

## Editorial

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European social work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is facing many ongoing transformations, triumphs, challenges and dilemmas. One simple reason why we should always look to our history when grappling with current issues is to remind us that many of the 'current issues' in practice and policy have historical and often transnational antecedents (e.g. Lorenz 1994 and 2006). To know this assures us that whatever the challenges faced, we have some reference point to consider how similar problems were dealt with in different moments and in the various ideological contexts of the transforming European nation states. Indeed there are many arguments which can be made as to why history is important in the present such as: a means of problematising the present; preserving the past; understanding the origins and changing nature of dilemmas such as how one intervenes effectively to protect children; emphasizing continuities and discontinuities across time and space and so on (e.g. Skehill 2008).

This special issue presents the work of one active Network interested in the European history of social work and gender and shows through a few selected articles, the huge value of historical perspective and the insight that can be offered on the profession from well developed, inter-disciplinary and research informed studies. In September 2001 at the social work conference in Mainz a workshop was organized dedicated to historiography of social welfare and women in Europe between 1900-1950. As a first exploration of the possibilities of transnational gender perspectives on history of social work, the workshop gathered enthusiastic scholars throughout Europe. Many had been the lonely 'only ones' in their branch of study in their own countries, and thus the participants in the workshop enthusiastically agreed to continue working together to build further co-operation. *The Network for Historical Studies of Gender and Social Work in Europe* was established in 2001 coordinated by professor Sabine Hering, University of Siegen and professor Berteke Waaldijk, University of Utrecht. It was made possible under the practical care and maintenance by Dagmar Schulte, University of Siegen.

One of its major funded projects related to the history of social work in nine Eastern European projects (see for e.g. Waaldijk in this issue). Indeed, over the past decade the network members have been active in discovering histories of professional social work, social welfare, social care, various traditions of voluntary work and the broader context of social policy and welfare states in various parts of Europe and between the nation states. These inter-disciplinary studies have paid particular emphasis on gender and gender-related issues. The completed empirical research of the network, together with the pedagogical activities of associated networks which members have also been involved in such as ATHENA and ATGENDER (networks for European gender studies partly funded by the programs of European Union), has led to innovative developments relating to teaching European social

work history from a gender perspective ( for e.g. Leskosek 2009), [http://www.erg.su.se/content/1/c6/06/44/80/Teaching\\_Gender\\_in\\_Social\\_Work.pdf](http://www.erg.su.se/content/1/c6/06/44/80/Teaching_Gender_in_Social_Work.pdf) and a teaching module with open access in European history of social work <http://www.fhnw.ch/socialwork/international/module-history-of-social-work/>

The network has also promoted historical knowledge on the development of social welfare and social work especially in the Eastern parts of Europe (e.g. Hering 2009, Hering & Waaldijk 2006). Through these various activities, the network succeeded in establishing an innovative academic forum for comparative European debate. It has provided possibilities for transnational and cross-disciplinary comparisons especially regarding the balance of the activities of state welfare and civil society, and the impact of men and women in them. It has also provided, for example, possibilities to reconstruct the relevance of the previous international networks in the social field in connection with the development of various traditions of European welfare states (e.g. Schilde & Schulte 2005, Hering & Waaldijk 2003).

Now the network is celebrating its 10th anniversary with this special issue on History of social work, social care and gender in Europe which reflects and celebrates the outcomes of the network in the past, and at the same takes a step forward. The idea of special issue was launched with an open call for abstracts for the network in spring 2010. The research articles published in this issue have been selected based on their representative variety, in terms of the country of origin of the authors; the range of data and sources used; disciplinary breath and the variety of underlying theoretical assumptions. The articles have gone through a peer review process. They give a flavor of the nature of the work of the Network and for those whose interest is excited by the diverse and interesting themes addressed, the dedicated work of the Network leaders has meant that there are many other valuable sources, referred to below, which give a more complete overview of the historical research into the history of gender and social work in Europe over the past decade.

In this special issue Berteke Waaldijk – basing her work on the results of the network and related research - constructs a fascinating and vivid comparative history of the different stances professional social workers have taken and been forced to take in the often stormy political conditions of the European nation states during the past century. This includes some countries with colonial and post colonial social contexts which have shaped the nature of relations and the development of social work practice. Waaldijk draws from a range of work carried out by the network and gives a great insight into one of the most significant research projects of the network referred to as SWEEP which was focused on the histories of social work in nine Eastern European countries. Through reference to this and related research, her paper requires us to engage in critical reflection on the origins and developments of our professions in certain spaces and places in the past and to take responsibility for not only the positive transformative influences social work has had, but also the more repressive and constraining policies and practices we have been complicit in.

Hering's essay makes another important comparative contribution based on current research which is focused on the issue of gender politics in Eastern Europe during state socialism, and after 1989 in the context of neo- liberalism. Her discussion raises many contradictions for women during both eras which are against the common knowledge and the publicly declared policies of governments. It was not only freedom women in these countries gained!

Timo Harrikari from Finland, Gisela Hauss from Switzerland, Vesna Leskosek from Slovenia, and Kristina Popova from Bulgaria write their analyses in the particular context of their own

nation states and without cross-country comparisons as such. However, in the light of the publications of the network and other works listed in the bibliography, we know that their discussions have great relevance to what happened behind their borders.

Leskosek writes about the various ideologies of motherhood based on previous international feminist scholarship in addition to her own analyses with Slovenian data; she demonstrates how these ideologies have been everywhere in the Western world and have influenced not only the nature of child care, welfare and protection but social work more generally. - She shows how it was the important alliance with mothers which brought modern social work profession for families into existence e.g. in France (Donzelot 1980). And she demonstrates how those who fell outside of the ideal of motherhood- such as unmarried mothers – were judged from an idealized notion of family.

Harikari focuses on the delayed making of child welfare legislation in Finland on the 19<sup>th</sup> and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His analysis grounds on the idea of multilevel historical time by Braudel and takes advantage of extensive contextualization of the process. His data includes parliamentary papers like national committee reports, diaries and discussions by the MPs. Among other themes, his results open up the gendered nature of the legislative process; how the political processing was connected to the gender of the agents, e.g. the need for the Child Welfare Act was strongly argued by the first female MPs with working class background and ideology.

Gisela Hauss' article makes an interesting contribution to our present knowledge about the often slightly hidden regulation of the labor force by the means of social work, and about the transforming relationship of labor control and social work. Her article builds its arguments on three local Swiss case studies of poor relief or social work and considers what was deemed necessary and possible as a means to working out the suitable working class labor qualities of the time. This theme is one less explored in histories of social work and while specific to Switzerland, it has strong resonance for the present labor market practices and processes transnationally.

Popova offers a detailed, descriptive historical account of the development of public health nursing in Bulgaria and the subsequent construction of social work as a result of this in the 1930's. Using original and new archival data on the practices of the new professions, Popova makes a significant contribution to building knowledge and understanding of how early social work emerged in Bulgaria though a mixture of local and national policy making vis-à-vis international (mostly from the USA) influences led in particular by the early Bulgarian public health nurses who went to train abroad and international figures – often involved in transnational organizations such as the Red Cross – who spent time with the new professionals observing, teaching and training.

Maria Maiss's historical portrait of Ilse Arlt from Austria offers an insight into the work of one of the super female pioneers of European social work in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ( e.g. Hering & Waaldijk, 2003; 'historical portraits' series in *European Journal of Social Work*). She developed scientific analysis of poverty and developed welfare science and social work discipline ambitiously long before they became established in the rest of Europe. Arlt is also representative example of the fruitful connections between the first global wave of feminism and social work. However, for political reasons her work became forgotten for decades which is not a unique fate – the same has happened with her female contemporaries.

The contributions of this special issue altogether make visible how ideas and ideologies have travelled not only over the borders of nation states but from early on all over the European continent and also from one continent to another and back again. North America in particular has played a very important part in this both as a receiver of ideas, and an innovator in social interventions which over the past decades have greatly enriched both women's struggle for more humane welfare as well as the development of European social work in general. In the present time when globalization is importantly contributing to the social problems social workers deal with throughout Europe, this kind of past pushes us strongly towards increasing exchange not only in research but in teaching the future generation of practitioners. But these papers are only a sample of the work of network members. As indicated in the bibliography, over the past 10 years, many publications have been developed which literally open up brand new histories for some countries, especially those which we refer to as Eastern Europe, as well as offering new perspectives and insights into more established Western histories. The greatest strength of the papers in this issue, and accompanying publications, has been the way in which gender has been considered in a nuanced and varied manner; the range of careful methods used to study history from different disciplinary perspectives and the fact that through the work of the network, one 'myth' has been challenged and demonstrably disproven: that is the view that under socialism, there was no such thing as social work. Throughout Europe, we have much to learn from the new understandings the work of the network has contributed to of social work under different political regimes and this understanding is vital for the present in terms of maximizing the benefits of learning from cross-country and transnational comparisons and shared learning.

Last, but not least: As everyone involved in researchers' network activities is well aware, it can be difficult to sustain the work of a network that has gained some core funding via focused research themes and related teaching projects but on the whole has managed to survive through collegiality, cooperation and creative management of resources available. Such commitment is driven by a belief in the value and importance of the process and outcomes associated with this vibrant, diverse and effective network. At present, there are major challenges the network needs to address, such as core funding to support a strong web presence and to continue to employ a coordinator. The present map of the past in European social work traditions and professions has less white spots and more exiting options for future directions in research than ten years ago, however, there are still a number of hidden details in every special field of transnational social work or social care practice to be discovered by cross-European scholars.

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**Skehill Caroline** (2008) Editorial. *Looking Back While Moving forward: Historical Perspectives in Social Work*. Special Edition of the *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol 38: 4.

### **Open access resources for teaching comparative Histories of Social Work in Europe:**

**Leskosek, Vesna** (ed.) (2009) *Teaching Gender in Social Work. Teaching with Gender. European Women's Studies in International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms*.

[http://www.erg.su.se/content/1/c6/06/44/80/Teaching\\_Gender\\_in\\_Social\\_Work.pdf](http://www.erg.su.se/content/1/c6/06/44/80/Teaching_Gender_in_Social_Work.pdf)

E-learning teaching Module History of Social Work, coordinated by **Gisela Hauss**

<http://www.fhnw.ch/socialwork/international/module-history-of-social-work/>

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