

On the contradictions of activation policies for professional social work – ‘welcome visits for new-borns’ in the framework of early childhood intervention¹

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1 Introduction

Since the 1980s, a paradigmatic shift in welfare state arrangements of OECD-countries can be observed, as new modes of welfare production have been implemented: before this shift, traditional welfare programs focused on the compensatory alimentation of citizens. Individuals were granted legal claims to welfare benefits to secure against social risks. The benefits were largely universalized and standardized (Dingeldey, 2011, p. 129). In contrast, the new formations of welfare state arrangements that emerged with the paradigm shift are primarily based on *preventative policies, social investment policies, and personalized social services*. The resulting, new architecture of welfare state arrangements can be broadly described as *Welfare Service States* (Bonvin, Otto, Wohlfarth, & Ziegler, 2018, p. 2). Personalized social services are becoming an increasingly important component of this new arrangement. In contrast to these rather standardized welfare benefits, the criteria of eligibility and entitlements in the context of personal social services “are more individualized and depending on personal behavior,” (Wohlfarth, 2019, p. 5) and professional discretion. It becomes evident that within the framework of Welfare Service States, there is a shift from the unconditional granting of social rights to a granting that is more dependent on the behavior or willingness of the beneficiaries to cooperate.

Against this background, a debate has developed in the field of social work on the significance of social rights and social citizenship (e.g. Schaarschuch, 1998a, 1998b; Lister, 1998; Muetzelfeldt, 2000; Wagner, 2009, 2013; Schlingensiepen-Trint, 2019). Among other things, it is discussed which implications these transformations of welfare states have on social work which is a constitutive component of welfare state arrangements, and on the concept of citizenship. The discourse about Welfare Service States corresponds to the German debates about the *activating state* and its consequences for social work that have been ongoing since the 1990s and will be the focus of this paper.

There is broad agreement in the socio-pedagogical discourse that social work does not remain unaffected by the new logics and rationalities of the activating state (e.g. Kessl & Otto, 2003; Dahme, Otto, Trube, & Wohlfahrt, 2003; Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2005; Dollinger & Raitchel, 2006; Büschken, 2017). However, there is no consensus on how the relationship between the state, social policy, and social work can be conceptualized. Critical theorizations often describe this relationship as deterministic: activating social policy strategies lead, more or

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less, directly to an *activating social work*. Such deterministic perspectives are mostly based on an understanding of the state as a non-contradictory unified bloc.

With reference to theoretical approaches developed in the context of ‘regulation theory’ and its neo-Marxist concept of the state, this paper elaborates on the ambivalent character of social work under the conditions of socio-political imperatives of activation. This will be exemplified by the welcome visits for newborns (further referred to as *welcome visits*) which is a universal preventative service within the field of *early childhood intervention*. This field has been established over the last fifteen years, influenced by, among other things, ideas of social investment in the context of an activating state. Furthermore, based on the example of *welcome visits*, this paper discusses the scope of action for social work, focusing on the ambivalent nature of activation policy strategies. There are indications of tendencies of social work in this field conveying aspects of a social infrastructure. This raises questions about the implications of the status of citizenship concerning the users of these services.

2 The state and social work

In this chapter, it will be argued that the relationship between the state and social work can be characterized as contradictory, using rather rare contributions from regulation theory on this topic (e.g. Schaarschuch, 1990, 1994; Otto & Schaarschuch, 1999; Chassé, 1988, 2010; Diebäcker & Hammer, 2009).

Regulation theory² (e.g. Aglietta, 1979; Hirsch, 1990; Jessop, 1986) – although it does not have a truly settled theoretical structure – regards itself as a critical reconstruction of Marx’s theory. It analyzes how fundamentally contradictory capitalist social formations can be relatively stable and reproducible over long periods of time (Hirsch, 2002, p. 51). Regulation theory emphasizes “that the state, and state functions, could no longer be simply ‘derived’ from the economy, in the sense of a schematic conception of a determination of the superstructure by the economic basis,” (Otto & Schaarschuch, 1999, p. 138). Instead, regulation theory interprets the relationship between state and economy as a mutually constituent one. According to Poulantzas, the capitalist state is neither an instrument of the ruling class nor is it an autonomous legal subject with its own unity. Rather, Poulantzas understands the state as a social relation, as “[...] a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as this is expressed within the state in a necessarily specific form,” (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 128f.). The state itself is the product of past struggles, hence it is not a “monolithic bloc without cracks of any kind” (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 254), but finds itself shaped by the class contradictions inscribed in its structure. Based on this, the capitalist state is conceived as a *material condensation of social relationships of class forces*. Poulantzas has shown that capitalist states can be described as political arenas or terrains of various societal groups and conflicting actors struggling for their particular interests (Schaarschuch, 1998b, p. 98). The form and structure of the capitalist state is essentially shaped by specific social conditions

² The theory of regulation, which will not be further discussed at this point, assumes – in contrast to economic approaches – that the mutual relationship of economic, political and ideological instances, which are understood as relatively autonomous in themselves, secures the reproduction of capitalist social formations (Kohlmorgen, 2004, p. 20). Historically specific capitalist social formations such as “Fordism” or “Post-Fordism” can differ on the basis of an “**accumulation regime**, a **social mode of economic regulation** and a **mode of societalisation**, that is, institutionalised integration and social cohesion” (Otto & Schaarschuch, 1999, p. 138, emphasis in original). However, this paper will not focus on the analysis of transformation processes of social formations, but on the understanding of the state and the consequences for the theorization of the relationship between the state and social work in the activating state.

and, in particular, by social conflicts – state practice is thus, always contested and changeable by the diverse actors within these arenas (Diebäcker & Hammer, 2009, p. 22).

This perspective has consequences for theorizing social work: social work as a *public apparatus of socialization* is a constitutive component of welfare state arrangements and, in this perspective, considered to be included in the “inner contradictions of welfare state regulation,” (Chassé, 2010, p. 195, my translation). In what follows, social work as a personal social service is regarded as *part of the state's regulation of socialization* which “expresses itself through a form of state action related to the individual and is framed and legitimized by a capitalist welfare state of liberal-democratic character,” (Diebäcker & Hammer, 2009, p. 12, my translation). Despite this functional integration, referring to Poulantzas analysis of the state as an ‘arena of class struggle’, social work cannot be understood as simply passive but can be theoretically framed as an active political actor within these ‘arenas’. The relationship between the state and social work can thus be reformulated as contradictory due to the functional integration and the simultaneous possibility of fulfilling its specific aims as an active political actor in the arena of the state.

3 The concept of the German activating state

Regarding the state as deeply intertwined with the economy, the state’s form and structure differs with each social formation. The paradigmatic shift of social formations is analyzed and characterized in regulation theory as a transition from ‘Fordism’, with its typical ‘Keynesian Welfare State’ to ‘Post-Fordism’ with its evolving ‘Schumpeterian Workfare State’ (Jessop, 2007). The form and structure of the new Post-Fordist state varies across nation-states.

After the manifest crisis of the Fordist social formation in the 1970s and 1980s, the German social policy of the Keynesian Welfare State was criticized by neo-liberals for its lack of justice, inhibition of competition, and ineffectiveness (Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2004, p. 1). In response to this criticism, the agenda of the activating state was developed as a new welfare state arrangement in the framework of political-programmatic writings (Hombach & Mandelson, 1999; Deutsche Bundesregierung, 1999).

An essential characteristic of this new type of state is the division of responsibility between state and society. A “new balance between state duties and activated self-initiative as well as civic engagement” (Deutsche Bundesregierung, 1999, p. 2, my translation) should be implemented according to the central motto of *promoting and demanding* (in German: *Fördern und Fordern*). This “neo-social restructuring of the welfare state” (Lessenich, 2009, p. 14, my translation) leads to a reorganization of various policy fields, particularly, in German social policy. The *Agenda 2010*, “which became the symbol of [...] neoliberal social policy” (Nullmeier, 2018, p. 2) is primarily based on social investment strategies and active labor market policies. For example, the duration and amount of wage replacement entitlements were reduced, the conditions for receiving benefits tightened, the retirement age increased, formerly universal social risks were individualized, and the pressure on individuals to take up employment systematically increased³ (Lessenich, 2012, p. 116). The activating state “demands the priority of education policy and preventative measures over policies based on social benefits” (Nullmeier, 2018, p. 3).

³ In the light of current German political debates about a non-means-tested basic pension, an unconditional basic income or a basic subsistence income for children, the question arises whether these debates can be interpreted as indicators for a new orientation of social policy or at least as moments that point to alternative rationalities within the framework of the current welfare state. Close attention should be paid to such moments.

The *Agenda 2010-Policy*, thus, can be understood as a systematic implementation of the guiding principle of the activating state: *promoting and demanding*. On the one hand, activation strategies aim to mobilize the self-regulatory forces of society, while at the same time, they are accompanied by control and sanctions (Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2002 p. 11, 17). The logic of promoting and demanding cannot only become functional by convincing strategies such as information, counselling, or appeals to personal responsibility, alone. It also requires social control as well as, if necessary, the use of punitive measures (Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2002, p. 17). Therefore, activation strategies refer not so much to social structural features. Above all, its focus lies on changing the behavior of individuals, and therefore, it is increasingly dependent on person-centered, communication-oriented pedagogical forms of intervention.

4 Social work in the activating state

With reference to the theorizing of social work as outlined above, as part of the state-regulated socialization, it must be assumed that those transformations of the welfare state arrangement effect the field of social work.

Insofar as social work is linked to the everyday life and the lifeworld of individuals (Böhnisch, 1982, p. 67), it is regarded as crucial for the implementation of activation strategies – especially if social work is focused on changing the behavior of individuals. The implementation of activation strategies, therefore, requires the interaction between professional social workers and clients. In the sense of *promoting*, the professionals should advise, qualify, and inform their clients, and in the sense of *demanding*, they should control and, if necessary, admonish and sanction their clients (Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2002, p. 21). *Activating social work*⁴ can generally be summarized as “concepts of actions of social work that are oriented towards state theoretical and socio-political debates about the conception of an ‘activating state’” (Kessl & Otto, 2003, p. 61, my translation). Activating social work focuses on mobilizing the self-care of the members of society (Kessl & Otto, 2003, p. 64).

Within the framework of the activating state, in which social policy is understood primarily as a social investment in non-active or not-yet-active individuals such as women and children (Lessenich, 2005, p. 27), attention is increasingly focused on education, Bildung, and the family, in which everything promotes individual employability (Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2004, p. 7). Children become the most important socio-political target group because investments in children promise the highest productive effects (Olk, 2008, p. 296). In this comprehensive social investment strategy, which above all else promotes the employability of future “working citizens” (Oelkers, 2012, p. 157), children and their families become the focus of political and socio-pedagogical attention (e.g. Oelkers, 2009, 2012; Oelkers & Richter, 2009; Olk, 2008). In Germany, these strategies were implemented, especially during the second legislative period of the “red-green” ruling coalition (2002-2005, referring to the coalition of Social Democratic Party and the Green Party), as a new policy for children and families (Olk, 2008, p. 296). This policy includes, among other things, the expansion of all-day school programs, early childhood education as well as preventative counselling services for parents (Olk, 2008, p. 296f.; Oelkers, 2012, p. 165) – i.e. services of *early childhood intervention*, which will be the focus of further examination. Preventative programs, and in particular those

⁴ If the term of *activating social work* is used here, we must ensure that current forms of activating social work are linked to a long conceptual tradition within social work. Kessl & Otto (2003) emphasize that activation can be understood as the socio-pedagogical principle, but that it takes on a substantially different meaning within the context of an activating state (Kessl & Otto, 2003, p. 67; Kessl, 2006, p. 221f.).

that address all people in a universalistic way (e.g. universal preventative services for parents), become increasingly important in activating states that aim at strengthening self-regulation and individual responsibility of citizens. Without these broad programs, the state might be unable to reach those citizens it wants to reach.

Using the example of the *welcome visits* as a universal preventative service, it will be discussed below to what extent and in which way activation strategies are reflected in these services. In contrast to a deterministic view, the ambivalent character of social work programs induced by activation policies will be emphasized and elaborated.

5 Welcome visits within early childhood intervention

The field of early childhood intervention includes a local and regional support system with coordinated services of assistance for parents and children from the beginning of pregnancy to the first years of childhood (NZFH⁵, 2014, p. 13). Early childhood intervention has primarily been driven by the increasingly important debate on child protection in Germany since the 2000s, the related demand for early and systematic prevention (Sann, 2012, p. 257), and the neo-social restructuring of the welfare state.

Welcome visits are a universal preventative service within early childhood intervention, addressing all families with newborns regardless of their specific life circumstances. As the “earliest ‘early childhood intervention’ after birth” (Stork, 2009, p. 1, my translation), a strong familial-political significance was attributed to the *welcome visits*. Within the framework of the Federal Child Protection Act passed in 2012, a legal regulation was enacted for this service and its nationwide implementation was equally promoted (Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 11). According to §2 of the Act on Cooperation and Information in Child Protection (KKG), local youth services organizations are obliged to offer parents a personal information meeting on family-related social services in the local catchment area, which can also take place at parents’ homes as long as they request this (German Bundestag, 2011, p. 2975). Legislation does not give further specifications concerning the requirements for the conceptual and content-related implementation of *welcome visits*. Accordingly, there is a broad heterogeneity in the implementation of this new type of service (Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 39). The following analysis of this service, therefore, can only be based on the ideal-typical conception of *welcome visits*.

The target groups of *welcome visits* are all families with newborns. This broad approach was designed to avoid stigmatizing effects, with the intention of possibly getting in touch with all families, especially those who are seen as being burdened and in need of professional support (Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 31). The focus of this service is on handing over a welcome package which mainly contains: emergency telephone numbers in the city district, information on topics relating to the registration of the child, economic assistance such as parental allowance, social benefits etc., information on existing counselling services in the city district and the healthy growth of children, and early detection examinations and gifts for the children (Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 93-128). Depending on the municipality, professional social workers, professionals of the health care system, or volunteers carry out *welcome visits* (Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 37f.). The youth welfare office or the respective child and youth service provider informs parents in writing about the service. In order to achieve the highest possible number of visits, opt-out program designs are usually used where visits are scheduled

⁵ The NZFH (national center on early intervention) was founded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) in 2007 to strengthen preventative child protection.

by default, and parents have to actively cancel appointments if they do not want to participate in the program (Stork, 2009, p. 3). The visits are designed to take place as early as possible, usually within the first six to eight weeks after birth (Stork, 2009, p. 1).

The objectives of an ideal-typical conception of *welcome visits* are, among others, needs-oriented information for young families, the referral to suitable programs and the encouragement of the parents to visit parent-child meeting points, and to participate in self-help groups or neighborhood and district activities (Stork, 2009, p. 4; Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 44f.). The referral to suitable programs is intended to promote educational competencies of parents. In addition, parents are also informed about aspects of health promotion and early detection examinations for children (in Germany, this includes ten medical examinations during the first 6 years of childhood U1-U9) (Frese & Günther, 2011, p. 247). Another objective of *welcome visits* is to increase the perceived family-friendliness of a municipality, and to improve the image of the youth welfare office - from a controlling intervention authority to a competent partner for families (Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 45-51). In addition, *welcome visits* are intended to help prevent cases of child endangerment by early identification of parental burdens and challenges. The promotion of social integration and participatory opportunities for families, the strengthening of voluntary and civic commitment, and the reduction of socio-educational support can also be regarded as objectives of *welcome visits* (Frese & Günther, 2013, p. 51).

6 Activation strategies within the welcome visits

Against the background of the theoretical analysis of activation strategies (Kessl & Otto, 2003; Kessl, 2006; Dahme & Wohlfahrt, 2002, 2004; Oelkers, 2009, 2012), four dimensions of activation strategies can be analytically distinguished at the conceptual level of *welcome visits*⁶. These four dimensions are mutually interdependent, but can be differentiated analytically:

- *activation of parental responsibility*
- *activation of human communities like families or neighborhoods*
- *activation of the social environment*
- *activation of social work itself*

In the following, only the *activation of parental responsibility* will be discussed⁷. This activation strategy reveals the ambivalent character of social work in the context of the activating state in a specific way.

The mission statement of early childhood intervention says that services within this field should be based on the resources of families, strengthen their self-help potential, and promote parental responsibility. It also states that the aim of early childhood intervention is to “reach and activate families in their lifeworld; the focus is on strengthening resources and mobilizing the potential for self-help” (NZFH, 2014, p. 9, my translation). Here, semantics allude to the logic of the activating state and the specific Post-Fordist understanding of the subject as an

⁶ The contribution follows the argumentation developed for the field of youth work with regard to its structural appropriateness for activation strategies (Sturzenhecker, 2003, 2005).

⁷ For a detailed illustration of the different dimensions of activation within *welcome visits*, see Dehm 2019.

autonomously acting, preventative, and self-responsible subject, and the conception of *welcome visits* itself also indicates the activation of *parental responsibility* (Oelkers, 2009, p. 144). *Welcome visits* thus have an important “information, referring, and steering function” (Frese, 2013, p. 7, my translation) within the context of early childhood intervention. It can be assumed that, in the sense of universal prevention, the legislative body intends to inform as many parents as possible about the health and well-being of children and family-relevant services in the social environment, and, if necessary, offer suitable services. Above all, the intention was to facilitate access to educational opportunities and social services for mothers (Stork, 2009, p. 4).

Even if, at first glance, a sensitive look at the needs of families and appropriate provision and referral of services seems to be desirable and to make sense, the implementation of such services must be interpreted against the background of the new logics and rationalities of the activating state. In light of the above-mentioned transformations of the welfare state, it can be assumed that as many parents as possible should be encouraged to take responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of their children’s supposedly ‘correct’ and ‘healthy’ upbringing and, if necessary, seek help independently and responsibly when problems arise. Through the medium of *information* and the *knowledge of* specific services in the social environment, self-help potentials of parents are strengthened. In particular, legislation aims at equipping burdened parents to seek support and thus shape the upbringing of their children in a responsible manner. In other words, these services should encourage parents to ultimately produce socially necessary *human capital*.

The activation of parental responsibility through *welcome visits* can be understood as “mobilizing the self-care of the members of society” (Kessl & Otto, 2003, p. 64, my translation), in this case specifically, the parents for themselves and their children. In the context of the current transformations of the welfare state, which are characterized above all by the withdrawal of state responsibility and welfare state benefits, the attribution and claiming of parental responsibility increases its importance (Oelkers, 2012, p. 166). This is the case as parents become more and more responsible for the beneficial shaping of their children’s growing up. This attribution of responsibility to parents, however, “tends to detach itself from the individual preconditions (resources, abilities, possibilities, etc.) and structural conditions for a successful shaping of parental responsibility” (Oelkers, 2012, p. 166, my translation). Insofar as the activating state welfare systems for families are reduced or restructured and social risks are more often re-privatized, demanded parental responsibilities rather can lead to an “exhaustion of family resources and potentials as well as to a personal exhaustion of the parents” (Oelkers, 2012, p. 156, my translation). The question arises, to what extent existing structural conditions enable families to cope with their problems and challenges. This is followed by the question of whether *welcome visits* actually “appeal to parental willingness to act” (Oelkers 2012, p. 166, my translation) and lead to self-responsibility.

As Oelkers (2012) points out, the dictum of the *promotion of human capital* – even though recently there has been a political debate about a ‘basic subsistence income for children’ – has not yet led to sufficient material security for children and families⁸.

⁸ It remains to be seen to what extent the recently passed ‘Strong Families Act’ (May 2019) will achieve a sufficient material security for children and families (BMFSFJ, 2019).

7 On the ambivalent character of activation strategies in welcome visits

In addition to the activation strategies mentioned above, *welcome visits* also reveal the ambivalent character of activation strategies. This is mainly reflected in the *voluntary, supply-led character*, and *universal preventative approach* of this service.

As mentioned above, activation strategies are based on the logic of promoting and demanding and can only become functional through social control. In the sphere of social policy, social control is institutionalized, for instance, by requirements and implemented through the reduction or cancelling of social benefits if these requirements are not fulfilled. This is different in the field of child and youth services, and therefore, for the *welcome visits*. The voluntary participation – at least from a formal point of view – is regarded as one of the central structural characteristics of child and youth services (Oelerich, 2012, p. 347f.). This structural characteristic is also reflected in the conception of *welcome visits*. According to §2 KKG, as described above, *welcome visits* are a service that parents can refuse. The *voluntary nature* and the *orientation to needs* are central characteristics of this service. Due to the maxim of voluntariness and the lack of opportunities to sanction and thus formal instruments of power (Sturzenhecker, 2005, p. 135), the participation of parents in *welcome visits* cannot be required. The service can only have an activating effect if the structural conditions for the field of youth and child services and in particular for *welcome visits* will change (Sturzenhecker, 2005, p. 137).

This illustrates the difference from an activating social policy: in the field of social policy, activation strategies become effective according to the motto of promoting and demanding. In contrast, *welcome visits* as a voluntary and needs-oriented service seem to have little significance of the demanding aspect. In order to reach parents and especially burdened parents, *welcome visits* as a universal preventative service necessarily depend on reducing moments of paternalism, control, and discipline. If these moments are not reduced, there is a definite risk that parents will withdraw and not use the service at all.

Activation within *welcome visits* can therefore be regarded as an ‘appeal’ to parents to sufficiently fulfill their ascribed responsibility. However, the consequences of this being a mere appeal, should not be underestimated, since, as Kessl & Otto (2003) emphasize, the attribution of responsibility can go hand in hand with a processes of moralization. If, for example, parents decide not to use such a service and do not seek any further support elsewhere nor comply with the required self-regulation and personal responsibility, they could be socially and morally devalued according to the prevailing mentality of self-debt (Oelkers & Richter, 2009, p. 41). The structural conditions for the ‘failure’ of parents to assume responsibility then recede into the background (Oelkers & Richter, 2009, p. 41).

In addition to the supply-led character, the expansion of universal preventative services within programs of early childhood intervention, which led to the establishment of *welcome visits*, need consideration. In the context of early childhood intervention, universal preventative services have increasingly emerged in recent years. These are addressing all parents with children up to three years of age and are voluntary and free of charge. Here, it is suggested to interpret this development in an alternative way: as a first indication of elements of a substantially supply-led social work as social infrastructure (Oelerich, Schaarschuch, Beer & Hiegemann, 2019, p. 55). Social infrastructure here is understood, in line with Hirsch & Steinert (2012), as “the mobilization and provision of institutional and material resources necessary for the acknowledged social activities” (my translation) for the practice of one’s own life and the comprehensive participation in shaping and organizing society and its future.

This kind of social infrastructure has to be decentralized and democratically designed, and access to its utilization has to be guaranteed for all citizens (Martin & Wissel, 2018, p. 209).

What does this mean with respect to *welcome visits* to conceive of social work as social infrastructure? The implementation of this new type of service itself initially can be seen as an indication for the expansion of social infrastructure, and at the same time, as an easier access point to additional services. Based on the referring function of *welcome visits*, barriers to access can be dismantled through increasing knowledge of parents about possible services and encouraging access to additional services, it can be regarded as a social infrastructure. The extent to which this perspective on social work as a social infrastructure is actually viable as an alternative or even as a counter-project to the provision of social work that has prevailed up to now, and the resulting consequences, must be examined in more detail.

8 Social work as a political actor in the arena of the state

This paper argues that the simultaneity of elements of activation strategies present in *welcome visits*, and its references to supply-led social work, can be interpreted as an ambivalent character of social work programs induced by activation policy. On the one hand, *welcome visits* encourage topics of the socio-political agenda, in the sense that behavior and modes of action of subjects, here of the parents, are regulated in a way that they are in compliance with the Post-Fordist social formation; on the other hand, however, the service certainly exhibits ambivalences and differences to activation policies and thereby references supply-led social work as social infrastructure.

This can be interpreted as a reference to the underlying assumptions of regulation theory with its neo-Marxist concept of the state in the sense that capitalist social formations are understood as fundamentally characterized by contradictions. These contradictions – in a fragmented way – materialize in the state as the center of institutional regulation and thus in the field of social work as a state agency. The analysis of this ambivalent character of social work in the context of the current welfare state arrangement has consequences for (I) a perspective of social work as a political actor and in a broad sense for (II) citizenship in the context of the activating state.

(I) If the state is understood as a *materialized relation of social forces* it becomes evident that the increasing significance of needs for personalized social services within an activating state can lead to changes in power relations between various political actors in the arena of the state. The current highly ambivalent situation of social work in the activating state – being an instrument of social policy and its increasing relevance and significance – opens up the possibility for social work to intervene as an active political actor in the arena of state institutions (Otto & Schaarschuch 1999, p. 143). Social work, as a political actor, can reject the social policy concepts on activation which goes hand in hand with control and sanctions and therefore is contradictory to a critical self-image of social work. At the same time, social work can strengthen emancipatory potentials which, as suggested here, can lie in supply-led and voluntary services of social work as social infrastructure, and therefore, interfere in the ‘struggle’ for the organization of society in the interest of its users.

(II) The socio-pedagogical debate on social rights and social citizenship references the fundamentally contradictory character of citizenship within the framework of bourgeois-capitalist societies (Schaarschuch, 1998a, p. 226). In particular, it highlights the contradictory character of citizenship with regard to the exercise of social rights in the institutions of the welfare state. It is a characteristic, especially of social services, that most of them require

some sort of means test in order to be used, that they “intervene deeply in the private and intimate sphere and, legitimized by the constitutional mandate of the welfare state and a concept of professional ‘help’ violate civil rights. No political rights exist to influence the form and content of professional provided services [...]” (Schaarschuch, 1998a, p. 226, my translation). However, since citizenship is not ‘dividable’ single elements like civil rights or political rights cannot simply be suspended without violating citizenship as a whole. This means that clients of social work are not recognized as *full citizens* with *civil, political, and social rights* (Schaarschuch, 1998a, p. 230; Schaarschuch, 1998b, p. 104).

Taking this into account, it can be assumed that within the framework of an activating state – in which the claiming of social rights is again increasingly accompanied by means tests and by the obligation to take up work in the sense of ‘workfare’ – social rights themselves are turned into their opposite, i.e. instead of inclusion they lead to exclusion. Additionally, civil rights, as a classic fundamental right of the inviolability of the private sphere, are violated (Schaarschuch, 1998a, p. 221, 224), and citizenship is thus violated as a whole.

At the same time, it can be seen that, among other things, in the field of early childhood intervention, more low-threshold supply-led services are being established. This can thus be interpreted as first indications that social work of this kind conveys a new quality that can be interpreted as first elements of an infrastructure-oriented social work. This means social work is structurally dependent on maintaining, or at least not violating, the integrity of citizenship of their (potential) users. Since these services cannot be operated in a paternalistic manner, but necessarily have to be used on a voluntary basis, parents can exercise their social rights without any means testing or professional diagnostics. This form of supply-led service provision can also be read as an underpinning of citizenship – even if it would be necessary to examine to what extent a political right to influence this service exists. This points once again to the contradictions in the current welfare state arrangement also in regards to citizenship.

What can be seen here in the case of low-threshold *welcome visits* in the field of early childhood intervention can, furthermore, be regarded as a strategic need for social work in the context of the activating state. This perspective gives rise to the question for implications for social work in a general perspective as to how service provision must be carried out so that users are recognized as *full citizens*. There are indications that these tendencies – contradictory as they are – contain the potential for social work to develop in the direction of becoming a social infrastructure that can be utilized in a way that fosters the full status of citizenship of service-users instead of diminishing it.

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