

Europeanising the Social Professions – Networking in practice and education



Picture: www.pixelio.de
/Fotografieren: Rudolf Omerl

Günter J Friesenhahn / Friedrich W. Seibel / Anette Kniephoff-Knebel

In both science as well as in practice a newly raised awareness for the significance of European dimensions of social work has been detected since the mid eighties triggered by strategic considerations and initiatives of the European Union, that intended to liaise people in Europe more intensively on a personal and professional level by offering special programmes. International networks, cross-border projects and the development of international education perspectives have been growing since.

A major network in this context was and is the “European Centre for Community Education – ECCE” (<http://www.ecce-net.eu/>). The people linked by ECCE were amongst the first who were operating across Europe and who were able to put Europe and the social professions in a brisk and critical-constructive operational and discourse-relevant correlation and who accompanied the political changes in Europe and their impact on social work.

This unexpected political uproar was substantially promoted by publications (cf. Lorenz 1994, Seibel/Lorenz 1998, Chytil/Seibel 1999, Lyons 1999, Chytil/Lorenz/ Seibel/Striezenec 2000, Lorenz/Elsen/Friesenhahn 2002, Homfeldt/Brandhorst 2004;

Hamburger/Hirschler/Sander/Wöbcke 2004-2007; Campanini/Frost 2004, Lorenz 2006, Lyons et al. 2006, Lawrence 2009, Friesenhahn/Kniephoff-Knebel 2011 complemented by articles in journals – partly published online – “European Journal of Social Work”

(<http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com/app/home/>) and the online only journal “Social Work & Society” (<http://www.socwork.net/>) as well as “Journal of Global Social Work Practice” (<http://globalsocialwork.org/>).

“Europe”, one may say, has meanwhile arrived at the study courses of social work.

The Europe-related agenda is embedded in global developments entailing significant changes for our cross-border communication and interaction schemes.

The fall of the Iron Curtain and thus the overcoming of the gap caused by the conflict between East and West did not only lead to the extension of the European Union but brought long forgotten traditions and new discourses into social work in Europe and created a new, vibrant transnational cooperation which was not solely restricted to the EU but also showed its effect beyond European borderlines.

The invention and establishment of new communication and information technologies do not only guarantee access to any information round the clock and contacts around the globe in real time, they also provide inspirations in view of new forms of collaboration as well as new forms of teaching and learning in social work e. g. online modules, virtual information exchange or student support abroad via Skype.

The support of the transnational exchange is not solely done by the EU, the Council of Europe demanded in a declaration in 2001 that a mutual sharing of knowledge as well as the mobility across borders was also necessary for professional social workers (<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=180283&Lang=en>).

This way things seem to have been stirred up in the discourse about the alignment of social work in Europe, since the European integration process made an impact both on a structural

level as well as in terms of content with regard to the education of social professions. Mobility requirements and expectations play a major part here.

Mobility as a Foundation Pillar of the European Union

Mobility in its broadest sense represents an essential part of the European Union's architectural structure (formerly EC resp. EEC) and has been demanded and promoted since the 80s.

The EC education summit of 21 December 1989 already highlighted emphatically:

„Government heads had agreed upon the European integration in higher education requiring additional efforts. Study contents and structures had to be given a European dimension aligning with international occupational areas to a greater extent than before. Student mobility should be encouraged and university graduates should be able to pursue their profession at least bilingually“ (Bulletin of the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government Nr.152. of 18.12.1989, p. 127).

Complementary to these political declarations the European Community agreed upon a variety of action programmes, which covered some parts of the education system:

The following should be pointed out:

- the first community action plan on education 09 February 1986,
- the COMETT programme (Community in Education and Training for Technology) of 24 July 1986,
- the ERASMUS-programme 1 (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) of 15 June 1987 and ERASMUS II of 14 December 1989,
- the PETRA programme 1 (Community action programme for the vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult and working life) of 01 December 1987,
- the resolution of the Council of Ministers on the “European Dimension in Education“ of 24 May 1988,
- the “Youth for Europe” programme for general youth exchange programmes of 16 June 1988,
- the TEMPUS programme (Trans European Mobility Programme for University Studies) of 07 May 1990,
- the youth policy-related memorandum “Young people in the European Community“ of 09 November 1990.

The prevailing notion is that the economic and political integration process in Europe without any accompanying social and education related measures would indeed remain fragmentary and unstable. Instead of a Europe with non-transparent bureaucratic institutions a Europe of Citizens was meant to grow, where people get to know each other, appreciate their mutual cultural differences and at the same time form a European identity by saying yes to the European core values.

The perspective of an open community, in which capital, goods, services and people would be able to move freely within Europe's borderlines was inspired by a report written by the Italian Paolo Cecchini. Along the lines of a research programme “Costs for the failure to achieve a common Europe“ (meaning the domestic market) Paolo had calculated resp. projected by order of the European Commission how much the failure of promoting this opening-up process would cost: 200 billion (ECU) Euro per year.

Further developments may be classified in this comprehension of efficient use of resources as confirmed by the Green Paper of the EU commission titled “Promoting the learning mobility of young people” which was published in June 2009.

The introduction emphasizes that studies had confirmed that the mobility for educational reasons would improve the quality of human capital, as pupils and students would gain access to new knowledge, improve their language skills and obtain intercultural competences. Employers would likewise appreciate this valuable experience. Those who were able to relocate as young learners are said to continue this behaviour in their professional life. (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0329:FIN:EN:pdf>)

The new EU-Commissioner for Youth, Androulla Vassiliou, announced in January 2010 to make youth and mobility to one of the core points of her period of office. This should be seen in connection with the programme of the new EU Commission named “E U R O P E 2 0 2 0. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (http://europa.eu/press_room/pdf/complet_en_barroso__007_-_europe_2020_-_en_version.pdf) which is supposed to replace the so-called Lisbon Strategy. Within this ambitious programme there are so-called “Flagship-initiatives”, one of them is primarily aimed at the mobility of young people.

„The aim is to enhance the performance and international attractiveness of Europe’s higher education institutions and raise the overall quality of all levels of education and training in the EU, combining both excellence and equity by promoting student and trainees’ mobility and improve the employment situation of young people. (http://www.jugendpolitikineuropa.de/downloads/22-177-700/EU2020_EN.pdf).

In line with the promotion of mobility of young people the EU is currently enhancing its (rhetorical) efforts to stimulate the now declining mobility in the tertiary sector. The final document of the Leuven conference (April 2009) under the heading: The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education states: “Mobility is important for personal development and employability; it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area and it increases cooperation and competition amongst institutions of higher education. Therefore, mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area. We call upon each country to increase mobility, to ensure its high quality and to diversify its types and scope. In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad. (cf. <http://www.bildungsserver.de/zeigen.html?seite=3401>)

Lifelong learnings: Student Mobility amidst Elite Recruitment and Personal Development

Mobility in higher education promoted by the EU shall have a positive impact on the competence enhancement and the employability in accordance with the objectives of the programme.

By means of international experiences students would be flexible to adapt to the situation on the European job market with a certain language proficiency combined with a performance-oriented attitude (cf. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/publ/impact08sum.pdf>).

Since the resolution of the Council of Ministers in June 1987 to further promote the cooperation between universities within the community and to increase students’ and teachers’ mobility, this programme has repeatedly been extended resp. revised in different versions. In the SOKRATES/ERASMUS programme running from 1997 through 2006 school, vocational and adult education were promoted in addition to higher education. The objective of the successor programme was – above all – to develop a “European dimension“ in the full range of study courses. (cf. European Commission, 1995, <http://eu.daad.de/eu/sokrates/programminformation/05360.html>).

Since 2007 the third generation of the EU education programmes has been in force which, with a running time from 2007 until 2013, summarizes the programmes of vocational education, school education, higher education and adult education that will have separated by then. The “Lifelong Learning Programme“ (LLP) now covers the entire lifelong process of education ranging from school education and higher education to adult education.

The programme of lifelong learning has been designed as a roof structure, which is based on four pillars, say sub-programmes. In line with the sub-programmes, funding is provided for projects that either support the cross-national mobility of individuals or contribute to the establishment of bilateral and multilateral partnerships or improve the quality of educational or vocational systems for example through the multilateral cooperation for the promotion of innovation. The four pillars are:

- the programme Comenius, which is geared towards the teaching and learning needs of those involved in preschool and school education up until the end of secondary level II as well as all institutions and organisations providing such education;
- the programme Erasmus, which is geared towards the teaching and learning needs of those involved in formal higher education (including transnational student placements in enterprises) as well as all institutions and organisations providing or facilitating such education;
- the programme Leonardo da Vinci, which is geared towards the teaching and learning needs of those involved in vocational education (including transnational placements in enterprises, except for students) as well as all institutions and organisations providing or facilitating such education;
- the programme Grundtvig, which is geared towards the teaching and learning needs of those involved in adult education of any kind as well as all institutions and organisations providing or facilitating such education

(cf. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm)

These four pillars are complemented by a transversal programme which encourages political cooperation and innovation with respect to lifelong learning, foreign language acquisition or innovative procedures and methods for lifelong learning. These activities are topped off by the new programme Jean Monnet, which supports institutions and activities in the field of European integration.

In a nutshell: The ERASMUS programme has had a major influence on the development of academic policy and institutions of higher education since its outset in 1987. It was the driving force of the globalisation of higher education in the member states and the forerunner of the Bologna Process. A number of measures have been taken over straight by ERASMUS, like for example comparable degrees that are easy to understand, the establishment of a system of recognition of study achievements, quality assurance and the creation of joint and double degrees

(cf. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/301>).

Our experience shows that students who spent a longer period of time abroad view their competence enhancement with respect to values like self-awareness, critical thinking, independence and intellectualism very positively. Here a personal statement of one of our students:

“The year abroad has had a positive impact on my personal development. I have become more tolerant and open to new people and cultures. I have become more independent, more confident and more courageous“ (former Koblenz student).

This is also in line with Otten’s statement

„Evaluation studies about effects and outcomes of mobility programmes usually value the

personal development of participants more highly than the academic achievement, but they also tend to overemphasize subjective self-assessments of students <...>. What has been raised critically about the idealistic connection of academic research and academic teaching seems equally true for the self-assessment of intercultural development through internationalization: “Much of the policy debate about the nature of faculty work is shrouded in myth, opinion, and conjecture <...>” (Otten 2009, p 409).

In order to organize the learning opportunities, that come with a study or placement semester abroad in the best possible way, we consider specific preparatory and follow-up work as essential. In addition to foreign language tuition it also involves dealing with students’ expectations.

To get prepared for time abroad we offer an appropriate event on a regular basis where questions like “Why go abroad?” can be raised and in that context looking for a “suitable” target country.

It is a matter of clarification of prior expectations and actual ways of realisation: Where are we heading? Will it have to be London or Paris? Even if we are talking about some awesome cities here, what about the costs for lodging, infrastructure, study conditions and support through the host university and so on?

Another core issue is the adequate appraisal of language skills:

In addition to finalising the organisational and personal requirements it is also about adapting to specific circumstances and needs in the host country and coping with any troubles and difficulties that may arise.

In this respect the main focus of such events is to prepare students for the intercultural learning experience and to sensitise them in an intercultural manner regardless of their individual plans. This includes in particular addressing any crises and conflicts in situations where cultures overlap, possible causes and coping strategies and emphasizing the emotional impact in this process.

Apart from an adequate preparation, students should also be given the opportunity to reflect and analyse their experiences systematically upon their return. In the category competence enhancement this means basically:

- Experiencing and “resisting“ foreignness
- Developing language and communication skills
- Changing perspectives
- Reflecting ones own culture and shedding its burden to some extent
- Learning to deal with unknown even tough situations
- Getting to know different fields of work / work organisations

The following are considered as negative experiences:

- Being strained beyond breaking point at times
- Excessive demand but also lack of challenge in the study or placement
- Absence of the familiar structure
- Communication- /Contact problems

In view of the employability, many students who spent some time of their study abroad, express their desire to live and work abroad in another stage of life.

“The year abroad was a very good experience. It has increased my understanding of social work in another European country: the reflection of the German working method and getting to know unfamiliar working methods. Without my year abroad I probably wouldn’t have

come up with the plan to work abroad again after my graduation” (former Koblenz student, today with a permanent job in Paris)“.

Mobility and new Trends

Despite all the positive effects of the internationalisation of study courses an increasingly negative trend can be identified with regard to the mobility programmes supported by the EU: The growing formal administration effort of the ERASMUS programme with funds stagnating at a low level is one of the reasons why students meanwhile abandon the idea of this programme and prefer to look for university places or placements outside Europe on their own account without making use of scholarships. England, France and Spain are no longer on top of the list – meanwhile their place has been taken by countries like Australia, South America and Africa.

While the overall mobility of students has increased within recent years, the mobility of bachelor students has remained the same, especially if time abroad has not been part of the curriculum or if the recognition of achievements is likely to encounter some difficulties. Our experience in recent years has shown that students have been hesitant in making use of international seminars over a longer period of time. This is where you can detect the impact of the EU as a sponsor and a signpost. Necessary grants for the realisation of an intensive programme are linked to a certain seminar length, meanwhile usually 12 programme days. It has become more difficult for all involved to provide these time slots. New educational offerings need to be created which also take into account the different living conditions of students.

We, for example, make use of our geographic location in Koblenz and run short-term seminars (2 – 3 days) with our partner universities that are within easy reach in Luxemburg, Maastricht (NL) and Kempen (B) without any EU funding.

But what about the remaining students? What about those who cannot take part in the Erasmus programme for social, financial or other reasons? Political leaders still think that there are not enough mobile students. According to the EU some 3 million students should take part in the ERASMUS programme in 2011.

(cf. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2004/com2004_0474en01.pdf).

It is estimated that approximately 4 % of European students receive an Erasmus allowance during their study

(cf. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1204>).

At the University of Applied Sciences in Koblenz the funding for a semester spent abroad has been between 87 and 288 Euro per month since the academic year 2004/2005 (depending on the number of outgoing students), an amount which is far from covering the real costs of a stay abroad – which automatically excludes a major part of students – those who can't afford it.

Despite all the positive feedback, the question must be raised how those who don't have the financial, social or other personal means can get access to European and international educational institutions.

Virtual encounters are considered to be a possible way out; they are understood as educational options that are no longer tied to a certain location and therefore allow the cooperation with foreign students and teaching staff. These are options, that enable learners to take courses regardless of their actual abode, for example at home, at work or as Erasmus students at a host university who enrol in courses at their home university or even at another university. Virtual mobility is made possible by using environments supported by information and communication technology, that include e.g. video conferencing, live streaming, shared workplaces or computer-mediated conferencing. (<http://www.elearningeuropa.inf>).

Mathiesen and Lager describe in „Building Global Bridges through Virtual Student Exchange“ the successful operation of such formats

(cf. http://www.globalsocialwork.org/vol1no1_Mathiesen.html).

Additionally, there are ways of studying European social work via the Internet following co-operations and networks amongst universities. “Virclass – the virtual classroom for social work in Europe” is one example (<http://www.virclass.net/>).

Virtual mobility can be seen in many different ways and it has been actively supported by the European Commission (as well as national authorities and individual institutions) for some time, primarily by funding projects in line with the SOCRATES/Minerva and eLearning programmes. Virtual mobility can include attending foreign university courses from home and vice versa complement the existing, real ERASMUS exchange programme with virtual elements in the preparation or return phase (student selection, linguistic preparation, remote appraisal and consultation). Consequently, virtual offerings can add to the previous learning and education opportunities.

One of the diverse innovative projects in the field of virtual mobility is the REVE project which is being supported by the eLearning programme of the European Commission and coordinated by EuroPACE (cf. <http://reve.europace.org/>).

However, up to now these pioneering activities have frequently lacked the coordinated support in the field of virtual mobility, which keeps significant achievements, results and experiences of pilot projects from becoming known within the target group. Subsequently, there are activities in the field of virtual mobility that have been organised by a small number of early adopters, often some isolated cases that are understood as pleasant „add-ons“ of a regular course rather than an integral component thereof. This attitude towards virtual mobility represents an impediment for the comprehensive cooperation of institutions of higher education and their staff and students on a European level.

Efficient Networks

In addition to individual stays abroad and virtual exchange opportunities international intensive seminars and/or summer schools are rightly considered to be a special contribution to the internationalisation of study courses (cf. Kühne 1998, Hoffmann, amongst others, 2001). Students, who have stayed abroad and who have been part of an intensive programme appreciate this concentrated form of learning more than the relevance of time spent abroad. They are considered to be the centre of intercultural learning (cf. Hamburger 1998). But not only students benefit from the intensive form of international work – it is likewise a matter of outstanding learning value also for lecturers involved. Occasionally, these international seminars result in fairly long-term partnerships and networks.

Meanwhile “the demand for cooperation and networking is part of the political and educational programme of the present“ Franz Hamburger writes and adds that in view of the modernisation processes cooperation and networking are functional necessities. Relevant programmes that cherish cooperation and networking would also be full of standards and regulations and cooperation would indeed combat any fierce competition. Another factor that needs to be taken into account is that cooperation itself is not only and always desirable, it would also be ambivalent and the danger of colonisation of different worlds is always existent and has to be treated in a reflexive manner (Hamburger 2004) in order to enable mutual learning processes also amongst unequal partners – meaning those that are not equipped with comparable resources (Steinert 1998).

Specific cross-border projects usually involve personal conflict zones and content-related issues (areas of concern), that are not easy to handle as they challenge familiar perceptions and methods, i.e. require intercultural competence. On the other hand it is obvious that a more intensive contact amongst universities, faculties and people leads to manifold Europe-wide co-operations and thus to reflections on the nature of diversity of social work in Europe. Furthermore, this indicates that the constructive debate about different theoretical, methodical and socio-political traditions and embeddings of social work in Europe are able to acquire a

significant potential of a more focused detection of the individual characteristics of these disciplines and their specific form of appearance.

Looking at transnational networking the question how, in the light of economy as a top priority in Europe, a common domestic market is to be established but also how Europe is supposed to develop into a joint social domestic area with the subsequent desire that existing organisational and network structures of social work in Europe will create the preconditions for innovative social policy and social pedagogy. "Networking has to be considered as a natural rising agent for the development of civic structures in Europe as a counterbalance to pure market legality and governmental constraints" (Bernhard 1999, p. 345).

With a differentiating stance Stauff/Lauer/Hamburger argue that primarily in Europe networking is often supported spiritually and / or materially by European institutions.

„European networks of social work require on the one hand institutional recognition (and therefore funding), while on the other hand they must be able to preserve their independence to continue to fulfill their critical function in the political arena“ (Stauff/Lauer/Hamburger 2007, p. 423).

Simsa underlined the issues of clearly identifying the relation between network and civil society and especially the NGOs. "Autonomy" as a definition feature would belong to the term civil society. Civil society in return would usually be considered as having unrealistic potential being the result of protagonists and activities and it would neither be market-profit-oriented nor state-organised, it would mainly be focused on shaping political processes and would primarily be achieved as part of a collective action meaning along the lines of various organisations, initiatives and social movements. "Almost all socio-political approaches, that have been worded as a response to the diminished solution competence of policies on a national level, are distinguished by high hopes for the significance of civic players" (Simsa 2001, p. 30). With a view to the actual daily routine Stauff/Lauer/Hamburger are tempering these hopes following the results of the project "Social Work Networks in Europe".

Especially the NGOs from the new Central European EU member states would not have been able to fulfill this function in view of the overwhelming EU bureaucracy in Brussels. They are talking about disillusion and exorbitant expectations (cf. Stauff/Lauer/Hamburger 2007, p. 434; see also Stauff's dissertation: The Balancing Act between Cooperation and Competition. European Networks of Social Work, which can be downloaded at <http://ubm.opus.hbznrw.de/volltexte/2008/1668/pdf/diss.pdf>).

In Europe mainly the Council of Europe, which is the transnational player for the promotion and establishment of civic structures needs to be emphasized. It is basically a question of strengthening the role of NGOs in certain states like Russia, Armenia, Belarus for example and guaranteeing them their chartered right of public participation. The programme "Strengthening Civil Society and Civic Participation in the Russian Federation" which was established in 2008, says:

„The programme is designed to create and maintain favourable conditions for NGO initiatives in fields such as human rights, democracy, civil society, culture and education, social cohesion and gender equality, in order to better respond to the needs of Russian society and increase the impact of citizens' action. Special attention is paid to the improvement of Russian NGO legislation and its implementation (http://www.coe.int/t/ngo/civ_soc_initiatives_en.asp)”.

The NGOs have meanwhile become a recognised institution of the Council of Europe and are organised at the "Conference of International Non-governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe" (http://www.coe.int/t/ngo/conf_intro_en.asp). They consider themselves as a civil society-related pillar of the Council of Europe.

Referring to them as such the conference of the NGOs tries to put pressure on governments by passing the "Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process" in April 2009.

„The principal objective of the Code of Good Practice is to define a set of European principles

and guidelines for NGO participation in decision-making processes that are to be implemented at local and national level in Council of Europe member States“ (http://www.coe.int/t/ngo/code_good_prac_en.asp).

Besides we need to mention the objectives that clearly express that the NGOs are free to pursue their own targets, provided that both the targets as well as the means applied would be compatible with the requirements of a democratic society. On top of that the NGOs shall be free to provide research-related, educational and promotional work for the areas of public interest regardless of the position taken being in accordance with the government’s policies or whether the law needed any amendment (cf. <https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1194609>).

In this context we frequently look at human rights-relevant NGOs and initiatives like standing up for liberty of the press and freedom of opinion. Co-operations at university level appear to be less political but have nevertheless given significant momentum to the transnational advancement of the profession and discipline of social work within the last 10 – 15 years.

Cross-border Networking in Social Work

We deliberately do not want to represent international organisations like the International Association of Schools of Social Work – IASSW (<http://www.iassw-aiets.org/>), International Federation of Social Workers – IFSW (<http://www.ifsw.org/>), International Council of Social Welfare- ICSW (<http://www.icsw.org/>) – descriptions of major scope of duties of organisations are commonly available (cf. e.g. Healy/Hall 2009) We prefer to focus on small scale networks.

One example for that is GÜSA – “Cross-border networking of social work in the European region Neisse“ (Steinert 1999), which was carried out from 1996 through 1998. Through organised contacts and joint training seminars for those involved from Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic they provided new stimulations for the cross-border social work in the areas of children and youth work, work with women, foreigners, refugees and the care and resettlement of delinquents. On the other hand the networked, cross-border work was the very reason why a number of problems became visible in the end: differences in the level of education of qualified employees, varying financial support, different national interpretations with respect to networking and last but not least speaking different languages. “Transnational networking is associated with considerable linguistic coordination work. English doesn’t come in handy in the European region Neisse as a lingua franca because of the lack of appropriate language skills. Hence conferences and meetings of teams are inevitably exhausting, tedious and often distinguished by a simplification of language due to consecutive interpretation in the respective national language” (Steinert 1998, p. 83).

It became clear that some Germans classified themselves as being more professional in the comparison with Polish and Czech colleagues. Children and Youth Work in Poland is said to be authoritarian and authoritarian behaviour is considered to be less professional. (cf. Steinert 2004).

While GÜSA was mainly focusing on a practice improvement, the network “European Research Institut for Social Work – ERIS” is concentrating on research-related topics. “The aim of the cooperation between the University of Ostrava’s Faculty of Social Studies and partner universities across Europe is to intensify research activities in social work based on partnership agreements and the foundation of the European Research Institute for Social Work (ERIS), based at the University of Ostrava. The mission of the Institute is to carry out high-quality funded research projects involving the Institute’s European partners and to produce European-funded teaching and learning materials for social work and social care programmes” (<http://eris.osu.eu/>). A comprehensive series of publications, a web journal, joint research activities as well as regular “Spring-Schools“ for Master and Ph.D. students illustrate the high efficiency of the network.

Thematic networks

Thematic networks are part of the ERASMUS programme and are aimed at identifying and developing a European dimension within a specific area. For this purpose departments and faculties work together on certain subjects resulting in remarkably productive transnational research and activity-related frameworks.

The editors of the four-volume publication “Ausbildung für soziale Berufe in Europa “ emphasize that this unique project with reports from all European countries has been initiated by the European Centre for Community Education – ECCE in Koblenz and has been further developed by the thematic network „Ecspress“ supported by ECCE (Hamburger/Hirschler/Sander/Wöbcke 2004-2007).

Ecspress – European Consortium of Social Professions with Educational and Social Studies is a thematic network as part of the SOKRATES/ERASMUS programme of the EU (http://www.fh-koblenz.de/sozialwesen2/ecce/ecsp_en.htm). The University of Applied Sciences in Koblenz was the coordinating institution for this network which was running from 1996 – 1999.

The major point was that the consortium ECSPRESS 1996 had been established amongst three European academic organisations by a binding agreement according to German law:

- European Association of Schools of Social Work – EASSW:
- Formation d’Educateurs Sociaux Européens/European Social Educator Training, formerly the ‘European Association of Training Centres for Socio-Educational Care Work’ – FESET
- European Centre for Community Education – ECCE

Another four significant European and international organisations, which represent different aspects of the occupational areas of social professions, were associated members that took part in the ECSPRESS activities in line with their expertise and resources, namely:

- International Federation of Social Workers – IFWS
- International Association of Social Educators – AIEJI
- Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives – FICE
- International Council on Social Welfare – ICSW

Based on the results of the ERASMUS evaluation conference in Koblenz in 1996 (Seibel/Lorenz 1998) the preliminary considerations of partner organisations have induced the phrasing of three topic priorities:

1. European dimensions in the curriculum development of social professions
2. The function of social professions in fighting social exclusion
3. Social professions in changing socio-political contexts in Europe.

These so-called thematic pillars have been developed during the project period through multilateral seminars, conferences and congresses, joint establishment of curriculum materials and multilingual publications (cf. Chytil/Seibel 1999; Chytil/ Lorenz/Seibel/Striezenec 2000), which cannot be specified in more detail at this point.

It is worth emphasizing that all participating organisations have been able to test new forms and formats of the European co-operation.

From today’s point of view the strong involvement of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) can be seen as a sustainable success, which was reflected in selecting conference venues located in Ostrava/CZ and Modra/SK to add a symbolic character and which was also reflected by the high participation of scientists at subsequent conferences in 2008 and 2009. (cf. Chytil/Friesenhahn/ Seibel/ Windheuser 2010).

The term “social professions” used in the network, has been introduced in order to cover the various professional/ vocational training traditions and the specific job titles in use in the different European countries – ranging from social pedagogue, social worker, via youth worker, sociologist, educator specialise and others.

This “umbrella term” has established itself as the term in the European discourse.

Jointly developed study courses – for example the “Master Comparative European Social Studies – MACESS” characterised by a clear European profile have been formed and were implemented by European lecturer teams for European student teams. (<http://www.maccess.nl/>)

Another thematic network with a significant impact on the discipline and profession of social work was “EUSW : European Social Work – Commonalities and Differences” which was operating from 2005-2008 and was developed further with the title “EUSW European Platform for Worldwide Social Work” (<http://www.eusw.unipr.it/activities.php>). While in the initial phase there were some 50 partners in European countries, more than 100 partners from university and practice-focused organisations joined the network in the second phase. The involvement of non-European partners which was demanded by the EU turned out to be difficult and has had no lasting effect although universities from Chile, Israel and the United States were part of it. Other elements seemed to have a more sustainable impact, which also distinguished this network from the Ecspress network.

The network was decidedly addressing to universities and practice / practitioners of social work and students were involved in the network working on different topics via international summer schools that lasted 10 days to name two examples (2005 in Parma / Italy, 2007 in Dornbirn / Austria). The web-based information exchange was developed consistently and a work group “Web Enhancement und Open Distance Learning- ODL” has been founded, which offers web-based modules named “Virclass” (<http://www.virclass.net/>) on the topic European Social Work recognised by participating universities.

A number of comparative studies have emerged from this network, in many cases as co-productions from colleagues from various countries (Campanini/Frost 2004; Freitas/Friesenhahn/Frost/Michailidis 2005; Frost/Freitas/Campanini 2007; Fortunato/Friesenhahn/Kantowicz 2008; Michailidis/Fargion/Sander 2008; Franger/ Necasová 2009), which overall contributed to defining the profile of European Social Work with respect to training, research, practice, social services, basic social conditions and the relations with the political decision-making level more clearly.

Social work in Europe shows itself across Europe as an academic discipline with intensive research activities. The academic education has a high level of practical relevance but does not enjoy a lot of public recognition. With regard to client appreciation a clear renunciation from the paternalistic approach can be detected and the empowerment and participation of clients / users of social services are in favour instead. The globalisation and the neo-liberal fundamental orientation of politics point out the dependency on political framework conditions. Nevertheless, or maybe precisely because of that social justice and solidarity are acknowledged as guiding principles of social work “human rights profession”. All European states are aware that they need to address topics like increasing poverty, cultural variety, ageing societies and educational opportunities with high priority. Fading social cohesion is perceived to be a serious problem and the organisation and financing of social services will be reregulated which will lead to a change of the previous self-image and the previous structure of social work. To some extent national expenditures for social services will be replaced by project funds of the EU (e.g. European Social Fund), which may, however, have a negative impact on sustainability.

In spite of these similarities there are still some differences in the justification structure of social work (related to the respective society), the level of education and the status within society. The integration within higher education structures (Universities, University School of

Social Work, Hogeschool, Universities of Applied Sciences) is just as diverse as the period of education and any favoured conceptual basics.

The fundamental concept and the various activities of the networks Excpres and European Social Work have been incorporated and merged into a new organisation: European Network for Social Action: ENSACT (<http://www.ensact.eu/>)

Campanini explains:

“During the last years, there has been developed the idea of strengthening the voice of social work at national and European level thorough being represented and listened to at the Council of Europe, European Union and European Parliament.

For this reason there has been constituted an umbrella association – ENSACT. One of the main purposes is to enhance the professional quality of social professionals, trainers and social services, innovate and strengthen their practices, concepts and theories, and also promote the consistency and effectiveness of professional qualifications and the quality of social services across Europe.

This will include, on the one hand, the need to work on the Bologna process and the EU mutual recognition of qualifications processes; on the other, develop more effective contacts with service users organizations at national and European level“ Campanini 2010, p. 69; or at http://www.ecce-net.eu/Ecspress_08_online_final.pdf).

ENSACT is currently supported by:

- European Association of Schools of Social Work – EASSW
- Formation d’Educateurs Sociaux Européens/European Social Educator Training – FESET
- Federation Internationale des Communautés Educatives – FICE
- International Association of Social Educators – AIEJI
- International Federation of Social Workers European Region – IFSW
- International Council on Social Welfare European Region – ICSW

Here, too, the optimistic keynote is visible, to be able to achieve synergy effects by networking in order to bring the concerns of the organisations of social work more effectively to the political level in Europe.

Implementation in Curricula

In fact there is a considerable demand for the qualification of skilled social professionals operating on an international, European and intercultural scale at all course levels.

The empowerment of students to act competently and to reflect internationally characterised settings has become a key task of the training also bearing in mind that the requirements on skilled professionals can vary considerably depending on the work and application area which rules out the existence of a standard study course. But for that very reason thorough justification and specification of the causes in the respective context, for example study placement, needs to be accomplished to make sure that the expected and targeted gain in competence remains within a realistic scale (cf. Otten/Scheitza/Cnyrim 2007).

If we take a look at our Faculty of Applied Social Studies we would like to introduce a development and implementation strategy, which indicates how we have integrated and embedded European dimensions in the curricula.

The Department of Social Pedagogy (now merged with Social Work and transferred into the Faculty of Applied Social Studies) of the University of Applied Sciences in Koblenz was founded in 1971. First bilateral seminars were already held in the initial phase, which had been set up due to personal contacts and initiatives of some fellow members.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary the ties to London and Bologna, which had been

developed until then, were laid down in an institutional contract. This led to regular bilateral seminars and projects, which were finally extended on a multilateral basis.

For the quantitative and qualitative extension of international activities the European Centre for Community Education – ECCE was founded in December 1985 by professors and staff of internationally operating organisations. ECCE has the legal form of a registered association. Foundation and establishment of the office, which has been existing in Koblenz since April 1986, were supported by the then Directorate-General V of the European Community. (cf. <http://www.ecce-net.eu>).

The objectives state amongst others: „In view of a United Europe the ECCE wants to raise awareness and foster a better understanding of different cultures, especially amongst young people“ (Filtzinger/Schäfer/Seibel 1993, p.6). Suitable measures were multilateral exchange programmes – for both professionals involved in the field of international / intercultural youth and social work as well as for students of the respective professions in Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

Multilateral seminars at HEI level led to a more intensified content-based co-operation between some two dozen departments in Europe and the jointly developed international study programme named “ACCESS Europe”, one of the first modular training schemes in Europe in this field. (Sozialarbeit/Sozialpädagogik/ Pädagogik/Sozialpolitik). ACCESS Europe means on the one hand “access to Europe“ and on the other hand it is an acronym for “Additional Certificate in Community Education Studies”. “ACCESS-Europe” is an additional certificate programme, which is part of the undergraduate course at the partner universities involved. “ (cf. Filtzinger/Seibel 1994, also at: http://www.fh-koblenz.de/sozialwesen2/ecce/dim_en.htm#access)

Based on that additional certificate course the major field of study Europe-COMES has been set up which means European Community Education Studies, and is understood as theory and practice in the community-based organisation as well as in development and education programmes across Europe and an invitation to develop new intercultural action strategies (cf. Filtzinger/Häring/Seibel/Wingendorf 1994, also at: http://www.fh-koblenz.de/sozialwesen2/ecce/dim_en.htm#comes).

The diploma study programme “European Community Education Studies – ECES” represented another development stage, which was established in 1996 and which is expiring now. This study course is distinguished by foreign language elements which belong to the compulsory elements and which include both one practical and one theoretical study semester that must be completed abroad (cf. http://www.fh-koblenz.de/sozialwesen2/ecce/eces_en.htm#inte).

With the introduction of the Bachelor course we have used content-related and structural elements of the preparatory work, to provide access to a European system of social work as part of the study now lasting 7 semesters. Cutting the number of semesters is no reason to lose sight of the European perspective in the educational phase.

We have incorporated an optional specialisation in the Bachelor course called “European Pathway“ (84 ECTS). As part of the study, students are required to consider designated events when they are planning their study that deal with international / intercultural contents like e.g. Managing Diversity, Intercultural Learning, Foreign Languages, European Law and international aspects of social policy.

The extended qualification, which is acquired through the specialisation “European Pathway“ for the same amount of work of 210 ECTS points, will be certified in the diploma supplement. A practical study semester in the fourth semester is of enormous importance for the specialisation, which should be spent in international or intercultural fields of activity. For that reason students can go abroad and complete this course element in cooperation with our European partner universities in line with the ERASMUS programme. Besides, we also take

into account the growing trend of our students looking for placement vacancies in countries outside Europe regardless of the sponsoring by the ERASMUS programme by assuring the attendance of practical semesters abroad with the aid of new media (telephone conferences, Skype, etc.) from our home country.

Additionally, the theory practice unit can be completed at home in international or intercultural fields of activity (for example working with migrants, refugees, international youth work and others). Primarily those students who are unable to spend time abroad for a longer period of time due to their family background or financial situation are likely to make use of that option.

What needs to be mentioned in this context is the consideration and recognition of students' foreign language skills. From the second semester on there is the possibility to enrol in specific language courses at different levels, which is compulsory for students of the European Pathway while the others are free to select other courses as an option. It is worth mentioning that students who have been raised bilingually will be given the opportunity, following a positive verification, to have their mother language recognised as a Foreign Language Skill and therefore as a passed module examination. This is our contribution to have those skills recognised that have been acquired beyond their academic education (cf. Friesenhahn/Strohe/ Szmalec 2007).

The European perspective is continued in the Master Course Master of Advanced Professional Studies – Maps (<http://www.social-maps.de/>), where one of the specialisation areas is focused on “Child and Youth Care in the European Context.“

References:

Campanini, Annamaria (2010): Insight in European Social Work Development: Personal and Conceptual Reflexions. In: Chytil, Oldrich/Friesenhahn, Günter J./Seibel, Friedrich, W. / Windheuser, Jochen (Eds.) (2010). Social Professions for a Social Europe. Boskovice. Albert-Verlag, pp. 60-72.

(http://www.ecce-net.eu/Ecspress_08_online_final.pdf).

Campanini, Annamaria/Frost, Elizabeth (Eds.) (2004): Social Work in Europe. Roma: carocci

Chytil, Oldrich / Friesenhahn, Günter J./Seibel, Friedrich, W. / Windheuser, Jochen (Eds.) (2010): Social Professions for a Social Europe. Boskovice. Albert Verlag http://www.ecce-net.eu/Ecspress_08_online_final.pdf

Chytil, Oldrich / Lorenz, Walter / Seibel, Friedrich W. / Strizenec, Stefan (Eds.)(2000):Auf Erfahrung Bauen. Vorbereitung der Sozialen Professionen auf das Europa von morgen . Boskovice. Albert

Chytil, Oldrich / Seibel, Friedrich W.(Eds.) (1999): Europäische Dimensionen in Ausbildung und Praxis der Sozialen Professionen. Boskovice: Albert

Filtzinger, Otto / Schäfer, Helmut M. / Seibel, F.W. (1993) Das European Centre for Community Education – ECCE. Koblenz : ECCE-Eigendruck (ECCE Inform 1), 3. Auflage

Filtzinger, Otto / Seibel, Friedrich W. (1994): ACCESS-Europe. Ein Studienprogramm mit europäischer Dimension. Koblenz:ECCE Eigendruck (ECCE-INFORM 2). Koblenz.

Filtzinger, Otto./Häring, Dieter./Seibel, Friedrich W./Wingendorf, Karl Heinz (1994):Europe-COMES. European Community Education Studies. Ein Studienprogramm im Fachbereich Sozialpädagogik. Koblenz: ECCE Eigendruck (ECCE-INFORM 3).

Fortunato, Vincenzo/Friesenhahn, Günter J./Kantowicz, Ewa (Eds) (2008): Social work in restructured European Welfare States. Roma: carocci

Franger, Gaby/Necasová, Mirka (2009): On the move. European Social Work Responses to Migration . Roma: carocci

Freitas, Maria José/Friesenhahn, Günter J./Frost Liz/Michailidis, Maria (Eds.) (2005): Children, Young People and Families. Examining social work practice in Europe. Roma:

carocci

- Friesenhahn, Günter J./Strohe, Heike/Szmalec, Agnieszka (2007): Bachelor Soziale Arbeit: Professionell, kompakt, flexibel. In: Die Neue Hochschule 6/2007, pp. 32-36
- Friesenhahn, Günter J. / Kniephoff-Knebel, Anette(2011): Europäische Dimensionen Sozialer Arbeit. Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag
- Frost, Elizabeth/Freitas, Maria José/Campanini, Annamaria (Eds.)(2007): Social Work Education in Europe. Roma:carocci
- Hamburger, Franz (1998): Interkulturelles lernen durch europäische Kooperation. Evaluation des ACCESS-Studienprogramms. In: Hamburger, Franz (Hrsg.) (1998): Faszination und Realität des Interkulturellen. Evaluationen zum europäischen Studien. Mainz: Schriftenreihe des Pädagogischen Instituts der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Sonderband 10, pp. 9-28
- Hamburger, Franz/Hirschler, Sandra/Sander, Günther/Wöbcke, Manfred (Hrsg): (2004-2007) Ausbildung für soziale Berufe in Europa. 4 Bände. Frankfurt: ISS-Eigenverlag,
- Hamburger Franz u.a.(2007): Vorwort. In: Hamburger, Franz u.a. (Hrsg.) (2007): Ausbildung für Soziale Berufe in Europa, Band 4. Frankfurt: ISS-Eigenverlag. pp.1-3
- Healy, Lynn M. /Hall, Nigel (2009): Internationale Organisationen der Sozialen Arbeit. In: Wagner, Leonie/Lutz, Ronald (Hrsg.) (2009): Internationale Perspektiven Sozialer Arbeit. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2nd Edition , pp. 243-261
- Hoffmann, Dimiter, M.(2001): Aspects of the philosophie of the VIENNET-approach. How to challenge borders. In: Hoffmann, Dimiter M./Furch, Elisabeth/Winge, Meinrad (Hrsg.) (2001): Grenzen – Borders. Kontakt und Konflikt in der Kulturbegegnung. St. Pölten:sozaktiv, pp. 13-22
- Homfeld, Hans Günther/Brandhorst Katrin (2004): International vergleichende Soziale Arbeit. Sozialpolitik – Kooperation – Forschung. Hohengehren: Schneider Verlag,
- Kühne Klaus (1998): Intensivseminare als Lernform zum Erwerb interkultureller Kompetenz. In: Hamburger, Franz (Hrsg.) (1998): Faszination und Realität des Interkulturellen. Evaluationen zum europäischen Studium. Mainz: Schriftenreihe des Pädagogischen Instituts der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Sonderband 10, pp. 75-92
- Kniephoff-Knebel, Anette (2006): Internationalisierung in der Sozialen Arbeit. Eine verlorene Dimension der weiblich geprägten Berufs- und Ideengeschichte. Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag
- Lawrence, Sue/Lyons, Karen/Simpson, Grame(Huegler, Nathalie (Eds.) (2009): Introducing International Social Work. Exeter: Learning Matters
- Lorenz, Walter (1994): Social Work in a Changing Europe. London Routledge
- Lorenz, Walter (2006): Perspectives on European Social Work – from the Birth of the Nation State to the impact of Globalisation . Leverkusen Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishing
- Lyons, Karen (1999): International Social Work: Themes and Perspectives.Hants: Ashgate Publishing
- Michailidis, Maria/Fargion, Silvia, Sanders, Robert (2008): Research Synergies in Social professions. Roma: carocci
- Otten, Matthias (2010): Funktionen und Organisationsformen interkulturell ausgerichteter Studienangebote. In: Straub, Jürgen/ Weidemann, Arne/ Nothnagel, Steffi (Hrsg.): Wie lehrt man Interkulturelle Kompetenz? Theorie und Praxis von Lehrmethoden in der Universitäts- und Hochschulausbildung. Bielefeld: transcript pp. 163-186
- Otten, Matthias/Scheitza, Alexander und Cnyrim, Andrea (2007): »Die Navigation im interkulturellen Feld. Eine gemeinsame Einleitung für beide Bände«. In: Matthias Otten, Alexander Scheitza und Andrea Cnyrim (Hrsg.): Interkulturelle Kompetenz im Wandel. Band 1: Grundlegungen, Konzepte, Diskurse, Frankfurt am Main: IKO Verlag, pp. 15-40.
- Seibel, Friedrich W./Lorenz, Walter (Hrsg.) (1998): Soziale Professionen für ein soziales Europa. Frankfurt: IKO-Verlag
- Seibel, Friedrich W / Friesenhahn, Günter J./ Otto, Hans Uwe (eds.) (2007)

Reframing the Social – Social Work and Social Policy in Europe
Reframing del Sociale – Lavoro Sociale e Politica Sociale nell' Europa
Festschrift Walter Lorenz. ECSPRESS-Edition – ECSPRESSE Band 4
Boskovice. Albert Verlag

<http://www.socwork.net/2007/festschrift>

Simsa, Ruth (2001): Die Zivilgesellschaft als Hoffnungsträger zur Lösung gesellschaftlicher Probleme? Zwischen Demokratisierung und Instrumentalisierung gesellschaftlichen Engagements. In: Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik e.V. / Beobachtungsstelle für die Entwicklung der Sozialen Dienste in Europa (Hrsg.) (2001): Europäische Integration als Herausforderung. Rolle und Reform der sozialen Dienste in Europa. Frankfurt. Eigenverlag, pp. 9-22

Stauf, Eva/Lauer, Felicia/Hamburger, Franz (2007): Verheißungen der Zivilgesellschaft . In: Seibel, Friedrich W. / Otto, Hans Uwe / Friesenhahn, Günter J. (Eds.) (2007): Reframing the Social. Boskovice: Albert , pp. 413-451

<http://www.socwork.net/2007/festschrift/csei/hamburgeretal>

Steinert, Erika (1998): Grenzüberschreitende Sozialarbeit. In: neue praxis 6/1998, pp. 609-613

Steinert Erika (Hrsg.) (1999): Sozialarbeit an der Grenze und über die Grenze hinaus. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag

Steinert, Erika (2004): Momente grenzüberschreitender Zusammenarbeit. In Homfeld, Hans Günther/ Brandhorst, Katrin (Hrsg.) (2004): International vergleichende Soziale Arbeit. Hohengehren: Schneider Verlag , pp. 179-186

This article is has been published in

Friedrich W. Seibel, Günter J. Friesenhahn, Walter Lorenz, Oldřich Chytil (Hrsg.) (2011): Europäische Entwicklungen und die Sozialen Professionen. Gemeinwesen, Ausbildung, Forschung, Professionalisierung.

- European Developments and the Social Professions. Community, Education, Research, Professionalisation.

- Sviluppo Europei e le Professioni Sociali. Comunità, Educazione, Ricerca, Professionalizzazione.

- Evropský vývoj a sociální profese. Komunita, Vzdělávání, Výzkum, Profesionalizace. ECSPRESS-Edition – ECSPRESSE Band 7, Boskovice/CZ: Albert, pp. 181 – 209

and reprinted with permission. A review of the entire book is available at:
www.socialnet.de/rezensionen/11477.php

Authors:

Günter Friesenhahn

Dr. Günter J. Friesenhahn is Professor in “European Community Education Studies” and currently Head of Department of Applied Social Studies at the University of Applied Sciences in Koblenz/Germany.

He is Vice-President of the “European Association of Schools of Social Work – EASSW”. His teaching and research areas are: international social work, international youth work and intercultural communication. e-mail: friesenhahn@fh-koblenz.de

Prof. Dr. Anette Kniephoff-Knebel teaches history and theory of social work and education, gender and diversity studies and international social work at the University of Applied Sciences in Koblenz. She is head of the international committee of the University and Vice-president of ECCE. e-mail: kniephof@fh-koblenz.de and anette@ecce-net.eu

Friedrich W. Seibel, Professor emeritus, he has been teaching in the Department of Applied Social Studies at the University of Applied Sciences in Koblenz/ Germany(1971-2006). Jean

Monnet Chair in „Interdisciplinary European Studies“ (1996-2006), Director of the Study Programme in „European Community Education Studies – E.C.E.S.“ (1996 2006). He was a founding member of the ECCE (its first president <1985-1995> and thereafter its Managing Director). Manager of the SOCRATES Thematic Network in the Social Professions „ECSPRESS“ (1996-1999). e-mail: fws@ecce-net.eu

Picture: www.pixelio.de (Photograph: Rudolf Ortner)