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Social Work in Germany

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Abstract

Social Work in Germany developed out of the tradition of assistance for the poor and the youth move-ment. The two historical fields of social work (*Sozialarbeit*) and Social Pedagogy (*Sozialpädagogik*) overlap, and in this contribution they are united under the heading of Social Work (*Soziale Arbeit*). This contribution offers insights into the historical emergence of Social Work in Germany, its organisational structures, its working methods and the current debate on how to make the German welfare system inclusive. This fundamental structural change is an invitation to the infrastructures of Social Work to undertake critical re-assessment and reflection. The contribution concludes with some ideas on what Social Work could be like if it is led by critical reflection, is self-confident, constantly scrutinises the directions it is taking in the light of its aspiration to produce inclusion and promote autonomy, and if its national and international organisations and global expertise are even more united than before.

Keywords

Social Work, Germany, inclusion, exclusion

Introduction

In the countries of the Global North, social work started out from historical tradi-tions of religious, neighbourly and moral support, and has developed into a profes-sion (Rehklau & Lutz, 2011). Social work has existed as a profession in Germany since the beginning of the 20th century. It was preceded by voluntary work in the field of poor relief. The origins of social work go back to what is known as the

"social question". The social process of industrialisation changed people's living conditions fundamentally. Social policy was designed to mitigate social risks such as poverty, impoverishment or job losses due to illness. In Germany, social work was initially rooted in municipal poor relief. Over the course of history, it split off into widely varying lines of work and areas of practice, in a balancing act between social support and state regulation.

This contribution reflects on the historical development of Social Work in Germany, with its highly differing traditions (Section 2). Starting out from the historical genesis of Social Work, the aim is to offer an insight into its current working methods and various administrative structures and fields of practice (Section 3), as well as current debates on what Social Work should be like in Germany given its inclusive self-image (Section 4). We particularly focus on the broad field of child and youth welfare (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*). In recent years and months, things have been on the move in the child and youth welfare system, which has faced some fundamental structural changes. The conclusion to this contribution anticipates the relevance of a Social Work that constantly reflects critically on the directions it is taking, and unites collectively all over the world (Section 5).

History of Social Work in Germany

The history of Social Work[1] in Germany is not a straight path of progress and improvement; it is marked by discontinuities, backward steps and even wrong turns. To distinguish between new solutions and past missteps, that history needs to be processed (Hammerschmidt et al., 2017, p. 7).

In Germany, there is a historical differentiation between social work in the social services (*Sozialarbeit*) and Social Pedagogy (*Sozialpädagogik*) (Hamburger, 2012, pp. 17–27). *Sozialarbeit* was already being taught in training centres at the beginning of the 20th century. *Sozialpädagogik* was only established as an independent field of study in the 1950s, when it fell under the heading of educational science. Different aspects come to the fore depending on whether the history of the field is viewed from the point of view of *Sozialarbeit* or *Sozialpädagogik*. Strictly speaking, it would thus be appropriate to speak of the histories of social support, in the plural. While *Sozialarbeit* sees its origins as being in poor relief, *Sozialpädagogik* came about in the context of the youth movement at the start of the 20th century, which was initially organised by young people themselves. This historical outline covers both these fields – *Sozialarbeit* and *Sozialpädagogik* – although they cannot be clearly separated from one another. Their stories are marked by

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[1] Section 2 of this article builds on the points made in Schmitt & Witte (2021).

commonalities (Eßer, 2018a). To highlight those commonalities, researchers in Germany are increasingly using the term "Social Work" (*Soziale Arbeit*), which is intended to include both *Sozialarbeit* and *Sozialpädagogik*. This contribution is also based on that understanding of the term. At the same time, various terms for describing social welfare activities can be found over the course of history. In the past, the terms *Fürsorge* and *Wohlfahrtspflege* were common (both roughly equivalent to "welfare"); these were then replaced by the new terms *Sozialarbeit*, *Sozialpädagogik* and "Soziale Arbeit". This abundance of terms itself shows that the field of social support did not develop from a single basis, but grew together out of a range of traditions (Münchmeier, 2018, p. 527). One aspect (among others) that characterises the historical development in Germany is the push-and-pull between Social Work and special needs education. These two subdisciplines of educational science only branched off at the start of the 20th century; historically, they do have "common roots and overlaps, for example in how they deal with 'waifs' and institutional education" (Loeken, 2012, p. 363).

Our historical retrospective begins in the Middle Ages. In the *Early Middle Ages*, material poverty was valued. In the Christian tradition, an ascetic life meant being close to Jesus and his disciples. This was distinguished from poverty, which fell under the Law of Persons. Those who were at the mercy of the powerful, without protection, received support in churches and abbeys, and from private initiatives. However, this form of charitable poor relief was not a systematic strategy to fight poverty. In the social system of estates, the poor were at the lowest level. Their situation in life was considered a blow of fate. While they experienced religious charity, this was not intended to change their living situation structurally (Sagebiel, 2005). For affluent members of the populace, almsgiving was a way to absolve themselves of their sins and gain a "seat in heaven". Life was not geared towards the "here and now", but towards an anticipated life after death (Deller & Brake, 2014, p. 78). At the start of the 13th century, the mediaeval system of estates gradually began to dissolve. The towns no longer had to pay taxes to the clergy and electors, and grew into centres of trade and industry. Increasing numbers of destitute people moved to the towns to look for work. In the *Late Middle Ages*, a booming population, wars and epidemics led to a change in the attitude towards paupers and beggars, and thus initiated the reorganisation and secularisation of poor relief. In 1370, the city of Nuremberg introduced poor relief records. Other cities followed, carrying out checks on the poor and entering them in registers. Residents of the cities were given passes identifying them as poor and received municipal support. People from other parts of the country and those who were classified as undeserving of support and able to work were excluded from this support. Those not carrying the pass when picked up by the police were expelled from the city. This shows that poor people were increasingly becoming the targets of regulatory

measures. The social understanding of poverty was changing: rather than being thought of as God's will, it was now seen as their own fault and a burden on society. Work, in contrast, was a sign of a successful life and diligence.

In the *16th century*, there was a step-by-step reorganisation of poor relief throughout Europe. The London Bridewell was set up in 1555, followed by other houses of correction, for example in Bristol. English institutions set an example for continental Europe. In Amsterdam, a house of correction or *tuchthuis* was set up for men, mostly beggars, but also impoverished residents of the city, men with disabilities and criminals (Wendt, 2017, pp. 23–26). The concept was later put into practice in Germany, with institutions being established in Bremen (1609), Lübeck (1613) and Hamburg (1620). In the houses of correction, poor people were tested to see if they were able to work, then set to work as a disciplinary measure. Those begging on the streets were sent to these institutions and punished with forced labour (Sagebiel, 2005, p. 4). Welfare was no longer provided for religious reasons, out of a spirit of charity, but instead with the aim of discipline and reformatory labour. These workhouses and houses of correction should thus not be seen as the first signs of civil social policy. People were kept there, excluded from the rest of society (Wendt, 2017, p. 27). Deller and Brake (2014, p. 83) differentiate between five types of houses of correction which could often not be clearly distinguished from orphanages or workhouses:

– The poor lived outside the city and came in of their own accord to work;
– The poor lived and worked in the institution but could come and go as they pleased;
– The poor officially lived and worked there of their own accord, but were not allowed to leave, or only under certain conditions;
– The poor were forced to go there based on an administrative decision;
– The poor were forced to go there based on a judge's verdict.

When the *Industrial Revolution* set in, the "social question" became more urgent. Technological innovations such as the invention of the steam engine and railways led to meteoric industrial development. Employment in agriculture, conversely, fell. People from rural areas flocked in increasing numbers to the towns and cities, where some were given low-paid jobs in the new factories; but not all found work. The number of homeless people rose in urban conurbations, and there was famine. In the *mid-19th century*, affluent burghers pressed for a solution to the issue of poverty, demanding social reform as a means of preserving social peace and preventing a class struggle (Müller, 2013, p. 22). As the workhouses were becoming too expensive, various German towns and cities introduced a new poor relief model: the Elberfeld System. Towns were divided into small quarters, each under the supervision of a volunteer almsgiver who lived in the quarter. The almsgivers took care of the people and families assigned

to them and reported to a district overseer. The system was first introduced in the town of Elberfeld in 1853, and its success led to the rapid proliferation of this management model. In the large quarters suffering from mass poverty, however, it was hard to find volunteer almsgivers. The prevailing problems were complex and specific, and differed from those affecting the areas where middle-class families lived. The Elberfeld System evolved into the Strasbourg System. This also divided urban areas into quarters, but the volunteers were joined by full-time professional almsgivers, and responsibilities were consolidated in a Poor Office. For the first time, a distinction was made between the individuals providing welfare and the entities making reasoned decisions on individual cases: the volunteers continued to be responsible for supporting the poor, while the full-time workers took on administrative tasks (Lambers, 2010, 149). Alongside this communal poor relief, churches and associations also laid the foundations for professional Social Work. The Protestant Church came to an agreement on the division of tasks with the municipal offices, ensuring that individual cases were dealt with and providing specialist facilities such as orphanages or lying-in homes (Hering & Münchmeier, 2003, p. 33). In 1833, Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808–1881) founded the "Rauhes Haus" in Hamburg. This is one of the oldest institutions in Germany run by the Diakonie welfare organisation, and differed in some very central aspects from the penal institutions and houses of correction prevailing at the time. Wichern wanted to give young people prospects. In 1843, he opened a training centre, where he trained "brothers", later known as "deacons" (*Diakone*). Meanwhile, Catholic nuns were among the first people in Germany to be trained in care for the poor and sick, and to work in that field as professionals. They opened orphanages and schools. These developments saw an increasing divide between Social Work and special needs education: while Social Work increasingly concentrated on the social effects of industrialisation, curative education – the forerunner of special needs education – took a path based more on medicine and psychiatry. Curative educators, who fell under the heading of school pedagogy, were devoted to establishing *Hilfsschulen*; special needs schools (Buchkremer, 1990, p. 63; Loeken, 2012, p. 363; Moser, 2000, p. 181).

At the end of the 19th century, the establishment of social services continued to advance. In 1897, the theologian Lorenz Werthmann founded the Caritas Association, whose administrative headquarters were in Freiburg. This new association was involved in various fields of social support, helping seasonal workers, seafarers, beggars, alcoholics and people with disabilities. It established kindergartens and facilities dealing with correctional education, protection for girls, nursing, and working women. On the part of the government, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck introduced social security: in 1883, health insurance was introduced, in 1884 accident insurance and in 1889 disability and old age insurance (pensions) for

workers[2]. Bismarck was concerned with two issues: ensuring firstly that the workers, who were organised along party political lines, did not upset the balance of power in society; and secondly that the national treasury did not bear the brunt of the high costs of poor relief. From then on, two support systems existed side by side: on the one hand assistance provided under social policy, and on the other hand individual poor relief.

Finally, the *First World War* led to an increased need for professional Social Work (Lambers, 2010, p. 154). The support provided to families without a father, and dependants' pensions, added to the number of people entitled to assistance. Until 1918, the state had seen itself as a liberal state that was governed by the rule of law and interfered as little as possible with social and economic processes; now, that understanding underwent a fundamental change (Schilling & Klus, 2015, p. 34). In 1918, the Prussian Ministry of Welfare was established as the state's central welfare authority. Various laws were enacted, for example on funding for war victims including surviving dependants and the war disabled; on social security pensions and small pensions for victims of inflation; or on youth welfare. Instead of "poor relief" (*Armenfürsorge*), the term now used was "welfare" (*Wohlfahrtspflege*). Structures came into being that are still in place today, such as the youth welfare office (comprising an administrative department and a youth welfare committee, the latter now being known as the youth assistance committee). In the Weimar Constitution of 1919, the new state reinforced its understanding of welfare in a parliamentary welfare state governed by the rule of law. In line with this zeitgeist, the women's movement, which had been coming together since the middle of the 19th century, began to draw attention. The grouping was modelled on political women's movements in France, which had been active since the late 18th century (Lambers, 2010, pp. 146–155). One of the main figures was the social reformer Alice Salomon, who campaigned for middle-class girls and women to be included in social assistance work in Germany. She helped establish an independent training system. In 1893, Salomon became a member of the "Girls' and Women's Groups for Social Assistance Work". In 1908 she founded Germany's first Women's School for Social Work in Berlin, and in 1929 the "International Committee of Schools of Social Work for Women". In 1926, her first textbook on welfare training was published. In it, she describes a multi-stage model for professional support including the collection of psychosocial data with the help of clients (Schilling & Klus, 2015, p. 39).

At roughly the same time as the women's movement began to take action, at the start of the 20th century, middle-class youth and the labour movement joined forces to launch a diverse *youth movement*. Youth movement principles such as the idea of group (self-)education were picked up by actors providing social support,

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[2] In 1927, unemployment insurance was also introduced.

leading to progressive education concepts and the "social pedagogical movement" (Wagner, 2009, p. 111). This middle-class youth movement is said to have begun in 1901, when the *Wandervogel* ("Bird of Passage") youth association for school excursions was founded (Wagner, 2009, p. 114). The middle-class youth movement revolted against schools, parents and society, met to go hiking and frequently subscribed to a romanticised understanding of nature. These gatherings should be distinguished from those by young people from the working class who came together for political reasons, protesting against poor working conditions. Urbanisation and industrialisation brought these young people many disadvantages (Münchmeier, 2018). While the young workers' activities often had international aspects, some members of the middle-class youth movement had nationalist and racist inclinations, reflecting the ambivalence of the contemporary zeitgeist.

When the National Socialists took power and the *Second World War* broke out, those nationalist tendencies became entrenched. The National Socialists set up the "National Socialist People's Welfare" organisation (NSV). They replaced welfare with eugenics (Schilling & Klus, 2015, p. 40). The aim was to protect an imagined "Aryan race" against "unhealthy genetic material" using barbaric measures and human extermination, such as forced sterilisation and the murder of people with disabilities, homosexual people or Jewish people. In many cases, social workers were actively involved in and supported the murders and racist politics. Prominent members of the profession were murdered or forced to emigrate, such as Alice Salomon, Adele Beerensson, Gertrud Israel, Hedwig Wachenheim or Frieda Wunderlich (Paulini, 2013, p. 125).

After the *end of the war*, the support system had to be rebuilt. Professional standards were no longer in place. Following Germany's capitulation on 8 May 1945, the country was divided between the occupying powers of the USA, Britain, the Soviet Union and later France. Social work practice prioritised care for war orphans, war invalids and refugees, and combating hunger and hardship (Hammerschmidt et al., 2017, p. 90). The remaining structures of the Caritas and Diakonie organisations continued their work. The "Central Workers' Welfare Committee" (today the AWO) and the "Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany" (ZWST), both of which had been banned during the National Socialist era, were fully re-organised.

In 1949, the Allied occupation ended with the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Different social support structures developed in the two countries. In East Germany, the Caritas and Diakonie organisations were joined by the "Central Committee for People's Solidarity", the central body providing social support. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) saw the state's task as overcoming capitalism and social problems, and the very well-developed state care schemes, such as kindergartens, corresponded with this understanding (Eßer, 2018b). However, anyone who failed to meet the

education system's goal of a "Socialist personality", or who was considered to have behavioural problems, was placed in a special home (*Spezialheim*). In recent years there have been reviews concentrating particularly on the acts of repression that took place in the *Jugendwerkhof* juvenile detention centres. These were designed for the correctional education of young people considered to be difficult cases.

In West Germany, the Red Cross and Paritätische associations formed further structures. Gradually, the leading independent welfare associations became established in Germany[3], along with a varied landscape of funding providers. Social work professionals tried to start out where the Weimar Republic system had left off, maintaining the social security and pension systems. The problem remained of Social Work being underpaid. Women primarily worked in subordinate social services positions, occupying positions in the field. Men held decision-making office positions (Paulini, 2013, p. 128).

Social work practice followed the working methods used in the UK and USA (Lutz, 2018, p. 290). From the 1950s onwards, the various training centres began to be turned into colleges of higher education (*Höhere Fachschulen*) specialising in Social Work (Paulini, 2013, p. 127). Key legal reforms followed, for example the 1961 Youth Welfare Act (JWG). In 1990 this was linked to the practice of child and youth welfare again when it was reformulated as the Child and Youth Welfare Services Act (KJHG), today part of the German Social Code (SGB VIII). The Federal Social Assistance Act (BSHG) was passed in 1961/62. This was the forerunner of today's Social Codes (SGBs). As in the GDR, the clients of Social Work were also sometimes dealt with using repressive methods. In the 1950s and 1960s, many of the people working in children's residential care were untrained. Discipline and control were the maxims in many of these institutions. It was not until the 1968 movement came about that there was widespread criticism of the conditions in Social Work. From the mid-1960s on, the 1968 protesters formed a "movement against the system" in many countries of the world (Steinacker, 2018). During the *Heimkampagne* or "home campaign", which was related to the 1968 protests, students freed young people from residential care and offered them places in their flatshares. They condemned the constraints and reprisals used to raise children and wanted to change the socio-political conditions. The 1968 protesters were involved in almost all classic fields of Social Work. Alternative kindergartens and forms of child care (*Kinderläden* and *Kinderhäuser*) sprang up, along with

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[3] Today, the leading independent welfare associations in Germany have joined together to form the Federal Association of Non-Statutory Welfare (BAGFW). This comprises six central associations, each with its own organisational structure: (1) the Workers' Welfare Association (AWO); (2) the German Caritas Association (DCV); (3) the German Parity Welfare Association (Der PARITÄTISCHE); (4) the German Red Cross (DRK); (5) Diakonie Deutschland; (6) the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany (ZWST).

independent schools, self-governed youth centres and cultural centres, alternative education projects and very small residential homes offering an alternative to residential youth welfare. Many of these schemes were short-lived and could not be financed in the long term. Nonetheless, the 1968 movement led to increased reflection on the basic social conditions in Social Work, and thus promoted the use of training academies (Eßer, 2018b). Universities increasingly taught courses in Social Pedagogy as an element of educational science. From the 1970s, the colleges of higher education began to be reclassed as universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*). More and more young people were studying at universities and other institutions of higher education. In the GDR, meanwhile, protests against the political system were increasing. The mass demonstrations in 1989 called for freedom of speech and a new political system. Eventually, the popular protests led to the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. On 3 October 1990, the GDR and FRG were officially reunited. In the climate of rapid change, opportunities were missed for Social Work to undertake a comparative reflection on the approaches and working methods applied in East and West Germany. *German unity* instead meant that the "Western system" was exported to the east of Germany along a one-way track (Bütow & Maurer, 2018). The fact that this "Western system" has required transformation can be seen from the discussion in Germany about a "new social question". Social inequalities are reflected in the gap between the rich and poor, which is growing ever wider (Butterwegge, 2021). Precarisation can be seen among broad swathes of the population, for example the working poor, whose income can no longer cover increases in the rent and the cost of living (Groenemeyer & Ratzka, 2012, p. 383). The 21st century is creating an acute need to develop new solutions for "the problem of social exclusion" (Kronauer, 2010, p. 11). The resulting social upheavals are not without their consequences for Social Work. They are an ever more pressing reminder of Social Work's mission to reduce exclusion and produce inclusion, and of the need to reflect on whether Social Work itself is involved in processes of exclusion (Anhorn, 2008; Otto, 2020). Germany's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 is thus a herald of significant legal changes. Inclusion is becoming a new guiding principle for society as a whole and making it necessary to fundamentally analyse and (re-)organise the social services and education system.

Working methods and organisational structures

A broad range of methods are applied in Social Work. May (2010) differentiates between approaches based on clients' everyday lives, lifeworlds, situations in life and coping strategies; on the theory of professionalisation, on systems theory, on

discourse analysis and on psychoanalysis. At the level of professional practice, working methods range from casework to group work and community work. This classic triad is constantly being refined and improved. Different approaches come into play depending on whether professionals are dealing with a young person's individual career plans, group dynamics in a classroom or the empowerment of people living in a marginalised city district. What they all have in common, however, is their goal of being adapted to suit clients' lifeworlds. Galuske (2013) presented a highly regarded attempt to classify the methods used in Social Work, dividing them into three groups:

1) client-based methods (such as social casework, counselling, case management, family work, street work, community work);
2) indirect intervention-based methods (supervision and self-evaluation);
3) structural and organisation-based methods (social management and youth welfare planning).

Client-based methods bring structure into interactions between clients and Social Work professionals. They can be divided into methods based on individual cases, groups and social spaces. It should be noted that this is an analytical differentiation. The individual methods applied mix and overlap. *Indirect intervention-based methods* are aimed at Social Work professionals and are designed to give them opportunities to observe themselves and others, and analyse the different forms of behaviour observed. This is not just about dealing with a "case". As a rule, their analysis also encompasses the background circumstances to the institution studied, the team structures, employment relationships, social spaces and their own biography.

Structural and organisation-based methods are geared towards creating conditions that are conducive to Social Work. In Germany, social management has been an issue since the mid-1980s. Tight public budgets and the corresponding need to economise mean that Social Work is called upon to be more efficient and effective – a requirement that is not without controversy. It is in the context of these debates that methods such as organisational development, quality management and human resource development have been entering Social Work. When planning youth welfare services, the goal is to come up with a needs-based youth welfare scheme and create positive living conditions for young people.

In light of these developments, one central skill that social workers are required to acquire is to have an overview of the wide variety of methodological options, limits and underlying conditions, on one hand, while on the other hand being able to select a method, from those various options, that best suits the case in hand.

The plurality of methods used in Social Work corresponds to a plurality on the organisational level. In Germany, Social Work has branched out to create a diverse array of providers, or *Träger*. *Träger* is a typically German term that relates to the way Social Work is organised. The term is ambiguous: there is a difference between

Sozialleistungsträger (providers of social benefits) and *Träger sozialer Dienste* (providers of social services). The providers of social benefits are the entities that bear the costs for social services, and may be the federal government, the federal states, municipalities or, for instance, health insurance funds. The providers of social services, by contrast, carry out the work itself. In other words, they perform the service and are financed by the social benefits providers. They are responsible legal entities and manage the professional, financial and staffing aspects of social institutions (Nikles, 2008, p. 29). In the case of providers of social services, a further distinction is made between public and independent providers. The public providers are the youth welfare departments, social welfare offices and public health departments set up by rural districts (*Landkreise*) and cities constituting districts (*kreisfreie Städte*). The independent providers may be either private and commercial or non-commercial. The large charitable organisations, churches, self-help organisations and foundations are independent and non-commercial. Private, commercial providers began to proliferate at the start of the 1990s. They work on a for-profit basis and do not have overarching organisational structures like those of independent, non-commercial providers. They are found in especially high numbers in residential and temporary care; however, they are not present in all fields of Social Work. The sometimes confusing variety that characterises providers is mirrored in the large number of different *fields of practice* found in Social Work. Based on the clients addressed by Social Work, these fields of practice can be categorised into schemes for children and young people, adults, senior citizens, families, women, men, mentally ill people, people with disabilities and other actors. They can also be categorised according to the social problems they address, such as homelessness, illness or poverty. At the same time, Social Work professionals work in a broad range of institutions – for example, in nurseries and kindergartens, residential group homes, educational institutions or immigration counselling centres. The degree of intervention by social workers can also be used to map out the different fields of practice: does the field of practice *complement users' lifeworlds* (as in the case of youth leisure activities, self-help groups or child guidance counselling), *support users' lifeworlds* (as with the semi-residential care forming part of socio-educational support, or in refuges for homeless people) or *replace users' lifeworlds* (as with children's residential care, prisons or retirement homes) (Deller & Brake, 2014, p. 43–48)?

Current debates: inclusive child and youth welfare

The child and youth welfare system is extremely significant to Social Work, and as part of Social Work. That significance has recently been underlined by the efforts made to reform a social code that is important in Germany: SGB VIII. This is the

eighth of twelve books of the German Social Code (*Sozialgesetzbuch*). These books regulate social security in Germany, including basic income support for jobseekers, employment promotion, statutory health insurance, accident insurance and pension insurance, long-term social care insurance and social assistance, and the basis for child and youth welfare under federal law. In Germany, the current debate on inclusion revolves around how to make child and youth welfare modern and inclusive, but the debate is also a challenge to the entire Social Work system.

Discussion on inclusion is not entirely new within Social Work (e.g. see Bommes & Scherr, 1996). There has already been wide-ranging discussion on the background to inclusion in the welfare state (Otto & Ziegler, 2008) and issues around exclusion (Ziegler, 2011). Essentially, this involves issues related to the nature and goals of calls for inclusion considering the living conditions in areas of social exclusion. Moreover, the overriding question remains of how inclusion can be achieved in a society that generates exclusion (Thieme, 2020). This makes it all the more astonishing that discussions on inclusion and exclusion have played hardly any role at all in the current debate on reforming SGB VIII. The current discussion instead focuses on issues around legal responsibilities, the administrative rationales underpinning the allocation of support under the different systems, the quality of services and the beneficiaries of child and youth welfare. The current considerations tend to be related to the superficial aspiration of remedying past deficits in the assignment of responsibilities, or in the approval and rejection of applications for services. At the same time, however, this criticism is also justified: one major point of criticism of SGB VIII is that the child and youth welfare system is not coordinated with the support system for people with disabilities (especially integration support). They are regulated separately from one another in different statute books. That separation, and how to correct it, is now coming into the focus of interest.

Social benefits for people having what are described as physical, mental and psychological disabilities[4] were initially united in the Federal Social Assistance Act (Wiesner, 2014). In 1990, the Child and Youth Welfare Services Act was then introduced. This act does not, however, cover all children and young people, but is instead primarily aimed at children and young people without disabilities. There have been repeated efforts to transfer integration support for all children and young people with disabilities to the field of child and youth welfare, in an all-encompassing solution. So far, however, only a partial solution has been achieved, in that the child and youth welfare services are now also responsible for supporting the integration of children with psychological disabilities. Integration support

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[4] This reflects a separation under the legal system that does not necessarily correspond to definitional debates on how to categorise disabilities (Dederich, 2009).

in cases of psychological disability initially fell under socio-educational support (*Hilfen zur Erziehung*, Article 27, subsection 4 of SGB VIII). Since 1993 it has been categorised as a separate service under Article 35a SGB VIII. This legal configuration remains in force to this day, but was already a compromise at the time it was introduced, and still leads to difficulties: in real life, disability-specific needs cannot always be distinctly differentiated based on the type of disability (especially in the case of multiple disabilities). It is also not possible to distinguish them clearly from needs related to parenting. This leads to disputes between the service providers, and often to service delays (Wiesner, 2014, p. 57).

In recent years, the debate has gained momentum on whether to amalgamate the child and youth welfare services, on one hand, with support for children and young people with disabilities, on the other. This is mainly due to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD), which Germany ratified in 2009. Another reason is the federal government's 13th Child and Youth Report, which sees "children and young people with disabilities (...) primarily (as) children and young people" and aims to put an end to the distinction between disability and non-disability (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend BMFSFJ, 2009, p. 12).

A working group on the Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities, comprising politicians from the federal states, the federal government and experts, developed proposals for re-categorisation (ASMK & JFMK, 2013). That working group was constituted as part of the parallel process of reforming integration support; a process which eventually led to the passing of the Federal Act on Participation (BTHG), which entered the first stage of its enforcement in 2017. The BTHG is already having consequences for child and youth welfare: the participation planning procedure set out in Article 19 SGB IX means that standardised means of needs assessment are now being used in child and youth welfare, which poses a challenge considering the more participative approach used in support planning (Article 36 SGB VIII). Altogether, it thus remains to be determined which instruments and specific methods can be used to identify and meet young people's needs.

To make child and youth welfare in Germany inclusive, it is important for both systems – child and youth welfare and support for people with disabilities – are fully merged, and that this goal continues to be pursued. They are yet to be merged. It would also be important to enable all children and young people, with or without disabilities, to receive needs-based support within a common statutory framework.

The coalition agreement of the 18th electoral term of the Bundestag finally announced plans for comprehensive reform of this kind, "designed to embrace years of highly contentious political and professional dispute in the field of child and youth welfare" (Böllert, 2017, p. 9). As a result, some draft bills were in consider-

ation in 2015 and 2016. Numerous critical objections came from the field of Social Work about the less than transparent process, and the goals of the reform, which were not considered sufficient (Ziegler, 2016). As a result, these drafts were withdrawn in November 2016 by the *Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth* (BMFSFJ). Although work continued on developing a new law, no such law had been passed by the end of the 18th electoral term. A second attempt at reform is still being made nonetheless. To counter the accusations of a lack of transparency and participation, the new reform attempt from 11/2018 to 12/2019 was launched as a process of dialogue; *Have a say – make a change: help shape the future of child and youth welfare* (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend BMFSFJ, 2020). The legislative process culminated in the Act to Strengthen Children and Youth (KJSG), which was passed on 7 May 2021 and whose key components came into force on 10 June 2021. Although the fact that this has come into force means that some steps have already been taken towards inclusion, the inclusive solution will only be adopted in 2028, when the service systems are amalgamated (Article 107 SGB VIII). In preparation for this overall responsibility, advisers are to be brought in as of 2024 who can guide parents, children and young people through all the procedural steps involved in accessing integration support services (Article 10b SGB VIII). The new act employs a strikingly interactionist, individualist understanding of participation (the term "inclusion" hardly features at all). The preamble to the act explains: "Participation is thus understood as an opportunity for young people to interact in a self-determined manner appropriate to their age and individual abilities in all areas of life that affect them" (Deutscher Bundestag, 2021, p. 67, preamble to Section 1 [2b]). This understanding of participation does not just fall short of the socio-critical notion that the integration and inclusion movements still stand for today (Feuser, 2012). It also fails to achieve the target that child and youth welfare sets itself of helping to create good living conditions for all young people and their families, and supporting and furthering the spread of child- and family-friendly environments (Article 1, subsection 3 [5] SGB VIII). In addition, these efforts at inclusion are still tied to the disability/non-disability dichotomy. That fundamental assumption also perpetuates the existing division between child and youth welfare, on one hand, and support for people with disabilities, on the other. Disability is also viewed very medically, as a deviation. Issues of social inequality are ignored. This is despite the fact that it would be important for child and youth welfare in particular for the law to actively counteract precarity and the exclusion of people who have experienced disability. Notwithstanding these limitations, there is still scope today for shaping policy. Professional concepts and instruments urgently need to be refined and tested before the two systems of services are amalgamated. The dynamics that develop before the federal act is formulated in 2027 will pivot crucially on

these efforts. However, as yet there is little theoretical or conceptual confirmation of how relevant child and youth welfare, and Social Work, are to inclusion (Hopmann, 2021; Hopmann & Schmitt, 2022; Kutscher, 2020).

Conclusion

This contribution traces the historical development of Social Work in Germany, goes over the central working methods, describes the institutional and organisational context of Social Work and offers an insight into the current debate in Germany on a child and youth welfare system that sees itself as inclusive. These current efforts are, however, by no means sufficient to really do justice to the growing aspiration to answer calls for inclusion and participation within and in cooperation with Social Work. Modern societal developments are marked by exacerbated instances of exclusion and inequality. However, if these instances of exclusion are identified, this also offers opportunities to make Social Work more inclusive than before. At the same time, processes of social exclusion should be seen not only as a particular challenge to Social Work, but also as resulting from Social Work (Cremer-Schäfer, 2018; Kessl et al., 2015). Social work thus functions as a substitute means of conveying inclusion, avoiding and managing exclusion (Bommes & Scherr, 1996) – and in some cases causing exclusion.

It is therefore important to stand up for change, so that Social Work really can achieve its professional mission of producing inclusion and promoting autonomy. Processes of division in society harbour the risk of the management of societal problems being shifted entirely onto the individual, and of this tendency being reproduced in Social Work due to the increasingly complex nature of living circumstances (Seithe, 2011). To counteract this tendency, the hypothesis is that a self-confident, "liberating" Social Work is needed (Lutz, 2011). This means a Social Work that constantly reminds itself of its mission, decries deplorable social circumstances in society as a whole, acts as an advocate for its clients and has the confidence to speak out in public and (socio-)political debates based on its own professional ethos and scientific expertise. To give greater weight to the voices speaking out in Social Work, it seems of great relevance to us to bolster the national and international Social Work organisations that offer a pool of expertise and could be more strongly involved than before in national and international debates (Straub, 2016). This would have to be accompanied by a sensitivity towards the mechanisms of exclusion that are reproduced through Social Work, as well as greater participation by clients. On an academic level, it is important around the world for dialogue and fusion to take place within Social Work in the understanding that the variety of different fields Social Work encompasses is

enriching (e.g. see the anthology by Sajid, Baikady, Sheng-Li & Sakaguchi), and working to reinforce the profession and the discipline by coordinating efforts and exchanging ideas.

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