



Epilogue

Walter Lorenz - Social Work - Central and Eastern European Countries

Oldrich Chytil

As president of the European Centre for Community Education – ECCE it is a great pleasure for me and a special honour to contribute (in the form of an epilogue) to the Festschrift which is published and dedicated to Walter Lorenz on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.

I would like to mention and stress the fact that this Festschrift has only been made possible through the cooperation of ECCE and the online-only journal “Social Work & Society”, a journal which is open to and free of charge accessible by the whole scientific and professional community all over Europe and in the rest of the world.

I therefore do appreciate particularly the work which has been undertaken jointly by Hans Uwe Otto, the editor in chief of SW&S, Friedrich W. Seibel, the managing director of ECCE, and Günter J. Friesenhahn¹, the first scientific co-worker of ECCE at its very beginning in 1986. Many thanks for their initiative.

Walter Lorenz has acted as president of ECCE for ten years (1995 – 2005), a successful period in which important contributions to Europeanising Social Work and Social Pedagogy have been realised amongst others by the thematic network project “ECSPRESS” and during which the journal SW&S has been launched.

This is for us a justification that this Festschrift is jointly published both as a special edition of SW&S and as a book in the ECSPRESS-edition at the same time. SW&S is a journal highly appreciated, read and consulted regularly by our colleagues and the ECSPRESS-edition which is published by Verlag Albert in the Czech Republic, a publishing house well known in the entire academic community not only in the CEEC.

I first met Walter Lorenz in 1998, during preparations for a conference organised by the ECSPRESS consortium in Ostrava, when he was the ECCE president.

In my evaluation of Walter Lorenz’s contribution to the development of social work in Europe, I would like to emphasise two areas:

The first area is his contribution to the constituting of social work that is in fact really European in its scope. After the disintegration of the former communist bloc in Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), western Europe continued in discussing social work as a profession, as an academic discipline or as the (then-forming) social science regardless of the

¹ now the Head of Department of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Applied Sciences Koblenz, with which ECCE was connected in a very intensive and productive way right from the beginning and still is.

development in the CEEC. Ignoring the fact that for instance in Czechoslovakia, there existed highly professional social work even during socialism, ignoring the traditions of social work in Poland, Hungary and other CEEC was typical for the first half of the 1990's. The discussion on social work in Europe automatically presumed that Europe ended at the (political) border of the European Union.

In this situation ECCE, and Walter Lorenz personally, started to look for ways to enable discussion about European Social Work within its actual geographic borders.

- His priceless contribution lies in the fact that he treated his new colleagues from the countries of the CEEC in an unprejudiced and open minded way, that he respected them, aware of their language barrier on the one hand but appreciating their knowledge, skills and competence on the other.
- His main strategy was supporting the national traditions of social work in the CEEC and boosting self-confidence of especially the senior colleagues working at the newly established schools of social work in these countries.
- His personal participation in conferences and seminars in Central and Eastern Europe as well as his authority enabled the creation of new educational or practically-oriented projects in social work.
- His great contribution also lies in his support of the professional growth of colleagues from the countries of this part of Europe. He provided his personal help, consulting their PhD theses and helping with preparation of publications. He also played an important role in making it possible for social work experts in western Europe to read texts from their central and eastern European colleagues.

The huge development of social work education in central and eastern Europe – the existence of all of the three levels of education in social work – that is of Bachelor's degree programs, Master's degree programs and postgraduate doctoral studies, as well as the appointments of university professors of social work, all of these things are also the results of Prof. Lorenz's efforts. And this is the reason why he enjoys such great authority and why he has so many friends in the countries of central and eastern Europe (cf. Chytil, 2007).

The second area where we can find Professor Lorenz's priceless contribution to European Social Work is his scientific work.

Social work is closely connected with the project of modernism and its development (Rauschenbach, 1992, p. 26). Modernism, industrial society, organised modernity, those may be the synonyms for the society which gave birth to social work.

At present, modernism is going through the second wave of modernisation. The first wave of modernisation came after World War II and that was the stage when industrial society reached its zenith. Today, we live in the society of services where many of the certainties which existed in the previous stages have been disappearing and where ambiguities concerning the direction of future development abound. Things which seemed to be unproblematic in the 1950's are now, at the turn of the century, becoming serious problems. This predominantly affects social issues, but also the ecological ones (Keller, 2007).

Listed below are the qualities relevant for social work which in my opinion determine the nature of modernity in its second stage (Baumann, Beck), that is in the conditions of post-industrial, reflexive or fluid modernity:

- Individualisation
- Functional differentiation
- Rationalisation
- Generalisation
- Transformation of the social structure
- Transformation of the social
- Colonisation of the public domain by private interests
- Uncertainty (cf. Keller, 2007).

The consequences of modernisation for social work are discussed only sporadically in European Social Work. Many authors believe that some kind of “remedying” of the old instruments of social work is the right reaction to the challenges of modernisation (Navrátil, 2005; Kappl, 2005; Merten, 1997, 2000; Dominelli, 2006, Maurer, 2006, Thiersch, 2006).

Another group of authors makes very precise diagnoses and reflects the problems of social work emerging as a consequence of modernisation. But when it comes to the drafting of proposals dealing with the problem of how to adjust aims and methods of social work, this group is just as helpless as the authors in the first one (Spatscheck, 2005, Göppner, 2004, Hämäläinen, 2004).

Walter Lorenz is one of the few authors who, as Elsen (2007) notes, are able to glimpse “over the fence” of social work. In 2007, he notes: “in the situation when social work as a profession is standing at the crossroads of fundamental societal events, it is necessary to approach the debates on the methods in social work with the understanding that these are not marginal problems.” In his publications and during presentations at conferences, Walter Lorenz systematically warns how radically the social conditions of social work have changed and that very often the reaction to these conditions on the part of social work is resignation.

This is the area where Walter Lorenz plays an irreplaceable role in European social work.

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