

PANORAMA

Current Research
in Swiss Schools
of Social Work

Editorial



Since 2006, when the first brochure on research appeared, research at the Schools of Social Work in Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts has both continued to develop and become established. A milestone was reached in May 2013, when thanks to long-standing efforts and cooperation between researchers, the admission of the Swiss Society of Social Work into the the Swiss Academies of Humanities and Social Sciences (SAHS) marked the recognition of social work as a social science discipline. This recognition as an academic discipline is the culmination of a century's worth of professionalizing social questions in Switzerland.

Research into social work topics significantly contributes to understanding and addressing sociopolitical and societal questions, which contributes to greater social cohesion and helps professionalize the discipline of social work. Regardless of whether the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the Commission for Technology and Innovation CTI, public or private organizations, or foundations finance it,

the research findings provide specific, grounded answers – available to administrators, organizations, politicians, cooperating institutions, professionals, and social work specialists alike – to the multilayered problems that exist in the social realm. The heads of the Schools of Social Work in German-speaking, French-speaking and Italian-speaking Switzerland have a strong interest in making these research insights more widely known and utilized. The Swiss Specialized Conference on Social Work SASSA, a consortium of Schools of Social Work, has therefore decided to issue a second Panorama brochure to provide an overview of some current research projects in social work.

Ursula Blosser,

President, Swiss Specialized Conference on Social Work at
Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts SASSA



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Mauro Dell'Ambrogio
State Secretary for Education, Research and Innovation

"Each new methodological approach leads to new knowledge about the object of research"

Science developed by experiment in order to establish the laws of nature. The constants of human behavior and co-existence were researched using different methods, with the results systematized. These methods are still valid today, augmented by experimental research: Grammar and the law were enriched rather than displaced by discoveries in the social sciences. Professional practice led to this development but also changed it. A doctors' experience leads to questions to which physiology or genetics seek answers, and in the process, this increases the scientific character of clinical actions. The same is true for an engineer, a linguist, a lawyer, and for social workers. Each new method used leads to a new knowledge about the particular research object, even though it may not be possible to immediately apply it in practice. Psychology, anthropology, sociology and allied disciplines have this kind of effect on the social professions. Is an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach therefore sufficient? Or must self-reflection on a professional practice that has been introduced become an independent scientific discipline? Answers to questions of this kind in Switzerland are not commonly provided by political decisions. Those who want to change things must take the time and effort to create credibility in the scientific community, and one can wish them the best.

Original text in Italian

Introduction

Research in Social Work: Still a Challenge

The 1995 federal law on Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts called for them to conduct research that was oriented to the needs of professional practice. This obligation is a challenge Schools of Social Work have taken up, though the framework conditions are not yet particularly favorable.

Research in social work needs to fulfill a set of exacting demands. Research should further the scientific basis for social work. It should supply practitioners with results that foster innovation. It should provide scientific explanations for current social problems that suggest empirically-based solutions. It should provide governmental bodies with "useful" data for public debate and for making sociopolitical decisions. It should contribute to the renewal of education at Schools of Social Work. Meeting all these demands has been the challenge faced by the research projects carried out in Swiss Schools of Social Work during the last fifteen years.

The Future of Research in Social Work

The largest part of the funding for the research projects described in this brochure has come from the SNSF and other governmental bodies. Research contracts from federal and cantonal authorities, and from other public agencies, have made it possible for important data to be fed into the political decision-making process. The SNSF's DORE funding instrument contributed significantly to developing research competence and activity in Schools of Social Work. It allowed social organizations and partner institutions to be involved, thereby supporting the practical implementation of the research results. As a direct result of experiences with the DORE funding instrument, the SNSF has recently decided to more strongly support application-oriented research – giving welcome legitimacy to the research projects carried out at Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts.

The current rapid pace of technological and social change generates both interesting new possibilities and worrying imbalances. There is no doubt that Switzerland's ability to meet these challenges rests on innovations produced in its laboratories. But it also rests on an understanding of newly emerging problems for individuals and society, and

on finding solutions for these problems. This is the contribution research at the Schools of Social Work can make. Expanding such application-oriented research that focuses on the life circumstances of the weakest groups in society requires better conditions for conducting research at Schools of Social Work. In particular, sustainable financing is needed to ensure that research activity can be carried out; young academic talent also needs to be cultivated and promoted.

Overcoming Vulnerability in the Course of Life

When faced with change to their social reference points or if weakened by social dislocations, many people find themselves vulnerable. The goal of the LIVES project is to research both the processes which engender such vulnerability and the processes that allow people to overcome this. The LIVES research project, part of the National Center of Competence in Research NCCR program funded by the SNSF, is hosted by the Universities of Lausanne and Geneva, but researchers in various disciplines who work at the Universities of Lausanne, Geneva, Bern, Fribourg and Zurich, at the Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration IDHEAP and at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland HES-SO, also participate.

In the first phase (2011-14) of the LIVES project, social work researchers coordinated projects on the integration of second generation migrants, on how despite unemployment it was possible to overcome vulnerability, on the effects critical events had on families, on social vulnerability among the very aged, and on social policy. Since 2013, HES-SO has financed a project leader, whose job it is to disseminate the results of the LIVES studies to institutions so they can incorporate them into their own work. It is likely there will be even greater engagement on the part of social work researchers during the second phase of the LIVES project (2015-18).

National Center of Competence
in Research LIVES project
www.lives-nccr.ch/en



Caroline Knupfer
Director of Social Policy
Department of Health and Social Affairs, Canton of Vaud

"Social research helps us critically address the consequences of our actions."

Research in social work is indispensable today in shaping, adapting, and steering social policy. The Department of Health and Social Affairs of the Canton of Vaud regularly gives out research contracts to illuminate areas in which we are active. We get to know the groups our measures target better this way, and we can recognize emerging social problems. Such social research helps us critically address the consequences of our actions.

One of our current projects, conceived in the spirit of partnership between the mutually augmenting areas of academe and public administration, is concerned with the life trajectories of vulnerable families in Vaud (NCCR LIVES). We hope to be able to identify the resources these families have for coping with major life challenges, as well as the factors that lead to vulnerability or to breaks in the life course. From this we can draw the conclusions we need for designing future public policies.



Research from Four Perspectives

The selected research projects presented in this brochure reflect the research carried out in the last few years at the Schools of Social Work, and illustrate the range of topics researchers have addressed. The emphases placed in social research itself are reflected in the presentation here:

Perspective 1: *The Social Responsibility of Research*. This encompasses studies that analyze the current state of social measures taken on behalf of the weakest individuals and groups in society. They also examine potential future changes to these measures.

Perspective 2: *The Contribution Research Makes to Professionalization*. These research projects focus on occupational applications in social work, on the competencies and values of practitioners, and on paths to greater professionalization.

Perspective 3: *The Use of Research for the Persons Concerned*. The addressees of social policy and of social intervention are of particular interest here, as is the question of what effects social work has on their life circumstances.

Perspective 4: *Expansion of Knowledge and Theory through Research*. These are projects that either investigate newly emerging problems or that cast light, from the point of view of social workers, on the margins of society.



Josiane Aubert
National Councilor SP (until 2014)
Member of the Commission on Science, Education, and Culture (until 2014)
Vice-President of the FUTURE network (until 2014)

"Research in social work is the crucial link between practitioners and political and institutional decision-makers."

A complex social network has been developed, by formulating public policies, to make it possible to respond to the varied problems that exist in particular groups. Social workers stand at the front lines, and are therefore also those best placed to evaluate the measures adopted, to suggest other approaches, and to cast a critical eye on governmental policy-making.

Politicians who pass or implement these laws are responsible for ensuring the measures taken are also effective. This calls for respecting the taxpayers, whose expression of solidarity with the weakest makes such measures possible. Research conducted at Schools of Social Work lies between these two poles and is of eminent significance. It makes an objective analysis of the measures taken available to the various actors, compares programs with those adopted in other cantons and countries, and proposes new projects, evaluates and adapts them.

Western societies today are living through a revolution as significant as the invention of the printing press in the 16th century, with the Internet and new telecommunication means giving wide access to knowledge much as the invention of printing did. But globalization, which puts the leading role of our civilization in question, and the finality of our planet and its natural resources are developments that shake the foundations of our society just as much. Such changes throw many people out of balance, and here, too, social work stands at the front lines. We need many research projects at the Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts working in close cooperation with the social sciences at the research universities, to understand the social changes that are now taking place and to monitor them on a daily basis. This is an ambitious program for the Schools of Social Work. With their research projects, they can contribute to finding solutions that preserve social cohesion.

The Social Responsibility of Research

Research on social issues is increasingly urgently demanded by both public and private institutions. This is not merely to focus on social structure and its changes, using common interpretive models. Rather, new paradigms and orientations for action are needed that can meet the needs of more complex societies. Research shows the welfare systems set up after World War II have become less effective, even as it simultaneously shows that basic welfare principles of insurance, solidarity, and equality must be preserved and renewed. Political institutions expect guidance from researchers as to how these demands can be implemented in practice, while still taking into account all the financial, ethical and cultural limitations that burden every community. Given the systemic problems in society, research is called upon to argue for measures that will guarantee the societal cohesion whilst allowing it to continue to develop. It is precisely in this area that research has long, and repeatedly, emphasized how important it is to see demands for freedom, individual and collective responsibility, and equality as a synergistic, fruitful, interdependence. This new convergence between research and institutions can be seen in the positive attitude in public discourse to investments in society and to upholding the principle of social responsibility.

Occupational Integration Rather Than Pensions: Evaluation of Early Detection, Early Intervention and Integration Measures in Disability Insurance

Project contractor/Project financing
Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO

Project management/Project team
Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, School of Social Work:
Tobias Fritschi (project director), Renate Salzgeber, Pascale Zürcher, Oliver Hümbelin

Project partner
Büro Vatter: Christian Bolliger (overall project director)

Abstract

The fifth revision of the FSIO's public disability insurance regulations heralds a cultural change, and introduces new measures to encourage occupational integration and a case management approach. The research project investigates whether, and how, this cultural change has been successfully realized, particularly how occupational integration measures are applied and which effects revising the policy seems to have had thus far had on integration success.

Successful integration is measured by whether, in the course of the disability insurance process, the insured persons tend to be more oriented to occupational integration or to receiving pensions. The goal of the new instruments, which include early detection, is to recognize individuals with health problems in adequate time so that they can stay engaged in gainful activity for as long as possible. Short-term early intervention measures are intended, for example, to ensure that workplace adjustments or participation in courses will lead to rapid improvement of the problematic health situation. Integration measures are targeted especially at those with psychic issues that impair carrying out an occupational measure or in preparing for re-entry into the labor force.

The research is based on a written questionnaire submitted to the 26 disability offices, on data from national registers, as well as on an analysis of 325 case files.

Social Report for the Canton of Solothurn

Project contractor/Project financing
Social Security Office, Canton of Solothurn

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland FHNW, School of Social Work: Edgar Baumgartner (project director), Roland Baur, Peter Sommerfeld, Jörg Dittmann

Abstract

The goal of the project was to complete a second Social Report for the Canton of Solothurn. This cantonal report provides broad, thematically organized information about the social situation of the population living in this canton, as well as about the facilities for care and social security benefits. Ten chapters concentrate on problem areas and life situations and form the core of the report, augmented by a particular focus on the families and their economic situations. In terms of methods, the report is based on a differentiated set of indicators and an analysis of existing statistical data (from about 80 different sources). By updating the social reporting, and comparing current data with the 2005 Social Report, it is possible to trace the developments over time. Geographic comparison with national data and between social regions in the canton, as well as comparison with the sociopolitical goals that were set, make an overview of the social situation possible, as well as identification of where the sociopolitical challenges remain.

The Educational Spaces of Children and Adolescents: the Community as a Supportive Net

Project contractor/Project financing
BREF Program, Gebert Rűf Foundation

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences FHS St. Gallen, Institute of Social Work IFSA-FHS:
Christian Reutlinger (project director), Mandy Schőne, Sara Kurmann,
Johanna Brandstetter

Project partners
Towns of Rapperswil-Jona and Schaffhausen

Abstract

Having children and adolescents mature successfully is an important aspect of a community's social and economic development, given the profound changes to society. It is crucial to keep in mind that the educational spaces children and adolescents use today more than ever are spread out between family, virtual spaces, the street, youth centers, kindergartens, schools, and other venues.

Given this, and in cooperation with the towns of Rapperswil-Jona and Schaffhausen, the project pursued the question of how all the actors in a community can work together to make successful maturation for children and adolescents possible. How can one establish a common working basis among the fragmented actors involved?

And above all, how can one incorporate the perspectives of children and adolescents from the outset in this process? With the help of a common dialogue and development process, the socially innovative aspect of this project linked actors together who had previously acted separately. The transfer of the knowledge thereby gained will be synthesized into an advisory instrument that can be used for the (further) development of community-appropriate socio-spatial and cooperative arrangements.

Learning Processes and Innovation in Home-Provided Care: the Case of Dementia

Project contractor/Project financing
Leenaards Foundation

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work,
Geneva: Barbara Lucas (project director)

Project partners
University of Geneva: Institute for social and political research, CNAM/CNRS:
Laboratoire interdisciplinaire pour la sociologie  conomique LISE

Abstract

This research project concerns itself with innovative processes for providing home care; the particular focus is on Alzheimer's. In European countries, facility-based efforts to provide such care face numerous problems. They are subject to contradictory national or international regulations with respect to management, their quality, the spectrum of services provided, and the participation of those being cared for, which creates numerous dilemmas for practitioners. Given this context, the research project wants to establish how local actors find new solutions to overcome institutionalized national regulations. We analyze three innovative projects for dealing with dementia in three different European contexts. One project (in Ahlen, Germany) addresses the integration of the Turkish community into the local welfare system, a second (in Renfrewshire, Scotland) uses early detection and ongoing support in its efforts to empower those with dementia, while the third (in Vaud, Switzerland) focuses on the support given to informal caregivers by specialized caregivers. The study, employing various specific perspectives, shows the role practitioners play in generating innovation, the various stages of the innovation process, the factors that favor or curb innovations, and the internal changes that can occur when an innovative approach is implemented to provide home-based care.

Conceptualizing a Cantonal Integration Policy: a Preliminary Study

Project contractor/Project financing

Canton of Fribourg, Department of Security and Justice, Office for Migrant Integration and for the Prevention of Racism and the Health and Social Welfare Department, Social Pensions Bureau

Project management/Project team

University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work, Fribourg: Geneviève Piérart, Marie-Claire Rey-Baeriswyl and Jean-Claude Simonet (project directors), Jean-Luc Heeb, Regula Zahler, Walter Montesel

Abstract

In the context of cantonal integration programs launched by the federal government, the Canton of Fribourg contracted the HETS-FR to draft a participatory needs study of structures and activities to promote the integration of migrants. The study includes a description of the actors and services they provide, of the lacunae these actors have identified, and suggestions they have made for how to close them; these perspectives are also evaluated. From this, guidance for the canton's integration program is provided with respect to:

- harmonizing how persons who have newly moved to the canton are received through developing integrated services and by mobilizing various channels and means to make these services known;
- an increased provision of language courses accessible not only geographically but also in terms of type and level, and better information provision about existing courses and financial incentives;
- developing projects adapted to the needs of migrants that are coordinated between associations, professional organizations, and existing public and private structures;
- promoting coexistence by using a transversal approach that transcends sectors and that mediates between the respective cantonal commissions and institutions.

Interlinks – Health Systems and Long-Term Care for Older Persons in Europe: Intersections and Connections between Prevention, Rehabilitation, Service Quality, and Informal Caregiving

Project contractor/Project financing

European Union, Seventh Framework Program

Project management/Project team

University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work and Health – EESP, Lausanne: Pierre Gobet (project director), Elisabeth Hirsch Durett, Marion Repetti.

The European project is coordinated by Kai Leichsenring (European Center for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna). The project involves 15 researcher teams from 13 countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovakia, and Spain.

Abstract

The project intends to work out the conditions needed for integrating caregiving systems for older persons so that coherent and lasting caregiving can be ensured. The project looks at the steering of the systems and the financing of services provided, quality control, the support given to caregivers, and the promotion of preventative measures. Particular emphasis is given to integrating social and health benefits. In addition, more than 120 innovative projects were surveyed, with an eye to stimulating and enriching public debate about these questions.

Implementing the New Law on the Protection of Adults in the Canton of Bern: Monitoring and Evaluation

Project contractor/Project financing

Canton of Bern, Department of Justice, Communities and Churches

Project management/Project team

University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work HES-SO//Valais – Wallis: Peter Voll and Michael Marti (project directors), Julia Emprechtinger, Claudia Peter

Project partners

Ecoplan AG, Bern

Abstract

A completely revamped law on the protection of adults came into effect on January 1, 2013. Strictly speaking, it implies a reorientation, away from controlling (“guardianship”) and towards helping (“providing support”) protect adults, and thereby moves closer to how social work sees itself. Structurally, it replaces the councils, often identical with the local political executive, that were charged with guardianship tasks, with interdisciplinary expert councils. It thereby gives new weight to social work as a profession. The Canton of Bern has comprehensively reorganized child and adult protection to meet the requirements of federal law. Administrative oversight has been elevated from the level of the community to the level of the canton, so rather than having 318 local, and often lay, guardianship councils there will now be 11 interdisciplinary bodies composed of professionals and experts.

The present project, carried out on behalf of the Canton of Bern, will monitor the new bodies during their first four years, examining them for how they function, cooperate with other actors – especially with social services – and how they are equipped in terms of staff and finances. Of particular interest, from the perspective of organization theory, is how processes and intersections will be structured and what effects these will have on how clients are treated. Of interest in terms of the profession is how, or whether, the various disciplines represented in the new bodies will develop common problem definitions and strategies for action. Interviews and the quantitative analysis of process data will be used.

Debt Prevention: Effective Good Practices

Project contractors/Project financing

The non-profit associations for debt counseling of Aargau-Solothurn and Basel (Plusminus), the Federal Commission for Child and Youth Affairs (EKKJ), and the Müller-Möhl Foundation (Zurich). Financial support also provided by the Swisslos lottery, the Canton of Aargau, and the Christoph Merian Foundation (Basel).

Project management/Project team

Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – School of Social Work: Claudia Meier Magistretti (project director), Claudia Arnold, Peter Brauneis, Maya Zinniker, and students in this program and at the School of Applied Psychology at the University of Applied Sciences FHNW in Olten.

Abstract

The “Debt Prevention: Effective Good Practices” project is a state of the art report on the effectiveness of debt prevention. Its comprehensive international literature review provides the empirical foundation for identifying effective practices in preventing debt among adolescents and young adults. A group of finance, prevention, association, and politics specialists augments the results of this literature review with conclusions and recommendations for debt prevention in Switzerland.

The second part of the project is a detailed evaluation of the “Youth Wages” project, one selected on the basis of the state of the art report. Recommendations for best practices and model projects in debt prevention will be derived from this evaluation. The final report on the state of the art appeared in mid-December 2013; the evaluation study will be published in the fall of 2014.

The Model Swiss Social Enterprise

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Southern Switzerland SUPSI, Department of Business and Social Work: Luca Crivelli (project director), Anna Bracci, Gregorio Avilés

Abstract

Thanks to its successful economic and social model, Switzerland, as compared to other nations, has adopted the idea and practice of a social economy, if with some delay. So it has only been in the last two decades that one could observe the emergence of social enterprises, and of occupational integration of a kind found among social enterprises elsewhere in Europe. The present research investigates this realm. The focus is the labor market integration of vulnerable individuals, seen against the backdrop of a changed course in social policy that began in the 1990s. 48 organizations participated in this study, 20 from German-speaking, 21 from French-speaking, and 7 from Italian-speaking Switzerland. This study investigated the size and emergence of this sector, along with the factors influencing its development. Other interests included examining the self-perception of the social enterprises, and the peculiarities of the Swiss context relative to practices elsewhere in Europe. The differing forms social enterprises take were analyzed in terms of the integration models they used, their areas of production, their forms of financing, and their governance models. This investigation makes it possible to establish the models social enterprises have developed over the years in the different language areas. Beyond the regional differences, four prototypes of social enterprises and some projections of the development in this sector were suggested. Finally, one part of the project empirically investigated individuals with employment difficulties and their readiness to accept the challenges of working in a social enterprise.

SO.NEU.Adliswil: Social Monitoring in New Housing Areas in Agglomeration Communities

Project contractor/Project financing
Commission for Technology and Innovation CTI; Allreal AT (general contractors); Helvetia (insurance companies); the Ökopolis Foundation; Town of Adliswil

Project management/Project team
Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, School of Social Work: Hanspeter Hongler (project director), Sylvie Kobi
Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, School of Engineering, Institute for Sustainable Development: Markus Kunz (project director), Thea Weiss

Abstract

Using the example of a new housing development in the town of Adliswil, the project asks which aspects of social integration an agglomeration community needs to take into account, particularly when confronted with a sharp increase in new residents who come mostly from the middle and upper regions of the social area. How can this housing development become a home to its residents, which socio-cultural activities and infrastructure services are needed, and how can this new area become a part of the town? The project alternates phases of research and of intervention. Most of the research phases involve social monitoring, while the focus of the intervention phases is on participatory activities: Knowledge gained from the former flows directly into the latter. The research uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The economic partners of the project include the town administration of Adliswil, the general contractors Allreal AG, and the Helvetia insurance companies. The project was contracted by the town of Adliswil, and is implemented by the Ökopolis foundation: It is responsible for the products resulting from the project (for example, planning, project, and operational check-lists of social measures, the systematic collection of best practices for participatory procedures in monitoring, planning and implementation, and so forth).



Olivier Grand
Managing director of AvenirSocial (until the end of November 2013)
Vice-president of SAVOIRSOCIAL (until the end of November 2013)

“To strengthen social work, our entire practice must be more strongly research-based.”

Specialists in social work continually adapt their working instruments to the social, economic and political context of our society, but research data is lacking in many areas of social work. In our sector, the statistics available from the Federal Statistical Office, for example, are frequently incomplete or so imprecise that we can barely use them. Certain areas of activity are insufficiently surveyed. To strengthen social work, our entire practice must be more strongly research-based. A good utilization of the results of this research by specialists allows for a diverse transfer of knowledge. If social work has a political component – in the sense of the agora – then it must rest on secured knowledge. The partnerships existing between research and application in social work are therefore very valuable.

The Contribution Research Makes to Professionalization

2

Research into the profession asks questions at three levels: social work as a specific occupation or profession, aspects of professionalization in establishing this occupation, and the professionalism of social workers. More specifically, these analyses reconstruct and analyze acts in terms of the methods employed in the profession, the available store of knowledge, and the habitus and self-understanding of social workers. Institutional support is also addressed as are the interactions between social workers and addressees of social work. A further focus, in various realms of action, is on the legal, political and organizational framework for professional work. Technological aspects of professional activity are investigated, such as the influence or consequence the methods used by professionals appear to have. Research into the profession can be combined with a variety of theories, methods, and methodologies. Fundamentally, it is concerned both with the further development of social work practices, with respect to its professionalism and professionalization, and with the development of theory.

Child Protection Systems: an International Comparison of “Good Practices” from Five Countries, with Conclusions for Switzerland

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss Funds for Child Protection Projects

Project management/Project team
Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, School of Social Work:
Jachen C. Nett (project director)
Queen’s University, Belfast: Trevor Spratt

Project partners
University of South Australia, Australia: Leah Bromfield
University of Jyväskylä, Finland: Johanna Hietamäki
German Youth Institute DJI, Germany: Heinz Kindler
University of Lund, Sweden: Lina Ponnert

Abstract

The goal of this international and comparative study is to investigate child protection systems in specific countries. In these case studies conducted by child protection experts in their respective countries, “good practices” were to be identified, as were results potentially relevant to the Swiss situation. Nations were sought that had comparable levels of socioeconomic development (the UK, Australia, Germany, Finland, Sweden), but that also had administrative units which differentiated between central state and regional or local political entities. This last aspect was important inasmuch as one interest was to illuminate differing cases of institutional cooperation and divided responsibilities between administrative levels. The role of the non-profit and private sectors in the national child protection system was of particular interest. Based on the results, recommendations were formulated and presented to a committee of selected experts in Swiss child protection.

Generating Utility and Effects in School Social Work and in Programs for Juveniles: Clear-Box Research in Loosely Structured Fields of Action

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland FHNW,
School of Social Work: Florian Baier and Rahel Heeg (project directors), Julia Gerodetti

Abstract

In this SNSF project, modes of action, their effects, and the utility in school social work and programs for adolescents were investigated in the community of Spreitenbach. On the one hand, using a black-box model, the effects and utility of what was undertaken were investigated. On the other hand, using a clear-box model, the specific practices used were investigated, as was how the various actors involved interpreted and evaluated them. By combining both levels, the question was not just whether school social work and work with juveniles had effects, but also how effects and utility are generated. The methods used were primarily qualitative, in particular videography, participant observation, and interviews. All participating pupils completed a questionnaire. The results of the project are intended to help professionalize school social work and programs for adolescents.

Foster Family Settings: the Potential for Providing Professional Support in the Life Course of Foster Children

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences FHS St. Gallen, Institute of Social Work IFSA-FHS:
Annegret Wigger and Monika Götzö (project directors), Silvia Beck, Claudia Nef

Project partner
The Swiss Foster Children Campaign; The TIPITI Association

Abstract

Currently, foster families are supported in different ways in the various Swiss cantons. The revised official regulations on childcare (KiBeV) aim to create greater uniformity, as well as professionalization, in the area of foster child care. However, criteria for how to structure this system lack empirical grounding.

The support system for foster families is complex. On the one hand, the foster child needs to shape his or her relationships within a web composed of the milieu the child comes from, the foster family he or she is in, and the supervisory structure. On the other hand, foster parents are caught between maintaining the privacy of the family and the public task of fostering they have taken on. The goal of the project is to sound out the potential for providing support in foster family settings in the context of the life course of foster children. To this end, eight to ten foster family settings were reconstructed. Using narrative interviews with adult foster children, their foster parents, and the responsible public authorities, the potential for, and the experience of the support provided was examined in each case from the three perspectives. Examples of successful support were then articulated that took the past structural conditions into account. In conjunction with the project's partners, this knowledge was used to formulate recommendations for how to structure the foster child system, as well as recommendations for further education.

Acquiring Occupational Competence: the Development of Values among Social Pedagogues

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work,
Geneva: Sylvie Mezzena (project director), Kim Stroumza, Nicolas Kramer

Abstract

The question of values plays a central role in social work, a profession that reflects the will of our society and that is legitimized by social policy. Values are demanded by institutions not just as guides for professional behavior, but are also very much in evidence when social work professionals defend or justify practices. The social sciences have long regarded values as though they existed independent of experience, treating them as though they were all fully formed and separate from action. The present research project defines values not as normative ideals that stand outside the realm of action but instead from the point of view of situational ethics, as practical processes predicated on action. It investigates how, in carrying out their activities, social pedagogues continually impute values to the other entities with which they work (the clientele, partner institutions, families, and more generally, the physical or symbolic environment) and to their relationship with these entities. The project asks how values, through education and consolidating practice-based judgments, function as guides for acts intended to solve practical problems. Using an approach that links values and knowledge to an ability to make judgments, this study investigates the role knowledge plays in taking action and in the development of professionalism.

Young Adults in Vaud, Neuchâtel and Fribourg between Public Assistance and Social and Occupational Integration: Categorizing a Group and the Offers Targeted to It

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work, Fribourg; Dunya Acklin and Caroline Reynaud (project directors), Colomba Boggini, El Marsaoui

Project partners
Cherpillod Foundation; Le Relais Foundation; Job Service; Reper

Abstract

The goal of this research project is to understand the construction of the category “young adult recipients of public assistance as a group targeted for social benefits.” We start with the question: What characterizes the situation of this group of persons, and which measures are recommended for them?

The analysis takes account of three levels: 1) the arguments of actors who formulated the policies in the Cantons of Vaud, Neuchâtel, and Fribourg; 2) the arguments of those who provide measures and programs to socially and occupationally integrate young adults; and 3) the perspective of the social workers who provide support to this group of persons, and who communicate the integration measures to them. In particular, this approach allows one to recognize differing social work approaches. To explain these differences, the analysis shows on the one hand how cantonal and institutional regulations are interpreted, and on the other, illustrates how they interpret the particular situation of these young adults. This ultimately allows one to recognize which actions are open to specialists in organizing and legitimizing their intervention.

SocEtY: Social Innovation. Empowering the Young for the Common Good

Project contractor/Project financing
European Union, 7th Framework Program

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work and Health – EESP, Lausanne: Jean-Michel Bonvin (project director), Benoît Beuret, Stephan Dahmen
The European project is coordinated by Hans-Uwe Otto of the University of Bielefeld (Germany). The project consists of 13 researcher teams from 11 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, and Spain.

Abstract

The SocEtY project analyzes innovative programs that focus on the social integration of disadvantaged youth and on what can be done to improve their quality of life. First, the inequality factors that particularly affect youth are identified. Then the programs that promise the greatest success in reducing these inequalities are identified and subjected to an in-depth empirical analysis (document and network analyses, partially structured interviews, and so forth). The project also wants to actively draw youth into the research process in order to promote new forms of social work intervention in which research subjects are not simply beneficiaries but partners in developing and implementing the programs. Hence, this European project promotes a form of social innovation and social work practice that is based on greater involvement of these disadvantaged youths.

Aging Together under the Gaze of Specialists: Dramatized Intimacy?

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work
HES-SO//Valais – Wallis: Clothilde Palazzo-Crettol (project director),
Angélique Wüthrich
School of Health, University of Health Sciences HESAV, Canton of Vaud:
Annick Anchisi (project director), Corinne Dallera

Abstract

In this explorative, qualitative study conducted in 2012, we were interested in the image social work professionals had of the elderly couples they cared for, as well as how these couples themselves viewed the changes brought about by aging and social assistance. Though there are an increasing number of people who live together in old age and who could make use of social services, elderly couples seem to be hidden, out of sight of the social workers we interviewed. These professionals often saw only one member of the couple, or did not perceive them as a couple. By contrast, socio-cultural animators saw couples daily and cultivated a relatively idealized image of the couple and of living together in old age.

Both social workers and animators are not very sensitive with respect to social relations, whether between classes or genders, and act based on partial or biased knowledge that is basically guided by a “common sense” psychology and a stereotyped image of cohabitation. In the end, they reproduce existing gender-specific inequalities and are not immune to any type of age-based discrimination.

How Much Mistrust Can Social Work Bear?

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – School of Social Work:
Susanna Niehaus (project director), Paula Krüger, Manfred Seiler

Abstract

In the last years, the unlawful receipt of social welfare benefits has become a highly volatile political topic, not least due to its treatment by the media. In the meantime, responses have come at the sociopolitical level, though the various measures taken have not yet been examined for their effectiveness. One of these measures involves using welfare inspectors. Largely ignored in the current debate is the effect this multiyear discussion has had on social workers, most particularly the changes it has brought to the work environment, and the expectations to fulfill their mandate placed on those engaged in social work.

The goals of this project are to describe and systematically analyze how those engaged in social work deal both individually and institutionally with decision situations in which credibility plays a role, and the potential role conflicts this brings in the area of social assistance. The analysis is meant to provide a guide for reflecting on the changes taking place, especially those involving trust and distrust, to the world of social work. It can be used both in applications and for educational purposes, and can thereby contribute to professionalization.

Peer Education: a Project to Promote the Welfare of Adolescents

Project contractor/Project financing
Interreg Switzerland-Italy

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Southern Switzerland SUPSI, Department of Business and Social Work: Fulvio Poletti (project director), Leonardo Da Vinci, Laura Bertini

Project partner
Specialized School for Health and Social Professions, Lugano-Canobbio

Abstract

This project originated with a desire to find ways to promote the health and welfare of adolescents and to develop and test a highly promising educational strategy through numerous exchanges with schools, social workers, teachers, and adolescents themselves. Peer education is an innovative method to address problems that arise in the area of health and social pedagogy; they include addressing issues of sexuality, alcohol and drug consumption, and other risky behavior. Using a horizontal transfer process, the approach involves specially training adolescents to provide knowledge and experience to their peers who, due to age, interest, or group membership, are at the same level as the peer educators. The strength, and principle, of peer education lies in seeing adolescents as agents of their own lives, as well as acknowledging the central role peers play in adolescent developmental and educational processes.

Within the project, research and action alternates between educational phases with teachers, to sensitize them to taking an appropriate approach, and peer meetings that are meant to encourage sharing experiences and developing social competence. Newer forms of communication are used (multimedia and social networks), as they are closer to the world of adolescents. The goal is to recognize adolescents as subjects competent in analyzing their needs and as agents in their interactions with their age-mates, particularly when it is a matter of the welfare and quality of life of the citizenry as a whole.

Back to Everyday Life: Mothers after Treatment for Alcohol Dependency

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management
Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, School of Social Work:
Silvia Gavez, Trudi Beck

Project partner
Forel Clinic: Sonja Stutz

Abstract

This study focuses on alcohol-dependent mothers with minor children. To date in Switzerland, the question of alcohol dependency and motherhood has been little researched. The subjects of the study are mothers in inpatient or outpatient treatments at the Forel Clinic. The study investigates factors that either protect or put these mothers at risk in their daily lives, factors that influence how sustainable or successful treatment will be. The following questions were at the heart of the investigation: How do these mothers deal with the challenges posed by everyday life? What support do they receive either from inside or outside the family? How do these mothers assess the after-care provided? How do the specialists involved evaluate the mothers' need for support in dealing with everyday life?

Data was gathered three ways. First, data collected by the Forel Clinic already existed. Second, two interviews were conducted with these women patients, the first shortly before treatment ended and the second six months later. Third, interviews were conducted with social workers in contact with the patients in the context of providing aftercare. The intent of the study is to improve the action plan for dealing with alcohol-dependent mothers in treatment, therapy, and in aftercare, and to provide insights for the profession.



Christian Gertsch
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“Gains in Knowledge and Action due to the Links between Research and Application”

Social work is subject to strong political, social and financial pressures. Demographic developments, a coming dearth of qualified specialists, a growing demand for non-family caregivers, increasing pressures to cut public expenditures, and rising demands for quality care options are issues that pose strong challenges for social work organizations. Every change to the environment influences the existing conceptual basis. An individual organization can only find answers or solutions when the basics have been formulated, the relevant knowledge acquired, and the conceptual considerations and suggestions for solutions weighed and evaluated.

This increase in the knowledge individual institutions possess can only come about by networking with research conducted at the Universities of Applied Sciences. The expectation, and precondition, is that such research be conducted in a manner close to social work practices. Social work needs practice-oriented research contracted by an organization, an association, or a network of interests. The development of the discipline and pioneering projects need to be conceptually formulated, have ongoing support, and be evaluated. In this sense, research provides benefits for stationary institutions. Key is the link between application and research, so that what is correct is also done correctly. For the goal of research is to take action.

The Use of Research for the Persons Concerned

3

Knowledge gained from research about users and addressees aims to understand the social and individual situations of social work clients better. The focus is on those who receive aid, but also on the members of vulnerable groups in need of aid. This kind of research uses varying approaches to focus on the realities of life, on developing problems, or on how problems can be addressed or resolved. Qualitative approaches that analyze perceptions, expectations, utilization, and experiences, using a subjective perspective, are particularly important. In newer research, the recipients of support are increasingly understood as co-producers in aid processes, and their active participation (or agency) forms part of the research. With this, the danger recognized in theory, namely of reifying clients largely as the recipients of aid, is countered. The particular utility lies in being able to justify either acting or not acting with reference to specific social addressees, and to design support in a manner specific to the addressed group.

Intervention and the Effects of Public Assistance. A Qualitative Study of Public Assistance Trajectories in German-Speaking Switzerland

Project contractor/Project financing
Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH

Project management/Project team
Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, School of Social Work:
Dieter Haller (project director), Florentin Jäggi, Christian Beiser (external research assistant)

Abstract

The legal mandate for providing public assistance encompasses more than just ensuring financial subsistence. The goals are also to hinder social exclusion, encourage occupational and social integration, and strengthen self-help efforts. To date, the specific contents of such support and how the measures actually functioned were barely researched. So from 2009-2012, the Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH addressed this gap in research. The core of the study was composed of 33 client case histories. Three sources were used to elaborate a typology: data on the clients' socio-demographic characteristics and on the chronology of their case, information from semi-structured interviews with the responsible case managers, and information gleaned from qualitative interviews with the clients. A model public assistance trajectory was created, based on grounded theory, which focused on the resources or deficits the public assistance recipient had. Three types of recipients were identified: "everyday life combatants," "integration combatants" and "those with a mind of their own." Study results also focused on the differing modes of interaction between public assistance recipients and professional social workers. The effects of public assistance were also presented, in the context of resources available to clients and the pattern of interaction, and judged positive or negative long before public assistance ended or was triggered.

The Work Histories of Disabled Persons after Vocational Training under the Disability Insurance Act

Project contractor/Project financing
National Association of Institutions for Disabled Persons INSOS; Swiss National Association of and for the Blind SNAB; Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities FBED; Ernst-Göhner Foundation; Alfred and Gertrud Bernays-Richard Foundation

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland FHNW,
School of Social Work: Anne Parpan-Blaser (project director), Stefania Calabrese, Annette Lichtenauer
Intercantonal Special Education Teacher Training College HfH:
Kurt Häfeli (project director), Michaela Studer, Angela Wyder

Abstract

The subjective meaning of vocational training for those with disabilities has been very little researched. As a result, the perspective of the disabled themselves is largely lacking in the sociopolitical discourse and in social work deliberations about training, employment, and the structural conditions for integration into the working world of these persons. The present project investigates the work histories of the graduates of semi-skilled training programs (under the disability insurance act) or of practical vocational apprenticeships (coordinated by the National Association of Institutions for Disabled Persons INSOS). Such graduates, from throughout Switzerland, were given a standardized questionnaire, formulated in simplified language, and participated in semi-structured interviews. What was the work history of these graduates following their training? What was the significance of this training for the interviewees? In terms of their subsequent work history, which factors hindered, which helped? The results provide a basis on which to formulate recommendations at the individual, institutional, or structural level, and for improving the conditions under which disabled persons participate in society and in gainful employment.

Involving Children: a Project to Support Children's Participation in Contexts outside Their Families

Project contractor/Project financing

Canton of St. Gallen, Interior Department, Bureau of Social Affairs

Project management/Project team

University of Applied Sciences FHS St. Gallen, Institute of Social Work IFSA-FHS:
Annegret Wigger (project director), Nicolina Stanic

Project partner

Quality4Children Switzerland

Abstract

The goal of the project is to work together with children and adolescents who cannot live with their families to generate ideas for how they can participate practically in their settings. Children, adolescents, skilled personnel, and administrative authorities are largely unaware of children's rights and their significance for day-to-day pedagogic work. In a first step, and based on existing data from the Canton of St. Gallen, we established how many children live in foster families and care homes, and for what reasons. In a second step, we conducted conversations with children, adolescents, skilled personnel, and directors of facilities to learn about their interest in, and experience with, involving children and adolescents. From the analysis of this material, the need to strengthen or even initiate children's rights practices in the Canton of St. Gallen was established. The particular ambition of this project is to involve not just skilled personnel and the directors of facilities in analyzing, evaluating and formulating recommendations, but to have the children and adolescents concerned participate as well. Three support groups composed of, respectively, skilled personnel, adolescents, and children were created to facilitate participation in this project. The task of the project team was to negotiate between the perspectives and points of view of the various interested parties. The result, after three years of work, was to create a report with specific recommendations to the contractors of the study, the Bureau of Social Affairs of St. Gallen, along with a handbook entitled "Kinder wirken mit" (Children Participate). This publication illustrates how involving children can be initiated at the political level and strengthened within institutions.

From Aid Provided to Recognition: the Ethnography of Social Provision

Project contractor/Project financing

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team

University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work, Geneva: Laurence Ossipow (project director), Alexandre Lambelet, Isabelle Csupor

Abstract

The project describes the activity of the professionals who work at Hospice general, Geneva's social and health centers, and is based on interviews and on repeated observations of interactions between social workers and the recipients of social benefits. Additionally, the work conducted in four institutions involved in reintegration – *Réalise*, *Les Fringantes*, *Le Bilan portfolio de compétences*, *Arcades 84* – was also studied. The focus lay less on social policy, or on regulations and guidelines, than on practical implementation: We wanted to focus on the daily work of reintegration. We concluded that such work is primarily grounded in "re-socialization" forms. However, due to a lack of time and resources, the development of competencies and networks among social benefit recipients is neglected. Nevertheless, social workers and recipients develop an exchange of services and return considerations that go beyond the framework of an institutional relationship driven by necessity and power – and this transmits the kind of valuation necessary to any kind of social work.

The Situation of Young Adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Care Homes in French-Speaking Switzerland

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work, Fribourg: Véronique Zbinden Sapin (project director), Sandra Wiesendanger, Carine Bétrisey, Alida Gulfi
School of Social Work and Health – EESP, Lausanne: Evelyne Thommen (project director)

Project partners
Autisme suisse romande; Les Perce Neige Foundation

Abstract

The goal of the project is to analyze the socio-educational care provided to young adults who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and are housed in institutions in French-speaking Switzerland. Those with ASD need a specific kind of support, and there are research-based recommendations that can serve as guides for caregivers. What is the situation in French-speaking Switzerland? Do the institutions adapt the care and support they give to the needs of this group?

The project evaluated various dimensions of the care and support given to 42 young adults who live in 29 residential groups in the French-speaking part of the Canton of Bern, as well as in the Cantons of Fribourg, Geneva, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud. How are their difficulties in communication taken into account by the social pedagogy teams? Is their environment adapted to their need for predictability? What kind of support do they receive in developing their social skills and in their integration into the community? What is the content of the educational program? How are provocative forms of behavior dealt with – or how are they avoided? These are some of the questions the research project poses. Its results will make it possible to make “good practices” better known, but will also establish where there exists a need to take action to improve the care and support given to these persons.

Relatives and Partners Who Provide Care: between the Working World and Providing Terminal Care

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work and Health – EESP, Lausanne: Marc-Antoine Berthod (project director), Yannis Papadaniel, Nicole Brzak

Project partners
University Hospital Center of the Canton of Vaud CHUV; Valais Hospital; Guidance and Prevention Center for specialists at Neuchâtel schools; Espace Pallium; Rive-Neuve Foundation; Vaud Anti-Cancer League, Raiffeisen banks; Social Security and Care Home Office, Canton of Vaud; Movis SA

Abstract

When a person stands at the end of life, his or her caregivers are often still gainfully employed. How do they deal with the competing demands of the working world and of providing care? Can tasks be re-prioritized? What resources can they mobilize to adequately support their dying relatives? This project, utilizing observations and conversations, documents the life situation and environment (co-workers, supervisors, relatives, nursing staff) of employed caregiving relatives and partners. It provides an understanding of the hurdles they must overcome during this critical end of life period, and in the grieving phase thereafter. The project supports social work intervention that helps caregiving relatives and partners bridge private and occupational lives in such a way as to best accompany and support close persons at the end of their lives.

Violence in Partnerships: What Sense Do Male Participants See in Group Therapy and from What Perspective?

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work
HES-SO//Valais – Wallis: Susanne Lorenz (project director), Sarah Dini

Project partners
EX-Pression; ViFa; Vires; SAVC

Abstract

Programs directed at the instigators of violence in partnerships are often carried out in groups, and complement measures taken against aggression in relationships. The number of participants who actively commit to the therapy process, and who last the course, varies.

This project focuses on the factors and practices that encourage the lasting commitment of participants in such groups. Seventeen of them describe, at two different points in time during the group sessions, why they took this step and why they stayed the course. The project also illuminates the practices of the specialists who lead the groups. An analysis of the responses indicates that – depending on whether they last the course or break off the therapy – participants have differing motivations as well as differing expectations, as well as reservations, with respect to the work in the group and their fellow group members. What matters for their commitment is the quality of relationships within the group, how violence is addressed, their own learning process, or the hope that group therapy will help resolve their problems. The specialists in turn, using a minimalist therapeutic bridge, try to maintain a balance between confronting the men with their acts and maintaining their motivation to remain committed to work in the group. The results indicate the importance of developing methods that permit relationships to develop between members of the group and that one needs to learn to see differences between the participants as an enrichment.

A Neighborly Network in the Sonnmatt Housing Development in Willisau

Project contractor/Project financing
Sonnmatt Housing Cooperative in Willisau; Swiss Age Foundation

Project management/Project team
Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – School of Social Work:
Simone Gretler Heusser and Simone Meyer (project directors), Mario Störkle,
Alex Willener, Gregor Zbinden

Abstract

A neighborhood network was to be developed in the Sonnmatt housing development in Willisau to promote coexistence. Its specific goal was to make support available and accessible to older persons, assuming this would allow them to live independently longer. The Sonnmatt housing development was expanded in 2011 by adding two new buildings with apartments suited for older persons and for families. With the help and cooperation of already resident tenants, the housing cooperative refashioned the outdoor environment and created a communal room, the latter to foster cross-generational communication and interaction by providing a large variety of activities. A group was formed, composed of residents from the various buildings in the housing complex and the president of the housing cooperative, whose task it was to enliven the communal room with various activities and thereby support the community's integration and bring residents of older and newer buildings together. A team from the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts HSLU supported and then evaluated the project. In a systematic survey, it investigated to what extent the core group, the communal room, the activities offered, and the outdoor environment contributed to creating a neighborly network. The following key success factors were identified:

- How the communal room was equipped
- The promotion and presentation of the neighborly network
- The adapting and coordinating of activities with the needs of the residents.

A Survey and Analysis of Satisfaction among Residents and Staff in Old-Age Homes

Project contractor/Project financing
Canton of Ticino

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Southern Switzerland SUPSI, Department of Business and Social Work: Alberto Gandolfi (project director), Anna Bracci, Luisa Lomazzi, Carla Sargenti

Project partners
Canton of Ticino, Department of Health and Sociability; Old-Age Homes of the Canton of Ticino

Abstract

The study surveyed the 60 cantonal old-age homes, focusing on the degree of satisfaction expressed by residents with the care provided and on the internal social climate of the facilities from the point of view of residents and their relatives. Staff experience with the work environment and working conditions was surveyed at the same time. Surveys of this kind have been conducted repeatedly over the last few years: They are meant to highlight strengths and problematic aspects, and to give an opportunity for residents and staff to identify where improvements and changes should be made.

The long-term goal of the survey is to continually improve the quality of care, as well as to promote learning processes within the organization. Knowing how satisfied residents are, what level or quality of care visitors perceive, and how staff judge the work environment, is a basic precondition for providing residents of old-age homes services that guarantee a good quality of life and maintain high standards of care.

The survey enables the canton and its communities to formulate political courses of action. With respect to establishing benchmarks, the survey makes it possible to cite specific control indicators.

Adoption: Investigating the Factors that Influence Child and Family

Project contractor/Project financing
Department of Education of the Canton of Zurich, Office of Youth and Careers Guidance, Cantonal Central Authority of Adoption

Project management/Project team
Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, School of Social Work: Thomas Gabriel (project director), Samuel Keller

Abstract

The core interest here is to establish secure knowledge of the adoption process in the canton of Zurich. The research project pursues the following four goals:

- To understand the most important influences on the welfare of the child.
- To improve the quality of the adoption process.
- To formulate specific recommendations and transmit them to the Cantonal Central Agency for Adoption.
- To deepen professional and scientific knowledge about the process of adoption.

The perspective of the addressees is used for pursuing these goals: the best interests of the child, the well-being of the adoptive children, their possibilities to exert influence and to develop, the experiences of the adoptive parents, and the influence the process has on family life.

In all its phases, the research project is oriented towards answering three larger questions: Which safeguards contribute to successful adoptions, and which risk factors lead to their failure? How do these two aspects interact in the adoption process? In the context of clarification (prognosis) and granting permission to adopt, where might there be potential for improvement?



Claudio Bolzman
Member, National Research Committee,
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

«Research in Social Work: between Dynamics and New Challenges»

Research conducted at Schools of Social Work in Switzerland has developed significantly since they became associated with Universities of Applied Arts and Sciences, and since the “Do Research” (DORE) funding instrument was created (funded from 2000 to 2004 by the SNSF and by the Commission for Technology and Innovation CTI, and subsequently just by the SNSF). The results have been impressive. From 2000 to 2011, a total of 246 project proposals were received from social work researchers, and of these, 144 were funded (total amount disbursed: 15,419,126 francs). Of the seven divisions at the Applied Sciences and Arts universities, social work stands for its dynamism: Overall, it had the most projects and received the highest level of research funding.

This phase of promotion has been superseded, and these universities generally, and social work in particular, face a new challenge. The special programs to promote research at the Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts ceased in 2011, and since then, they have stood in direct competition for SNSF research funding with the cantonal research universities and the two federal technical universities. Social work research project proposals are accepted in Program I (Humanities and Social Sciences), but a new category of proposals was also created based on the DORE experiences: application-oriented basic research. The SNSF feels it is appropriate to continue to support a type of research that involves partner organizations that are engaged in practical or applied work.

The Expansion of Knowledge and Theory through Research

4

Where do social problems come from? Which groups are most affected by these problems? What is social work and what role does it play in society? Social work research at Universities of Applied Sciences answer these and other questions. Such research systematically uses and often extends methods from other human and social sciences, including Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Education, and History. It not only addresses burning social questions but also creates new knowledge. This can be measured by the steadily increasing number of publications in national and international research journals. Specialized journals such as the *Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Soziale Arbeit* play a significant role in disseminating this new empirical knowledge, based on data to which those who teach at Universities of Applied Sciences have privileged access.

Income and Wealth Inequality in Switzerland

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project contractor/Project financing
Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, School of Social Work:
Robert Fluder (project director), Tobias Fritschi, Luzius von Gunten, Oliver Hümbelin

Project partner
University of Bern, Sociology Institute: Ben Jann (overall project director),
Rudolf Farys, Stefan Ilic

Abstract

The 2013 OECD Report notes that the gap between rich and poor is increasing throughout the world. The state of knowledge with respect to changes in inequality and the factors influencing it remains inadequate; what is known is contradictory, as it is based on differing data sources or time periods. To ensure that secure knowledge is available for Switzerland, we asked the following questions: How has the distribution of income and wealth changed since World War II, and in particular since 1970? What cantonal differences exist and how can they be explained? What are the determinants of this development? What connection exists between change (socio-demographic, economic) and the form the welfare state takes? To answer these questions, long-term longitudinal data on income and wealth was evaluated. In this process, individual-level tax data from selected cantons was available, and federal tax data was also analyzed. This new data basis, covering about 60 years, and the data analysis allowed the project to close a significant gap in knowledge. The current results of this research may be found at inequalities.ch.

Knowledge Production through Cooperation? On Cooperation between Research and Practice in Social Work

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland FHNW,
School of Social Work: Peter Sommerfeld (project director), Daniel Gredig,
Matthias Hüttemann, Pascal Amez-Droz, Fabienne Rotzetter

Abstract

The Wisskoop project focuses on whether forms of cooperation between research and practice, as can be epistemologically justified for the applied social sciences, can also prove themselves in social work. What forms might such cooperation take empirically? The investigation is based on a central conceptualization – the Practice-Optimization Cycle – formulated at the Institute for Research into the Profession and Cooperative Knowledge Creation in the School of Social Work at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland FHNW. Since the state of research on such cooperation is nascent, the approach adopted here is explorative and qualitative. Using problem-centered interviews with researchers and their partner organizations that work in practical applications, document analysis, and with the help of a panel of experts, a grounded theory of cooperation between researchers and professionals in social work will be established. This empirically-based permeation of the relationship between research and application is a constructive contribution to the further professional development of social work.

Help for the Weak from the Divine Spirit? The Meaning of Religion in the Professionalization of Social Work

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences FHS St. Gallen, Institute of Social Work IFSA-FHS:
Peter Schallberger (project director), Urs Hafner, Alfred Schwendener

Abstract

Historically, religious motivations, such as those behind social services provided by churches in Switzerland (e.g., Diakonie or Caritas), played an important role in the genesis of social work organizations. In this project, we investigate how religiously justified ideas about education have changed over time, and the extent to which they shaped daily life, in various epochs, in educational institutions for children and adolescents. The findings to date in this area were extensively surveyed in Urs Hafner's 2011 book "Heimkinder. Eine Geschichte des Aufwachsens in der Anstalt" (Care Home Children: a History of Growing Up in Institutions).

The project also investigates a more recent question: Are there characteristic differences between religious and non-religious social work professionals in their work? The focus here as well is on institutionalized education. Non-standardized interviews will be conducted in selected care homes with their directors, with social pedagogy professionals, as well as with children and adolescents in order to acquire knowledge about the influence religious orientation has on how daily life is structured in socio-pedagogical terms. An initial evaluation of these interviews indicates that professionals working in care homes are guided by extraordinarily different notions of education and maturation. Among professionals of faith, their specific form of religiosity appears to influence what they see as their pedagogic task.

The Meaning of Depriving Minors of Their Liberty? Pedagogic Notions, Current Justifications for Imprisonment, and Controversy among Specialists

Project contractor/Project financing
Commission for Technology and Innovation CTI

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work, Geneva: Arnaud Frauenfelder (project director), Eva Nada, Géraldine Bugnon, Christophe Delay

Abstract

In trying to find sociopolitical answers for criminality among youth, Switzerland has experienced a partial renewal of "questions about the penal system" since the 1990s. This has taken place in a hybrid ideological context where institutions are supposed to simultaneously show both "toughness" and "dignity".

About twenty qualitative surveys, conducted among various occupations that work in closed correctional institutions, were analyzed. This sociological study wanted to clear up certain existing inconsistencies within current reform projects, and came to three conclusions:

1. The new legal and institutional framework has already been extensively investigated, but the ambivalence that resulted in the realm of intervention remains largely unknown.
2. In penal institutions, the simultaneous presence of caretaking staff, legal enforcement personnel, socio-pedagogical heads of workshops, pedagogues, and teachers, is rather new. Analysis of forms intervention taken indicated that the traditional demarcation between "educating" and "punishing" is no longer adequate. New normative rules and differentiation apply.
3. In dealing with young inmates, efforts to orient life inside walls more towards life outside walls permits one to reconsider the idea of the "total institution."

The Dynamics of Poverty and Precariousness over the Life Course

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work, Fribourg; Jean-Luc Heeb and Elisabeth Gutjahr (project directors)

Project partner
Université de Lausanne: René Levy

Abstract

This research project investigates the interplay between poverty risk, economic precariousness and the life course. On the one hand, it wants to illuminate this interplay over several years; on the other, to identify typical biographies.

The results expand the discussion about the key explanations given for poverty: social stratum, individualization, cumulative disadvantage. As poverty itself has diversified, particularly in conjunction with social precariousness, it is no longer as much a condition shaping the entire life course of the weakest from which the better-off are spared. The risk of poverty can change over the course of life, and depends on key events such as education, divorce, loss of employment.

A static approach investigates poverty at a particular point in time. But investigating the life course allows one to address a dynamic supposition that life courses are becoming more individualized or that disadvantage cumulates. The consequences of individualization, of cumulative disadvantage, and structural determinants such as belonging to a particular social stratum, can be simultaneously investigated for their effects on poverty risk. By examining their interaction, these three explanations can be directly contrasted. The project results aid in identifying specific starting points, and in helping to develop measures to avoid poverty even before social insecurity starts to develop.

The Changing Institution of the Family: the Example of “Non-Statutory” Parents

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work and Health – EESP, Lausanne: Marianne Modak and Pascal Gaberel (project director), Yazid Ben Hounet, Claire Ansermet

Project partners
Profa Associations; Jeunesse et Famille Foundation; Homoparents Group; Rainbow Families

Abstract

This project examines family situations in which a parental role is relatively consistently exercised by a person who is not legally a parent. How does this person, whose parenting role is not recognized, confront the institutions involved in caring for the child? How do they adopt the parental model used by these institutions even though they know their own position is unclear?

The hypothesis is that exercising this legally “marginal” parental role demonstrates intimacy, given the power of new social customs and manners. Under these circumstances, adults are forced to invent their parental role in private.

At the theoretical level, we are interested in the phenomenon or process we call the de- or re-institutionalizing of the family. How do these private “strategies” of socially legitimizing a lived parental role in the end lead to a new construction of the family?

Culture Policy in the Valais: History, Actors, Challenges

Project contractor/Project financing

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF); Office of Cultural Affairs, Canton of Valais

Project management/Project team

University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland, School of Social Work HES-SO//Valais – Wallis: Gabriel Bender and Isabelle Moroni (project directors), Rafael Matos-Wasem, Sarah Jurisch Praz

Abstract

This project investigates cultural dynamism, between 1960 and 2010, in cities in the French-speaking part of the Canton of Valais. This was influenced by the intentions and activities of public and local institutions, of artists' circles, and of those more generally engaged in cultural affairs. An overview of culture policy from its outset to today makes clear what characterizes the spirit and the character of Monthey, Martigny, Sierre or Sion. Cultural policy is the result of cooperation, but also of conflict, between actors in the realm of culture. That realm, barely formally regulated and seldom a core topic in politics, also reflects the uniqueness of local politics, which in its complexity reflects a social dynamic in its historical and regional dimensions.

One of the significant developments has been an increasing willingness on the part of the canton to support professional structures for culture. That makes it possible to secure resources in a responsible way, to promote initiatives and the work of artists, and to make the public at large more open to, and aware of, culture. This development has been one that has moved from subsidizing to steering.

The cultural dimension – often hierarchically caricatured as falling between elite art and folk customs – could be better reflected upon. It is necessary to move away from improvised actions and pragmatic politics dominated by hidden ideological goals.

Removing Persons from Urban Public Spaces

Project contractor/Project financing

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team

Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – School of Social Work: Monika Litscher (project director), Beat Grossrieder, Peter Mösch Payot, Marco Schmutz

Abstract

Urban public spaces are used by different groups and social strata. The present study investigates the mechanisms and consequences of removing persons who are regarded as 'troublesome' from such spaces, as well as the basic norms underlying such action. The assumption is that societal discourses (e.g., about cleanliness and security), local conflicts of interest (e.g., between those who use the space and local residents) and international trends (e.g., video surveillance) manifest themselves in public spaces. These are representational spaces of the society, and one of their important characteristics is basic accessibility. However, there have always been conflicts over the utilization of public spaces, and over inclusion and exclusion: They lend themselves to multifaceted projections. Given the political frameworks, power structures and spatial planning policies can be anchored in urban public spaces, allowing for corresponding disciplining procedures and exclusions. Removal measures are an expression of this, and a potential way to approach the complex utilization patterns that exist in public spaces. These are anchored in police procedures, and removal measures are usually undertaken by local police forces.

The study illustrates how the diverging ways public spaces are utilized are understood. Removal practices, in their connections and consequences, reflect the development of social space, societal differentiation, and the political constellations of Swiss cities.

Agency for Caregiving Female Migrants from Non-EU Countries

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Project management/Project team
University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Southern Switzerland SUPSI, Department of Business and Social Work: Paola Solcà (project director), Angelica Lepori Sergi, Anita Testa-Mader, Antonietta Colubriale Carone, Pasqualina Cavadini

Project partner
Associazione Opera Prima

Abstract

The growing size of the elderly population has reached a point in some countries where it has become necessary to rethink the system of eldercare. At the same time, the proportion of working women has been rising steadily since the 1970s. Families are increasingly unable to provide home care for their aged relatives. In the Canton of Ticino, as in Switzerland more generally, migrant women have taken over the task of providing home care and aid to the elderly. These women come to us from Eastern Europe in search of better employment opportunities, while trying to maintain long-distance relationships with their own families. The investigation here is part of a series of studies on transnational life courses which focus on the connections between labor migration and work in the caring professions. Its focus is on the working and living conditions of the Eastern European female labor migrants who provide home care for the elderly. One interest is to investigate the conditions under which these women maintain the connections to their own families; another is to examine the network of relationships they build, seen against the backdrop of the social and migration policies they face. Our goal is to develop scenarios for home care for the elderly that simultaneously make a good quality of care and appropriate work and living conditions for these female labor migrants possible.

Growing Old in the Penal and Correctional System

Project contractor/Project financing
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF); Pöschwies Cantonal Penitentiary; Saxerriet Cantonal Penitentiary; Bitzi Correctional Institution

Project management/Project team
Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, School of Social Work: Barbara Baumeister (project director), Samuel Keller, Sylvie Kobi

Abstract

As in other countries, the number of aging prisoners has been steadily increasing in Switzerland. Thus far, there have been no studies of this phenomenon, from the perspective of the social sciences, which could be used in the penal system. One goal was to gather information about particular burdens older prisoners face and about challenges prison staff charged with their care face. Another goal was to establish an information basis that could be used for planning prison space appropriate for older prisoners.

The study asks: What everyday demands or problems do older prisoners face? What efforts do aging prisoners make to meet these demands? What are the challenges for prison staff in caring for this group? To what degree has this target group been taken into account in existing penal system concepts?

The mean number of older prisoners has doubled from 1984 to 2008, and the study showed that they face specific problems arising from physical limitations to what they can daily accomplish, but that these are also dictated by their biographies or life courses. The perception among prison staff of their role and task is a balancing act between respecting the lives older prisoners have followed and knowing the serious crimes they have committed. It is an effort to grant autonomy and provide care, while trying to find a balance between treating all prisoners alike and finding individualized solutions.



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Organization

The School of Social Work organizes its research and development activities in four thematic fields:

- “Social intervention” investigates the conditions under which social work measures and methods are employed.
- “Social organization” researches the connections between structure and effectiveness: The way Social Work is organized and managed is crucial for the success of its interventions.
- “Social security” looks into the functions of the welfare state from disciplinary, economic and legal points of view, and asks about intended and unintended effects.
- “Socialization and re-socialization” conducts research on successful and unsuccessful individual development, and on instruments that protect children, adolescents and adults.

The School of Social Work is substantially involved in supporting the Institute on Aging, which investigates questions of participation in society of people from their fifties onward.

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Research Organization

In the School of Social Work, located within the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland FHNW, research and development is decentralized. The performance mandate (research and development; service provision; basic education; continuing education) is carried out in six thematically-oriented institutes at the two sites in Basel and Olten. This decentralized organization serves to systematically entangle knowledge production and knowledge dissemination. This is particularly true of the research and development core theme “Social Innovation.” The Scientific Support Centre provides internal research support and provides more general information about research and development. The contact person is Susanne Bachmann (susanne.bachmann@fhnw.ch). Insight into the research and development activities of the School of Social Work FHNW is available at www.fhnw.ch/sozialarbeit/forschung-and-entwicklung and at the “Social Innovation” blog (blogs.fhnw.ch/sozialarbeit/).

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Organization

The Institute of Social Work IFSA-FHS, at the University of Applied Sciences FHS St. Gallen, offers applied research, development and services in the focus areas of generations, social spaces, and concerning the development of the social work and social pedagogy professions. As the only social science institute in the entire University of Applied Sciences, Eastern Switzerland, the IFSA-FHS is actively engaged in interdisciplinary efforts and in finding innovative solutions.

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Research Board

Directors of the Social Work discipline define the research strategy in social work at the HES-SO universities, communicate this to the university rectors, and give responsibility for its implementation to the research and development committee of the discipline, composed of a research officer from each of the four HES-SO universities, as well as both a female and a male researcher.

Organization

Social Work at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland HES-SO has programs at Fribourg-Givisiez (HETS-FR, www.hef-ts.ch), Geneva (HETS-GE, www.hesge.ch/hets), Lausanne (HETS-EESP, www.eesp.ch) and Sierre (HETS-VS, www.hevs.ch). The research activities conducted in the respective Schools of Social Work are either part of a larger research strategy in the discipline of social work (as developed for all HES-SO universities) or part of the research strategy at a specific university. The research and development committee for the discipline establishes the necessary coordination, gives researchers useful support, suggests how to strengthen social work research at HES-SO universities, and promotes promising young researchers. University rectors' committees provide support for projects involving other European nations.

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Organization

The specialists in the Lucerne School of Social Work conduct research at the Centre of Teaching and Education, and at its Institute of Social Work and Law, Institute of Social Management, Social Policy and Prevention, and Institute of Sociocultural Development. The focus areas of the research include: professional development and education; the analysis and optimization of intervention and decision-making processes in the context of law and social work; management in the social domain and in social policy, prevention and health promotion. In the sociocultural area, the focus is on the development of the profession, on occupations in the sociocultural realm, and on sociocultural intervention. Research is also conducted in city and regional planning, focused on social and socio-cultural development. The Lucerne School of Social Work is a department of the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

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Collaborative Research

Research activity at SUPSI is organized into seven research areas and its goal is to promote collaboration between individual departments and interdisciplinary projects. In concordance with the principles of basic vocational and continuing education, each department creates its own centers of competence and determines in which direction research will develop.

Organization

Research in social questions is located in a center of competence in welfare and work, whose focus is the development of the world of work, social exclusion, and the welfare state. It evaluates laws and suggested measures, which can benefit institutions for socially weak groups, and monitors measures for social and occupational reintegration.

In the last several years, research in the department has also addressed transformations of sociocultural processes, social solidarity, and promoting well-being, life quality and lifestyles. The target groups of such research include young migrants, the disabled, women and the elderly: The intent is to provide research results that can help in making political and institutional decisions.

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Organization

Research and development in the School of Social Work, at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, is thematically focused on “*Childhood, Youth and Family*,” “*Delinquency and the Prevention of Criminality*” and on “*Diversity and Participation in Society*.”

- The main focus of research into “*Childhood, Youth and Family*” is on questions of maturation, particularly in families that are part of vulnerable groups, as well as on prevention and intervention measures used in social work with respect to such groups. The current focus is on aid provided to children and youth; families and maturation; and schools and social work.
- Research and development in “*Delinquency and the Prevention of Criminality*” addresses the causes and consequences of criminality, as well as intervention and the prevention of criminality.
- In “*Diversity and Participation in Society*,” projects investigate how diversity among people is handled, as well as how their participation in society can be encouraged, maintained or restored. The current focus is on social integration, social gerontology, and the development of community.

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