„A European Model of Social Work – Utopia or Necessity?"
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The history of social work is intricately linked to the history of the European nation state. Just as the introduction of compulsory education was an early measure of the newly emerging nation states for the consolidation of the social fabric of an otherwise culturally divided society (the common language, the common knowledge of history and traditions of a nation were yet to be created) so the investment in welfare became a necessity to prevent social divisions erupting in violence and disorganization.

In contrast to education, the political realization of this necessity in the area of welfare was not universally present. In some political ideological frameworks, such as that of liberalism, welfare had to be limited to the margins of society and public resources should only be spent on rescuing (or coercing) people whose behavior was in conflict with the norms of decent citizens, while the decent portion of the population should have the foresight to look after themselves. In contrast to that, welfare in the Nordic countries, dominated by social-democratic politics, counted as a public priority and led to pervasive, largely also preventative measures aimed at preventing the polarization and fragmentation of society and therefore offering benefits to all strata of society.

A third option was the Bismarckian approach shaped by the conservative political ideology of subsidiarity. Conservatism, or corporatism, sought to preserve traditional solidarity structures, such as the family, the churches, but also the private associations and insurance schemes, under the changed conditions of modernity. Instead of aiming at equality and overall solidarity it appeals to the duties of civil society organisations to provide aid where it is needed and within the cultural value structures that people adhered to.

From these ideological positions the specific course of national social legislation proceeded with the corresponding development of social service structures. The United Kingdom as the epitome of liberalism limited public social services to 'the worst cases' where self-help efforts had failed or where limits of good behavior had been overstepped. In view of that, however, a highly politicized approach to providing non-governmental welfare provisions emerged in opposition to the stigmatizing effects of public welfare. This flourished for instance in areas of community development, neighbourhood action, poverty advocacy and also in the clinical context. Child Guidance Clinics were part of a movement that introduced Freudian principles into family work, placing the psychological need of children and families beyond the reach of moralistic judgements.

In the Nordic countries social service developments were guided by a sociological understanding of integration processes so that structural measures, the provision of child care and nursery provisions, of public and affordable housing, of equal access to education and health services evolved side by side with an equally 'universalist' orientation of social work itself. Casework was applied as a matter of a social right and not as a conditioning measure to produce adjusted behavior.

The Bismarckian approach in turn left it largely to the private welfare organisations to 'fine-tune' the effects which national social legislation were meant to produce in terms of securing people's livelihood in times of crisis (illness, old age, later also unemployment). Welfare had to reach the right people, but people should also find a kind of caring community within the confines of the respective civil society grouping, the denominations or the secular philanthropic organisations. Social work had a mandate to guide people towards civil responsibilities, in their own families as much as in the public domain, which is one of the reasons why the methodological model o 'social pedagogy' gained such prominence in Germany.

As social work moved toward becoming a profession and to develop its distinct identity accordingly it had to take account of these national welfare characteristics in order to find its place within the various welfare structures. As mentioned, the organizational conditions of corporatist welfare states such as Germany not only meant that the majority of social workers came to work in non-governmental organisations (and Caritas, the welfare organization of the Catholic Church is still the biggest employer in Germany), but also that their methodological orientation had generally an educational dimension in the sense that it transmitted, implicitly or explicitly, values of belonging to social units that within that ideology constituted the building blocks of society, family, neighbourhood, associations, churches…

The predominantly public organizational framework of social work in the Nordic countries, shaped by social democracy, meant that their value-orientation was meant to be 'technically neutral, giving support within a system of growing social rights and entitlements. Social workers were carriers and transmitters of those rights.

Social work in a liberal political tradition such as that of the UK had a divided and largely polarized position between public social services which, being supposedly universalistic, promoted a typical 'bureau-professionalism' especially in the post-WWII era of the 'residual' welfare state, and a range of non-governmental campaign groups which recognized and opposed very often the stigmatizing effects of state-based casework with their methodological orientation towards advocacy, empowerment and self-determination, prevalent not only in community action projects (claimants unions) but also, for instance in the area of disability or children's rights.

But being inserted into national welfare regimes is only one half of the story, of the history of social work. The other half is that social workers from very early on sought to relativise this dependency – and thereby assert their professional autonomy – through seeking international contacts and exchanges. The individual contacts that many of the pioneer women of social work and social work education fostered, chief among them Alice Salomon, Jane Addams, later Eileen Younghusband and Kathleen Kendall, often through contacts in the feminist or peace movements, became soon institutionalized into international organisations and international conferences, such as the big conference of Paris of 1928 with over 5000 delegates. These exchanges not only served to broaden the knowledge base on which training of social workers was to be built by constructing a transversal theoretical framework for effective social interventions that relativized the dependence from national conditions, it also had the purpose of promoting understanding among people of different

national backgrounds and cultures. Influenced by the internationalism of the women's movement, less so perhaps by the internationalism of the socialist workers' movement, but definitely in line with the international peace movement (after all Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize) social workers expressed their social responsibility not only vis a vis the individual cases they had responsibility for but also in terms of their views on social conditions, social legislation, working conditions, child care and protection instruments.

These international efforts were severely disrupted by the advent of Nazism and suspended by the Second World War but re-emerged 'top down' so to speak when the newly formed United Nations after the war commissioned regular international reports on the state of social work training because it was recognized that social work could play an important role in promoting peace, social stability and democracy through its efforts.

There were two agendas that in my view shaped the development of social work and social work education in Western Europe in that era of post-fascism and at the same time of anti-communism:
- all Western European nations made a commitment to some sort of welfare state development, some more forcefully, others inconsistently and hesitantly, but the sacrifices of war on the part of the fighting soldiers who now returned to largely ruined homes had to be recognized by an overall commitment to social protection. The state had to be seen as not only demanding sacrifices, which had been the perverse propaganda demand of the Nazi war machinery but also the 'spirit' with which the soldiers of the Allied Forces were brought under a shared anti-fascist commitment, but also to care for its citizens in return. As had also been recognized since the initial advances into public welfare and social policy, in order for those measures to reach their maximum level of effectiveness they had to be 'fine-tuned' to the needs of each individual which could not be achieved by legislation alone. This gave the decisive incentive for personalized social services to play their part in the new welfare arrangements. In most Western European countries social work training received a boost, albeit with considerable time lags.
- A second factor was anti-communism. The Cold War provided not only a scenario for military confrontation and mutual deterrent, it was also a driver of welfare measures for the purpose of dampening or correcting the divisive effects of unfettered capitalism. This opportunity was clearly grasped by the British and American anti-fascist reconstruction programmes in Europe which saw in the training of social service personnel in the methods-triad of case-work, group work and community work a means of spreading the message of democratic competences in 'self-management' and active participation. Through the translation and import of US standard social work textbooks into practically all Western European languages and countries (France was somewhat isolated from this, Spain and Portugal had to wait for the end of their dictatorships) and through training courses or scholarships for the training of lecturers in the UK and the USA a kind of 'standard model of social work' became installed in countries that then also constituted the founding members of the EEC.

The result of these developments was that the thereby established 'international character' of social work assumed a flavor of neutrality and uniformity. This in turn boosted the status of social work as a profession based on a culturally neutral model of science in analogy with

that of for instance psychology or medicine which could also be taught in different cultural contexts to the same standards and contents of knowledge.

But this arrangement could not prevail for long given the fundamental changes that were symbolized by the 'events' of 1968. While they initially opened up a critical view of cultural colonialism and imperialism, mixed with anti-American sentiments arising from the opposition to the Vietnam War and therefore began also to question the hegemony of the 'standard model of social work' in Western Europe, they in the course of the 1970s and 80s issued into a series of movements which had as their common core the affirmation of the 'right to be different' and to receive recognition for being different on the grounds of culture, ethnicity, gender, without this diminishing equal social rights. For social work this constituted a profound challenge to the until then prevailing 'equality-motto': 'people are people – irrespective of their skin colour or gender or culture'. The critique centred on the inability of 'neutral' approaches to see the vastly different conditions from which people had to manage their lives and the implied lack of recognition this afforded to discriminated groups. Declaring their equal rights was not enough.

In the wake of these challenges, which brought with them a series of paradigm shifts in social work theorizing and the emergence of publications like 'feminist social work' or 'black social work' the re-emergence of an interest in indigenous social work traditions in various countries of Europe made previous approaches to 'internationalise' social work appear problematic. This was a period when new titles for social type activities were tried out, social pedagogy, androgogy, animation, each in a certain sense untranslatable and reduced to specific national and cultural-historical contexts. This was a period when European and international conferences continued to take place but actual exchanges between countries stagnated, to say nothing of the absence of monographs or journals that would address international comparative aspects of social work.

This changed with the advent of the Erasmus exchange programme, which surprisingly was taken up enthusiastically by social work study courses in the member countries, promoted by a few pioneers who had forged international contacts even before Erasmus. What these exchanges taught and what was systematically investigated by the First European Network of the Social Professions, of which EASSW, FICE and ECCE were partners, was the realization of the diversity of titles and approaches to social work, but at the same time a renewal of the commitment of those professions to core principles that however required culture-sensitive implementation and application. In those years the outlines of a European model of social work became visible and inspired not just further student and staff exchanges but a serious scientific dialogue conducted in the form of prestigious European social work journals, such as the European Journal of Social Work and Social Work and Society, which in turn spurred other journals like the British Journal of Social Work or social work journals of the Nordic states to devote more interest to investigating European dimensions.

These exchanges flourished at a time of historical departure in Europe: The revolutions of 1989 gave impetus to the search for models of social work theory and practice in former Communist countries that would connect with pre-communist beginnings of social work but at the same time connect to the international European discourses that were developing. In many countries of Central and Eastern Europe the ensuing processes resembled those that had characterized Western European countries after the war: Enthusiasm for gaining access

to textbooks and models of social work education from abroad was mixed with skepticism in the face of the dangers of a new kind of imperialism, nourished by the collaboration or collusion between social welfare and capitalism that had already been demonstrated once.

At a political level this period was characterised not only by the expansion of the EU into countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but also by attempts to supplement the economic agenda and priorities of the EU by common social policy initiatives, as manifested in the Delors proposals. This showed an awareness that also in the history of national consolidation or unification within the European nation states the development of social policies had played an important role.

These hopeful developments almost came to a halt by the turn of the Millennium, thereby revealing the factors had had lain behind the post-war welfare state project: War and its devastating consequences had become a distant memory and economic achievement rather than socio-political measures could be ideologically portrayed as the foundation and guarantor of well-being; and with the 'defeat of communism' the need for maintaining public social protection as a competitive measure had disappeared. These two factors gave rise to the almost universal attraction that the ideology of neo-liberalism exerted on politics all over Europe. If welfare was now being presented as an optional, if not a negative factor in national politics this meant that it had to be restricted to the most urgent – and the most 'deserving' – cases.

We can therefore see since then a fundamental shift in the orientation of social services towards operating under much more restrictive conditions in practically all European countries, restrictive conditions which have the effect of privatising the concern for the welfare of citizens, of shifting responsibilities for securing one's welfare to the individual and therefore of emphasising the controlling over the caring responsibilities of social service staff generally. The results can be seen in the growing crisis of European integration, but also in various crises of internal integration exemplified by the refugee crisis, the growing discrepancy between rich and poor, the disaffection of young unemployed people who turn to virtual realities as they are marginalised in the concrete reality.
Consequently, the enthusiasm for developing European dimensions in social work has also somewhat stagnated. European exchange programmes continue to attract students, European networks and joint degree programmes have survived in places, social work scientific journals, even where they are not explicitly focused on European issues like EJSW, report a greater number of contributions of cross-national interest and international and European conferences continue to attract participants. But in my observation the scene is dominated on the one hand by comparative issues and studies like approaches to child protection or to refugees, or on the other by reports on the impact of changes in social policy contexts and the pervasive negative influence on social services, which can be uniformly experienced all across Europe.

It is therefore timely to ask ourselves, what do we hope to achieve by going beyond national contexts and boundaries in social work, how can we avoid simply commiserating each other on the harsher conditions under which social work is being practised and assert our European knowledge and orientation positively.

Turning these experiences into a vision of the future of social work it can be concluded that first of all, looking across national boundaries is an absolute necessity for social work if it is not to become reduced to the "long arm of the administration" and as being determined by regulations and fixed targets, which ultimately would amount to a purely controlling function.

But looking across what neighbouring countries do and collecting ideas and experiences is not enough. The exchanges must become a reflective occasion to look at the various practice and theory forms and formats with a critical eye and with a normative orientation, not in the sense of formulating an authoritative international version of social work that could be applied universally, but on the contrary with a clear understanding of the importance of cultural, political and legal differences. This would mean seeing a European orientation and dimension not as an optional extra for social work, but as a necessity to maintain both its professional autonomy and its service user orientation with all the understanding for subjectivity this requires.

In these exchanges and in working towards this goal lies an opportunity for social work not only to develop its professional and disciplinary profile with regard to the immediate practice challenges, which are more and more characterised by issues of cultural diversity, subjectivity and in this sense of agency, but also to make a significant contribution for getting the stagnating European unification process moving again. Because this process is stalling precisely on the inability to resolve conflicts of diversity and universality. Individual member states are fearful of being subjected to external control from the part of a European political or bureaucratic establishment and develop a tendency towards nationalism, separatism and 'ethnic purity', and at the same time their inter-dependence is becoming ever more apparent in economic, cultural and political terms. This is not simply a problem of political governance and a result of a constitutional weakness in the construction of the EU, it is a crisis of solidarity which makes not just European, but national cohesion precarious.

Social work's speciality is the ability to focus simultaneously on processes of individual identity formation and of social solidarity, adhering to principles of justice and dignity while respecting individuality and subjectivity. The values on which social work is founded are essential European values, developed in a long history of emancipatory ideas and the accompanying controversies. European values are not a unified codex, although they found entry into international conventions on human rights, but they are expressions of what it could mean to build societies worth living in, to overcome divisions of mistrust and hate, to provide for people's different needs. In this sense a European model of social work is not a utopian goal beyond reach, but a history of hopes and aspirations in the process of manifesting and concretising itself.