THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL WORK

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Zusammenfassung | Der Beitrag diskutiert den Zuwachs der Profession Sozialer Arbeit aus einer globalen Perspektive. Es werden die Ursachen des Wachstums ebenso untersucht wie die voraussichtlichen Entwicklungen im Kontext der Nachhaltigkeitsziele der Vereinten Nationen sowie der zunehmenden Erkenntnis vieler Regierungen und Politiker, dass ökonomische und soziale Ziele in Abhängigkeit zueinander stehen.

Abstract | This article discusses the recent growth of the social work profession from a global perspective. It examines why such growth has occurred and also how the profession is likely to further expand in the context of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and the increasing realisation of many governments and policy makers that economic and social development are interdependent.

Schlüsselwörter ▶ Soziale Arbeit ▶ soziale Bewegung ▶ international ▶ Berufsverband ▶ historische Entwicklung

1 The Roots of Modern Social Work | The foundations of the international collaboration to build the social work profession date as far back as 1847 (*Second International Conference on Social Work* 1933). At that time the first International Congress on prison reform proclaimed the necessity of 'establishing contact between the persons engaged in the different countries, in improving the lot of the working classes and indigent poor'. Similar calls were also made by other international conferences a few years later such as the International Statistical Conferences which held its first conference in Brussels in 1853. This was followed by the International Charity Conference(s) in Brussels in 1855 and then again in 1856 and then in Frankfurt in 1857. Each of these conferences acted as forerunners to the infamous 1928 world conference that officially launched the international social work profession (*ibid*.).

All of this took place long before the creation of the United Nations, the concept of international human rights and the International Labour Organisation. Yet the above international charity and reform conferences adopted resolutions and recommendations that were seen as mandatory to all the countries members who were affiliated to the conference structures. At the time such acts of international standards of care and treatment of all people would have been revolutionary and comparable with other struggles such as the right of women to vote or the abolition of slavery. Among the conferences, various resolutions and recommendations were made, including:

▲ that asylums should not contain more than 100 children.

▲ that children under the age of 18 should be prohibited from working at night and that there should be a limitation or working hours for children under the age of 16.

▲ that workplaces should have the duty to pay for a child's education if the parents could not afford it and that workplaces should be inspected by people who have the power to enforce the law.

▲ that opportunities to employ the deaf and the blind should be created, and 'Children of early age, regardless of handicap, should no longer be excluded from common schools and should receive ordinary instruction' (*Ancestors of the International Conference of Social Work Social Service Review* 1966).

Such conferences continued to blossom and expanded in their global focus. In addition to the European delegates in regular attendance were representatives from Japan, a number of Latin American countries and the US. In 1889, another body was also formed, The International Society for the Study of Public and Private Welfare Problems which led to conferences on International Voluntary Assistance in Paris 1889, and again Geneva 1896, Milan 1906 and Copenhagen in 1910. Meanwhile outside of Europe national social work associations and conferences were springing up in many countries and regularly corresponding with the conference officials (*ibid*.).

In the years following the First World War interest and the expressed need for international contact elevated even further as social workers and volunteer assistances faced the challenges of mass forced migration and refugees. This lead to the first international conference in 1928 that used the title of Social Work. It was a conference with a big vision for a new global profession that could make a substantial impact on the suffering of working people and the chaos left

behind from wars. A profession that would address the social issues of the modern world (*Second International Conference on Social Work* 1933).

Funding was gained from many sources, some of which seem highly unlikely judging by today's standards. The Russell Sage Foundation provided travel money; other funds came from the Carnegie Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund as well as the Rockefeller and Milbank foundations. The conference was marketed widely around the world inviting government representatives as well as people engaged in social work (*Ancestors of the International Conference of Social Work* 1966).

Long before commercial airlines 5 000 participants from throughout the world travelled to Paris, many making a journey of several weeks (*Second International Conference on Social Work* 1933). The speakers' list read like a 'Who's Who' of modern social work: *Mary Richmond, Jane Addams* and *Alice Salomon*, to name a few.

The conference resulted in an explicate plan to establish a permanent secretariat to organise ongoing opportunities for further international gatherings, that would share information and build the global profession of social work. The continuity of this today is the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

IFSW however also recognises that there are many strands, roots and elements that equally have formed and shaped the social work profession. Indigenous social workers have demonstrated the massively adverse effects where Western models of practice have directly contributed to the destruction of their culture, dignity and customs. Such colonial approaches have or are continuing to be replaced by indigenous cultural approaches to social work that have proven to have far better social and personal outcomes than the Western approaches that they have replaced. Such indigenous approaches that predate all of the above conferences have been so successful that in many Western countries they have adopted as some preferred models. One example of this is Family Group Conferencing (*Wikipedia* 2007).

Naturally, other influences have also shaped the modern social work profession such as trade unions and civil rights movements. Each of these traditions

Horizont

Der Sommer ist die Zeit der weiten Horizonte. Im Urlaub lassen wir das enge Korsett des Alltags hinter uns, sind offen für neue Eindrücke, andere Menschen, fremde Kulturen. Selbst wenn wir wieder zurück sind, bieten die noch immer langen, hellen Tage Raum für Treffen mit Freunden im Garten, kleine Ausflüge, kulturelle Unternehmungen. All das bringt nicht nur Erholung, sondern öffnet uns auch den Blick auf Perspektiven und Möglichkeiten der Erneuerung.

Diese Juli-Ausgabe der Sozialen Arbeit ist auch ein Heft der weiten Horizonte. Gerade die Beiträge von *Rory Truell*, Generalsekretär der International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), sowie des Vorstands der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziale Arbeit (DGSA) über Qualitätsstandards für das Studium der Sozialen Arbeit, zeigen uns neue, teils wirklich aufrüttelnde Perspektiven für die Chancen und Herausforderungen unserer faszinierenden, dem Menschen dienenden Profession.

„Die Soziale Arbeit ist weltweit das am schnellsten wachsende Berufsfeld" – „Jeder Dollar, der für soziale Dienstleistungen ausgegeben wird, bringt der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung einen Vorteil im Wert von drei Dollar". Schon allein diese beiden Statements im Beitrag von *Rory Truell* zeigen die im Alltag oft verkannte Bedeutung der Sozialen Arbeit und belegen, wie gut und richtig es ist, dass sich der Vorstand der DGSA nun in unserer Fachzeitschrift mit seinem Positionspapier zu Qualitätsstandards im Studium der Sozialen Arbeit äußert. Denn eine Profession kann nur in dem Maße nachhaltig und erfolgreich wachsen, wie dies auch in ihren Ausbildungs- und Beschäftigungsstrukturen gelingt.

Viel Freude und Gewinn beim Lesen – und Ihnen eine schöne Sommerzeit!

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makes what social work is today and place the profession well for meeting the challenges and social problems of the future.

2 The Fastest Growing Profession | Today, social work is the fastest growing profession globally. There isn't a reliable index or scale that measures the growth of the professions, yet in many countries, the statistics show and predict significant further growth. For example, despite the cuts to public administration by the *Trump* government, the USA Department of Labour Statistics predicts a 16 percent growth of the profession between 2016 and 2026 (*Bureau of Labour Statistics* 2019). IFSW membership has also shown unprecedented growth between 2011 and 2017. The membership model of IFSW only allows one national representative organisation or one group of organisations per country as a member. Yet in the above period, the Federation has grown by 60 percent to 128 country-level members representing over three million professional social workers. The big question that follows these statistics is: Why?

Studies from Oxford and Princeton universities have shown that for every one dollar spend on social services there is at least a three dollar return to the economy (*Stuckler; Basu* 2013). This is because when social workers are placed in a community, there is a corresponding rate of reduced crime, better health, more people attending education and improved pathways for people accessing employment.

Not all governments or regional political bodies have fully understood these realities and politicians that represent the particular interests of for-profit sector appear little interested in the welfare of people. Such politics have seen the decline of social service budgets particularly in austerity affected countries of the European Union and also more recently in the United States. Yet, these are exceptions to the world trend in maintaining or increasing social service spending with the realisation that economic and social development are interdependent.

Another equally important factor driving the growth of the profession is the profession itself. After some years of relative political neutrality, the global professional bodies of social work launched a new strategy of influencing political environments with social work messages. The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (Agenda) officially commenced in 2010 with interrelating key messages on economic and social equality, the dignity and worth or people, community and environmental sustainability and the importance of interdependence (*IASSW* et al. 2014). These concepts were developed well before the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and resonated strongly with social workers throughout the world. Since the launch of the agenda platform social workers throughout the world have spontaneously translated these messages into their local languages, turned them into banners and lead community activities, and lobbied their governments to invest and expand the social work profession (*IASSW* et al. 2016).

3 The Potential of Social Work | These factors above, the understanding that economic and social development are interdependent, and the global groundswell of community activism and interest for social work messages, have propelled the profession forward. Yet, the profession is only at the beginning of realising its significant potential in shaping a more inclusive, democratic, sustainable and socially just world that celebrates its diversity and environment.

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The profession of social work has significant potential in shaping the social and political future. There is no other profession, organisation or political movement that comprises such a large highly trained and skilled workforce dedicated to social justice that works directly at the community level. This potential to utilise this human resource is clear, but to what effect is still a matter of discussion for many both within and outside of the social work profession. To address the issue of how social workers can shape the social and political future starts with understanding what social workers already have in common.

3-1 The values and ethics that bind three million social workers | To be recognised as a social worker by the 128 professional bodies of social work, the worker must practice in accordance with the Statement of Ethical Principles (*IFSW* 2018). These are divided into two categories:

Human rights and dignity:
1. Respecting the right to self-determination;
2. Promoting the right to participation;
3. Treating each person as a whole;
4. Identifying and developing strengths.

Social Justice:
5. Challenging negative discrimination;
6. Recognising diversity;
7. Distributing resources equitably;
8. Challenging unjust policies and practices;
9. Working in solidarity and to work towards an inclusive society.

Casting these ethical practice requirements into a global vision illuminates an entirely new world perspective: A world that recognises all peoples and their contributions equitably, a global population where exploitation is prohibited, and equality is actively strived for, and the full recognition that people are a part of their environments and nature.

Phrasing social work in this way will sound to some as utopian, but social workers are far from utopian, they are pragmatic professionals whom on a daily basis successfully enact on both the statement of ethical principles and this vision. To illustrate this claim three examples are highlighted, one from Africa (a country in absolute poverty), another from Latin America (a country plagued by inequality), and lastly

a country in Europe (with one of the most resourced social services in the world).

3-1-1 The Empowerment Village in Zambia | The people of Zambia receive minimal or no financial, health or educational support from their government. Funds from UN agencies don't find their way to the streets where there is no fresh running water, nor toilets. For many people, the only money that contributes to survival comes from what can be grown, made and sold. It is an environment the UN would describe as extreme poverty. An added complexity that communities and social workers face is from HIV/AIDS. It is reported that in Zambia the HIV prevalence among females aged 15-59 years is 14.6 per cent (*UNICEF* 2018).

This results in thousands of children being abandoned at a graveyard, at the door of a church, or found by social workers begging in the streets. For many their mothers and fathers died, and as happens in so many cities around the world, the children have lost contact with their extended relatives when their parents moved from the countryside to search for a better life (*Truell* 2017).

Social workers in Zambia, however, have found ways to effect sustainable change that gives the children and their extended families a much higher level of life quality and a significantly more positive future. One of several examples is the Empowerment Village in Lusaka.

Social workers arranged for a section of unused land to be established as a permanent home for the village. It is situated close to some street markets on a busy road linking Lusaka (the Capital city) with other main towns. On this land, the extended families of children, whose parents have died, are invited to live with the child in a self-led and self-supporting community. The community has a charter that gives all residents rights and responsibilities, but the charter starts by outlining all the resident's joint responsibility; that 'All Children have the Right to Be Loved'.

The village started with only social work support and a vision, but within a short time, maize crops where established and a milling machine purchased. The economic strategy was then widened to produce both meat and vegetables for sale. As funds were

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produced, the residents decided to build a medical facility which is staffed once a week. A doctor and nurse can treat illness and injuries as well as advise on nutrition. Social workers also assisted the villagers in establishing a school for the children which meets the requirement and standards of the national curriculum and a pension scheme for community members that are not able to work due to illness or injury.

After six years the Empowerment Village has grown to include 140 families, and the model has spread to other towns and cities. The once-orphaned children now have the opportunity to gain higher levels of vocational training or university education, and above all, each of the residents has a robust social network of support and a sustainable future.

3-1-2 The Bridge to Development in Costa Rica | Another example of a social work led initiative that demonstrates the power of the profession in shaping social outcomes is found in Costa Rica. Like the example from Zambia the social work approach of addressing the multidimensional factors of poverty has been the key strategy for success, yet in this example, the social work approach has been reinforced by national laws.

Social workers led and nurtured legislation (*Government of Costa Rica* 2018) which has resulted in a national strategy integrating government agencies to work together to end poverty. The law applies a social work methodology addressing the multidimensional factors associated with poverty (violence against women, drugs, ill health, internalised oppression etc.) and is focused on strengthening the capacity of families and communities.

The three-layered model starts with the base of ensuring that there is: 'Social Protection Services in Every Community' including access to social services, benefits, food, clean water, and community planning to stop all forms of violence. This involves both establishing services within communities and running programmes that enable all people to use the services and help shape the services to meet their needs.

The next layer: 'The Development and Generation of Capacities', includes community education programmes and supporting community initiatives.

Examples are that everyone, of all ages, has access to appropriate primary and secondary education, IT training, English, women's empowerment and parenting support and more.

The third layer is: 'Economic Independence' which involves working with the business community for job creation and family and community business planning and development. Although the legislation was only introduced in 2016, by the following year the government officially recorded a six percent reduction in extreme poverty.

Addressing the multidimensional factors of poverty is a substantially different concept to the traditional welfare models. It is based on capacity-building, facilitating the inter-dependence of people; supporting their self-determination and the reshaping of societies structures for the inclusion of all. Many development agencies now see the legislation and approach advocated by social workers as the most effective example of social and economic advancement for peoples in low-income countries.

3-1-3 The Amaryllis Flower of the Netherlands | The Netherlands is one of the few countries that provides a wide range of relatively well resourced social services. In this respect, the Netherlands is at the opposite pole of the above examples of Zambia and Costa Rica. Yet a social work led national strategy has reshaped social provision which has resulted in a more useable, cost-efficient community services that build on sustainable informal family and community structures.

The strategy was piloted in the municipality of Leeuwarden after social workers identified that in some areas of the province, the oversupply of complex services that focused on the individual, prevented families and communities from being able to use those services adequately (*Amaryllis* 2018). The social workers asked people of Leeuwarden to report their experiences of using social services which resulted in a short video illustrating how services focused only on one problem and neglected the real concerns of the individual, household or community. A typical example would be a service's focus on a child's absence from school, and another service's attention to the father's addiction problem, while even another service treated the mother's depression.

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Each of these uncoordinated services not only failed to address the central problems of the family, but also left the family feeling disempowered, and that they were beyond help. The people who used services also reported on the added stress of having to juggle multiple appointments with care professionals. The provincial social workers successfully advocated for new service arrangements and a new strategy called 'One Plan Per House'. This involved each household being allocated a specific generic social worker whose job is to work alongside the family to develop a family-led plan for their social care needs. The social workers are also proactively identifying isolated community members and facilitated community support plans or government resources to reach people who previously were not seen by services.

The results of 'One Plan Per House' resulted in families and communities being able to take responsibility for their own care and more effectively utilise the services. Communities now report that they can not only access help but can direct that assistance to meet their real needs. The Leeuwarden annual budget for social services dramatically changed within the first year. Social workers reported that from a spend of 60 percent of funds being spent on administration to 60 percent being spent on family and community outcomes.

One Plan Per House was so successful it was adopted nationally in the Netherlands. The social workers in Leeuwarden, who worked in an agency called Amaryllis – a flower in the Netherlands – indeed caused social work to bloom. It is now a model that social workers in other parts of Europe and the world are closely studying in preparation for advocating change in their national law related to social services.

3-1-4 Summary of examples | All of these social work-led initiatives have involved the profession's nine ethical principles, with specific emphasis on self-determination and interdependence. They are an illustration that communities work best when they are supported in their own development and have control and influence over their own lives. Self-determination has also been an underlying factor in the realisation of human rights, as social workers identified that people taking responsibility for themselves and others is a necessary aspect in achieving rights for all (*IFSW* 2014).

Each example demonstrates the power of the social work approach in shifting old paradigms of 'welfare' and 'aid' to new structures of community-led development. They are living demonstrations of the IFSW policy on the Role of Social Workers in Social Protection Systems (*IFSW* 2016) that identifies the need for social services to become platforms for community engagement in meeting their real aspirations.

Such examples are in many countries where the profession is strong and can exercise a level of independence. Of course, not all professional associations have yet developed such levels of independence, and some are so intertwined with the state apparatus that the consciousness of being a professional social worker is lost in the competing demands of government. Imagine, however, if all national level professional social work associations were able to introduce legislation such as in these examples successfully. Envisage if all of the three million social workers (and many more in the future) could use their reach into communities and facilitate both self-led development and people's control over their environments. What effects might this have on politics, concepts of democracy and the confidence or self-belief of populations?

The profession of social work is still relatively young having only been established in most countries in the last one, two or three generations. It is still growing, evolving and its potential not yet realised. Nevertheless, there is one significant accelerating factor that sits before the profession. A worldwide strategy that all governments have agreed upon: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4 The Future of Social Work: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) | The 2015 to 2030 United Nation's SDGs comprise 17 interrelated goals (*UNDP* 2015). Each is directly relevant to social work and hold the potential to both considerable expand the profession and make real the 'sustainable' aims of the Goals. For example, the first goal: 'To end poverty in all its forms by the year 2030' is explicitly underpinned by the objective to establish social protection systems (social services) in every county. Today only about 45 percent of the world's population is adequately protected by formal social protection systems (*ILO* 2014), and with the global push for social services, there should be a corresponding increase of social workers. The question remains, however, will

the social workers be employed for their professional expertise or is it considered that social workers will be a part of an older welfare paradigm that perpetuates dependencies? A significant part of the answer to this question, it is argued here, rests with the social work profession articulating its contributions and relating them to the SDGs.

By integrating social development with environmental protection, the UN has made a seismic leap in the global conceptual understanding of development. Older prototypes and constructs such as the Millennium Development Goals constructed the world into 'developed countries' and the 'developing countries' stating that 'developing countries' need charity, aid and support from the 'developed'. It is now widely considered, however, that such 'aid' approaches have only resulted in deepening social inequality, the dependence of low-income countries on more wealthy nations and the perpetuation of the dynamics that drive poverty and conflict. Indeed, when social workers in Africa met in 2012 to make a submission to the then planned SGDs, they said: 'The people of Africa do not want aid or benefits. They want decent jobs, security for their families, education and to be able to make decisions over their own lives. The dynamics that drive poverty need to be addressed, not supported by more aid which leads to dependence and unfulfilled lives' (*IFSW* 2015).

Now the SDGs determine that all countries are developing, that none have met the UN's sustainability targets scheduled for 2030; and further that all countries must be united in their common struggle for sustainability. By adopting this framework, the United Nations has moved closer to a social work approach and the themes the profession advanced in the 2010 Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. This was partly recognised when *Ban ki-Moon*, the UN Secretary-General who oversaw the development and launch of the SDGs, said: 'We cannot achieve the SDGs without social workers' (*Ban* 2016).

The UN Secretary-General was right to say this, not only because social workers are needed to work in the services delivering care, but also because the social worker has profound insights into how to support communities to effect change in their own social and psychological well-being. By being able to imple-

ment the approaches such as in Zambia, Costa Rica, the Netherlands (and elsewhere), social workers will be able to sustainably influence social systems to foster interdependence, empowerment, sustainability, community confidence, and the continuous movement towards equity and social justice.

With the SDGs lies the potential of social work. These goals give the opportunity to underpin development with the profession's ethics, skills and shared learning and wisdom. As the SDGs will oversee the expansion of social protection systems that serve currently 45 percent of the world population to 100 percent, it is the profession's opportunity and ethical obligation to bring its experience to the clear focus of the United Nations and all its member governments. However, this potential is only hypothetical, and the profession quickly needs to assess if it can strive to place itself in this role and determine the challenges it will encounter on the journey.

5 The Challenges of Reaching the Potential of Social Work | Social work as a profession is relatively new, and while celebrated in some countries it can also be treated with hostility or suspicion by others. Some governments regard social work as a luxury and disconnected to the economy, or they feel threatened by professional stands for social justice, human rights and peace. Even the 'mother' of modern social work, Jane Addams was named as the 'most dangerous woman in America' by the FBI in 1919 for her work in promoting peace during and after the first world war (*Dupree* 2012).

The profession also suffers from fragmentation with the division of the professional bodies of social work education and practice. This separation in the profession has made it difficult to create policies and professional cultures of praxis and has led to a tendency where research is often focused on theoretical development rather than capturing the rich experiences of transformational practice. Likewise, in many countries, the taught models of social work tend to replicate the traditional welfare models.

Both of these challenges can be more effectively responded to by the profession. The evidence mentioned above that shows that for every dollar spend of social services results in at least a three dollar return to the economy can be for example a prime factor in

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convinging governments on the need for sustained investment in social work. Also compelling is the evidence that the social work approach of addressing the multidimensional factors of poverty is the essential key to supporting marginalised peoples out of dependency, violence and ill health and into productive, responsible members of the communities. Likewise, the profession can overcome its fragmentation and steer a course towards a fully united, confident, independent and expert strong voice globally and at national levels.

Each of these challenges has solutions, much of which can be influenced by the profession itself. Should the profession of social work be able to continue in meeting these challenges and utilising the SDG's platform, then, it is likely that governments will see the profession as a key player in shaping and influence their societies.

Social workers have made such significant advances before. The movements during the late 1800s and early 1900s in the industrialised countries in establishing welfare, recognising the rights of children to attend education, the rights of the poor and marginalised was revolutionary in its time. The challenges for today generation of social workers are no more complicated and the potential just as great.

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