

Journal of Social Intervention: Theory and Practice –
2011 – Volume 20, Issue 1, pp. 118–122
URN:NBN:NL:UI:10-1-101312

ISSN: 1876-8830

URL: <http://www.journalsi.org>

Publisher: Igitur publishing

Services in cooperation with Utrecht University of
Applied Sciences, Faculty of Society and Law

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John ter Horst (Ed.). **Social Work in Europe**. Baarn:

HBuitgevers (ThiemeMeulenhoff), 2009, 142 p.,

€22.50.

ISBN 9789055746187

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SOCIAL WORK: AN INTERNATIONAL PROFESSION IN NATIONAL STRAITJACKETS

GLOBAL AWARENESS

As in all other professions, social work is being affected by the ongoing process of globalization, in the form of vanishing borders, shrinking distances, rapid communication, waves of global migration, supranational policy and international money streams. Although many practitioners and teachers in the field of social work still consider their profession as related to culture and bound to language, there is a growing awareness that it is part of an international profession that is being confronted with comparable developments, that is seeking the same type of solutions, that is using familiar interventions and that is fulfilling similar tasks in society.

Since 1982, social work has been defined and described by the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The latest version (from 2000) is as follows:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of

human behavior & social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IFSW, 2000, p. 1).

This definition provides a brief, general description of what social workers do, as well as how and why they do it. The definition also provides a foundation for common standards and values, global standards for education and training, and joint elements of a global, professional body of knowledge (Blok, 2009, chapter 1).

Researchers and theorists are leading the way by discussing the phenomenon of “international social work”. The Australian researchers Mel Gray and Stephen Webb (2009, 2010) have assumed the role of bibliographers of international social work by collecting, ordering and selecting theories and methods that have, had (and will continue to have) an impact on thinking and operating in social work all over the world. In 2009, they published an overview of “the key ideas of authors who have contributed significantly to theoretical discussions shaping social work in recent years” (2009, p. 8). In 2010, they presented *International Social Work*, a four-volume set intended “to represent the diversity of viewpoints that exist in social work” and offered as “a major reference in social work” to researchers, students, practitioners and policy-makers (2010, p. xxvi).

According to Gray and Webb, professional social work is based on two logics: “the logic of regulation” which represents the society and its institutions, and “the logic of security”, which represents individual or community well-being and the freedom from fear, harm, apprehension or doubt. They conclude that “[...] the essential rationality of modern social work is ambivalently configured through these twin logics of regulation and security, which work in and through each other” (2010, p. xxix–xxx).

On a more practical, methodical (i.e. national) level, a growing number of textbooks are being published that mention, include or facilitate the international dimension of social work.

In the Netherlands, Van Ewijk, Spierings and Wijnen-Sponselee (2007) referred to the international definition in their latest introduction to Dutch social work.

I wrote a textbook for Dutch students and workers from an international perspective (Blok, 2009), incorporating core parts of the international body of knowledge, along with several frameworks for analyzing the position and functions of social work.

BOOKS

Another publication in this series of textbooks was written by John ter Horst, a senior lecturer at the School of Social Work of the Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle. Ter Horst drew upon his international experience and network to edit *Social Work in Europe*, which includes contributions from two colleagues from Germany (Sabine Hering and Brigitta Zierer), one from the United Kingdom (Emily Grundy) and one from Canada (Rianne Mahon).

SOCIAL WORK IN EUROPE

The textbook *Social Work in Europe* was published in English in the Netherlands. The book is intended to help students “gain theoretical and empirical knowledge about the internationalization process of social work” while learning to develop “a comparative perspective to professionalize their analytical and methodological skills in their local context” (cover).

The book consists of a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part offers historical, political and ideological frameworks for analyzing professional social work in the national contexts in which this work is carried out. Part 2 offers three comparative studies on the topics of female trafficking, childcare and care for the elderly in Europe.

In Chapter 1, which addresses the international history of social work, Sabine Hering shows that leading figures within the field of social work have maintained international contact with colleagues from the earliest stages, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Until the Second World War, the development of social work extended beyond social organizations, churches and politics to include the women's liberation movement as well, given that most of these key figures were women.

During the 1930s and after 1945, the three major international organizations (known today as IFSW, IASSW and the International Council on Social Welfare or ICSW) were established or reorganized.

In Chapter 3, John ter Horst introduces and explains the three welfare mechanisms (the “welfare triangle”) of the Scandinavian sociologist Peter Abrahamson. These forms of welfare-state organization are the market (money), the state (power) and civil society (solidarity). The political scientist Esping-Andersen uses this typology to distinguish three types of welfare states in Europe: corporatist, liberal and social-democratic.

Conservative welfare states (e.g. Germany and Italy) are based on the mechanism of civil society as a means of caring for vulnerable people. Liberal welfare states (e.g. the United Kingdom and

Ireland) rely on market mechanisms to develop social-work programmes, while social-democratic welfare states (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Sweden) assign this responsibility to the government. Ter Horst considers The Netherlands as a “hybrid case”.

In Chapter 4, Ter Horst describes four ideologies upon which welfare states are based: conservatism, liberalism, socialism and the Third Way. To demonstrate the consequences of these perspectives for social work clients, he presents a fictive case study involving a 42-year-old, lower-class man (“Frank”), married with children, who lost his job due to health problems. Four different social workers (i.e. conservative, liberal, socialist and one with Third Way ideas) are introduced to illustrate the differences in approach, solution and outcomes of these ideologies.

The three comparative studies in the empirical part of the book (Part 2) have the character of empirical field studies on the subjects of female trafficking, childcare and care for the elderly. These fields are influenced by cross-national processes and further shaped within the specific economic, social and cultural boundaries of specific countries. Each of the studies is different in terms of subject and various research-related aspects.

These comparative studies have an educational-didactic function: “Having deployed a firm theoretical background in part one, the trick for students will be to connect the research results in part two with the theoretical models they learned in part one” (p. 64).

CONCLUSIONS

The title *Social Work in Europe* does not cover the content of the book. The book discusses the various national contexts in which social work is performed (the “welfare states”), and *not* social work itself. Social work itself is only the subject of a brief, historic overview of international contacts and cooperation in Chapter 1 and of the case study in Chapter 3.

Of course, it is obvious that social work is financed, organized and taught within national social infrastructures (the “welfare states” in the rich western countries). It is clear that these conditions have a strong impact on social workers, as well as on the space that they have to do their work according to their values and standards. Social work is nonetheless more than merely a part of ideologically dominated national welfare states. It should also be considered and studied as a profession (on an international scale), comparable to nursing and teaching.

BOOKS

Social workers throughout the world share goals, values and standards, approaches, knowledge and tasks – and they have been doing so for a long time. This makes social work more than merely the passive subject of ideologically dominated national welfare-state systems; it is also an international profession with its own history, character and development.

Social Work in Europe is useful for educational purposes in social work. The book offers several basic frameworks for analyzing various national welfare states, and it helps to identify the international character of current social problems.

Because of its focus on national differences, the book should be used in combination with a textbook or publications containing the joint character and aspects of social work from an international point of view.

The book is appropriate for second-year undergraduate students of social sciences who are preparing for practical placements, research or projects abroad.

It is also useful in other countries than the Netherlands. For these purposes, publisher or teachers should add a separate translation list of key words and concepts in their own language, preferably on the accompanying website: www.hbsocialwork.nl/europe

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