



## **The Emerging Paradigm Shift in Social Work - in the Context of the Current Reforms of European Social Work Education**

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### **Introduction**

The century-old profession of social work has been characterized, among other things, by ideological commitment and political alertness. However, it has also been accompanied by diverging positions and professional invisibility. This has been perceived as both a strength and a weakness for social workers among other traditional helping professions — of which most are now academic or striving for that.

It is argued here that social work is about to change its position, developing from the status of a semi-profession towards maturity and full professionalization.

For contemporary social work, the challenge is thus to reconstruct old experiences and narratives as professional integrity, visibility and power in a qualitative work-through process. The clarification and rethinking of themes such as invisible loyalties, dichotomous thinking, conflictual positions, and incompatible meaning of social work research are highlighted as crucial tasks on the path to professional maturity.

The increasing interest in and acknowledgement of theory and research in education and professional practice is, alongside an increased, although still ambivalent, emphasis on evidence – knowledge – or information-based practice, a sign of an epistemological change. New ways of thinking, whereby theory, practice, and research are viewed as an integrated, continuous interplay, may be defined as a paradigm-shift. This emerging paradigm shift and epistemological change in social work simultaneously implicates an identity transformation, a role shift.

Both first- and second-order change are necessary for facilitating developmental changes. First-order change can be achieved by structural reforms or technical interventions. On the other hand, processes of dynamically reconstructed outcomes imply second-order change, meaning that things become qualitatively different from before. The current reform taking place through the Bologna process is an example of this. A case illustration from the University of Iceland is presented where the pros and cons of the reform process are examined.

### **Social work development from the perspective of the history of science**

In philosophy and the history of science it is now customary to study the development of science in a perspective of contextually analyzed historical effects and connections of events, instead of only from the point of view of single events, linear processes or chronology. (Holton 1988). The development of disciplines may either be seen as mainly structured from within or from the outside. It can be assumed that the discipline of social work has mainly

been influenced by outside factors due to its frame of reference, its goals and role in society. This is logical, as social work developed in a context of radical social change and as a reaction to problems of individual adjustment in the turbulence of industrial revolution and urbanization during the late nineteenth century. Thus its primary position was one of response to circumstances and defense against injustice rather than analysis or active influence on developments. This genesis will probably always set its mark on the character of the profession. As it grows and approaches maturity through age and experience, however, other influences, e.g. developmental factors from inside, are gradually gaining more importance in the development of the profession. Maturity also implies an integrated self-image. In that context it has been claimed that disciplines vary in the degree of their maturity and may thus be divided into mature and immature disciplines. Mature disciplines develop their own autonomous existence which means a *common core* of (ethical) values, habits, methodological tools, and reproductional capabilities such as knowledge production and professional skills.

Thomas Kuhn introduced a new definition of the concept of *paradigm* in his influential work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1980). The concept had previously referred to a thought pattern in a scientific discipline or other epistemological context (Merriam-Webster 1900). Other contemporary experts on knowledge and science in relation to social development and social phenomena introduced different terms. Michel Foucault, in his writings on knowledge, power and disciplines (like social work), used *epistémè* (epistemology) and discourse for aspects of Kuhn's concept "paradigm" (Foucault 1980; Chambon et al. 1999). Kuhn adopted the concept of paradigm to refer to the set of practices that define a scientific discipline at a particular point in time. He relates it to his idea of acknowledging that different research subjects or disciplines require different methods and tools to suit different tasks. This was revolutionary, as well as his discussion about the different ways in which disciplines use their knowledge. The social sciences consequently began to realize that they were contextually of another kind than the natural sciences. Social phenomena were parts of culture, values, ideologies and habits, all of which are subject to change. They had naturally different qualities than the natural ones. Thus the research methods of the natural sciences could sometimes not apply to the subjects of social sciences at all. Different approaches and technical measurements had to be developed.

According to this, each academic subject and discipline has to develop a basic understanding of its own meaning and common concepts. Jerome Bruner discusses in his book *Acts of meaning* how meaning is "a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends upon the prior existence of a shared symbol system" (Bruner 1990, p. 69) and that it relies on "preconditions to construe the social world in a particular way ..." (Ibid, p. 73). The process of constructing meaning in any context is a response to historical circumstances. A profession's shared symbol system and co-created meaning shape its culture and common understanding (Bruner 1990; Gergen 2001).

This means that a discipline has to develop its own core of common understanding of its meaning. Its level of maturity is reflected in the coherence of its paradigm and how well it is developed.

A semi-profession's paradigm is lacking in professional maturity, commonalities and coherence. On the path towards maturity certain phenomena are stumbling blocks. Invisible loyalties, dichotomous thinking, heterogeneity and imbalances regarding attitudes and factual concern with research are such examples. They need to be worked through in favor of a

collective meaning of what we understand as professional competence. Identity reconstruction and educational reforms can develop in a co-creational process. According to a social constructivist view it needs to be processed through a narrative reconstruction on individual and group levels linked with social interactive processes in the educational and professional discourse (Gergen and Gergen 2004; Lindeman-Nelson 2001; Júlíusdóttir 2004).

### **Co-creation of the meaning of professional competence**

Structures and reforms or other instrumental interventions primarily imply first-order changes. Those are helpful in facilitating developmental processes. They can however never replace qualitative second-order change obtained through processes of working out (Watzlawick et al. 1974). Changing attitudes and old mentalities together with an elaboration of professional self-understanding of common meaning are indeed preconditions for successful structural changes. Some of these are examined in the following.

### ***Transforming old invisible loyalties into visibility and power***

Social work has developed through identification with – and been generated by – conflicts, social turbulence, inequality and conflicting interests in modern industrial society, as mentioned above. The beginning of the discipline thus has both ideological, political and religious attachments to the moral ideals of philanthropy, social reform and human rights. For the modern academic discipline and profession, the conflicting and often hidden loyalties to these roots have probably created more obstacles than advantages. At the same time, the strength has doubtless been, and hopefully always will be, the emphasis on professional ethics and holistic approaches. The heart of social work, its mission and vision, and its empathetic qualities must therefore never be denied or erased. We must acknowledge, teach about and read the history. Students must be trained to respect the ideology behind the remarkable social contributions of the pioneers. Seeing them as role models in the perspective of the conditions of their times motivates us to keep the pride of the social work profession abreast. Only by acknowledging the efforts and achievements of the pioneers is it possible to shape the conditions to feel *entitled* to professional autonomy (Júlíusdóttir 1999). It is important to remember that Jane Addams (1964) struggled for socio-environmental improvements. Her socio-scientific endeavors were appreciated in that she was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace in 1931. It is also crucial to refer frequently to Mary E. Richmonds' writings (1917; 1922) about the importance of scientifically based practice and Bertha Reynolds' (1942) contributions to learning and teaching in the practice of social work.

Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) presented a theory of *invisible loyalties* according to which it is not possible to be entitled to growth to a further extent than the obligating loyalty to the past (history of pity) allows for. Loyalty to historically created conditions and obligating commitment to clients may thus appear as obstacles against higher professional achievements and autonomy, even reflected as a taboo against professional visibility (Júlíusdóttir 2004).

In spite of powerful role models from the past it seems that the initial basis of strong involvement with and empathic feelings for badly situated clients appealed strongly to the profession and its educators. Interest in client work was seen as almost antagonistic to theoretical knowledge and empirical research, a conflict which reached its climax in the nineteen sixties and seventies. The message was that one was *either* a practitioner and true to the “parental/caregiver role” *or* a theoretician. Impending tasks and daily obligations would be given priority over research. Short-term political involvement was thought to be more important than research-based developmental work. Strong and demanding loyalty to clients

practically prevented the social worker from professional development? Paying attention to theory, developmental projects, or research in the professional role was even portrayed as ethical betrayal of clients. Underlying this, however, was ambivalence towards self-realization and insecurity of entitlements. Research on the “caregiver-syndrome” has revealed different forms of such insecurity and ambivalences, often related to individual factors of health, or family background, which certainly needs more probing but will not be discussed further here (see Black et al. 1993; Deal 1999; Jurkovic 1997; Lackie 1983; Marsh 1988; Rompf and Royse 1994; Russel et al. 1993; Siebert 2004).

### ***Transforming dichotomous thinking into integration***

Some conflictual issues inherent in professional doubt about entitlement as described above are often expressed in *dichotomous thinking*. As is well known from gender studies, dualism usually reflects resistance which thwarts development and empowerment (Butler 1990; Honneth 1997; Júlíusdóttir 1997). Therefore signs of dichotomous thinking in social work, long existing in relation to old loyalties, now remain to be worked through.

Hidden and open agendas in the endeavors to shake off dichotomous thinking call for further clarification. Here they will only be cursorily mapped. Examples of these agendas are conflicts (i) about priority of different elements of social work curriculum, i.e. between the theoretical part, practicum and research; (ii) between professional foci in different domains, i.e. between client work, administration and research; (iii) between ideological commitment and theoretical involvement. These conflicting views are often reflected by viewing academia and field as “different worlds” or separate epistemological domains, expressed as “we don’t speak the same language,” reflecting how the *meaning* of social work has been internally divided.

Some imbalances and conflicts between areas of professional practices may also appear, creating tensions between e.g. criminal justice, educational social work, social services and health services. Another one is between high-level versus street-level professionalism such as in prevention-research-policy as opposed to care-control-treatment. Another dichotomy is the creation of knowledge (by means of research) as opposed to the application of knowledge. This is also exemplified by the habit of organizing practitioners’ conferences separately from researchers’. Finally there are conflicts of interest regarding visible or invisible loyalties regarding client versus personal self on the one hand and regarding the client versus profession on the other, as described above. Both can be seen in terms of a discrepancy between aspirations and self-evaluation.

A recent Icelandic study on theoretical awareness and research activity among Icelandic social workers revealed a certain degree of imbalance and signs of discrepancies (Júliusdóttir and Karlsson 2006). The discrepancies were revealed in that social workers in one field were more likely than those in another to seek further education, emphasize and participate in research. The discrepancy between what social workers wanted and what they actually did was reflected in that the majority of respondents rated importance of research quite high while their own research activity or research-related activity was rated as restrictive. It was also found that in spite of substantial research training in the educational program for Icelandic social workers (four general courses on social science research methods and an additional one on ethics and paradigms in social work research), many stated that more training was needed. Fieldwork supervisors stressed the importance of linking theory and research results to practice, but few actually had done so. Discrepancies between fields and levels also revealed inconsistencies and ambivalences implying an ideological gap between research and practice.

The results implied a rift in the profession on different levels and domains. Several indications of this are to be found in recent Swedish research by Dellgran and Höjer (2003) regarding imbalances and discrepancies. The dichotomous thinking revealed in the results is divisive and diffuses energy, besides impeding professional solidarity. Issues related to the juxtaposition of autonomy against dependency, visibility against invisibility, assertiveness against submissiveness (towards the workplace), consistency against imbalances, are all crucial in this regard.

These hidden conflict areas need to be analyzed further through research, in order to stimulate discussion and knowledge-based insights. It can be argued that the abandonment of dichotomous thinking would open up new interactions and influences. This notion is presented elsewhere by referring to *fluidity between levels* (Juliusdottir et al. 2002). The question of a developed balance between the levels of theory, research, and practice within the profession, and between countries has been discussed elsewhere as one of professional survival (Juliusdottir 1999; Marthinsen 2005).

### *Clarifying the meaning of social work research*

The problem of discrepancies and tensions related to dichotomous thinking often relates to a general critical attitude and doubt towards academization, theorizing practice and manifest research activity in the profession. Further examination, analysis and definition of the concept of social work research would enhance its development.

However, social work research and theoretical ambition is currently developing with great force. Although met with some resistance and skepticism, a powerful information campaign, published papers, numerous conferences and seminars have stimulated a fruitful debate about social work research in the Nordic countries (Cochrane 1972; Chalmers 1993; Kanoja 2005). Varied attitudes towards evidence-based practice and antagonistic views on systematic quality control through RCT (randomized controlled trials) have also been expressed (Mansson 2003; Angel 2003).

The three-year-old Nordic Campbell Collaboration, NC2, has the goal of improving quality controls of social work in social services, the educational system and in the criminal justice establishment. At the same time, the function of the Campbell Collaboration is to bridge the gap between practice and research. This is manifested in that the Nordic board is comprised in equal numbers of academics and practitioners or administrators. Practitioners, administrators, scientists and politicians are invited in equal numbers to the annual seminars and conferences, which opens up possibilities for dialogue between the different spheres. This ideology is the same as lay behind the foundation of the Nordic Associations of Social Work Research (Forsa) in 1985 ([www.forsa.nu](http://www.forsa.nu)). This gives hope that the separate seminars – one for the practitioners and one for the educational programs in Nordic social work – will be abandoned and re-established as joint professional conferences.

The uncertain status of social work research requires further processing both within the educational and the professional discourse. In order to develop a collective meaning of the concept, elaborations of its diverse connotative dimensions are needed.

Thus the concept of social work research also relates to research activity in different dimensions, forms and kinds. Consciousness of the importance of a common conceptual framework is a prerequisite for general acknowledgement of research as an integrated part of the professional self. Some central dimensions of the concept will now be looked at but they

need to be penetrated further in the educational and professional discourse. Only by going through such a dialogue of clarification within the educational programs and between academia and field is it realistic to have aspirations for the acceptance and legitimacy of social work research. Mapping some of the relevant dimensions may serve as a basis for further examination.

One dimension is *research thinking*. It entails being positively disposed towards research. It appears in the *custom* of giving priority to *reading* and digesting theoretical texts from professional journals and books; *referring* to research, theory and results in professional discussion; *applying* theories and research results in professional practice on a daily basis. This means integrating research with professional tasks and linking the social worker's own professional contribution to social work research in interdisciplinary team-work.

Another dimension is *research production and dissemination*. It is implemented by the social worker's own initiative, responsible participation in a research team or by using certain parts of research projects in broader contexts. The dissemination of scientific knowledge relating to social work is crucial for the benefit of the client group, for the professional image of social work and its reputation and status in society. Mindful of the target group, all channels are relevant for the dissemination of social work research. It may be colleagues, clients, interdisciplinary groups or the general public. The research topics and scientific results may be presented as open lectures, in closed seminars or at conferences, as publications in journals, newspapers, or in mass media in general.

A third dimension is research *methodology*. It has to do with the acknowledgement of different methodological approaches, the ability to apply different techniques, depending on the topic in question. Furthermore, the core aim of scientific *methodology* for the profession in general, i.e. creating a solid basis for enhancing development of professional concepts, new methods and tools. The various emerging methodological approaches are without doubt furthering the development, acceptance and suitability of research as integrated parts of professional competence. In a pragmatic subject like social work the golden rule of the *means to serve the goal* is especially applicable and relevant.

Scholarly reports and systematic reporting about developmental projects have been some of the most firmly established elements of research activity in social work. Evaluation research, including consumer satisfaction and user involvement studies, is also developing in a fruitful direction (Dahlberg and Vedung 2001; Julkunen 2004). Furthermore, there is increased emphasis on practice research and practitioner research (Ramien 2004). As for methodological development, two issues are waiting to be resolved. On the one hand, we have the unfruitful (once again dichotomous) tension between quantitative and qualitative research, which needs to be worked through and diffused. This tension is unfruitful and invalid because it is not a question of having to pick between two alternatives. The question is mainly of being able to apply these respective research methods as they fit the actual subject and research question. On the other hand we have an enormous challenge ahead: that of developing new concepts and tools for measurement and assessments pertaining to basic research standards.

A paradigm shift in social work implies moving away from conflictual positions such as those outlined above, towards a coherent, scientifically based practice, where the category of social work is recognized as being capable of *both applying and producing theoretical professional knowledge*. Epistemologically this reflects a second-order change in social work; a more coherent view of its *meaning*.

Firmly based reformative endeavors such as *structures*, standards and declarations can serve as helpful tools for qualitative improvement of social work education. They favor the integrated science-practice perspective produced by this paradigm shift in social work. But before we are able to apply these endeavors effectively it has to be realized that (although being a goal in the European policy) they are *tools* no less than *goals* in the process of educational change.

### **Structures as tools – three types**

The goal of the Bologna Declaration is to reduce differences and enhance cohesion, comparability and compatibility of higher education in a global perspective, within and between countries (Bologna Report 1999). With regard to social work this provides a strategic opportunity to augment professional growth and progress. A successful implementation of such educational reforms (as first-order change) is nevertheless strongly dependent on concurrent efforts through a relational dialogue to consolidate the *meaning* of professional social work.

We will now examine how different structures are helpful tools for reform towards more harmonized educational systems and programs. Through a reflexive process of academization conditions are created for a dialogue through which second-order developmental processes may simultaneously benefit.

### ***Academic setting as a formal structure***

- (1) *The institutional status* of the educational program of social work favors the formal structure of higher education of university, i.e. an academic setting. That means *belonging to, interacting with, contributing to, talking the same language as, identifying with and influencing as well as being influenced by* other academic disciplines. Being included in the academic culture creates new perspectives in a reflexive process beneficial to interdisciplinary understanding and mutual respect.
- (2) *Professional identity* is empowered when academic role models are complementary to professional role models (in practicum). Being a part of the culture of other academic disciplines facilitates unconditioned motives for training and active participation in the social worker's *own knowledge production* through *research* and other *theoretical activity*. Most of the traditional academic disciplines (medicine, theology, law) give theoretical training within academic settings with strong links to the field. The integration of these two basic domains of professional training brings social work confidence and status in society.
- (3) *Professional coherence and comparability* gained through a universal educational structure strengthens professional advocacy on a global level. Too many educational programs in social work are neither academic, consistent nor compatible with one another. The existence of non-academic programs creates bothersome misunderstandings of the professional advocacy and impedes confidence on micro and macro levels. Such differences in training create rifts in the international profile of the profession, in addition to preventing compatibility and mobility in times of increasing globalization and shared labor markets.

### ***Standards – educational and professional***

Becoming an integrated discipline through the creation of a common educational baseline and recognition of minimum academic and specialist standards, is a matter of professional

sustainability (Juliusdottir 1999). The early strivings of different educational and professional associations of social work (NASW in the USA, IASSW, EUSSW) have been met with ignorance and sometimes resistance, more in Europe though than in USA. According to Lyons and Manion (2004, p. 94) this tension is decreasing due to closer collaboration between fields, areas and levels.

In the Nordic countries several attempts have been made in the last twenty years to introduce ideas and suggestions to shape a more consistent form, policy and content of social work programs. Based on research on the development of educational programs in the Nordic countries, two distinct patterns have been identified (Juliusdottir and Petersson 2004; Juliusdottir 1996). One is the *Specialized Field Model*, which emphasizes relevance to the field, while the other is referred to as the *Integrated Research Model*, which emphasizes research. An emerging third model has been proposed: *the Integrated Social Work Education and Training Model* which brings together the strengths of the two other models into a single coherent framework. We can currently see clear signs of a development towards this in the Nordic countries. *Integration* subsumes the focus on research. The term *training* suggests the legitimacy and importance of the field. Viewing it from a process perspective the field relevance is something that the Specialized Field Model should not lose and the Integrated Research Model to some extent has to validate. The term *integrated* should also be understood as the key word for curriculum development.

#### ***Main issues of the Bologna Declaration (BD)***

The Sorbonne declaration from May 1998 pictures the creation of a European area of higher education “as a key way to promote citizens’ mobility and employability and the continent’s overall development”. This vision was already expressed in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. It was also stressed that European universities’ independence and autonomy should ensure the continuous adaptation of higher education and research systems to changing needs, society’s demands and advances in scientific knowledge. This applies manifestly to the basic assumptions of social work.

The European Ministers’ Group (Bologna Report 1999) described, analyzed and compared higher education in general, including an overview of learning structures and a comparative analysis of the different systems embodying these structures. It has made recommendations for achieving greater *compatibility and comparability of the educational systems*. In more concrete terms, the co-ordination of European policy involves reaching as soon as possible the following objectives:

1. An adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees.
2. An adoption of a system based on two main cycles, *undergraduate* (3–4 years, depending on the kind of study) and *graduate* (master’s of 1–2 years and doctoral of 3–4 years), referred to as “3+2+3”.
3. An adoption of a *system of credits*, the ECTS system.
4. Promotion of *mobility* for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff. For this purpose, the co-ordination *of the academic year*, incl. *studies in semesters*, is made possible.
5. Promotion of co-operation in *quality assurance*.



6. Promotion of European dimensions regarding: curriculum development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research.

These general demands are valid for all fields of education but there are also specific demands made for social work education.

***Some practical aspects of implementing the Bologna Declaration – A case illustration***

In the Nordic countries, social work education involves 3–3½ or 4 years of professional training, regardless of whether the programs are academic, approved by law, research based, have their own Code of ethics, with formal specialist license, or not.

The Icelandic social work program is academic, situated in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland. The title “social worker” is protected by legislation 1975 on social work practice and education. A new paragraph on specialization was added 1992. The process of structural reform according to BD is underway and the steps needed for implementation have been planned. This means that the old program will not be taught after 2006, and the first admission to the rehabilitated MA-program will be in autumn 2008.

Changing a four-year course with a possibility of adding a professional master, either an MSW-degree or an academic MA-degree, requires considerations of professional interest and policy.

Studies towards a BASW are open to all university students, without any specifications exceeding the University’s general requirements. BASW students acquire basic knowledge about social structure, social theories, research, human behavior, social organizations and services. They are not provided with qualified (supervised) field practice training. They are only offered an introductory course on social legislation, and they do not do a professionally linked research project. BASW students are prepared for various tasks in the social field, without having the qualifications or capacity to take professional responsibility on their own, nor have they the right to use the legally protected title “social worker”. A BA-thesis should be based on theoretical knowledge rather than an empirical research project.

Applicants to the MA-program complete course requirements similar to those of the MSW-degree, but the thesis is longer, while requiring stronger methodological capabilities. In the second year of graduate studies the student completes elective (diploma) courses in an area of specialization (school, criminal justice, etc.) An admissions committee is responsible for the enrollment of students.

A doctoral program will be made available by autumn 2006.

The following benefits and disadvantages of the reform process are currently under elaboration:

**Benefits:**

- Differentiating clearly between undergraduate and graduate studies creates the possibility of the admission of an unlimited number of students to the undergraduate level.

- Distinguishing between undergraduates and graduates in social work education will give the latter increased esteem in society, in line with their increased competence.
- Delineating the difference between *general assistance*, or auxiliary tasks on the undergraduate level and *professional responsibility* has ethical and qualitative relevance for clients, staff and authorities in the field of social work.
- Graduates of the BASW program in different positions in society will spread knowledge about the profession of social work.
- The Department of Social Work benefits from the reforms, as its finances are based on the number of completed ECTS credits and the number of students.
- Larger numbers of undergraduates offer a broader selection of students for graduate studies.
- Gate-keeping is facilitated by admission requirements to the graduate level, as professors have been acquainted with individual students during undergraduate studies.
- The fairness of strict requirements (grades, experience, personal statements, personal tests, confirmations/reference letters) is guaranteed by more solid conditions.
- A two-year graduate program creates a solid ground for professional social work.
- More profound knowledge of social work methods, specialization, techniques and qualified practice training will be processed and incorporated in the long term.
- Social work research, ideological framework, techniques and implementation will be integrated with practice to a greater extent than before.
- Stressing the difference between professional areas at the graduate level allows for improved academic and professional skills training, emphasizing both general and specialized knowledge.
- The MSW-model has been a requirement for the professional title of “social worker” since 1922 in the USA. It is professionally acknowledged and may be said to be “evidence based”.
- Making the (5 year) master’s degree, MA or MSW, a requirement for licensed professional social work improves general quality and the collective status of the profession in Europe.

### **Disadvantages**

- Some students would only finish BASW and feel unsatisfied or even have problems finding satisfactory jobs.
- Many students would not succeed in completing requirements for the professional title.

- Those with a BASW-degree may threaten the image of social work and compete with qualified social workers for positions (In Iceland the shortage of qualified social workers) makes the public and even employers confused about advocacy.
- Difficulties in monitoring that they would only be employed as assistants, youth leaders or general counselors etc. in accordance with their training.
- Difficulties in ensuring qualified practice placements under supervision (as required) from a licensed social worker.
- The Nordic professional associations have traditionally acknowledged each other's educational programs. The reform – if not accepted in all the Nordic countries – will require new agreements.

At this stage it is easier to see the benefits than the disadvantages. They remain, however, to be examined further. All of them relate to issues which need to be processed and evaluated before, during and after the reform.

### **Concluding remarks**

The thesis of this article is that a reflexive co-creational process is necessary for successful educational reform favoring a transformation of the professional role and institutional status of social work. It has been argued that self-understanding and preparedness for change needs to be worked out in a close and simultaneous process of:

- a paradigm shift and adaptation of new perspectives where dichotomous thinking and antagonism is rejected.
- narrative reconstruction of the professional identity on the individual and collective level. A campaign like the NASW four-point program year 2004 is a case in point. Collective professional associations and joint conferences for both practitioners and researchers are another example.
- favorable structural changes in accordance with the Bologna process.

In 1996 the *Council of Europe* presented a report by “The Steering Committee on Social Policy”. In their work entitled *The initial and further training of social workers taking into account their changing role* the authors stress the overall importance of empowering social work education in a changing Europe by stating the following:

The pace of social and economic change has suddenly accelerated from a leisurely jog to a sprint. Inevitably, many of those who cannot keep up with the suddenly accelerated pace, or who are trampled down by it, end up in contact with the profession of social work. That is as it should be: because that is one of the primary reasons why this profession exists. Yet, the profession of social work is not a variety of magic; often its practitioners and those who educate them are nearly as disoriented – or even frightened – as anyone else. In fact, sometimes social workers are even more disoriented and frightened than the general public, because they experience more quickly than most the gap between social reality and the institutional and financial arrangements which society provides to deal with it. (Council of Europe, 1996)

These words are not less valid today, but ten years later we may add: A more coherent, unified profession with a strong inner core of consistency and outside professional autonomy is better equipped to act as an agent of resilience. A paradigm shift in which theory and research go hand in hand with a transformation of the professional identity opens up new possibilities of empowerment. When social workers feel entitled to acknowledgement, the profession will be capable of dealing effectively with diversity, fragmentation and challenging individual and global changes in our contemporary life.

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