

The Social Work Mix

Arno Heimgartner

The purpose of the following treatise is to create a broader understanding of social work, an understanding that can serve as a point of reference for the research of social work. Those who speak of social work and conduct research in the field often mean professionalised and paid work. However, social work occurs in several contexts. As the first important point of my contribution, I want to promote an internal perception of social work as a complex structure that can then serve as a point of reference for research. By analogy to the “welfare mix” (e.g. Wessels 1994, p147; Dettling, 1995, p161), we could speak of a “social work mix”.

The components of social work: In which contexts do we encounter social work?

Several action approaches contribute to the overall system of social work. The overall social quality is connected with this range of action approaches.

Therefore, the first task of research, of social policy, but also of social work, is to be aware of the different categories of social work. The condition of the categories and the resulting changes need to be clarified.

The second task is to appreciate the development of these areas. Possibilities to take measures and initiate projects must be identified, and in case of research projects, they also need to be followed up by scientific methods.

The third task is to prevent presumable future quality losses in a certain area, revealed by observation, respectively to compensate such losses in another area after due reflection. The transfer of social work from one category to another must be supported on a social action planning level. As the development of each category is independent to a certain extent, it cannot be assumed automatically that a loss of social services in one category can and will be compensated by another category.

The following approaches can provide a suitable context for research in the field of social work (see Heimgartner 2004):

Individual work

Work within the family unit or work in one's own household

Friendship-based work and work in social networks

Neighbourhood support or work in the social sphere or community

Volunteering

Work in local exchange trading systems

Work in self-help groups

Community service (as an alternative to military service)

Practical training

Paid work

Structure dimensions:

What are the differences between these types of approaches to social work?

The mentioned types of approach to social work go back to very peculiar traditions. Therefore, they do not follow a constructed pattern according to which they could be classified. As a consequence, research is forced to work with content-related overlapping and blurred definitions.

However, it is possible to distinguish some dimensions from a theoretical perspective according to which different types of social work can be differentiated and discussed. The following step is dedicated to the discussion of these dimensions.

Orientation of social work and feeling of identification

Roughly, we can draw a line between "self-help" and "help for others". Nevertheless, this soft criterion presumably features fine graduations between individual work, work in the family unit, self-help, work in the community and the neighbourhood and paid work or community service in lieu of military service. It is important to appreciate that a feeling of identification does not necessarily have to focus on one's self, but that an equivalent emotional bond may also be felt towards the family, the community and even towards society in general.

Individual work and self-help do not primarily focus on society, but are characterised by the need to help oneself. Rarely mentioned, individual work as work on one's own self does occupy a special position. Spitzley (1998, p168) defines "working on one's own personality (...) as an indispensable part of the plural economy". The value of activities oriented towards one's own personality is recognisable through community participation. The notion of "individual work" as food for thought should stimulate us to recognize the importance of the individual lifestyle for the living culture of the community,

also in action-regulating agents (for instance development and protection of socio-cultural skills, waiting periods).

Whether or not somebody is personally affected is an important characterising element of the self-help variety. Being affected by the problem or complaint addressed by the self-help group is the prerequisite for participation. Self-help develops "in a group of people who are affected by a certain problematic situation. The group members – each with the same rights and obligations – support each other and act according to the principle of solidarity," (BMFSFJ, 1996). Therefore, the scope of the support given is restricted to others who are equally affected (see Rauschenbach, Müller and Otto, 1992). The line between self-help and community work dissolves if self-help groups offer consultation, advice and events for the general public.

Usually, volunteering work is society-oriented. In Heimgartner's study (2004), it is reported that 13% of voluntary work is performed by volunteers who are in the same life situation. The group of those who have been affected by an equivalent situation in the past is larger, reaching 22%. In the words of one volunteer, these workers sometimes "reappraise a piece of their own life story." 27% of the volunteers at least believe that the same situation could happen to them in the future. The thought that one could potentially be affected ("this could happen to any-one") is more decisive and irrelevant for only 11% of the study participants. Finally, a general feeling of solidarity ("this concerns everybody") is overwhelmingly apparent, having been identified as important by 97% of volunteers.

Degree of payment and monetary consideration

The degree of payment sets paid work and illicit work apart from other types of social work. The fundamental issue is whether it should be an objective to pay for all social work and manage it in an economic context. Payment is a decisive value symbol and a decisive resource in our society. It is relevant for other so-called immaterial dimensions such as power or status.

The example of volunteering illustrates just how sensitive the issue of payment really is, for the absence of payment is not used consistently for voluntary work. In theory, it is considered as the central determinant, as Badelt (1997, p359) also explains. However, some institutions do grant workers they refer to as voluntary an hourly consideration or monthly payment (see Heimgartner, 2004). Horch (1992, p149) emphasises that "the repayment of expenses, honorary remunerations or partial payment reveal that "unpaid" is a relative criterion". To what extent a certain amount constitutes financial compensation, or already constitutes remuneration, needs to be discussed. In any case, the values are not far apart. While the granting (for instance of a small) payment for voluntary work is controversial, the replacement of actually incurred costs is

considered as a basic demand (e.g. Stefan, 1997). According to Heimgartner's study, 39% of the volunteers are in favour and 35% against a small payment. Among managers, the ratio of advocates and opponents of payment is almost 1:1; the majority of board members (63%) is against payment for their activity (Heimgartner, 2004).

When we refer to volunteering as unpaid or low paid work, it is important to identify how the volunteers obtain their cost of living. In Heimgartner's study (2004), approximately half of the participating volunteers have an income of their own. 27% are maintained by their partner. In the random sample, the number of women maintained by their partner exceeds that of men by the factor 26. A total of 29% receives a pension. 11% of the volunteers are financed by their parents, and 4% receive a grant. 2% of the volunteers receive unemployment benefit and a further 2% is on maternity leave. The participant's way of obtaining his or her cost of living very much influences the decision whether he or she is for or against payment. Volunteers with their own pension are most frequently against payment (48%), volunteers who depend on the support of their parents are most frequently for payment (73%).

Payment must also be seen in conjunction with the advantages of labour law-protected employment. Debasement as a consequence of an ill-defined line between paid and unpaid work cannot be ruled out. At the same time, if paid work is forcefully promoted, it should be borne in mind that the degree of freedom and the possibilities of social work will be restricted radically if only a paid variety is considered.

Exchange trading as practiced in exchange trading systems must be seen as an important alternative to a monetary consideration. Regional economic cycles are an alternative to the global cheap labour policy and the lowering of ecological standards (see Schlemm, 1999). Regional currencies are created, and value allocations can be redefined. The result is a money design (see Linton, 1996). Exchanges attempt to revitalize individual competences and solution types based on own initiative. According to Elsen (1998, p22), this would enable people to act "without being susceptible to blackmail at the hands of a market without borders and without imposition of thought or attitude by the sovereign state". Issues such as the reliability of the exchange pools over time (e.g. liability in the event of a dissolution) and the compatibility of different exchange pools (e.g. in the event of a relocation) will have to be the subject of detailed discussion if their reach increases. A flourishing clearing house for exchange pool connecting exchange trading will be able to contribute (see Pichler and Graf, 1996).

Degree of organisation

The central question arises as to how much organisation or autonomy is beneficial for social work. Neighbourhood support as a borderline phenomenon, for instance, does not necessarily require organisation, but it can also be supported in organisational terms by an institution. According to a definition proffered by Heimgartner (2004), volunteering takes place in an organized context, but Badelt and Hollerweger (2001) also mention types of informal volunteering that do not take place in an organized context, for example mutual support among neighbours.

However, whether we can really speak of a duality between organisation and disorganisation is open to question if we bear in mind that self-organised groups, but even family units and friendship relations all impose a kind of organisation upon themselves. This suggests that a more detailed differentiation has to focus on the sponsor of the organisation – i.e. we would have to differentiate between self-organisation and public or state organisation and on the type of organisation.

Degree of obligation

An obligation can be imposed by the state (community service as an alternative to military service) or by a certain institution (e.g. practical training). The fundamental issue is to what extent the volunteers are actually forced to carry out social work. In any case, the issue of obligation also arises in connection with the societal task to distribute unpaid work fairly.

Olk (1992, p32) calls the state-imposed obligation as a “last choice strategy”. Empathy, sympathy and motivation are essential ingredients of social work and they may be lost if this type of work is made compulsory. Wessels (1994, p148) also expresses the fear that social work may then be perceived as nothing more than an “irksome obligation”. For instance, representatives of bodies that use volunteers criticize the “Welfare to work” programme in the United Kingdom from 1997, which forces young people without employment to decide between training and voluntary work after six months of unemployment, otherwise their unemployment benefit will be discontinued (see Strümpel, Pleschberger and Riedel, 1999). In Heimgartner’s study (2000), a manager of a socio-economic institution calls it a “*very subtle form of forced labour*”.

Referring to the system of community service as an alternative to military service, the majority of those involved in the system benefits, as they have stated themselves. The general public has become used to it, and community service is accepted. Apart from the question of to what extent social work should be based on rules with a strong obligation component, it should not be forgotten to provide appropriate resources and structures for the existing systems (practical training, community service).

Two prominent demands that can be tied to the planned or unplanned allocation of social work that I just wish to mention in passing (a separate workshop looks at this issue), are the degree of professionalisation and the fairness concerning the distribution between the genders.

**The current situation from the point of view of research:
What is the contribution of the individual systems
and which studies were conducted?**

When Thiersch (1992) published his book "*Lebenswelt-oriented social work – practical tasks in situations of social change*", he did not only make the paradigm of *Lebenswelt* orientation a maxim of social pedagogic and social work, but in doing so he also characterised the expansive development of paid social work. Evidence of the development of full-time social work is provided by the increase of the number of education centres and the higher number of graduates. Further evidence is found in the labour market.

However, the question arises whether this expanding development is also reflected in other social work categories, for instance volunteering, exchange trading systems, self-help groups or community service. As a general rule, it can be said that a relative organisation and documentation reluctance is a characteristic features of some types of social work. In the absence of available indicators and data, it is all but easy to find evidence of their development. Compared to the paid labour market, there is often an institutional privacy that needs to be taken into account. Therefore, an analysis must walk the tightrope between an excessively pushy investigation and determination of the situation (which has to be rejected) on the one hand, and a sensible reflective perception on the other (see Jakob, 1993).

Volunteering

Volunteering must be considered as an extensive field of action. Attempted quantifications of relatively hard facts such as the number of hours worked, or the value represented in various provinces (e.g. Zapotoczky, Pirklbauer and Pass, 1996; Zapotoczky, 1998; Strümpel, Pleschberger and Riedel, 1999), or the result of a random sample covering the whole of Austria (Heimgartner 2004; Badelt and Hollerweger 2001) illustrate this readily. The difficulty to capture volunteering is attributable firstly to the immense quantitative dimensions, as stated by Badelt (1997), and secondly to the lack of recognized definitions and differentiators to set volunteering apart from other types of work (see Heimgartner, 2004). This makes it extremely difficult to make a meaningful statement about the extent of volunteering in Austria. A recent approach

is based on the distribution of passes for voluntary work. At least in the areas where the pass is used, this would indeed lead to a higher degree of openness.

Badelt und Hollerweger (2001) conducted a survey and asked 2000 Austrians about voluntary work performed by them, and they then compared their findings with the results from 1982. In their study, the term "volunteering" includes both organised and non-organised work (such as neighbourhood support). Their results indicate that 51.1 percent of the Austrian population above 15 performed voluntary work in 2000. Compared with the data from 1982, when almost 59 percent of Austrians between the ages of 16 and 70 had been doing some kind of voluntary work, this represents a decrease of the participation of volunteers. According to Badelt and Hollerweger (2001), the average number of hours per week (irrespective of the area) and volunteer in Austria is 5.07 hours. The hours put in vary considerably from one volunteer to another (from 0 to 88 hours). In 1982, the average input of volunteers was 6.22 hours per week. We must therefore conclude that the volunteers dedicate less time to their voluntary work than in 1982. While activities in the field of religious and social work were mainly provided by women (participation 47.2%), disaster relief services and sports tend to be a male dominated domain (participation 55.5%).

According to Heimgartner's study (2004), which includes a survey of voluntary workers in social work institutions, the volunteers work 23.3 hours per month on average. Approximately one third (30%) works up to 10 hours, and another third (37%) between 11 and 20 hours. 20% of volunteers work between 21 and 40 hours. 13% of voluntary workers reach more than 40 hours per month.

Exchange trading systems

Exchange trading systems are innovative systems, but socially they are still in their infancy. Nevertheless, it is apparent that there has been an important development in the last ten years. In Austria, there are more than three dozen regional exchange trading systems. LETS Vienna (www.waffeltausch.at), Tauschkreise.at (www.tauschkreise.at) and Tauschkreis.net (www.tauschkreis.net) offer a list of Austrian addresses about exchange pools as well as addresses in the German speaking area. LETS Vienna was established in 1995 and mentions nine goals in connection with exchange trading activities: (1) development of new skills and abilities; (2) help in difficult situations without creating the feeling of having to depend on charity; (3) improvement of the quality of life through more social contacts; (4) equalisation of services; (5) ecological and sustainable business practices; (6) development of democratic structures; (7) open co-operation; (8) reassessment of work and the search for economic co-operation alternatives; (9) revitalisation

of the idea of neighbourhood support in an increasingly anonymous society. The clearing unit for the provision of services is called WAFFEL (Wir arbeiten füreinander für einheitlichen Lohn, i.e. we work for each other for a standard wage) (see LETS Vienna, 2004). The "Ressourcentauschring" (Resource Exchange Pool) in Salzburg extends the idea of exchange trading to the level of companies and clubs. Its goal is regional business-making in association with an improvement of the quality of life (see Gruber and Gruber-Andreatta, 2004). Studies about the exchange trading systems in Austria are not available.

Community service

Community service providers (who have opted out of military service) make an important contribution to the overall volume of social work. Referring to Germany, Bartjes (2001, p. 1998) says that community service providers "have become an important factor in the social and nursing services". In Austria, young men have been given the option to choose community service instead of military service since 1975. The community service commission, which verified the veracity and applicability of the reasons for the rejection of military service, was abolished in 1992. The legal basis of community service is laid down in the Community Service Act (CSA), 1986 as amended on 1 August 2003. According to this law, a young man liable for military service, and found to be fit for military service, may declare (declaration of conscientious objection) "that he is unable to do his compulsory military service because he refuses for moral reasons to use a weapon against another human being – with the exception of cases of self-defence or help in an emergency – and that doing military service would therefore represent a moral dilemma for him, and that he therefore wishes to do community service instead." A reduction of the duration of the community service (12 months) is currently the subject of discussion as military service will also be made shorter. Likewise, the replacement of an army based on conscription with a professional army is talked about repeatedly. In 1998, the number of the community service declarations received was 9,185 (representing 22.9 % of young men liable and fit for military service). After 1999 (9646), the number of community service declarations began to drop to 7,942 in 2001. The ratio of persons recognized to be liable for community service versus the total number of positive fitness certificates (i.e. young men declared to be fit for military service) dropped to 20.7% in 2001 (see parliamentary materials 605, 2002). There are no studies about the performance within the scope of community service.

Self-help groups

The contribution of self-help groups to social work is also important. However, it is not known exactly how much work is provided in self-help groups. An approximation could be achieved by taking the collections to self-help groups

as a measure for quantification. Self-help groups can be found in many areas. Arge Selbsthilfe Österreich (www.selbsthilfe-oesterreich.at/) acts as a platform to “strengthen, qualify and focus the resources in self-help structures” (Arge Selbsthilfe, 2004, p1). A global index of Austrian self-help groups in the area of health, their umbrella organisations and contact offices, known as SIGIS, is maintained by the Fonds Gesundes Österreich (www.fgoe.org), i.e. Funds for a Healthy Austria. The list includes more than 100 different categories, alphabetically sorted by province, with entries such as adoption, adreno-genital syndrome, alcohol, menopause, illnesses transmitted by ticks and coeliac disease. Another information collection point for self-help groups is found at www.selbsthilfe.at. A documented index of self-help groups in Austria with introductory information chapter was published by Matejcek (1998).

Janig’s study from 1999 about the participation in self-help groups can be seen as an example for empirical work. Janig (1999) conducted a survey among 485 participants of several self-help groups. 70% of the participants are women (average age: 52) and only 30% men (average age: 50). The biggest chunk of time spent is attributable to group meetings for the mutual exchange of experiences. This is followed by time spent with experts. However, the differences between time spent with specialists are huge depending on the problem addressed. Not much time is spent for sociable activities and public relations. According to Janig, important reasons in favour of a participation in a self-help group are utter desperation and the feeling of being all alone, the need to get help and the wish to be in contact with affected persons. Better information and social/emotional strengthening are perceived as benefits from the participation in the group.

An outlook:

Which transitions can we recognize between the areas?

The analysis of the relationships between the individual contexts of social work is only just starting (see Heimgartner 2004). As an example of the relationships between paid and unpaid work, we can describe the ratio of paid work to unpaid work. Two directions are relevant: developments from volunteering to paid work, and in the opposite direction the involvement and input of paid workers in the social sphere.

From volunteering to paid work.

In thinking about a paid working society, we should mention at first the niche or pioneer function (identification of new areas of work) and the generating function (work through co-ordination of volunteering).

Heimgartner (2004) asked managers with voluntary employees whether there are voluntary activities in their institution for which a transformation

into a full-time job would make sense. 23% of the managers did indeed identify voluntary work in their institution for which a full-time position would make sense, i.e. the managers in one out of five institutions with voluntary co-workers believe that proper jobs should be created. For a further 38% of the managers, this applies in part. Overall, in more than half of the institutions it would be worth considering to switch over to full-time jobs.

From paid work to social commitment: synthesis of profit and social profit

Companies that promote social projects with their available capacities or become sponsors of social initiatives move towards partnership. Company resources – know-how, money, premises, personnel etc. – create a potential for social projects. The utilisation of the working time of employees is not only considered as an investment in the community or a potential source of profits, but because of the required social competences, a participation also meets internal objectives of training and personnel development (see Kinds, 1999). In Austria, the CSR platform – Corporate Social Responsibility – promotes activities where businesses emphasize social, artistic or ecological responsibility. In 2003 alone, more than 60 real life examples could be quoted.

Concluding statement

In my contribution, I wanted to show the many facets of social work in its various contexts. It was attempted to give a name to the different contexts and also to give appropriate dimensions for a structural discussion of these contexts of social work. Current descriptions and some research approaches from Austria were used to characterise the situation of individual components such as volunteering or exchange trading pools. It is clear that an overall view is required to determine the development of social work. For research culture, this means that more action is needed, also in areas not dominated by full-time work, for instance with the goals of picking out unpaid social work as a central theme, of contributing to an extension of the infrastructures, of implementing the possible transfer into paid work and of contributing to a fair distribution of social work in society.

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Arno Heimgartner, Dr., assistant professor at the University of Graz, Institute for Education, Department of social work; Issues of research and teaching: scientific accompanying of social projects like streetwork or school social work, volunteering, social professions and their working fields, research workshops on migration and antiracism, methodology of empirical research, especially computer-assisted qualitative text-analysis. E-mail: arno.heimgartner@uni-graz.at