

**Stefan Bestmann**

Europäisches Institut für Sozialforschung  
Katholische Hochschule für Sozialwesen Berlin

*info@eins-berlin.de*

## **AND WHO CHECKS UP ON THE SOCIAL WORKERS? ON THE STRUCTURAL (AND NOT ONLY METHODOLOGICAL) DEMOCRATISATION OF THE INTERACTIONAL FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK**

Social work is highly affiliated with social development. The tasks of social work are determined not only by the guidelines of social policy in form of a normative frame but also by the results of political decisions and especially economic movements shaped as processes of exclusion which differ in intensity and reference parameter. Considering this, social work always sees “two sides of the story” (Olk et al. 2003b, XXI): on the one hand it focuses on the needs of the addressees on the condition of normalization work and a “personal and social integrative perspective” (Hörster 1999:125); on the other hand it has to guarantee the “security of social normalization standards and the course thereof” (Olk et al. 2003, XXI). At the same time, such normalization course in the postmodern globalized society shaped by Central Europe is rather decreasing and leading to detraditionalization. As a form of reflexive modernisation (Beck et al. 1996) and because of the plurality of biographic opportunities and the tendency of individualisation in the postmodern society linked to that, as well as the sovereignty of responsibility for the biography that has been transferred to the individuals, a “transformation of the expert system into a democratically organised, public sphere, distinguished by dialogue” (Lash 1996,345) is necessary. Referred to the subsystem of social work this is corresponded to the “farewell of experts” (Olk 1986) and the “withdrawal of asymmetries of interpretations between professional social workers and clients by means of the concept of operation of the common sense world” (ibid, 241). If a typical biography can no longer be distinguished and can additionally not be foreseen during the individualisation process of the whole society, normalization tasks are especially hard to seize, thus a sphere of a “state of not-knowing and uncertainty” (Kade et al. 2005,56) is created. This indicates a possible change of the self-concept of the professional role in the relation between social worker and addressee.

Especially the interaction of the social worker in dialogic actions is converted into a non-public ‘black box’. It seems counterproductive to enlighten the dark of the process by a standardised course of such process and differentiating means of reporting. As a result, it remains one of the current core challenges of social work, how the addressee on the one hand is strengthened in the direct process of the supporting, personal service within the meaning of a democratic citizen’s society. On the other hand, it is also necessary to strengthen the addressee as a citizen within the control of the professional execution of action to respectively guarantee an examining position to “put pressure of reflexion on the system of action” (Olk 1986,252). Moreover, the addressees as citizen have to be generally authorized in the asymmetry of the production context of a service. “The dilemma can only be solved if social work à la longue involves its clientele in the hierarchic structures which it follows and if it furthermore lets them participate in the power it has acquired by them before.” (Krieger 2007,70) The main core of the authorization of social work is the position as a citizen of the addressee, accordingly, the “democratization of the organizations of social work becomes a condition.” (Schaarschuch 2003,165)

Already in 1902, Jane Addams demanded: “What is it about this talk of fraternity and equality, if man has no right to make this talk definite and real in the helping relationship?” (Jane Addams, cited in Staub-Bernasconi 2003,38). At that time, Addams was referring mainly to the democratization and at the same time professionalization of the performance context from the perspective of social work. If we read the above quotation again and if we try to adopt the perspective of an addressee of social work, a subject, which was on the agenda back then and has thus remained highly topical, becomes

clear: who is actually checking on the social workers in their interaction, if they do not put the demanded pressure of reflexion self-satisfied on themselves?

### References:

**Beck, U., Giddens, A., Lash, S.** 1996: *Reflexive Modernisierung – eine Kontroverse*, Frankfurt a.M. S.19-112

**Hörster, R.** 1999: *Sozialpädagogische Integration heute – Gesellschaftliche und pädagogische Räume der sozialen Arbeit*, In: Treptow, R./ Hörster, R. (Hg): *Sozialpädagogische Integration – Entwicklungsperspektiven und Konfliktlinien*, Weinheim S.123-143

**Kade, J., Seitter, W.** 2005: *Jenseits des Goldstandards – Über Erziehung und Bildung unter den Bedingungen von Nicht-Wissen, Ungewissheit, Risiko und Vertrauen*, In: Helsper, W./ Hörster, R./ Kade, J. (Hg): *Ungewissheit – Pädagogische Felder im Modernisierungsprozess*, Weilerswist S. 50-72

**Krieger, W.** 2007: *„Macht jenseits der konstruierten Selbstunterwerfung?“ Begriffe, Formen, Quellen der Interaktionsmacht. Konstruktivistische Ansätze einer Mikrophysiologie der Macht in der Sozialen Arbeit*, In: Kraus, B./ Krieger, W. (Hg): *Macht in der Sozialen Arbeit – Interaktionsverhältnisse zwischen Kontrolle, Partizipation und Freisetzung*, Lage S. 29-77

**Lash, S.** 1996: *Expertenwissen oder Situationsdeutung? Kultur und Institutionen im desorganisierten Kapitalismus*, In: Beck, U./ Giddens, A. / Lash, S.: *Reflexive Modernisierung – eine Kontroverse*. Frankfurt a.M. S.338-364

**Olk, T.** 1986: *Abschied vom Experten. Sozialarbeit auf dem Weg zu einer alternativen Professionalität*, Weinheim

**Olk, T., Otto, H.-U., Backhaus-Maul, H.** 2003: *Soziale Arbeit als Dienstleistung – Zur Analytischen und empirischen Leistungsfähigkeit eines theoretischen Konzepts*, In: Olk,T./ Otto, H.-U. (Hg): *Soziale Arbeit als Dienstleistung – Grundlegungen, Entwürfe und Modelle*. München S.IX-LXXII

**Schaarschuch, A.** 2003: *Die Privilegierung des Nutzers*, In: Olk,T./ Otto, H.-U. (Hg): *Soziale Arbeit als Dienstleistung – Grundlegungen, Entwürfe und Modelle*, München S.150-169

**Staub-Bernasconi, S.** 2003: *Soziale Arbeit als (eine) Menschenrechtsprofession*, In: Sorg, R. (Hg): *Soziale Arbeit zwischen Politik und Wissenschaft*, Münster S. 17-54