



Walter Lorenz - Mentor of a critical European Social Work

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I.

In their recently published literature review of international social work (Homfeldt/Schneider 2006) the authors observe that, in Germany, internationalism does not always play the role that it should, given the increasingly global nature of society's problems and responsibilities. 'Although in the last ten years educational perspectives have become more international (focusing particularly on Europe), professional discussion is still largely confined to the national level' (ibid., p. 6). This observation holds true not only for Germany but, in varying degrees, also for other countries, despite international congresses and problem-orientated discussions at European level. On the other hand, reciprocal understanding and openness have grown through comparative analysis, to the benefit of all participants. A growing understanding is now becoming more evident, arising from the need to introduce regulations on a multiplicity of social issues, not all directly to do with social work. With others, Walter Lorenz in particular pushed for this, demanding critical European activity in this field. Of the publications that accompanied this process Walter Lorenz's 'Social Work in a Changing Europe' stands out. It first appeared in 1994 and has since been translated into several other languages. In 2006 came a second theoretically more substantial publication this time with the title 'Perspectives on European Social Work: From the Birth of the Nation State to the Impact of Globalisation'. In this book he points critically and evocatively to social work's roots in nation states but shows at the same time that purely national foundations for social policy and social work fail, on their own, to offer viable solutions in increasingly trans-national social arrangements.

For him the challenge of a European social work is to loose itself from traditional, national identifications without relinquishing them. What is needed is a form of critical rapprochement between these two ways of looking at things. Walter Lorenz's perspectives and subtly expressed hopes revolve around the potential and resources of civil society. 'The origins of social work and particularly of social work education do not ... lie within state structures but within the domain of civil society. The various starting positions were concentrated in a band of middle-class concerns, religious renewal, philanthropy and women's emancipation, working class and socialist ideas of self help and solidarity did not normally translate into social work training. Nevertheless, these value positions did create a space around social work within which the demands of the various state systems could be modified and re-interpreted and a professional profile of social work could develop across different value positions' (Lorenz 1994, p. 173). He sees the tasks of a trans-national social work as being to analyse and to draw more closely together commonalities (tasks, methods, ethical principles), differences (educational systems, professional awareness) and challenges (fighting for social justice, promoting autonomy).

In sum the considered comparison of concepts and working methods can generate funds of knowledge that act as impulses for an increasingly professional social work and equally help to bring about both the growth of structures for a European civil society (Lorenz 2006) and greater social justice for all. Only if these challenges are addressed in parallel is progress to be expected. The essential kernel of Walter Lorenz's scholarly work has its locus here: the location and foundation of social policy in Europe, the role of civil society as well as the threats to it from mechanisms of exclusion, racist thinking and related practices.

Put rather more abstractly one can speak of a concentration on two fixed points that he pursues single-mindedly. One of these is the new framing of 'the social' that he studied intensively from a philosophical-idealist perspective during his time in Cambridge and at the London School of Economics (LSE), and that he later experienced at first hand during the time he spent as a social worker in London's Docklands. He frequently returns indirectly to these roots both in the analytic sharpness of his descriptions of problems and in the social/political sketches that he draws in discussing the relationship between failed social initiatives and class and socio-economic exclusion. The experience he gained in England and his long, intensive academic work in Ireland undoubtedly fashioned a way of thinking which is as helpful in establishing a clear description of the problem as it is subsequently in identifying links with theoretical interpretations and explanations, not excluding the question of class in this process.

'All social professions are affected by changes in social policy because they are not and cannot be, in any of their fields, private enterprises that deal only with private transactions between people On the one hand the state is universally concerned to reduce public expenditure on social matters, a policy trend which is normally attributed to the effects of the globalisation of the economy and the necessity to keep national employment prospects competitive. On the other hand social policy remains a valuable source of political legitimacy for the state. The state needs to be seen as a caring state....' (Lorenz 1999).

With this statement Walter Lorenz also correctly captures the current discourse about the position of social work in Europe. On the one hand social work is organised by the state and therefore always also has the state's interests at heart and must on the other hand offer services that can and should in principle be repaid with loyalty. His thesis in this context is that 'the whole quest for uniformity and for a dominant, secure and uncontested position in society is evidence of a specific arrangement through which, all in all, social work seeks to hire itself out to the social state' (Lorenz 2000, p. 64).

According to its self-image as defined through international expert discussion, social work has a stake in social change and in the creation of a more just society. However social work must also, on self critical reflection, acknowledge that it is not politically strong, hindered as much by processes of professional deconstruction as by the continuing widening of its responsibilities and diffusion of its professional competences. The effort of social work to re-frame 'the social' according to the given conditions is, self evidently, not always achieved.

Walter Lorenz sees these problems very clearly and tries with great persistence to counter them. In the tradition of Anglo-Saxon social work and social policy he analyses central themes comprehensively, in particular, anti-racism, poverty and unemployment so that they encompass professional practice and thus highlight and demand both socially and professionally relevant competence profiles for social work.

II.

Since the education ministers from 45 European countries signed declarations (Bologna 1999, Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005 and now in London 2007) to create a unified framework for European higher education with arrangements for the reciprocal recognition of certificates, diplomas and single units of study (by means of the European credit and transfer system) the European dimension in education for the social professions has achieved even greater relevance.

Walter Lorenz's expertise has been much in demand in helping to address the questions of reforms in the degree structure in Europe. In his essays and discourses he has pointed out in timely, precise and reflective ways the snares to be expected, particularly if excessive performance requirements serve to cloud the real issues.

The same applies with respect to managerial forms of social work which can be described as social/political 'dead ends' if the guideline of the professionalisation of social services is not firmly enough established as the necessary guarantor of a professionally assured quality.

Through his work as an external examiner in the higher education system of the United Kingdom he gained a deep understanding of the requirements of these new consecutive curricula. He warns strenuously against too strong state regulation of quality requirements as standard specifications and equally against excessive control systems that are too closely bound up with a competitive, market orientated, credo. He thinks that this can only increase the influence of market orientated approaches in the realm of practical problem solving in the social domain.

Hirschler and Lorenz have looked back and established that this process is embedded in a wider context, from which the real meaning of this re-structuring of higher education is best understood. They refer to the European Union Lisbon Declaration (2000) which states that, by 2010, the Union will be the most competitive, dynamic, knowledge based economic zone in the world. A programme that supports this goal is 'education and training 2010' which is closely linked to the Bologna process. The first goal of the Bologna process is to create a European Higher Education Area. 'A knowledge based Europe' is to be achieved through the processes of standardisation, quality control, transparency, Europeanization and hierarchical development (Hirschler/Lorenz 2005, p. 5). Secondary goals are to:

- improve the links between degrees and professional qualifications,
- make higher education more accessible,
- develop up-to-date teaching and learning methods in the form of student-centred learning,
- promote the principle of life-long learning (ibid.).

This process offers the social professions the chance to help both in the formation of an international perspective for social work and of a Europe-wide social policy as well as supporting and creating structures for civil society.

'This form of social work as reflective practice is geared towards creating the conditions of social citizenship ... at social policy level. In addition to mediating the relationship between

civil society processes and state at national level this type of practice will increasingly have to engage with trans-national social policies and with international social movements such as they find their expressions in the move towards giving the European unification project a social dimension. This programme therefore contains the outline of what could be termed 'critical European social work' in the specific historical context of Europe' (Lorenz 2006, p. 18).

This perspective also offers a counterweight to the danger that internationalisation is simply confined to formal/structural aspects whilst neglecting the dimension of content. Walter Lorenz has been leading this debate for almost 20 years, steadily enhancing his reputation in the process.

According to Lorenz, the Bologna process can have positive effects in the sense mentioned above if, as well as introducing a common degree structure it leads to a substantive debate about the characteristics and specifics of educational systems and educational content in the different countries. In this way Lorenz does not see the individual characteristics of the different professional and academic traditions as a barrier to the process of Europeanization but, on the contrary, as a pre-condition.

'Although the parallels (and the misunderstandings that arise from them) between social work and social pedagogy have become almost legendary, they are by no means a special case. A closer look leads to the discovery of a multiplicity of titles that belong, more or less, to the group of social professions, for example *youth worker*, *care worker* in English speaking countries, *sociaalraadgiver*, *socionom* in Nordic countries and variations on the title of *educateur* as well as the attractive sounding '*animateur*' in Latinate countries. This multiplicity is likely to increase in the future because, for political reasons, the concept of social work is no longer highly rated in some countries with concepts like 'social manager' being valued more highly. This leads to the point that when it comes to the 'recognition' of qualifications we cannot have an uncritical 'free for all' (the more the merrier!). Rather this multiplicity demands that we pose the question of where, ultimately, the boundaries of social work should be drawn not around its periphery but around its heart. The centre of social work should not stand still but there are central points of contention to which the debate always returns and within which the prevailing historical and social meaning of the term 'social' itself must be wrestled with' (Lorenz 2002, p. 11).

III.

With reference to the field of higher education, the <Council Directive (89/48/EEC) of 21 December 1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years' duration> marks an important step in the history of European unification, dealing as it does with perspectives on the harmonisation of Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education. Differences in education systems and in the ways they link with the tertiary sector together with the diversity of final examinations and access routes were seen as hindrances to the desired 'mobility effect'. 'In terms of the remit of the EU this diversity constituted a problem to be resolved by the means of closer cooperation and coordination, associated with the promise of thereby enhancing the status of a professional field that was still struggling to rid itself of the image of a 'semi-profession' (Lorenz 2006a, p. 43).

For the field of the social professions the 'European Centre for Community Education - ECCE' has undertaken specific enquiries. The aim was critically to analyse the multiplicity of social professions in the context of their historical roots.

A Scientific Committee under the scholarly direction of Walter Lorenz and with members from 18 European countries studied the effects of Erasmus programmes on the social professions and presented its findings at the international Erasmus evaluation conference in Koblenz in July 1996 (Seibel/Lorenz 1996). As a consequence of this conference the European Consortium ECSPRESS was founded, supported by the European Commission as a thematic network.

The network pursued the following goals:

- Promoting the development of European dimensions in all aspects of education for the social professions,
- Building up expertise based on the experiences of the co-operative network created within the framework of Erasmus,
- A contribution to the systematic establishment of 'institutional contracts' within the framework of SOCRATES.

Over and above the content of the programme the structural framework requirements for this project are worth noting:

Three academic European organisations form the kernel of ECSPRESS:

- The European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) which is an independent branch of the International Association of Schools of Social Work brings together over 300 different European schools, universities and institutions in the field of social work (in the broader sense);
- The European Association of Training Centres for Socio-Educational Care Work (EATCSECW)¹ which as the organisation that represents post secondary education in the field of socio-pedagogical work (in the narrow sense) has around 80 members in Europe;
- The European Centre for Community Education (ECCE) that has member institutions in most European countries. Through its extensive interdisciplinary programmes ECCE promotes a critical, inter-cultural orientation within the social professions.

Other practice-orientated international organisations were also linked:

for the professional staff:

- the 'International Federation of Social Workers' (IFSW Europe),
- the 'International Association of Social Educators' (AIEJI-Europe),

¹ Now: FESET (Formation d'Éducateurs Sociaux Européens / European Social Educator Training)

for the field of professional practice:

- the 'Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives' (FICE),
- the 'International Council of Social Welfare' (ICSW) (Chytil/Seibel1999; Chytil et al 2000).

Looking at the themes listed below that stand out, the close relationship of these themes to Walter Lorenz's work is abundantly clear:

- the role of the social professions in the struggle against social exclusion;
- social professions and the changing social political context of Europe;
- European dimensions in the development academic curricula for the social professions.

The experience of this thematic network project resulted in the positive evaluation of the professional variety and richness of social work in Europe that Walter Lorenz characterises as a resource not as a problem. 'Perhaps somebody in the European Commission had the idea that the Thematic Networks would establish a kind of common standard which would represent the conditions under which courses and departments in newly eligible countries could co-operate with existing networks. But at end of the second year of ECSPRESS we recognise ever more clearly, that such standards do not exist and that it would not be desirable to work towards them' (Lorenz 1999a, p. 13).

A further lasting structural aspect of this project was that it drew in middle and eastern European countries (MOEL). The international conferences of ECSPRESS in Ostrava (1998), Modra (1999), and Kaunas (2000) considered themselves duty bound to recognise variety and for example supported the independent development of social work and social pedagogy in Poland and the Czech Republic (Seibel, 2001; Lorenz 2006a; Chytil 2007). In the course of the TNP the range of workshops broadened to include intercultural work, self help strategies, curriculum development, pre-conditions for social citizenship, work with offenders and human rights work. An open forum for the creation of new networks and partnerships was thus created, above all between east and west. Developing a European educational perspective was a real concern of this project although not in the sense of standardised criteria. 'Instead, ECSPRESS undertook a painstaking process of examining the meaning and value of existing diversity of training patterns, professional titles and practice traditions against the background of cultural patterns in social policy and in recognition of the historical nature of the requisite professional methodology (Lorenz and Seibel, 1998). The members of the TNP concluded that a decisive element of a common identity lay in the recognition of such a multidimensional diversity....' (Lorenz 2006a, p. 43).

IV.

The thematic network project that Walter Lorenz led was run during the time he was president of ECCE (1995-2005) to which he had belonged since 1988. The enduring influence of his activity and his engagement are published and documented in a variety of ways. In particular his active involvement in the development and implementation of a model for multi-lateral seminars and his contribution to the first European ECCE project (European dimensions in the education of youth workers) (1992) should be singled out.

Looking back, the project that he led in 1993 (anti-racist education in international youth work) was the basis for further research and for multi-lateral seminars on the theme of anti-racism within the ERASMUS programme framework, and prompted much fuller discussion of this subject (Aluffi/Lorenz 1995; Aluffi/Lorenz 1996, Aluffi et al 1999).

In the Erasmus network 'Inter cultural and anti racist social work and social pedagogy - Viennet' the themes of racism and anti-racist models were intensively worked through with Walter Lorenz's participation, demonstrating that very different approaches and ways of thinking exist with reference to the handling of cultural differences, each touching on different political traditions. In Germany for example the issues were to do with inter-cultural pedagogy and learning, the integration of immigrants and refugees and learning processes that were directed particularly to the majority of the population. In Great Britain, racism and anti-racism was the main theme (specifically anti-oppressive social work) which, first and foremost, aimed to strengthen the rights of the minority vis-à-vis the majority and to do away with inequality. Here the initiative started from the perspective of the minority who were demanding their rightful place in society. The misunderstandings that can surface if students and teachers from different backgrounds/origins and interpretive contexts come together to work at these themes are all too obvious. Terminological adaptation, mostly into English, often hides differences in meaning. In real situations the necessary processes of clarification do not take place. Bad feelings about other interpretations may persist, making future co-operation more difficult.

However if one sees the clash of 'alien perspectives' as a challenge it can, in certain circumstances, result in fresh developmental perspectives for individual work and herein lies the potential of seminars like this for educators. Here Walter Lorenz could use his prowess as a translator. For him the English language has become much more than a technical helpmate. His formal competence in its correct usage is so good that he is always a pleasure to follow and he offers his listeners a great deal of help with their own efforts to translate content and meaning. That he has mastered the 'lingua franca' of international social work so well is indeed a by product but one that is increasingly valued in these times of increasing European 'trans-nationality'.

Walter Lorenz also drew attention to social work's capacity to influence policy in the field of anti-racism 'the question of the relationship of social work to anti-racism brings into sharper, more precise definition the political character and engagement of the social professions (Lorenz 2006b, p. 164). By setting the European discourse within its proper socio-historical contexts, it becomes clear why distinct national discourses and related reactions to them can be perceived as problematic cultural differences. According to Lorenz the term 'anti-racist' sounds too militant, too partisan, too selective and above all too negative in some countries. The theme of anti-racism and social work creates unease. This cannot be dispelled by clarifying terms because the word 'race,' practically speaking, is only used in a neutral sense in English (the term 'race relations' is untranslatable). The political dimension to emphasise is, in his view, that anti-racism makes no claims to address those problems brought about primarily by migration but rather that it is about identifying pre-existing mechanisms of discrimination. From this perspective hierarchical structures can be analysed on the basis of the biological and cultural arguments characteristic of the prevailing history of a country. Social work should not avoid the question of how its relationship to this power system is structured, doing it however whilst shunting the necessary clarifications to methodological sidings.

The greatest cause and justification for paying explicit attention to concepts and methods of anti-racism are offered by the phenomenon of the radical right and neo fascism, above all amongst young people where racism is localised and therefore legitimised as a pedagogical task for the social professions. This gives them the chance to draw on social work's political relevance although, characteristically, the way they do it is to dress up political themes in pedagogical clothes to spare society the fundamental debate about the political nature of social problems. From the relationship of social work to anti-racism can be seen all too clearly how difficult it is for the political mandate of social work to assume a central position and how strong the pressure is, both from inside and outside the profession, to marginalise this engagement.

The award of a Jean Monnet chair 'Social Europe 1995-2001' at the National University of Ireland in Cork, with the task of developing curricula with a European orientation was made during this period of problem analysis and elucidation. His influence as founding editor of the first specialist European journal must also be mentioned. With the support of the Oxford University Press he started a project of the utmost importance. The 'European Journal of Social Work-The International Forum for Social Professions' gave European social work a scholarly voice for critical analytic discourse for the first time. It also gave a voice for an alternative or fuller depiction of social reality in debates with other disciplines as well as for social and political interpretations of social problems to which social work lays claim, whether in its theoretical or practical discourse.

V.

Meanwhile Walter Lorenz has left Ireland and the British Isles and has moved to Italy where, as a professor at the free university of Bolzano, he has been able to address even more intensively the second main theme of his personal profile and scholarly activity: to make clear that the European question is a social question and also a challenge for the future. His belief in a social Europe has become a given in the growing discussion about a new quality of life in this increasingly trans-national continent. Related proposals for a European social model will not, in his opinion, displace country specific regulations but it will increasingly be a matter of whether rules of European trade also come to be applied to social systems. 'Professional autonomy for the social professions is not a matter of perfecting their distance from political processes and to foster personality and identity development as purely psychological processes, but to make a positive contribution to the social and political conditions under which such processes led to social solidarity and equality in a society' (Lorenz 2006, p. 21). But here, as in other fields of social governance, there will increasingly be a body of rules that is, in the best sense, overwhelmingly European, not only out of necessity to take the European Union forward but also, and in particular, out of a growing recognition that this is the only way to find policies for increasingly serious problems like migration, unemployment, and poverty, that promote and result in acceptable ways forward to a greater extent than national regulations can ever hope to deliver. Walter Lorenz emphasises this point when, in this context, he addresses the question of the extent to which, and under what conditions, the present status of social work in Europe can further develop into a European social work.

For Walter Lorenz this does not mean standardisation and uniformity in the sense of a derivative, sufficient professional adaptation/competence. It means rather quality through diversity and mastery of a problem through expert knowledge that always defines its potential to explain social conditions within the contextual framework of 'the social.' More comparative European research is urgently needed to shed light on this (Lorenz 2003).

‘International comparisons show that underlying political changes run right through every political system and cultural tradition. Moreover different governments are using similar arguments about the effects of globalisation to explain and legitimise their lack of political room for manoeuvre. Organised resistance against this tendency is no longer possible at the national level because a positive representation of ‘the social’ in the sense of the redistribution of life chances and resources no longer has electoral value within national party politics...The Europeanization of the social professions means professions and educational programmes more thoroughly and consciously incorporating the concept of a social Europe because realising the possibilities of ‘the social’ now actually depends on this trans-national framework’ (Lorenz 2002, p. 16).

Walter Lorenz’s achievements as a reflective scholar, an inspirational educator and a forceful social critic are worthy of honouring with much gratitude on his 60th birthday.

The assembled European contributors to this volume as well as other colleagues from around the world are immensely thankful for the insights they have gleaned from getting to grips more intensively with his work. That this book could be published online in the international scholarly journal ‘Social Work and Society’ on his birthday’ is the result of teamwork made possible through friendship and appreciation for what he has done.

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