of traditionally divisive mentalities (good/evil, faithful/unfaithful, correct faith/wrong faith, sacred/profane). According to Christian dogma, man and woman are the two poles of a single whole, with no overlapping points. A woman does not have what a man has and vice versa. Ivan Štuhec, a contemporary Slovenian theologian, presents man as a rational arbiter belonging in the public sphere, and woman as an explicitly subjective and emotional being who belongs in the private sphere and is constituted as a person only through motherhood. Men think analytically while women think synthetically; men rationalise relationships and women live them out (The news weekly *Mladina*, 25 June 2001: 21). A similar underlying dichotomy could be identified in the attitude to the foreign manifested in the debate on the acceptability of a planned Muslim religious and cultural centre in Ljubljana. One part of the public perceives the centre as a foreign body in the national tissue and as a harmful intrusion into the Slovenian cultural landscape. Accordingly, the main issue has become the supposed 'impact' of the Muslim centre on the local population. Dragoš described this manner of thought as 'diptychisation'⁶, a phenomenon whereby a specific mental attitude towards reality is motivated by vested interests and reduced to two opposite poles (Dragoš 2003: 44).

The same mode of thought also lies at the foundation of continually revived public debates on identities. The philosopher Rosi Braidotti (1994) sees the EU's deft avoidance of debates on European identity as being to its advantage, because it enables various activities to concentrate on the prevention and elimination of discriminatory practices. The EU adopted the declaration on combating xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance in 1993, emphasising that there were no lines of demarcation setting apart these phenomena, as the set of ideas underlying each of them was one and the same. Discourse on identity seems to be problematic primarily because it draws on a difference or peculiarity. It is all right to ponder identity on the individual level when one needs answers to questions such as 'Who am I?', 'Am I different from others?', 'What is my place in the world?' However, these questions are typical of adolescence, the stage in life when a person is constituted as an autonomous, independent subject that must be able to develop new, more equality-based links with others. In the later stages of life, a person assumes various identities. Therefore, Braidotti refers instead to the 'nomadic subject', meaning people who are at home wherever they happen to be, who are always accepted and who are always able to express themselves.

The postmodern era has brought the de-centred subject with multiple identities to the fore. 'Adopting the internal plurality of identities and plural forms of individuality is a necessary prerequisite for life in a plural society, which does not entail the need to subordinate oneself or draw the lines of demarca-



⁶ Diptych: a hinged two-leaf tablet used for writing in Ancient Greece and Rome.

tion between oneself and others, or within oneself. We need internal plurality in order to be able to handle the controversial systems of sense' (Ulle 2000: 307). Simply speaking, we need internal plurality to be able to understand difference. The insistence on the classical concept of fixed, collective identities is pre-modern, because these identities are based on a difference that sets one apart from others who do not belong to a specific body or collective.

The topic of otherness originated in philosophical enquiries about the nature of identity. What constitutes the identity of things? Is the difference between the same and the Other an issue of essence or existence? Cultural difference is a major part of otherness.⁷ In the West, one such early difference set Christians/Catholics apart from pagans. 'The Enlightenment introduced the concern with classification and scientific attempts to classify humans on the basis of "race" and language, mind and the body. In the wake of the French Revolution nationhood became a defining element of identity. The notions of "race", language and nationality mingled and others were targets of hatred' (Cashmore 1996: 263). Genocide perpetrated against Indians, Tasmanians and Armenians was also rooted in a specific understanding of Otherness, as were slavery and the inhumane treatment of other autochthonous peoples that propelled colonialism and imperialism.

The issue of otherness was first made a relevant subject within structural anthropology and its approach to culture as a linguistic system. Analysis of discourse on the Other became an important tool which showed how the understanding of the Other is reflected in attitudes towards foreigners and the foreign. The Other is constituted in such a manner that it appears as a foreign body in a dominant culture, and therefore needs to be removed if that culture is to be healed. The anthropologist Henrietta L. Moore (1995: 16–20) explains this using the concept of cultural pollution, which forces certain groups of people into a subordinate position or even excludes them entirely. The cultural pollution theory refers to the set of beliefs that a collective body (a nation) can be contaminated by the foreign to such an extent that its existence becomes threatened. Such beliefs are xenophobic in and of themselves because they never arise from real dangers or concrete experience. Anthropological research on various taboos (related to the perception of pollution) also includes gender. Some cultures excluded women while they were menstruating, because menstrual blood was believed to be the source of lethal bacteria.

Xenophobia does not involve the fear of physical contamination, but the fear of being contaminated by another culture. In Slovenia, these apprehen-



⁷ It also brings changes in understanding racism. In the past, racism mainly referred to biological difference; today, it primarily refers to cultural differences. The changed focus is a consequence of the construction of immigrants as the suspicious carriers of dangerous cultural characteristics.

sions have found expression in debates on the Islamic religious and cultural centre mentioned above. Various groups have repeatedly demanded an answer to the question of the impact that such a centre might have on the nearby population. It is unclear what motivates such demands. Could it be emotional pain felt at the sight of a somewhat different architectural style? To date, no one has raised the question of emotional pain experienced at the sight of *avant garde* architectural projects in the Slovenian capital. Is it the fear that those living nearby will become 'overwhelmed' by Islam and will take to mass conversion? Is it the fear of violent, fundamentalist Muslims who will indiscriminately attack anyone they can get their hands on? Is it the fear that a neglected and marginalized social group will obtain greater power, adopt a more active public stance and participate in politics and state issues, *ergo*, that it will engage in activities to which, supposedly, a group of foreigners is not entitled? These questions primarily testify to the systematic fomenting of fear and unease arising from the conviction that foreigners do not deserve to be granted rights and that their status should never be equal to that of locals. Localness has become a criterion for granting rights.

Hate speech and the construction of the deviant foreigner

To date, most of the research on discrimination has focused on thinking patterns, that is, mentalities, and then only in regard to actual attacks on foreigners. In most cases, the viewpoints of the majority population were surveyed. Recently, these research studies have been supplemented with ones concentrating on the personal stories of victims and perspective on events. Research on public discourse on foreigners and the foreign is important primarily because hate speech is the most common component of xenophobic and discriminatory reactions and alone suffices to define an act as a racist or sexist incident. There is a graffiti in Ljubljana that reads: 'Bosnians are kings! Only when dead.' Public debates about erased citizens⁸ attempt to justify the unlawful erasure of 25,671 people from the register of permanent residents of Slovenia by associating these people with criminal activities during the war for Slovenia's independence in 1991. These people were collectively



⁸ 'Erased' is the term used to denote the 25,671 people that were erased from the register of permanent residents of Slovenia because they did not apply for Slovenian citizenship. Almost all of them were from the former Yugoslavia. They should have had the right to continue living in the country as foreigners with all the rights that arise from the permanent resident status, but were erased without any official notice or formal documentation, without any information on the act, and without any legal grounds for such an act. They lost all of their rights literary overnight; many of them lost their jobs, pensions and other allowances; their documents were destroyed, and many of them remained in Slovenia without any legal documents because they could not return to their county of origin because of the war or for other reasons (Zorn 2009).

constructed as enemy forces, although it was later revealed that the majority of them had nothing to do with the war, and even less with crime. They were ordinary people who were deprived of all rights practically overnight because of a combination of circumstances and a specific strategy adopted by the state. Although not one of their alleged crimes could be proved, those who deny that they should be granted rights continue to refer to their deviant nature. Jelka Zorn⁹, a researcher at the Faculty of Social Work in Ljubljana, has been collecting their testimonies for several years now. In an interview, she said:

When they cross the border they are categorized as criminals because their passports are not equal to ours and because they do not have a visa which is nowadays required from virtually every foreigner entering Slovenia. If they do not penetrate deeper into the country, they are returned immediately, and if they are caught somewhere inside Slovenia, they are left to the self-will of civil servants and policemen who can send them back whenever they want. (The weekly magazine *Jana*, 29 April 2002: 5)

Zorn also quoted a conversation with an unnamed police inspector who said that 'they can apply for asylum, but they won't get it. We are a small country and we don't have enough for ourselves. We don't need Romanians. What shall we do with the Romanians if we don't have enough for ourselves!' (*Ibid.*)

A research project conducted among youths by the Faculty of Education over the past years yielded similar results: 'Čefurji (a derogatory term for Slovenian citizens with ethnic roots in other ex-Yugoslav republics, mainly Bosnia) are responsible for the greatest part of violence ... There should be a group of policemen dealing with čapci (another derogatory term for the same group). I'm not a racist, but I can't stand those foreigners perpetrating crimes against the Slovenes' (Dekleva and Razpotnik 2002). A teacher interviewed for the same survey stated: 'Yes, those not skilled in Slovene cannot cope with equations either' (*ibid.*). This is a typical racist remark, linking nationality with intelligence, or political status with biological characteristics. The consequences for those who are the targets of such statements are disastrous. Similar stories can be found in the book *Zdej smo od tu – a smo še čefurji?* ['Now we are from here – are we still čefurs?'] by Alenka Kobolt; only in this case, the stories are told by the victims of discrimination.

The construction of the deviant foreigner is the most frequently used method for fomenting fear of the foreign; it is also one of the most effective. In such an atmosphere, criminal prosecution of foreigners appears to be entirely socially acceptable and even desirable, since such measures are supposedly



⁹ The doctoral dissertation *Etnografija vsakdanjega življenja ljudi brez slovenskega državljanstva* (The Ethnography of the Everyday Life of People without Slovenian Citizenship) describes the lives of immigrants and erased persons and reflects on the reasons leading to their specific treatment.

meant to protect the locals and increase their safety. The attitude towards foreigners also became evident during research on community resources and social capital conducted in 2001 in Ljubljana (Dragoš and Leskošek 2003). The entire neighbourhood of Nove Fužine was constructed as a ghetto and associated with poverty and crime solely because most of its residents were people from ex-Yugoslav republics. However, the statistical data showed that the crime rate in Nove Fužine was lower than in other neighbourhoods in Ljubljana. Nove Fužine has a population of 20,000 registered residents. In the opinion of the police, its size makes it comparable to the town of Nova Gorica, where the number of criminal offences was twice that of those recorded for Nove Fužine (*op. cit.*: 58). The association of this neighbourhood with crime obviously did not rest on the actual number of criminal offences, but on prejudices about people from the south. In other words, in the eyes of ordinary people, there were more criminals living in Nove Fužine than elsewhere. For these people, the crime rate was not a relevant factor; their prejudice does not correspond to facts whatsoever. A negative attitude towards foreigners was also obvious in responses to the question about multiculturalism. A mere 31% of respondents thought that multiculturalism enhanced community life, while 49% did not agree with this assertion. The greatest number of those who disagreed with it were members of outlying urban communities with no immigrant population, while most of those who agreed with the statement (that is, felt that multiculturalism enhanced community life) were from suburban communities with larger numbers of immigrants (*ibid.*: 59).

Hate speech is an important contributing factor to the fear of foreigners. Understanding and contextualising hate speech as a hostile act is a prerequisite for understanding intolerance or hostility. It is as much a criminal offence as a racially or nationalistically motivated physical attack. Hate speech shapes reality and hostile mentalities and creates the basis for all other kinds of hostility. Language creates reality, rather than merely reflecting it. If hate speech is not recognised as a criminal offence, it becomes more difficult to treat other incidents as racist, homophobic, nationalist or sexist. The decision as to whether the notice 'Disabled people not allowed' constitutes a hostile act or an issue of the proprietor's free choice as to whom he/she wants to sell services to depends primarily on how we interpret human rights and freedom of expression.

Words used with the purpose of humiliating, dehumanising, depriving of dignity, placing someone in an inferior position, and presenting someone as non-human or as a third-rate non-civilised being affect the social status of their targets. Their options, living conditions, fate, treatment and, last but not least, their self-perception are determined by the situation into which they are forced by those who have social power. A nonchalantly uttered word can have an impact on one's everyday life. Our life courses are in fact determined by such nonchalantly uttered words. For example, Roma have difficulties

finding work because employers believe that they are thieves and lazy by nature; women have difficulties entering political life because, in the public's view, they are primarily destined for the roles of mother and homemaker; the handicapped have difficulties entering education because they are perceived as intellectually inferior; and homosexuals have difficulties finding educator or teacher jobs because they are thought to be immoral and degenerate.

Hate speech is one of the most powerful discriminatory tools, especially because it is difficult to define and even more difficult to research and punish. It is unexplored territory, and is rarely the subject of academic interest (as anyone who has tried in vain to find literature dealing with it will know). Much like other forms of discrimination, it is based on the belief that some people are inferior because they belong to a particular group. Its main goal is to dehumanise, humiliate and frighten its targets, and to incite violence and other actions on the grounds of the 'racial', ethnic, sexual, religious, national or physical features or origins of these groups. Although the term 'hate speech' refers to verbal and written communication, it is particularly dangerous because it gives legitimacy to other forms of hostility, such as physical attacks or institutional oppression. Hate speech constructs foreigners as criminals, which is why, in Slovenia, law enforcement is the institution most involved in dealing with foreigners.

The examples below will show that no one can escape the dominant mentality (in this case it is an exclusive mentality). Traces of xenophobia and racism can be found in police and judicial procedures in Slovenia, and some of the most conspicuous cases have been described in reports by international institutions that combat discrimination. For example, the 2003 ECRI report¹⁰ draws attention to the fact that the police and the courts treat racist attacks as ordinary criminal offences or street fights (ECRI report 2003: 9). Police often carry out discriminatory checks on people of different skin colour or people whose appearance suggests a different culture (*ibid.*: 20). The Human Rights Ombudsman and Amnesty International have arrived at similar conclusions. Examples can also be found in various intolerance monitoring reports¹¹ and several scholarly articles dealing with xenophobia and racism. At the same time, various national and international institutions have established that, in their handling of xenophobic or racist incidents, the performance of the Slovenian police and courts is lacking and in fact reinforces discrimination. Below, three examples¹² defined as unambiguous cases of racism and xenophobia by



¹⁰ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

¹¹ Mirovni inštitut, Monitoring journal, published by ISH (founded after the racist attack on Trubarjeva street by The Commission for a Bearable State); various scholarly articles in sociological journals.

¹² I used articles from various magazines as the material for this analysis, but the main source are the documents handed to me by several victims of these procedures, with whom I also conducted in-depth interviews.

the academic and professional community, but wherein these dimensions were completely overlooked by judicial and police institutions, will be presented.

Case 1: The headscarf

A brief synopsis: Mrs. Amela Đogić¹³ came out of the building in which she lived and was stopped by two policemen in plain clothes who asked to see her documents. She gave them an identification document but did not have her temporary residence permit with her. She called her husband on the intercom and he immediately came down and brought the missing document. Nevertheless, the policemen handcuffed her and took her to the police station. In Amela Đogić's words, the grounds for their suspicion that she was committing a minor offence or even a criminal offence was the headscarf worn by Muslim women (The news daily *Delo*, 25 October 2002: 2). The policemen acted in accordance with Article 35 of the Police Act (Ur. l. RS 107/06), which stipulates when a police officer can check a person's identity. According to this Article, 'Police officers may carry out a procedure to establish the identity of a person who, by his/her behaviour, actions, appearance or loitering at a particular location or at a particular time gives reason for suspicion that he/she might commit, is committing or has committed a misdemeanour or criminal offence.' The incident prompted the intervention of the Human Rights Ombudsman and the Australian Embassy; a number of public protests were staged, including one in which a large group of people gathered in front of the police station on Trdinova street wearing headscarves as a sign of protest. The police offered its apologies to the victim a few weeks later and announced proceedings against the officers involved.

This incident is a clear example of a discriminatory interpretation of the law. It brings up several questions: How did it happen that the police officers were in front of the building at the moment the victim came out? How did they assess her as suspicious and why did they decide to take her to the police station? Unable to provide answers to these questions, the police eventually apologised and announced measures against the two police officers. The only sign of foreignness (and, consequently, suspiciousness) was the headscarf worn by the victim, which unambiguously showed her to be a Muslim. The reason for taking her to the police station was her belonging to an undesirable religion that is labelled¹⁴ as barbaric, uncivilised and primitive, and therefore dangerous and criminal. Operating in a xenophobic and discriminatory atmosphere, the police constructed themselves as the guardians of 'Sloveneness', and accordingly acted in an ultimately nationalistic manner by espousing cultural (racial) purity. This led them to use a procedure that was beyond their powers.



¹³ I use people's real names and surnames if these appeared in media reports and are, therefore, not a secret. I use initials for names that were not given in the media.

¹⁴ Especially after 9/11.

In doing so, they had counted on public support, since they were convinced that they were performing a positive and desirable task.

For the victim, the procedure was unpleasant and humiliating. Humiliation or treatment that violates dignity, lacks respect and reflects double standards – one set of which is applied to desirable groups, and the other to those that are undesirable – reflects the divisive mentality setting 'us' apart from the 'others', who usually come from the east or the south rather than from the west or the north. The event also helps us understand another phenomenon – the operation of 'hierarchical reversal' (Rommelspacher 1996: 26), whereby the one who is subordinated is ascribed the traits of the one who is superior and is also expected to assume the responsibilities and consequences. In this story, it was not the victim who was primitive, barbaric, or uncivilized, but rather the initiators of the procedure, who projected these traits onto the victim in an attempt to justify their conduct in the eyes of others and to themselves.

Case two: Roma men exiled

A brief synopsis: Two Roma men, one from Bulgaria and the other from Bosnia and Herzegovina, were stopped while transporting scrap metal. Both were foreigners in Slovenia; one had a valid visa and the other a valid passport. The police officers first took them to the police station in Ljubljana, where they were detained for over 12 hours, and then to a court for minor offences, where they were fined. Although the two men should have been released upon paying the fine, they were again taken to the police station, where the assistant commander ordered their removal from the country despite the fact that they had valid documents. He persisted in his intention to invalidate the visa and remove them from the country, regardless of a lawyer's warning that such conduct was unlawful: the power to invalidate a visa is solely in the hands to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The assistant commander's actions constitute multiple violations of Slovenian laws. His intention was thwarted only by the intervention of the Human Rights Ombudsman (The news weekly *Nedelo*, 1 December 2002: 13).

This example bears certain similarities to the one presented above, only in this case, the conduct of the police was even more excessive. The police officer took the law into his own hands. He violated something that he should have protected by upholding it consistently. In this case as well, it is possible to assume that the assistant commander thought that his conduct was legitimate. He was convinced that he was performing a socially useful act that would receive public support. He assumed the role of the guardian of what he thought was a dominant, desirable and generally accepted view, that is, that Roma are a foreign body in Slovenia; that they are a nuisance; that they are involved in illegal acts and crime; and that they are eternal immigrants to whom the state gives everything they need, but from whom it receives little

in return; to mention only a handful of the prejudices that have been voiced in public debates on Roma. The assistant commander's behaviour suggests that he was largely influenced by the dominant mentality and social climate of the time, so much so that he was willing to break the law, which is the basic tool in his field of work. Once police begin to tailor laws to suit their whims, a police state isn't far off: the dominant divisive mentalities eventually 'back-fire'; what was originally directed against others now affects us... For who can guarantee that an arbitrary violation of the law is just an isolated incident?

Case 3: Trubarjeva street

A brief synopsis: In July 2001, at 10 p.m., three skinheads first harassed and then attacked an African man who lived in the vicinity of a bar frequented by skinheads. The victim later stated that the skinheads in the bar always insulted him; but on that particular occasion, they followed him and provoked him. They used the derogatory Slovenian terms for black people, 'črnc', 'črnuh' and 'opica'¹⁵. They physically attacked him when he was in front of his home. He managed to break away from them and use the intercom to summon his two friends, who came to his rescue. Four skinheads and three African men were involved in the fight that ensued. Passers-by watched the fight and called the police without getting involved. The police took personal data from the seven men involved in the fight, but did not try to find witnesses. The next day, only the Africans were called to appear before the judge, and not the attackers. The event was categorised as a street fight between two equal groups, and the judge also treated it as such. At the hearing, the judge stated that the event was not exceptional, as dark-skinned people had been attacked elsewhere in the EU, and that they should get used to such things (The weekly magazine *Jana*, 24 July 2001: 7). Media articles covering this story bore titles such as 'Foreigners Fight' and 'Four Dark-skinned Foreigners and Slovenian Skinheads...' (The news daily *Večer*, 10 August 2001: 6) In the words of Inacio Bitchende, the victim, during the hearing the judge asked why one of the skinheads had face injuries, commenting that a victim could hit back only



¹⁵ The Slovene language does not have an outrightly hostile word for blacks which would, in terms of intensity, correspond to the American 'nigger', 'shine', etc. 'Črnc' and 'črnuh' are slang words based on the generally used, perfectly acceptable word for blacks, 'črnc' = 'black person': the first is basically the same word with a vowel omitted to sound more slangy; the second adds a suffix, '-uh', whose semantic role is usually limited to mild derision in jocular contexts: 'debeluh' = 'fatso', 'lenuh' = 'lazy bones', etc., and therefore can be translated as 'blackie'. 'Opica' means 'monkey'; though the most offensive of the three, its use as a derogatory term for blacks is not established and can therefore be considered *ad hoc*. Far from indicating a more tolerant society, this linguistic phenomenon could be a contributing factor to the failure of society to take the events described here seriously.

as many times as he/she had been hit. The one who has more injuries is therefore a greater victim. Under pressure from the angry public outcry, the police gave a press conference on July 10, 2001. They stated that they could not find witnesses to corroborate the allegation that it had been a racist attack, and that they themselves had not identified it as such, but rather as an ordinary fight. They further asserted that for an incident to be characterised as racist, the involvement of skinheads and Africans was not sufficient, and that the establishment of racist intolerance was the responsibility of criminal police, not of uniformed police (The news weekly *Mladina*, 16 July 2001: 16). Two of the skinheads involved in the incident had already been prosecuted for similar offences (The news daily *Dnevnik*, 11 July 2001: 2). In the end, the court fined all those involved except for Inacio Bitchende, who found witnesses and was able to prove that he had been a victim. Michel Obenga, himself a victim of racist attacks, commented on the court ruling as follows: 'People have permission to do with us whatever they want' (The news weekly *Mladina*, 18 February 2002: 29).

Attacks on Africans by one and the same group of skinheads have been going on ever since the early 1990s. The attack that occurred on city bus number 14 in 1994 was completely overlooked; neither the passengers nor the driver reacted, and the victim did not report the attack out of fear. Several years later, an African man was attacked near the Parliament building. The police filed a report, but did not detain the attackers or offer protection to the victim. It is not known how this incident ended or what steps, if any, were taken. Several years later, a man from Gabon and another man from Mali who were attending a congress in Slovenia were beaten. The police took action only when pressed by several embassies and only after the incident had attracted international attention. In this case as well, it is not known how the investigation ended. All these attacks were perpetrated by the same group of skinheads.¹⁶

The institutions responsible for handling these incidents overlooked the underlying racism and treated them as street fights. It is therefore possible to speak of institutional racism. There are more than enough elements to qualify such incidents as racist attacks. The facts that point to discriminatory behaviour and a high degree of tolerance of racist attacks on the part of the police and the judicial system are as follows:

- *The treatment of skinheads and African Slovenians as two equal groups, in line with the logic that 'one group would not be possible without the other'.* Victims are put on par with perpetrators, although the perpetrators are the proponents of hostile ideology, and the victims its targets. For a long time, similar logic underpinned the understanding of domestic violence. As long as domes-



¹⁶ In 2002, on Čopova street in Ljubljana, the group brutally thrashed a theatre actor who played the role of a homosexual in a television series. While beating him, they offended and humiliated him.

tic violence was seen as fights between a husband and a wife, a solution could not be found. It emerged only once the aggressor and the victim were clearly identified.

- *Failure to involve the criminal police in resolving the case, the criminal police being the authority responsible for the investigation of discriminatory behaviour.* The uniformed police made a deliberate decision to not forward the case to the criminal police. This points to the fact that it never occurred to them or to the judge that the incident could be characterised as a racist attack.
- *The diminishing or minimisation of the importance of the incident.* Why did the judge in the case state that similar incidents had happened all over Europe? What is the implication of her statement? Did she mean to suggest that the incident was an ordinary occurrence, unexceptional in every respect and therefore unworthy of serious consideration? Or that Slovenes were no more racist than other Europeans, who, after all, serve as role models for Slovenes? Did she mean to suggest that Slovenes should be content with the given state of affairs? Her statement represents an attempt to minimise the importance of the event through generalisation and by presenting it as part of a reality that cannot be avoided. This premise influenced the judgment and points to the dominant patterns of thought behind discrimination.
- *The reinterpretation of the criminal offence in favour of the attackers.* What is the source of the view that an act can be defined as self-defence only if the number of blows delivered in self-defence is identical to the number of blows delivered by the attacker and, consequently, the injuries sustained are equivalent? Does this mean that an act can be categorised as self-defence only when the victim sustains more injuries than the attacker? This is another example of the minimisation of the incident, with the responsibility transferred to the victim, who becomes responsible because he 'over-defended' himself. In other words, self-defence should be carefully rationed out if one wants to avoid losing the status of a victim. In this case, the victim is understood in the most banal sense of the word, that is, as a 'passive object'. It is passivity that makes one a victim. By extension, racism could be identified as such only when the victim does not defend himself/herself. On the other hand, in rape cases, passivity is an aggravating circumstance, as rape cannot be proved if the victim is disabled and cannot defend himself/herself. A raped woman qualifies as a victim only if the signs of resistance are visibly present.

The three stories above demonstrate institutionalised racism based on an aversion to and hatred of foreigners. What legitimates such operations by institutions is the belief that the people considered to be Others are not entitled to human rights, and that, consequently, the legal order governing the conduct of repressive bodies is not applicable to them. The conviction of representatives of institutions that they can take justice into their own hands

rests on a shared, collective attitude towards Others; in their view, their conduct seemed just. It is justifiable because they see themselves as defending the purity of the nation against the intrusion of Others while espousing larger goals. Social work and institutions concerned with people in distress are not immune to such ideologies. Social work practices can also be racist, nationalistic, or discriminatory in such ways, even though education for social work is relatively highly reflexive and self-critical. Books and articles on anti-discriminatory practices, power, empowerment, the role of users and changes in the welfare system have proliferated, especially over the past two decades. Furthermore, the last decade saw an increase in texts on social justice and solidarity (and to a lesser degree on equality), the effects of globalisation, radical social work and the role of social movements.

Xenophobia and racism help spread the new social order

The new social order is based on the idea of 'just' differentiation rather than equality¹⁷. Human rights have been increasingly turning into an arbitrary category that depends on the erratic judgments of those who appropriate the right to interpret them. Over the past decade, equality in Slovenia has been interpreted as a remnant of socialism (itself seen as a totalitarian system) and associated with '*uravnilovka*' (the levelling of wages) in the literal sense of the word. This creates an atmosphere in which inequality has become acceptable. The idea that there are two kinds of people – those who are better and those who are worse; ethical people and those for whom no values are sacred; honest people and those who exploit honesty and goodness – does not stop at the line dividing 'us' from 'them', locals from foreigners, but extends to and distinguishes between the poor and the rich, those at the top and those at the bottom, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals and so on. Such divisions have become the basis for contemporary pogroms and are manifested in expulsions of Roma from villages and towns, unemployment among women and people with handicaps, and in the establishment of impassable borders that spell death primarily for poor people.



¹⁷ The majority of states with a developed free market and a large number of powerful corporations place stress on Christian values and attribute to themselves the highest level of civilisation. Other countries that do not belong in the Christian world are denied their level of humanity. Buss and Herman (2003) draw attention to the growing power of Christian, and particularly Catholic, civil society groups operating within the international arena. Christian international activism has penetrated all important international institutions, and is particularly powerful within the UN. The main goal of Catholic organizations is to promote 'family values', where the standard is the average western heterosexual family with at least two children. It is presented as a natural formation, and as such is above objection. The globalisation of values therefore mainly refers to traditional values related to Christianity.

'Othering' processes and dynamics occur at the individual and collective or group levels and can be challenged in both domains. 'Othering' facilitates the articulation of dominant discourses that privilege insiders and promote dichotomous conceptualisations of the world and human social relations. The North/South divide of rich and poor countries is one of these... Commonly perceived as either-or formulations of reality, including choices about particular actions that people undertake, this expression ignores complexity, e.g., poverty within communities not just between them. Othering discourses accepted by outsiders become hegemonic or internalised as a normal condition of life. Hegemonic discourses penetrate the routines of everyday life and become rooted in a person's consciousness as taken-for-granted assumptions that make the exclusion of outsiders seem natural and immutable. Social interactions located within these dynamics render resistance difficult. (Dominelli 2007: 8–9)

The new rulers obtain consensus for such conduct primarily from racists. Political campaigns that rely on the labelling and persecution of particular groups in an effort to attract voters have become quite commonplace, and are greeted with enthusiasm by an ever greater number of people. Such populism changes mentalities, affects the perception of the world and becomes a code for understanding all social relations and processes. Yesterday, racist actions may have been directed against Roma and people without documents; today, their targets are the poor, addicts or homeless people. In Slovenia, they find expression not only in civil actions; they have become institutionalised and manifest themselves in acquittals in cases of sexism or homophobia and in the persistent equalisation of the victims and perpetrators of racist attacks.

When discriminatory practices become indisputable institutional practices, we can speak of the normalisation of racism and nationalism. It is not by chance that neo-liberals often find partners in conversation among neo-conservative and nationalist governments. Neo-liberalism itself implies the idea that there are two kinds of people – deserving and undeserving, winners and losers, the rich and the poor. The 'natural enemy' of both neo-liberalism and nationalism is the welfare state and the related concepts of equality, social justice and solidarity. Capital is served only by dehumanised beings without rights, who can be easily managed without fear of resistance. Racism is a dehumanising practice – its ambition is to present certain groups of people as barbaric and inferior so that their rights can be readily denied. The goal is unquestionable: to ensure a sufficiently large mass of people who are denied humanity so that they can be available for exploitation and put in the service of the interests of the capital of a small group which, in turn, is increasingly served by state governments.

Implications of changes for social work

Social work is currently confronted with changes triggered by globalisation that cause or increase social inequalities. Furthermore, it is also facing the

more or less obvious vanishing of the framework within which it was constituted in the beginning of the twentieth century, at the time of the emergence of welfare state. The conditions for its emergence were provided by social rights, the Fordist production system, and the labour, feminist, anti-Fascist and other movements of the early twentieth century. Social work was developed in parallel with practices and theories that sought to establish social control and regulate behaviour (Haus and Schulte 2009). It was born at a time when, in the name of humanisation, punishment was socialised and transferred from the body to the soul (Foucault 1986), triggering the development of a series of occupations and ideologies that took over the function of social control. Social control represents a form of influence that is based on interactions and relations among social groups that have unequal social positions. Consequently, mechanisms of social control most frequently apply to those groups living close to the margin or on the margins (Day 1981), in other words, the same ones that are often the primary concern of social workers. Social work with these groups is influenced by mechanisms used by society to regulate individual behaviour. These mechanisms are embedded not only in laws or professional doctrines, but also in the mentalities and the cultural framework of a specific society. They are both conscious and unconscious and dependent on beliefs about others.

Payne (2005) points out the connection between theories on the one hand and social work policies and the power of interest groups on the other. Various groups within the field of social work make select theories in accordance with their own understanding of the nature and practices of social work, or based on their attitude towards individuals and the community. Conflicts arise when social work itself is employed to regulate behaviour that is assumed to be deviant. The power to determine a certain type of behaviour as deviant and to define people's needs is the most important source of power within social work (Day 1981). Social workers are in a position to adopt important decisions about people's lives. The life courses of such people frequently depend on the intervention of social workers and, with it, on their fundamental beliefs about the nature of difficulties and the state's role in eliminating them. Apart from the personal inclinations of social workers, Lorenz (1994) also emphasises the societal dimension, arguing that social work is largely determined by the existing welfare system and the cultural context within which it takes place. Therefore, in dealing with individuals, social workers operate within a specific social reality.

Globalisation processes affect social work, and not only by producing new social groups defined as problematic or 'at risk'. They also produce social realities that increasingly aggravate social work. According to Wallerstein (in Beck 2003: 54–56), in the new, emerging social order, states will form a transnational coalition of state bureaucracies that will unify perspectives on values, norms, political ideas, management of the state and problems. Such a coalition will

be based on the technocratic understanding of complex social phenomena. It will develop a uniform *governmentality*, that is, a set of universal and simplified formulas for managing the state and social life¹⁸. The new social order will be co-created by a global civil society that will constitute a parallel form of political interaction. Its main function will be the expression of values and cosmopolitan moral consciousness, making it more capable of operating within the fields where the governments are less effective (Hurrell and Woods 1995). The globalisation of values mainly refers to traditional values related to Christianity, which cause or strengthen a dividing mentality and foster differences between 'us' and 'them' by maintaining traditional perspectives on the Other.

These changes have been causing the disintegration of classic welfare states by changing the meaning of the fundamental principles on which their development after the Second World War was based: social justice, equality and solidarity.¹⁹ Neo-liberalism has changed the meaning of justice. It has reduced taxes for the rich (in accordance with the principle that they should be able to enjoy what they have earned), vindicating this move by dividing people into the deserving and the undeserving (working people and those without work), thereby justifying the increase in social inequalities. It perceives solidarity as a personal stance, leaving the care for vulnerable members of the community to individuals and encouraging the development of the informal sector and private services (Leskošek 2005). The responses of social work to these changes vary. We are witnessing, on the one hand, a plethora of critical analyses of present social relations on the local and global level and, on the other, an increase in the number of social work curricula geared to the new need for efficient social workers who will adopt the universal values of the new social order and find their way around the service market without problematising social relations. It is true that social work has never achieved consensus about how to approach social inequalities and their sources, and that, as a result, different theoretical traditions and practical approaches were developed. However, the present time differs from the past in that the disintegration of the welfare state is causing the disintegration of the public sector, that is, the domain in which the practice of social work had been most intensely present. Privatisation and de-institutionalisation reduce the demand for highly skilled social workers, who are being replaced with a new breed of workers with a narrow, pragmatic focus on a very limited area of human needs, difficulties and problems. Pragmatic approaches, a narrow focus and insufficient education prevent them from obtaining a structural analytical overview of social reality. Since they incorporate – or do not problematise – discriminatory ideologies of the new social order, social relations remain unreflected and social inequalities



¹⁸ For more on this, see Dean (2006).

¹⁹ The principle of solidarity refers to the institutionalisation of the principle which enables social justice and equality through the redistribution of income by means of taxes.

are strengthened. Being based on the principles of social justice, equality and solidarity,²⁰ social work represents an obstacle for neo-liberalism, the future of both the academic discipline and practice is strewn with risks and challenges.

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²⁰ As defined by IASSW.

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PART III

Participatory Approaches in Social Work

Chapter 8

Social Work with People with Dementia: The Case of Slovenia

Jana Mali

Social work and dementia

It is estimated that about 5 percent of people over 65 years of age in Slovenia have dementia; for people over 80 years of age, this figure is 20 percent (Mali and Milošević-Arnold 2007). Dementia is not only a serious medical condition. Its consequences also have a deep impact on a person's social functioning, meaning that the role of social workers is important. Due to the characteristics of dementia, the affected persons are not able to maintain their existing social contacts and tend to be excluded by their environment, with the consequence that their capacities gradually deteriorate even further. Also, the relatives of persons with dementia become socially excluded in a way, for they invest all their energy and time in the person with dementia and increasingly neglect their usual social activities; as a result, they too grow increasingly lonely. Dementia therefore represents a serious experience for everybody involved in the interpersonal relationship: the person with dementia, his/her relatives, friends and neighbours, and also professionals. The consequences of dementia often bring about constraints in interpersonal understanding. To be able to work in the field of dementia, social workers need specialised knowledge for work with people with dementia and those in their social network.

Social work with older people is referred to as a specific area of social work; at the same time, older people are a specific population that social workers work with. Mali (2008) demonstrates the substantiation of social work with older people through a development perspective and describes social work with older people as a specific field of both social work and the wider science of gerontology. An interesting comparison of the foundations and definition of social work with older people is given by both foreign (Koskinen 1997, see also Burack-Weiss and Brennan 1991) and Slovenian authors (Milošević-Arnold 1999, 2004), and useful concepts for the field of social work with older people have been introduced by some Slovenian social work authors (Čačinovič-Vogrinčič et al. 2005, see also Zaviršek et al. 2002, Dragoš 2000, Ramovš 1992, 2003, Flaker 1998) who do not deal directly with social work with older people (Mali 2007: 376). A specific characteristic of social work with older people in Slovenia is what Koskinen (1997: 2) has described as a

focus on increasing older people's capacity and ability to face problems and solve them. Accordingly, social workers make an effort to identify and mobilise older people's power and resources instead of simply drawing attention to their powerlessness (Mali 2008: 65). Conceptualisations of social work with older people can benefit from the principles for work with older people described by Burack-Weiss and Brennan (1991: 5–14). It would be useful to briefly paraphrase these principles:

- Seeking strengths: Social workers provide help and support for older people to draw strength from their wealth of life experience in order to overcome their present problems.
- Promoting maximum functioning: Social workers focus not only on individual losses which older people often face, but also take into account the entire life context in which these losses occur.
- Promoting a non-restrictive environment: Individuals have the right to live independently in the kind of environment and in a manner that does not endanger their lives and the lives of others. The transition from a functionally inappropriate living environment to a more suitable one requires a gradual approach and maximum respect for the individual's desires, needs and requirements.
- Promoting ethical practice: Ethics serves as a reminder that two basic ethical principles for work with older people must not be neglected – respect for and preservation of their dignity.
- Respecting cultural differences: Ethnicity affects the choice of assistance and the individual's attitude towards living in an institution, as well as his/her acceptance of illness and relationships within the family. At the same time, it also affects the relationship between the person and the social worker.
- Working within a systems perspective: Social workers interact with individuals and their environments. Older people are often dependent on the help they receive from their social environment, either at the informal level (help from their families, relatives, neighbours, friends and acquaintances) or at the formal level (the help of professionals from various organisations and institutions).
- Setting appropriate goals: To achieve appropriate goals, social workers and users need to set them together. They should be based on the actual situation and the individual's circumstances and, at the same time, should motivate the user to undertake the optimal activity to achieve the set goals.

At the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Ljubljana, education for social work is oriented towards the principles outlined by Burack-Weiss and Brennan. These principles are also further articulated within the following concepts:

- Partnership: A partner relationship in social work means the equal participation of the user and the social worker in the definition and solution of the problem, and includes the expert's belief in the user's ability to successfully solve his/her problem and in his/her competence to take

responsibility and control over his/her life. The Code of Ethics of Social Workers of Slovenia¹ is permeated by the partner relationship between the expert and the user.

- The power perspective: In modern social work, the power perspective represents a paradigm shift towards looking for new resources and power for users. In Slovenia, this concept forms a constituent part of the working relationship concept developed by Čačinovič-Vogrinčič et al. (2005). The power perspective offers a simple formula, namely the mobilisation of the user's power (talent, knowledge, abilities, resources) in order to achieve his/her goals and visions and aid him/her in leading a higher quality of life, in line with the user's own concept of quality.
- An anti-discriminative orientation: According to the Code of Ethics of Social Workers of Slovenia, the practice of social work is oriented against prejudice, negative relationships and the inadequate treatment of people on the basis of characteristics such as 'race', gender, religion, ethnicity, age or other characteristics.
- Social network: Old age influences social networks and vice versa. The reciprocal nature of this relationship stems from the fact that 'ageing influences social networks through the choice of people with which we associate, and through the way in which we do it' (Dragoš 2000: 293).
- Community care: The process of asserting the community care concept is related to de-institutionalisation and the establishment of adequate services of help in the community, as well as residential groups in which people can maintain their identity and autonomy. Different models of de-institutionalisation from around the world and in Slovenia are described by Flaker (1998).

These principles underline the specific nature of social work with older people in Slovenia and correspond to some aspects of work with people with dementia found in foreign social work literature². The concepts foreground an integrated understanding of the individual and his/her needs and assert that the user is a partner in the helping process, which serves to foreground his/her influence in choosing different kinds of help. The remainder of this chapter focuses on a presentation of the specific aspects of work with people with dementia in connection with the concept of social work with older people presented above; its aim is to illustrate the specific role played by social workers in the phenomenon of dementia.

The phenomenon of dementia in social work research

It is of great importance for the profession to initiate research on the current involvement of social workers in this field with the aim of designing



¹ Available at <http://www.fsd.uni-lj.si/dsdds/Kodeks%20etike.htm> (27. 5. 2009).

² See, for example, Marshal (2005) and Feil (2005).

new guidelines for the activities of social workers working with persons with dementia in different settings, which could also be applicable to caregivers. Since 2003, the Faculty of Social Work in Ljubljana has been involved in action research on dementia. The research project *Community Care for Persons with Dementia* (2005–2008) was designed on the basis of a previous research project, *Work with Persons with Dementia in Homes for the Older People: A Model of Treatment* (2003–2004). The research strategy was based on the tradition of grounded theory pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and on the tradition of qualitative research developed at the Faculty of Social Work in Ljubljana by Mesec (1998).

In the research project *Work with Persons with Dementia in Homes for the Older People: A Model of Treatment* (Flaker et al. 2004), the researchers wanted to collect and review information on the experience of work with people with dementia in homes for older people. 22 homes for older people were included in the research. The phenomenon of dementia was approached from the perspective of the residents themselves, as well as from that of their interaction with their relatives and the staff in the homes. The aim was to obtain as accurate information as possible on what life was like for people with dementia living in homes for older people; towards this end, in-depth interviews were conducted with all staff directly or indirectly involved with them. The interview questions were exhaustive, and examined numerous details of the daily routine at the homes in order to get a picture of what homes for older people were doing in this area, where the staff saw problems, and what solutions they suggested. The persons interviewed included the directors of the homes, heads of health and nursing care, social workers, registered nurses, work therapists, physiotherapists and doctors. Nurses, nurse's aides, cleaning staff, wardens, receptionists, and accountants were also interviewed. Alongside the interviews, students conducted a close observation of the life of 27 residents with dementia in different phases of the disease. The interviewers also carried out group interviews with members of the expert team. In the discussion, they reflected upon their own experience of getting acquainted with the life of residents with dementia and collecting data for the research. Through the group interviews, the criterion of actively involving the researched subjects in the research was met.

It must be emphasised that the research was limited to the life of people with dementia living in homes for older people, an aspect which, in certain segments, would later prove to be a weak point, since the life of residents at the homes is also connected with life in the community and existing forms of help available to these people. Another point to consider is that the majority of people with dementia live in a domestic environment, where they have to cope with diverse problems. Such people were not included in the research, which is why a pilot research project called *Community Care for Persons with Dementia* was initiated. The overall aims of this research included

presenting the life of persons with dementia and the problems encountered by their relatives (family caregivers); identifying the forms, types and quality of care provided for persons with dementia in the community; defining the experiences of the caregivers (descriptions of professional and personal care); identifying services within the community which provide help for persons with dementia and their relatives: home help organisations, health care centres, centres of social work, residential homes for older people, psychiatric institutions, programmes offered by non-governmental organisations, diverse associations; and developing adequate forms of help and services.

The data was collected by students of the Faculty of Social Work during their practice placements and by graduate students preparing materials for their theses. The students visited health care centres, centres of social work, residential homes for older people, and non-governmental organisations in their hometowns, where they inquired about the existence of programmes for persons with dementia and their relatives. Each student conducted interviews with five persons with dementia living at home and their relatives; with five representatives of an institution dealing with persons with dementia; and with five caregivers employed by organisations that provide home help. The data referred to in this chapter includes a sample of 29 persons with dementia, 24 relatives, 12 caregivers and 23 representatives of institutions which encounter persons with dementia within their professional work.

Results important for developing social work with people with dementia

In the research project *Work with Persons with Dementia in Homes for the Older People: A Model of Treatment*, it was established that three models of treatment for persons with dementia were applied: the integrated model, the segregated model and the partly segregated model. Each model has its weak points and strong points. Within the integrated model, residents with dementia live together with other residents, an arrangement which fosters mutual understanding and acceptance, which has a positive impact upon the treatment and behaviour of persons with dementia; also, residents who offer help to their co-residents with dementia experience a sense of self-confidence. However, conflicts do arise, since co-existence with persons with dementia requires a lot of patience, understanding and adaptation, and this cannot be expected of all the residents. Some homes therefore apply the segregated model of care for persons with dementia; these persons are accommodated in separate, specialised sheltered wards. This form of care requires a clear definition of the contents of work in order to ensure a high quality of residence and care for persons with dementia. According to the research, the number of residents in wards of this kind ranged from 12 to 35; the smaller wards have been able to establish a family atmosphere, while the bigger ones are characterised by alienation and an institutionalised climate. It is very important that

these wards provide not only accommodation, but also opportunities for active involvement in daily activities, in line with the abilities of the individual resident. A specific trait of these wards is that the medical staff often carry out work which they otherwise would not: a nurse, for example, carries out memory exercises. At the centre of attention is the individual person with his/her special characteristics, habits and needs.

Some homes opted for a kind of a mixed, partly segregated, form of work by setting up special groups for persons with dementia. The group meets every day, with the same leader and in the same room, which is made available for this purpose. According to the research, these groups meet at different times and for different lengths of time: in some homes, they only meet once a week, but in most cases, they meet every day of the week, with some only meeting in the morning, and others meeting in the morning and in the afternoon. In most cases, the groups include between 10 and 16 persons with dementia, and efforts are made to join together persons who are roughly in the same stage of the disease. The aim of the groups is to give the persons with dementia something to do, preserve their existing faculties, impede the progress of the disease, allow socialising, and prevent conflicts between persons with dementia and other residents. Although the residents with dementia are separated from other residents for a major part of the day, they retain contact with them and are not stigmatised.

The research also showed that social workers adopt different roles when working with persons with dementia. In most cases, it is the social worker who maintains contact with the relatives; the social worker's main task is thus to explain the symptoms and other characteristics of the disease to the relatives. Another important role of the social worker entails cooperating in preparing biographies of residents with dementia, which then serve as a basis for an individualised action plan for each individual resident. In some homes which apply the segregated model of care, social workers spend most of their working hours in the wards for residents with dementia.

The research project *Community Care for Persons with Dementia* demonstrated that coping with dementia is a serious life challenge for persons with dementia, as well as for their relatives, friends and acquaintances and experts. Feelings of powerlessness are common among persons with dementia, and they frequently feel depressed, angry and misunderstood. Friends, acquaintances, and neighbours gradually retreat or are rejected by the affected person. The social environment is gradually reduced, both for the person with dementia and for the relatives who provide care for him/her. In such circumstances, it becomes difficult for those involved to see a sense in life. Persons with dementia have to cope with the changes brought about by the disease on two levels: their individual, internal perception of the disease and their relationships with other persons. As the disease progresses, they have to realise that it will be increasingly difficult for them to carry out simple everyday

tasks; they have to cope with failures, unconnected acts; and they frequently experience anger, despair and fear. Their circle of friends will become smaller and smaller. Increasingly strong feelings of being lost and deserted gradually create a different life situation, one of alienation and non-recognition. The relatives soon represent the person's only contact with the outside world, making the person with dementia increasingly dependent upon them. The relatives in turn become overburdened, which leads to a changed atmosphere within the family. When they reach the stage of not being able to cope with the burden of care, professional caregivers are usually engaged. Persons with dementia need the assistance of a person who will stand by them, help them maintain their independence and only do what the person concerned is not in a position to do by himself/herself. It is of the utmost importance that good communication be established between the person with dementia and his/her caregiver.

The attitude of professionals involved in the care of people with dementia varies: it is mostly the relatives who first seek contact with professionals. They seek help from the institutions and experts whom they believe would be most able to provide competent help; in doing so, they rely on their previous experiences with experts, information from the environment they live in and, above all, on their instincts. The institutions they most frequently listed include health care centres, homes for older people, centres of social work and psychiatric hospitals. In urban environments, they would also turn to the non-governmental organisation *Spominčica* (Forget-me-not), the Slovene Association for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders.

The research data also indicates that traditional patterns of treating persons with dementia still prevail. Social workers at the centres of social work continue to refer these persons to homes for older people, or advise their relatives accordingly. Their advice is based on the recommendations of the relatives, doctors or field nursing service once they think that the person concerned can no longer remain in his/her own home. When direct contact with the affected person is established, social workers are disturbed by the fact that their memory is so seriously affected that what was agreed upon has been forgotten. Another disturbing feature cited by social workers is the difficulty of working with people with dementia who have no caretakers who would defend their interests and who refuse to go to a home. Such a situation makes it impossible for them to help.

Relatives who are the sole caregivers for persons with dementia tire out from providing direct care for them. They are unable to find additional sources of either formal or informal help; what they would need are diverse forms of help, ranging from the provision of information and training about adequate care for the person with dementia to extensive personal help and support. At present, only a few forms of formal help within the community environment are being offered, and the burden of care therefore rests mainly

on the family members and other informal caregivers, in most cases relatives or neighbours. Within the family, it is mostly women who take over the care of their elderly parents. Some of them may still be employed, while others have already retired and, due to their own medical condition and age, are unable to provide adequate care for the sick relative. They have virtually no information on the care of persons with dementia, and are torn between the responsibility of caring for their parents and that of caring for their own families. The most frequently mentioned difficulties include work overload, their own health problems, financial problems, and a poor understanding of and insufficient knowledge about dementia.

Although the hospitalisation or institutionalisation of a relative with dementia does bring about temporary and partial relief for the family caregivers, the older person situated in an institution still requires his family and their emotional support, which cannot be provided by anyone else. At the same time, once the family member is admitted to a home for older people, the distress felt by his/her relatives does not cease to exist. They experience it when they see how much their parents miss their home, and through feelings of guilt stemming from the fact that they suggested the move to a home and insisted on this solution. Such impressions are intensified by the fact that most homes do not provide an adequate level of privacy; their relative is even lonelier there; and there is not enough staff to provide adequate care. Visits to the home present another stressful situation for the relatives. In the research, a case was noted where a woman did not visit her mother because she reproached her with admitting her to the home to get rid of her.

Conclusion

Social work with persons with dementia and their family caregivers contributes a social perspective to solving the multidimensional problems of persons with dementia and their caregivers. In both research projects discussed above, it was found that social workers lack the knowledge which would allow them to approach and adequately deal with problems related to dementia. In response, the Faculty of Social Work prepared a series of seminars and workshops on this topic. However, in the future more attention will have to be paid to the phenomenon of dementia by undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes of social work than has been the case to date. At the moment, it is important to define an orientation for social work with people with dementia in institutions and in the community.

In homes for older people, it is possible to develop a social model of care for persons with dementia based on an individual approach and equal cooperation of health and social care services. It would be an integrative model of treatment within specialised programmes adapted to residents in different stages of dementia. Certain changes would have to be made within the

homes in order to make them more able to meet the needs of residents with dementia. These changes refer to direct work with the affected persons, and are based on a professionally designed procedure which would help the residents with dementia feel safe and accepted in their new institutional environment. Here, an individual team formed as a project group for each individual resident would play an important role. The team members would all be staff who directly work with the resident with dementia within the home, but may also include anyone concerned with the person's well being, including staff from other institutions, volunteers and advocates. A key worker would be chosen by the resident himself/herself, and would be responsible for carrying out an individual action plan for each new resident and monitoring the process of his/her getting accustomed to the new environment. Other important members would include a social worker, an occupational therapist, a doctor, a psychiatrist, a nurse, a nurse's assistant, and a housekeeper. The main task of the individual team would be to provide individualised services for each resident based on his/her individual plan of services, as opposed to a package of services available to all residents. Individual services would allow the affected person to make choices regarding care, whereby the team would see to their implementation, since the resident himself/herself does not have the power to do this.

Within the social model of care in homes for older people, the tasks of the social worker are specific and include the following: managing the admission procedure for a person with dementia; preparing an individualised programme for each resident and the coordination of individual programmes for different residents; assisting residents in choosing a key worker; individual work with residents; work with groups of residents (applying diverse methods and techniques); individual work with relatives; the organisation of various forms of work with relatives (responsibility, coordination of programmes, evaluation of the degree of satisfaction of the relatives with the forms of work etc.); coordination and management of supervision or intervision groups for the staff working in the wards; responsibility for the evaluation of the programmes for persons with dementia; acquiring, training and supervising volunteers for work with persons with dementia; etc. The tasks listed here are rooted in the existing concepts of social work in homes for older people as well as in the holistic treatment model of dementia developed in the research presented above. Unfortunately, the realisation of these tasks has been pretty weak, mainly because of the very low number of social workers employed in homes. According to the current standards, only one social worker can be employed per 195 residents, and it is clear that social workers are not able to perform all the tasks.

Social work plays an important role in the search for new possibilities which would allow persons with dementia to live within the community for as long as possible. Although the care of such persons is extremely demanding

and stressful for the relatives, it also offers positive experiences for them. Among other things, many of them stated that they established a more personalised and loving relationship with their parents; discovered a new sense of life; and experienced personal growth, satisfaction, better interpersonal relationships and a positive response from other people. The fact that the relatives also have positive experiences is useful information for social workers, since it helps them understand that the care of relatives with dementia is not only stressful and full of problems. Our practice confirmed the importance of focusing on the needs of people with dementia and their carers. It enables us to adapt, in cooperation with them, their everyday lives to their needs, wishes and abilities to the greatest possible extent. By researching, discovering and identifying the needs of people with dementia, we also discover the abilities and capabilities of these people for independent living in a community. Furthermore, we assess the suitability and success of (in)formal assistance.

The well-being of persons with dementia and their relatives should be considered the joint responsibility of all the professions involved in the care of people with dementia. Care for people with dementia involves various registers of existence and combinations of various resources (formal and informal, the welfare state and relatives and medical, psychological, social and technical interventions). Effective dementia care involves establishing a number of links and providing answers not only to the users, but also to their environment. Through the more intensive engagement of social workers in programmes of treatment for persons with dementia and in providing support for their family caregivers, it is expected that, in the future, social work will develop new professional roles in this challenging new field of practise.

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Chapter 9

Recognition and Recognitive Attitudes between Refugees and Authorities: A Finnish Example

Kati Turtiainen

Introduction

Finland was among the first countries to host resettled refugees processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Welcoming people based on international protection needs started in the 1970s, with a small group of Chilean refugees. Later, in the 1980s, Finland began accepting refugees from Vietnam. Systematic refugee resettlement began in the beginning of the 1990s; the annual quota is now 750 refugees. These resettled persons are known as quota refugees, and are the target group of this chapter.¹

Article 1 A (2) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as someone who has left his or her country or is unable or unwilling to return to it 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'. Finland follows this refugee status criterion and the concept put forward in the Geneva Convention of 1951. This concept of the refugee, which differs from descriptions found in many other countries, will be used in this chapter. It is important to keep in mind that refugee resettlement programmes vary from country to country based on how they grant access to their country to people in need of international protection.



¹ Up to the end of 1980s, most of the immigrants coming to Finland were return migrants from Sweden or immigrants with family ties in Finland. By the middle of the 1970s, the total number of foreigners was only around 10,000. The situation changed radically during the 1990s, when the number of foreign citizens residing in Finland increased four-fold. The latest statistics, from the end of the year 2008, show a steady increase in the number of foreign citizens, which is now at about 140,000, 25,000 of which are quota refugees. However, the total percentage of foreign citizens is still low by European standards. Out of a population of 5 million, only 2 % are of foreign origin. Recently, the government immigration policy has taken more interest in work-related migration. Finland is being forced to solve the problem of an aging population and to secure the economic well-being of the country. The growing multiculturalism of Finnish society places increasing demands on the intercultural competence of members of the host culture in many areas of life, including the public sector (Brewis 2008, 18).

Migration has a dual character (Soydan 1998: 23–24): while it solves problems in certain instances, it generates problems in other contexts, both for individuals as well as in communities. In the global context, refugee resettlement is one of the available problem-solving mechanisms for refugee issues. Resettlement countries have adopted different approaches to the division of responsibility for the reception of resettled refugees. In some countries, the central government is the main player, whereas other countries employ a high degree of delegation to local and regional authorities. The latter model is found in the Scandinavian countries, where local municipalities are vested with wide administrative and budgetary powers (Ekholm et al. 2005). In Finland, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for resettled refugees at the central government level. It covers the costs of reception incurred by the receiving municipalities in accordance with agreements between the government and individual municipalities. The resettlement of refugees in a given municipality therefore depends on the municipality's own political willingness.

Alongside humanitarian immigration, the central role of public sector authorities in the Scandinavian system provides another context for this article. In Finland, work for receiving refugees is based on The Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999, 280/2006), which specifies the responsibilities of various parties in integration work. In particular, the role of the municipal authorities and social workers is essential in the refugee receiving services. In practise, social work in refugee matters consists of the following main areas: counselling on social benefits and integration support measures; psychosocial support; child protection; community work and networking activities; providing information; and awareness-raising activities. The term 'social workers' will be used for those who engage in special social work practices; in all other cases, the term 'authorities' will be used.

Recognition of refugees will be considered through examples of resettlement as a problem-solving mechanism on the personal level. The key concept of this article is recognition, as defined by Axel Honneth (1995), who uses the concept to construct normative criteria for a good society. Another central author, Charles Taylor (1995), points out that getting recognition is a vital human need and the foundation for equal human relations. The definition of 'refugee' includes persecution, which often consists of forms of non-recognition such as psychical abuse, discrimination, humiliation, and disrespect on the part of the authorities in the countries from which refugees have escaped. According to Honneth (1995: 129, 2007: 136–139), non-recognition threatens physical and social integrity and dignity. Honneth's (1995: 92–131, 2007: 138–139) approach is based on the notion that the possibility of identity formation depends on the development of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. These practical relations to the self are built in an inter-subjective process. Corresponding forms of recognition, love, respect and esteem also

exist in social reality.² Heikki Ikäheimo (2003: 128–135) clarifies Honneth's analysis by suggesting that the different attitudes of recognition correspond to different dimensions of the personhood of the recognised person: we love or care for people as singular beings; we respect people as autonomous and entitled to certain rights; and we esteem people for their particular qualities.

Refugees' past experiences of non-recognition by the authorities have an effect on the formation of trust towards the new society and its authorities.³ This notion has led me to look at the prerequisites of trust formation in the relationship between newly arrived refugees and public authorities. The concept of trust can be examined in terms of mutual relations of recognition (Kotkavirta 2000: 60–61). I understand the different types of recognition as a basis for the formation of trust towards the new society.

Recognition will be located and examined in the relationship between refugees and social workers, in light of the latter's key role as receiving workers in the Scandinavian model. The research discussed here focused on the early stages of the integration process in Finland. My first research task focused on the following question: What kinds of needs, traits, and rights are identified in the relationship between authorities and refugees? Needs that refugees *would have liked* to have recognised are also discussed, so it must be kept in mind that all the interviewees' needs weren't recognised following their arrival in Finland. My second task was to identify the prerequisites or the means of successful recognition in relationships between resettled refugees and authorities, especially social workers. This entails the identification of needs and prerequisites of successful recognition in my data using the forms of recognition described by Axel Honneth and the philosophers Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen.

Identification, recognition and recognitive attitudes

Ikäheimo (2003: 137–144) proposes drawing a clear distinction between recognitive attitudes and recognition on the one hand and the social and institutional settings where recognition and/or mis-recognition may occur on



- ² Honneth (1995) sketches an approach similar to that of Hegel or George Herbert Mead, focusing on the importance of social relationships for the development and maintenance of a person's identity. This approach can be understood as a continuation of the Frankfurt School's attempt to locate the motivating insight for an emancipatory critique and struggle within the domain of ordinary human experience rather than in the revolutionary theory of intellectuals.
- ³ In a previous study (Turtiainen 2008), I examined trust and confidence between refugees and the host society from different perspectives. Trust is an important element of social capital which has an essential bearing on whether refugees become players or non-players in a new society (Dominelli 2008). The findings include four different types of stories: trust stories, conflict stories, withdrawal stories, and joined stories.

the other. The relationship between these is extremely complicated (Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007: 42–43). In this article, the nexus of newly arrived refugees in Finland and their social workers and other authorities forms the social setting where recognitive attitudes are to be found. These social settings are heavily influenced by past experiences. Refugees experienced non-recognition at the hands of authorities during the refugee process. Also, the laws, regulations, and values of the new country influence the social settings.

Ikäheimo further (2003: 137–144, see also Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007: 37–42) argues that it is important to distinguish between distinctly recognitive attitudes and the totality of attitudes instantiated in a given personal relationship. In line with Ikäheimo, I view recognition as a 'two way complex of attitudes', where attitudes are different ways of accepting another person as a person, which, to be exact, means respecting him/her, esteeming him/her and/or loving him/her. Here, 'love' means care for another person's well-being. Recognition is not a crude natural process, but something that is always already taking place for certain reasons: it consists of mutual attitudes involving judgements (*ibid.* 2003: 130). It is also important to understand the other part of the relationship as capable of making judgements about us.

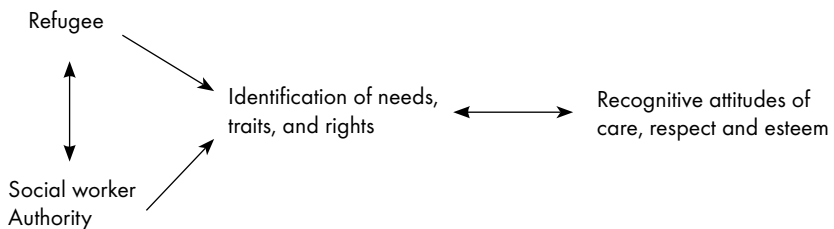
Ikäheimo and Laitinen (2007: 43–47) point out that one can easily be seriously mistaken about the recognitive attitudes of others towards himself/herself. By attitudes towards persons, they understand not only explicit opinions or views, but also implicit background attitudes that affect the ways in which we encounter others. Recognitive attitudes have an important role in the motivation of action: we can often read others' attitudes towards us in their actions. Conversely, Ikäheimo and Laitinen also point out that it is often important for a person to know that someone loves, respects or esteems him/her, *even if that other person has no way of acting on these attitudes*. Another important point is that people are easily prone to imagining or guessing others' attitudes towards them; this can sometimes lead to unnecessary conflicts or feelings of insult. For example, a service user might think that a social worker wields too much power, even if the social worker is in fact carefully respecting the client's rights. In such cases one cannot speak of a real lack of recognition because the social worker genuinely cares for the client's problems and respects the client's autonomy and the conditions which must be fulfilled to maintain it. In the 'dialogical' model of recognition that Ikäheimo and Laitinen support, recognition is a matter of real attitudes, and a merely imagined lack of recognition is not a genuine lack of recognition. Following Honneth, Ikäheimo and Laitinen, I stress the importance of a dialogical model of recognition. If one person in a given relationship does not have a positive attitude towards the other person, toleration may quickly set in. Toleration of another person without recognition means that the person in question is unwanted, but must be tolerated because nothing else can be done (Ikäheimo 2008: 27–28, see also Rainer Forst 2007: 215–237).

Many authors, such as Honneth and Taylor, use the terms 'recognition', 'identification', and 'acknowledgement' to describe roughly the same phenomenon⁴. I, on the other hand, draw a distinction between 'identification' and 'acknowledgement' in terms of building relations of recognition between refugees and authorities. Ikäheimo's (2003: 142–151) and Ikäheimo and Laitinen's (2007: 34–37) clarification serves as a base for my understanding of these concepts.

'Identification' is used as a synonym for recognition in the sense that one identifies things and persons as definite individuals having some particular feature(s). Identification can be external or internal (self-identification). Self-identification is never completely independent of qualitative identifications made by others. From the workers' perspective, identification can be seen as a proactive work approach (Valtonen 1999: 55). I understand identification as the complex process of the identification and self-identification of the needs or traits of refugees in the relationship between refugees and authorities. These needs or traits are those which refugees would like to get recognised. Furthermore, these needs or traits must be identified if recognition is to take place. However, identification is not enough if it does not lead to recognition.

'Acknowledgement' is used as a synonym for recognition in the case of norms, rules and so on. Through acknowledgement, things are construed, for example, as valid, good, genuine. I use the concept of acknowledgement when special rights are or should be recognised by the laws and regulations.

Figure 1. The process of recognition between refugees and authorities



Data and analysis

In my study, I looked for extracts from my data that would be applicable to the framework of Honneth's or Ikäheimo's theory of recognition and recognitive attitudes. I approached the data by asking the following questions: Firstly, what are the identified attributes of the interviewees? What was recognized,



⁴ Ikäheimo (2003: 141–151) analyzes Taylor's (1995) understanding of these concepts. He concludes that each of these concepts is a complicated phenomenon in its own right and that grasping their internal connection is a far from easy task.

or what did they want to get recognised in the mutual relationship with the authorities? Secondly, what are the prerequisites or tools for recognition by the social worker and the refugee?

My data consists of interviews with 13 quota refugees living in Central Finland. I received the refugees' contact information from the immigrant services in one town. The interviewees represent a heterogeneous group in terms of ethnicity, education, age and gender. Ethically, it is important that, at the time of the interviews, they were no longer users of the services to which the interviews pertained, and thus could speak freely about them. At the time of the interviews, they had been living in Finland for 4 to 13 years. Three refugees were interviewed with the help of an interpreter; the others were interviewed in Finnish. I translated the data from Finnish to English, which means that some informative details may have been lost in translation. The interviewees' own words are used to provide a better description of the examined phenomena.

The data was collected using episodic interviews (Flick 2006: 181–182), a format containing elements of both focused and narrative interviewing. Basically, I collected narratives about trust towards the authorities during the refugee process (escape from one's own country, living in a second country and resettling in a third country). The theme of trust was reconstructed during the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. In this chapter, I will use thematic analysis (Gubrium and Holstein 1997) to identify needs which refugees would like to get recognised and what is required of the refugees and of the authorities during the recognition process. I selected extracts concerning the phase of arrival in Finland because the research applies to the early stages of integration.

The data revealed 25 issues which refugees would like to get recognised. I classified this data by grouping the identified needs, rights, and traits of the interviewees under the concepts of autonomy, particularity, and singularity (Honneth 1995, see also Ikäheimo 2003). Because my aim was to collect accounts of successful relations of recognition, the accounts pertain to the requirements which must be met by authorities on the one hand and refugees on the other in order to make recognition possible. I left out accounts of negative experiences with authorities following arrival in Finland because my aim was to determine the prerequisites and tools needed for recognition. That's why it is necessary to keep in mind that the data presented here does not reveal the whole picture of what transpired between interviewees and authorities after arrival in Finland. When analysing the data, I was looking for extracts where refugees talked about helpful factors in their relation to social workers and other authorities after arrival in Finland. I was also looking for extracts containing suggestions of factors which they felt would have been helpful in their relation to authorities. In some of the data, the past represents a comparative contextualising factor; at the same time, it allows for greater

insight into the refugees' backgrounds. All the interviews are multi-voiced, which means that interviewees aren't speaking only about themselves, but also about other refugees and factors that could help them in their relation to authorities (Potter 1996: 142–143)⁵. Below, the findings of my analysis will be discussed under the headings of the recognitive attitudes of esteem, care, and respect. The analysis of esteem applies to refugees' particular qualities; care applies to a refugee's singularity as whole person; respect concerns refugees' autonomy as persons entitled to certain rights.

Information exchange and being esteemed

'Esteem' concerns persons as having particular abilities or achievements that may be understood as being of benefit to persons other than the esteemed person himself/herself (Ikäheimo 2003: 132). Refugees have education, training, and know-how which they can contribute to their new society. Education or skills are gained either before arrival in Finland or after resettlement. Refugees consider the exchange of information a central tool of esteem after resettlement in the new country. Authorities have to identify refugees' abilities and goals; refugees, in turn, have to learn about the possibilities open to them in the new circumstances. Without this, the recognition of abilities is not possible.

In the following extract, an occupation had already been learned and practised prior to arrival in Finland:

My background is media...and here I like to be active and if I am active I hope I get more job...Hope is very important. It gives a message to me that if I am active my life will be easier. If I want to run 100 meters I am asking here do I use car or is it better to walk?

There is the hope that, if a person actively displays his/her abilities, he/she will have his/her know-how identified. The validity of one's own goals and the means to achieve them are discussed in relations with the authorities. Before abilities can be identified, 'you have to know who I am and what do I want'. This identification takes place *in relation* to the authorities through negotiation and the exchange of information about refugees' abilities and the possibilities for their use in the new society.

'There are people they know the language really well but still they are unemployed...What can I do, I would like to be a carpenter, but still you need more language'.



⁵ Potter (1996: 142–143) uses the term 'footing' when a speaker is presenting some factual account as his/her own or distancing himself/herself from it. The notion of footing was developed by Ervin Goffman (1979).

'When I called there they asked where you come from and when I told they got quiet. But I am a driver...I thought, what the hell, he is not taking me to work because I am a Muslim woman. But I went there and they took me to practise this work...And then they saw what kind of person I am and now my employer sends me a Christmas card every year and all my co-workers like me'.

'...As a black woman I have to go there again and again and show that I can take care of my patients and they learn to trust me'.

According to these extracts, the abilities of the refugees need to be exhibited to the authorities or employers before they are identified. Employers question language skills, even when proper knowledge of the language is not needed to practise a profession. The fact that the persons have a different religion or skin colour than the majority population affected the identification of their professional skills. They are identified 'only' as immigrants having different features than the majority population.

These findings about the esteem of the immigrants' professional skills echo Annika Forsander's findings (2002, see also Valtonen 1999), which are also from the Finnish context. There is a lack of trust about immigrants' abilities, even if they are highly educated and know the Finnish language. According to my data, they are not esteemed as professionals until they are able to show what they can do in practice.

The authorities' activity of delivering information is heavily stressed in my data. Information as a tool of esteem is underlined in different ways:

From my point of view my experience is important in the beginning when you come as a refugee what kind of view you have just in the beginning and what kind of knowledge in the beginning then you can change yourself and go faster forwards...You can start to build your own story immediately. But a person who has not any view like this year will study and later do something else, they can't go fast...You have to catch him/her and give him/her such successful stories. Such a good role model and its effects and in Finland you can go forward...If he/she has understood wrongly in the beginning. But if in the beginning you give good information he/she can decide by herself/himself and later cope up independently.

An immigrant needs explanation about laws, life. I needed to know that I should like to become an entrepreneur, how many those companies are in this area and does it make any sense to establish one more and what is needed any way...I come to talk to my social worker and she helped me by telling me contacts and booking me an interpreter because I would like to go forward in my occupation. If she is not helping me what can I do.

General information is not enough in relations with authorities. Fostering hope by sharing successful examples and positive role models is also a part of the exchange of information. The above examples highlight that decisions are made with an impression of what may be possible in the future. The motivation to learn activities and some professional skills must exist before such

information can be put to use. Knowledge about these goals and how refugees achieve them is a primary tool for professionals. Also, guidance in finding peers in a professional field is mentioned as an important issue. The role of the social worker is to provide information about social security and other laws, which improves the refugee's understanding of how this society functions and also makes it possible for him/her to identify his/her possibilities. The clarification of goals is a process constantly taking place between the immigrant and social workers.

While educated and active refugees are provided with information about possibilities in their relations with authorities, the abilities of refugees who are ageing or illiterate or who lack motivation or hope for various reasons also need to be esteemed, as the following example shows:

When they come here their role disappears. Before when they went shopping, children were behind them but now when they go to the labour office they are following their children. Before she was cashier in our house. I always think how they can live like that... They have to be esteemed also.

As noted above, this analysis focuses on successful relations of recognition. However, in the case of refugees whose abilities are not esteemed, the role of social workers and other authorities lies in the search for ways to facilitate the identification of these people's abilities as being of value to the new society or to the refugees themselves. Their know-how and past roles are not valid in the new society, and if their potential value to this society goes unidentified, they will not be esteemed. Holding such a person's abilities in esteem means finding ways for him/her to learn a new role in the new circumstances, one in which the abilities of the person would promote his/her well-being, even if they do not contribute to the good of others (Ikäheimo: 2003: 132). In finding a new role by acquiring new skills and finding ways in which past abilities can become valid, esteem comes close to respect for autonomy. If this is to occur, authorities must play a part.

A central finding of my study is that mutual activity is needed in the identification process if the refugee's abilities are to be esteemed. The exchange of information and various actions, such as changing professions, are a key tool for esteem; on the other hand, one cannot automatically assume that professional skills will be esteemed simply because a refugee has found employment: as noted above, employers take note of foreign features before professional skills.

Caring for a person as a whole

'Care' as a recognitive attitude means that authorities care for the well-being of refugees. Care is not shown for refugees as a result of their particular features or autonomy but, as Ikäheimo argues (2003: 131–132, see also Honneth

2005: 129), for their own sake, as singularities. Singularity implies a singular point of view or definite life horizon, encompassing hopes, fears, desires, interests, valuations etc. (*ibid.* 2003: 132). But here, these are not considered features of the individual, care concerns the person whose hopes and fears etc. they are. It concerns people as wholes, and not particular features. However, the authorities have to identify people's needs in order to gain knowledge about how to improve their well-being. In other words, authorities take care of a person's needs because they care about the person's well-being, regardless of what kind of person he/she is. This is a reason why the identification of the needs of refugees takes place in a mutual relation.

Here, I analyse the kinds of needs that are identified as taken care of following arrival in Finland, as well as the means used to fulfil these needs. Persons selected for resettlement in Finland are mainly among the most vulnerable of refugees – at risk woman, victims of torture, survivors of war. The refugee's background is revealed in the following extracts:

I must say that immediately at the airport my thoughts turned upside down. I felt that I am a human being not an animal, I felt here I have human rights, here I have human relationships, here I have love of the life, here people will understand me as a human being not like something different. I think even if I am an immigrant people will take me as a human being not as a different person. I felt they treat me as they treat their own children.

They were so warm people...They try to support us. They try to help us in different stage of life because they thought this place is culturally and geographically and religiously very different and they understand where we come from...Listening our stories it helped and then they tried to take our backgrounds into account and try to support us because we had so hard backgrounds. And what was the most important they gave a possibility to open up and relief what was in our hearts.

It was the main thing in the beginning that she (social worker) takes care of everything...It was very good in the beginning I did not need to take care of these bills because all information went out from my knees. I had so many other things to think about because I am a single mother.

These extracts show that refugees received support despite the fact that they belong to a minority group and, as refugees, had a difficult past. Support for persons with a background as members of a maltreated minority gives relief in and of itself. Also, ethnicity is recognised as a background factor in understanding individual customs and behaviour. The interviewees discussed ethnicity in two ways: on the one hand, as representatives of a maltreated ethnic group; on the other hand, as representatives of a certain culture who also possess cultural features as individuals. The latter is more applicable to discussions of rights; the former is identified as the possibility to feel safe despite one's belonging to a maltreated ethnic minority.

There are two kinds of approaches to 'caring' in terms of identifying the needs of refugees. Firstly, there are cases where refugees identify their needs and have the capacity to ask for support following arrival in Finland. Social workers are identified as persons who provide social, practical, and emotional support, which enables therapeutic elements in the relation to provide relief and healing from stressful and traumatic memories. Secondly, there are cases where time and different kinds of care are needed in a relation before refugees can identify either their needs or the authorities as care givers. Authorities have to prove their trustworthiness through care and valid support. Authorities have to actively search for different methods for building safety, and must also guide refugees to places where safety building is possible, such as peer groups. A proactive approach aimed at the early identification of difficult situations is especially important if larger problems are to be avoided in the future (Valtonen 2000: 162–163).

Following arrival in a new country, it is important to build safety by taking care of practical matters, especially in the case of refugees who have special needs, such as illiterate persons, single mothers, or people with serious illnesses. Authorities have to be aware of these features so that they can find valid ways to take care of the refugees' needs. Fluent routines provide safety, and building routines is an important means of taking care of a person. Because of the backgrounds of the refugees, giving signals that emotions and behaviour are accepted was also mentioned as an important tool of care.

'Tell them I am like a friend, ok not like a friend but you are there to help them like a friend. Everything has to be explained, why you are there'.

'Social worker takes care of this and that yes they did not leave us alone yes it affects really positively a lot that somebody pays attention to you'.

'It takes long time when you understand Finnish law and other things. But I managed because you guide and take care of all my practical things'.

Practical support for building routines and coping independently are stressed strongly in these extracts. In this regard, one interviewee's comment is quite telling: 'The only thing which is in my mind is where to find a tea pot'.

Emotional and practical support are an important way of taking care of the refugees in their new environment. Safety can be built little by little through a relationship where the social worker is active, and results in the person feeling that he/she is being taken care of.

'That therapy has a direct effect to these days. We could relief ourselves; it felt really good that somebody is interested how you feel and are you ok'.

Safety building through emotional, social, and practical support and by fostering feelings of acceptance in people acknowledged as having different and painful backgrounds is the main means of providing care. Expressions like 'love', 'warmth', 'like a friend', 'treated like their own children' refer to family or other close relationships. Honneth (1995: 129) in fact situates these kinds of

care and love in the family context. However, once we understand care as an attitude and as the opposite of a lack of concern and indifference towards the welfare or well-being of other people, it is easy to understand care as something that can also take place – and be expected – outside the realm of close personal relations (Ikäheimo 2003: 157–169, 2008: 22–23). Refugees often come from countries that don't have state or municipal social services. Their language might not even contain words for 'social services'. This is one reason why they use the vocabulary of close relations when describing these services. Not only the vocabulary, but also the provision of care and safety is taken over by the receiving workers and new networks because family or other close relations are not available. Care as a recognitive attitude is highly valid in social work with refugees, as revealed by accounts of these relations. The processes by which the needs of refugees are identified by the refugees themselves or by the authorities and suitable services for providing relief are built can start immediately after arrival in Finland or later, through the care relation.

Becoming a service user in a new society requires a capacity to know or to learn to know how to use services when in need. Building this capacity is a social work method. The following excerpt illustrates the results of a caring attitude in the case of a refugee with a very difficult background: 'I am very, very happy for that support I have got and I value it because here I can become a person that I have dreamt the whole of my life.'

Respect of independence

'Respect' as a recognitive attitude concerns persons' rights. Respecting rights has several aspects: firstly, rights concern a person, regardless of his/her autonomy or particular features. Secondly, people's rights should be respected as autonomous, that is, in spite of their varying degrees of autonomy. Thirdly, people have rights stemming from particular features, for example ethnicity or age (Ikäheimo 2003: 128–135). According to Ikäheimo, when personal relations are not present during the identification of these rights, the concept of acknowledgement is used in order to draw a distinction between relations to persons and relations to society or the state. I will begin by analysing aspects identified as being respected in terms of rights, and proceed with a consideration of what is needed to make respect possible in a relation between refugees and the host society or its authorities.

Refugees' backgrounds are contrasted to the host society when the latter respects the possibility for a refugee to continue his/her life without fear of being killed or persecuted, as shown in following example: 'Here even if you have only mattress but it is peace and peaceful how can you believe it'. Routines in the everyday life of Finnish women are described as a symbol of equality, which also reflects a background marked by a lack of respect: 'I go shopping and beside me a Finnish lady takes a same kind of shopping bag'.

These rights respect refugees without referring to any special features or autonomy. A seriously mentally disabled child is shown respect by being given the right to go to school and receive necessary treatment, regardless of her (lack of) capacity for autonomy:

'Everything went fine because my daughter got treatment and started school and that was the reason I could start my life here even if I am a woman and a single mother'.

While the child with learning difficulties herself is respected as a singularity, her mother's autonomy is also increased because the child is no longer totally dependent on her mother. The following extract describes autonomy, but also points out limitations:

The circumstances here are really better...I don't speak about work but if I speak about services, the services are good, everyday money is coming and it is many ways to get services through taxation. But economically it is difficult because we can't get work. I would like to improve my family's life economically, if I could plan my future not only food and cloths I claim that everybody wants to go out from the social office because it is stressful to wait if she grants anything or not.

In this case, the person could not find work, a situation which decreases his autonomy; even though he is entitled to social benefits, these only secure minimal economic autonomy and keep him dependent on his social worker. His degree of autonomy is not equal to that enjoyed by the majority if his immigrant background affects this particular lack of acknowledgement. For example, if an immigrant's skills are not esteemed because of an immigrant background, even though he/she is entitled to the same social benefits as the majority, it can't be said that he/she is a full member of society.

Respect as a person with particular features is also essential:

Because of this country I am understood as me. In my own country I have been disliked because of my ethnicity and my religion. But here I have been educated by your laws and you and helped a lot economically and mentally. Here even if we have different religion you give me a key to my flat and tell that this is your rights and this is your home.

If a civil servant understands what kind of position our ethnic group has in our country...There you are threatened as an animal because you belong to that ethnic group that why you have to tell in the beginning that here you are all equal.

It is bad if you don't know anything about my customs. Culture is general but a person is individual, it depends on the family. Here about 100 Kurdish people are living and all of them are different.

It was already noted that another feature that merits respect is that one is a woman and a single mother. Respect linked to these features allows refugees equal access to social benefits and support and freedom to practice their

religion and be treated equally. Finland has an Act of Equality (2004), which states that people must be granted equal access to services and receive equal treatment, regardless of their ethnicity, age etc.

The acknowledgement of equal rights takes place in the relation between refugees and legislation. One interviewee expressed this by saying that the 'state is my shoulder'. The identification of oneself as entitled to these rights takes place, on the one hand, without a personal relation and, on the other hand, in the relation between refugees and authorities. In the first case, legislation itself is a source of relief and allows a positive relation with representatives of the law such as social workers to emerge. In the second case, the essential content of the relation is the affirmation of rights and the negotiation of doubts about equality in the distribution of social benefits and in how refugees are treated by social workers. In the following example, the difference between past experiences and experiences in the new country is explained in terms of an understanding of the law:

'Here immigrants use word "why" because they think they are not equal and they are treated unequally...But here you see poor and rich people through the same eyes and you try to deal with everything equally...Here nobody takes money but they write an Act and goes forwards with it... There (in my country) gun is the law but here words are law, words have meanings. They come from the country where law does not mean anything. I tell that Finnish law is law and I live with it'.

Time and a great deal of explaining and experience of positive treatment are needed before rights, acts and regulations are identified and acknowledged by the refugees. The relationship between authorities and refugees is essential in fostering a positive attitude stemming from a realisation of the meaning of the law. An understanding of the laws and of one's rights and duties through a positive experience is needed before acknowledgement of laws can take place.

Interdependency is stressed in all the relations of respect because refugees' rights are generally improved compared to their previous situation. Refugees usually did not have any rights in their countries of origin; even in the country to which they escaped, their right to stay has, in most cases, been violated. Resettlement solves the problems of refugees once they are respected, for example, as a woman, as a single mother, as having a special culture and religion. They are no longer dependent on those at whose hands they have suffered abuse, and respect is a key factor in this. Refugees mention entitlement to social security as generally improving their life, but also as a constraint to their autonomy in cases where it is their only source of income.

Conclusions

The resettlement of refugees as a problem-solving mechanism for humanitarian migration requires recognition in all its forms. The attitudes of esteem,

respect, and care are interrelated. The identification process in a mutual relation is holistic in terms of rights, traits, and needs. A time-intensive relation and sensitivity to the identification of the person's needs, skills, education, and rights is essential in the process of recognition. Especially in the case of respect and care, the active involvement and sensitivity of authorities is needed to identify the needs of refugees before mutual recognition is possible. Some dimension of the personality may stand out, and be the first to be recognised, with other dimensions following. For example, care as a recognitive attitude later allows skills to become visible and potentially esteemed in the new society (in contrast, mere passive tolerance of another person does not provide any kind of basis for equal relations). For example, a single mother's rights are respected by giving her social security, and her child with learning disabilities is respected by being allowed to attend school. As an illiterate mother with several children, she cannot cope with practical matters and is taken care of by social workers and other authorities. Later, she learns a new profession and is esteemed as having employment.

A refugee background provides a special backdrop for recognitive attitudes. Persecution because of particular features such as ethnicity leads to humiliation and the violation of rights. A refugee background is most emphasised in relations where safety and rights are essential. Gender appears mainly in relations of safety and respect. In the case of at risk women, gender is a key factor in resettlement. Care is important due to a difficult background and/or a lack of family or other close relations in the new country.

Honneth's theory of relations of recognition and Ikäheimo's analysis of recognitive attitudes are equally represented in my data. It is important to keep in mind that the extracts contain not only accounts of actual events, but also suggestions for improvements in receiving work. Studies of refugee receiving in Finland and other multicultural work studies⁶ show that 'culturally sensitive approaches' are not sufficiently represented in work with refugees and other immigrants in Finland. Also, my previous study revealed that a successful initial arrival in Finland does not automatically lead to successful integration (Turtiainen 2008).

Ikäheimo (2008: 22–25) suggests that recognitive attitudes and relations of recognition are the cornerstones of 'the social'. The data presented above makes it easy to concur. Recognitive attitudes as a foundation of equal relations in the new society work well as an analytical tool for examining relations between newly arrived refugees and authorities. This chapter has shown that personal relations as a foundation of 'the social' in social work and the work of other authorities are a key factor of recognition. The role of social work is mainly seen in the terms 'rights' and 'care'. Social workers are representatives



⁶ See, for example, Valtonen (1999, 2000, 2004), Anis (2008), Hammar-Suutari (2006), Brewis (2008), Martikainen and Tiilikainen (2007).

of their society through the training they give to refugees on how to use social security and live independently. Rights are also negotiated in a relation with social workers. Social workers have an important role because they serve as representatives of the new society and because, through a dialogue with the newly arrived refugees, they can negotiate doubts about rights and treatment. At the same time, social workers emphasise care in different ways and seek to understand the backgrounds of the refugees. All this requires a mutual relation where the identification of needs and the building of tools for recognition can take place. If successful, it could ultimately ensure that a refugee's status as a client of social work is not permanent.

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Chapter 10

From the Margin to the Centre: Service Users as Researchers in Social Work Practice

Petra Videmšček

Introduction

Social work is a 'science of doing'. This chapter will examine how user-led research contributes to social work practice. It will address two issues in detail: user-led research and the purpose of participatory user-led research in social work practice. Firstly, it will focus on the development of user-led research; this is not a new development, but one that already appears in the late 1960s with Mayer and Timms' (1968) research. Later, a variety of movements served as the basis for the inclusion of users in research, from the feminist movement (Oakley 1998) at the end of 1980s, to the development and interests of the disability movement (Oliver 1992, see also Barnes and Bowl 2001, Ramon 2003, Beresford 2008). All of these movements revealed that users have their own experiences, which had been neglected and overlooked in the past. At the end of the 1990s, the user movement clearly formulated its requirement that user-led research be one possibility for making the voice of service users heard (Fisher and Evans 1999, see also Ramon 2003, Beresford 2008).

Niel Thompson notes that it is quite clear that social movements have influenced social work thinking and practice in a number of ways (2002: 716–17). The service user movement challenged the traditional model of professionalism, emphasising the rights of service users and the role of their expertise. Numerous changes have come about as a result of the inclusion of service users in research, including the struggle for power, which means that users gain the power to influence the course and procedures of research.¹ This chapter will also explore user-led research from the perspective of knowledge production. User-led research brings a new type of knowledge, knowledge based on experience. It focuses on the idea that service users are experts on their own care. Social workers must be aware that knowledge from experience represents knowledge which they may lack, but require to be competent social work practitioners.



¹ Lena Dominelli uses the term 'bypassing voice', that is, who is creating the statements and making sense of them to produce what counts as knowledge or is accepted as such (2009: 253).

This chapter is based on my experience of leading participatory user-led research in partnership with six trained user researchers. The research was conducted at the Faculty of Social work in Ljubljana. This experience will form the basis for a discussion about the advantages of involving service users as researchers in social work practice, while acknowledging that user-led research poses a challenge to both the social work profession and the service user. This chapter concludes with the claim that user-led research can be a tool for the empowerment of service user researchers.

The development of user research

Blaž Mesec states that, in the past 30 years, social work has witnessed a veritable renaissance of the so-called qualitative methods that once accompanied social work's first steps as a science (1998: 19). A review of these methods shows that changes in research in individual time periods were mainly due to researchers seeking to gain a better understanding of changes in society and to better present the characteristics of people's actual problems. A time scale of these methods shows that:

- a. Most case studies dealing with individuals in relation to their families emerged in the 1960s (Mesec 1998);
- b. Between the 1970s and 1980s, a 'new paradigm' (Reason 1994) in research emerged which raised the question of the power relations between the researchers and the researched (Ramon 2003, see also Maglajlić 2007). The development of new techniques of data collection and qualitative empirical material analysis provided conditions which enabled the inclusion of users in research as co-researchers. In the 1970s, John E. Mayer (sociologist) and Noel Timms (social worker) drew attention to this in their study *The Client Speaks: Working Class Impressions of Casework*. The study was conducted in 1968 in the Family Welfare Association in London, and included 61 users of this social service, both those who were and those who were not satisfied with the service. Their research aim was to discover the reasons behind the users' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service, and to present, through a user perspective, the ways users establish connections with existing services.
- c. Since 1990, participatory research² that emphasises participation as a univer-



² Participatory research involves those who might traditionally have been categorised as subjects of research (Humphries 2001, see also Banks 2009) and is based on the partnership ideology. Nevertheless, participation with service users is not something new in social work practice. A historical overview shows that participation has been part of social work practice from the beginning of professional social work practice in Slovenia. In her *Priručnik iz metodike socialnega dela* [Handbook of Methods of Social Work], Katja Vodopivec (1959) writes: 'Social workers think together with client about the problem. The client usually suggests the solution that he or she thinks is the best one. Afterwards social worker and client in partnership talk about the possibilities of mentioned solution and also of its consequences' (1959: 106).

sally acceptable role has appeared, together with action research³. Beth Humphries (2009: 312) asserts that those who want to bring about genuine change in the lives of poor and exploited groups need to find new methods and new ways of thinking about social problems. The development of new techniques of data collection and qualitative empirical material analysis provided conditions which enabled the inclusion of users in research as co-researchers.

Today, the extent of users' involvement in research is a question addressed by many researchers. The extent to which service users are included in research, and the ways in which this can be achieved, has become a methodological question; responses differ mainly in the degree of user inclusion in a particular study. From a review of literature – works characterized by the principle that, in Peter Reason's words (1994), research should be done 'with' people, and not 'on' people – three levels of user involvement in research can be summarized:

- a. Research within which users are members of the research team and are in the position of consultants (Barnes 1993, McLaughlin 2006);
- b. Research where users carry out research with the support of professionals (Ramon 2000, Humphries 2001, Beresford 2008);
- c. Research that is user-controlled and led (Wiltshire and Swindon Users Network 1996, Evans and Fisher 1999, Ajduković 2008).

This categorisation reveals that the main questions were who decided upon what and who had control over the research process. Lena Dominelli (2009: 250) pointed out that involving service users in research is not straightforward; the terms on which they are integrated are important.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, an increased interest in user-controlled research could be noted. Many authors (Beresford 2000, 2008, see also Evans and Fisher 1999) observed that users have become more experienced in participation. In service user groups, there is a growing understanding of how to design and undertake research. Since my experience is with user-led research supported by a professional (I call it participatory user-led research), this kind of research will be discussed in greater detail below. I will also show that participatory user-led research can lead to user-controlled research.

Participatory user-led research with mental health service users: An example

The research discussed here was conducted with mental health service users living in several group homes in Ljubljana in 2007.⁴ During the research



³ Action research refers to research that has an explicit focus on bringing about change or improvement (Reason 1994, see also Banks 2009).

⁴ In the article, I present only one part of a more complex research design that was completed for my Ph.D. work, which is still in the writing stage. A result of the participatory user-led research was disseminated by service user researchers at the Social Work Congress in Maribor, October 2007.

process, I worked with six mental health service users that had received training to be researchers. Since group homes are a recent development in community-based services in Slovenia (1990s)⁵, the research wanted to explore the ways in which group homes encourage residents to live an ordinary life, the level of the residents' social inclusion and the quality of their life.

At the beginning of the research process, an important preliminary element had to be sorted out. This is education.

The training programme

I was aware that high quality research would not be possible if the researchers were not qualified (Ramon 2003, see also Dominelli 2009). Researchers need to be aware that 'professional researchers' are usually employed to do the research. They are skilled in their work. With this in mind, I prepared and developed the training programme for service users; it was supported and led by one of the service users.

The training was divided into three parts. Training programmes can function as a way of empowering people to become researchers. If, in terms of design and process, a research undertaking is to be collaborative, it is important that the roles each of the participants is to have in the group be stated as clearly as possible. This was especially important for me, since I was carrying out research for my dissertation. The first part of the training programme was an introduction (who we are; why they would like to do the research; our expectations; why I [P.V.] want to try participatory user-led research).

The second part included main information about the research and a clarification of the purpose of the research, as well as a discussion on roles, responsibilities and ethical issues.

The third part of the education programme addressed how fieldwork is to be conducted, including actual examples (how to initiate an interview; self-presentation; handling difficult situations; listening; writing up). A lot of the



⁵ Until the end of 1989, Slovenia had a monopolised public sector. After 1989, pluralisation of the welfare system began. A plural sector means the introduction of different policy sectors such as public, private, non-governmental, informal. This development has been supported by a number of measures, especially the National Social Protection Plan (NSPP). NSPP is a key social policy document that covers the field of social services for different population groups. It specifies how the state will treat these groups, prescribes guiding principles of working, and prescribes key values (social justice, solidarity, prevention of social exclusion, equal opportunities and dignity, free choice, enhancement of the influence of service users, de-institutionalization, individualization of rights, individualised financing). It introduces radical changes in the organisation of services and the social protection system in Slovenia. Part of this plan covers the process of de-institutionalization (Leskošek 2003).

Today, there are 43 group homes for 250 people with mental health difficulties that are run by NGOs (Videmšek 2009).

time was devoted to self-presentation, to questions about handling difficult situations and to listening skills, writing up and dealing with one's own emotions. Six people completed the training and were ready to be interviewers.

The research process: Methodology, methods and sampling

In the first phase of the research process, the service user researchers themselves were involved in articulating the major issues they would like to explore. They chose to explore group homes in the field of mental health, listing a number of arguments for their choice of subject:

'...The residential groups programme is only good for one year, and no longer...' (Sonja, personal notes 2007)⁶

'...Instead of allowing for rehabilitation the system only pushes people towards even greater distress.' (Uroš)

'...Users remain on the margins with the emerging phenomenon of ghettoisation.' (Lan, personal notes 2007)

'...Residential groups do not facilitate progress in socialisation to the society and a fully equal active role in it.' (Milan, personal notes 2007)

The research question that emerged was 'Do group homes encourage service users for independent living?'

The methodology that was used was co-operative inquiry. According to Peter Reason (1994), co-operative inquiry makes it possible to get to know the development of individual processes and life dynamics and to understand and get to know specific groups of people, and allows the participants to feel good and actively participate in the whole research process (*op. cit.* 41).

The data collection technique used was structured interviews, which were chosen, prepared, conducted and disseminated by service user researchers. An interview schedule was drawn up by participants during the training programme; all participants had a chance to ensure that the questions that they thought were important would be included. A sample of group homes was independently selected for interviews by the service user researchers themselves. All the interviews were transcribed. A total of 12 interviews with service users from different group homes were conducted. There were more men than women respondents, as more men than women were residents of the group homes included in the research. Two service users read all the interviews, and the other four were involved in the discussion about the results.

Adopting a multiple-partnership approach in the research process challenges the status of researchers and their role as experts with overall control over the research methodology (Powell 2009). I tried to employ a model of research that is user-led: at every stage, service users were involved in the



⁶ All names in personal communications and personal notes have been changed.

process – from serving as key informants in drawing up the research question to the final stage of the dissemination of the results. Nevertheless, it must be said that the participation of service users changed during the process. They defined the theme of the research, prepared the interview schedule, and conducted the interviews. The group also took the responsibility for discussing the results of the interviews and preparing for the dissemination of the analysis. On other occasions, they were involved as consultants, since they participated in the team discussions of what was heard and learned.

Evans and Fisher (1999) make the point that user research supported by a professional's expertise must be conceptualised as belonging as much to the service users as to professionals, and that professional skills lie as much in facilitating user-led and user-controlled research as in technical skills traditionally reserved for 'the researcher'.

The research revealed a great deal of criticism of the existing group homes, which were supposed to be increasing the social inclusion of mental health service users. The user-led research showed that, although located in the community, residential groups provide a minimal degree of integration ('...Users remain on the margins with the emerging phenomenon of ghettoisation'), and that residents' activities were organised within the welfare programmes and residential units, not in the community (visits to day centres, rehabilitation activities, attending chess clubs within the welfare organisation). For most residents, living in group homes meant accommodation for 'an indefinite period of time' (people had been living there for up to nine years). Most residents came to the group homes from their primary families and not from institutions, meaning that the group homes actually did not implement de-institutionalisation processes. An interesting issue was smoking: the element of infantilising the residents became very obvious, since the professional staff decided on the daily amount of cigarettes for each resident.

The research explores not only the negative, but also the positive experience of living in the group homes. The results showed that the residents could decide about their diet, while social workers helped them to structure their menus. The most positive effect of living in a group home in the eyes of the residents was that they were able to make choices about certain things (time of getting up, daily activities and diet, doing whatever they want, having a roof over their heads). For most of the residents, the group home was a place that offers shelter, but not a home.

Of course, the research was not without problems. Although research that is participatory fits well with the values of social work, this approach is fraught with problems and can be more complex and time-consuming than a more traditional model where the researcher has control over the process.

Drawing on my experience, I would like to mention some of the changes that seem to be playing an important role in the co-operation between service users as researchers and academic social workers. One of these pertains to

the central issue of the power relationship. Another pertains to the dynamic between the professional researcher and the service user researcher. A third change pertains to the co-creation of new knowledge.

'Who is who?' Power relations

Research is an expression of power relations, which have a direct bearing on the product of the research or knowledge-building enterprise. With the involvement of service users in research, their perspective becomes one of the most valued qualitative methods for ensuring that their experiences are accounted for. It highlights the centrality of the relationship between the researcher and the object of research.

Questions of power can reflect different interests and levels of analysis that represent very different concerns about power, for example, who has power, who can control whom, who can get what, who defines the issue, who decides what to research etc. These power relations are especially important when users are supported by social workers in carrying out research. Some concerns include:

1. Discussing the power relations between the researchers themselves. (Who will determine the research issue? Who is creating the statements and making sense of them?)
2. Ensuring equality among the researchers. Greater equality in the relationship between the researchers themselves can be enabled through the careful selection of terms used (How do different researchers address one and other? Service user, patient, expert, social worker etc.?) It is important that the service user researcher is respected and treated as a person with agency and an active contributor to the research, not a passive object that is just one part of the research process.

Another important step in the process of participatory user-led research is the discussion of power relations between the researchers and the object of the research. Power relations at the level of the relationship between the researchers and the object of the research are manifested in different ways. Researchers reveal their power by acting as specialists in their field, enjoying a favourable reputation and having the possibility to ask questions, while the researched often have no power. In terms of power relations, involving service users in the research is crucial since service user researchers are people with experiences similar to those of the object of the research. Our experience shows that answers obtained by the service user researchers are more honest and open than those obtained by other researchers without lived experiences. Also, all the responses were much longer, more explicit, and contained more exact facts.⁷ This can be explained by the fact that many people



⁷ We compare the answers with those of a steering group (consisting of students of social work) that completed the same questionnaire.

will only allow themselves to reveal their vulnerability or to be approached by others when they are in contact with a peer. The second reason inevitably lies in the interviewees' relationship of dependence on the service (in this case, the group home unit); respondents have difficulty revealing their true opinion of the service, but when speaking to individuals with a similar experience they can be more open about their experience. When service users work as researchers, they are recognised by the respondents as equal interlocutors with whom they can speak more openly (without censorship).

Participatory user led research as knowledge production: The diversity of knowledge

Jackie Powell (2009) claims that research involves findings about the world, and therefore cannot avoid making a claim about knowledge. Important questions include how the knowledge has been produced and by whom, what counts as knowledge, and on what grounds are such claims being made. With the involvement of service users in the research process, diverse knowledge is produced. This knowledge exists in social work as authentic knowledge (Lorde 1984), professional knowledge (Banks 1995)⁸, and/or 'subjugated' knowledge (Humphries 2009).

Beth Humphries (2009: 313) writes that participatory approaches recognise and open a space for the knowledge of marginalised groups and the subjective elements of human experience, that is, the meanings attributed to events and behaviour by particular social actors. These kinds of knowledge are often called 'subjugated knowledges', a term which assumes the existence of more than one kind of knower and of a range of different kinds of knowledge. Subjugated knowledges are a legitimate form of knowing. While dominant groups may dismiss the authenticity of the knowledge of marginalized groups, it is in fact the aim of critical research to assert its legitimacy and insist that it be heard and recognised.

With participatory user-led research, obstacles present in traditional research can be overcome, since the involvement of users in and of itself implies changes to the traditional research format. Traditional research focuses more on issues relevant to practice than on the development of more conceptual, user-friendly work. It is characterised by positivism, which suggests that, in the interest of objectivity, it is acceptable to exploit or even control (Ledwith and Asgill 2007). While equally concerned with development and improving practice, traditional research methodologies focus less on outcomes and more on developing and understanding the processes involved (Powell 2009). One of the differences between traditional research and more collaborative aspects of researching revolves around who can be a knower and the status of differ-



⁸ As Sarah Banks (1995: 14) pointed out, the social worker has special knowledge and expertise and must be trusted by service users to act in their best interest.

ent kinds of knowledge. The collaborative aspect of researching *with* people rather than *on* people leads, in Peter Reason's words, to margins rather than replacing the values of the dominant ideology. Traditionally, the 'knower' is the researcher who brings scientific objectivity to his/her work and collects information from informants.

I personally acknowledge that knowledge is not fixed and does not belong to only one group. This is supported by the claim that we are open to a variety of answers. Lena Dominelli pointed out that 'treating knowledge as fixed encourages practitioners to look for a "toolkit" that equips them with answers and checklists that can provide them with the correct response to a complex situation' (2009: 252). That being said, the involvement of service users in the research process promotes a new type of knowledge, a knowledge based on experience. Shula Ramon pointed out that 'knowledge itself is powerful in providing a way to make sense, give meaning and predict reality... It provides a new way of looking on at what has been taken for granted' (2003: 16). Knowledge as such is not monopolised and reserved for professionals, but, as in the example described above, is shared and distributed to the participants in the research. Participation of the users ensures the reconstruction of knowledge and helps to develop a more 'democratic social science' (Oakley 1998: 725). Furthermore, user-led research contributes to the 'development of theory, values and practice in a way which is not based on the premise that all theories are formed by dominant groups of people' (Clifford et al. 2002: 115 in Maglajlić 2007: 57).

The participatory user-led research discussed above was based on the assertion that 'the real integration of theory and practice will not come about from a ponderous, rigid body of knowledge, but from the humility to learn from practitioner's experiences' (Jones and Jordan 1996: 267).

Beresford (2000: 493) claims that one key quality distinguishes user knowledge from all other kinds of knowledge that appear within social care, and that is 'direct experience'. Instead of the service users' experience being defined by the researcher, research comes directly under the control of the service user.

How does participatory user-led research contribute to social work practice?

The involvement of service users in researching presents several advantages, not only in the quality of the results obtained, but also because user-led research can be a tool that actually empowers service users. User involvement in research is a challenge to both social work professionals and service users. It promotes some basic principles of social work as a science of doing, such as the ethics of participation, empowerment and the co-creation of solutions. By including those who have no social power, professionals enable them to express their views and to take part in decision making which promotes the principles of inclusion and diversity.

Advantages of participatory user-led research for the social worker

Beth Humphries (2001) suggests that there is a need for research to generate different kinds of knowledge for understanding the complexity of social work practice. Drawing on the example presented above, I will first outline some of the advantages this kind of research presents for the social worker:

1. It promotes the application of the basic principles of social work in practice (the ethics of participation, empowerment, co-creation of solutions).
2. By including those who have no social power in research, the social work profession enables them to express their views.
3. For good research, the only important methodological question is how to include the users to the highest possible extent (Mesec 1998, see also Maglajlić 2007). Users can help evaluate the results and explain them in greater detail.
4. By including users in research, a way of thinking based on the ideology of inclusion and diversity is promoted.
5. The inclusion of users in research presents a challenge for the science of social work because it introduces a new kind of knowledge to it, one based on the personal experience of the researcher.

Advantages of participation for service user researchers

The list of advantages for service users involved in the research process is even longer:

1. Participation in research represents a life contribution from experts by experience to research. User-led research has shown that users are encouraged to report on the less positive sides of their lives when interviewed by other users (Rose and Lucas 2007: 226).
2. With the shift in roles, users take on the new role of interviewers. This can be illustrated by the following quotations from service user researchers: 'For me, research is a form in which we have been taken seriously' (Janko, personal communication, 2007); 'I was taken really seriously by the social worker. The social worker took the time to talk to me. I found out that we had similar opinions. I had never viewed a social worker from this aspect' (Boštjan, personal communication, 2007).
3. A new, 'I' perspective is created.
4. Users as researchers become subjects of a change in their situation. As one service user said: 'This is a form in which we can make a contribution and feel accepted and where our knowledge is appreciated' (Janez, personal communication, 2007).
5. Inclusion in research means valuing an individual's experiences of mental health problems. Experience becomes an advantage, not a deficiency. This was clearly illustrated by a service user participant: '...I am IN and no

- longer OUT, this is crazy... It is really crazy...Are we crazy?...Even if we are, there is nothing wrong with it...because they listen to us...Yes, here we have space, where we are really being listened to, elsewhere we are not, though we should be...I know something about the mental health system, including things that nobody wants to hear but they should...I tell you, I am an old bird...I have rich experience...And now I can use it to participate in a good research' (Boštjan, personal communication, 2007).
6. By participating in research, service users achieve socially valued roles, as revealed by the experiences of many service user researchers: 'Now, I am a researcher and not a mental patient...In the morning I tell everybody that I am going to a research meeting' (Zvonko, personal communication, 2007). For others, being a researcher meant a sense of appreciation: 'It helped that I became a researcher in that other service users and experts appreciated me more. I got the impression that experts do not wish to do what they are doing to us...They treated me with respect; they listened to me and seriously answered my questions. This is a really positive result...' (Bojan, personal communication, 2007). Inclusion in research brings about peer valuing. People reported that when they came and presented themselves as researchers, they received a great deal of support from others, and often heard something to the effect of 'you're lucky, you pulled yourself through'; 'you're something to be able to do this'.
 7. User research brings an important aspect to the career of a researched person. Experts by experience are seen by research subjects as an opportunity for change, in line with the principle 'If he could do it, why can't I?' Our work showed that research presented a challenge for many experts by experience.

Why we, as social workers, should promote participatory user-led research

Through the inclusion of service users in research, 'we demystify research and "de-jargonise" its language, on the one hand, while enabling people to have a good enough understanding of the internal logic of research and its application to the issues investigated, on the other' (Ramon 2003: 31). By entering the research field, service users are put in the position of co-creators of theory, which is important for what Gabi Čačinovič-Vogrničič calls 'actionable knowledge' (2002). Service users thus become part of the search for answers and the co-creators of solutions. From being passive service receivers, they obtain to the position of active solution seekers. The inclusion of users in research ensures that theories are generated from users' experiences, and not only from professionally conceived deductions.

Nonetheless, until recently, the inclusion of service users was not practiced by social workers, although participation is one of the immediate aims of social work (and, it should not be forgotten, of the state's social policy

[Leskošek 2003]). One of the basic messages of the participatory research that we carried out was that there is a discord between aims and actions. Ramon noted that 'being a researcher makes use of the users' considerable experience of being identified as having a disability or a problem of living, and being consumers of services, many over a long period of time' (2003: 15).

User research is also important for raising 'the right' questions. Mesec uses the metaphor of nature as an open book for the natural scientist; he/she has but to know how to pose the right question and he/she will be given the answer. Nature, despite the fact that it is always disclosed, never reveals anything to those who do not know what to ask. Like a natural scientist, a social scientist should pose exact questions to 'society' in line with his/her theory and records its answers (Mesec 1998: 27). Our experience shows that service user researchers pose different questions than those raised by other researchers, namely, that theirs are linked to concrete life situations, reflect knowledge of living conditions in the group and focus on specific changes which could be brought about through the research. Users participating in 'user research apply their emphatic understanding as a research instrument with which to pinpoint the impact of important research questions versus the less important ones' (Ramon 2003: 15).

Last but not least, involvement in research is also important because empowerment is one of the central concepts in social work practice. I am very much aware that the concept of empowerment is a slippery one, since its definition covers a wide range of focuses. However, if understood, as Dragoš says (2008: 38), as an endeavour for the redistribution of power (transferred from professionals to users) with the aim of increasing the autonomy of users' lives (individually or collectively), then we may conclude that, through user participation, empowerment was achieved within our research. As a matter of fact, in our work, this occurred both on the individual and collective level (Videmšek 2008): the participants have since established their own newsletter, *Most* [The Bridge]; founded their own organization, The Mostovi [Bridges] Association for Health in Mental Health, which was officially registered on January 28, 2008; organised training using the TnT (Training the Trainers) system Empowerment in Theory and Practice; and, on May 15, 2008, organised the round table discussion 'Residential Groups 16 Years Later – How to Become a Person Instead of a Number'.

However, at the beginning of our participatory user-led research project, the practical implementation of empowerment hardly seemed possible; the activities listed above have proven the opposite, at least collectively. Empowerment seemed impossible because at the first meeting, the participants mainly looked for individual rather than collective empowerment. Individually, empowerment was reflected in terms of personal growth, as the following statements from the reflection meeting show:

'I see myself as somebody who has knowledge. I started to write stories and look forward to future research. I really like being a researcher.' (Sonja, personal notes, 2007)

'The research brought a really positive result of empowerment and, in turn, personal satisfaction. Ever since we have started to work together I have gained some self-respect.' (Jože, personal notes, 2007)

Collectively, people have started to connect and, what is more relevant, they have started to do their own user-controlled research. This tendency to take the process a step further has also been noted by other researchers (Fisher and Evans 1999, see also Beresford 2000, 2008). Service user researchers that have been involved in our participatory user-led research learned how to do their own research. After our research was completed, they prepared new user-controlled research on the issue of employment, and managed to obtain financial support from the municipality of Ljubljana (Personal correspondence 2009). This is the first time in Slovenia that users with mental health difficulties have run and conducted their own research. While experiences with the involvement of service users go back to the mid 1990s, their involvement was never documented and reflected upon, and their role was more that of consultants than leaders of research. We can only hope that their ideas and proposals will be met with a proper audience and support.

Potential drawbacks of participatory user-led research

Participatory user-led research also has potential drawbacks. One source of criticism lies in its 'lacing' of the objectivity of the research and its critical distance. People with experience are likely to have been or still be involved in practice, and therefore bring a greater awareness of the bile. But this inevitably brings up the question of their objectivity. How objective can people with experience that are living in the same circumstances be? Are they concerned with their own interests, or interested in social change? Participatory user-led research seems to be too partisan and to lack objectivity; it can be criticised as utopian, as relying on rational consensus and as being naive about the group process.

Another potential drawback of participatory user research is its preoccupation with equalising power between the professional researcher and user researcher(s). How can equality be ensured if inequality exists in the research (payment could be one source of inequality)? On the other hand, this is a debate that is relevant for all research approaches that strive for the participation of marginalized groups, and therefore requires further investigation.

Conclusion

User-led research contributes to a new paradigm in social work practice and ensures that research integrates theory and practice. Involving service users in research means emphasising the role of research as a resource for practice. Adopting a more participatory approach within research processes presents

challenges to the status of researchers and their role as experts on the research methodology. By involving service users in research, social work enhances its potential to respond to service users' needs. Social work needs to meet these new challenges and find ways to involve service users more fully in the research process.

I believe that it is possible to develop effective partnership between researchers (professional researcher and service user researchers) that brings about further movements and enhances the empowerment of service users. Indeed, our own experience provides clear evidence that partnership is possible and that it constitutes a challenge to both social work professions and service users. Our pilot participatory user-led research can be used to support the claim that user-led research works as an efficient empowerment tool.

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Concluding Remarks: Crossing the Borders in Social Work

In the introduction, we pointed out that the topics addressed in this book have been frequently theorised in literature on social work. The original theoretical contribution of the book lies in its approach to the problem and in its manner of argumentation. In general, theories are developed in accordance with the capacity of science to respond to social changes and to reflect on them and analyse them and identify new paradigm shifts and new laws. Social work is no different in this respect, except for the fact that, in many countries, it is not recognised as an academic discipline, even though the theoretical contributions to this field originating from these countries are no less rich or extensive. The difficulties encountered by social work on its way to being recognised as an academic discipline point to the durable and closely guarded borders between 'us' and 'them', which remain an emphatic feature of the world even in the era of much-lauded and promoted globalisation. The more we hear about the free movement of goods, people, services and money, the more the world becomes characterised by closed borders and new walls. For some, the world is becoming globalised, while for others it is becoming inaccessible. Accordingly, the issue of borders has become one of the central themes within the field of social work. In this connection, an important question is how social work, as both an academic discipline and a profession, is responding to social changes and the increase in social inequalities. Equally important are the effects of the emerging new world order and the numerous new challenges it presents to social work in areas that traditionally were not within its domain. The essays in this book address both of these questions: social work as an academic discipline and a profession, and the effects of global changes. Since we touched upon these issues in the introduction, we will now take a closer look at the different perspectives in terms of internationalism, as the contributors come from different countries.

In the context of this book, the international aspect has several dimensions. These involve geography, content and the application of case studies. Let us begin with *geography*. For a long time, the borders of Europe were clear and unambiguous for many people. Europe extended from the Atlantic

Ocean to the iron curtain. The part behind the iron curtain bore the same name, but was quite different. Europe proper extended as far as the borders of the European Union. And although the iron curtain came down towards the end of the 1980s, the border persists; only now, it is called by another name. The border between capitalism and socialism was replaced by the border between western and eastern Europe. Nor did the accession of 10 new member states to the European Union in 2004 significantly change the situation. This division can still be found in many texts. It alerts us to the fact that Europe's borders are just as firm as they were two decades ago. While western Europe is believed to be a plural space, eastern Europe is seen as a uniform space lacking diversity. Internationalism frequently stops at the borders of Europe, and the same holds true for proverbially open and cosmopolitan science. The authors in this book, who come from diverse geographical areas where they actively participate in the theory and practice of social work, prove that such a division is unnecessary.

The *content* of this book rests on theories and practices that occur in the international arena. The bibliography includes renowned international authors as well as less known or completely unknown names. This book provides an opportunity for them to make their voice heard in the international community. Although social work is proverbially open, inclusive and participative, we should not forget that, for many scholars, it is difficult to penetrate the international arena.

The *case studies* in this book offer new perspectives that point to the local peculiarities of social processes and their effects. They refer to local policies, practices, methods and approaches, all of which could potentially constitute research or study topics in their own right. Being aware of the controversial nature of the concept of good practices, we cannot describe these case studies as such, but should rather view them as contributing to a plurality and diversity which help eradicate the borders and enable the exchange of experience, findings, results, methods and theories.

In this sense, this book should be viewed as a contribution to an internationalism unhampered by borders, even though we are continuously aware of their existence.

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