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Abstract

Social Work in Austria can be described as an action and profession based science dealing with the different forms of social support that help people maintain agency in difficult circumstances and situations in life. At the same time, the field sees itself as a practical form of social policy that undertakes a critical examination of how social problems and risks of exclusion are generated within society. Finally, Social Work pursues its own educational goal based on opportunities for personal realisation and participation. Historically, Social Work in Austria developed along two separate paths, firstly as *Sozialarbeit* (social work in a narrow sense), administrative practice that is rooted in occupations around youth welfare and healthcare, and secondly as *Sozialpädagogik* (Social Pedagogy), which arose from social education work in out-of-home care for children and young people. Since the 1970s, the number of tasks and approaches in this context has proliferated, increasingly causing social work and Social Pedagogy to overlap and converge. In recent years, there have been signs of growing professionality and of the field slowly becoming established as an academic discipline. Simultaneously, approaches are becoming more important that are participatory or relate to social spaces and civil society.

Keywords

social policy, Social Pedagogy, professionalisation, research in Social Work, participation

Introduction

Social Work in Austria can be described as an action and profession-based science dealing with different forms of social support. On one hand it is related to the field of professional social support, designed to help create, restore, and maintain people's agency in critical circumstances and difficult situations in life. In this respect, the field sees itself as a practical manifestation of social policy that also undertakes

a critical examination of how social problems and risks of exclusion are generated within society. On the other hand, Social Work pursues its own educational goal based on creating opportunities for personal development, realisation, and social participation, and on promoting an inclusive society.

As such, the development of Social Work in Austria is in line with the discourses found in all German-speaking countries. One result of that, however, is that the origin of Austrian contributions in the field is often hidden: imported terms and theories obscure the developments that are specifically Austrian (Scheipl, 2011, pp. 1342–1343; Winkler, 2010, p. 45–46). Thus, during the 2000s, the term *Soziale Arbeit* (Social Work in a wider sense) became widely used in Austria rather than *Sozialarbeit*. *Soziale Arbeit* was introduced from Germany and is an overarching construct covering both *Sozialarbeit* (social work in a narrow sense) and *Sozialpädagogik* (Social Pedagogy). It comprises a wide range of forms of social and pedagogical support, from child and youth welfare to various counselling schemes, work with delinquents, addicts or drug users, or community work. It is understood both as a concept and a field offering "services to support and assist people in troubled circumstances" combined with "learning and coping tasks across their life course" (Füssenhäuser & Thiersch, 2011, p. 1638), subject to the prevalent social conditions.

In Germany, jobs and work in social care are now commonly consolidated under the heading of Social Work despite some differences in emphasis (e.g., between traditional universities and universities of applied sciences). In Austria, meanwhile, the process of social work and Social Pedagogy converging under the label of *Soziale Arbeit* is not yet complete. The term "Soziale Arbeit" is largely replacing "Sozialarbeit", leading to a related debate on what distinguishes social work from Social Pedagogy.

In Austria, Social Work is still only in the early stages of professionalisation and becoming established as an academic discipline. This is the latest step in an independent developmental history following what are sometimes widely varying paths and involving a wide range of activities, training pathways and professional qualifications (Kohlfürst, 2016, p. 43). Below, an attempt is made to trace the contours of the field from a historical perspective. Some contemporary concepts and positions are then presented, followed by an outline of current debates and developments, to complete the picture of Social Work in Austria.

The history of Social Work in Austria

A description of the history of Social Work in Austria must take into account the two different branches of social work and Social Pedagogy. As it took some time for any enduring scientific basis to become established, and the degree of profes-

sionalisation within Social Work was relatively low, very few sources are available. For that reason, historical depictions are necessarily fragmented and can only address individual aspects, painting a relatively imprecise picture of the field's development as a whole.

The history of *social work* (in a narrow sense) in Austria was related to the establishment of a national social policy, beginning in the 1880s. The introduction of financial assistance schemes (such as statutory health insurance) was accompanied by the foundation of various welfare schemes reacting to social phenomena and health issues. Simon distinguishes between three branches of welfare: 1. *general welfare*, now known as social assistance, which comprises the successor system to poor relief, 2. *child and youth welfare* and 3. *the health service* (Simon, 2010, p. 210). The theoretical groundwork for general welfare, and the foundations of its professionalisation, were laid by Ilse von Arlt, who introduced specialist courses in public care ("Vereinigte Fachkurse für Volkspflege") in 1912, marking the beginnings of Social Work training (Scheipl, 2011, p. 1344). Ilse von Arlt saw welfare as "applied poverty research". The welfare she introduced was based on a comprehensive theory of human needs, which she used to map out the forms of assistance provided and consistently establish welfare as personal services dealing with individual cases (Arlt, 1921, pp. 25–27). However, Ilse von Arlt's school remained the exception; the welfare provided under government-organised social administration was normally the sole domain of public employees working in central public administration. The youth welfare offices that were founded from 1913 onwards were also staffed entirely by male public employees with no specific qualifications in welfare (Simon, 2010, pp. 217, 210–211). From 1916 on, these public employees were assigned *professional carers* to support them. The female carers were responsible for providing the actual care, but reported to "legally qualified persons" who monitored and supervised them. The youth welfare office was designed to function "like a patriarchal family ... with the roles allocated accordingly: the professional guardian as a substitute father, the carer as a substitute mother" (Simon, 2010, p. 211, translated from German).

In other countries, social work developed from the basis of poor relief and private initiatives and welfare organisations; in Austria, however, the profession of the female "carer" was "invented by the public administration" (Simon, 2010, p. 210). After the First World War, serious health problems were rampant in Austrian society, leading to the establishment of state programmes to monitor the health of children and adults. The female carers working on these programmes under the supervision of doctors "were increasingly torn between monitoring recipients and providing them with support" (Moritz, 2020, p. 12, translated from German). To provide the carers with qualifications, Women's Schools for Social Work were set up, administered by the federal states or church organisa-

tions. However, they offered relatively low-level practical training, for women only (Simon, 2010, p. 217). In other countries, such as Germany, there were also male carers with their own separate qualifications (Moritz, 2020, p. 18), sparking academic debates on the profile of the "male public welfare worker" (Nohl, 1926). The work carried out by Austria's female carers, which involved family welfare and healthcare (Messinger, 2020, p. 42) remained subordinate to the perspective of (mostly male) legal professionals and doctors. It was not possible for a separate professional debate to develop, and international networking was also relatively scarce. Ilse von Arlt was, for example, the only Austrian attendee at the 1928 International Conference on Social Work, held in Paris. For financial reasons, no Austrians attended the subsequent conferences (Moritz, 2020, pp. 19–20). The career profile of the carer that became established was not highly professionalised, making the field poorly equipped to counter its appropriation by National Socialist ideology, and its tentative development into an autonomous profession was interrupted by the Nazi regime (Simon, 2010, p. 214). In 1938, the German Reich's welfare law was introduced, based on beliefs around genetics and eugenics; welfare workers were given tasks relating to eugenic selection (Messinger, 2020, p. 46).

After the Second World War, foreign aid organisations, members of the occupying powers and people returning from exile spread the word about welfare following "American" social welfare work methods (Messinger, 2020, pp. 48–49; Simon, 2010, p. 217). Simon notes that the practice of these methods (case work, group work and community work) was initially unsuccessful as they were alien to the Austrian tradition of

> the blessings of welfare being bestowed by an authority displaying varying degrees of benevolence. Self-help, or the helper and recipient of care acting in partnership, were viewed with suspicion and seen as encouraging insubordination and subversion (Simon, 2010, p. 218, translated from German).

As there is no transnational historiography of social work in Austria during this period, little is known about the disputes associated with the establishment of new professional methods (Messinger, 2020, p. 49). In 1962, a national Schools Act introduced uniform regulations on vocational training, a development which meant that the new image of social work increasingly found its way into practice. Starting in 1975, vocational schools began to be turned into "Academies of social work" (Scheipl & Heimgartner, 2004, pp. 117–118). These social work academies continued to offer post-secondary vocational training. The field only gained academic status on becoming firmly established at universities of applied sciences. As of 2001, universities of applied sciences in all the Austrian federal states began

to introduce degree programmes in social work to replace the training courses at academies of social work (Scheipl & Heimgartner, 2004, p. 118).

When the Bologna Process was put into effect to harmonise European education systems, bachelor's and master's programmes were introduced at universities of applied sciences. Degree courses in *Sozialarbeit* (social work in a narrow sense) were renamed "Soziale Arbeit" (Social Work in a wider sense) and were intended to provide qualifications covering the entire field of social work and Social Pedagogy (Austro-Bachelor-Team, 2005). However, it soon became apparent that this aspiration had not been achieved, as the pedagogical content only makes up a small part of degree programmes at universities of applied sciences: they are still geared relatively closely to the model of "person-oriented, law-based administrative practice" (Sting, 2015, p. 199). As a result, degree programmes and professional development courses in Social Pedagogy were also increasingly brought in at universities of applied sciences in addition to training in "social work", creating a situation in which "Soziale Arbeit" and "Sozialpädagogik" sit alongside one another. This clearly demonstrates that as of yet, social work and Social Pedagogy have not been successfully consolidated under the overarching heading of "Soziale Arbeit".

The genesis of professionalisation in *Social Pedagogy* is marked by two child protection conferences, one in 1907 in Vienna and the other in 1913 in Salzburg. The background to the conferences, and thus the origins of social pedagogical outlooks in Austria, was an impression that "youth neglect" was increasing (Baernreither, 1907, pp. V–VI). The problems encountered in raising the next generation were seen as something society as a whole had to tackle, and made the focus of a systematic state policy concentrating on three fields: child protection (mainly dealing with regulations for foster children and foster parents), residential care (dealing with residential care) and juvenile criminal law, where the aim was to support the "point of view of education" (Baernreither, 1907, pp. 19–20).

Ralser's research into the welfare system around 1900 shows that as Social Pedagogy became professionalised, it did not follow its own, independent route as a specialism or discipline; it went through the process as part of the field of medicine-based pedagogy, in which psychiatry was becoming established as a powerful "resource for understanding a culture in crisis" (Ralser, 2010, p. 135). Social and pedagogical challenges were interpreted as "social pathologies" due either to "asocial" behaviour prompted by the milieu people inhabited or to innate "childhood defects". Psychiatric diagnoses arose which became the basis of correctional education and led to the idea that medicine and pedagogy should cooperate closely to deal with deviancy (Ralser, 2010, pp. 142, 144). On the basis of the discourse on neglect, the combined forces of the justice system, the youth welfare system, the guardianship authorities and the field of child psychiatry produced a new category of "patients": "children from the 'underclass' exhibiting some degree of bad behav-

iour" (Ralser, 2010, p. 146). Social Pedagogy thus became dependent on medicine and psychiatry from the very outset.

After the First World War, theorists began to tackle social pedagogical issues in the context of the psychoanalysis movement. Leading figures in this field were Siegfried Bernfeld and August Aichhorn, who worked on a "theory of neglect" and the reform of residential care in the 1920s. Both were closely connected to the field of psychiatry but were keen to emphasise the independent nature of a pedagogical viewpoint. Bernfeld brought psychoanalysis his concept of the "social place". In Bernfeld's view, neglect or criminality were often a case not for therapy, but for pedagogy. He believed that they resulted from the conflict between the milieu in which a child grew up and that in which the adult actually lived, leading to a need for "re-education" and inspiring criticism of real social conditions (Bernfeld, 1929). His "Baumgarten" residential care project represented an attempt to develop a new form of community education based on democratically justified self-government by children and young people (Bernfeld, 1921).

Aichhorn, who had been involved in setting up the after-school childcare system in Vienna before the First World War, was particularly influential. After the war, he developed an educational concept for children's residential care informed by psychoanalysis. Later, he tested and generalised this concept in the context of child guidance counselling (Scheipl, 2011, p. 1343). Like Bernfeld, Aichhorn believed that residential care was first and foremost about "re-education": in his view, "neglected" children were not a medical problem but an issue related to upbringing (Aichhorn, 1925, p. 14). Neither were they "criminals" against whom society needed to be protected; in his opinion, they were "people who had been overburdened by life, whose negative attitude and hate against society was justified, and for whom a milieu thus had to be created in which they could feel at home" (Aichhorn, 1925, p. 130, translated from German). They were seen as normal children and young people whose problems resulted from stressful social environments and traumatising life experiences, and who could be re-educated by creating a positive social milieu and enabling them to have positive social experiences. Social Pedagogy thus encompassed the aspects of institutional pedagogical support, reflection on the social conditions of education and childraising and the establishment of communities with an educational effect. In Austria, however, Social Pedagogy was largely restricted to the field of child and youth care, whereas its development in Germany involved a broader range of tasks from the beginning.

The new era of Social Pedagogy emerging in the 1920s did not lead to the field becoming lastingly established in Austria. First, the reform movements rooted in psychoanalysis were restricted to Vienna and met with little interest in other regions. Second, although Aichhorn set up specialist courses for his staff as early as 1921, and there were other courses for educators, e.g., in religious institutions,

a single overarching, uniform vocational training system was not established for Social Pedagogy (Scheipl & Heimgartner, 2004, p. 129). Third, child and youth care with an emphasis on Social Pedagogy was not able to challenge the dominance of the approach based on social hygiene, medicine and psychiatry; an approach that, towards the end of the 1920s, was increasingly connected to the principles of human population planning and genetic health (Messinger, 2020, p. 44; Scheipl, 2003, p. 31). Fourth, National Socialism ultimately led to the end of the psychoanalysis movement. Many of its protagonists were banned from their places of work or forced to emigrate. Residential care was turned into traditional institutional education on the basis of National Socialist ideologies. In the Vienna care institution "Am Spiegelgrund", for example, this led to the killing of some 700 children in the period from 1942 to 1945 (Neugebauer, 2000, p. 149).

After World War II, there was no further awakening of Social Pedagogy. The National Socialist era was a "turning point" (Messinger, 2020, p. 50); according to Moritz, the expulsion of progressive workers had after-effects leading right up to the present (Moritz, 2020, p. 23), meaning that Social Pedagogy in Austria still has a relatively low level of professionalisation. Up to the start of the 1960s, training in Social Pedagogy took the form of short courses and staff training, sometimes organised by individual federal states but mostly arranged by the institutions and providers themselves. This not only resulted in poor-quality qualifications but also made such "educators" extremely dependent on their employers (Gnant, 2003, p. 464). Work in the field began to be professionalised throughout Austria starting in 1962, when new educational legislation was brought in. Courses were set up at the level of the vocational school, designed to offer qualifications in children's residential care, after-school care and boarding school education (Gnant, 2003, p. 463). In Austria, boarding schools still play a relatively important role in secondary schools due to the rural structure.

After the Second World War, the practice of children's residential care was dominated by large, institutional homes. In the wake of the 1968 student movements, a "homes campaign" arose in Vienna, calling for homes to be opened up to the public. In 1972, the first supported youth group home was established in Vienna, with other such group homes following in other federal states. From the 1970s on, this development led to the large institutions gradually being closed and the types of care available becoming more varied. Increasingly, they were privately run (Scheipl, 2007, pp. 149–151). At the same time, this played a key role in stimulating the foundation of ambulant and mobile forms of social pedagogical support.

Changes in social pedagogical practice led to discussion on the quality and level of professional training provided. In 1982, the courses on offer for educators were raised to a higher level, involving either five years of schooling with a *Matura* (the qualification required to enter higher education) followed by educator

training, or two years of college after the *Matura*. In 1993, an amendment to the Schools Act turned all these institutions into "colleges of Social Pedagogy" (Gnant, 2003, pp. 467–469). Under the School Organisation Act (Schulorganisationsgesetz, SchOG), these colleges provide the qualifications required for educational tasks in after-school care centres, homes, day care centres, the support elements of full-service schools and out-of-school youth work (SchOG in Gnant, 2003, p. 462). However, this type of qualification in Social Pedagogy has not yet become firmly established, meaning that it occurs alongside a wide range of courses and professional development programmes leading to qualifications at various levels and specialisations that sometimes vary regionally. As a result, career profiles in Social Pedagogy are still not very clearly defined (Sting & Lauermann, p. 2020).

As well as vocational training courses, Social Pedagogy is also gradually and falteringly becoming established as an academic discipline at Austrian universities. Social Pedagogy was first explicitly mentioned as a specialisation on the degree course in educational science offered in Graz from 1978 on. Other courses with a specialisation in Social Pedagogy were then introduced in Innsbruck, Vienna, Salzburg, and Klagenfurt. In Innsbruck, this specialisation was discontinued as of 2002 (Scheipl & Heimgartner, 2004, pp. 135–136). In Salzburg and Vienna, Social Pedagogy is restricted to individual, optional modules on degree programmes in educational science. Only Graz and Klagenfurt currently run separate master's degree programmes in Social Pedagogy. On those programmes, Social Pedagogy is linked to a broad range of pedagogical and social activities and is part of an integrated approach covering the entire field of Social Work (in a wider sense) but still rooted in the key disciplines of educational science.

Concepts and positions

The professionalisation of Social Work in Austria has so far tended to be relatively slow and unsystematic, meaning that in practice, social workers have a variety of qualifications and job descriptions, with little sign of any consistent working concepts and methods. "At the same time, social work and Social Pedagogy cannot always be regarded as a key profession or occupation in this field" (Mayrhofer, 2010, p. 54, translated from German). Child and youth care, for instance, can be provided not just by social pedagogues and social workers but also by psychologists, psychotherapists, educationalists, early childhood educators, teachers and people with lower qualifications, with strong regional differences (Sting & Lauermann, 2020). Due to Austria's federalist structures, the entire sector of social affairs is primarily the responsibility of the federal states. As they each enact their own legal provisions, the Social Work schemes and measures differ from one federal state to

the next and different terminology is used. There is no overarching, uniform set of rules in Austria that is similar, for example, to Book Eight of Germany's Social Code (SGB VIII).

Brunner also notes that Austria does not have its own, separate theoretical debate on the topic. The historical approaches that appeared at the start of the 20th century have hardly been pursued any further at all; there seems to be not just a lack of resources for taking the theories further, but also a lack of interest in doing so. Instead, to this day the Austrian situation still relies heavily on theories from other German-speaking countries, especially Germany (Brunner, 2020, pp. 104, 115–117). At the same time, social work and Social Pedagogy follow different paths.

According to Brunner, concepts and professional guiding principles that are found in German-speaking countries as a whole, such as Social Work being described as a "human rights profession" (Staub-Bernasconi, 2015) or the concept of a life-world oriented Social Work (*Lebensweltorientierte Soziale Arbeit*) (Thiersch, 2020), have also come to have widespread influence in Austria's professional discourse and practice (Brunner, 2020, p. 113). In his comprehensive description of Social Work in Austria, Heimgartner also describes the field as being guided by resource orientation, social spaces orientation, participation, inclusion and empowerment (Heimgartner, 2009). In Austria, Social Work adopts a perspective that is widespread in German-speaking countries: that the field of Social Work, along with the field of pedagogy, generally suffers from a "technology deficit" (Luhmann & Schorr, 1982) preventing it from relying on methodology as a means of achieving its goals. As subjects' autonomy and independence mean that the effects of any professional practices cannot be predicted, professionality involves remaining flexible in each specific situation or conditions. This can be described as a "reflective" professionality that is open to all possibilities and constantly reflects on how it can deal with uncertainty (Dewe & Otto, 2018, pp. 1204–1205).

To bridge the gap between the intended effect of professional practice and the observed consequences, professional guiding principles or "orientations" are becoming increasingly important. The term *orientation* is used "to describe a set of ideas, images, norms, values and practice-related principles and concepts that influence Social Work institutions and structures, producing specific patterns of professional practice or a specific professional habitus" (Heimgartner & Sting, 2016, p. 10, translated from German). The function that such orientations fulfil is to guide people's actions. In the discourse on professionality, a distinction can be made between the level of orientations and guiding principles based on professional ethics, on one hand, and that of theoretically based professional concepts, on the other (Heimgartner & Sting, 2016, p. 11).

On the level of *orientations based on professional ethics*, social justice and the enforcement of human rights are the main fundamental guiding principles adopted by Social Work. Schrödter (2007) argues that in picking up on the idea of *social justice*, Social Work sets itself apart from associated professions such as psychotherapy, medicine, the judiciary, the police or politics (Böllert et al., 2011, p. 517). Thiersch asserts that moral pretensions to social justice are the cornerstone of Social Work, his main argument being that the field is there to assist people "who live in particularly difficult circumstances, support them as they cope with life and help them make it more 'successful'" (Thiersch, 2011, p. 968, translated from German). Accordingly, Social Work is committed to fairly distributing resources, to doing away with privilege and to giving people equal access to lifestyle options and the chance to achieve socially recognised goals (Böhnisch et al., 2005, p. 251).

As well as following the principle of social justice, enabling people to achieve self-determination also requires a legal basis that grants all members of society civil liberties and social security. That basis comes in the form of universal *human rights* establishing people's right to meet fundamental social needs, their right to express and recognise opinions and interests, and the right for all people to participate in society. Staub-Bernasconi described Social Work as a "human rights profession" (Staub-Bernasconi, 2015) that has assigned itself that task by committing itself to civil liberties and social rights. The aim is to enable sections of the population to live their lives with dignity, especially those affected by social problems, exclusion and relegation to a lower social status.

Recently, the guiding principle of human rights has been reinforced and broadened by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This has led to a call for inclusion with the aim of ensuring that universal human rights are exercised by the particularly disadvantaged group of people with disabilities (Winkler, 2014), although this goal is also relevant to other groups that are particularly affected by discrimination (Schmitt & Uçan, 2021). This call for inclusion shows that even Social Work institutions and measures can involve exclusionary practices (see Oehme & Schröer, 2014), and rekindles the aspiration for participation to be as universal as possible. The discussion on how to assert children's rights within society and Social Work is moving in a similar direction, and has been further stimulated by the revelation of historical and current cases of abuse in child and youth welfare institutions (e.g. see Kerber-Ganse, 2008; Liebel, 2013).

The two fundamental ethical guiding principles of social justice and human rights have since fed into the compilation of a code of professional practice for Social Work. The global statement by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) identifies human rights and social justice as keystones of professional social work. The Austrian Association of Social Workers ("Österreichischer Berufsverband für

Soziale Arbeit", OBDS) has added these two principles to its professional profile of social work (OBDS, 2021). Professional orientations based on social justice, human rights and inclusion can also be found in Austria in contexts such as the profile of the department of Social Pedagogy in Graz, or that of Social Pedagogy and inclusion research in Klagenfurt.

On the level of *professional concepts*, Hans Thiersch's *Lebensweltorientierung* (lifeworld orientation) has become widely established; the concept of Social Work being guided by subjects' everyday lifeworlds. This views "difficult behaviour as an attempt to get to grips with life even under difficult conditions" (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2018, p. 914, translated from German). People's everyday lifeworlds are the scene of subjective interpretations, experiences, relationships, and the pragmatic management of day-to-day tasks. Grunwald & Thiersch (2018) describe the everyday lifeworld as what can be seen *on stage*, shaped by the socially determined situations in life and associated structures of power and inequality that are hidden *backstage*. Everyday life is characterised by conflicts resulting from social power structures and expressed as oppression, lack of consideration, shame, resignation, and rebellious anger. This can lead to attempts to create a "more successful everyday life" that flourish particularly in crises and times of transition. "Lifeworld oriented Social Work" (Thiersch, 2020, translated from German) creates pedagogically designed "spaces and strategies" that respect people's self-will while also offering them "options that can make everyday life 'more successful'". This is associated with an effort to transcend people's day-to-day lives as "pseudo-concrete", and to reflect on the balances of power and situations of inequality that are found in them.

Another widespread concept is that of *Sozialraumorientierung* (social space orientation). This has specifically Austrian roots. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Viennese economist and social policy maker Otto Neurath developed the concept of the *Lebenslage* which describes a person's situation in life. This was an attempt to identify the objective characteristics of people's living conditions in their respective environments, which social planners aim to alter to "improve" people's living condition (Schmidtke, 2008, pp. 42–44). Taking subjects' social space as a guiding principle combines the idea of diverging situations in life with a connection to the space where socially constituted living conditions (and the balances of power and situations of inequality within them) take material form; a space that simultaneously shapes people's perceptions and actions in its function as an arena for the subjective appropriation of social reality (Kessl & Reutlinger, 2010, p. 27). In the 1980s, Hans Hovorka combined the concept of *Lebenslage* with community work approaches in his "population-activating" urban research projects. The reformation of residential child and youth welfare in Vienna from 1997 to 2004 also followed an approach focusing on the urban communities and social spaces (Scheipl,

2008, p. 21). Today, the entire child and youth welfare sector in Graz is consistently guided by the concept of social spaces, and the organisational structure and action plans used in youth work in Vienna are heavily based on the same approach (Krisch, 2015).

In Austria, Social Work guided by subjects' social spaces is understood on one hand as "practical social policy" intended to improve people's socio-spatial living conditions in specific life contexts. According to Amann, social workers are "professionals"; experts in the "social infrastructure" who mediate between formal and informal resources and "are prepared to intervene in specific 'situations in life'" (Amann et al., 2010, p. 31, translated from German). The field also aims to maintain an "attitude of reflection on spaces" that examines how places and the people in them are treated (Scheipl, 2008, p. 23). Another aspect is analysis of the educational effect of processes by which social spaces are appropriated (Deinet & Reutlinger, 2014). This topic is mainly, but not exclusively addressed in community youth work. In the balancing act between formal and informal educational processes, *social pedagogical educational research* is becoming increasingly relevant. This investigates the places and spaces related to educational processes, and sees education as a phenomenon that is spread over social space and takes place in different social landscapes (Sting, 2021). The social space orientation thus has elements related to Social Pedagogy and education alongside those related to infrastructure and social policy.

Current debates

Current debates continue to indicate that there is a low level of theorisation and theory-forming basic research in the field of Social Work in Austria (Amann et al., 2010, pp. 16–18; Mayrhofer, 2010, p. 57). As a result, when issues relating to Social Work come up in the public discourse, the expertise of legal experts and psychiatrists is still frequently drawn upon. The resources available for research into Social Work remain relatively limited in Austria, and research approaches are often restricted to specific regions due to the decentralised structure of the social sector. A few years ago, an overview of the Austrian research landscape revealed that there was only little well-founded data and few overarching research activities (Heimgartner & Sting, 2012).

In the past decade, there have been some tentative signs of change with regard to certain topics. Investigations into historical abuse in residential care, for example, have prompted numerous studies painting a nuanced picture of the development of child and youth care in Austria (see Imširović et al., 2019; Ralser et al., 2017; Scheipl, 2016). In Innsbruck, basic historical research has begun to be car-

ried out on issues in Social Pedagogy (e.g. see Ralser et al., 2020). In St. Pölten, the theoretical stances adopted by Ilse von Arlt are being systematically reappraised and a connection made to current theoretical debates such as that on the capability approach (see Maiss, 2016). In Klagenfurt, a line of basic research has become established on the topic of leaving care (Groinig et al., 2019; Sting & Groinig, 2020). In Graz, a focus has emerged in the field of participatory research that covers topics such as participation in social organisations, digital literacy in Social Work and political participatory theatre work (Anastasiadis, 2019; Klinger & Mayr, 2020; Wrentschur, 2019). Participatory research, which is designed to help Social Work beneficiaries develop self-determination, and which challenges paternalist, authoritarian approaches, is also found in key fields of research on inclusion in Klagenfurt (More, 2021; Sigot, 2017).

One debate that primarily affects the practice of Social Work relates to establishing the professional identity of Social Work, and further advancing its professionality. To counter the tendency for professional practice to split into a variety of regional concepts, sometimes specific to a particular provider, the Austrian section of the International Federation of Educative Communities (FICE) initiated overarching discussions on the quality of child and youth welfare, a field that is restricted in Austria (but not in Germany) to residential child and youth care and non-residential parenting support. During a project phase spanning several years, national quality standards for residential child and youth welfare were developed in a cooperative process involving various providers, regions, and disciplines (FICE Austria, 2019). Two further projects have been started, one to create a training concept for child and youth welfare work, another to develop quality standards for non-residential parenting support. The ultimate aim is to establish a shared basis for professional practice in child and youth welfare that is recognised throughout Austria and create greater clarity and definition with regard to professionality. A similar attempt was made some years ago by the Austrian Network for Open Youth Work (bOJA) to establish guiding principles for high-quality professional practice in community youth work, which is a particularly broad-ranging field of practice bOJA.

The Austrian Association of Social Workers (OBDS) is currently focusing on the construction of professional identity within Social Work as a whole, with working groups developing career profiles for social work (in a narrow sense) and for Social Pedagogy that are to be included under the umbrella of Soziale Arbeit (Social Work in a wider sense) and thus act as a guidepost within practice. These career profiles are to be taken into account in training concepts and form the basis for establishing a code of professional conduct for Social Work. This discussion again includes perspectives from different regions of Austria and attempts to connect the professional approaches taken by social work and So-

cial Pedagogy. Considering the many overlaps between the fields of Social Work practice in Austria, as elsewhere, it no longer seems logical for the two branches of the profession to develop separately. Instead, there are signs of unforced integration taking place over a continuous spectrum extending from social work to Social Pedagogy; a process that permits differences in emphasis while also leaving space for new topics in future (Schröer & Sting, 2006, p. 19). In the as of yet rudimentarily explored field of solidarity research, for example, education-related approaches from Social Pedagogy coincide with approaches related to social policy (Hill & Schmitt, 2021).

Conclusion

Social Work in Austria is following the same patterns of development found in all German-speaking countries, though knowledge of the specifics of the Austrian situation is required to understand the dynamics in the discipline and professional field. When the terminology is applied in a context-sensitive manner, some overarching terms are found to have different connotations. In Germany, for example, Social Work (*Soziale Arbeit*) includes Social Pedagogy (*Sozialpädagogik*) as a matter of course, whereas in Austria the convergence of social work (*Sozialarbeit*) and Social Pedagogy is not (yet) complete. And while child and youth welfare (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*) is an extensive field in Germany – extending from kindergartens and parenting support to community youth work and youth careers guidance – in Austria these are separate disciplines and professions that fall under different policy domains.

     As the field continues to be dominated by legal and medical/psychiatric expertise, basic research on a solid theoretical foundation needs to be further developed and expanded in Social Work. In this context it will also be necessary to clearly define how perspectives from the educational sciences are relevant to the field of Social Work, as personal social services always aim, among other things, to set in motion educational processes to improve subjects' agency, helping them deal with life crises and guiding them towards a more successful way of managing their lives. With regard to Social Pedagogy, steps need to be taken to counteract oversimplified notions of pedagogy that see childraising merely as disciplinarianism and the expression of governmentality (see also Fenninger-Bucher, 2017). The professional expertise of Social Work includes on one hand – from a socio-political perspective – addressing the topic of how to improve people's situation in life, and on the other hand – from a socially reflected perspective – examining how pedagogy can enable their upbringing to be successful, and how education can enable them to participate in society.

Considering that Social Work in Austria can be described as having been "invented by the public administration" and bears traces of paternalistic traditions, in future two courses appear to me to be particularly important to its development. The first is to foster the use of participatory elements in research and practice that help Social Work clients exert their free will and themselves grasp opportunities for participation. The second is to promote elements from civil society that encourage social progress towards the ultimate goal of a democratic society guided by inclusion and social justice.

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