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Connecting theory and practice



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## Editorial

Editorial .....	2
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## Papers

Veronika Knauer Anti-Muslim Racism in Germany – a Challenge for Educational Work .....	6
Vera Taube Developing Close Bonds: One-to-One Intermediate Treatment in Children's Services in Germany .....	22
Kateřina Glumbíková Accelerators and Barriers to Integration into Permanent Housing for Mothers Living in Asylum Houses .....	40
Eva Křížová Specific Techniques of Exploring Spirituality as a Part of Holistic Social Work .....	50
Martyn Higgins Villains, Fools or Unsung Heroes? A Study of the Contradictory Narratives of Social Work Identities in Contemporary England .....	57
Marie Špiláčková The Importance of Historical Knowledge for Social Work as a Science, Profession and Academic Discipline – Experiences from Czech Republic .....	66
Katherine Bird More Alike Than We Think? Frames and Practice of Social Work with Families in the UK and Germany .....	79

## Book Reviews

Marilyn Strathern The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia .....	96
---	----

## Research Note

Science and Research Activities at the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, Trnava University in Trnava .....	98
Research on Deinstitutionalisation .....	100

## Our mission

Public Commitment to the Journal .....	102
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## Editorial

This English edition of the journal *Sociální práce / Sociálna práca / Czech and Slovak Social Work* contains articles which contribute to the development of social work knowledge and theory based on some of the key and enduring themes of social work, contained within discussion and analysis of contemporary areas of concern for our profession.

If we look at the International Association of Schools of Social Work's *Global Definition of the Social Work Profession*, we see there that:

*'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work.'*

*'Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.'*

In relation to these areas, the articles in this edition of the Journal cover issues such as social inclusion and exclusion – for example, in relation to mothers with children and their housing needs; discriminatory practices in relation to Muslim people in Germany; how social work can start to respond better to the needs and difficulties of some of the most troubled and troubling young people in our societies; the knowledge we need to best deal with the barriers and accelerators in the integration process of single mothers moving into permanent housing; the ways in which social workers can address the spiritual needs alongside other needs of service users; how social workers in carrying out their role come to be seen by the public and service users, with the concomitant effects on their relationships with those service users; the importance of historical knowledge for social work; and the value of comparing frames and practice



of social work in different countries, in this article in particular in the UK and Germany. In the article on *Anti-Muslim Racism in Germany – a Challenge for Educational Work*, Veronika Knauer examines the concept of *anti-Muslim racism*, differentiating this from other concepts, such as *Islamophobia* and *Muslimfeindschaft* (enmity against Muslims), setting this within the context of political groups which set out to demonise Muslim culture and people, detailing the attacks on Muslims, and some of the potential causes of this. The author addresses some of the key features of such processes which social workers need to be aware of and challenge, and how racism-critical educational work can aid in recognizing and questioning mechanisms which constitute and promote hierarchical approaches and power asymmetries, combined with considerations of intersectionality. The author then applies this analysis to an insight into what practical racism-critical work with young adults might look like in school as well as in non-school contexts, which can guide and support practical racism-critical work.

*Developing Close Bonds: One-to-One Intermediate Treatment in Children's Services in Germany* by Vera Taube presents a specific practice field of social work that addresses a target group characterized by severe behavioural problems in combination with a lack of capability to enter

relationships. Sometimes labelled as “hopeless cases”, these mainly young people are not only marginalized in society but also in the potential support systems.

Starting with basic information about one-to-one intermediate services in Germany including the legal framework, target group, types of provisions, previous research, and theoretical references, the article then emphasizes the special features of the German Child and Youth Services Act to provide an account that will be of interest to those inside and outside Germany in terms of concepts and approaches, asking what happens if a young person drops out of these systems? How can social work reach young people who refuse any form of help and support? The author notes that it is not unusual that young people entitled to individual support are often seen by society, their parents or the helping system as “impossible to raise and educate”, or that they even should be locked up to prevent further harm or to demonstrate limits.

The Kateřina Glumbíková article addresses the topic of the *Reintegration of Single Mothers Living in Asylum Houses*, focusing on barriers and accelerators of the integration process of single mothers moving into permanent housing. Using a participatory research approach, several categories of accelerators and barriers were identified – social relationships, boyfriend, children, crime, money, housing, asylum house, domestic violence, addiction and self-confidence. The article in particular builds upon previous research by concentrating on the gendered aspect of those in Asylum Houses, and focuses more on potential barriers to such mother’s integration into permanent housing than previous research, therefore providing valuable knowledge for those working in this field concerning how to approach the difficulties and the potential for effective work in this area.

In her article *Specific Techniques of Exploring Spirituality as a Part of Holistic Social Work*, Eva Křížová discusses an issue which social work has often not dealt with well, if at all – spirituality and religiousness. The author presents techniques which serve to explore this area within a client-centred approach, presented

as an important dimension of human lives and as such should be a key part of holistic social work, even in secular or post-secular societies. The article sets out how spirituality can be viewed as one element of resilience, support or recovery, and as a person-centred resource that can enhance the human understanding between the client and service provider. The author sets out the three conditions she believes are necessary when dealing with spirituality, with the intention being to find additional resources which may strengthen the person in decision-making and active behaviour to overcome the problems.

The article *Villains, Fools or Unsung Heroes? A Study of the Contradictory Narratives of Social Work Identities in Contemporary England*, by Martyn Higgins, examines a number of rival ‘stories’ of social work which reflect the contradictory and ambivalent attitude of society towards social work and social workers, and argues that critical pedagogy offers a way forward to move beyond these contradictions. Based on a qualitative study of a qualifying undergraduate social work degree in social work in England, 48 participants were interviewed. Participants included academics, students, service users and practice educators in the agencies where students were in placement. Three narratives of social work identities were identified: social workers as ‘villains’, ‘fools’, and ‘unsung heroes’, which can be seen as contradictory and ambivalent, reflecting the ambivalent relationship of social work to how social work is viewed by contemporary society. Higgins argues that social work needs to embrace these views of and by itself, in order to engage with them and move beyond these rival and dissonant narratives, so that social workers engage more constructively and critically with the current debates on social work in England. A critical pedagogy of hope is explored as a way forward.

*The Importance of Historical Knowledge for Social Work as a Science, Profession and Academic Discipline – Experiences from Czech Republic* by Marie Špiláčková examines how, as in any other scientific field, social work has its history, and how important it is to have a knowledge of this history – the factors affecting it, as well as

the reasons which have triggered those factors – and how the present is the necessary result of previous development. The article focuses on social work in the Czech Republic. The paper is based on the results of research on professional discourse on the significance of historical findings for social work as a science, profession and academic discipline to apply historical research as a scientific research method in social work, and introduces the value of using the methodology of historical research. Historical knowledge, the author contends, is poised to enrich the currently presented information on social work history, and also that it is one of the key ways with which to enhance the prestige of the social work profession and a means to bring it into the public eye.

In *More Alike Than We Think? Frames and Practice of Social Work with Families in the UK and Germany*, Katherine Bird uses the UK and Germany as examples of different welfare state regimes that have been confronted with similar social developments over the last fifty years, in the context of the internationalisation of social work practice (in the sense of increasing cross-border convergence). The author sets out how, although social change has followed a similar course in both countries, the political reactions to these developments diverge, giving examples from each country as to how parallels can be identified. At the end of the article, the author presents a case study of a family that in terms of their composition pose a challenge to dominant conceptions of the family which social work will increasingly have to cope with in the future.

In this edition's book review, Thomas Marthaler and Claude Haas examine Marilyn Strathern's 1990 work, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Whilst acknowledging that some might question its validity for social work, the reviewers argue that Strathern's analytical strategies continue to add to our knowledge in two key ways. First, by explicitly addressing our cultural practices of taking position on phenomena; and second in the ways in which we might make use of Strathern's analytical method concerning relational practices between people at places in times in order to reflect on how different places and different people are variably connected in

order to distinguish the important from the insignificant, to determine how to act, towards which goals, and in collaboration with which other actors.

In addition to the main article and book review, we offer two research reports as examples of research activity in social work and social science departments.

The Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, Trnava University in Slovakia, gives an account of their major scientific and research activities, including long-term international and national projects, including:

- 'GENOVATE', an action research project which aims to ensure equal opportunities for women and men by encouraging a more gender-competent management in research, innovation and scientific decision-making bodies,
- a needs analysis of social services for early intervention in Slovakia focused on the support of young children at risk of developmental delay and
- a European project supporting European countries under pressure of large migration, in ensuring effective healthcare for refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants.

The second research report from Tallinn University, Estonia, sets out its co-operation with Tartu University in conducting research on deinstitutionalization policies, consisting of an international review on the experiences of seven selected European countries, and focus groups and individual interviews among Estonian stakeholders related to deinstitutionalization and community based services in the field of disability care and mental health. The report notes how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities that was signed and ratified by Estonia and related reference documents emphasise the importance of a clear commitment toward deinstitutionalization and community living.

The report discusses how sharing responsibility for care between the government and municipalities caused tension in many Eastern European countries, where decentralization and autonomy of local communities was a vital



element of the newly established democracies in the region- an obvious political achievement, but the work addresses the sustainability of the municipalities' work on this during the whole period. It also discusses how, according to several studies, personal budget holders reported improvements in their sense of well-being, self-esteem and self-determination after having started to receive these. The work suggests that the fundamental reason for the improvement in the quality of life here relates to the opportunity to use more power in the decision-making processes concerning the services used. The international overview explored the failure of the first wave of deinstitutionalization in Sweden where first community housing was organized in group of group homes, and segregated "disability" blocks instead of real integration, pointing to how only fully implemented deinstitutionalization leads to successful social integration, and how any scenario with remaining, renewed or renovated institutional capacities most likely will lead to failure.

So, we welcome you to this latest edition of the Sociální práce / Sociálna práca / Journal of Czech and Slovak Social Work and invite you to consider the role of social work as presented in these articles, in terms of social work's role in social justice, and challenging social exclusion within communities and social work agencies; how social work is seen, and politically constructed, and then how we can take account of this knowledge; and then move forward in terms of raising its status and profile in order to have a greater platform to produce the changes that its values herald, based on analysis of its history and current image, within the key social work values and methods that can be applied in these contexts.

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# Anti-Muslim Racism in Germany – a Challenge for Educational Work

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## Abstract

The article begins with the description and characterization of current events and discussions in the context of Muslims in Germany. In a second part, it tries to theorise and conceptualise these occurrences and developments by the concept of *anti-Muslim racism* and by simultaneously differentiating it from other concepts, such as *Islamophobia* and *Muslimfeindschaft* (enmity against Muslims). Finally, it shows the implications and consequences of this conceptual framework on the pedagogical educational work. By pointing out the 'stumbling blocks' and problems of common educational approaches of 'intercultural' and 'antiracist' pedagogy, it searches for the answer to the questions on how education can meet the situation seen in Germany and how educational programmes must be conceptualized and designed in order to fight *anti-Muslim racism* and, thus, to make a contribution to social justice and participation within our society.

## Keywords

racism, Muslims, anti-Muslim racism, education, educational programmes, racism-critical pedagogy

## 1. Discrimination and racism against Muslims in Germany

Events and occasions in Germany have been evolving week by week during the last year. In October 2014, some "concerned citizens" started to protest against the estimated Islamization of the occident and the asylum policy of the German government, at first, every Monday in the streets of Dresden. The movement called itself PEGIDA (patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Western World)<sup>2</sup> and grew rapidly. At the beginning of 2015, you could find offshoots of this movement in nearly every large city in Germany. Although it was accompanied by large counter-movements, PEGIDA grew bigger and bigger and was also flanked and infiltrated more and more by right-wing extremists and groups.

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<sup>2</sup> In German "Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes" (PEGIDA).





The ‘assaults of Cologne’ seemed to be the temporary climax of these developments: In January 2016, a number of violent thefts and sexual incidents were reported to have occurred on the preceding New Year’s Eve at the main station and cathedral in Cologne. The perpetrators were described as looking North African and Arabic. Reports on these occurrences spread like wildfire in social media and provoked public outrage at the supposed misogynistic and sexist culture of Muslims. In this context, the issue of refugees also came back into the middle of public debate. Initiatives were increasingly created to prevent refugee accommodation within neighbourhoods, justified by the fear of violent assaults from Muslim men.

Right wing populist parties took advantage of the growing uncertainty among the population and started campaigning against refugees and Muslims. The results can be seen in the regional elections of March 13 in 2016: The clear winner of these elections was the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*), a party which is classified as a right-wing populist party by political scientists. “The right-wing populists collected the dissatisfied from all other parties”<sup>3</sup> (Heidtmann, 2016), summarized journalist Jan Heidtmann in the *Sueddeutsche Online*, and questioned how it may be explained that tens of thousands of voters moved to a party whose representatives make propaganda for racism and hatred.

### Actual discussions and developments

There have been discrimination and attacks against Muslims in Germany before last year and there was already a quite evident hostility and violence against Muslims and people who are suspected of being Muslims before the *assaults of Cologne* and the *refugee crisis*. The bloody series of murders committed by the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU: National Socialist Underground), whose members planned and executed numerous attacks involving explosions and homicides between 2000 and 2006, led by a xenophobic and subversive attitude, were probably the most well organised, extensive and infamous activities of brute force, but not by any means the only ones. In addition to the criminal acts themselves, the media representation of these crimes was also racist. Although having an unambiguous political extremist right-wing background, the murders were named the “kebab murder”<sup>4</sup> in public discussion, reflecting the official assumption of a conflict within the Turkish drug milieu. Thus, the murders carried out by the right-wing terrorist cell have been characterized by this term for years. This fact not only shows how long investigators and journalists were in the dark, but also which racist prejudices have been involved (Fuchs, 2012). Finally, in 2011, the term *kebab murder* was judged to be the *bad word of the year*<sup>5</sup> in Germany by an independent jury of linguists. Explaining its decision, the jury stated: “With this, in fact, inadequate folkloristic stereotypical labelling of a political terroristic murder series, entire groups of society are excluded and the victims themselves discriminated against by reducing them to a snack food based on their parentage”<sup>6</sup> (ibid.).

In addition to this murder series, numerous additional attacks and assaults were performed against mosques and Muslims during the last few years, not necessarily within the context of a political right-wing motivation, but doubtless with racist backgrounds. Not all of them received much public attention. It is, thus, not easy to reveal how many acts there were, and the number varies from source to source. The Government’s answer to the request from the party “*Die Linke*” (The Left) regarding how many attacks there had been on mosques, mosque associations and other Islamic

<sup>3</sup> In German: “Die Rechtspopulisten haben die Unzufriedenen aus allen Parteien eingesammelt”.

<sup>4</sup> In German: “Döner Morde”.

<sup>5</sup> In German: “Unwort des Jahres”.

<sup>6</sup> Translated into English by the author; an exact quote: “Mit der sachlich unangemessenen, folkloristisch-stereotypen Etikettierung einer rechtsterroristischen Mordserie werden ganze Bevölkerungsgruppen ausgegrenzt und die Opfer selbst in höchstem Maße diskriminiert, indem sie aufgrund ihrer Herkunft auf ein Imbissgericht reduziert werden.” (Fuchs, 2012)



institutions was that there were 78 attacks between January 2012 and March 2014 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2014:12).

At the same time, individuals have increasingly become victims of racist hostility and violence. In July 2009, for example, Marwa Sherbini, a 31-year-old Egyptian, was murdered in the Dresden provincial court by being stabbed 18 times with a knife after she had defended herself against a racist insult. The reaction of politicians and media publicity was as appalling as the criminal act itself. Detailed information was revealed only fragmentally, leaving the impression of an, in fact, regrettable but only exceptionable case. Finally, large sections of the media discussed security within courts of law instead of the obviously racist act itself. However, the victim was Muslim and she was obviously murdered because of wearing a hijab (Bühl, 2010:9). The way in which this murder has been discussed in public leads us to other questions: How is the topic of hostility and violence against Muslims perceived and discussed within German society? How can these attitudes towards Muslims and Islam in Germany be described generally?

The publication "*Deutschland schafft sich ab*" (Germany is abolishing itself) written by Thilo Sarrazin<sup>7</sup> and discussed extensively in the autumn of 2010, gives an impressive insight into the attitudes towards Muslims within German society. The book deals with the implications due to a declining German birth rate, a growing lower class and the immigration from predominantly Muslim countries. The discussion mainly covered the question whether or not Sarrazin expresses racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic positions (Bühl, 2010:135).

In his book, Sarrazin elaborates his opinion that the group of Muslim migrants is characterized by substandard integration into the labour market by an above-average dependency on transfer payment, a below-average participation in education, supernormal fertility, local segregation and tendencies to parallel society formation, a tendency to fundamental political currents and an above average crime rate. His opinion regarding Islam can be summarised as follows: "No other religion in Europe keeps up such a demanding attitude. No other immigration is connected so tightly with such an extensive claim of welfare state benefits and criminal offenses; no other group emphasises its differences so strongly in public, especially by the clothing of their women, and no other religion shows similar fluent transitions to violence, dictatorship and terrorism"<sup>8</sup> (Sarrazin, quoted by Bühl, 2010:144). He argues essentially that the Muslim virility distinguishes itself by a high propensity to violence based on incorrect ideas of social roles, poor success in education and sexual frustration. Moreover, he supposes that if schools tolerate Muslim girls wearing the hijab, they subsequently agree that girls enjoy fewer rights than boys and, thus, Sharia has entered the German normative system (Bühl, 2010:144).

These are only some of his positions and opinions concerning Muslims within German society. Nevertheless, the fact that a well-known publisher<sup>9</sup> edits the book, that the weekly magazine 'Spiegel' promotes it by preprints and that the author's positions are presented as being worth discussing within several media formats (for example, in numerous talk shows) show how 'discussable' and accepted the positions have become in German society. No problem of integration is named in the book that has not been discussed for years. However, the novel fact is that it is possible again to talk about genes as the basis of expected (cultural) differences and to describe Islam, and, thus, more than one billion people, as being "worthless", using fascist diction (ibid.:154). It is actually

<sup>7</sup> Thilo Sarrazin was finance senator in the Berlin Senate from 2000 to 2002. Subsequently, until 2010, he was a board member of the German Central Bank.

<sup>8</sup> Translated into English by the author; exact quote: "Keine andere Religion in Europa tritt so fordernd auf. Keine andere Immigration ist so stark wie die muslimische mit der Inanspruchnahme des Sozialstaats und Kriminalität verbunden, keine Gruppe betont in der Öffentlichkeit so sehr ihre Andersartigkeit, insbesondere durch die Kleidung der Frauen, bei keiner anderen Religion ist der Übergang zu Gewalt, Diktatur und Terrorismus so fließend." (Sarrazin, quoted by Bühl, 2010:144)

<sup>9</sup> Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, München; Random House GmbH.



not a new discovery when Sarrazin points out a lack of education of children with a migration background. What is new, however, is that he shifts the responsibility of their failure to themselves, as he does not focus on school as an institution, but some biologically determined low intelligence as the reason for the problems (ibid.).

Indeed, sections of the political élite of the country disagreed with the thesis presented in the book, but they particularly denounced the biological positions, not the anti-Muslim and racist approaches on which these positions are based. The statements were even welcomed with major agreement and sympathy within a broad range of the German population.

Equally embedded within an anti-Muslim discussion is the so-called *hijab debate*<sup>10</sup>. Without going into too much detail, I briefly want to outline on which Eurocentric and racist assumptions this discussion is based. The hijab in this discussion, from the majority point of view, is less recognised as a religious symbol or dress code than as a symbol of subordination and repression. Women are not supposed to wear it voluntarily, but are forced by men to do so. The “Islamic women” are, thus, depicted as foggyish – the “Western women”, by contrast, seem to be progressive and modern. As a result, the interpretation of the hijab within this debate generates a hierarchy of the European as an “enlightened woman” and the Muslim as a “backwards-oriented migrant”<sup>11</sup> (Bühl, 2010:162).

It does not seem to be of interest for this discussion that these assumptions have already been disproved by various empirical studies (Bühl, 2010:163; see also Beck-Gernsheim, 2004:60). Qualitative interviews have been conducted that show a lot of different motivations, contexts and histories in respect to wearing the hijab. For one woman, it may be a religious symbol, for another, one part of her individual identity that is built in between different ways of life and cultural symbols, and for a third, it may be a conscious demonstration of difference. Additionally, there are also women who would like to wear a hijab but do not, fearing stigmatization, social exclusion or loss of employment. Of course, it cannot be denied that there are Muslim families in which female children and women are forced to wear the hijab. Nevertheless, it is a remarkable fact that, especially in the younger generation, it is often the outstanding self-confident and self-reflective women and girls who decide to wear the hijab (Bühl, 2010:163).

The neo-orientalist equalization of wearing the hijab with subjection and suppression ignores that there might be different reasons to do so, varying in historical, political, sociocultural or familiar contexts. The stigmatization of the hijab as ‘backward’ exercises a very real pressure on the people concerned and leads to job-related and daily discrimination. It is a ‘colonializing’ enforcement demanding the acceptance of ‘Western’ patterns and punishing a refusal of assimilation with depreciation and discrimination. The debate about the hijab, following Achim Bühl, proves that, similar to other discussions about Islam, it is a pseudo debate which is not really concerned with the hijab itself, but is a discriminating pejorative attack on Islam in general (ibid.:165).

The *mosque building discussions*<sup>12</sup> have to be seen in a similar context of rejection and delineation. Like in the *hijab debate*, several aspects of the problem are frequently exploited in an anti-Islamic, respective anti-Muslim, discourse. Without discussing in detail the numerous different conflicts and without generalizing, these conflicts are merely about acceptance, tolerance and respect for a religion and its community. If this community leaves traditional backyard mosques and starts raising representative buildings, it can be regarded as a symbol of the desire to stay. However, the majority of the population does not perceive these actions as a symbol of integration, but as a demonstration of dominance within the public space and, therefore, as a sign for a growing self-confidence of Muslims that is challenging their own self-consciousness. The core of the discussion

<sup>10</sup> In German: “Kopftuchdebatte”

<sup>11</sup> The dichotomization ‘Islamic’ vs. ‘Western’ applied also has to be questioned, as a religious category is compared to a geographic one. By opposing these terms, the discussion. Thus implies that a woman cannot be ‘Islamic’ and ‘Western’ at the same time.

<sup>12</sup> In German: “Moscheebaudebatte”.



is, thus, the status of Muslims within German society. Even if all neighbourhood problems are solved, a remarkable part of society is still not willing to tolerate this form of symbolic acceptance and inclusion of Muslims into German society. The controversy about the building of mosques, therefore, represents a symbolic conflict of acceptance (ibid.:176).

Hence, “Islam-bashing” (ibid.:10) in Germany is on no account ostracized, but presentable. The equation of Islam and backward violence does not only take place within the minds of diehards, but also within the statements of political, economic and cultural élite. Hostility towards Islam and Muslims has become an acceptable attitude within Germany and cannot, thus, be seen as the problem of a right-wing extremist minority, but has to be found within mainstream society.

### Studies on attitude towards Muslims

Different studies and investigations have tried to explore the attitudes towards Muslims and Islam within German society and to provide statistical numbers about the situation. In the following, I will briefly show some results of a study called “Die Mitte im Umbruch Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland”<sup>13</sup> (Decker et al., 2012, 2014).

Since 2002, a team around Elmar Brahler and Oliver Decker at the University of Leipzig have been conducting the shortly called “Mitte-Studien”<sup>14</sup>. The political perception in Germany is explored biennially by this representative long-term study with the aim of mapping antidemocratic and right-wing extremist attitudes on a timeline. These attitudes are documented by means of a questionnaire on the basis of six dimensions: recommendation of a right-wing authoritarian dictatorship, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, social Darwinism and trivialization of National Socialism (Decker et al., 2014:5). The “Mitte-Studie” of 2012, furthermore, addressed the phenomenon of Islamophobia explicitly. It concludes that Islamophobia is the “new costume” (ibid.:48) of racism: now (superficially) the biological argumentation is substituted by a supposed backwardness of the Islamic culture (ibid.).

As you can see in the diagrams below, more than half of the respondents (57.1 %) agreed with the statement that “Muslims and their religion are so different to us that it would be illusory to claim equal access to all positions in society.” Nearly as many share the opinion that “The Islamic world is lagging behind and refuses new realities” (57.5 %) and that “Islam is an archaic religion, unable to adapt to present times” (56.3 %). A little bit less, but still nearly half of the respondents agree “that the connection between Islam and terrorism is designed into Islam itself and its aggressive part” (46.6 %) and that “Any criticism of the Western World by representatives of Islam is exaggerated and unjustified” (44.4 %). Finally, more than a third feel like a stranger in their own country because of the Muslims (43.0 %) and are of the opinion that “Immigration should be prohibited for Muslims” (36.6 %).

<sup>13</sup> In English: “The centre in a state of upheaval. Right-wing extremist attitudes in Germany.”

<sup>14</sup> In English: “centre studies”.



Table 1: Agreement with Islamophobic statements

<b>Islamophobia</b>	<b>I am totally/largely opposed to the statement (%)</b>	<b>I partly agree / disagree with the statement (%)</b>	<b>I totally/largely agree with the statement (%)</b>
The Islamic world is lagging behind and refuses new realities.	14.8	27.8	57.5
Islam is an archaic religion, unable to adapt to present times.	16.5	27.2	56.3
I believe that the connection between Islam and terrorism is designed into Islam itself and its aggressive part.	25.7	27.7	46.6
Any criticism of the Western World by representatives of Islam is exaggerated and unjustified.	25.8	29.8	44.4
Muslims and their religion are so different to us that it would be illusory to claim equal access to all positions in society.	17.2	25.8	57.1

Source: Decker et al., 2012:92, statements translated by the author

Table 2: Agreement with Xenophobic statements

<b>Xenophobia</b>	<b>I am totally/largely opposed to the statement (%)</b>	<b>I partly agree /and disagree with the statement (%)</b>	<b>I totally/largely agree with the statement (%)</b>
Foreigners come to Germany only in order to milk the country's social welfare schemes.	41.3	31.5	27.2
If jobs are scarce, we should send back the foreigners.	49.5	26.4	24.1
Germany has become "non-German" to a dangerous degree because of its many resident foreigners.	47.2	25.3	27.5

Source: Decker et al., 2014:32, statements translated by the author

In general, you can see that about a third of the respondents agreed with xenophobic statements, while the average agreement on Islamophobic statements is higher and ranges between 44.4 and 57.5%. That demonstrates that anti-Muslim attitudes in Germany are currently more widespread (and maybe even more accepted) than xenophobic attitudes.

The study also revealed a decrease of xenophobia between 2012 and 2014, while, at the same time, it noticed an increase of support of Islamophobic statements. That shows that the phenomenon of Islamophobia cannot be correlated with the phenomenon of xenophobia. Instead, they seem to be two different societal occurrences.



Table 3: Agreement with Islamophobic statements 2009 – 2014

Islamophobia (agreement to the statements)	2009	2010	2011	2014
Immigration should be prohibited for Muslims.	21.4	26.1	22.6	36.6
Because of the Muslims, I feel like a stranger in my own country.	32.2	38.9	30.2	43.0

Source: Decker et al., 2014:44, statements translated by the author

Other studies which dealt with these issues achieved similar results. Exemplarily are the study of the Bertelsmann Foundation, “*Religionsmonitor – Sonderauswertung Islam*”<sup>15</sup> (2015) and a study conducted by Naika Foroutan and published by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 2012, “*Muslimbilder in Deutschland Wahrnehmungen und Ausgrenzungen in der Integrationsdebatte*”<sup>16</sup>.

**2. What does anti-Muslim racism mean? A discussion of terms**

How can these social developments be described and theorised? As we can see above, they cannot be simply subsumed under the term xenophobia, but they seem to be a very unique phenomenon. Apparently, there is an agitation which is directed especially against Muslims and those who are envisaged as Muslim. In the context of this agitation, a culturalist characterization of Muslims takes place: Every Muslim seems to be equal by nature and this equality is based on the *belonging* to Islam. Islam is seen, therefore, as the only source of identity of all Muslims – other sources of identity, such as nationality, social background, gender, profession, seem to be subsumed by being Muslim. Furthermore, these attitudes are based on the projective expectation that Islam contains a world view which does not fit into Western society and from which Muslims are not able to emancipate. The ability of Muslims to position themselves towards Islam is, thus, denied. Every action of Muslims is then seen as determined by their belief. Muslims lose their identity – they become “agents of Islam” (Decker et al., 2012:90). In this perspective, Islam and Islamic culture can be regarded as a sufficient explanation for all the difficulties within Islamic countries as well as within Western society (ibid.:86).

Scientific debates show a great variety of different terms to deal with this phenomenon. In the following, I will explain and discuss the most common ones that are used especially in German debates, as there are *Islamophobia*, *Muslimfeindschaft* (enmity against Muslims) and *anti-Muslim racism*. A discussion about terms in this case is not at all quibbling, as it is not only a debate about different words, but about their meanings. It is a discussion about what type of phenomenon we are talking about, as the use of different words implicates different contents. It is important to clearly define the precise content of the concept applied especially by using terms which have a scientific as well as a political implication.

The most widespread term, especially in English literature, is probably the term Islamophobia. It was first mentioned in the “Runnymede Trust” in 1997, a study with the title “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All”. In this study, the term was used to describe an aversion towards and a fear of Islam and Muslims which is based on resentments and stereotypes. The UN also used the term Islamophobia with the same meaning at the United Nations World Conference against Racism, and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, which was implemented by the

<sup>15</sup> In English: “Religion monitor – special evaluation of Islam.”

<sup>16</sup> In English: “Pictures of Muslims in Germany. Perceptions and exclusions within the debate about integration.”





EU and which submitted a report on Islamophobia in 2002 and 2006 (Pfahl-Taughber, 2012:11). Furthermore, a long list of scientific literature and studies which contain the word Islamophobia in their title could be added<sup>17</sup>.

But does the word itself fit the meaning given? If you look at the term, it consists of two parts: 'Islam' and 'phobia'. The first part is the name of a religion; the second part is the ancient Greek word for clinical fear or anxiety, a medical or psychological term. It is used to describe a pathological and unfounded emotion that goes beyond an appropriate level of fear (ibid.:13). This leads us to the problems of the term. Firstly, in this context, Islamophobia gets the connotation of a mental illness, an involuntary aversion, but not the meaning of fear of Islam and Muslims as a learned bias. Furthermore, used in this way, the term suggests reference to a certain (psychological) problem of the individual, but not to an attitude of large parts of society.

Secondly, it is a concept that confuses the criticism of a religion and the stigmatization of the people who believe in this religion. An aversion to Islam as a religion, which means to its ideology, religious symbols and practices, does not necessarily mean an aversion to the people who believe in this religion. When using this term, two concepts are mixed. It is not clear what we are talking about. Is it about the religion or is it about the people? The concept of Islamophobia, thus, confuses the description of attitudes towards a religion and attitudes towards the people (ibid.:17).

Finally, Armin Pfahl-Tauber argues that the word is used as a political catchword in many settings and is, thus, inappropriate for scientific contexts. The establishment of the term in public discourses also allows Islamist groups to use it for ideological and political reasons, as they know about the sensitivity towards the accusation of xenophobia in society and policy. This enables them to describe criticism of human rights violations with the term Islamophobia and, thus, evade discussions about it (ibid.:14).

One possible alternative term, which was developed by the German Islam Conference (Deutsche Islamkonferenz, 2012), is the term *Muslimfeindschaft* (enmity towards Muslims)<sup>18</sup>. The term has been developed out of the criticism of the term Islamophobia, and wants to take account to the effect of discrimination of *people* because of their (ascribed) inclusion in a certain group – this is evident as it contains the word 'Muslim' instead of 'Islam'. It, thus, strengthens the necessity to distinguish between a hostile attitude towards a religion (specific ideologies, symbols and practices) and a hostile attitude towards a group of people, in this case, Muslims, as members of a religious community (Pfahl-Tauber, 2012:20).

The term *Muslimfeindschaft*, therefore, describes an ideology of discrimination which is about the devaluation and disadvantage of a group of people, whereas this devaluation and discrimination can be independent of the criticism of the religion of Islam. With this term, the phenomenon we are talking about can be seen as a type of "group-focused enmity," according to the studies of Wilhelm Heitmeyer.<sup>19</sup> The concept tries to analyse how certain groups of people are perceived and confronted with hostile mentalities by the majority of society. From this point of view, the situation becomes a human rights issue, as it is not about the truth or the reputation of a religion, but about the people and their right to dignity, freedom and equality. Only people can be subject

<sup>17</sup> The list of examples is too long to list them all. If you want to know more, just type the term 'Islamophobia' into the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) of any social science library and see what happens!

<sup>18</sup> See: DEUTSCHE ISLAMKONFERENZ, 2012: *Muslimfeindschaft – Phänomen und Gegenstrategien Beiträge der Fachtagung der Deutschen Islam Konferenz am 4. und 5. Dezember 2012 in Berlin*. Tagungsband. Druckhaus Bernd Brümmer, Bonn.

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Heitmeyer conducted a long-term study at the University of Bielefeld from 2002 to 2011 to find out more about the relation between social and economic factors and the development of prejudices towards minorities in Germany. The studies are published by Suhrkamp Verlag under the title "Deutsche Zustände".



to human rights, therefore, a focus on the people at the same time enables a focus on their claims to human rights (Bielefeldt, 2012:23).

A problem of this term is that it neglects the asymmetry of power between the majority society and the marginalised minority, which, in this context, are the Muslims. The concept of 'enmity' does not say anything about the societal position from which one speaks and from which collective ascriptions are made (Shooman, 2011). Therefore, dominance relations between different groups within society are not reflected in the concept of group-focused enmity and in the term *Muslimfeindschaft*. Furthermore, as it is a German term, it is not able to adapt to and to join international debates, which means that there is no connectivity to international discourses.

Based on these critics, I advocate the term *anti-Muslim racism*, following Yasemin Shooman (2011) and Imman Attia (2013). An argument for the term *anti-Muslim racism* is that the concept of racism contains the concept of societal power asymmetry. Neither the concept of 'phobia' nor the concept of 'enmity' says anything about the societal position from which collective ascriptions to the group of Muslims are made. Who is able to define *who* Muslims are? If we especially compare *Muslimfeindschaft* and *anti-Muslim racism*, we see that there is not only a difference in the words, but in the whole approach on which they are based. As mentioned above, the term *Muslimfeindschaft* is based on the concept of 'group-based enmity'. This concept refers to the assumption of two groups existing next to each other. Contrarily, the concept of racism refers to the process of 'othering', which means a process of addressing the others as an essential group which is opposed to one's own group. Furthermore, this process of 'othering' is not prevalent to the phenomenon, but is part of it and is a process that is connected with societal power (Shoomann, 2011). The concept of *racism*, thus, contains more than just a set of prejudices towards a certain group of people.

Following Paul Mecheril and Claus Melter (2011), I understand racism as a powerful system of discourses and practices that is operating with and connecting to constructions of race. This system takes unequal treatment into account and, at the same time, validates it. The distinction of people and their classification into hierarchically organised groups are associated and connected with ascriptions and attributions that are imagined as natural. Social and cultural differences are, thus, naturalized, suggested as unchangeable and associated with a certain group of society (ibid.:15).

Furthermore, the concept of racism contains the process of ethnicization. In the context of *anti-Muslim racism*, this ethnicization is visible in the synonymous use of terms such as 'Turk', 'Arab' and 'Muslim'. However, not every Turk or Arab is Muslim – nevertheless, they can be subject to anti-Muslim racism. That means, not only (practicing) Muslims may be victims of anti-Muslim racism, but also people who are just suspected of being Muslim. Rejection and hostility towards Muslims, therefore, have little to do with the actual religious practice of the people concerned. Regardless of whether they go to the mosque, fast during the month of Ramadan, read the Qur'an or understand themselves as faithful Muslims, they experience distrust and refusal only due to ethnic reasons, because of their Muslim-sounding names or their physical appearance. In other words, origin and attributed ethnic background seem to play a more important role than actual religious practice. This is a very important aspect of the phenomenon described and can be made visible by the concept of *racism*.

Moreover, the concept of anti-Muslim racism goes beyond the individual-based explanation of prejudices and stereotypes and also comes into effect on a structural level. It is not only about the personal attitude of an individual, there is also a structural dimension of racism against Muslims within German society.

Finally, the term *anti-Muslim racism* is able to adapt to international discourses. The German term *Muslimfeindschaft* is very difficult to transfer into the international scientific debates and discourses, which are generally conducted in English. In these discussions, you mostly find the term Islamophobia (as mentioned above), which was quite rightly criticised because of its pathological implications. Nevertheless, it can be observed that Islamophobia in recent discourses



in the USA and the UK is more and more designated and interpreted as a form of racism and used synonymously to the term *anti-Muslim racism* (Shooman, 2011).

### **3. Racism and education – How can education against anti-Muslim racism work?**

If you look at the occurrences and developments described at the beginning, you can easily see that there is a lot to do. In the fields of social work and educational work, I see both the necessity and the possibility to meet these challenges. Building upon the previous discussions of empirical manifestations and theoretical conceptualization of the phenomenon, I will now ask how education can meet this situation and especially how educational programmes have to be designed and conceptualized to fight anti-Muslim racism. In comparison to conventional pedagogic concepts and their “stumbling blocks” (Brodén, 2012:29), I will work out how anti-Muslim racism can be made subject to education with the aim of contributing to a society of greater social justice, in the sense of equal opportunities and access to resources, participation and social acceptance.

#### **Criticism of common approaches of ‘intercultural’ and ‘antiracist’ pedagogy**

The “market” (Elverich et al., 2006:9) of intercultural and antiracist educational work is complex and diverse. The following is regarding the reflection weaknesses and problems of existing concepts accordingly to draw conclusions for an alternative approach critical of racism.

The term ‘intercultural’ pedagogy already shows the first conceptual difficulty. The implicit focus on ‘culture’ strengthens popular ideas of cultures as homogeneous entities to which people can be assigned. This perspective will lead to a culturalizing interpretation of societal phenomena. A focus on ‘cultural’ differences and ‘intercultural’ conflicts mostly entails that social problems and inequalities are seen as located within the cultures themselves or as misunderstandings between different cultures, which can be eliminated by encounter and tolerance. Racist structures within society and forms of everyday discrimination lose sight in these kind of approaches (Elverich et al., 2006:9).

The underlying logic of the ‘intercultural’ follows horizontal differences. It stresses different parallel existing groups and their cultural differences. On the contrary, an emphasis on the vertical difference that does not assume these groups to exist equally next to each other, but to be integrated in a system of power structures would reflect reality much better. Without reflecting on these structures, an intercultural pedagogy follows a practice of not addressing and of more or less consciously concealing vertical racist structures because of talking about horizontal interculturality (Foitzik, 2010:267).

Similarly, a practice of exoticism that is often inherent to such approaches and which emphasises the enrichment of ‘our’ culture through the culture of the ‘others’, is an approach that does not meet reality. It merely reproduces and confirms the supposed dichotomy between ‘us’ and the ‘others’, but does not try to break it down. Furthermore, these ‘others’ are reduced to a static cultural phenomenon by being addressed by cultural ascriptions and essentializations (Brodén, 2012:29).

In the same way, the criticism of antiracist approaches starts with a criticism of the term. In this context, the term ‘antiracist’ suggests that there may be a position outside racist structures from which antiracist work can be done (Elverich et al., 2006:16). However, if one does not accept the embeddedness of *all* actors in racist structures of society, racism will be seen as the individual problem of a person, as a product of individual prejudices. Racism then occurs as a result of a weak self, as a result of group conflicts or interpersonal conflicts that are based on a lack of information and, consequently, may be – analogous to the intercultural approach – explained by a mere problem of understanding each other (Lang, 2012:22).

A methodological individualism like this declares racism as a problem of individuals and is often accompanied by normative and moralizing positions. Racism is seen as a morally reprehensible and ‘false’ attitude of a person, which this person can be individually made responsible for. A perspective like this will indubitably lead to a practice of not talking about racism, as one’s



own entanglement will not be addressed. It supports the delegation of racism to others and, thus, prevents a confrontation with and discussion about one's own position and involvement within the racist structures of our society. An approach like that also misjudges that even racism that occurs on an individual level cannot be separated from societal conditions and inherent meanings. Racist reality can hardly be fought in this way (Brodén, 2012:27; Scharathow, 2011:16).

Another antiracist position of argumentation, the supposed defence of the others through a utilitarian rhetoric, is problematic as well. If it is argued, for example, that 'we' need 'the Turks' or 'the Muslims' to reverse the challenging population pyramid in Germany, and that 'they' are, thus, economically useful to 'us', this position can evoke counter arguments in contexts where the argument of economic utilisation does not work. Furthermore, an approach like this is not useful for analysing and decomposing dichotomies and reducing societal power asymmetries. The legitimate presence of the 'others' in this approach is always based on 'our' need of 'them' and, thus, consolidates existing structures of dominance (Brodén, 2012:29).

### **“Racism-critical” education as an alternative approach**

Building upon these criticisms and to make clear that “antiracism” is a claim that cannot be fulfilled within a society that is characterized by racist structures, Paul Mecheril suggests using the term “racism-critical”<sup>20</sup>. As an alternative term, it takes account of the knowledge about the problems and paradox effects of common approaches (Mecheril, 2012:19).

If you understand racism as a societal relationship and mechanism of structuring reality that concerns and influences *all* members of our society, as suggested above, racism can neither be seen as an individual problem nor as a peripheral phenomenon. From this point of view, the “difficulty of not being racist”<sup>21</sup> (Kalpaka, Rätzzel, 1990) becomes clear and stresses the importance of understanding and questioning the societal patterns of dividing people into two different groups of a “natio-ethno-cultural us” and “not-us” (Scharathow et al., 2011:11).

As members of this society, we all meet in a space that is structured by racism on different levels (individually, institutionally, and structurally), which, in turn, are based on racist knowledge. Racism, therefore, does not only refer to violent assaults, but can also be embedded in very subtle forms of everyday actions. Entangled within these racist structures, discourses and practices, individuals and social groups are always involved in the reproduction of the racist societal conditions (Scharathow, 2011:16). Nevertheless, our actions cannot be seen as completely determined by the entanglement within those structures. Racist patterns of interpretation are always in competition with alternative interpretative patterns, so that we are able to consciously refer to them within a certain framework. The ability to recognise the spaces where critical, resistant and solidarity action is possible and expand it and utilise it for pedagogic work is important. (ibid.:17)

Racism-critical educational work, thus, has to endeavour to recognize and question mechanisms which constitute and promote hierarchizations and power asymmetries. It has to encourage critical reflections of one's thoughts and behaviour and to develop and show possible action alternatives. In this process, pedagogues and multipliers, of course, do not find themselves outside the discourse. They are well entangled and positioned in this framework of meanings in a certain way and, thus, have permanently to question and reflect on their position in the context of their pedagogic work (ibid.). In the sense of a racism-critical pedagogical perspective, it is, thus, about developing and teaching a critical attitude that enables people to reflect, understand and question their own actions in the context of societal structures, discourses and power asymmetries as well as in the context of racism-theoretical implications. In doing so, it is also important to recognise connections and links to other forms of inequality and discrimination – racism-critical work has, thus, always to be combined with considerations of intersectionality.

<sup>20</sup> Translation of the author; the German term according to Paul Mecheril (2012) is “rassismuskritisch”.

<sup>21</sup> Title of the book in German: “Die Schwierigkeit nicht rassistisch zu sein”.



### Cornerstones of a racism-critical educational work

An important condition for successful pedagogical work is to accept that racism is part of our society and that we are all part of it. It is essential for a racism-critical approach to reflect and address one's own position within the societal structures and the relation to the existing racist system. That means, in the context of the majority population, becoming aware of the dominant position each individual has in this system. A useful category of analysis for this is that of 'whiteness'. 'Whiteness' symbolizes a marker that ensures privileged status and national belonging, also in a postcolonial constellation, without the need to name it. The category 'whiteness', therefore, does not describe an identity, but calls attention to the fact that all people – also white ones – are positioned within the racist power relations. It is not possible to take a position beyond racist normality. If one tries to analyse racism, he or she will encounter their own entanglement with the issue. This may be either because of their own experiences of discrimination or because of their privileged social position, which is invisible, as it meets the unexpressed societal norm (Messerschmidt, 2012:16). One of the most important competences to recognise and reflect these entanglements is, according to Anne Broden, the ability of self-reflection (ibid.:30). To strengthen this ability has to be a key objective of racism-critical educational work. It is the only way to put people in a position to critically reflect, understand and question their position and status within society, as well as existing perceptions of normality, dichotomies and racist knowledge.

Of course, it is as important to teach knowledge *about* racism. This means to present general theoretical knowledge about racism, as well as historical and empirical knowledge (Mecheril, 2012:19). Furthermore, it is essential to discuss linguistic customs, certain terms, their meanings and social functions. The (pedagogical) work on and with terms is very important as there is no power-free language at all – a careless and unreflective use of it, therefore, leads to the reproduction and solidification of power asymmetries. Language should better be used to represent negotiation processes within a racism-critical discourse. It can be an arena where developments in the direction of a recognition and appreciation of plurality can take place. Racism-critical language has, thus, to be aware of its incompleteness and relativity. In the discussion about the dilemma of names and labels, it is, however, important to distinguish between terms that are self-chosen and terms that are an ascription made by others (Broden, 2012:29).

Another essential cornerstone of racism-critical educational work is to address experiences of belonging. This means, on the one hand, approaches that deal with experiences, patterns of self-perceptions and outside perceptions as well as one's own forms of affiliation, and, on the other hand, the discussion of one's own reproductions of racism. It is important to be aware that this form of addressing experiences of belonging is always in danger of reproducing dominant positions. It is, thus, crucial to be concerned about the spaces and contexts in which these activities take place. In a close connection with this is the reflexion of racist patterns of ascription. Attributions of being 'other', 'different' and 'foreign' that are connected with racist distinctions have to be reflected on together and alternative forms and possibilities of belonging have to be discussed and developed (Mecheril, 2012:20).

Last but not least, racism-critical educational work has to contribute to a deconstruction of binary schemes. The core of racist thinking is the simple figure of a derogatory and discriminating distinction between a 'natio-ethno-cultural us' and 'non-us', which is maintained and perpetuated through a complex system of societal practices – starting from the legislative situation through media representation up to individual habits. A pure redistribution of material or symbolic goods would not touch this binary logic, it would rather confirm it. The method of deconstructing could, thus, be an appropriate method to uncover and question binary oppositions and, consequently, to show the variability and changeability of meanings. The goal, therefore, is to distance oneself from a view that considers identities such as 'Turks', 'Muslims' and 'migrants' as disparate and distinctive entities and turn towards a perspective that accepts pluralism and hybridity. It is about establishing deconstructive strategies that uncover valuations and exclusions, which go hand in hand with binary oppositions and, thus, strengthen the heterogeneity and plurality of identities (ibid.:21).





### Examples of practical racism-critical approaches and material

Finally, I want to give a brief insight into what practical racism-critical work with young adults might look like in school as well as in non-school contexts.

As we could see above a central aim of racism-critical pedagogical work with young people is to enable them to understand and question their own actions in the context of societal structures, discourses and power asymmetries. That means to encourage them to be independent, critical and think reflectively. It concerns not merely adopting general opinions and information, for example, provided by the media, but to be able to always question and to be aware of the perspective from which one speaks and what normalities and social structures the information is based on, and, finally, position oneself towards it. To exercise this, participants of racism-critical educational work may try to investigate information on a certain topic, such as the hijab debate, and to find out and present as many different opinions, positions and arguments on it as possible. In the following, a controversial discussion should be held that goes beyond stereotypical and one-sided (media) representations, and expresses resistant voices and alternative perceptions. In this way, a critical examination of societal production of knowledge and racist ascriptions may be possible. The construction of certain categories and dichotomies can, thus, be made visible and questionable.

Meanwhile there are a series of working materials in Germany dealing with a racism-critical approach, especially designed for educational work at school and in youth welfare organisations, which can guide and support practical racism-critical work. Examples include the “*Bausteine zur nicht-rassistischen Bildungsarbeit* (Building-blocks for non-racist educational work)” of the DGB Bildungswerk Thüringen e.V., the programme “*Woher komme ich? Reflexive und methodische Anregungen für eine rassismuskritische Bildungsarbeit* (Where do I come from? Reflexive and methodological suggestions for racism-critical education)” of the Diakonie Württemberg and “*Zwischentöne. Materialien für Vielfalt im Klassenzimmer* (Nuances. Materials for diversity in the classroom)” of the Georg Ecker Institute, Leibniz Institute for International Textbook Research. All of these collections contain information and theoretical knowledge on racism and specific approaches and material designed for practical work with young adults. You also find texts there which can be used as a basis for discussions that lead to encouraging a self-reflective confrontation with and deconstruction of binary schemes. An example is the text “*As if we were all hillbillies*”<sup>22</sup>. The text is about Maimuna K., a girl wearing the hijab, and her experiences in everyday life in Germany. It shows an alternative perspective on common debates that questions societal patterns of perception and interpretation. In a similar way, the text “*Against the mainstream. Why the headscarf is more modern than ever*”<sup>23</sup> questions common lines of argumentation and interpretation within the hijab debate and, thus, encourages the questioning and deconstruction of binary schemes. Further material which can be used to promote critical discussions and thinking processes are films, for example, provided by the film project “*Enmity towards Muslims. A series of films about anti-Muslim racism*”<sup>24</sup> created by the *Medienprojekt Wuppertal*<sup>25</sup>. By means of different short films, which mainly consist of interview sequences on different topics and experiences of Muslims and non-Muslims, it is possible to discuss anti-Muslim racism and its consequences for Muslims living in Germany and reflect one’s own stereotypes and racist thinking. Finally, the ‘opinion barometer’

<sup>22</sup> Translated by the author; German title: “Als wenn wir voll die Hinterwäldler wären”. Source: DGB\_BILDUNGSWERK THÜRINGEN e.V. (Ed.). 2008. Bausteine zur nicht-rassistischen Bildungsarbeit.

<sup>23</sup> Translated by the author; German title: “Gegen den Mainstream. Warum das Kopftuch moderner ist denn je”. Source: DIAKONISCHES WERK DER EVANGELISCHEN KIRCHE IN WÜRTTEMBERG e.V. (Ed.). 2014. Woher komme ich? Reflexive und methodische Anregungen für eine rassismuskritische Bildungsarbeit.

<sup>24</sup> Translated by the author; German title: “Muslimfeindlichkeit. Eine Filmreihe über antimuslimischen Rassismus”.

<sup>25</sup> [www.medienprojekt-wuppertal.de](http://www.medienprojekt-wuppertal.de)





is a method where certain (possibly provocative or controversial) theses and opinions are presented for discussion and each participant has to position him- or herself towards these theses. The aim of this method is to become aware of one's own position with regard to the theses discussed, as well as the positioning of others, and, furthermore, to critically reflect and question one's own position and eventually modify it<sup>26</sup>.

However, in the context of practical racism-critical educational work, it has to be noted that fruitful work cannot remain on the level of merely carrying out methods based on working material provided by the internet. Racism-critical education has to be seen as a process which includes all the people involved – that also covers the educators. Only if they and their students are willing and able to engage in the process and to act self-reflectively, can racism-critical work be successful. Training courses and guidance for pedagogues and teachers is, thus, an important element of racism-critical educational work.

#### 4. Conclusion

Numerous events and debates show that virulent anti-Muslim attitudes are widespread within German society and cannot be seen as the problem only of a right-wing extremist minority, but have to be located within mainstream society. Studies reveal, furthermore, that this phenomenon cannot be equated with the phenomenon of xenophobia. There is a culturalist characterization, naturalization and essentialization that make all Muslims seem to be equal by nature, and this 'Muslim nature' is considered not to fit into the Western world.

Following Iman Attia and Yasemin Shooman, I theorise this phenomenon of *anti-Muslim racism* as the concept of racism involving aspects of naturalization, essentialization and ethnicization as well as power asymmetries within our society. A conceptualization like this can make it possible to challenge common views and perceptions. Anti-Muslim racism has to be recognised as an existing phenomenon that influences all levels of society. No one can evade it and position themselves outside the racist conditions. However, or exactly because of that, we have to steadily reflect and question existing structures and normalities. Why is it so difficult for Abdul to find a flat, although his income is more than average? Why is it nearly impossible for Aisha, wearing the hijab, to get a job, while her grades are even better than the ones of her classmates? Why does Mustafa always have to show his passport at the main station, while Stefan has never been asked for it? Anti-Muslim racism is not only a subject concerning individual prejudices, but also a subject regarding societal structures in general. Therefore, we have to raise sensitivity towards social inequalities and dominance structures by deconstructing and questioning existing societal categories of belonging and the dichotomies on which they are based. Pedagogic educational work can and must be an area where these entanglements are unfolded and discussed. It is, thus, the task and the responsibility of educational work to enable people to deal with this issue in a (self)reflective and sophisticated way. A racism-critical approach, according to Paul Mecheril, seems to be an adequate method to meet the difficulties and developments within German society, as described at the beginning.

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<sup>26</sup> Examples and instructions for this kind of exercise may be found in "Bausteine zur nicht-rassistischen Bildungsarbeit" on page 222 or in "Woher komme ich? Reflexive und methodische Anregungen für eine rassismuskritische Bildungsarbeit" on page 97.



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# Developing Close Bonds: One-to-One Intermediate Treatment<sup>1</sup> in Children's Services in Germany

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## Abstract

The article presents a specific practice field of social work addressing a target group characterized by severe behavioral problems in combination with a lack of capability to enter relationships. Labeled as "hopeless cases" these mainly young people are not only marginalized in society but also in the support system.

Starting with basic information about one-to-one intermediate services in Germany including the legal framework, target group, types of provisions, previous research, and theoretical references, the article then emphasizes the special peculiarity of the German Child and Youth Services Act to provide that support also outside Germany.

As an example for implementation of one-to-one intermediate care in a foreign country, the article introduces the work of EAL<sup>3</sup>, a provider working with young people who cannot be reached by the common support system. EAL is also the object of a current doctoral thesis research aiming to develop a practice model for the particular practice field. Summing up challenges and demands within this particular practice, the article offers theoretical foundation as a proposed solution to

<sup>1</sup> Due to writing about a phenomenon rooted in the German child welfare system, German terms have to be translated into English as the lingua franca of academic communities. As described by Pösö (2014), translation is always accompanied by knowledge transformation. Some terms might be misleading or neglect the history and philosophical foundation of the native term. In order to minimize these effects as much as possible, the author consulted Framptons (2013) dictionary of English for social work for every translation of core terms of German child welfare. Frampton studied social work in Germany and Great Britain and has a comparative research focus on German and British social work.

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<sup>3</sup> EAL is the short form of "Erleben, Arbeiten und Lernen" which is the name of the union organizing the individual child welfare measure being researched for my doctoral thesis. The English translation is "Experience, working and learning". The name indicates to the basic pedagogic ideas of the union that refers to reform pedagogic ideas as well as experiential outdoor pedagogy. The union cooperates with the "Evangelische Kinder-, Jugend- und Familienhilfe of Diakonie Würzburg" (Protestant Child-, Youth- and Family-Care Center of Diakonie in the city of Würzburg, Germany, short: EKJH) which is a non-statutory agency in the German child welfare system.



face difficulties arising from the task to re-integrate marginalized young people into the common child support system and offer them a perspective.

### Keywords

one-to one intermediate treatment, Germany, foreign setting, theoretical foundation, implementation

### Introduction

Growing up in a shifting world offers a great degree of freedom but also endangers young people through exclusion and difficulties in finding orientation.

Lacking guidance in strong relationships, some young people are living in social isolation.

The aim of Social Work is to counteract this tendency by offering help on a professional basis. But what happens if a young person drops out of this system, too?

How can social work reach young people who refuse any form of help and offers?

This article focuses on a provision rooted in the German Child and Youth Services Act addressing this specific target group: one-to-one intermediate treatments carried out outside Germany. After introducing general information about this specific family support provision, EAL is described as an example for its implementation and object of a research project.

The high need for the young people's, individual character and closeness of living together in a strange environment is a demanding task. Besides structural and financial questions, the aim to offer and build close bonds is especially demanding to the worker. Assessing this as an issue of social work, the value of theoretical foundation of social work practice is discussed.

This article arose from a presentation at "European Research Institute for Social Work" (ERIS) annual conference, organized in cooperation with the "Institut Sozialer Wandel und Kohäsionsforschung" (IKON) / "Institute for Social Change and Cohesion Research" of the University of Applied Sciences Landshut. The conference topic assessed "The role of social work in a shifting world – social change and cohesion as a challenge and mandate of professional social work." EAL and the related research project was presented as an example of social work practice aiming to bring marginalized young persons back into social cohesion.

### One-to-one intermediate treatments in a nutshell

This article subjects a topic that is more or less limited to the German speaking part of Europe. As mentioned (see Footnote 1) it is difficult to translate the cultural and ideological background if there is no equivalent in the target language. This article seeks to introduce the phenomenon, providing background information and giving an example of implementation in child welfare practice.

One-to-one intermediate treatment is rooted in Section 35 of the German Children and Youth Services Act "SGB VIII" (Social Code Book VIII). One-to-one intermediate treatments constitute approximately 9% of child and youth services, which represents the smallest part of child and youth services in Germany compared to the other fields (Statistisches Bundesamt<sup>4</sup>, 2015a).

In particular cases, this individual measure might be carried out in a foreign country.

It is not unusual that young people entitled to individual support are labelled by society, their

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<sup>4</sup>The federal statistical office (Statistisches Bundesamt) annually publishes statistics on child and youth support services. This comprehensive statistical data informs about support services, the situation of addressees and duration of support. It represents the basis of future planning and political discussion about social and family-related for further development of child and youth support services. The data is gathered by questionnaire survey among statutory agencies.



parents or the helping system as “impossible to raise and educate”, or that they even should be locked up to prevent further harm or to demonstrate limits. Krause and Peters (2009) describe them as borderline cases between children’s services, psychiatry and youth justice.

But who are these “challenging” young people who bring child services, psychiatry and youth justice to their limits?

The target group of this very individual and intensive measure are young people with severe behavioural problems in combination with a lack of capability to enter relationships. These young people already have passed through several child welfare services and support. Due to their severe behavioural problems like elopement and straying, criminal behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse, aggressive behaviour, outbursts, high rate of anxiety, lack of self-confidence, school dropout and prostitution (Groß, 2010), and the failure of common child support services, youth welfare offices may decide to use an individual and intensive form of help to support the young person.

These young persons are severely endangered in their personal development: Growing up without trustworthy key people, often leads to their problems in shaping their own identity, self-concept and self image as well as life attitudes and value orientations (Frampton, 2013). Dropping out of the school system and not seldom also out of the support welfare system may follow and lead to further marginalization.

These serious cases combine a high need of help and simultaneously distanced and dismissive behaviour (Münder et al., 2006). The special way of treatment in a foreign country is usually chosen in cases of young people that show the latter combination of need and rejection.

Klawe’s (Felka, Harre, 2010) review of major studies about individual support measures in Germany shows clear similarities among participating young people: a combination of high need of support due to multifactorial strains, a history of failed child welfare services as well as a strong mistrust in adults and the helping system, fighting back any form of support. This is also confirmed by the latest annual statistic of child and youth support services (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015b). According to that, 67% of the young people recommended for one-to-one intermediate care showed severe behavioural disorders like aggressive outbursts, running away, drug addiction or delinquency.

This shows a problematic situation in starting individual child support, yet individual indicators like drug abuse, delinquency and severe behavioural disorders as well as emotional strains and lack of stable and supportive bonds in the family prove the importance of successful support for the individual.

Studies show that the average age to enter an individual support measure is 14. Twice the amount of male young people compared to female young people are recommended to take part. Approximately two thirds have no immigrant background. The number of female addressees increases, but still 60% of the participants are male (Fischer, Ziegenspeck, 2009; Felka, Harre, 2010; Klawe 2010; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015a).

As mentioned earlier, a shifting world offers freedom and diversity but lacks guidance and orientation for those who need it. Amongst other things, this change also affects the young people’s families: common experiences among them are the divorce of their parents, neglect, violence and abuse, poverty, constant change in family structures and key persons, substance abuse and mental health problems of parents (Felka, Harre, 2010; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015b).

Socio-emotional and economical strains often occur together and lead to family problems and breakdown. Besides the high-risk factors, participants with individual support also show severe behavioural disorders. Aggressive behaviour, school absence, elopement, straying, homelessness, self-injurious behaviour, suicidal tendencies, drug abuse and prostitution are frequently described in the case files of participants. It is also a common phenomenon that a high number of addressees show apathy and a “can’t be bothered” attitude regarding their own future and perspectives (Witte, Sander, 2006; Felka, Harre, 2010). Attachment disorder, mistrust, lack of perspectives and self-confidence, combined with aggressive and oppositional behaviour, low tolerance of frustration and the tendency to run away lead to a constant collision with rules and norms in their living environment.





Usually, these developments are counteracted by family support provisions, community-based or in residential settings, but in some cases, the common support system is not enough. In these cases, it happens that a young person passes through several measures and becomes a “challenging” case – the helping system finds itself helpless because young people refuse the relation by massive defense strategies, they run away, react in aggressive ways to key persons and endanger themselves and others. Altogether, one-to-one intermediate treatments address and support young people with severe child raising issues, high-risk factors, and especially repeated experiences of disruption in relationships, which can no longer be reached by conventional provisions of support. The decision to locate the treatment in a foreign country is usually taken under circumstances of additional high risk and/or criminal behaviour (Münder et al., 2006).

The decision for a one-to-one intermediate measure abroad derives from the need of the young person.

The following aims are frequent arguments of local youth welfare offices to suggest projects in foreign countries (Wellenbrecher, 2002; Felka, Harre, 2010; Klawe, 2010):

- gain distance to endangering or family milieu,
- allow relationship-oriented work,
- allow self-reflection and personal development in a stimuli-reduced environment,
- develop social competence and a self-worth,
- develop perspectives for the future by low threshold access to school education or as a special alternative to secure units or young offenders institutions,
- avoid running away.

The latter aims and arguments seem quite common in recommendations of conventional child support services, too. The decision for one-to-one intermediate care follows the same aims but especially considers the core issue of disorder to enter a relationship. This core issue hinders the success of common services (Witte, Sander, 2006) and is therefore faced with supporting circumstances to build up close relationships.

### **What is the legal framework of one-to-one intermediate treatments?**

So far, the possibility to take care of a child’s need by placing the treatment outside the home country seems to be a specific practice mainly in Germany and its neighbouring country Austria. What structural framework allows this unusual service provision? To answer that question, a closer look at the providing agencies, legal framework and basic principles of German child welfare services is necessary.

There are several private agencies providing this kind of individual child welfare measure.

This manner is declared as an exceptional case, and its range of application within children’s service provisions is rather small. It accounts for just 3% of the already smallest part of child and youth services (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015b).

Addressing young people with a significant need for support, one-to-one intermediate care, especially in foreign countries, is not infrequently considered as “last resort” for this challenging target group. In some cases, it functions as an alternative measure to avoid placement in a young offenders institution (Kaun, 2002).

In every case, the stakeholders (young person, parents, local youth welfare office and other involved authorities) have to agree about adequacy to start one-to-one intermediate treatment abroad due to several reasons. Arguments for this decision are always considered on an individual basis. Common points in most cases are the acquisition of life-skills, offer of a framework for developing close bonds and finding positive role models, as well as ensuring distance from endangering and familiar surroundings.

SGB VIII comprises several general regulations about child welfare, rights and duties of parents in



the upbringing process, and defines the cooperation within the welfare system for the support of families. Furthermore, it offers a catalogue of provisions relevant to support parents in their efforts toward child upbringing and wellbeing. The basic principle of this law is the right of the child “to support his or her development and upbringing to enable an independent and socially acceptable personality” (Section 1, Subsec. 1 SGB VIII). Followed by the entitlement of parents to raise their child, the law states a subsidiary role of upbringing support.

If families request support in raising their child or to secure the child’s well-being, the law offers several measures to meet the need of the family (Felka, Harre, 2010).

Starting with Section 27 SGB VIII, which defines the demand of parents and the child, eight provisions arranged by increasing intensity of support and need of the child are listed. As a general rule, any provision must be carried out in Germany. Due to the general character of this law to be flexible and oriented on the young person’s individual need, exceptions can be made. If it is considered to be adequate and necessary for the success of a provision in regard to the child’s need, the measure may be carried out abroad (Kaun, 2002; Münder et al., 2006). Choice of measure is always derived from a needs evaluation. Whether the need is characterized as an upbringing issue (according to Section 27 SGB VIII), or related to mental health problems (according to Section 35a SGB VIII), or in seldom cases addressing young adults (Section 41 SGB VIII), this defines the basis for further decisions on which measure is adequate.

The last and therefore the most intense provision in the service catalogue is described in Section 35 SGB VIII as “one-to-one intermediate treatment.” Characteristics of this measure are openness and the possibility of individual, need-oriented implementation. It addresses a specific group of children and young people, who are at particular risk and frequently reject any form of support. This group of young people will be described later in more detail.

The prior distinction to other provisions of family support is the intense staff ratio that allows one-to-one care if needed. Usually, this kind of treatment is intended long term and as already mentioned, addresses young people with a high need for support and care. Included in the catalogue of upbringing support for families, the intention behind Section 35 SGB VIII is pedagogical, even if young offenders or children endangered by mental illness are involved. Under the pedagogical conception of SGB VIII, it is considered to bring these severely endangered young people back into the common support system by allowing individually adapted forms of support (Brumlik, 2008).

In order to fulfill the need of the young person, the permission to move the treatment to a foreign country is explicitly given if necessary. Even if the measure happens in a foreign country, SGB VIII is still the mandatory legal framework. Therefore, additional legal matters have to be considered.

Besides the basic requirement of Section 27 or Section 35a SGB VIII, other general principles are highly emphasized (Münder et al., 2006; Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge, 2008):

- Section 36 SGB VIII Support Plan: This tool of service user involvement ensures participation of all stakeholders. In case of services abroad, it is recommended to obtain a medical and/or psychiatric statement also. During the support process, the support plan functions also as a steering and quality assurance tool: a regular meeting of all stakeholders to evaluate the process, developments and goals should be held approximately every six months.
- Section 72 i.c.w. Section 78a SGB VIII Professional Training: It is legally required to ensure qualification of the providing agencies as well as of the key workers. There is no detailed specification of training and expertise, but there are further regulations for operating licenses of providers, remaining responsibility for the process with the local youth welfare office, and recommendations by major providing organizations about necessary expertise and knowledge to ensure professional work.



- Legal regulations of the host country have to be considered.
- Compulsory education is an indicator for future perspectives and re-integration in the domestic system. As such it is mandatory to provide school education during the stay abroad.

In the 1990s, the number of providers offering individual measures in foreign countries rapidly increased and brought a high diversity of concepts. The subsequential need of regulation to ensure quality and seriousness lead to “KICK”<sup>5</sup>, an amendment of legal regulations in 2005.

KICK brought an increase of controlling and training, demanding strict regulations to avoid untrustworthy providers, to ensure the security of the young person and the quality of support.

The exceptional nature of moving to a foreign country is emphasized. One-to-one intermediate treatment outside of Germany is considered being a part of a comprehensive support plan with a domestic relation. Usually, a measure starts in Germany by planning and organizing the stay abroad among a young person, parents, provider and youth welfare office. Core issues are meeting the key person and figuring out what comes after the return to Germany.

According to the legal framework, one-to-one intermediate treatments in foreign countries are exceptional and strictly regulated regarding participation in the decision process, as well as on core issues like a professionally trained staff, time-limitation and adequacy.

Studies show that reality is not always reflected in these legal demands (Fischer, Ziegenspeck, 2009; Wendelin, 2011).

### **What types of one-to-one intermediate treatment exist outside Germany?**

There is a high number of diverse agencies offering one-to-one intermediate services in foreign countries. Due to a high range of different concepts, a general characterization of these projects is not appropriate to display their diversity.

A common aspect in regard to the legal foundation is, of course, an individual orientation toward the young person’s personal need in an intense setting outside Germany that allows close relationships to a key person (Klawe, 2007).

How this personal need is addressed, what stages are taken during the stay abroad and what kind of key person is there differs in many ways.

A common classification is to distinguish services by the way of living during the stay. A service might be organized like family - long term living together in one stable place. In these cases, young people usually live in native families or together with a professional for a longer time, months or even years. Other services follow the concept of traveling together. Here, key persons and young people spend rather short periods of time, normally weeks, seldom months, and experience challenges in traveling through a foreign country.

It is also possible to differentiate projects by the level of professionalization of the key persons: lay people admit young people into their everyday family live, as well as care settings run by professionals in child support either in one-to-one or in group-organized settings. Both types usually maintain professional supervision by the providing agency. As mentioned before, SGB VIII demands and emphasizes training and professional treatment especially for treatments abroad, but still Witte (2009:189) states that there is a “quite low rate, 51 %, of professionals working in such projects.” This is discussed controversially among proponents and opponents and displays a serious point of critique.

Most projects provide school education due to the legal right of education for the child, especially if the stay abroad lasts longer than just a few weeks. This is usually carried out by the key person as an inherent part of the daily schedule or organized through cooperation with local schools.

<sup>5</sup> “Kinder- und Jugendhilfeweiterentwicklungsgesetz” KICK (Advancement of Child and Youth Services Act)



Most agencies chose countries that differ a lot from the German home country, for example in regard to climate, rural character of living environment, language and cultural habits. Settings are usually arranged with a high emphasis of seclusion and with as little distraction as possible. Altogether, projects that take care of children in a foreign country can be characterized between the poles native-German, lay-professional, group-single, and travel-residence. All projects are subject to SGB VIII and run by German agencies aiming to organize individual support for young people at high risk. It is important to note that usually an agency develops a concept situated within the latter poles and then sticks to that concept. Therefore, youth offices compare projects of different agencies to find what is considered the best fit for the need of the child.

### **EAL: an exemplary case of one-to-one intermediate treatments in Finland**

Providing a special setting of a one-to-one relationship being together in a foreign country, the practice of EAL was chosen as an exemplary case to describe a specific practice in child support addressing disengaged young people, whose high need for close and stable relationships could not be satisfied by the common helping system.

As mentioned before, EAL represents a measure rooted in the German Child and Youth Services Act, run by a German private agency, and is carried out and supervised by German professionals.

In order to understand the character of EAL and how it faces the needs of young drop-outs, EAL will be illustrated below as an exemplary case for one-to-one intermediate treatments abroad.

EAL e. V. is a non-profit organization situated in Würzburg, Germany, that yields diverse child support services. As a reaction to increasing cases of young people that could not be reached by common support services, employees of the EKJH, a major non-statutory agency of child and youth services in Würzburg (see Footnote on p. 1), and representatives of local and Finnish universities founded the EAL union in 1995 (Adams, 1998).

Since then, EAL provides flexible services for young people who could not benefit from the common helping system. Close linkage to EKJH enlarges possibilities for EAL to offer individual support and re-integrate addressees into regular child support services.

The term EAL represents diverse aspects: It is not only the name of the providing union or the label of the specific measure but also the pedagogical idea behind this practice.

The project starts by taking the addressees out of their well-known structures and behaviour patterns and brings them into a setting that offers experiences, demands work and provides diverse fields of learning. This setting allows building of a stable relationship and close bonds to support the young person in his or her development.

Besides other child support services in residential care in Germany, the one-to-one intermediate measures situated at two farms in Finland are the core task of the union.

During the last 20 years of its existence, EAL has enlarged its services to a Husky farm, foster care families, and a horse farm in Finland.

Different organizational conditions in every unit allow for individual support of young people. Amongst that, the farms are the most used provision.

Despite different settings and structural circumstances, there are some common aspects in all projects. In every project key persons share a one-to-one relationship with a young person. The farms offer room for up to 4 couples, but there is always one key person responsible for one young person. The key person is responsible for structuring and planning daily life and school education during the stay in Finland. Their professional expertise is either from a pedagogic profession (social worker, pedagogue, informal educator, learning disability nurse) or carpenters on master level. They are supported by external supervision and counselling during their stay in Finland, especially in times of crisis or illness, by social workers of EAL in Germany by telephone, the internet and occasional visits on the farm (Adams, 1998).



The stay in Finland represents one stage of the whole support process that is discussed and decided between the young person, their parents, EAL, and the local youth welfare office in care plan meetings. Team leaders as well as key persons (except in Finnish foster care units) are German professionals that act within the legal framework of German Child and Youth Services Act. Just like cases of common national child support services, the local child welfare office remains responsible throughout the whole support process.

So far, 124 young people participated in EAL during the last 20 years (Robanus, 2014). According to case files and the agency's statistics (Groß, 2010), the young people suffered from several frequent behavioural problems and deficits.

In many cases the following symptoms are described:

- aggressive behaviour against objects and persons,
- self-damaging behaviour,
- depressive disorder,
- suicidal tendencies,
- emotional and behavioural instability,
- lack of self-control and impulsivity,
- emotional coldness,
- lack of distance,
- anxiety,
- school-refusal,
- straying,
- criminal behaviour,
- sexual salience.

Another common issue of EAL participants is a history of unsuccessful child support services in the young people's lives. It seems to be impossible to integrate them in residential care settings or school classes. Therefore, they are often labelled as "uneducable" and "unteachable", which leads to marginalization within the helping system. Case files reveal a history of emotional deficiency and negative, non-dialogic relationships in their personal environment. Their personal development is determined by a failure-oriented and negative self-perception. In order to compensate negative experiences and the lack of positive relationships, the young people react through aggressive or avoiding behaviour as well as drug addiction and development of mental problems. This results in a further lack of positive feedback by peer group members or key persons and stabilizes the negative self-perception by hindering positive experiences (Adams, 1996). Even professional care settings are overstrained to meet the high need of this group of young people. It is often not unusual that criminal prosecution or closed care units without the pedagogical aim are the 'terminus' for these young people.

All in all, participants of EAL show similarities in their problems, in the history of child support interventions and the fact that their participation is agreed upon by all stakeholders. There are also contraindications, for example specific medical needs or severe mental problems like schizophrenia, persecution complex as well as borderline structures with dissociative disorders.

### **EAL setting and active factors: Rural live in the Finnish countryside**

Addressing young people who are lacking positive relationships, role models, and experiences, EAL is rooted in pedagogic ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and humanistically oriented pedagogy (Adams, 1996). Combined with items of experiential pedagogy (Heckmair, Michl, 2012) influenced by Kurt Hahn, these references shape the character of EAL. The key concepts are, for example, represented by the rural setting, emphasis on physical work and sporting, outdoor-oriented activities. Additionally, EAL is based on two vital core aspects:



firstly, the idea of a dialectic relation between a young person, and a key person that demands to offer a stable and broad relationship to the young person; and secondly, a sheltered environment allowing the young person to face exemplary tasks to experience and develop his or her abilities. Accompanied by a trusted key person, the young person should be given the opportunity to broaden his or her horizon and experiences of self-effectiveness. The close cohabit with a trusted adult who is an educator and role model in this process, the young person should allow developing more and more abilities, and as a result take responsibility for his or her own life.

In the following, the implementation of these theoretical core concepts is explained in greater detail.

A measure starts with the common decision of the young person, parents and the responsible child welfare office that an individual child welfare measure in a foreign country is appropriate to support the young person's needs. The young person and his new key worker then move to a small farmhouse together. One farmhouse provides space for two adult/young people teams; the care standard is one adult responsible for one young person. There is no shift work among key persons. The key worker is responsible for the young person 24 hours, seven days a week. The farm is situated in the Finnish countryside, 10 kilometres away from a small village in Savon Savonia region. It is surrounded by woods and lakes and can only be reached by a small farm track.

The arrangement of the farm purposefully lacks comfort and luxury. The farms have electricity but no running water. Water is taken out of a draw well next to the house.

There is no car; shopping must be done on foot and goods have to be carried all the way in a backpack. Everyday life is carried out without electronic devices: stove and heating run by burning wood, and the wood cutting is done with saw and hatchet by the young person and his key person. Cooking is done all by themselves: they bake their own bread and wash their clothes by hand. Any digital and electronic devices such as smartphones, are not allowed to be used during free time. Instead, playing music together, reading, playing games or go hiking are activities that are done together in free time.

Besides rural living conditions, working with own hands and absence of distractions by electronic devices or consumer goods, a very important part of the measure is education. Every key person educates the young person during the morning to catch up on schoolwork. Housework, craftwork, and school education structure the day and provide a stable framework for daily life.

Getting up and going to bed early, regular study units for school work and fixed times for having lunch together mark every day. The sense of every task is evident: if it is cold and the fire has to be lit, you have to cut wood. If you need clean clothes, you have to wash them. If you are hungry, you have to walk to the grocery store and then prepare a meal for which you need wood fire again. No discussion or excuse can change these interdependencies.

Usually the stay during this so called "intensive phase" characterized by a non-distractive environment that challenges both participants physically and mentally, lasts six months. The duration usually is set in advance depending on the case. It is important that the young person, key worker, parents and youth welfare office can rely on the agreed time. According to regulations of SGB VIII, cancelling, extending or shortening this first phase is discussed among all participants in care plan meetings.

The plain setting and rural lifestyle at the farm as well as dependence on each other is a challenging situation for the young person and the key person. Background idea is to provide enabling circumstances that keep the young person away from all distractions and demand to learn new behavioral strategies. The second important aspect is the expectation that "sitting together in the same boat" facilitates entering a relationship and developing close bonds that are grounded on trust and shared experiences. As running away is almost impossible due to being situated in the Finnish woods, the young person has to face conflicts with his key person as well as challenges of daily life.

As described in the latter, EAL implements a set of active factors (Klawe, Bräuer, 1998; Klawe, 2010; Klein et al., 2011; Macsenae, Esser, 2012).





Summing up characteristic active factors and their implementation, Table 1 lists active factors and their implementation in EAL.

Table 1: Active factors and their implementation in EAL

Active factor	Implementation in EAL
Foreign country	rural setting on farms in Finland climate and nature language barrier
Flexible adaption of treatment	detailed care planning user involvement
Close relationship	one-to-one 24/7 support shared experience, being dependent on each other working together and spend free time together no elopement or straying due to location of the farm
Orientation on daily life tasks	daily structure set by working tasks school education
Experience of Self-efficacy	working with hands (being responsible for the farmhouse, surroundings and fulfilling the basic needs of all participants) adequate outdoor activities, working tasks and experiential challenges with increasing demands
Absence of distractions of urban civilization	no electronic devices such as smartphones, TV, stereo equipment no car rural setting and housing no running water
Transparent planning process and Management	care planning throughout the process deciding duration of stay and aftercare at the beginning of the intensive phase frequent supervision for key workers and crisis intervention by a team in Germany

Source: Klawe, 2007, modified by the author

Although there is no predictable cause-and-effect correlation, these factors showed significant impact on participants' development in diverse studies (Klawe, Bräuer, 1998; Klawe, 2010; Klein et al., 2011; Macsenaere, Esser, 2012). After the intensive phase, both return to Germany and start the reintegration phase, intended for continuing to live together. If this is not possible, alternatives under the roof of EKJH are taken into account.

### What evidence do we have about one-to-one intermediate treatments in foreign countries?

Individual measures abroad represent only a small amount of the measures in child welfare (Felka, Harre, 2010) in Germany. Most research about child welfare measures does not cover this special topic. Witte und Villányi (2006) point to the present lack of empirical affirmation concerning individual pedagogic measures abroad. Until now, there are only a few theory-based ideas about the effects of these measures. Witte and Villányi (2006) developed a data-based stage model to explain effects, Fischer and Ziegenspeck (2009) concentrated on structural and legal matters of these specific kinds of child care measures. They present socio-political principle questions regarding measures in foreign countries.

The current status of research on these measures is low. The German child welfare law defines a distinguished supply of assistance that is unique in comparison with other countries. Due to that, there is no research done in other countries outside Germany about this special topic. At best, effect analyses of outdoor education or boot-camps in Canada or the USA can be found. Giving a summary of research about individual pedagogic measures in foreign countries in the German speaking area, the list below represents the most important studies:



- **Zwischen Alltag und Alaska. Erlebnispädagogik in den Hilfen zur Erziehung** (Between everyday life and Alaska. Outdoor pursuits in child welfare, Klawe and Bräuer 1998). The outcome of this research project includes descriptions of the care process and evaluation of active factors. From the participants' points of view, the main active factors of the measure were the experience of their own self-efficacy, participation and a well-prepared transfer back to everyday life. In addition, a survey amongst youth offices concerning measures abroad show the understanding of measures abroad as "last resort" for some young people.
- **Einzelbetreuung in der Jugendhilfe** (Individual care in child welfare, Fröhlich-Gildhoff 2003). Fröhlich-Gildhoff discharges specific indications of young people participating in measures abroad. Individual-pedagogic measures abroad were especially successful for young people that 1) live in a highly stressed family, 2) could not be helped by established measures of child welfare, 3) have a strong need for orientation and structure, 4) are not yet in the state to build stable relationships and 5) are not able to cope with established assistances.
- **Jugendliche in individualpädagogischen Maßnahmen** (Young people in individual-pedagogic measures, Klawe, 2007). Findings of detailed data concerning age, gender, migration background, cause and duration of measures abroad, measures beforehand, agreed aims, success with regard to school and education, and further measures after the stay abroad are completed by interviews with young people about their idea of helpful aspects in the measure. The importance of a relationship between professional and participant, the experience of self-efficacy, and specific characteristics of the professional was proved to be effectual.
- **Betreuerreport Ausland** (Report of assistance abroad, Fischer, Ziegenspeck, 2009). Fischer and Ziegenspeck executed an analysis of the conditions in measures abroad. They developed profiles of participants' personalities, basic conditions in the measures and indications. Discharging reasons and effects had not been possible using the chosen research methods.
- **Jugendliche in intensivpädagogischen Auslandsprojekten** (Young people in individual pedagogic measures abroad, Witte, 2009). Witte developed a typology of participants in individual-pedagogic measures abroad and a phase model on the basis of his findings by exploring biography, self-perception and future perspectives of participants in individual-pedagogic measures abroad. Within the chosen research design it was not possible to carve out specific active factors, but Witte came to the conclusion that it is necessary to base the pedagogic action on the young people's situation and cognition.
- **InHaus Studie** (Research on one-to-one intermediate projects in foreign countries: evaluation, efficiency, effectiveness, 2011). The randomised control group study of Klein, Arnold and Macsenaere compared one-to-one intermediate treatments in foreign countries to 93 child support services in residential care and one-to-one settings in the home country. Results display that young people who participate in projects outside Germany show more severe difficulties compared to young people in the control groups. Despite the toughest initial situation, projects in foreign countries developed successfully and showed high effectiveness and efficiency in comparison to residential and one-to-one settings in the home country.

The common aim of the called studies is to collect findings of active factors and structural aspects of measures abroad and its receivers. Methods of choice are gathering data from case files and mainly different kinds of interviews with miscellaneous participants. Fischer and Ziegenspeck (2009) as well as Witte (2009) combine non-experimental (questionnaires, tests, surveys, interviews) and experimental (participant observation, photographic records) approaches in their design.



Indication, process of the measure, and effects or the measures from the participant point of view is content of the mostly reconstructive evaluative research designs.

Regarding EAL until today, the only research so far was done in the context of Bachelor-theses implemented by students of the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg. Topics of the recent four studies were development of an instrument for evaluation (Steuerwald, 2008), two follow-up studies (Stepanow, 2001; Groß, 2010) to evaluate effects of EAL, and an analysis of case files of EAL (Wurst, 2010) to gain information about participants and indication. The outcome of these research projects shows success of EAL concerning the following success criteria (Groß, 2010):

- Elopement/straying: no straying during the measure, slight increase after returning to the home country.
- Attending school: all participants have been taught during their stay; after returning home, school achievements remained stable.
- Criminal behaviour: almost no more criminal behaviour during and after the stay.
- Drug and alcohol abuse: no use of drugs or alcohol during the stay or in the phase of reintegration in the home country.
- Self-confidence: no suicidal ideations during the stay, but two young people spoke about suicide after returning home.
- Aggressive behaviour: clear decline of aggressive behaviour during the stay, slight increase after return.
- Respect of other people's' needs: half of the participants accepted the custodian and his instructions; after return decrease of the improved behaviour amongst half of the participants
- Emotional behaviour: clear improvement of emotional behaviour during the stay and after return.
- Adequate rate of anxiety: improvement during the stay, slight decrease after return.

In order to give an overview of basic conditions and features of the project, a research project was engaged with a complete inventory count of case files focused on participants, indication, previous measures etc.

In summary, there are indeed findings of structure, conditions and effects of the work of EAL. But until now, no research leading to evaluated effects had been done to consider active factors or theoretical foundations of the praxis of EAL.

In summary, the current state of research on individual-pedagogic measures in foreign countries in the German area embrace works on evaluation of measures relating to effects and structural matters. As constituted above, the same situation can be found in regard to EAL.

So far there are only few theoretical references listed referring to pedagogical traditions and experiential pedagogy, but yet there is no practice theory or model for the working field of individual child support in one-to-one intermediate settings. Following Walsh (2013) in his assumption that social work practice is always guided by conscious or unconscious theoretical references, a research idea was developed in order to contribute to the knowledge base of one-to-one intermediate treatments abroad.

To address the called lack of research, EAL will now be researched within the scope of a doctoral thesis to develop a theoretical foundation of its practice. In a larger scale, the aim is to contribute to the knowledge base of social work to ensure quality and professionalism.

Consideration on its history of ideas, theoretical knowledge base and their implementation sets a stable base for future work of EAL and social work within this practice field of one-to-one intermediate treatments abroad.

The research design is still in the development phase, and plans on use of qualitative methodology; expert interviews will be conducted with professionals working in the project as well as with



originators and supervisors of the project. In a second step, the key concepts gained by the analysis of the data will be given back to the participants of the sample in focus groups. This allows for a review of the discovered key concepts and deepens the information. Finally, the key concepts will be further developed into a middle range theory in the form of a model of practice for individual care referring to EAL. The aim of the research is to root social work practice in theoretical knowledge and develop professional social work as a human rights profession.

The presentation will also explore questions of qualifications and demands in social work and social workers to face the challenge that is given by young drop-outs and their situation in a shifting world.

Another aim is to contribute to the knowledge base of this particular field of social work practice. In order to follow the aim of a practice oriented study, grounded theory approach was identified as a valuable methodology to focus on the “nature” of EAL as an exemplary case for one-to-one intermediate treatments abroad. The term “nature” refers to a holistic view of the phenomenon. It demands consideration of several defining features, characteristic aspects and key concepts in practice to reconstruct underlying guiding patterns as well as theoretical and historical roots of EAL.

“Grounded theory” comprises not only a methodology that prioritizes data that is close to reality but also allows theoretical frameworks to provide a reference point. Furthermore, it is a method of data analysis that allows deeper understanding by three stages of coding that allows critical reflection of the data and deduced results by comparative interpretation and frames of reference in theory. Finally, grounded theory can be understood as the result of a research process in the form of a middle range theory that is rooted in the empirical data as well as theoretical references. “Theory” is therefore not understood as a set of ideas that explains or predicts a phenomenon but theoretical knowledge that describes and characterizes the phenomenon (Schröer, Schulze, 2010).

The results of this research effort might be used to evolve a guiding strategy for working in this particular setting. Together with the additional perspective of the history of ideas, the results may support key persons as well as providers of individual child support in their work (Niedermeyer et al., 1997; Soydan, 2012).

### **What is the theoretical foundation of one-to-one intermediate treatments in foreign countries?**

The young people’s high needs in personal socio-emotional development combined with a rejecting attitude and efficient defense strategies towards adults, help represent a serious challenge for the key person. Because the conventional support system was not able to successfully support the young person, an individual and very intense measure was finally chosen. What helps to face this challenging situation?

According to diverse theorists of social work (Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004, Payne, 2005; Turner, 2011; Walsh, 2013) solid theoretical knowledge helps to plan and decide what to do. But so far, there is little literature about theoretical foundations of one-to-one intermediate treatments, especially in foreign countries.

Besides theoretical references from the perspective on the young people’s needs, like attachment theory (Schleiffer, 2009) or developmental theories (Adams, 1998), there are few theoretical references to guide practice.

A frequently mentioned concept (Witte, 2008; Felka, Harre, 2010; Klawe, 2010, 2013; Wendelin, 2011) is the “Stage Model”, developed by Witte and Villányi (2006). Even though it is not yet empirically proven, it gives a general explanation of the process of one-to-one intermediate care in a foreign country. Embedded into a process that comprises six stages, the stay abroad occupies three stages – delegitimization, rebuilding and consolidation, with specific impacts that lead to development and change in cognition and behavior of the participants.

In the following, a short summary of Witte and Villányis model is given:



At every stage specific factors are effective. Success is held by passing through and completion of all phases. The specific aspects of the episodes placed abroad (delegitimization, rebuilding and consolidation) lead to the following hypotheses about effects of the active factor foreign country:

- **Stage 1: Delegitimization.** Assistance placed in a foreign country allows a safeguarded break with familiar structures for participants. This leads to a commotion of usual actions aroused by irritations due to new and completely different situations in comparison with the reasonably assured structures at home (culture, language, climate, nature). Usual ways of thinking and ways of solution are set out of order.
- **Stage 2: Rebuilding.** The shock of being displaced leads to a massive loss of confidence that offers and forces a chance to build new faith. A new confidence and the specific challenges that both young people and key workers are facing allow for the installation of new paradigms of action and cognition.
- **Stage 3: Consolidation.** Faith stabilizes, new structures become steadier by progressive embedding of the young person in fields of activity with growing responsibilities. The closed setting in a foreign country offers suitable structures allowing for consolidation and assurance of new developments.

The fundamental assumption that the passage from one phase to the next is just possible after the completion of the latter phase helps to split the complex process and allows a detailed look at what is happening. Used as a structuring tool it facilitates better understanding of the situation of the young person as well as the life together. Of course it is not possible to sharply divide the process into secluded stages, transitions are smooth and floating. But still, the model helps to reflect educational aims and developmental steps of the young person to plan the pedagogical strategies close to individual need. Witte (2008) additionally discusses Urie Bronfenbrenners socio-ecological approach as a basic theoretical reference for one-to-one intermediate treatments abroad. Besides seeing transitions as significant situations for personal development, this approach emphasizes the influences for change on different stages, micro-, meso- and macro-level. Moving to a foreign country constitutes a high potential to influence the young person's life on micro-level by leaving behind well-known structures and circumstances, roles and relationships. This also affects the inner mind of the young person because former strategies to manage everyday life, problems and challenges are useless under new conditions. New circumstances and challenges demand a high need to develop new ways of coping, especially in the relationship with the key person and other items on the meso-level. Macro-level comprises cultural, institutional and societal issues that might significantly differ from the well-known structures in the home country. Being in a foreign country, this overarching framework is mainly unfamiliar to the young person as well as to the key person, but still represents a broad frame of reference for both. This offers an opportunity to develop close bonds due to their interdependence in mastering the new situation. Witte (2008) concludes that the combination of the socio-phenomenological stage model and the socio-ecological approach provide two valuable perspectives for the implementation of individual treatments in foreign countries. Two aspects, strange environment and close relationship, that characterize one-to-one intermediate care abroad are represented and put into relation together by these two theoretical references.

So far, one-to-one intermediate treatments cannot count as "evidence-based practice" due to a lack of scientifically sane research projects, neither quantitatively nor qualitatively. Moreover, the history of pedagogical ideas behind this practice is not yet elaborated. This intense pedagogical work with highly vulnerable addressees exhibits an unclear and vague body of knowledge and theoretical relations. This fact is a major issue within the critical discourse about one-to-one intermediate treatments abroad because it bears a high risk for unprofessional conduct, with a menace of severe harm for the young participants. As mentioned before, there is still a gap to close between theory



and practice in regarding effectiveness and efficiency as well as to knowledge about active factors and theoretical references from pedagogy and social work.

### **What are the challenges for Social Work in one-to-one intermediate treatments in foreign countries?**

As the example of EAL shows, one-to-one intermediate care goes beyond working shifts, 40-hour working week and team-shared responsibility in a familiar setting with settled structures and patterns for the worker. In fact, the key person more or less faces the same challenges as the young person, as described in the stage model of Witte and Villányi (2006).

Taking into account the hypotheses of delegitimization, moving to a foreign country offers a guarantee to break problematic archetypes in action and cognition as an elementary part of the process. What if this delegitimization also happens to the professional concerning their personal routine and pedagogical paradigms?

If delegitimization succeeds, the young person is able to build up new faith to the attachment figure. The shock of delegitimization opens the possibility to build new faith (in the stage model: rebuilding). On this base s/he is able to develop new paradigms of action and cognition. The common duty to surrender challenges in a foreign environment is supported by being reliant on one another. The success of this stage is dependent on the development of the relationship between a young person and an attachment figure because faith between the participants is the base of further developments.

A stable, trustful relationship and cooperation of a young person and an attachment figure is forwarded by the setting in a foreign country. Therefore, the key person has to appear trustful and reliable to the young person. How can the key person consolidate him or herself even in a situation of potential delegitimization? How can be ensured that the professional is also able to develop new, adapted paradigms through delegitimization and be a reliable person for the young person?

Through the stage of consolidation, new patterns grow steadily by a step-by-step increase of the young people's own responsibilities and tasks. Especially the closed and family-like setting is seen as a positive factor for stabilizing innovations (Witte, Villányi, 2006). How straining is this intense situation, far beyond used circumstances structured by shift-work in teams, limited working hours and well-known circumstances for the worker? How can the worker be supported and prepared for the closed and unpredictable setting in a foreign country?

Due to the earlier explained specific issues of participants, a key person might be confronted with overstraining situations that cause a lack of understanding of the situation but need to be solved. How to prepare and support the worker for widely unforeseeable challenges?

All in all, work in one-to-one intermediate settings abroad set high personal and professional demands for the key person.

According to the legal framework, professional expertise of workers is mandatory, but there is no detailed explanation of specific training or working background. As explained above, a variety of solutions between volunteers and professionally trained persons are to be found in the diversity of one-to-one intermediate services. EAL recruits workers that have a pedagogical background as well as carpenters on a master level to ensure professional expertise. Still, it is difficult to answer the question about the adequate expertise to fulfill the task in one-to-one intermediate treatments, especially in foreign countries. Felka, Harre (2010) offer a different perspective and point to aspects of personality to fulfill the task: accepting and appreciative attitude towards the young person, resilience, and ability to face ambiguities. What other personal features are beneficial? How is it possible to predict if expertise and personal features are reliable during the straining and uncertain intensive stage?





## Conclusion

Assessing these crucial questions as tasks for social work discipline, the main issue is how to solve them. It is important to keep in mind that one-to-one intermediate treatments address clients who have a very high sensitivity due to their experiences with the helping system. Therefore, one-to-one intermediate treatments are organized in a very individual way. This leads to dismissing any idea to solve the crucial questions by listing methods or give advice on what to do in specific cases. Failure would be preprogrammed because of the general character of “guidebook” solutions that often are too reduced to meet individual aspects.

More flexible ways to face the task are adequate theoretical references that allow giving guidelines not as a set of “best practice examples” but as a way of thinking and reflecting personal aspects of the client. Social work discipline involves education, research and practice that are connected by a circular relationship to inform and influence each other (Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004; Robbins, 2010; Turner, 2011; Sommerfeld, 2014).

Walsh (2013:3) refers to the term “practice theory” that represents “a coherent set of ideas about human nature, including concepts of health, illness, normalcy and deviance, which provide verifiable or established explanations for behavior and rationales for interventions”.

The work of EAL is an example of addressing young people at high risk who could not yet benefit from the support system and are severely endangered by social marginalisation. Achieving positive results for 20 years, ideas and practice of EAL might provide valuable knowledge contributing to the improvement of support of the latter target group. Offering a pedagogic alternative to young offenders’ institutions or secure units in psychiatric wards, which are often terminus for the mentioned target group, EAL is a valuable source of ideas that are worth investigation.

Uncovering implicit patterns and their visualization in a model allows its use in training and supervision of practice. This circular relationship between theory and practice allows advancement of theoretical frameworks to ensure quality in both dimensions.

In conclusion, developing practice-oriented theoretical knowledge opens promising ways to answer the crucial questions for social work in theory and practice. Investigating theoretical structures of EAL helps to develop a generalizable knowledge base that allows systematic education for key persons and application to diverse settings.

This is a vital core issue for future support for young people who are labelled as “hard to reach” and secure their reintegration into society.

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# Accelerators and Barriers to Integration into Permanent Housing for Mothers Living in Asylum Houses

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## Abstract

The article focuses on barriers and accelerators of the integration process of mothers living in asylum houses into permanent housing. As a part of a participatory research approach in qualitative research, several categories of the occurrence of accelerators and barriers have been identified. The categories are as follows: social relationships, boyfriend, children, crime, money, housing, asylum house, domestic violence, addiction and self-confidence. The accelerators and barriers in these categories were compared with communication partners changing stays in asylum houses and communication partners leaving an asylum house.

## Keywords

asylum house, shelter, integration, homelessness, barriers, accelerators, single mothers

## Introduction

In the literature insufficient attention is paid to the reintegration of the target group of mothers in asylum houses. Currently, however, this topic appears at the forefront of scientific interest in the Czech Republic as a result of the adoption of The Concept of Prevention and Solution of Homelessness in the Czech Republic in 2020, as a result of pilot housing projects associated with this concept, and finally in connection with the planned adoption of a new law on social housing. The aim of the presented article is to acquaint professionals and practitioners with barriers and accelerators of obtaining permanent housing for the target group of mothers living in asylum houses.

## Research context

Mothers living in asylum houses<sup>2</sup> in the Czech Republic are the target group of the research presented below. At this point it should be noted that the ETHOS (2013) classifies staying in

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<sup>2</sup> An asylum house is a paid accommodation service that is focused on the group of people who get into difficult life situations associated with the loss of housing. In the asylum house they are provided counseling services. The residence time in this residential facility is limited (usually one year).



an asylum house as one of the forms of homelessness. It is possible to say that the theme of accelerators and barriers of integration of mothers living in asylum houses into permanent housing is not given sufficient attention in the Czech scientific literature. The research of reintegration factors of homeless people was conducted, for example, by Mikeszová and Lux (2013). However, the research lacks the gender aspect, therefore the reintegration of homeless people, men and women grouped together, is studied. In foreign literature we meet with studies that focus more on the causes of the life situation of homelessness among homeless mothers than potential barriers to their integration into permanent housing. Of course, we can also encounter a research of needs with this target group, from which we can derive the barriers.

To frame the context of this article and to depict the current living situation of homeless mothers, we can state the following causes of homelessness among this target group. Meadows-Oliver (2003) reports that the following were among the causes of home loss of mothers with children: drug addiction, domestic violence, unavailability of suitable (quality), high housing cost/eviction and divorce/separation. Rademeyer, Tischler, Vostanis (2006) report that domestic violence, break-up or a split in the family are the main reasons why a mother loses her home. Cassel and Hinton (2013) offer the following reasons for homelessness among homeless mothers, which are a troubled childhood (either in terms of unstable family care, childhood trauma, distance from the family or “growing up in poverty”), which may be subsequently connected with a lack of resources and support in adulthood; underage pregnancy (which often leads to school drop-out and taking precarious work), unavailability of housing, substance abuse, long-term unemployment and multiple parenting (three or more children). Swick (2002), in the context of the causes of homelessness among homeless mothers, states that mothers often stressed the idea of how society views them. A certain *a priori* label of bad mothers is clear there, which highly affects the self-esteem and self-perception of homeless mothers. This view is particularly sensitively perceived by representatives of institutions, e.g. teachers from schools that the child attends.

Duffield and Lovell (2008) and Zlotnick, Tam, Bradley (2007) connect the homelessness situation of homeless mothers with long-term unemployment, precarious work and low wages. The economic situation therefore constitutes a significant barrier in the lives of single homeless mothers. The above-mentioned barriers (long-term unemployment, precarious work and low wages) can be connected with accumulation of debts. Homeless mothers themselves identify low income as an essential component of their situation of homelessness (Swick, Williams, 2006). However in this context, it must be understood that poverty is a social construct that has its subjective and objective definition (Špiláčková, Nedomová, 2014). The social situation of homeless mothers can be characterized by the absence of supporting relationships with family and the absence of a partner who would be involved in the care of a child (Haber, Toro, 2004). Butt and Morris (2003) also accentuate bad relationships of homeless mothers with their family. For the above mentioned reasons, homeless mothers often find it difficult to provide children with their basic needs (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2007). In this context, it is necessary to realize the cost of child care in terms of buying clothing, food, school supplies, or perhaps financing their courses (Zlotnick, Tam, Bradly, 2007).

Swick, Williams (2006) and Groves (2002) talk about psychosocial barriers, which refer to past experiences with domestic violence, child abuse, or experience with the “disintegration” of family relationships in relation to the barriers of mothers living in asylum houses. At the same time, Hersberger (2003) points out that the loss of home is not only the loss of the place of residence, it is the loss of emotional support. The fact that a person does not have a home, that is his safe place, leads to series of barriers to taking control over his/her own life. Dashora, Slesnick and Erdem (2012) state that homeless mothers reported the following barriers to gain permanent housing in their research: criminal history, debt, unemployment, unavailability of housing, inability to pay deposits or debts. In relation to finding permanent housing, possible barriers of finding a job were described. Problematic arrangement of interviews due to lack of phone, email or a difficult



possibility to arrive at an interview due to transportation prices, were described as a barrier to finding a job. Padgett, Hawkins, Abrams et al. (2006) add several other areas as barriers to find permanent housing. The first is the need to process a traumatic event, with which communication partners have met, in relation to this need the barrier is the lack/unavailability of professional support. Another perceived barrier to gain permanent housing is the fear of leaving familiar space, in this case the area of the asylum house. The last barrier is described as perceived stigmatization and loss of status related to the situation of homelessness.

### **Methodological research anchor**

The aim of the research was to describe and analyze accelerators, thus supporting factors of integration into permanent housing, and barriers to integration into permanent forms of housing<sup>3</sup> and to compare them with the group of communication partners (mothers) leaving asylum houses and the group of communication partners (mothers) changing stays in asylum houses. (A consecutive stay in at least three asylum houses was the criterion for inclusion in the research group). The research draws on a qualitative research strategy, namely a participatory approach, which consisted of collaboration of two peer researchers with mothers living in asylum houses. Even the paradigmatic anchoring research was participatory. The research approach is therefore based on cooperation with the target group to gain “endogenous knowledge from solidarity practice” and on “hearing out” marginalized people (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005). I saw the advantage of participatory research in the fact that it does not bring “mere” knowledge, but also insight (Schuman, Abramson, 2000). Communication partners were selected based on purposive sampling through the institution of asylum house and afterwards based on snowball. Twenty-six half-structured interviews with clients from five asylum houses in Ostrava were conducted within the survey. The interviews were conducted with 17 communication partners changing stays in asylum houses and with 9 communication partners leaving the asylum house. Communication partners changing stays in asylum houses stayed in three asylum houses (N = 5, N = 6, N = 6). Communication partners leaving the asylum house stayed mostly in the two remaining asylum houses (N = 5). The remaining four communication partners leaving the asylum house stayed in the first three locations along with communication partners changing stays in asylum houses. Three focus groups were formed within the validation of the data obtained from the research. One group of the communication partners changed stays in asylum houses, the second group of communication partners were leaving an asylum house to permanent forms of housing and the last of the so-called significant others, i.e. persons who communication partners themselves identified as key for the successful process of reintegration into permanent housing. The data were analyzed using grounded theory, specifically through interpretative and constructivist Charmaz approach.

### **Analysis and interpretation of the data**

Data analysis is based on comparing differences in perceived barriers and accelerators of reintegration into permanent housing with communication partners leaving asylum houses and communications partners changing stays in asylum houses. Barriers and accelerators will be compared in the following categories: social relationships, boyfriend and violence, discrimination, crime, money, housing, asylum house, addiction and self-confidence. In the presentation of the data, the shortcuts KP (communication partner) and PV (peer researchers) will be used.

### **Housing**

Within the data presentation, it is important to accentuate that housing is a goal and also a current situation. Housing is a problem and also a source of hope. Housing is a measure of individual

<sup>3</sup> Integration in terms of housing means finding permanent housing outside the socially excluded localities and unstable forms of housing (e.g. staying in asylum houses or hostels).





barriers. Lack of housing determines the depth of the downturn “*at the bottom*”. Housing is not only a current situation but also a process.

In the category of housing the accelerator is smaller (or no) experience with insecure accommodation with the communication partners leaving an asylum house. On the other hand, communication partners leaving an asylum house have experience with their own housing (even if it is rented), and if they have experience with a stay in an asylum house, this experience is distant in time (in accounts a minimum of five years). Communication partners leaving an asylum house have, in relation to housing, a support network of short-term accommodation (e.g. the opportunity to stay with parents, friends ...).

In the context of barriers and accelerators, it is important to mention that both groups of communication partners consider the benefits system in relation to the rent and stay in the family a barrier to gaining permanent housing. (Living in rented accommodation does not allow one to gain poverty benefits in terms of housing allowance or housing supplement). Both groups also perceive hostels negatively as a source of insecure housing. The quality of housing in a hostel is perceived as poor, as it does not match the price or needs. Thematized environment is unsuitable for raising children in terms of roommates (noise, drug use, sharing small spaces ...). The feeling of safety and security is not perceived there.

### Money

Finances are associated with lack and need according to both groups of communication partners. It is important to see the overall socio-economic situation of the target group of mothers living in asylum houses. In relation to the category of money, the resignation in the sense of “*I will never repay it*” is apparent with communication partners changing stays in asylum houses, in their accounts a depersonalization / alienation from past debts is also seen. Debts are perceived as a kind of burden belonging to the past, and negatively affect the future of this group of mothers. The debts here are cumulative in nature and constantly reproducing. Regarding debts, thematized learned helplessness appears in the accounts, which results from the impossibility to pay off the debts despite all effort. For this reason the reminder of the need to solve the debt situation and the system of saving is very negatively perceived by the communication partners in asylum houses, both are perceived as a “*proving*” an inability to save. Communication partners leaving asylum houses perceive debts (including deposits) as manageable in the future, they often have the possibility of financial assistance from surroundings. The debts of these communication partners have a one-time nature and are lower by their nature. Deposits on housing are perceived as a greater barrier to get housing by communication partners changing stays in asylum houses. In the context of deposit problematisation by communication partners changing stays in asylum houses “*simply there is no money to start, otherwise we would not be here*” (KP7), it is interesting that the subsequent payment of rent is not thematized as a perceived barrier to gain permanent housing by neither a group. “*I will manage somehow, the main thing is the deposit ...*” (KP6), “*Because you have to have some base, deposit money, and even if from someone, at least five thousand. To have some reserve at the beginning. But it is not possible when you have one thousand eight hundred per month and live here*” (KP3). Communication partners changing stays in asylum houses are usually quite income-dependent on social benefits. The amount of benefits and their potential delivery behind schedule are therefore much more problematic issues. Certain convictions, that have the character of “*invention*”, are associated with the amount of benefits. These inventions are mostly based on the fact that an acquaintance, who is exactly in the same life situation as a communication partner, has much higher benefits ... “*I know the girls in the same situation like me who have the same kids that take three times more than me*” (KP10). In this context, the communication partner feels that she does not get what she is eligible for, which further increases the distrust in the social system. For communication partners changing stays in asylum houses benefits are neither a solution nor a motivating factor “*benefits do not motivate me. I will simply lose more at work, I will destroy more clothes, I will need snacks, tickets, and simply greater consumption of everything. We have counted that with a lawyer and I would even*



lack money” (KP15). With communication partners changing stays in asylum houses deprivation expenses are also evident (e.g. buying a tablet for daughter in a situation when family does not have resources for food) that can problematize the relationship with a social worker. It would seem that it is pointless spending but if we look at this story through the eyes of theories deprivation, the interpretation may be following: this gift is used to maintain a certain level, to maintain the feeling of a certain value and to retain much-needed withdrawal from the role of the deprived. Communication partners leaving an asylum house have more confidence in social workers and the system of social benefits.

Fees at asylum houses are seen as a bigger barrier, again by communication partners changing stays in asylum houses, especially due to their worse financial situation. Regarding the research in asylum houses, we can say that the fees are perceived negatively by both groups of communication partners. The reasons are different, however, the communication partners leaving an asylum house stay in the asylum house often for the first time and the system of saving money with their social workers is perceived as an intervention in their privacy. The sense of asylum house fees is perceived by communication partners in order to learn money management but they do not understand them in relation to the function of asylum house as a temporary accommodation that should help to gain permanent housing. The fee for the Internet, that should serve as a means for finding housing is perceived as particularly absurd. *“Thirty per washing machine seems a little but if you have three kids, you do the washing all the time and it is expensive”* (KP22). These fees are seen as a barrier to save money to gain permanent housing. With communication partners changing stays in asylum houses the system of saving money is considered as *“the evidence of inability to save”* (see above).

The stay in an asylum house, which is limited to one year, is perceived as a bigger barrier to saving money for payment of the deposit / getting housing by communication partners changing stays in asylum houses.

The category of work is approached by both groups of communication partners within the motto *“housing first, then work”*. Communication partners leaving an asylum house often have more experience, which is associated with higher self-esteem in relation to getting work / work-related, which is based on the past ability to take care of themselves. Long-term unemployment is the barrier of getting work with communication partners changing stays in asylum houses, which is associated with the stay in an asylum house. Among the groups of communication partners the difference in the perception of undeclared work can be perceived. Communication partners leaving asylum houses perceive it more as a momentary extra income rather than as fully-fledged work, therefore they prefer legal forms of work.

The regime in an asylum house is perceived as a barrier in relation to work by both communication partners, especially compulsory cleaning and the inability to leave the child alone in the asylum house. With leaving communication partners the barrier is perceived as lower, because they are planning a quick exit from the facility and because they usually have smaller children (and therefore higher benefits).

### **Asylum house**

In the overall context of the stay in an asylum house, an asylum house is perceived as a certain process. The perception of an asylum house is dependent on the length and amount of stays therein. Communication partners changing stays in asylum houses perceive fewer benefits of their stays there. *“You know, I understand that for moms who are here for the first time, it can be nice, what you are doing here ... maybe those cooking classes, hygiene, and then also this saving ... but for me it does not make sense ... I simply do not save anything and they just keep proving the fact to me”* (KP5).

In relation to the category of asylum house, the perceived stigma of stay in it is significantly higher with communication partners changing stays in asylum houses mainly due to the fact that the communication partners leaving an asylum house perceive themselves as those who *“do not belong here”* (it is often their first stay in the facility).



An asylum house is perceived as greater uncertainty in the housing sector by communication partners changing stays because of the length of stay and short-term contracts. This group of communication partners also has worse view of an asylum house in relation to social workers and service facilities. Services in an asylum house are perceived as totally unsuitable to their needs. With communication partners leaving an asylum house, the perception related to the asylum house as a place of “*to have a place to go*” prevails.

Communication partners changing stays in asylum houses perceive social workers as being more prescriptive and less empowering and also feel that they “*have written them off*”. “*I do not see the sense here ... for those new moms the services are good ... but I see mainly the control and restriction ... I feel here like in prison, and I know that it will only lead to another stay in an asylum house*” (PV1). With communication partners leaving an asylum house the first stay at asylum house often brings shock of perceived control and regime in the asylum house, this shock is the accelerator for their departure from this facility.

With communication partners who have completed several stays in asylum houses, it is a thematic fear of leaving the facility, which can, with its regime and control, arouse a habit and a sense of security. “*I have been living here for eight years ... and I do not know ... I am afraid to go and live somewhere alone ... here I am surrounded with friends who will help me, with whom I can be ... and if you do not have something, maybe money ... they will help you ...*” (PR1).

With communication partners changing stays in asylum houses the perceived stigma associated with staying in an asylum house and with accumulation of roles of social workers (counselor, guardian of the asylum house regime, gate keeper in relation to access to start flats) is considerably higher. They also have higher requirements for social workers in terms of self-acceptance, empathy into their roles and empowerment.

In this context, an individual plan that every client of asylum house must have, is negatively perceived by both groups of communication partners. Communication partners talk about the need to get accommodation and that are willing to do whatever. In interviews the often-mentioned question is whether they can trust and share everything with social workers who decide about allocation of a starter flat and what they can tell them. The individual plan is, in relation to the acute need for housing, seen as a formality where they “*promise anything*”. Communication partners changing stays in asylum houses in fact perceive the individual plan more negatively.

### **Social relationships**

In relation to the category of social relationships, communication partners leaving an asylum house describe relationships with family as better and talk about maintaining a circle of friends outside the asylum house. Conversely, communication partners changing stays in asylum houses talk about the loss of social relations outside the asylum house and poorer relationships with their family, where they are often labeled as “*black sheep*”.

The category of children and pregnancy is closely related to social relations. The period of pregnancy is described by both groups of communication partners as an accelerator of the reintegration process. It is a period of reassessment of their lifestyle. Communication partners changing stays in asylum houses describe problematic finding schools / kindergartens (constantly changing in the context of moving) for children and accumulation of social relationships in an asylum house (not just their social relations but also social relations of their children) as a perceived barrier. An effort to maintain relations from the asylum house and find a place to live “*next to each other*” may be, in this context, another possible barrier. The group of communication partners changing stays in asylum houses perceives the asylum house and ever-present children, lack of privacy and the possibility of resting, spaces in an asylum house as inadequate. With communication partners leaving an asylum house, children are seen as an accelerator in the sense of “*I do not want my children to live like this*”.



### Discrimination

In both groups of communication partners perceived discrimination is a significant barrier to leaving an asylum house, while this discrimination is perceived as burdensome by communication partners changing stays in asylum houses. Discrimination is closely related to stigma, stigma is perceived as internal and external, and it is connected with the stay in an asylum house. The internal stigma is based on the set of rules in an asylum house with perceived directive and controlling approach of social workers. The external stigma is based on public view of those who stay in an asylum house. Particularly communication partners changing stays in asylum houses bring some label with them from their primary family, where they are “*black sheep*”. Discrimination is a high barrier to the reintegration process in terms of its stability in the case of ethnic discrimination.

### Addiction

Within the barriers, with communication partners changing stays in asylum houses a barrier of more frequent occurrence of the full homelessness in this target group and higher topicality (in relation to the time horizon) of experience with addiction can be perceived. Addictions still play the role of the accelerator and the immersion of the loss of housing process and maintenance of unstable housing in the account.

### Crime

Crime is another barrier to the reintegration process. Whether with its actually committing or rather experience with crime committed by a partner of communication partners, often on them. The external criminal behavior that leads to an entry in the criminal record or direct imprisonment forms a greater perceived barrier to the process of reintegration into permanent housing forms. Criminal behavior may lead to imprisonment of communication partners’ partner, which subsequently leads to a stay in an asylum house, because the communication partners cannot afford to pay rent from a single income. Imprisonment or criminal record is also a stigma in relation to a future stay in a leased/rented accommodation when a rental relationship is denied due to past crimes and their consequences.

### Boyfriend and violence

Relationship with a “*boyfriend*” is seen as important in the reintegration process by both groups of communication partners. His presence is perceived as associated with reducing the chances of finding a permanent housing, with a deepening of their problems. The presence of a partner is perceived as an accelerator of “*being down and out*”. In many accounts a boyfriend of communications partners leaving an asylum house has rather the role of one-time barrier function, thus more a current or past intervening condition. Communication partners leaving an asylum house have the relationship with their boyfriend more worked-out in terms of a more realistic view of his person. They take more responsibility for their situation and wait less for a boyfriend as a “*universal savior*”. Communication partners changing stays in asylum houses thematize the person of boyfriend as “*a universal culprit*” for their situation more and rely more on him in the future in the meaning of “*universal savior*”. A boyfriend is perceived as a universal culprit in connection with domestic violence (as a performer) with crime (participant/executor of domestic and external crime, thief of money, equipment destroyer, aggressor ...) and with addiction (as its teacher and actively practicing person). He is also seen as a cause of bad relationships with family, as he is the reason why the family is disappointed by their daughter’s behavior and why he does not provide support in relation to housing. Family sees the need to leave the boyfriend, its love and support is conditioned on this. A boyfriend is considered as a universal savior in relation to finances as the second income producer, so as a potential mediator of gaining permanent housing. In this context, a boyfriend is the person who “*pulls me out of all this*”. “*And as I have read the accounts of other mums ... we are probably still looking for someone to save us and help us fix our lives, and we do not think about*



*the fact that we have to save ourselves*" (PV1). So waiting for a universal savior is also the barrier to the reintegration process. As a universal savior "*a new boyfriend*" is thematized in their accounts. In relation to reintegration into permanent housing a boyfriend is the one who threatens the stay of a communication partner at an asylum house "*He used to scream under my window and stand outside the door ... the manager of the asylum house told me that it could not continue and that I had to move out because he disturbed other moms ... Perhaps due to such people like him, it is fenced here*" (PV2).

With communication partners leaving an asylum house, the experience with domestic violence committed by a boyfriend is perceived as a single matter of the past, if it occurs at all, therefore, as something less current. A boyfriend is perceived realistically by communication partners leaving an asylum house, a certain independence is evident there, a certain distance from the relationship: "*I already do not rely on him ... I feel better without him ... now my little daughter is important ... we see each other but I do not want to live with him ...*" (KP9).

### **Self-confidence**

The last described category is the category of confidence. Communication partners leaving an asylum house have higher self-esteem, greater awareness of their own value and greater feeling of the situation manageability. Conversely, communication partners changing stays in asylum houses describe lower perceived confidence and self-esteem in relation to the perceived stigma of staying in an asylum house. "*Yeah ... some people stopped talking with me when they had found out where I lived ... they take it here as an institute or what ...*" (KP3) and also in relation to the "*black sheep*" label when reduced confidence stems from frustrated needs of appreciation in the family and the perceived deprivation of the need for closeness: "*Moreover, I have always been such a black sheep of the family, and when you know that the others think so about you, so you do not want to continue to fight, first you are terribly upset, but then you do not mind ... and you think, so that and you tell them stories, so that they think you are even worse ... to show them ... and maybe that's why those guys were always more for me than my family ...*" (KP19). There is also certain connection between lower confidence and lower perceived empowerment by social workers at an asylum house. Reduced confidence can lead to dependence on others, increasing and continuous need of support, fear of loneliness and abandonment of a "*safe*" environment of an asylum house, to fear of opening to their surroundings and becoming independent. Thus reduced confidence itself is a barrier to the reintegration process.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore to acquaint professionals and practitioners of social work with barriers and accelerators of gaining permanent housing by the target group of mothers living in asylum houses was the aim of the presented article. An analysis and interpretation of data barriers and accelerators of gaining permanent housing with mothers living in asylum houses were presented.

Each category may yet serve as an inspiration for social work practice. Let's walk through a couple of examples. From the category of social relationships we can imply the need for a settlement of family relations. The category boyfriend and domestic violence highlights the need for "trauma-oriented" approach by workers in asylum houses. The category that refers to money shows the need to be able to earn even during the stay in the asylum house, which could be facilitated for example by creating links between asylum houses and social enterprises. Communication partners also expressed a need for regime change in the asylum house in several respects, for example in settings of the fee system (see above). The category of dependency highlights the need of professional education of social workers in asylum houses in the issue of addiction. The category discrimination and confidence shows the need to be free from discrimination and to gain confidence. In this context the communication partners pointed out the need for a campaign explaining the reasons of their stay in the asylum house, which would change the negative public image of mothers in asylum houses. Yet they are seen as "bad mothers". The category of asylum





house points to the diversity of needs of communication partners changing stays in asylum houses from the needs of communication partners leaving the asylum house. Asylum houses could reflect these needs. Another need arising from the analyzed data is the need of authorization approach by social workers.

The objective of the article was thus fulfilled, and yet at the end of the article the need for further investigation and attention to the topic of reintegration of homeless mothers into permanent housing must be re-emphasized.

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# Specific Techniques of Exploring Spirituality as a Part of Holistic Social Work

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## Abstract

The article deals with spirituality and religiousness in social work and presents techniques, which serve to explore it in the client-centred approach. Spirituality and/or religiousness are presented as important dimensions of human life and as such can be a part of holistic social work, even in secular or post-secular societies. Especially in personal crises existential issues urge us to pay attention and explain. Broadly perceived spirituality can be resilience, support or recovery resource and can enhance the human understanding between the client and service provider. Three conditions are necessary when dealing with spirituality: the social worker has learnt his/her own spirituality/religiousness, he/she avoids assessing or changing clients values and it is the client's wish and autonomous decision to involve spirituality/religiousness in the social work as a potential improvement to his/her situation. Main stress is laid on qualitative verbal and nonverbal-creative techniques.

## Keywords

spirituality, religiousness, holistic approach, social work, qualitative techniques, creative techniques

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

*"If clients wish to engage in a discussion of spirituality, counsellors should be comfortable and skilled at engaging in such conversation"* (Specht et al., 2005:58).

Research and spirituality are relatively recent agendas in social work. The inconsistency exists, especially in Europe, between the potentially increasing need to deal with spirituality in social work and existing professional competences to explore it and involve in the process of a holistic social work. A properly designed social work requires a needs assessment and a in this respect the issue is about how to explore spiritual needs and capacities of the client and possibly the social worker as well. We may assume that spirituality is a resource coping with crisis and that it is a platform

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of an existential encounter between the social worker and client. Each person independently on his/her social position can develop his/her spirituality and consider it a coping mechanism. We may further assume that focus on spirituality restores human dignity and self-esteem in the most disadvantaged persons and may become an additional source of recovery and personal strength used in solving social problems. This paper informs on the main tools of research on spirituality, which can be used by clients, professionals and students of social work. The main focus is laid on qualitative approaches, which may better fit the values and needs of social work.

Sociologists describe today's advanced (post)industrial society in terms of postsecularism which aims to note the changing role of religion and spirituality both in public and private life (Habermas, 2008; Kaufman et al., 2012; Nynas et al., 2012). According to Habermas, "*in these (= post-secular) societies, religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground*" (Habermas, 2008:21). Habermas has further elaborated the idea on desecularization by P. L. Berger (Berger, 1999)<sup>3</sup>. Postmodernist society is thus featured by a new resurgence of religion and spirituality in various forms in the public and private space. In the postmodern era religious and non-religious forms are morally equal in democratic societies. Plurality of ideas and their coexistence in the "market of religious ideas" is taken for granted. Post-secular societies approach religion in non-traditional, personalised and integrative ways and set up a new agenda in this respect. Even in the most atheistic societies like e. g. in the Czech Republic there is a visible change in attitudes towards religions and churches. New trends in religious and spiritual search (sometimes described as a bricolage of ideas which means that people mix up various elements from "the market of ideas") are obvious and many people try to achieve a worldview that again integrates faith and beliefs with modern/scientific thinking. According to Voas, "*many people are neither regular churchgoers nor self-consciously non-religious*" (Voas, 2009:155). The relevance of spirituality to social work has largely been considered, also by Czech scholars (Kaňák, 2015; Vojtíšek et al., 2012).

### **What is the difference between spirituality and religiosity?**

Most recent articles recognize specific qualities of spirituality and religiosity (Saslow et al., 2013) instead of viewing the Religion/Spirituality factor as one item with interchangeable parts, which is more appropriate in highly religious countries. In this article we also refer to the most updated approach, which makes the distinction between religiousness and spirituality and considers spirituality as more adequate to the "Zeitgeist" of the postmodernist societies. From this reason we decided in this article to speak rather about the spirituality in social work, even though it may contain in certain persons also religious elements.

Spirituality is a positive concept of resilience, comfort, relief and support, similar to religion. Spirituality and religiosity are interconnected concepts, sometimes overlapping, but spirituality is perceived as a broader concept. Spirituality is the personal and emotional aspect of religion, or notably, an emotional connection with something transcendent or sacred (Heelas, Woodhead et al., 2005). Whereas religiosity usually means a concrete correct form of religious belief and practice that is shared by the religious community (Hill et al., 2000), spirituality is rather personal, individual, but paradoxically also more universal and does not need necessarily a collective form. Both spirituality and religiosity are related to the idea of the verticality of human lives manifested by a symbolic relationship with transcendent entities (may it be God, nature, universe, destiny, higher/ultimate power, holy texts etc.) "*that fosters a sense of meaning, purpose and mission in life*" (Hodge, 2001:204). It is often associated with a perception of sacredness and mysterious immaterial essence of life. Often it is related by respect for specific values, objects and norms and associated to feelings of love, acceptance, understanding, gratitude, forgiveness, truth, altruism and mutuality. Spirituality is expressed in thoughts, feelings and behaviours that allow making

<sup>3</sup> Some doubts on secularity existed already in the 1970's (Bellah, 1970).



sense, peace, hope and connectedness with self, others, nature, and God, divinity or higher power. Spirituality is connected to “*feelings of sympathy, empathy, compassion, involvement, tenderness, and gratitude*” (Vaillant, 2008:16), whereas religiousness can distinguish between “correct” and “incorrect” religious practices and may lead to conflicts in religious norms. Unlike conventional religious practices spirituality is experienced personally, uniquely and subjectively. As such it is an integrative force at the level of personality and a platform of dignity and value of each human being. Spirituality is a dynamic concept that is often accompanied with personal search and growth and it is a “*process through which people seek to discover, hold on to, and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives*” (Hill, Pargament, 2008:4)

### **Role of spirituality in social work**

Human existence appears complex, ambiguous, uncertain and vulnerable, especially in personal and social crises, family conflicts, sicknesses, and/or losses. Unemployment, incapacity for work, migration, marginalisation, isolation, stigmatisation, natural disasters, poverty, violence or exclusion can fundamentally undermine one’s basic trust in the world, society, other people and self. Scientific findings have documented that disadvantaged people often manifest a more profound need to understand their difficult condition, which may be longstanding or perhaps permanent. Spirituality appears as “*a protective mechanism in the lives of people with disabilities during turning points in their lives*” (Specht et al., 2005:58) and is even more “prominent as a strength” among disadvantaged people (Hodge, 2001:211). In a small sample of Czech adult persons with cerebral palsy also stronger religiousness and overall need for spirituality was found out when compared to the general population of the same age (Rohlenová, 2014). Consistently, in a sample of hospitalized older U.S. adults, when asked how important spirituality was as a coping mechanism, 40 percent reported that it was the most important factor that kept them going (Hodge, 2005a:322). Religion or spirituality may thus be one of the copying mechanisms. This certainly is not a replacement for the real solutions, which are difficult to find by a retreat into other worlds. The intention is to find additional resources, which may strengthen the person in decision-making and active behaviour to overcome problems.

### **Tools for spiritual assessment**

Based on the above-mentioned arguments we now turn to concrete tools of dealing with spirituality in social work. All social interventions must be planned and founded in client’s needs assessment. Needs assessment of spirituality is considered an underdeveloped area for many reasons, though the positive potential is visible. Sometimes people are afraid to involve spirituality since this is a highly private and intimate domain, especially in Europe and more obviously in the Czech Republic which is one of the most atheistic countries in the world in terms of institutionalised traditional churches. Furthermore, values of the client may so much vary from values of the social worker that it seems better not to touch this potentially divergent area, at all. The aim, nevertheless, is not to reach the same values but to discover client’s spirituality as a resource in solving the situation.

Quantitative tools of measuring spirituality are routinely used in opinion polls (questionnaires on spirituality) but in an individual case approach, qualitative approaches are much more appropriate. Qualitative tools enable a balanced symmetrical and dialogical communication and action. Within this large category we distinguish between narrative (verbal) and creative (visual) techniques. Among narrative approaches we list “**taking a religious or spiritual history**” (e. g. Bullis, 1996) which may be organised chronologically or structured around therapeutic goals (Hodge, 2001:205). In certain situations, it is more advisable to use an **implicit spiritual assessment** (Hodge, 2013), which is rather undirected or **Sentence Completion Tests** like Nino’s spiritual quest (Nino, 1997:208). In the latter, ten open ended items are completed by the client which elucidates his/her existential story.



Table 1: Nino's spiritual quest – client completes the unfinished sentences

I see myself now ...
I think the spiritual is ...
The people I have met ...
Thinking about my past ...
When I feel fragmented ...
My relation to God ...
The world around me ...
A meaningful life ...
The best thing I have ever done ...
What I really would like to do ...

Source: Nino, 1997:208, modified by the author

A far more extensive and deeper insight into spirituality is provided by Hodge's **Framework for Spiritual Assessment**. Apart from biographical details (which are similar to a family religious story), he further outlines a framework of six dimensions, which can be discussed and elaborated in the conversation (Hodge, 2001:208):

- affect (pleasures, sorrows, hopes),
- behaviour (rituals and practice),
- cognition (theology), communion (relation to Ultimate),
- conscience (good/wrong, values),
- intuition.

This framework can be adapted according to the client's and provider's needs and capacities in a simpler model (Hodge, 2006).

Table 2: A brief spiritual assessment by Hodge (2006)

- |   |
|---|
| 1. I was wondering if you consider spirituality or religion to be a personal strength?                            |
| 2. In what ways does your spirituality help you cope with the difficulties you encounter?                         |
| 3. Are there certain spiritual beliefs and practices that you find particularly helpful in dealing with problems? |
| 4. I was also wondering if you attend a church or some other type of spiritual community?                         |
| 5. Do any resources exist in your spiritual community that might be helpful to you?                               |

Source: Hodge, 2006:13, modified by the author

### **Creative techniques to explore spirituality**

The above-mentioned techniques get stuck on verbal communication and conversation. Words are often not sufficient to express fine nuances whereas a creative action or visualisation may be more productive and time-efficient. Further, the language may be a social barrier for low social classes or disabled persons. Such issues like spirituality are likely to demand an elaborated language code in the talk, which the client may not possess due to his/her social deprivation. Especially socially vulnerable populations with low education status are likely to be disadvantaged since their language code may be "restricted" and not suited for a discussion on spirituality as Bernstein pointed out in his sociolinguistic theory. To speak about situations without a prior or shared understanding and requiring more explanation means to communicate in "elaborated code" (Bernstein, 2003).

Nonverbal creative action can be thus equally available across all social groups without discrimination toward vulnerable populations. Creativity is an inborn quality of each human being, though regrettably the potential of human creativity is seldom used in our adult and often routine daily lives. Recent scientific literature draws new attention to creative expressions and dramatic



or artistic forms of communication in e. g. persons with dementia, may it be drawing, collages, drama, singing, photography or filming etc. (Miller, Hou, 2004; Hannemann, 2006; Goodill, 2010; Chancellor, Chatterjee, 2014, Hodge, 2005b). The aim is not to produce aesthetic values but to enable an authentic and spontaneous expression of personality or feelings. It is not easy to reflect intimate and personal issues related to spirituality in words, but it may become obvious in creative actions, instead. In the scientific literature there exists a broad array of visualisation techniques, may it be spiritual/religion maps, ecograms, spiritual collages, or a spiritual (family) tree (genogram of spiritual life of at least three generations). In the “spiritual / religion map” the client creates a topography of symbols connected with spirituality and religiousness, and visualises his/her relation to them. By drawing lines and creating distances, paths and crossroads the client may easily locate his/her position on this map of spiritual symbols. Examples of spiritual life maps are available online (Hodge, 2005a:318). In the Photovoice method participants create by the use of digital cameras their photographic responses (photographic images) to given stimuli (Mulder, 2014). The prompts (= the stimuli) may include single words, phrases, or questions. Important is the debriefing in the group, which follows after the pictures have been exhibited. The group discussion may be structured according to the SHOWED frame:

Table 3: SHOWED frame

<p>What do you <b>See</b> here?          What's really <b>H</b>appening here?          How does this relate to <b>O</b>ur lives?  <b>W</b>hy does this problem or strength exist?          How can we become <b>E</b>mpowered by our new social understanding?          What can we <b>D</b>o about this?</p>
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Source: Mulder, 2014:23, modified by the author

Many further creative varieties exist to tackle the issue of spirituality or religiousness. In this article we have focused on techniques, which have been specifically developed in the field of social work and were published in foreign social work literature. Social workers can use these examples, modify them according to their conditions or develop their own (like e. g. collages). Creative actions serve for visualisation and reflection of deep spiritual, religious and/or existential issues, which may be further discussed in the process of client-centred social work unless it contributes to the improvement or solution of the client’s difficulties.

**Conclusions**

Spirituality is an integrative part of human lives and personality. As such it is increasingly researched in the post-secular society also in frame of social work. Spiritual dimension is today perceived as a part of a holistic approach to client. Taking into considerations the inner diversity within social work and keeping in mind various paradigms of this profession the holistic approach embracing spirituality as mentioned above is more prone to the therapeutic paradigm (Payne in Matoušek, 2001) and/or possibly to the philanthropic approach (Musil in Růžicková, Musil 2009). It is more appropriate to consider spirituality as a part of individual social therapy provided to people in personal crises, social work with mental patients and disabled persons, compared to social counselling or a social reformist approach, which are more distant from this delicate and existential issue. Focus on spirituality is also more self-evident in such study programmes that combine social and pastoral work or charity and social work.

Certain conditions must be then respected: 1) the social worker must first know and reflect his/her own spirituality, 2) the social worker must avoid any effort to change the clients values even if they





are different from his/her own, 3) it is the client's wish to speak about his/her spirituality which seems as a resource that is helpful in his/her difficult situation. Hodge believes that "(social) workers must strike a delicate balance between using and developing client's spiritual strengths and remaining focused on the present helping task" (Hodge, 2001:210). In case of heterogeneous values, attention to norms and rules in the clients cultural environment must take priority. Best practice is to negotiate a contract that contains an informed consent before the social service is started.

The idea of the community mental health centres which will be responsible for coordinated and planned out-patient mental health services allows us to suppose an increasing value of spirituality in therapeutic social work resulting in a higher need of appropriate competences of the staff participating in the mental health care. In this article various existing techniques to explore spirituality were presented. Qualitative and creative approaches are more appropriate to the individual case work. People can visualise their life situation by their own means and without social barriers, which are represented by restricted language codes or discourses. Creative techniques (collages, drawing, combined techniques, photographs) are an alternative way to establish a provider-client relationship based on trust, human understanding, respect for dignity and moral equality of everyone. Visual products serve to be discussed and analysed in a dialogue between the social worker and client or in the group. Creative art techniques can explore spirituality and satisfy the whole range of client needs. Spirituality even allows transcending pain and suffering (Pendleton et al., 2002). The consensus exists that awareness of spirituality is heightened through sharing of the experience with others. Spirituality reminds us of the equality of human existences despite all financial, political and social differences in social status. Creative techniques are inexpensive but labour-intensive, similar to other activities in social work. So from the economic perspective of the workload it is comparable to apply verbal or nonverbal communication, or to mix them. Taking into account the low financial demands on equipment we may consider creative approaches as cost-efficient. Creative techniques cannot only be used in the individual social therapeutic work with clients, but they also can be utilised in education and training of social workers.

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# Villains, Fools or Unsung Heroes? A Study of the Contradictory Narratives of Social Work Identities in Contemporary England

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## Abstract

The aims of this paper are to identify rival stories of social work which reflect the contradictory and ambivalent attitude of society to the profession and to argue that critical pedagogy can offer a way forward beyond these contradictions. Based on a qualitative study of a qualifying undergraduate degree in social work, 48 participants were interviewed: participants included academics, students, service users and practice educators.

Three stories or narratives of social work identities were identified: social workers as villains, fools, and unsung heroes. These tales can be seen as contradictory and ambivalent, reflecting the ambivalent relationship of social work to contemporary society. The key message of this study is that there are rival stories of social work, which evidence the contradictory and ambivalent attitude of society to the profession. Critical pedagogy may offer a way forward beyond these contradictions.

Only by going beyond or removing these rival and dissonant narratives can social workers engage constructively and critically with the current debates on social work in England today. A critical pedagogy of hope is explored as a way forward.

## Keywords

narratives, professional identity, social work, contradictions, critical pedagogy

## Introduction

The state of social work today seems troubled and the profession appears to be moving in directions that may at times appear unclear if not inconsistent with each other. A quick examination of history soon tells us there is nothing new about social work being in difficult and uncharted waters. It has been seen before as a changing profession (Parton, 1994; Dominelli, 2004) confronted with difficult choices about its future direction (Lymbery, 2001; Social Work Taskforce, 2009). The introduction of the Social Work Reform Board's changes in 2013 may indicate a departure from earlier 'transformational' moments. However, subsequent reports on social work reform (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014) may indicate that the 'crisis' in social work continues

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as before. Whether contemporary innovations are radically different or, instead, another part of the travails of a “troubled and troubling” profession (Dominelli, 2004:1) remains to be seen. The contribution of this study to contemporary social work is to argue that the Social Work Reform Board’s (2011) search for a ‘safe and confident future’ for the profession is as distant a dream today as it was in previous generations (Higgins, in press). Social work continues to be troubled because the profession seems to be described in contradictory ways and troubling because service users, other professionals and society as a whole seem to find it difficult to decide the role of social work in England today (Higgins et al., 2016). Unless or until these tensions can be resolved the future of social work is destined to continue to be insecure and uncertain. The key message of this study is that there are rival stories of social work, which evidence the contradictory and ambivalent attitude of society to the profession. Critical pedagogy may offer a way forward beyond these contradictions

### Background

The relevance and importance of professional identity has been considered in the social work literature (Landau, 1999; Hudson, 2002) and in the literature of others professions such as nursing (Glen, Waddington 1998; Williams, Sibbald, 1999). Consistent expectations of professionals within an organisation require a coherent and explicit and coherent identity (Glen, Waddington, 1998). If professional identity is confused or not clear, professionals may themselves become uncertain about what they are expected to do (Williams, Sibbald, 1999).

One way of looking at professionals is to focus on the individual professional (Haslam, 2004). In recent years a social identity approach has become established, which focuses on how individuals develop their professional identities within a group (Haslam, 2004). Social identity theory can be defined as: “Part of a person’s sense of ‘who they are’ associated with any internalised group membership.” (Haslam, 2004:21)

Having joined a professional group individuals tend to define themselves within a particular category of ‘nurse’ or ‘social worker’. This identification is created by distinguishing themselves from a comparable outsider group. For example social workers tend to distinguish themselves from nurses by saying they use the ‘social’ model while nurses make use of the ‘medical’ model (Davis, Sims, 2003). Professionals want to delineate themselves in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’, which may limit their ability to move beyond their understanding of their professional roles (Snelgrove, 2009).

Another way to express this group or professional identity formation is the notion of ‘atrocious stories’ (Dingwall, 1977). Professionals make use of stories, which emphasise the differences (as distinct from similarities) between themselves and other professionals. Dingwall’s (1977) study of health visitors made use of such narratives to separate clearly their roles from doctors.

In atrocious stories the narrator is cast as the hero and the opponent as wrong or incompetent. Often the hero is viewed in a less powerful position as against the other more important (but less able) professional. By using scripts with heroes and villains storytellers re-affirm their intrinsic value and that of their colleagues. The problem with this approach to professional identity (as identified in social identity theory) is that its use may reinforce the uniqueness of a profession at the expense of its ability to work successfully with outsider professions, serving to reinforce the sense of isolation and powerlessness of the profession.

Applying professional models of social identity (Haslam, 2004) and Dingwall (1977) provide ways of identifying how participants develop contradictory notions of the roles of different professions. However, this paper argues that there is a wider and underlying problem for social work, namely the ambivalence of society to social work.

This study explores the rival stories of social work, which evidence the contradictory and ambivalent attitude of society to the profession. Critical pedagogy may offer a way forward beyond these contradictions.



## Methods

Having gained ethical approval, a qualitative thematic study of a social work undergraduate qualifying programme was undertaken at two different times. A single-case (embedded) design is adopted in this study. An embedded study arises when there is more than one unit of analysis. In this study there are five units of analysis: academics (10), practice educators (8), practice learning leads (2), students (17) and service users (11). There was a total of 48 participants. In terms of sampling selection, the choice of the individual academic programme was the result of the researcher being an academic on the postgraduate qualifying programme. Individual interviews were used for academics, practice learning leads, and practice educators because each of these participants knew about the old as well as the new BA programme and could compare and contrast them. Focus groups were seen as preferable for students and service users because they could comment only on the programme in which they were involved.

The case was 'instrumental' (Stake, 1995) because it was selected to gain insight into the social work degree generally (by analytical generalisation) rather than a particular example of the programme. Selecting an instrumental case is as appropriate as choosing one that is typical or unique (Simons, 2009). Choosing a 'typical' case may seem to promote transferability. However, this may not always be the reality (Stake, 1995; Simons, 2009). The important question is whether the case may "illuminate a decision or set of decisions" (Schramm, 1971:6) or promote learning and understanding (Stake, 1995).

All academics are qualified social workers but based within the university. Academics undertake placement visits to students and their practice educators. Practice educators are qualified social workers who are in social work practice and provide placement opportunities to social work students. Practice learning leads are based within the university and organise student placements and develop placement opportunities. Students were in the final year of their BA Social Work qualifying programme and were in their final placement. Service users are recipients of social work intervention and involved in the teaching and assessment of students on the course. The justification for an embedded study is that multiple units within the case lend support to the trustworthiness of any findings because the findings will be triangulated across the units for reliability. The same units of analysis in stage 1 are maintained in stage 2 (academics, practice educators and students). However, the participants are different. In stage 2 service users and practice learning academics are also participants. There are a number of reasons for these changes in stage 2. First, it was a pragmatic solution to the fact that most of those originally involved had left some time previously. Second, the continuing fluid nature of social work education during this indicated that inviting other participants might stimulate a greater enrichment of the data to support or challenge emergent themes. Third, emergent themes from stage one indicated that there were further units of analysis that could be involved, which were service users and the practice learning academics.

Data analysis in case study research is one of the most problematic parts of a case study because it is the least developed and most laborious part of the model (Yin, 2009). Braun and Clarke's (2006) model was chosen to provide the detailed guide, lacking in other approaches. An iterative approach was adopted throughout all phases. It is important to note that having a clear and systematic guide is not simply about helping the researcher analyse the data. A clear approach to data analysis is also evidence of the trustworthiness of the data. In this study the themes are data-driven because it is an exploratory study (Yin, 2009). It is an inductive analysis (Braun, Clarke, 2006) because the data is coded without the researcher having a pre-established coding or theoretical framework or set of propositions (Yin, 2009).

## Results

### Villains

Service users, other professionals, the media and the wider public tended to have a negative image of social workers. At times social workers were seen as dangerous or just plain bad. If service users had a social worker, "*there's something wrong with you*" (service user) because the professional did



not have a positive image. More than just having a negative portrayal service users saw at times social workers as villains. One service user felt social workers actively wanted to break up families and place them elsewhere:

*"You know the statutory social workers? I personally think all they want to do is take away people's children and give them to people that can't have. I've always thought that"* (service user).

The story of social workers intending or wanting to remove children provided a picture of a profession that sought actively to harm vulnerable groups. Instead of helping families there was a *"great big separation or distress"* (service user).

What was clear from the study was that the notion of social workers as villains was a dominant theme. Social workers sometimes felt they had to hide their professional identity in social situations. This was seen to be as a result of the media perpetuating negative stories of the profession:

*"From what you see in the media, I mean, you hesitate, don't you, about telling anybody that you are a social worker because they've given such a big baddy sort of thing. I mean they can't win. So I think that makes it very difficult"* (academic).

This image of social workers was shared by service users, which made the negative comments of some service users in the study understandable. When a service user complained about the failure of social workers to prevent child deaths featured in the press, this might be as much a result of the public perception as the service user's own personal experience:

*"I would presume that a lot of service users have a rather similar perception to the wider public, which is if they've never used a social worker or been engaged with a social worker they may well get their opinions from the press and that might not be very complimentary"* (practice educator).

### Fools

The underlying ambivalent narratives of social workers were reinforced by the second theme of social workers being fools. It is of course possible to be bad and stupid but at times the narratives of villains and fools seem to veer away strongly from each other, which might indicate that others struggled to maintain consistent positions about social workers. A practice learning lead recounted the story of Tracey Beaker, which was a television series about a young girl in a residential setting. The social worker was nicknamed 'Elaine the pain' because she was:

*"... a bit daffy... She does very silly things sometimes. She tries to be very caring but she's a bit intense and the children can quite often run rings around her"* (practice learning lead).

People simply assumed that when social workers become involved they would be ineffective. The perception of social workers as fools or incompetents preceded their actual intervention or involvement because *"they already pre-empt that something's going to go wrong; and they're going to be useless"* (student).

Social workers were not seen as equipped to provide a professional service to the public because they did not possess the requisite professional skills. One participant described her previous experiences as a social worker in an interprofessional team. She felt that she was at the bottom of the professional *"hierarchy"*. As a social worker her contribution was not considered *"valuable"* because social work was not *"rated"* highly as a profession compared to others (academic).

Social workers were portrayed as incompetent. When service users learnt they were to be allocated a social worker, they assumed the social workers would be *"useless"* (student). The social workers would not keep in touch or would be late.

### Unsung heroes

In addition to the negative conceptions and tales of social workers as either bad or foolish there was a third narrative, which provided a hidden positive story of social workers as heroes unrecognised by outsiders. Social workers were able to protect and champion service users from other professions. A service user explained how three social workers intervened to stop a consultant sectioning her under the mental health legislation. Some service users felt social workers had insight into the





difficulties of service users because social workers had a holistic or wider understanding not confined to specific medical or formal settings:

*“They [social workers] are one of the professions that see you outside of a hospital environment, outside of a clinical area, they have that expertise and they have that information, and they have those skills, I think”* (service user).

Social workers possessed a greater knowledge of the wider socio-political environment than other professions and are able to raise issues other professions might consider “*peripheral*” (practice educator) such as discrimination or a service user’s support systems.

In some sense social workers saw themselves as providing an essentially complementary role on behalf of society, which was not appreciated. Social workers dealt with people excluded from mainstream society and sensitive and uncomfortable subjects such as sexual abuse and child deaths. Social workers raised subjects the rest of society did not want to hear about. A practice educator suggested that society wanted to place unpleasant matters with social workers in order to forget about them:

*“Also, you know, society doesn’t want to deal with certain issues. We don’t want to deal with the fact that there is child sex abuse and there are people that are, you know, children who are grossly abused. And they want to park it somewhere, with social work”* (practice educator).

The kinds of areas social workers were involved in were too uncomfortable or “*too raw*” (practice educator). Social workers dealt with upsetting and painful subjects. Other professions simply wanted to “*solve and fix the problem and we want to look at all these different things and empower the person*” (student). Social workers were not afraid to become involved in situations in which wider society wanted to resolve or ignore.

One student reported that other people became uncomfortable on finding out he was training to become a social worker. Most members of society did not come into contact with social workers and did not want to learn about what social workers did because “*we deal with that side of society that other people don’t want to bother with*” (student). Social workers undertook an essential role on behalf of society but were not rewarded or recognised precisely because society did not want to know about the kind of things social workers were involved in on behalf of the wider community.

## Discussion

The first two themes of villains and fools are nothing new in social work literature. Studies on the public image of social workers tend to indicate the contradictory conception of the profession as either dangerous or incompetent (Franklin, Parton, 1991; Ayre, 2001). Negative portrayals are not restricted to England or United Kingdom (Valentine, Freeman, 2002; Zugazaga et al., 2006). However, there is some evidence to suggest social work in England has a more “*troubled*” relationship with the media than elsewhere in Europe (Gaughan, Garrett, 2012:268). What distinguishes this study is the final theme of unsung heroes.

The notion of social workers as unsung heroes may be understood to be a response to conceptions of social workers as either fools or villains. It is the way or narrative by which social workers strengthen and affirm their own understanding of their identity. Social identity theory (Haslam, 2004) suggests that individuals reinforce group identity by developing their commonality with other members and contrasting this group identity with the identity of those outside the group. The very lack of acknowledgement (‘unsung’) of social workers’ important role in society reinforces the special quality of professional social workers as ‘heroes’.

Being unsung heroes can be seen to be an ‘atrocious’ story (Dingwall, 1977). The uniqueness or special nature of social workers is the very fact they are ‘unsung heroes’. The narrative of unsung heroes arises from social workers’ conception of being outsiders or misunderstood. In some sense the uniqueness of social workers can be seen as structurally related to competing notions of the professionals as fools or villains. The concept of unsung heroes is depended on being excluded and denigrated. The stories of bad and foolish social workers create the heroic quality of social workers.



The idea of social workers as unsung heroes may be understood to be an exclusionary strategy, to defend and protect social workers from rival and negative narratives. Exclusionary practices have been identified within social work and other professions (White, Featherstone, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; Whittaker, 2011). The story of unsung heroes may be seen to have two functions. First, the story emphasises the intrinsic worth and importance of social work. Second, the story distinguishes the profession from others and champions its uniqueness in comparison to other professions. Being outsiders makes social workers even more important than being one profession among others.

An example of the story of unsung heroes can be taken from a speech of Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education in England in November 2013 (Gove, 2013). On the one hand Gove emphasises the failures in recent years to protect vulnerable children. He uses the rhetorical device of listing (Fairclough, 2000) the names of the children, which may be seen to reinforce the loss. Having implicitly blamed social workers for these deaths, Gove moves on to explicitly praise social workers by explaining how his life was transformed by social workers when he was adopted as a child. He reinforces the importance of social work by use of the words 'change' and 'mission'. Social work is not simply a profession: it has a mission, which may be likened to the theme of social workers as heroes in the results.

Having implicitly blamed and then explicitly praised social workers, Gove explicitly condemns social workers by claiming they are not sufficiently professional, too bureaucratic and not sufficiently accountable. The rest of the speech continues in the same type of rhetorical structure, alternating severe criticism with, at times, extravagant praise. At one point Gove describes the profession in terms of being 'noble'.

It is this contradictory mix of severe criticism with extravagant praise, which may indicate the relevance of the findings from this study. What this research indicates is that there is a contradictory and ambivalent response to social work, which Gove's speech evidences. It is not simply that social workers have a 'negative press'. There is nothing novel about this point. What is interesting and original in this study is the existence of the story of social workers as unsung heroes alongside stories of them being villains and fools. Social workers themselves reinforce the negative images by resorting to stories that portray them in an extremely positive and unique way, which ironically serves to reinforce their isolation from the professions and society as a whole. Being special can be as much a curse as a blessing.

The changes introduced by the Social Work Reform Board (2011) seem to replicate these stories of extremities. The language of reform portrays social work in terms, which, at times, reinforces a concept of social workers as heroic figures, which may ironically merely reinforce the existing contradictions noted in this study. For example, the Professional Capabilities Framework in England provides a conception of the profession in terms of social justice, human rights and the responsibility for the transformation of society. It clearly echoes the International Federation of Social Work's (2014) definition of the profession.

The problem with the rhetoric of heroism and transformation (Garret, 2012) is that it runs the risk of merely disguising or reinforcing existing contradictions. The reality is that social workers are no more heroic or villainous than other professions. Attempts by social workers and the Social Work Reform Board to emphasise the unsung heroism of the profession are unhelpful because they are merely the other side of the contradictory narratives considered within this study. We do not need heroes, villains or fools in social work. What is needed is a more critical conception of social work within contemporary society that escapes or deconstructs existing contradictory narratives. Pedagogy needs to be extended from its particular use within a profession to become a 'critical' pedagogy as part of the development of a strategy to support the Professional Capabilities Framework and its understanding of social work. The rationale for adopting a critical pedagogy is that the debate about social work is not an internal argument between social work professionals. It is linked to our conception of the telos and nature of our state. What sort of social work a society wants depends for the most part on its own self-conception. Social work needs to



join the discussion about what the ‘good’ is in society. Championing the Professional Capabilities Framework’s version of social work is a critical engagement with what we want our society to become. In this context critical pedagogy is:

*“A moral and political practice [which]... provides tools to unsettle common sense assumptions, theorise matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic society”* (Giroux, 2011:3).

Critical pedagogy in the sense used here is derived from the work of Freire (2005) and Giroux (2011). This paper argues that critical pedagogy provides three specific features, which can be applied to conceptualise the findings of this research within a wider active educative analysis. First, critical pedagogy is both productive and deliberative. This means that critical pedagogy can offer alternative ways of understanding approaches to social work and models of the profession. Applying this productive and deliberative analysis to the findings in this paper, it may be argued that social work can offer an alternative to the limited conceptions of the profession identified in this paper.

Second, the focus on pedagogy or education highlights the transformative (Freire, 2005) potential of education. As both an analytical and transformative tool critical pedagogy can transform traditional contradictions and limited labels of social work into a debate about the transformative opportunities of hope, which a critical social work can provide.

Finally, critical pedagogy conceives of education as a place of struggle (Giroux, 2011). The conflicting models of social work identified in this paper may arguably be seen to be a debate about the role of social work in the twenty-first century. The differing conceptions of social work in this article are better understood as a struggle for the future of social work rather than a ‘neoliberal’ evaluation of the ‘best’ type of educative practice for social workers (Higgins et al., 2016).

Neoliberal pedagogy is understood here to mean the contemporary focus of education as a means to an end within a wider move towards the privatisation and commodification of knowledge. The commodification of knowledge produces or creates a product rather than an open or fluid conception of truth. Acquired learning as innovation and change, as critical or challenging (critical pedagogy) is replaced with a market conception of knowledge. For example, substituting in England the Professional Capabilities Framework (Social Work Reform Board, 2011) in place of the occupational standards (Department of Health, 2002) may be understood to be an example of a ‘brand’ or product change rather than an attempt at transforming how social work students learn. The assumption seems to be that a new product (e. g. the Professional Capabilities Framework) may improve professional education. Commodification of knowledge, however, reinforces the notion of learning as a type of goods rather than the wider concept of critical pedagogy.

## Conclusion

The key message of this study is that there are rival stories of social work, which reflect the contradictory and ambivalent attitude of society to the profession. It is argued here that critical pedagogy can provide a strategy to champion a revised model of social work. Critical pedagogy has had some limited application to social work (Saleebey, Scanlon, 2005; Higgins, 2014). This critical pedagogy must be understood as a critical pedagogy of hope (Freire, 2005) because it is committed to the aspirational agenda of social work reform of which the Professional Capabilities Framework is a key component. Developing and championing this critical pedagogy of hope may provide a way forward beyond the contradictory binary models of identity explored in this study.

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# The Importance of Historical Knowledge for Social Work as a Science, Profession and Academic Discipline – Experiences from Czech Republic

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## Abstract

This article reports upon the importance of historical research in social work according to experiences from Czech Republic. A research approach concentrated upon an exploration of the history of social work is gaining interest among the professional public. Various examples of literature present arguments in favour of the description and critical analysis of historical knowledge. The aim of this paper is based on the results of professional discourse on the significance of historical findings for social work as a science, profession and academic discipline to apply historical research as a scientific research method in social work. Initial conclusions from an analysis of available literature proved that historical research is a way to describe how and where social work originated, how it has evolved over time, and where it stands today. Historical findings are also important to strengthen the identification of social workers with their profession and to anchor the basic values and central goals of the profession. Currently in the field of social work, very few historical works have appeared. The history of social work in the Czech Republic is waiting to be fully considered and processed. One reason for the lack of interest in historical themes is simply unfamiliarity with the methodology of historical research. A starting point is the inclusion of historical research into the curriculum of social workers' education in methodological subjects. Historical knowledge is poised to enrich the currently presented information on social work history through the utilization of relevant methodological means. It is one of the key ways with which to enhance the prestige of the social work profession and a ready means to bring it into the public eye.

## Keywords

social work, historical findings, historical research, curriculum, Czech Republic

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## Introduction

Like any other scientific field, social work has its history. And through a knowledge of its history, both its context and the factors affecting it, as well as the reasons which have triggered those factors, it is possible to comprehend the initial causes affecting its present state and to a significant extent also its future (Oláh et al., 2009). This corresponds with an understanding of history based on the concept of causality. Simply said, the present is the necessary result of previous development. There are patterns of historical development inherent in this concept and therefore, paradoxically, by looking back we gain insight into the future. History therefore is not merely a passing function, but rather a necessary part of the process itself (Šubrt, 2013).

According to Foucault (2002), the concept of discontinuity holds a key position in historical fields. It has thus become one of the fundamental elements of historical analysis. Discontinuity is the stigma of temporal fragmentation and the task of each historian is to eliminate it from history. Freshly appearing history thusly enables the active uncovering of that, which was hidden, missed, or that has been carefully, deliberately, and maliciously distorted and obscured (Foucault, 2005).

In professional texts of both Czech and world provenance (Soydan, 1993, 2012; Fisher, Dybiczy, 1999; Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004; Lorenz, 2007; Brnula, 2013; Kodymová, 2014), there is an appeal for the description and study of the genesis of social work. The reasons behind making this appeal, as given by the authors, are slightly varied, but their outcome/goal is identical. They consist in extending the range of knowledge about the history of social work as a profession, science and academic discipline, thus enhancing the prestige of social work and social workers, and enriching the foundation for formulating social work as an established science. Professional articles dealing with the topic of the genesis of social work are very scarce; whether theoretical articles summarizing the grounds of precisely why its history should be studied, or the actual outcomes of implemented historical research studies. The absence of professional knowledge presented in this field is also the primary reason why this article refers to a rather limited number of authors.

This text aims at introducing the arguments of the few authors who do encourage research into the development of social work. The objective is to propose a methodological tool for the description and critical analysis of social work history and to recommend its inclusion in the curriculum of social workers as part of their university studies. In the first part, in line with the topic, I state the argumentation of those authors regarding the need to concern oneself with the history of social work. It is followed by a contemplation of why knowledge of history can enhance the prestige of social work and the professional identity of social workers. To ensure relevant historical knowledge I present a brief methodology of historical research, which is available as a suitable way to study the history of social work. The final part of the text deals with my recommendations for introducing courses on historical research into the curricula of disciplines whose task is educating social workers.

## Argumentation in favour of exploring social work history

Social work can be understood as a profession, an academic discipline, a scientific discipline, or, according to Soydan (1993, 2012), a research tradition. Therefore, historical findings can be used for a number of reasons as well. Based on this division of the understanding of social work, argumentation in favour of description, analysis and interpretation of the genesis of social work can be found in specialized literature. It entails an examination of the process, and the causal relationship in the line of past – present – future. According to Soydan (1993), historical findings on the roots of social work are essential for these reasons: (a) extra scientific (e.g. for legitimization) and (b) intra scientific (e.g. theoretical and methodological reasons). The importance of the history of social work is associated with the basic functions fulfilled by the discipline. Kováčiková (2002:86–87) defines three basic functions of the history of social work:



1. *The theoretical function of the history of social work enables* – based on scientific research – mediation of its historical research results to both professionals and the lay public, and thus the subsequent shaping of an historical awareness of social work, exploring the essence of social and political phenomena and their historical transformations. Acquired knowledge becomes a basis for processing concepts and theories in the present.
2. *The educational-training function of social work history rests on* – the ability to monitor development trends of social phenomena, social policy, social welfare and social theory, the ability of historical thinking and evaluation of social phenomena and events, on the ability to understand the genesis of individual social phenomena and their solutions, on the sensitivity of perception of social phenomena and events in the life of society, and on a positive motivation for pursuing social work.
3. *Its pragmatic function emphasizes* – that the history of social work is a source of knowledge and experience, which allows for a better recognition and understanding of current problems, while conscientiously avoiding mistakes and errors. Knowledge of the historical development of social work is a precondition for a professional self-awareness leading to a deeper identification with the profession. Social work enriched by knowledge of its historical roots strengthens its position by referring to its history.

It is apparent from published articles that historical findings form a professional tradition of social work which is important in order to build upon the internal logic of social work. The existence of an internal logic is a prerequisite for the systematic arrangement of the social work science. According to authors Göppner, Hämäläinen (2004), the formation of the theoretical systematics of social work is an antidote to theoretical arbitrariness. Historical knowledge is also a part of the social work science. The existence and description of historical facts of practical activities are a criterion for formulating the profession, thereby strengthening the professional identity of social workers with their profession, forming the historical consciousness of social workers and playing an important role in the self-awareness of social work. Last but not least, they ensure the meeting of the minimum standard of education in social work. Now let us elaborate upon the individual arguments in more detail.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, authors Göppner and Hämäläinen (2004) re-established a debate on the existence of social work as a science. Three opinion groups can be tracked in the professional discussion. Adherents of the first groups argue in favour of establishing social work science, while proponents of the second group make assertions as to its uselessness. The third group points to the absence of questions, which the social work science could and should ask. Žilová (in Brnula, 2013:194) defines the basic attributes required for a substantiated existence of social work science. They include the subject of the interests of social work, the system of its findings and methods of work, its links to related scientific disciplines and the formulated history of thought, research and practical activities. It is clear that knowledge of social work history as a discipline, profession and science plays an important role. The requirement for establishing the science of social work is related to the question of whether or not it is a developed profession with its own profile. There cannot be a scientific discipline without a profession. Authors Morales, Scheafor (in Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004) formulated the basic criteria for a profession: it is the existence of a systematic inventory of theories, a professional authority, recognition by society, a code of ethics and a professional culture. In the Czech Republic, social work is considered as a profession because it has a system of education, there are professional associations and professional principles (Novotná, 2000). We can talk about a profession if it is a significant cultural tradition, or a set of knowledge in the form of a perspective upon problems within a functional system, which has been developed (Merten in Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004). The set of knowledge on social work also includes knowledge of practical activities captured over time. We talk about a professional tradition of social work. In each country, the notion of social work depends upon the national



context, on what was regarded as social work in the past and what is perceived as social work now (Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004).

Karvinen, Pösö and Satka (in Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004) claim that it is necessary for social work to develop its own internal logic and a mechanism based upon a specific understanding of environmental conditions, defining its place and role in this environment. To build upon the internal logic of social work, a link with the professional tradition and its cultural system is of capital importance. Authors Göppner, Hämäläinen (2004) see the formation of internal logic as a precondition for the existence of social work science. Internal logic contributes to the creation of theoretical systematics of social work science. According to authors Göppner and Hämäläinen (2004), theoretical systematics are incorporated into the programmatic content of social work science. The programmatic content should ensure the allowance of all the theoretical references taken into account in social work, while protecting the science against the danger of eclecticism. In social work a wide range of theoretical approaches, mostly from other disciplines, is applied. The formation of the theoretical systematics of social work is an antidote to theoretical arbitrariness (Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004). According to the authors, with its help it is possible to create an ordered system of findings for social work which would not be paradigmatically narrowed, eclectic, and would not get lost in the complexity of the individual disciplines either. Theoretical systematics can be used as a critical tool to evaluate benefits.

Another argument for the description of the development of social work is the self-conception of social work. The results of historical research in social work shape the historical awareness of social workers (Brnula, 2013). Historical awareness is, according to Šubr (2013), understood as an awareness of certain connections between the past, present and future. As an awareness contributing to the formation of people's attitudes towards the present and future. The shaping of the historical awareness of social workers plays an important role in a self-awareness of social work. Brnula (2013) considers history as a gateway to understanding the contemporary forms of social work. Historical knowledge is linked to a specific time and space, and therefore the discussion on the self-awareness of social work is also dependent upon the social context (Göppner, Hämäläinen, 2004).

Czech social work is still waiting for its history to be mapped. Although the history of professional social work is very rich and can serve as an inspiration for current events it is neglected by the professional public. Yet the requirement for inclusion of the topic of social work history into the education of students in social work occurs both domestically and internationally. In the Czech Republic, the development of social work is included in the Minimum Standard of Education in Social Work elaborated by the Association of Educators in Social Work. Knowledge of history is similarly emphasized by the Council on Social Work Education in the USA. In its standards for accreditation of its various fields of study, it states that social workers need to know the history of their profession (Education Policy, 2012:6).

Fisher and Dybicz (1999) consider the current state of historical research to be rather short-sighted. The authors refer to developments in other disciplines of social sciences and call for a return to the study of social work history. Currently very few studies on social work history are available, precisely due to the marginalization of historical research by contemporary social workers, students and academic workers. They suggest, therefore, that a larger space should be devoted to historical research in the practice and education of social workers.

Another point of argumentation is related to practical skills. Researchers utilizing historical research cannot do so without critical thinking, reflection and contextualization (Fisher, Dybicz, 1999). The study of history is thus a predisposition for further processes, especially for the skill of critical thinking. The ability to utilize critical thinking and critical reflection belongs, of course, to the personal attributes of many professions, not only social and academic workers.

Knowledge of historical facts is important for emphasizing or strengthening a professional identity. Lorenz (2007) identifies three types of reasons. The first articulates the accentuation of the historical



context of the development of social work theories and methods. The process of creating theories and methods of social work with clients is perceived from a dynamic perspective that corresponds to the nature of the social work profession. And precisely this dynamic perspective recognizes the very important historical context in which the development of theories and methods of work with clients obviously takes place. The historical context embraces the variability and flexibility of interventions with clients. But this is not seen as a weakness of the profession of social workers, but as a specialization core. The description of the establishment and improvement of social work theories and methods serves as clear documentation of the field. In this manner, social workers can comprehensibly recognize when and how the profession started and where it has arrived during its development. The second justification is the need to reflect on the validity of social work methods precisely through the knowledge of history. Theories and methods of social work are in the process of constantly being constructed and reconstructed, while facing new challenges. And this applies to all countries, irrespective of their political system. Especially under the influence of globalization, social work has to reflect on the validity of its methods and their development (Lorenz, 2007). The third motive consists in maintaining the position of social work by drawing on national traditions. This is due to the pressure of the postmodern criticism of social work. It is struggling to preserve its position and identity. Lorenz (2007) points out that for post-communist countries, this means a double task. They have not only to build upon the theoretical discourses of their own national traditions, which could be largely suppressed, but also to build upon discourses in other countries, which are fragmented. The tradition of social work in the Czech Republic has something, historically speaking, to connect with. For instance, from 1968–1989, professional social work was certainly not suppressed, which is documented by the conclusions of the implemented historical research (Špiláčková, 2014a).

### **Knowledge of social work history strengthens professional identity**

Professional identity means a person's sense of belonging to a certain profession. Besides social identity, belonging to a particular profession is also a component of individual identity. There are several typologies of the professional identities of social workers. Růžičková, Musil (2009) describe three types of identities. The identity of a therapist, a counsellor, and a reformer. Another division, following upon the concept of the social worker's role in practice, is presented by Musil (2008), describing a philanthropist, an administrator, a professional, and an activist. The differences in the identities of social workers in Czech society are based on their diverse concepts of work with clients (Růžičková, Musil, 2009). This is further confirmed by Lorenz (2007) when stating that, nowadays, diversity is prevalent in both theory and practice in regard to the increasing differentiation of functions and domains of social professions.

The main motive for identifying with a group is a sense of belonging. And the sense of belonging to a group can be acquired only in the case of obtaining a positive image of one's profession, in the case of being able to achieve a certain status in society. Social workers may feel a personal sense of belonging to their profession if, apart from other things (adequate remuneration, recognition by society), they are sufficiently acquainted with everything that social workers have achieved throughout their history, and what course of development the profession has undergone. Generally, it can be said that it is meaningful to convey findings on the development of social work on the basis of a knowledge of historical facts and their critical analysis. The knowledge of social work history leads to the potential of acting as a source of identity for social workers with their profession and, at the same time, it is a prerequisite for its preservation and cultivation. Also Abbott, Adler (1989) and Reisch (1988) consider the study of the history of social work as important, with a view to strengthening the identity of social workers and anchoring the basic values and core goals of the profession.

In the Czech Republic, there is a discussion of the topic of a professional law for social workers, which is currently in preparation. An obligation to join a thus far unspecified professional association that defends and protects the rights of social workers is expected. Membership will



be a condition for carrying out the profession. Currently, no legislative provision regulates the professional grouping of social workers in the Czech Republic. Along with the law, a question has arisen as to whether or not social workers actively wish for the existence of such associations (as well as of the law) at all. One of the reasons why there is no consensus on the establishment of a single professional body may be the insufficient identification of social workers with their profession and a subsequent lack of understanding of their discipline.

The question of whether social workers in Czech society experience the need to formulate a collective identity in their field was addressed in research by authors Růžičková, Musil (2009). Their result is the discovery that social workers (respondents of qualitative research) experience the need to formulate a collective identity of social work primarily in two ways. In the case of belonging to the whole field of social work, collective identity is experienced incompletely. The authors termed it “latent” collective identity. This means that social workers do not adequately consider collective actions throughout the field. However, the situation is different in the case of collective identity within a specialized group. Here, they experience their belonging very actively, even by means of implementing collective actions in their sub-disciplines<sup>2</sup>. Růžičková, Musil (2009) speak of “partial” collective identity. It follows from the above that the need to formulate the identity of social workers with their profession is a topical theme at the moment. It is clear that an interest in enhancing the identification of social workers with their profession exists. And that it is present especially in the area of individual target groups of clients, albeit less in social work as a field.

Lorenz (2007) claims that there is no need to worry about the professional identity of social workers. Quite the contrary, according to him, the profession is experiencing great changes and pressures which collectively mean that social work stands at a crossroads of major social events. And the discourse on social work methods cannot be content with passively watching the latest simple “fashion” in the field (Lorenz, 2007). It seems requisite to gather findings on historical facts to create a comprehensive picture of social work history. And not only of social work as a profession, but also of social work as a science. The scientism of social work is based on an established system of the findings of professional social work, and its history inherently belongs to them (Levická, 1999).

### **Historical Research – a methodological bridge between the past and the present**

Historical research is a suitable means to ascertain the historical facts of social work. It provides a telescopic image of significant events within social work (Danto, 2008). According to Hendl (2005) it is one of the key approaches in qualitative research strategy. Its importance has increased dramatically thanks to postmodernism (Danto, 2008). Findings obtained by means of historical research do not capture past events in their reality, but depict various interpretations of these past events through studies by various researchers. According to Dvořák et al. (2014), the main problem when examining history scientifically is that the past in its complexity is no longer accessible to researchers. Researchers work only with the witnesses of past actions still in existence today.

When it comes to historical research applied to social work, we find similarities but also differences with other areas of research. Unlike other historical studies, the researcher digging into the history of social work must simultaneously pursue two distinct lines, as pointed out by Danto (2008). The first line observes the practice of social work at the level of social work with a client in the context of the functioning of social services. The second line focuses on the practice of social work within the greater society, with emphasis placed upon global aspects, culture, language and political context.

Based on the research of specific procedures in the past, analysed in the minutest detail, we can

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis on partial collective identity of social workers supports the theory of social work by W. Lorenz (2007).





also express doubts regarding institutional mechanisms that may lead us to a new understanding of the current contingent practices (Satka, Shekill, 2012).

Historical research occupies an increasingly significant place in social work, yet without this fact being reflected in the current literature. Fisher and Dybicz (1999) conducted a study on the use of historical research in social work in the US. They selected the monitoring of methodology in dissertations as an indicator. Historical research was a legitimate and accepted research approach in dissertations, but the interest in its use has decreased over time. Before the Second World War, dissertations on the history of social work were quite common. In the 1950's the topic of social work history occurred in 13% of dissertations. This number is associated with the methodological pluralism prevalent in the fifties. In the following years, the percentage of occurrence was steadily declining. In the nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, historical research appeared in only 2% of dissertations. The result of the study was to prove the clear marginalization of research on social work history by doctoral students. Historical research was more popular in the first half of the twentieth century, when history was more dominant in the social sciences.

The methodology of historical research is applicable not only in social work, but also in other scientific disciplines and professions. The description of the research procedure in historical research cannot be encompassed, even only in broad outline, due to the limited extent of this paper. Therefore, I present only very basic information regarding the implementation of historical research<sup>3</sup>.

The subject of the history of social work is a close look at the practical activities, through which social work has been implemented in the past, and theoretical activities (such as theoretical approaches, the discourse of social work, and social education), through which social work has established itself as a specific area of theoretical cognition. According to K. R. Popper (in Bláhová, Sládek, 2007), the primary subject of the history of social work is human beings, their work and their ideas viewed in time and space and in the basic coordinates in which we perceive history. The scientific development of social work would not be possible without a methodological base, i.e. without a system of theoretical foundations and methods resulting from them and which are useful in social work practice. Social work is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach to the regulation and management of social issues. Its subject matter is a synthesized and generalized research of the causes that have led to the social problems of individuals, groups, families or communities in certain social conditions (Oláh et al., 2009).

Danto (2008) describes various perspectives – ontological assumptions – through which historical events can be viewed. There is no single history, thus there is no uniform system enabling an explanation of everything we need to know. We can use (1) the optics of empirical / descriptive history based on the positivist tradition of research. It considers the facts obtained as paramount. (2) Social history is based on an empirical foundation, too. It emphasizes social categories and the behaviour of groups, but not individuals. Unlike the preceding approaches, (3) cultural history calls for a reduction of our fixation on facts as objective reality. Instead, it acknowledges the influence of social constructs, e. g. the role of culture, on historical events as a subjective experience. New types of cultural history are feminist, gender-based, postcolonial or text history. The given event is observed with regard to the research subject. Another option of viewing a historical event is (4) postmodern history, sometimes referred to as text history or textual criticism. Its main method is deconstruction, which was originally utilized in literary criticism, but which over time started to be implemented in other areas, too. The approach of deconstruction was initially formulated by the French philosopher J. Derrida. Postmodern history subjects classic textual analysis to an intensive check in an effort to uncover various nuances of explanations of power relations and the multiformity of social and political behaviour. The fifth lense for viewing historical events is (5)

<sup>3</sup> In case of interest, a detailed description of methodology of historical research in social work can be found in the text of author (2014b).





Marxist history. It stands in direct contrast to linear empirical work. The perspective of Marxist history takes into account a broad macroview of society, in which units (families, institutions) are historical examples, which reproduce a social complex (Danto, 2008). Selection of an appropriate research method of analysis and the technique of data collection is dependent on the ontological perspective, which the researcher chooses for research, which ultimately depends upon their predetermined research question.

An indispensable and unique subject of research is primary sources, which are mainly preserved either in archives or the private collections of individuals. They originate at the very time with which they deal. They capture authentic information and findings about the era, phenomena and facts in which they are closest to in time. Another useful subject is secondary sources. However, they fulfil an auxiliary function, as they originate with the distance of a time span sometimes long after the described event, phenomenon or fact. Historical research does not merely ascertain what history was like, but also how it was articulated. The key aim is to capture past events and the changing interpretations of these events conveyed by different authors at the same time. Therefore, it is necessary to combine different types of sources and to approach their analysis critically.

The implementation of historical research cannot function without partial steps in each stage of work. One of the primary activities is the definition and formulation of the research problem or research questions. This is followed by ascertaining of the state of the affairs in secondary sources and by identification and localization of relevant materials (primary and secondary sources) to be used by the researcher.

The next step is selection of an appropriate method and technique to be applied by the researcher to their research subject. These are not specifically historical methods, but universal procedures of scientific research. Induction and deduction, direct and indirect method, diachronic and synchronic approach, oral history method and others are used. For social work, the discursive method is on hand. It is a way of understanding the reality characteristic of a certain time and cultural setting. Discourse analysis enables the supplementing of the typical interpretation of the past relying solely on classical sources. It reveals the mind-set of a person, group of persons, detects key concepts of these persons or distinct subcultures (Dvořák et al., 2014).

The most widely used technique to obtain historical data is content analysis. It can be utilized as part of both quantitative and qualitative research strategies. After the actual data gathering and their critical analysis, it is ultimately necessary to evaluate historical research. Researchers use triangulation, which can be described as a validation/comparison of the research conclusions with data obtained by different methods. Out of the three basic types of triangulation (of data, triangulation of researchers, methodological), the most frequently used form is methodological triangulation. It is a combination of several methods or techniques (questionnaires, interviews) with a view to adequately answering the research questions. It represents a very important step in historical research. Reliance solely upon archival data is not sufficient. It is necessary to compare them e.g. with accounts of eyewitness of the given time, or to confront them with secondary sources. An essential part of historical research consists in setting the findings into a broader context of the period in which they originated. We talk about contextualization. In doing so, researchers reflect the level of cognition of the phenomenon or problem under study at a certain point of time, take into account specifics of the given territory, of a certain area, and look for connections, interactions or developmental influences. The final stage is interpretation and publication of the ascertained historical findings, which is basically the same step as in other types of research.

Satka, Shekill (2012) contributed to the discussion of methodological approaches specifically applied to social work. Their works contribute to the development of their own research concepts required for the formation of social work as a science. They offer an innovative methodological approach to the study of the history of social work by utilizing the works of interdisciplinary scientists. These include the philosophical works of Michel Foucault, as well as his archaeological and genealogical analyses, and also sociological works by Dorothy Smith. Both theoretical



approaches were utilized by Satka, Shekill (2012), when analysing the case studies of individual clients' childcare.

Shekill developed some of Foucault's ideas in her study of social childcare and protective social work, especially in terms of the idea of the 'history of the present,' while Satka anchored the idea of the 'history of conceptual practices' in Finnish social work to sociology by Smith (Satka, Shekill, 2012).

Foucault's research method of combining an archaeological and a genealogical analysis to enable exploration of a complex interplay of factors that affect the methods used in social care, thus avoiding too simplistic and reductionist explanations, opens up new possibilities for understanding and problematization. It reveals everything that is hidden and tucked in one's subconscious mind. Simply stated, archaeology refers to the construction of discourses, such as social work 'as a strategy', and genealogy refers to the relationships and interactions between discourses, such as social work and its surrounding political, social, cultural and institutional discourses.

It is necessary to understand these two concepts (Foucault's and Smith's) independently, however, what is essential for the construction of the history of the present is the relationships between them. If a researcher wants to describe a view of involved actors (social workers, children, etc.) in a particular social environment in time and space, it requires alternative methodological tools such as those developed by Smith and her followers. Foucault offers tools for describing and identifying power relations, while Smith's work is more concerned with 'mapping' how power works at the level of professional practice (Satka, Shekill, 2012).

According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (2010), Foucault proposes the currently most significant attempt to create a research method when applied to human beings. Foucault argued that he writes the history of the present; he subsequently called the method enabling this process an interpretive analytics.

Archaeology, however, is a purely descriptive method. As Foucault says: "Archaeology seeks to describe the testimonies, and the function of the act of testifying of the bearers, to analyse the conditions under which this function works, and to cover different areas that this function assumes as well as the way these areas are articulated ..." Archaeology is not trying to reconstruct what people might have thought or what they struggled to achieve, or what they desired precisely at that moment when they articulated discourse. Archaeology is only re-writing, and thus controlled transformation of what has already been written. It is a systematic description of the discourse-object.

Foucault defines archaeology (2002:197) as a general description topic that examines the "already said" on the level of its existence, the testifying function that applies in this "already said," as a discursive formation, to which it belongs, as well as the general system of an archive from which it originates. Archaeology thus describes discourses as specific practices in an archive. The archive stands for all the systems of statements, no matter whether or not they concern events or objects. Foucault defines the reconstruction of development in a linear form of history as the history of ideas. This discipline deals with the beginnings and ends, as well as the description of hidden continuations and indirect routes. Rather than an analysis of knowledge it is an analysis of opinions, and, at the same time, rather than an analysis of the truth it is an analysis of errors and mistakes; it is preferably an analysis of mentalities rather than an analysis of the forms of thinking. Archaeology is based on Foucault's concept (2002:212), only re-writing and a controlled transformation of what has already been written. While maintaining the exterior form, it is a systematic description of the object of discourse.

Now is the time to mention the second approach of Foucault (2010), which is genealogy. Genealogy is supposed to eliminate the drawbacks of archaeology. According to Foucault, it aims to show that our presence is not the result of continuous development away from a pure and elemental form to its current form. It focuses on the description of the mutual relationships of particular discursive formations. Genealogy is the first important step towards a more satisfying and more reflective comprehensive analysis of power. He avoids in-depth search, focusing on the surface of events,



and small details (Dreyfus, Rabinow, 2010). Ježková (2013) notes that even though Foucault tries to avoid the construction of causal connections between history and the present, it cannot be said that he proposed his critical history entirely devoid of this plan. Dreyfus and Rabinow (2010:22) mention it as “from archaeology to genealogy.” Archaeology, therefore, is not completely abandoned, but is subject to genealogy, and thus archaeology is a technique serving to genealogy. An archaeological description is complemented by a genealogical revolt.

Historical findings can enrich the current practice of social work, leading to a better understanding of the discipline. Through them, social workers have the opportunity to become acquainted with the historical roots of their profession, and thus to be inspired by them, learning about successes as well as problems. They strengthen the identification of social workers with their profession, while simultaneously increasing the prestige of the profession.

I wish to mention the practice of social work in the former Czechoslovakia in the 1970's as a tangible example of the positive impact of historical findings ascertained through historical research. A common reader, social worker or social work student who wants to become acquainted with the development of social work in the 1970's most often opts for available<sup>4</sup> publications. In them they can read about the aforementioned period that “*the process of sociology and social work renewal was interrupted after 1968*” (Šiklová, 2001:146). Without further research, they may simply imagine that social work as a practical discipline did not exist. A logical extrapolation which, however, is not true. And exact findings of historical research refute this assertion. Social work as a profession existed and functioned at a high level (Špiláčková, 2014a). For instance, a system of post-penitentiary care, a system of social protection for disabled children and young people was built, and foster care was intensively developed. Completely new facilities, such as Homes of Family Type, a Post-Penitentiary Centre, and the Dormitory for Homeless People appeared. New theoretical concepts such as Glasser's reality therapy were used in social work practice; individual, group and community social work was implemented. It is clear from this minimalist enumeration that social work as a practical discipline really existed. In the light of these facts, those interested in the history of social work can be advised not to be immediately satisfied with data commonly available in secondary sources, but to confront them with primary sources from the period under study. In this manner one can confidently implement historical research to its full extent.

### **Historical research as a part of social workers' education**

It is only possible to ensure historical knowledge based on the use of an adequate methodological tool. A suitable tool readily at hand for obtaining relevant findings about the past is historical research applied to social work.

Reisch (1988) and other authors (Fisher, Dybiczy, 1999; Chambers, 1973) are convinced that findings from social work history should be incorporated into the education of social workers, and further, that historical research should be incorporated into courses on research methods as well. Social work students are rather rarely taught methods of historical research. Also, specialized literature (Chambers, 1973; Reisch 1988; Fisher, Dybiczy, 1999) shows that historical research represents a very small proportion of the whole range of research methods in social work. Analysis of social work history requires painstaking effort, patience and dedication on the part of the researcher. Appropriate persons for ensuring historical findings are not only academic workers but also social work students, by means of their theses. The study of history can develop and strengthen values such as human perception, empathy, and the ability of generalization in social work students (Chambers, 1973). Students' interest in the implementation of historical research is very small. Nevertheless, academics find historical research beneficial and enriching because it increases respect for social workers (Danto, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> I regard available publications to be those which are prepared for readers in libraries, study rooms, bookshops. It is not necessary to visit e.g. archives.



An obvious reason leading to the small interest is insufficient competencies and skills for implementing research on the history of social work. Currently in Czech Republic, historical methods are taught only in the fields of study specialized in historiography and not in the specific area of social work. At universities and colleges in the Czech Republic, which educate social workers, historical research is not taught at all (cf. the Minimum Standard of Education in Social Work). For instance, in the United States inclusion of historical research into the field of tertiary education in social work is very common. Fisher and Dybicz (1999) state that courses on and implementation of historical research depend on the quality level of the university. Its place is mainly in the academic field. Historical research is typical for specific schools. Its application is usually connected with a particular person who is interested in history. If a teacher works at the faculty teaching both the history of social work and the methodology of historical research, the graduates are positively influenced and apply the acquired knowledge onwards as well. Historical research should be supported. It enables social workers to understand the values of historical knowledge and historical perspectives. By utilizing methods of historical research in doctoral dissertations, doctoral students participate in supporting the profession from the “bottom-up”. Fisher and Dybicz (1999) denote this type of education as institutional support of the profession.

I regard the considerable time-related requirements, which may discourage some researchers, to be the second reason that causes a lack of interest in the implementation of historical research. The study of archival materials requires patience, a sense of systematic work, conscientiousness, and enough free time. Researchers are compelled to search through the materials thoroughly and they may only occasionally manage to find something useful interesting, and applicable to their research topic.

A prerequisite for greater utilization of the historical method in social work consists primarily in motivating students to apply research. According to Fisher and Dybicz (1999), it should be encouraged preferably within masters or postgraduate courses by presenting results of historical research, which are often surprising in the positive sense of the word (see the example given above). This highlights the need to include historical research into the basic curriculum of social work students so that they can gain adequate skills for its implementation.

## Conclusion

A research approach focused upon the exploration of the history of social work, i. e. historical research, is gaining interest among professionals. The various literature sources mention arguments in favour of the description and critical analysis of historical knowledge. Historical knowledge forms a professional tradition of social work. Social work, enriched by the knowledge of its historical roots, strengthens its position by referring to its history. Subsequently, the professional tradition is important for building its own internal logic and for the systematic organization of social work as a scientific discipline. Historical findings constitute the historical awareness of social workers, and play an important role in the self-understanding of social work as a practice, science, and academic discipline. The existence and description of the historical background of practical activities constitute the criterion for defining social work as a profession. Finally, the inclusion of historical knowledge into the curriculum of future social workers meets the minimum standards of education in social work. Historical knowledge is essential to strengthen the identity of social workers with their profession and to anchor the essential values and key goals of the profession. In the extant professional literature we find explanations of why historical knowledge is to be preferred for reinforcing the identification of social workers with their profession. The reasons include the emphasis of the historical context upon the development of theories and methods of social work, the need for reflection upon the validity of methods of social work, and the need to maintain the position of social work by binding it to national traditions. All three motives primarily emphasize the importance of historical knowledge. Ignorance of the continuities and discontinuities in the Czech history of social work is a major obstacle to the solidarity of social workers, and their



willingness to cooperate with one another. An appropriate and widely recommended tool seems to be historical research applied to social work. The choice of a research method and its techniques depends on the selected ontological perspective and a predefined research question. A practical example, when studying the history of social work, is the application of the archaeological and genealogical methods of M. Foucault or the sociological theory of Smith. Historical research has its own unique methodology to be followed. First, it is necessary to appeal to the schools providing education in social work to encourage them to incorporate the teaching of historical research into the syllabi of methodology courses. The Czech Republic still awaits its compilation of the history of social work. The reward of the applied research is its potential findings, which will certainly enrich the currently presented information on the history of social work, revealed on the basis of relevant methodological resources. It is one of the ways to promote and ensure the prestige of the profession of social work and to make it more visible to the public eye.

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# More Alike Than We Think? Frames and Practice of Social Work with Families in the UK and Germany

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## Abstract

Given the substantial differences between the UK and Germany in terms of both their welfare state regimes and in the portrayal of disadvantaged families in public discourse, it would be logical to also expect different approaches to social work with families in these two countries. However, in presenting the Troubled Families Programme in the UK and Sozialpädagogische Familienhilfe in Germany the article aims to highlight the extensive similarities in social work practice. In the same way as theories and practice of social work are increasingly crossing borders, changes in the composition of families are also a growing challenge to social work in many countries. The article illustrates some of the questions confronting practitioners working with multi-household families with a real-life example.

## Keywords

social work with families, welfare state regimes, Sozialpädagogische Familienhilfe, Troubled Families Programme, social pedagogy, triple mandate of social work, Germany, the United Kingdom

## 1. Introduction

Social work services for families are a standard feature of the welfare state. Given the heterogeneity of developmental paths and guiding principles across welfare state regimes, it could be expected that social work in different countries finds different solutions to similar problems. Interestingly, this is not always the case as the spread of social pedagogy as a theoretical foundation of social work shows. Striking similarities in the practice of social work are, however, not mirrored in the framing of the social problems it addresses. Using the UK and Germany as examples of different welfare state regimes that have been confronted with similar social developments over the last fifty years, the internationalisation of social work practice (in the sense of increasing cross-border convergence) will be illustrated. Although social change has followed a similar course in both countries, the political reactions to these developments diverge. An example from each country is

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given to serve as a frame within which social work operates. Turning then to the practice of social work in England and Germany, parallels can be identified. As a conclusion to the article, a family is introduced who by their mere composition pose a challenge to dominant conceptions of the family with which social work will increasingly have to cope in the future.

## 2. Social change and parenting in the UK and Germany

In the 1960's and 1970's both Germany and the UK underwent a significant expansion of their education systems, which appears to have benefited women more than men. At the same time, the number of women in paid employment has been increasing, even if the number of hours they work has declined. Furthermore, migration has had – and is having – a significant effect on the composition of society. In Germany – which for historical reasons does not keep official records on the race of its population – the proportion of children under six with a so-called migration background is growing in large cities and given the current influx of refugees will continue to do so. The UK has had an ethnically diverse population for much longer, but as the days of Empire recede even further into the distant past, concepts of Britishness are becoming increasingly fragmented. Both of these developments – more women in paid employment and growing cultural diversity – are having a profound influence on how family is “done” (cf. Jurczyk, 2014; Jurczyk, Lange, Thiessen, 2014), and with it the position of the family within society. Simultaneously, the continuing evolution of the welfare state is leading to shifts in the relative roles of the state, the family and the market in the provision of welfare. As family itself is changing, so are the expectations associated with it. Consequently, the discursive framing of a “successful” or a “failed” family is similarly in flux.

In addition to socioeconomic and sociodemographic changes, ideas of parenting have also undergone a transformation process. The hands-off, children should be seen and not heard approach that punished rudeness and mischief with a slap is disappearing. Depending on social position, ethnicity and attitudes, a range of parenting styles can now be observed that are contingent on the different goals and priorities that parents have for their children: what is more important: the individual or the family? The child or the parents? Delayed gratification or instant satisfaction? Status or money? Security or adventure? Today it is precisely these questions that differentiate between parenting styles and lead to approved or “deviant” styles.

The differentiation in parenting styles has in part been driven by international developments rather than just nation-specific discourses. To name just one example, since the fields of early education and care and women's participation in paid work have become the object of OECD comparative publications (childcare) and EU strategic targets (both), the balance of responsibilities between the state, the market and the family has been shifting in many countries. Whereas in Germany the shift in early years care has primarily, but not exclusively, been from the family to the state, in England it is the market that has profited. In January 2015, 95% of two-year-olds and 61% of three-year-olds were looked after by private and voluntary providers (Department for Education, 2015:4).

Here we see two parallel and mutually reinforcing normative shifts that lead to new conceptions of family: a good mother is in paid employment, at least part-time, and sends her children at an early age into professional childcare. Interestingly, the father in this family is conspicuous by his absence. That is because in both the UK and Germany he is very likely to be working full-time, often extra hours and overtime.

These developments can be viewed as the conjunction of two disparate principles for organising society. On the one hand we have the issue of citizenship rights, welfare entitlements tied to paid employment and just plain ambition that have encouraged more women to remain in paid employment or to return faster after a family break. On the other hand we have economic developments (stagnating real earnings in Germany, house-price and rent inflation in the UK) that make it harder for the male breadwinner to feed his family on his own. So not only do mothers



want to work, they increasingly have to. Add to that the expansion of childcare, i.e. removal of a barrier to mothers' paid employment, and legal reforms concerning what is deemed acceptable as time out from paid employment for lone parents and it becomes apparent that the stay-at-home Mom is either rich enough or, from this normative perspective, a failure.

Social work with families often involves those families who do not live everyday life in the currently socially acceptable fashion. Both dominant norms of parenting and the framing of social problems can influence social work with families. Such public debates shed light on common conceptions of what a family is and what a family should do. From that starting point families are then judged – by their neighbours, by professionals, by the media and by politicians. These judgements establish the boundaries for what is and is not acceptable behaviour. Based on these definitions, interventions in the everyday life of the family can be justified – or not. To examine this issue further, examples of the political framing of parenting in the UK and Germany will be presented before turning to a brief investigation of social work practice.

### 3. The frames

#### 3.1 United Kingdom

In Esping-Andersen's (1990) classic typology of welfare states the UK is considered a liberal welfare state regime with a relatively low level of universal benefits (e.g. pensions) supplemented by individual insurance coverage that can be topped up in the market (e.g. private health insurance). Although there have been many changes to eligibility criteria for benefits since the first appearance of the typology in 1990, what is more interesting for the practice of social work is the significant shift in government policy and rhetoric away from social justice and solidarity as guiding principles towards an attitude of individual responsibility and the concept of "fairness". Unlike the principle of social justice, which is about removing barriers so that everyone can achieve their full potential, fairness encourages the individual to compare what they are getting with what others get. Any concept of a greater good, of improving society for everyone or of helping those less fortunate is blended out when individuals and families are constantly being divided into "taxpayers" and "benefit recipients".

Poverty, and child poverty in particular, illustrate this shift. Child poverty became a policy priority after having risen sharply since 1979 and peaking at 29% in 1992. As a result of the policies introduced in 1997 the rate was down to 17.5% by 2013 (Joyce, 2014). The policies introduced included measures for increasing employment rates among lone parents, the introduction of a national minimum wage and increasing the level of benefits for families with children. The assumption was that paid work was the best route out of poverty, which also serves to cement the norm of the working parent(s). It has been estimated that the extra spending amounted to an £18 billion annual increase between 1997 and 2010 (Joyce, 2014).

After the change of government in 2010 a new attitude towards child poverty began to gain ground: parents were portrayed as too dysfunctional to be able to participate in paid employment and bring up their children properly. The centre-right think tank "Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)" is pushing for a new definition of poverty that goes beyond the internationally recognised and implemented OECD definition of 60% of median income. Of course low income alone is not a sufficient measure of individual well-being and that is why the OECD studies a broad range of indicators summarised in six dimensions chosen to cover the major aspects of children's lives: material well-being; housing and environment; education; health and safety; risk behaviours; and quality of school life (OECD, 2009). In contrast, in 2012 in a report that made no reference to the OECD's dimensions of well-being, the Centre for Social Justice advocated a new definition of poverty:

*"It is vital that the main drivers of poverty – family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependency and worklessness, addiction and serious personal debt – are made central to measurement. Although a lack*



*of money is also a serious factor in determining poverty, a faulty conceptualisation of the nature of poverty has resulted in an overarching income inequality target which drives short-term, narrow and expensive policy responses.”* (The Centre for Social Justice, 2012)

The negative and stigmatising language used by the Centre for Social Justice is an indicative of the policy shift. Contrast “material well-being” as used by the OECD with “economic dependency and worklessness.”

The Welfare Reform and Work Bill currently going through Parliament contains provisions for local authorities to gather a broader set of data on “life chances”, including measures of worklessness and GCSE attainment. As critics (for example The Scottish Government, 2015) quite clearly point out, the working poor do not exist in this definition. What we are seeing here is a blatant recourse to the classic distinction between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. Poverty is being construed as an inevitable result of “lifestyle choices” made by individuals who could have made different choices. Had they done so, they would not be in this situation. Unemployment, precarious employment, low wages and high rents do not enter into this analysis – it is the victim, not the system that is at fault. Furthermore, a distinction is created between “good” families (who pay taxes) and “bad” families (who exist on benefits). Any concept of solidarity or social justice is completely ignored and is replaced by the issue of fairness – the government acts merely as a steward for tax payers’ money and does not seek to redress social inequality.

Once this frame has been established it becomes much easier to reduce benefit levels. The narrative is that it is “unfair” for the hard-working taxpayer to subsidise the lazy, workless family next door. If the “bad” family does not reform its wicked ways they will be sanctioned by benefit reductions. Interestingly, precisely this development was predicted by Esping-Andersen in his first edition of the *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* from 1990 (p. 26). He describes how the British liberal welfare state with its moderate universalism and strong market responds to a growing middle class and their growing aspirations. The state is unlikely to improve its provision of welfare services but allows the market to cater to the growing demand for higher quality services. In this type of system “the typical political effect is the erosion of middle-class support for what is less and less a universalistic public-sector transfer system.”

### 3.2 Germany

Esping-Andersen viewed Germany as a conservative welfare state regime. It has an insurance-based system of individual entitlements, in which for example the eligibility to unemployment benefit reflects an individual’s contributions. Due to the federal structure and the dominance of the principle of subsidiarity, the role of the state is indirect but nevertheless relatively large. Only recently is the market making minor inroads into private pension or private childcare provision.

Current debates on parenting and the family in Germany are less about child poverty, which is universally accepted as a social problem and as such a whole plethora of measures are being implemented. A more contentious issue is the question of public and private parenting, exemplified by the debate surrounding the *Betreuungsgeld* (German for childcare allowance). This debate sheds light on the shifting balance of care provision between the state and the family and how this is framed by different social groups.

In 2013 the new Childcare Allowance was introduced for parents whose children were between 15 and 36 months old and who did not send their child to publically funded childcare. In July 2015 the Constitutional Court ruled the benefit unconstitutional because the national government had overstepped its competence: only the federal states should legislate on this type of benefit. What was most interesting about this benefit was the vehement and passionate debate in the run-up to its introduction. On the one side was the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) who first brought the proposal into play. They argued that parents should have the choice between institutional childcare or reducing working hours or staying at home to look after children. Parents who sent



their children to state-subsidised childcare benefited financially, whereas parents who chose to look after their children themselves did not. Therefore it was only fair that parents who did not use state-subsidised childcare should receive a similar financial benefit. As an aside I'd like to mention that the concept of fairness does not often play a role in debates on social issues in Germany. This may represent a first attempt to shift the frame in a similar direction as is occurring in the UK.

On the other side of the debate were practically everyone else in the country; the most vocal opposition came from Social Democrats and women's rights groups. Obviously the major criticism was that this benefit merely cemented out-dated gender roles of the male breadwinner / female carer family arrangement. The most interesting arguments against the benefit were based on a certain image of low-income families and tried to elevate the best interests of the child above the parents' short-term financial interests. Two expressions of this position were, firstly, the claim that families with a migrant background (who have a higher than average poverty rate) would rather take the money than send their children to childcare where they would learn German and integrate faster into German society. The second argument was that the new benefit would "reward" low-income parents who "could not or would not" send their children to childcare where the foundations for a successful educational career would be laid<sup>2</sup>. Here we see the attitude towards disadvantaged families: they ought to send their children to state institutions as early as possible so that they, firstly, escape the bad influence of these poor parents and, secondly, start being educated properly from an early age.

These arguments reveal a widely-held belief about the role of public childcare in society. Since the PISA shock in 2001 the relationship between social background and academic success has been an important issue. The revelation that in international comparison the German school system was particularly bad at overcoming the effects of social background on academic success was one of the reasons for the major expansion and professionalization of early education and care. The idea is that if a child from a disadvantaged background is professionally looked after and educated from an early age, their chances of academic success and therefore their future employability should improve as well. There is a majority consensus that not all families can create the best opportunities for their children and that in this case it is the responsibility of the state to compensate for these deficits.

Finally, a further aspect of the German care regime contributes to the framing of parenting, namely the subsidiarity principle. This entails that as far as possible, actions and tasks should be undertaken by the smallest group possible. That can be an individual, a family or the lowest level of an organisation. Only when this is not possible or if greater benefits are to be expected by cooperation, then successively larger groups or higher levels of the organisation become involved in a subsidiary, i.e. supporting, fashion.

In terms of childcare provision this means that although the state (at a federal level) is involved in the financing of facilities, at the municipal level the state only owns and operates about one third of childcare facilities (Rauschenbach, Schilling, 2012). Table 1 shows who operates the rest: over one third (35%) of all childcare facilities in Germany are operated by religious organisations, primarily the Catholic and Protestant welfare associations (Caritas and Diakonie respectively). The non-religious nationally-active welfare associations operate nearly 16% of childcare facilities and private facilities account for less than 2% of the total. To a certain degree this situation may

<sup>2</sup> An analysis (Alt, Hubert, Jehles, et al., 2015) of who received childcare allowance showed that the motives were more complex. In regions with low levels of childcare provision, the proportion of recipients was higher. The most significant motive, however, was the desire to look after the child in the family until the age of three and only then send her or him to childcare. This belief tends to correlate with other aspects of organising family life, e.g. low rates of female employment and a higher likelihood of being married versus cohabitating. All three of these characteristics are more common in traditional, conservative middle-class milieus and families with a migration background.



help explain attitudes towards care: Christian concepts of charity and compassion underlie 35 % of childcare facilities and secular concepts of social justice are to be found in the 16% of facilities operated by the non-religious welfare organisations. In contrast, Table 2 shows that the state as a direct provider of childcare in England plays an even smaller role than in Germany (8.7% of providers) but over half (51.2%) of childcare facilities are privately run. Voluntary organisations (including local churches and other religious organisations) do play a significant role (39.1 %), but are strongest in provision of “sessional” childcare, i.e. playgroups and pre-school for a few hours in the morning or afternoon. Furthermore, the qualification level of paid staff in facilities providing only sessional rather than full day care is generally lower (Department for Education, 2012:95).

Table 1: Childcare facilities in Germany by provider (2011)

Provider	Number	Percent
Local councils	17,106	33.1
Private providers	951	1.8
Local churches and church-affiliated providers, of which:	18,105	35.0
Catholic welfare association	9,435	18.3
Protestant welfare association	8,495	16.4
Other religions	175	0.33
Secular welfare associations	8,118	15.7
Other providers	7,379	14.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,659</b>	<b>99.9</b>

Source: Statistiken der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe from Rauschenbach and Schilling (2012:3)

Table 2: Childcare facilities in England by the provider (2011)

Provider	Number	Percent
Local councils*	2,450	8.7
Private providers	13,490	51.2
Voluntary providers	10,290	39.1
Other providers	110	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,340</b>	<b>99.6</b>

\* Excludes nursery schools and primary schools with reception and/or nursery classes.

Source: Department for Education (2012:147)

#### 4. Social work practice

The brief outline of welfare regimes and current framing of parenting have hopefully conveyed some of the deep-rooted differences between the UK and Germany – differences that are reflected in both the organisation of the welfare state as well as people’s attitudes towards welfare. Given these two different sets of institutions and attitudes we turn now to how they impact social work practice.

##### 4.1 The Troubled Families Programme as social work practice

The “Troubled Families Programme” (TFP) has been chosen to serve as an example of current social work practice in England. The programme targets 120,000 so-called troubled families who are defined as families “who have problems and who cause problems” (DCLG, 2014). This definition is significant in that it accentuates the framing of these families as not only affected by social problems, but also are a social problem. As Hayden and Jenkins (2014) point out, this is





nothing new in the history of social policy in the UK and they refer to similarities in debates on the underclass dating back to at least the 1880's.

Given the current framing of welfare recipients as unfairly benefiting from the support of hard-working taxpayers it is interesting how the TFP proclaims to “promote a different approach to working with families in order to help them to change or turn their lives around” (DCLG, 2014). The emphasis on change is a constant theme of social work with families in the UK. In her study on social workers' constructions of parenting, Woodcock (2003:98) notes that “the focus of intervention consisted of requiring parents to change their behaviour.” Furthermore, she noted how the lack of a psychologically informed strategy for effecting change impeded the success of interventions. The different approach proclaimed by the TFP intends to address this issue and consists of three major elements which will be examined in more detail: the focus on the whole family and the family as a whole; employing a key worker/lead professional to work with the family; and having a plan. The two other elements considered key factors in family interventions (“practical ‘hands-on’ support and a persistent, assertive and challenging approach” (DCLG, 2012:6)) rather describe how social workers interact with families than the conceptual basis of the programme, which is more the focus here.

The idea of focusing on the whole family and the family as a whole acknowledges the interactions between family members and how the actions of one person influence the others. The drawback to traditional approaches that tend to focus on individual problems of certain family members without considering their broader relationships is that “it can mean families are only contained in their difficulties, often lurching from crisis to crisis” (DCLG, 2014:5). The whole families approach has been gaining increasing attention in the UK in recent years. In a 2008 literature review written for the Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Taskforce (Morris, Hughes, Clarke, et al. 2008) the authors list the advantages of a whole family approach as, among others, avoiding pathologising specific families or certain members (in particular mothers) and opening to door to resource-oriented strategies for strengthening families, such as resilience theory. The London Borough of Hackney reorganised its Children's Social Care in the same year and “became the first setting in the UK to undertake wholesale organisational change to support systemic approaches to social work.” (Hedtjarn, Khanom, Schiltroth, Wright, 2013). As will be shown below, the concept of the whole family is integral to the systemic approach.

In order to work with the whole family the TFP envisages having one key worker (or a small team) who works with the family over time. This is an alternative to the situation in which different family members are involved with different services, for example the professionals working with the parents of a child considered at risk of harm would not be the same as those working with the father for his substance abuse or the probation services working with the mother. Of course it is often necessary to involve several professionals with differing expertise but the idea is that the lead professional is the one who liaises with the others. The hope is that the lead professional can build a relationship of trust with the family members and so address the underlying problems rather than just their manifestation. Citing evidence from evaluations of family interventions in which a lead professional worked together with the family, the DCLG (2012:20) summarises the factors named by families for the success of the key worker:

*“Families can feel that the relationship with a case worker is very different to other agencies. They are clear that they want to feel that they are treated as a human being, that they are listened to, and that their individual circumstances are being taken into account. They often feel their worker really knows and understands them and their family. Families believe the workers are dedicated to helping them and ‘going the extra mile’.”*

Since there is one dedicated worker for the family it becomes easier to realise the third major element in the organisational conception of the TFP: having a plan. The lead professional will get



to know the family and the underlying issues that manifest as social problems. They will also be aware of the range of services that can be brought in as required. On the basis of this knowledge and their professional training they will be able to develop a plan of action for the family to tackle their problems. An example of how building trust as a dedicated worker leads to developing a plan is given by Hayden and Jenkins's (2014) evidence. Often the lead professionals first came into contact with the family due to a crisis, e.g. being faced with eviction, ex-partner being released from prison, mental health problems etc. As a first step, practical measures are taken to alleviate the crisis, which can serve to start building trust, although this is often not an easy task. Many families have already had extensive contact with social services, often not voluntarily or when the parents themselves were children. Why should this new key worker be different? Only after the professional has overcome initial resistance is it possible to start working on long-term issues, such as the children's school attendance. This would then become the focus of the plan, and a first step may be to develop morning routines that help to get the children to school.

As with many social programmes in the UK, both qualitative and quantitative evidence on the efficacy of the programme has been gathered (e.g. DCLG, 2012; DCLG, 2014; Hayden, Jenkins, 2014; Department for Education, 2015). Rather than focusing on the official presentation of statistics, the comments made by practitioners provide better insights into how the programme is being implemented.

Hayden and Jenkins (2014) gathered evidence from practitioners (10 in-depth interviews, a survey of 100 staff, five focus groups) to assess the programme's achievements at its mid-point (2013). They found that practitioners are making the programme their own. Many are rejecting the stigmatising label and presenting their services in a more positive light, e.g. "Strengthening Families", "Thriving Families" or "Turnaround Families". In talking about their experience of working in the programme the staff involved stressed the importance of "who works" over "what works" (Hayden, Jenkins, 2014:643), in other words it is the quality of the long-term relationship between the professional and the family that leads to change rather than the specific measures that are implemented.

Nevertheless, creating the space for the lead professional to assume this role for the family appears to be contributory factor:

*"We listen to what families say, children say, young people say ... what they don't want is to keep having to tell their story time and time again to other people. ... What they want is actually someone who can be consistent and a bit tough so that they don't let go of them, so they can't duck and dive. Because it's hard for them to keep that ... it's difficult but if they can keep that relationship with somebody the difference it can make to them in terms of themselves is huge." (Hayden and Jenkins, 2014:643)*

Although the importance of relationships in social work is well known, this finding has important implications for the organisation of social work. It would seem that standardisation of methods and practice is not as likely to produce as effective results as creating a framework within which a well-trained professional can operate. In terms of training, the implication is that building trust, listening and being consistent and persistent are skills that need to be focused on just as much as practical tools and methods.

#### **4.2 Germany: Sozialpädagogische Familienhilfe**

A common approach in Germany to supporting families with multiple problems is *Sozialpädagogische Familienhilfe*, abbreviated to SPFH and translated as Social Pedagogic Family Support.

SPFH was originally developed in the 1970s to fill the gap in social work services for families. At that time there was either counselling, usually initiated by the families themselves, or child protection cases, which usually meant the children were placed in residential or foster care. It was deemed necessary to offer some type of support to families who were experiencing difficulties in order to



reduce the number of out-of-home placements. During the 1980s SPFH was expanded gradually, but according to Trede (2014:209) it took until the 1990s before many practical recommendations from the 1970s were implemented, such as an orientation on social milieus, interweaving different services depending on individual needs and “a pedagogic orientation towards the context of the life world and ‘successfully coping with everyday life’ (Thiersch) in rejection of regulatory policies demanding normalisation” (Trede, 2014:217).

The term “Sozialpädagogisch” or “social pedagogic” implies teaching about social issues, in this case parenting. The social worker was no longer to be the person from children’s services who took away people’s children, but a partner to help the family learn. Walther (2014:94) cites Schugeresky and Silver’s (2013:2) in his mind “somewhat naïve but refreshingly simple” definition: “social pedagogy deals with the educational dimensions of social issues and the social dimensions of educational issues.”

In contrast to the TFP, SPFH is not a special programme for a limited number of families but a basic social work service available to anyone who is assessed as needing it. The most recent statistics from 2014 show that on 31st December 70,745 families were receiving SPFH and 43,100 have received SPFH during the course of the year but the support had now ended (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016). Interestingly, if we add these figures together, the total number of families who received SPFH during 2014 was 113,845, which is lower than the 120,000 target for “troubled families” in England<sup>3</sup>. Of course SPFH is only one of a range of services on offer, including individual and group work with children and young people or specialist day-care, but it is notable that both the number of children and young people aged 18 years or under and the number of families reached by programmes that target families who are considered to need support is a roughly equal in both countries.

The qualifying condition for SPFH is when parents (or guardians) cannot ensure that their parenting is conducive to their child’s welfare. Often professionals who work with the child in either childcare or school will suggest to the parents that they seek support. Other parents may be referred by parenting advice offices or may themselves directly seek help from the local authority’s department for children, young people and families (*Jugendamt*). Although eligibility is determined by the child’s needs, it is the parent(s) who are legally entitled to receive this support.

The goals of SPFH are defined in the Child and Youth Assistance Law (Section 31):

*“SPFH should, by means of intensive support and supervision, help families to help themselves in their parenting responsibilities, in coping with problems of everyday life, in solving conflicts and crises and in their dealings with other agencies and institutions. SPFH usually lasts for a longer period and requires the cooperation of the family.”*

According to Wolf (2015), there is no one single theory of SPFH but different perspectives arising from theories and research in different disciplines. One of the most commonly used descriptions is that in the standard handbook, first published in 1997 and also available online (Helming, Schattner, Blüml, 2006):

*“This support relates to the family as a whole. The approach is multidimensional, i.e. it is orientated towards the whole family system, its social networks and its parenting, relationships, social and material problems and resources.”*

<sup>3</sup> Although Germany’s population is much larger than England’s (81 million vs. 54 million in 2014), the number of children and young people aged 18 or under in 2014 was almost identical: 12,907,500 in England and 13,080,280 in Germany (Office for National Statistics, 2015; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015).



Fundamental to SPFH is the conception of the family as not just having problems but also having resources (or strengths). This is where the pedagogy kicks in: assisting families in recognising their resources and mobilising them to overcome their current problems. The principle methodology is support and supervision so that the family can find their own way out of their difficulties and manage their everyday and family life in a manner conducive to their children's welfare.

Although it is the state in the form of the department for children, young people and families (*Jugendamt*) that decides, whether or not a family receives SPFH, the actual work is largely outsourced to independent providers. This example of subsidiarity in action has a range of advantages and disadvantages including, on the plus side, a broad field of providers with diverse specialities e.g. multilingual practitioners from the same heritage community as the families or wide-ranging experience with child sexual abuse; on the negative side are the challenges of quality control and, for the providers, the uncertainties of a case-by-case financing system.

Once the department for children, young people and families has agreed that a family should receive SPFH, they have decided which provider will deliver it, and the provider's staff has met the family, all three parties come together to draw up the support plan (*Hilfeplan*). The idea is that all members of the family, including the children, participate in this process. The participative discussion process should erect "a certain hurdle to paternalism and arbitrariness" (Trede, 2014:220) that in the past were considered common in state authorities' dealings with clients of social work. The plan is central to the ensuing work between professional and family, guiding the methods used and providing a benchmark for "success". Frindt's (2010) research review mentions evidence showing that if the goals are openly negotiated by the three parties involved they become more important. Some families, however, did not feel that they had been adequately involved or did not agree with the goals set by the department for children, young people and families (2010:19), which are not ideal starting conditions for working together. Furthermore, it underlines how tricky it can be at the start of the programme for all parties to agree about the goals and that dealing with dissent needs to be part of the process.

Given its relatively long history, it could be expected that SPFH has been well evaluated by now. This does not appear to be the case. One reason is that evaluations of SPFH are often conducted on a regional level for a particular provider so their results may not be applicable to the practice of SPFH in other settings. Another argument is that since the support plan drawn up between the family, the provider and the department for children, young people and families is always tailored to the situation of each individual family, it is not possible to derive standardised measures for outcomes (Fröhlich-Gildhoff, Engel, Rönnau, 2006, cited in Frindt, 2010). Consequently, the evidence tends to be localised and patchy. In a literature review from 2010, Frindt lists eleven studies and model project looking at the effects of different methodological or organisational aspects of SPFH on the outcomes. Summarising the results (2010:29–32) she highlights that the foundation for working with the family is laid in the first meeting, during which engaging with the family and recognising what they are capable of are crucial for establishing a working relationship. The quality of the relationship between family and practitioner and the degree of trust are essential to achieving positive outcomes with SPFH.

In her conclusion Frindt (2010:44) sketches the peaks and troughs of SPFH: If well-qualified practitioners can spend enough time with a family and employ their skills and training as they see fit, then the intervention can improve the family's everyday life and the children's developmental opportunities. It can do so by mobilising even the scarce resources within the family so that they can find their own solutions to their problems and cope with new challenges as they arise. On the other hand, practitioners report that professional standards are being undermined, for example by limiting the number of hours per week for each family and the number of families a practitioner works with is often far more than the maximum recommendation of three or four. Similarly, the terms and conditions of employment in the independent providers are not always ideal: since they are paid on a case-by-case basis and the number of cases is hard to predict, there is a shift away



from full-time permanent employment contracts to more casual forms. Frindt writes (2010:44): “This can be described as a process of erosion that is loosening the boundary between professional and lay support.”

### 4.3 Similarities and differences

Given the different welfare state regimes and framings of families considered in need of social work support, the similarities between the TFP and SPFH are rather pronounced. Three are most striking: the whole family approach, the key worker/lead professional and working with a plan.

At the organisational level, working with a plan is a sensible practicality. At best it is a formal record of agreed goals and can be referred to in assessing progress, which in itself can be motivating. In Germany, however, it is also fraught with difficulties. Since the plan is drawn up at the start of SPFH, the three parties have not had much time to get to know each other, nor have the practitioners had much time to assess the situation in the family. There are established procedures for this exploratory phase (e.g. the social pedagogic family diagnosis; Uhlendorff, Euteneuer, Sabla, 2013:170) but even so, it remains just that: exploratory. Nevertheless, research (Wolf, 2015:223) has shown that the degree to which the family is truly involved in developing a shared plan, rather than having the feeling that a standard plan is being applied to them, is relevant to the plan's acceptance and efficacy. If everyone is involved in making the plan, they are more likely to believe in it and work together to realise it.

In the TFP the initial plan is not only between the family and social services but the lead professional also liaises with other agencies to coordinate all professionals working with the family. Since as part of the systematic model of the TFP all agencies involved will jointly review how the plan is working, it means it can be adapted as “progress” is made with the family (DCLG, 2012:29). The TFP plan appears to be more fluid and flexible than the SPFH plan.

The role of a key worker or lead professional is not quite the same in the two countries. Whereas in England there is one principal contact person for the family, in Germany this is not always the case. Depending on the family constellation and their support needs there may be a range of professionals involved who, because of data protection laws, are not always allowed to share information with each other. Nevertheless, how the social worker chooses to work with the family and which methods they employ are left up to them to decide on the basis of their professional training and their assessment of the situation. Building a relationship of trust is acknowledged as pivotal in both countries and also that this may be established by successfully dealing with a crisis at the start of the intervention (Frindt, 2010:18; DCLG, 2012:15). The fact that the new person can actually make practical things happen improves their credibility with the family and lays the foundation for a working relationship based on trust.

One of the fundamental differences is in how the professionals should actually achieve results with the family. Whereas in the TFP the emphasis is on being tough and bringing about lasting change (specifically lower rates of offending, anti-social behaviour, school avoidance etc.), in SPFH the objective is a more diffuse mobilisation of strengths to improve living conditions and coping with everyday life. Given the individual nature of the support plan that is agreed locally, a certain degree of vagueness in SPFH is inevitable. Furthermore, it exemplifies subsidiarity. Since the plan is agreed at the lowest possible level (family, practitioner from the independent provider, social worker from the local department for children, young people and families) its applicability is limited to this context. National guidelines exist in the form of legislation but the law does not proscribe a style of working, just standards that can be achieved in many ways.

Both the TFP and SPFH aim to work with the whole family. On the one hand this may mean working with all the members individually to find out how they view the situation, which resources they have, what they would like to change and how to go about; on the other hand it also means looking at the relationships between the individual family members. In German social work the whole family approach is a fundamental part of the *Systemischer Ansatz* (the systemic approach)





that, inspired by systems theory, looks at the functioning of a system (such as a family) within its environment. The systemic approach considers the family to be a system in which problems are not anchored in individuals but are seen to stem from dysfunctional interaction between individuals. Consequently, the relationships between family members shift to the fore (Rothe, 2013). Similarly, underlying the TFP is the view that:

*“Whole family approaches are seen to offer opportunities to focus on shared needs, develop strengths and address risk factors that could not be dealt with through a focus on family members as individuals.”* (Morris, Hughes, Clarke et al., 2008:88)

Much of the evidence cited for the whole families approach in the English context comes from experience with the family group conference that originated in New Zealand and is described by Morris et al. (2008:36) as “a whole family approach which draws on resilience theory, theories of power and powerlessness and strengths-based theories of change.”

The different theoretical foundations for the whole family approach in England and Germany may go some way to explaining some of the differences. Whereas in Germany the emphasis is on relationships between family members, and the family and its social environment, since this too has an impact on the functioning of the family system, in England the approach is more to explore how all family members, also those outside the household, can be involved in change. Here also we note a difference in terminology: whereas in Germany the terms “help” (e.g. helping clients to help themselves) and “support” (e.g. parenting support) are common, in England a commonly cited goal is “change”. The concept of change fits in neatly with the frame of fairness in welfare receipt: it is fair to offer “troubled families” the opportunity to change their ways so that they are no longer a burden on the taxpayer but become productive members of society.

Another difference is the greater emphasis of SPFH on the “environment” or life-world of the family. On one hand this means relationships outside the household to other family members or friends who may or may not live close by. On the other hand it means liaising with the local services and facilities the family is currently involved with or encouraging the family and the individual members to engage more with such services. Examples are childcare and school but also leisure activities for children like sports clubs, or drop-in centres with a range of activities for parents, children and families. Schools are frequently involved in the TFP but rather in their role as an additional state institution with which the key worker liaises.

Finally, without being explicit the TFPs does seem to employ social pedagogy as defined by Schugersky and Silver (2013:2, cited in Walther 2014:94). Trying to improve relationships between family members often means learning and improving parenting skills, which can be seen as educating parents about social issues. Similarly, a major focus lies on improving school attendance while recognising that home life (a social issue) significantly impacts education. So although it is theorised and defined differently in both countries, there is some conception of social pedagogy underlying family social work in both England and Germany.

### **5. A future challenge for social work**

A central commonality in the practice of social work in England and Germany is the focus on the whole family. As long as a family remains relatively small and limited to a specific locality, working with the “whole” family is fairly straightforward. But when large families with unclear relationships are involved the situation becomes more complex. An example from our research illustrates this point.

Lone parent families are overrepresented among recipients of both TFP and SPFH. In England in 2013, 49% of “troubled families” were lone parent households compared to 16% nationally (DCLG, 2014:10), in Germany in 2011, 14% of all families with children under 18 were lone parent families, but 51.6% of all families receiving SPFH (Fendrich, Pothmann, Tabel, 2014).





So in both countries we find that approximately half of the families targeted for support are lone parent families. The authors of the German report (p. 20) question whether the family is affected by a social problem or whether the family is a social problem:

*“This raises questions of to what extent the living arrangement “lone parent” negatively impacts parenting but also to what extent certain filter and allocation processes occur in the perception of professionals in social services when confronted with lone parents.”*

In both Germany and the UK the vast majority of lone parents are female. This raises the question on the fathers: what is their role in parenting in a whole family approach? A certain proportion may have left without leaving a forwarding address, but often they remain in the neighbourhood. How do they then fit into the whole family? An extract from a group interview we conducted as part of an evaluation of parenting support courses (Bird, Hübner, 2014) illustrates the complexity of the situation. As a warm-up question for the group interview to stimulate discussion we asked how many children they have. Here is an extract from the transcript that illustrates the challenge of defining the “whole” family:

*Interviewer: How many children do all of you have?*

*Bianca: I’ve got four.*

*Sabina: I’ve got five.*

*Bianca: That’s two little ones and two big ones.*

*Sabina: Three of mine are grown up and two are little.*

*Interviewer: Are the grown-up ones still living at home?*

*Paul: I just wanted to ask, are we talking about children living at home or children in general?*

*Interviewer: In general first and then ...*

*Paul: I’ve got four, the fifth is in production. One lives with me now, soon it’ll be two.*

*Jessy: I’ve only got one at home.*

*Interviewer: How old?*

*Paul: One is ten now, don’t know about the other one, I don’t know him ... uhm ... then eight and seven and number five is in production and will pop out in two or three months.*

*Jessy: I’ve got two children, two sons. One is six, well he’s going to be six in May and the other one’s four.*

*Interviewer directly to Bianca: And you have four?*

*Bianca: Three boys and a girl: 16, 17, 6 and 4. Right now none of them live with me.*

From the parents’ point of view the term “children” includes grown-up children not living at home, children currently in care and, for Paul, children living with their mothers. Paul’s family is a constellation that social workers in Berlin are quite often confronted with.

Paul was trying to be a good father to his one son who lived with him. The boy was having problems at school and social services had been involved for some time. It was their recommendation that Paul take part in the parenting course. During the interview he stressed his desire to be a “good” father. We asked him what being a good father meant to him:

*Interviewer: What is a good father?*

*Paul: Being a father is a crap job, and y’know I’m a single parent, I have a [female] flatmate, and yeah I give my son all the love that should be getting from his mum too. Right now it’s like this: I grab him, give him lots of kisses, he giggles and tries to run away, so we have fun. And then there’s the little play fights, wrestling, that he wouldn’t do with his mum. Sometimes it’s really great and sometimes it sucks because it is tougher on your own, but it’s OK.*



Several months later we met him again for a follow-up interview. By this time he had agreed to send his son to a residential care home outside of Berlin and was having a relationship with Jessy. It is hard to say whether it was really his choice to send his son to the home or whether he had agreed to this recommendation from children's services to avoid them applying for a court order. In any case it was clearly visible that he was missing his son. His social worker told us afterwards that he loved his son dearly and that the love for his son was Paul's greatest resource. Paul was trying to come to terms with what he probably construed as his sacrifice – agreeing to let his son go, so that he would have a better future.

So, what do we do about Paul? He did seem to be genuinely motivated to try and be a “good” father to his son and was trying to fill what he saw as the gap left by an absent mother, but this did not work out. But he does have four further biological children and was becoming involved in parenting Jessy's two children (who were now both living with her again). How does this fit in with the whole family approach? The first challenge of course is to define the whole family. Do we put Paul at the centre or look at each of his children in turn? Taking the latter approach and considering the child's right to have contact to both parents but knowing that Paul and these children's mothers do not want to meet, then each of these children would need their own social worker to ensure contact to Paul. Furthermore, it is quite likely that some of the mothers are in new relationships and consequently another man may have assumed the role of social fatherhood. How does Paul fit into this new constellation as the biological father? Do his children want to have anything to do with him?

Nowadays it is quite common for children in Germany whose parents have separated to spend one week living with the mother and one week living with the father. Considering that we are talking about four children here, the logistics start to become complicated: would he have all the children at once, does he have the space in his flat? Does he see each child one week in four? Does he just have a few hours of supervised contact each week with each child, and is maintaining contact with a child the same as parenting?

Furthermore, many current concepts for maintaining parent-child relationships when partnerships dissolve are based on the idea of one couple separating and at most two new couples forming. In this case we are potentially speaking of ten couples and Paul is certainly not unique in a city like Berlin; six related households were mentioned in a report on TFP (DCLG, 2012:27).

Finally, there is the question of the relationships between Paul's children. Biologically speaking they are half siblings: do they know each other, do they want to, do they get on with each other, what happens at birthdays and Christmas?

The classic response of the German welfare state is to place the children with their mothers (and not Paul) and to compensate for his absence by encouraging the mothers to send the children to childcare as early and as long as possible. At most, Paul will be expected to make maintenance payments, dependent on his income. In spite of all the developments in gender equality what we have here is still the classic male breadwinner / female caregiver division of family work. Consequently, when trying to protect the child's best interests keeping him or her with the mother after a separation is the common practice. But is this going to continue to work in the future?

Paul symbolises the trends of increasing fragility of relationships at a time of increasing recognition of the importance of fathers and a growing child-centric focus in not only social work but also education and health. If we are going to overcome the gender stereotyping associated with parenting and if fathers are becoming more emotionally and practically involved in everyday parenting then the challenge that social work with such families is facing is how to manage a whole family approach involving multiple interlocking households. What role can social pedagogy and the whole family approach play?



## 6. Concluding remarks

Although a liberal and a conservative welfare regime have fundamentally different ways of organising their institutions and delivering welfare, they have been confronted with very similar social change. Whereas the reactions to this change have shifted the UK framing of welfare receipt from a question of social justice to one of fairness, in Germany a conservative view of gender relations can still be observed at a time when state-funded facilities are being given a larger role in welfare provision, thus shifting the balance between state and family. Give these differences there is a surprising overlap in social work practice between the two countries. Although the paths taken in arriving at current practice were different, in the ideal case well-trained and supported social workers can build relationships of trust with the whole family. From this foundation of trust, change can be initiated; even if this word is not explicitly used in Germany, it is implied. Professionals in both countries employ social pedagogy and look beyond the single household to tap into further support and resources for the family. Finally, the changing composition of families and the growing role of fathers are a current challenge in both countries that will require innovative solutions.

I have every confidence that social workers will find such innovative solutions. I base this belief on the concept of the triple mandate of social work developed by Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (2007a, 2007b). In addition to the two mandates bestowed upon the social worker by their employers and their clients, the profession itself bestows a third mandate. This third mandate comprises two components: that the methods employed by social workers are based on solid academic research and not intuition, common sense, custom and practice or gender and ethnic stereotypes; and the ethical code of social work as a profession – a concept similar to the Hippocratic oath for doctors. Staub-Bernasconi places the foundation for a professional ethic of social work in the concepts of human rights and justice. Given the dual pillars of scientific method and universal human rights, social workers should be in a position to resist attempts by their employers or ultimately the state to instrumentalise them to the disadvantage of their clients. And this is the vision that I would like to leave you with: that social work takes a more prominent role in the setting of national frames, so that human rights and justice become an integral part of discourses on all families.

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# Marilyn Strathern: The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia.

Berkeley and Los Angeles:  
University of California Press, 1990.

## What could social workers possibly learn from Strathern's analytical strategies?

Admittedly, *The Gender of the Gift* by Marilyn Strathern is not a recent publication, nor does it strictly speaking belong in the domain of social work. Nevertheless, we see many good reasons for social workers to read it. A first reason relates to the potential of anthropological writing to make explicit our cultural practises of taking position on things and phenomena. Another is very much linked to the cunning strategies by which Strathern is challenging the degree to which comparison work is taken for granted. But our main argument resides in the transferability of Strathern's analytical movement to social work as a relational practice between persons at places in times.

The book came to us in our own movement of looking for answers to the question of how to conceive of the social work profession as embedded in organisations and organisational fields, and what such a position would eventually imply in terms of reflexive practice. More precisely, it is through the Danish STS-scientist Jensen that the work of Strathern first appealed to us. In the article from 2007,<sup>1</sup> Jensen draws on Strathern's notion of scale to

reflect on how different places and different people are variably connected and how actors engage in a constant deployment of their own scales in order to sort the important from the insignificant, and to determine how to act, towards which goals, and in collaboration with which other actors.

What has now caught our attention in *The Gender of the Gift* is Strathern's strategy of 'giving the language of analysis an internal dialogue' (p. 7). With regard to her focus on analysis - gender relations and gift exchange in Melanesia - she attempts this in two ways. First, by carving out the premises on which much writing has been based, and which 'belong to a particular cultural mode of knowledge and explanation' (p. 7). The second is by making visible the workings of this mode - she does not pretend to extract herself from it - and exploiting its own reflexive potential. Thus, Strathern works herself through various relations or oppositions - we/they, gift/commodity, anthropological/feminist - that have marked the debate over the last decades. It is through this very movement of exposing the contextualised nature of (western) analytical constructs that Strathern wants to get a glimpse at the contextualized nature of indigenous ones.

What is then the core message to be found in the *Gender of the Gift*? We must or, better, I must develop sensitivity for my own modes of cutting or scaling the world as (ontologically) discrete entities belonging, for instance, to the

<sup>1</sup> JENSEN, C. B. 2007. Infrastructural Fractals: Revisiting the Micro-Macro Distinction in Social Theory. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25, 832-850.

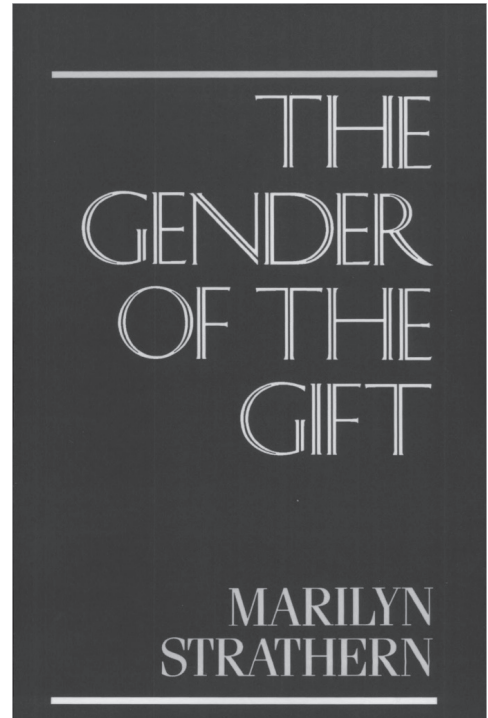




realms of the micro and the macro. This cutting work, if we follow Strathern, takes on the form of dichotomous or binary differentiations – me/you, right/false, good/bad – in western cultural contexts. Making these scaling modes visible is thus a kind of necessity to understand or, at least, to be sensitive about the life-worlds of persons at places in time. Strathern pursues this in a quite radical and disturbing way. Indeed, *The Gender of the Gift* is a tough read, as Strathern gently but unremittingly deconstructs the very ontological foundations of our being. This deconstruction effort proceeds from the first sentences to the dichotomy between the individual and society:

‘It might sound absurd for a social anthropologist to suggest he or she could imagine people having no society. Yet the argument of this book is that however useful the concept of society may be to analysis, we are not going to justify its use by appealing to indigenous counterparts. Indeed, anthropologists should be the last to contemplate such a justification. Scholars trained in the Western tradition cannot really expect to find others solving the metaphysical problems of Western thought’ (p. 3).

The ‘critical’ reader might now object that Strathern, as a writer, is missing sensitivity towards the ‘West’, as she cuts it in one big unit or entity. Much more important than this critique – we felt more as if she was ‘playing’ with her own (dichotomous) cuttings, from which she cannot extract herself, in order to provoke and irritate the reader – it seems to us the potential resides in Strathern’s analytical movement for social work as a relational practice between persons at places in time. Indeed, she provides us with good tools by which professional sensitivity could be fuelled: the rubbing against each other of (dichotomous) cuttings/scales of



social reality in dialogical situations in order to reveal their form and their effects on persons. For social work, such dichotomous cuttings to work on, could, besides others, be those of worthy/unworthy, inclusion/exclusion or familiar/professional. But also the dichotomous oppositions of the individual and society and the professional and the client on which social work is based belong to such cuttings that should systematically be worked on in order to make their effects visible.

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## Science and Research Activities at the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, Trnava University in Trnava

The science and research activities of the Department of Social Work are an important part of the science and research activities of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, Trnava University in Trnava. The connection between health and social problems is present even in Faculty research. Major scientific and research activity can be divided into long-term international projects (FP7 GENOVATE), long-term projects at the national level (SRDA Identity of Social Work in the Context of Slovakia, SRDA Needs Analysis of Social Services for Early Intervention in Slovakia) and annual international (SH CAPAC) as well as local projects (Streetwork in Trnava).

GENOVATE is an action-research project, which aims to ensure equal opportunities for women and men by encouraging a more gender-competent management in research, innovation and scientific decision-making bodies, with a particular focus on universities. The project is based on the implementation of Gender Equality Action Plans in European universities and brings together a consortium with diverse experience in gender mainstreaming approaches. All consortium partners come from different disciplinary backgrounds and have different national context. However, each of the institutions shares common challenges for gender equality in research and innovation, and all have identified three common areas for intervention:

- *Recruitment, progression, and research support.*
- *Working environment, work-life balance and institutional culture.*
- *Gender and diversity dimensions of research excellence and innovation.*

GENOVATE proposes to implement gender equality action plans for more gender-competent research management in seven European partners, i.e. University of Bradford, the United Kingdom, Trnava University in Trnava, the Slovak Republic, University College Cork, Ireland, Ankara University, Turkey, Lulea University of Technology, Sweden, Università degli Studi di Napoli, Italy, University of Madrid, Spain, all universities with different institutional and national contexts for gender equality. The goal of Trnava University in Trnava, Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work is to develop a contemporary model of gender equality implementation iteratively – a Gender Change Academy Model – guided by the Change Academy model and based on the process and outcomes of the GENOVATE project.

The national long-term projects are supported by Slovak Research and Development Agency (SRDA), which is the research and development grant agency in the Slovak Republic and is the instrument for distribution of public finances for research and development on a competitive basis in Slovakia. The Department of Social Work is a leader of two SRDA-funded projects.

The first project, Identity of Social Work in the Context of Slovakia, is very important for the progress of social work in Slovakia and to prepare possible and needed changes in the academic level of social work and in practical social work. One of the specificities of social work is the close

interconnection of the private space, so it is always necessary to examine the identity of social work in terms of the context of specificities of the culture, region, or country. Based on the differences in the duties, possibilities and responsibilities of social workers in each country it is reasonable to assume that almost every country is, in the identity of the social worker, different to some extent. The main objective of the project is to find out the current rate of professional identity by Slovak social workers and to identify factors strengthening or debilitating the formation.

The second SRDA project, Needs Analysis of Social Services for Early Intervention in Slovakia, is focused on the support of small children who are at risk of developmental delay or have been identified as children with special needs by the service of early intervention. The main goal of early intervention is to ensure the overall development of children, strengthen competences of parents of these children and to promote the social inclusion of families with disabled children. Through this service it is possible to provide coordinated care that offers various forms of support from social services, health care, education and others, and to avoid duplication of various forms of assistance. The main objective of the project is to learn of the real situation in the field of early intervention services in Slovakia. The description of the real situation is important for the identification of needs of service providers for care focused on this target group. Identification of needs of families with children with health problems is important for development and reconstruction of intervention service for children with special needs.

Our Faculty and the Department of Social Work is in this year cooperating on an international project SH-CAPAC (Supporting Health Coordination, Assessments, Planning, Access to Health Care and Capacity Building in Member States under Particular Migratory Pressure). SH-CAPAC is a European project, supporting European countries under pressure of large migration, in ensuring effective healthcare for refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants. Last year, more than one million refugees entered Europe. They often come from a violent, problematic environment and therefore have specific medical and psychological needs. The healthcare system in the different European countries is still not adapted to the needs of these new population groups. SH-CAPAC therefore supports the Member States by offering a series of coordination and support mechanisms for these specific challenges in health care. This project is a collaboration between: Andalusian School of Public Health – EASP (Spain, coordinator), Azienda Unità Sanitaria Locale di Reggio Emilia (Italy), Trnava University in Trnava (the Slovak Republic), Jagiellonian University Medical College (Poland), International Centre for Reproductive Health / University of Ghent (Belgium), Academic Medical Centre / University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and University of Copenhagen (Denmark). The SH-CAPAC project has launched in January 2016, and responds to the growing concern for the right health care for refugees and asylum seekers.

The Department of Social Work is collaborating with the city of Trnava in different activities. Our cooperation on Streetwork in Trnava is important from the research perspective, where we are preparing the methodology for data collection and data processing aimed at the homeless people in Trnava. Our findings in cooperation with service providers will affect the provision of services for homeless people in Trnava.

One of the goals of the Department of Social Work is a multi-level distribution of scientific and research activities, which should ensure the participation of all members of the Department in scientific and research activities and disseminate scientific knowledge in the academic environment and in practice.

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# Research on Deinstitutionalisation

## Introduction

Tallinn University in co-operation with Tartu University has conducted a four month long research on deinstitutionalisation policies, financed by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, between August and November 2015. The research programme consisted of an international review on the experiences of seven selected European countries and on focus groups and individual interviews among Estonian stakeholders related to deinstitutionalisation and community based services in the field of disability care and mental health. Based on the research the international research group suggested a number of considerations for the Estonian Case. Some of the most relevant are reported in this Research note.

## Considerations and recommendations

### Full implementation is needed

We found strong arguments to support deinstitutionalisation in Estonia. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities that was signed and ratified by Estonia and all related reference documents are emphasising the importance of a clear commitment toward deinstitutionalisation and community living.

Having an overview on the monitoring activity of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities we found very critical Concluding Observations addressed to different States Parties and especially to the European Union:

*“The Committee is concerned that across the European Union persons with disabilities, especially persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities still live in institutions rather than in local communities. It further notes that in spite of changes in regulations, in different Member States the ESI Funds continue being used for maintenance of residential institutions rather than for development of support services for persons with disabilities in local communities.”<sup>1</sup>*

In the United Kingdom early critics often referred to community care as a “failed”<sup>2</sup> concept but longer term studies of the outcomes for people who had spent many years living in the asylums have shown that the majority of people, even those with the most complex problems, have increased their social network, gained independent living skills, improved their quality of life and have not required re-admission. Our international overview also explored the failure of the first wave of deinstitutionalisation in Sweden where the first community housing was organized in a group of group homes, and segregated “disability” blocks instead of real integration. Within a few years it became obvious that the situation of residents hasn’t really changed in these settings, the culture of large institutions and also the segregation from real communities were transformed to new services.

Therefore, we pointed out that research data and existing policy experiences show that only fully implemented deinstitutionalisation leads to successful social integration. Any scenario with remaining, renewed or renovated institutional capacities most likely will lead to failure.

<sup>1</sup> Concluding observations on the initial report of the European Union. September 2015.

<sup>2</sup> COID, J. 1994. Failures in community care: psychiatry’s dilemma. *British Medical Journal*, 308, 805–806.

### **A multilevel approach with a leading role for local communities**

Sharing responsibility for care between the government and municipalities caused tension in many Eastern European countries. Decentralization and autonomy of local communities was a vital element of the newly established democracies in the region, which is an obvious political achievement but the sustainability of the municipalities remained a question during the whole period. Lack of resources led to an unfortunate practice in the care system. Local governments, instead of establishing community-based services that might provide relevant support for vulnerable people, preferred to refer them to regional/national services. That created growing demand for institutions and left fewer resources to develop community-based services, which resulted in further institutionalisation. We could explore this phenomenon in all Eastern European countries in our research.

In European countries, national mental health, youth care and disabled care systems largely predominate. It contributes to labelling and institutionalisation and hinders starting from the context of the vulnerable people and integrated tailor made and community based answers. The multilevel approach is not only needed between different layers of governance, but as well in merging local social work, local social policy and the systems of care. Horizontal cooperation between the systems and local professionals in care, cure, educational and social professions needs more room. So far, the vertical line from preventive work to specialised institutional within the different care systems are too much dominating. Specialized care should connect to the local needs and support local social services and social work.

Mobilizing existing community resources is vital for the future care system. Moreover, at the current level of social expenditures in Estonia there is very little chance to meet all needs with traditional state financed welfare services. Local resources, creativity, the commitment and motivation of local stakeholders are extremely important in this process.

### **Promoting personal budget**

According to several studies, budget holders have reported improvements in their sense of well-being, self-esteem and self-determination after having started to receive personal budgets. The fundamental reason for the improvement in the quality of life relates to the opportunity to use more power in the decision-making processes concerning the services used. Personal budgeting, therefore, promotes the opportunity to remain in control of one's life. If a person or family has the opportunity to use the budget to arrange a service that benefits most, they are seen as full citizens. It makes them more responsible, and it increases the possibility for self-determination and of being in control of their own life.

Based on the highlighted research results and positive experiences in different countries we recommend to consider the introduction of direct payment and personal budgeting scheme in Estonia to finance the newly established and existing community based services.

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Netherlands

## Call for Papers

### **ERIS Journal – Summer 2017** (English edition)

We are already accepting papers from various areas of social work for planned English issue. The deadline for obtaining papers from potential authors is March 10th, 2017. The publication date is August 2017.

The editor of this issue is Anita Gulczynska, University of Lodz, Poland.

*Papers should be sent to the administrator of the academic papers who will also provide you with additional information upon request:*

- Barbora Grundelova, [barbora.grundelova@osu.cz](mailto:barbora.grundelova@osu.cz)
- Vladislava Vondrova, [akademik@socialnipace.cz](mailto:akademik@socialnipace.cz)

## Our Mission

### Public Commitment to the Journal

The journal for theory, practice and education in social work

The mission of the journal “Czech and Slovak Social Work“ is:

- to support the ability of Czech and Slovak society and wider European societies to cope with life problems of people through social work,
- to promote the quality of social work and professionalism of social work practice,
- to contribute to the development of social work as a scientific discipline and to the improvement of the quality of education in social work,
- to promote the interests of social service providers and users.

In the interest of achieving these objectives, the Journal will, across the community of social workers and with co-operating and helping workers from other disciplines, promote:

- attitudes which regard professionalism and humanity as equal criteria of social work quality;
- attitudes which place emphasis on linking theoretical justification of social work practice with its practical orientation on clients' problems and realistic possibilities;
- coherence among all who are committed to addressing clients' problems through social work;
- open, diversity-understanding, informed and relevant discussion within the community of social workers;
- social workers' willingness and interest in looking at themselves through the eyes of others.



## Notice to Contributors

The journal Sociální práce/Sociálna práca/Czech and Slovak Social Work is published four times in the Czech language and twice in the English language each year. The journal publishes the widest range of articles relevant to social work. The articles can discuss on any aspect of practice, research, theory or education. Our journal has the following structure:

- Editorial
- Academic articles
- Book reviews
- News / Research notes

### 1. Instructions to authors of academic articles

Editors accept contributions that correspond to the profile of the journal (see "Our mission"). The contribution has to be designated only for publishing in the journal Czech and Slovak Social Work. It can also be a contribution which has already been published in another journal, but for another use the text has to be revised and supplemented. The number of contributions from one author is limited to two per year.

### The offer of manuscript receipt and review procedure

The academic text intended for publishing in the journal should be a research or overview essay (theoretical, historical, etc.). For the article to be accepted to the review procedure, the author of the text must work systematically with the relevant sources, explain the research methodology and present a conclusion with regard to the research goal. Because the journal has a specific professional nature, texts are preferred which also contain application aspects where the author explains the relevance of their conclusions in the context of social work.

The review process is reciprocally anonymous and is carried out by two independent reviewers. Student works are subject to single review process. Academic and student works are judged in terms of content and form. If necessary, a work may be returned to the authors for supplementation or rewriting. Based on the assessments of the review process a decision will be made to either accept and publish the article in our journal or to reject it. The Chairman of the Editorial Board will decide in questionable cases. Please send two versions of the article to the editor via e-mail. The first one may contain information which could reveal the identity of the author. The second version should be the complete and final text.

### Decision to publish

Authors are informed about the result of the review process within six months from the date of receipt of the text/manuscript.

### Manuscript requirements

The text must be written in accordance with applicable language standards. The text letters should be written in Times New Roman, size 12, font style Normal. Pages are not numbered. Footnotes should be placed strictly at the end of the article.

- I. Front page** contains a descriptive and brief title of the article in English; the names of all authors, biographical characteristics (up to 100 words) and also contact details for correspondence in the footnote.
- II. Abstract** in English in a maximum of 200 words.
- III. Keywords** in English. Please use two-word phrases as a maximum.
- IV. The text of the article** (maximum 10,000 words).
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### Quotes and links

Citations and references are given in accordance with ISO 690 (010 197). Representative examples are as follows:

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#### Monograph Chapters:

DOMINELLI, L. 2009. Anti-Opressive Practice: The Challenges of the Twenty-First Century. In: ADAMS, R., DOMINELLI, L., PAYNE, M. (Eds.). *Social Work: Themes, Issues and Critical Debates*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 49–64.

#### Magazines:

COLEMAN, J. S. 1988. Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(supplement), 95–120.

BOWPITT, G. 2000. Working with Creative Creatures: Towards a Christian Paradigm for Social Work Theory, with Some Practical Implications. *British Journal of Social Work*, 30(3), 349–364.

#### Online resources

NASW. 2008. *Code of Ethics* [online]. Washington: NASW. [18. 5. 2014]. Available at: <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

### 2. Instructions for book reviews

There is also space for all reviewers who want to introduce an interesting book in the field of social work and its related fields in the journal. We require making arrangement about the book review with the editors in advance. When sending the text please attach a scan of the front page of the reviewed book. (in 300 DPI resolution).

The format of the book review is set from 8,000 to 12,000 characters (including spaces); other conditions are the same as the conditions for journalistic articles. The book review must include bibliographic information on the rated book (e.g. Daniela Vodáčková a kol.: *Krizová intervence*, Portál, Praha, 2002). Please add your name and your contact details at the end of the review.

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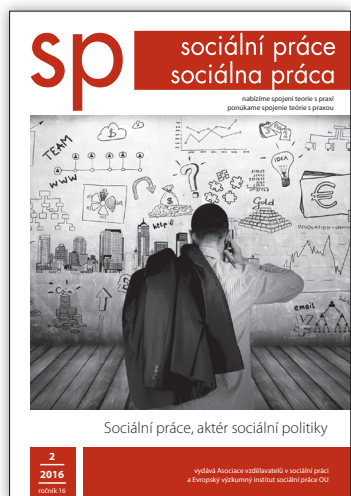
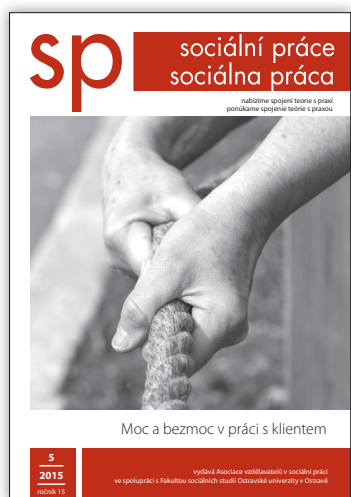
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