



**KEY THEMES AND SETTINGS  
OF SOCIAL WORK IN ESTONIA**

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## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

The dissertation is based on the following original publications:

- I **Kiik, Riina** and Sirotkina, Reeli (2005) The Development of Social Work as a Speciality and the Profession in Estonia. In *Social work and Society*. International Online-Only Journal, 3 (1), 128–133.
- II **Kiik, Riina** (2005) The Estonian Experience — How to inspire social work students to undertake research? *European Journal of Social Work*, 8 (3), 329–335.
- III **Kiik, Riina** and Sirotkina, Reeli (2006) Hospice — the ideology and perspective in Estonia. *International Nursing Review*, 53 (2), 136–142.
- IV Kõre, Jüri; **Kiik, Riina** ja Kõiv, Eva (2005) Kodutus Eestis — kas indiviidi või ühiskonna probleem? *Akadeemia* 17 (4), 715–734.

# INTRODUCTION

The essence of social work changes along with the developing society, and the nature of social work has become markedly more complicated. As a result, higher requirements are posed with regard to experience, competence and responsibility. An extremely high level of professionalism is required of people in this field. Even though in Estonia, social workers with a higher education have been trained at Tallinn University since 1991 and at the University of Tartu since 1992, the nature of the profession in society is not yet clear. It is yet unclear what social work is, who the social worker is and what the functions of social work are. There is even less of a connection made between social work and social policy.

Social work is one of the vitally important spheres of activity for the Estonian state and people where efforts had to start nearly from scratch. The Soviet system did not acknowledge social problems, and consequently social work in the Western sense of the word did not exist in the Soviet Union (Simpura, 1995). The needed attention was not paid to social work and its purveyors in the Soviet Estonia. According to Jordan and Jordan (2000) in former communist countries, the devastation of these economies, mass poverty and unemployment among populations, loss of security and the sense of collective solidarity, and the overall disruption and disorientation of the transitions to democracy and capitalism, made social work a *necessary* part of these countries' social policy programmes and created conditions in which social work was *possible*. The terms *social work* and *social worker*<sup>1</sup> were rediscovered in Estonia (I). It is a field to which previous experience or experiences of different societies cannot be extrapolated or directly applied. But it is possible to learn from earlier and other experiences, as long as we bear in mind the specifics of our environment and society. Social work stands in relation to a specific society in a specific social situation and time.

The opportunity to write an introduction of this kind is also an occasion to make a personal statement regarding what constitutes "modern social work practice". What should social workers know? How should they be able to "do it". To my understanding, social work is both a field of research, a field of study and a practical field where the relations between the client and/or the community and the social worker are what constitutes the field. It is a practical and action-oriented work at the intersection between the individual and society. The personality of the social worker is also important, since it is the primary instrument used in the work.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Estonian professional standard for social workers, social worker is defined as a specialist with specialized higher education, whose activity is aimed at supporting the coping of individuals, families and groups and bringing the community and society into conformity with the needs of its members.

This dissertation is about social work in Estonia, with a particular focus on the social work research and on the relationship between social policy and social work. The aim is to show that social work have many facets. The main question discussed in this dissertation is: how the contextual influences play a role in social work development.

This dissertation is based on four articles, all of which analyze from a different point of view social work and social policy:

**(I)** The first one tries to gain an understanding about how the profession of social work has developed in today's Estonia, to shed light on the importance of historical, socio-political, professional and educational contexts in explaining the societal position of the social work profession.

**(II)** The second one concentrates on social work education and research. Social work as a phenomenon consists of three parts: research, education and professional practice. Research should not only help professional practice but also the teaching of social work methods. Professional education requires skills and knowledge and the roots of skills and knowledge self-evidently lie in education and studies.

**(III)** and **(IV)** The third and fourth articles cover social work practice. These articles allow us to see how important the socio-political and organization's cultural context are. The articles also reflect society's values and the political choices that social workers meet with on an everyday basis. In addition, the articles are a fine research example of what can be drawn on in the course of teaching social work.

The research material in the articles was conducted during the last six years in the course of several research projects. These four articles include a summary of the results, a review of the research methodology and interpretation of the received data. All of the articles discuss both the theoretical and empirical possibilities of building and developing social work practice.

## Social work's many facets

Any discipline that studies the individual and the surrounding environment, are using various kinds of models and theories. These theories and models are based on a foundation consisting of defined terms. In the opinion of Muuga (2003), terms and definitions are conventional information-bearing units that are part of each field and should comprise among specialists a system that is unequivocal and has a fixed meaning. Moreover, definitions have an effect on everyday practical activity. Definitions have a major significance not only for the research world but for everyday life, in whether and how they spread in politics, practical work or the greater publicity. Definitions help one to understand and organize the everyday, to arrive at a common understanding, and to find a common language. Thus, in covering various topics, it is especially important to start with definitions. So, *what is social work?*

It is difficult to define social work, since it is a wide field influenced by many factors, such like geographical, political, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual<sup>2</sup>, and which will finally take concrete form through activity in practice.

Gibelman (1999) highlights the fact that the numerous definitions describing social work are characterized by a focus on the individual and their environment. The various ways to conceptualize social work are as follows: social work practice according to field (**III, IV**), place of activity, type of agencies (non-profit, state), function, client group (**III, IV**), method used (prevention, intervention), practical goal, service provided (**III**) and type of problem (homelessness (**IV**)<sup>3</sup>, unemployment, discord within the family etc.). Bergmark (1997) lists a total of 23 different definitions of social work.

Indeed, it is not easy to pinpoint what social work is, but a more precise definition would help. In recent years, the International Federation of Social Workers, in collaboration with the International Association of Schools of Social Work has been working on the definition of Social Work, which was adopted at the Montreal World Conference in July 2000. The Task Force on Definition of Social Work has developed a working definition (IFSW, 2000) to read:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on influencing factors, see "Human rights and social work", 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Eva Kõiv, one of the co-authors was master student in social work and she collected the empirical material by interviewing homeless people.

In the Task Forces paper (IFSW, 2000), social work is seen as addressing “the multiple, complex transaction between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction.” Indeed, social work is about planned change and social workers are the agents of change. Social work practice deals with the social intersections between individuals and society. The skilful social work professional is able to utilize knowledge of “human development and behaviour and social systems to analyze complex situations and to facilitate individual, organizational, social and cultural changes” (I, II, III, IV). Social workers are the skilled deliverers of community resources to those who need them most.

This is an internationally recognized definition that is not very well-known or widely used among Estonia’s social workers and social work professionals. It is interesting that Estonia has its own take on the definition of social work. The Estonian Encyclopedia (1995:609) states:

“social work is an activity that helps the person (as well as the family) cope with themselves and society in a difficult stage of life (accident, illness, disability, unemployment, homelessness, family violence, poverty, difficulties adjusting, psychological crisis etc). In the broader sense, it covers state social policy as well. It draws on psychology, psychotherapy, sociology, economy and other sciences and social welfare, personal and child protection, occupational and health care acts.”

Even this explanation is not widespread enough among Estonian social workers and other professionals in the field. The Estonian Encyclopedia definition relates social work to the micro psycho-social dimensions, to the sociopolitical framework, including legislation. In Soviet time Encyclopedia definition of social work was missing, not even the expression of *social work* was mentioned. But there was a definition of social pedagogic.

Every autumn, I begin my introductory course on social work with the same kind of question. In the nine years since 1997, the number of participants has reached around a thousand. Besides students in the social work major, the course has been attended by sociology, psychology, special education, public administration, philology, law, economics and educational science students. All of them have their own understanding of the definition of social work, which no doubt reflects the values and understandings that exist in society. Below I provide some excerpts from the essays<sup>4</sup> where the students have given answers to the question: What is social work?

In general, the responses can be divided into two groups: the ones that refer to helping and working with clients are in the vast majority and those that

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<sup>4</sup> The students wrote the essays anonymous. Therefore there is not possible, by reading the quotations, to know if there was a male or a female, either the age of the students or what kind of professions they belonged to.

highlight problems and relations on the societal level are in the minority. Over the last three years, a major change has been seen. More and more, social work is seen as a part of social policy and social workers as crusaders for justice, which in respect to the Estonian society is needed.

I have been asked many times what field I went to college to study and many people, upon hearing that I am a social work student, start laughing — because they think that people major in this subject only to get a job with the government later. I don't know how true that is but I think personally that if the main goal is to scrape together as much money as possible then business would be a better field. Becoming a social worker is still more something to consider if you want to help people /.../ social workers work with theoretical problems — they study what is wrong in society and look for solutions as to how to make things better.

It tends to be the same with social work as with sociology — people simply don't know what to think of it or what it actually is. Maybe the situation is in some respects even worse, because when people meet someone who studies sociology, they often ask straight out: What do you study? What is it? Who will you become in the future? But people make assumptions themselves about social work (if there is a lack of knowledge) — that no doubt it's a matter of changing old people's bedclothes.

To define social work in the wider sense, we should start with what belongs under social work. Above all, it is part of the social policy sphere, as a result of which it involves ensuring people's well-being. As part of ensuring well-being, we could mention such tasks as ensuring equality, financial and physical security and conditions worth living in.

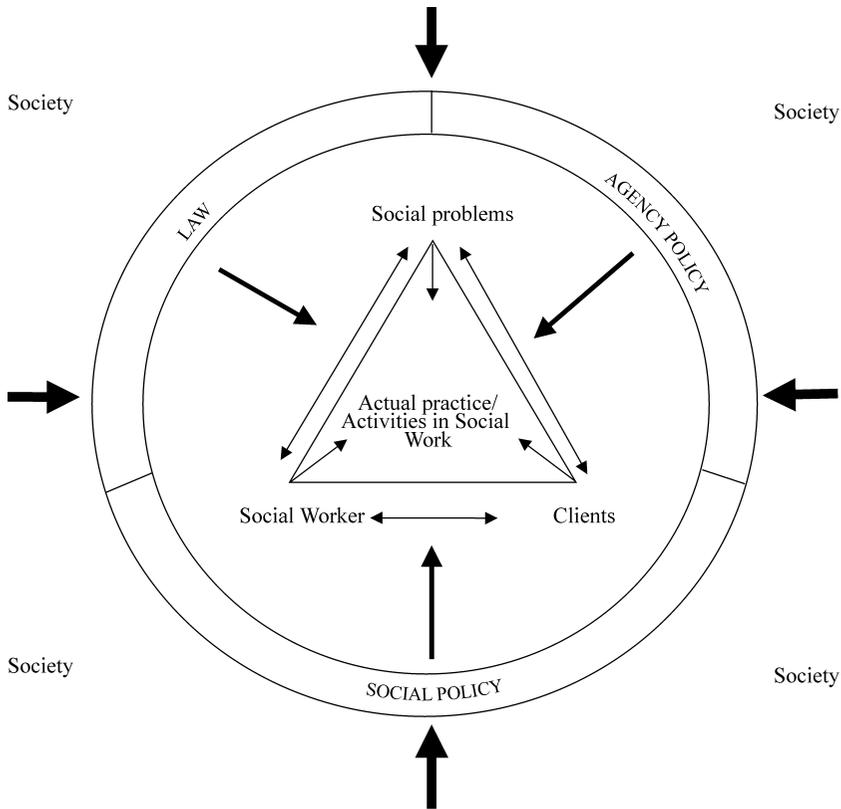
As can be seen from the above quotes, the term *social work* is broad and very multifaceted. I like to compare social work to a rubber band that can be stretched from 5 cm to a meter or even more. And since the Estonian social work is a case of a relatively new profession, it can be said that a general treatment of social work and social worker is as yet undeveloped and social work is often equated with all social activity.

To summarize, we can say that social work often adapts and takes on different “faces” in different contexts and settings (Morales and Sheafor, 1998) **(I, II, III, IV)**. According to Sven Hessel (2001), during 1970–1990, social work was defined as a semi-profession and there were enormous differences in the quality of the education and the status of social workers in the international perspective. Since the 1990s, social work has been developing towards a more holistic profession, formulating definitions of common main goals and academic standards in education in the different countries and cultures. Now it seems of utmost importance for the profession to acknowledge the different views, approaches and methods, thus guaranteeing solid professional standards (Juliusdottir & Petersson, 2003).

## Focus on social policy and social work

According to Walker & Walker (2002) social policy provides the context within which both social work professionals and their service users live and work, often reflected through legislation (Figure 1). Social workers need to understand and analyze the social policies that are relevant to their practice. The implications and impact of the social policies affect social work and social work clients. According to Heinonen & Spearman (2001:12), the social work/social policy equation involves knowing how to facilitate social change. Promoting social change almost always involves influencing politics. Or as practitioners in the welfare state, social workers must learn the process of policy development, and be prepared to shape as well as carry out the social policies which define their work (Wormer, K. Van 1997: 37).

In order to show the context in which social work develops, I like use a model to illustrate the ideas.



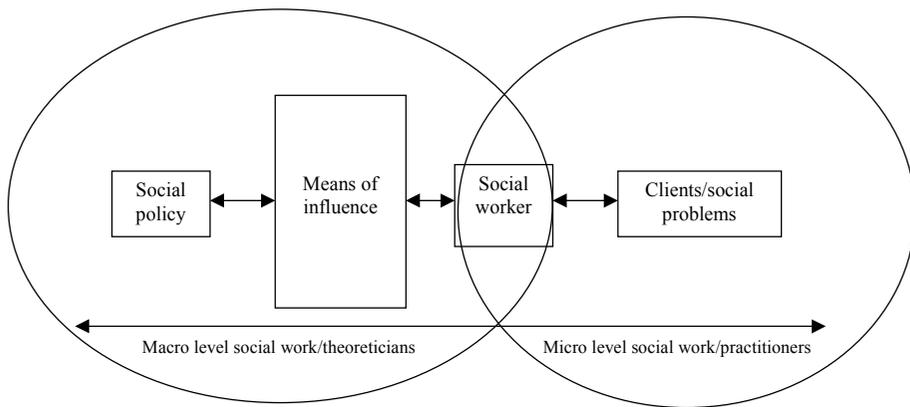
**Figure 1.** The context of social work

The model can be used to analyze context on different levels. If we look in one of the circles, we see how society, e.g. the political climate and economic market fluctuations f ex., affect social policy, legislation and the formation of agencies, which in turn provide “activities in social work” or “actual practice of social work”. Although the influence of laws and policies is very strong, laws and policies have to be interpreted — they do not spell out what needs to be done. Laws and policy do not provide detailed prescriptions for practice; individual social workers have to take responsibility for their actions. Law and policy are very influential in shaping practice, but it is still the decisions and actions of individual practitioners that form the basis of actual practice—and it is these that render the social work accountable, and also provide different ways to solve the problems. We can see how social problems, clients and the social worker himself/herself mutually affect each other. The social policy must go beyond a reactive response to big problems, and to take its place as an evolving social stake-holder.

The relationship between social work and social policy has been termed a point of integration or tangent by several authors (Reamer, 1993; Fjortoft & Skorstad, 1998; Kokkinn, 1998; Villadsen, Gruber & Bengtsson, 1998; Hegland, 2000). No social worker can avoid drawing connections between clients’ needs and publicly sponsored programs, regulations, or benefits pertaining, for example, to public assistance, elder or child welfare services, community-based programs for the mentally ill, or shelter care for the homeless.

As the tides of political change come and go, and as the public mood shifts, so does the social policy, however there is a path-dependency on social policy. Social work is in direct dependency on state social policy: they are entwined in theory and practice. Doing social work entails knowledge of social policy and an ability to assess society’s real possibilities. It is undoubtedly necessary to work on the macro level, and not only on micro level, in order to influence social policy, drafting of laws, and organizational culture, i.e. one’s own working environment. The last seems to be too theoretical in the opinion of social workers, at the same time that working with a client is very concrete and practical (Kiik & Grønningsæter, 2006). Figure 2 illustrates how social work and social policy interface.

According to Hutchinson and Oltedal (2000: 40), the dilemma of the theoretician is “to know, but not be able to do”. And likewise, the corresponding caricature of the practitioner is “to be able to but not to know”. There is now easy bridge or clearly defined crosswalk between these two paths. Social workers’ ideal is to find the fruitful balance between theory and practice.” The theories should be used with the objective of furthering more reflected practice.



**Figure 2.** Integration of social policy and social work

### **Social work and agency policy**

The radical societal changes are most obvious in the authentic world of people, i.e. at the local level (IV). This is also the place where social work has to prove its capabilities to cope with these challenges. Social work has to develop answers to social contradictions at the local level through developing appropriate organizational structures and even more through response to the ever-specific needs and demands of the people (III, IV). In much the same way that social policy involves interpreting and implementing the law, so, too, does agency policy involve making sense of the broader legal and policy issues and relating them to realities of practice.

According to Doel and Shardlow (2005), the organizations in which social work is practiced have a significant impact on the shape of that practice. Currently, these organizations are experiencing an extraordinary rate of change, and highly fluid and unpredictable context of organizations can sap practitioners and managers energies. Although agency procedures, and policy guidelines more broadly, are very important factors in shaping the translation of policy into practice, they are not the only ones. Another important factor is that of organizational culture. This refers to the sets of common patterns, assumptions, values and norms that become established within an organization over a period of time. The organization's culture can be a major influence on policy, largely because it tends to be such a strong influence on organizational behaviour in general. According to Thompson (2000), where there is a culture of defensiveness, it follows that policies will be implemented defensively. Similarly, in an organization with a culture characterized by a strong commitment to learning,

policies relating to training and staff development are likely to be more fully operationalized than would otherwise be the case in other settings.

This context is a very complex one, and one that constantly changes as a result of new laws, developments in policies and political changes. It is therefore important that social workers keep up to date with developments in the legal and policy issues that affect practice. To study such matters as part of one's qualifying training and then to pay little or no attention to developments in subsequent years is clearly a recipe for disaster. (ibid. 49).

## **The political context of social work — a political profession?**

As discussed above connections between policy and social work are rich and multifaceted. At the most basic level, all social work occurs within a policy context that facilitates or hinders social work endeavors. It behooves social workers and social work practitioners to understand these contexts if they are to take the utmost advantage of positive policies (Powell, 2001), avoid or subvert negative policies, and identify priorities for policy change in future. According to Yelloo and Henkel (2005:24):

“Social work is one of the most political of all professions. Indeed, it has virtually no role, no identity outside the welfare institutions where it is located. These in turn are shaped and developed by government policies. Social work is deeply affected by dominant political ideas and its practitioners are seen as key instruments in the operationalization of government policy. Social workers' daily activities reflect political intentions and are largely defined by them.”

Just like doctors and nurses, so, too, do social workers come into contact with decisions taken by politicians and bureaucrats or officials expressing society's attitudes and development with regard to clients/consumers. Public decisions can either alleviate or aggravate coping and fair treatment of individuals or groups.

At the present time, the correlation between the health care system and politics is clear to ordinary citizens and there is constant talk about the bottlenecks of the system, whether the long lines for medical care, low wages for nurses or doctors, or leaving for jobs abroad. Public funding is distributed through politicians, both in the health care and social sphere. Since health care is more a case of a state-level system, it is easier to control it both in the sense of supervising it and influencing it.

It was axiomatic to Jane Addams and some other founders of the social work profession that its members would prioritize policy-changing work, whether by electing progressive candidates, lobbying legislators, monitoring the implementation of existing policies, or obtaining data about social problems (Jansson, Dempsey, McCroskey & Schneider, 2005:319). Yet many social workers have

not followed — and do not follow — Addams’s vision, preferring Mary Richmond’s emphasis on services to individuals. Powell (2000:129) explains:

“The dual mandate defines the role and task of social work as promoting the interests both of the state and of the service user whom they are intended to help. This dual mandate makes social work by definition a politicized activity. For some practitioners this has involved a high degree of sensitization to the implications of the use of professional power. Other (the majority) prefer to avoid the implications of the dual mandate by adopting an individualized therapeutic approach that locates social work in the apolitical world of psychology and the personalization of social problems.”

In Estonia, policies reforming social work have not been supported by agencies or universities. Some social workers have believed, moreover, that it is unethical for professionals to participate in the political process. Social workers are expected to sense the problems of society more keenly than people in other professions (Haaland, Njå & Montgomery, 1999). They meet clients daily who reflect society’s problems. Social workers are a link between the individual client or group of clients and the environment with various institutions and the administrative and political decisions taken by them.

Social workers could be messengers who keep institutions and politicians informed of the situation of society and offer solutions to change the situation. Professional social work is in a certain sense the civil servant-work which should ensure the population their legal rights where they are needed. Thus social workers have a greater responsibility compared to ordinary citizens. They use the mandate and resources given them by society to take important decisions, and to help those who need help.

Therefore, social workers need to know the ways in which they can influence legislation, strategies for changing agency policies, and skills and tasks that are needed in policy reform work. Social policy-making is always related to public authority. It is directly and without exception a creature of political systems, closely connected with the ideology, goals, role models and principles of the government and bureaucratic proceedings. Leppik (1999) has noted that social policy making on the state level includes a conscious taking of a position in social issues and dealing with there. Whether they like it or not, social workers are implementers of social policy on the local level.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Kiik, Grønningsæter (2001, 2006).

## The significance of research in social work

The role of research in social work has become increasingly relevant to training, education and practice. Furthermore, the educational process can make links between social work research and direct service approaches (**III, IV**), looking at how one can inform the other — how research can improve practice and practical experiences can influence what and how we research.

Usually we think of research and practice in precisely that order. Social workers and those with whom they work are regarded as the beneficiaries, perhaps reluctant ones, of the outcomes of research. Researchers are taken to be the experts, while social workers are expected to dutifully apply the results of expert inquiry to their practice. According to D’Cruz & Jones (2004) *findings* — data, practice prescriptions, evidence-based outcomes, assessment and prediction tools, generalizations and occasionally theories — are presented for implementation, often in the form of “key lessons from researchers”. It is a small wonder if practitioners quail at the very thought of swallowing the latest social work practice and social work management, create and sustain a rich and diverse agenda for the practices of research. Shaw and Golud (2001:200) mention that the relationship between social work and research must never be utopian — but it must always be radical:

“It was possibly Einstein who said that “things should be as simple as possible, but not any simpler” /.../ and research should persistently entice us with glimpses of the possibility of seeing the world differently”.

Witkin (1995:427) has put it this way: Social work has always struggled with its research identity. Unlike related disciplines such as psychology, sociology and psychiatry, social work has no unique subject matter or methodology. What the social work profession does have is a unique commitment to a contextual understanding of people, an explicit value base that emphasizes human rights and human dignity, a commitment to serving marginalized and oppressed people, and mission to foster a more just society.

Social work research is also an important way of contributing to social work theory and knowledge. The methodical approach to social work emphasizes the need to apply theory to practice, the need to know various models of work and a wide array of knowledge to enable the worker to establish a relationship with the client and to diagnose the problems being faced. This knowledge enables the worker to discern the underlying conditions of social problems and to formulate a service plan. Social workers are specifically required not only to promote change, but also to have basic research and statistical skills, the ability to read reports and draw appropriate conclusions (D’Cruz & Jones, 2004).

One article (**IV**) makes concrete links between the social work and social policy approach on the local level. The approach that practice as direct service

to clients may inform important research questions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of policies that shape social work and service delivery.

It is clearly recommended that social workers continually update their base of knowledge and improve their research skills. The fundamental model of social work promulgated by theoreticians and practitioners is one in which social workers not only use research results but also conduct research and assess the effectiveness of professional practice themselves in order to enrich and develop professional knowledge (Engelke, 1992; Eijken & Ewijk, 2005; Mäntysaari, 2005).

The experiences of educating social work students for several years show that linking theoretical and practical training with research is good, and the same time enriches knowledge about the conditions of social problems. It is a way to educate not only for the role of the social workers, but also for the role of researcher.

According to Tronvoll (2001), one can anticipate that this type of research training will be a good test for the implementation of such new roles for social workers as initiators and participants in studying social problems, monitoring and evaluating programs and activities. As well as understanding research to be a crucial component in the practice of social work, whether that be in direct service provision or policy development, it can also be seen to be significant when it comes to the questions of professionalism.

## **Conclusion — The Future of social work**

The character of social work changes with the changing requirements of society. Its history reflects these changes. It is important for the social worker to know the needs of people in various social contexts and the larger political context. Social work is extending its scope of practice and reach far beyond the traditional practices. While being outreaching, as it must, there should be basic integrity and professional character. Social work must maintain its professionalism in the light of a multiplicity of approaches in social intervention so that it can steer ahead in a changing world. One thing we have to learn is that the constantly changing society causes social work to reflect change itself again and again.

The formation of social policy is complicated and often a time-consuming process. It is shaped, in addition to the global processes taking place in the world, by the political culture prevailing in the state, the national priorities, the values embraced and the applicable social policy model, along with the people and groups directly involved in policy making. There is occurring erosion of state welfare, and in its place a new pluralism and shift to competitive market solutions, with the aim of extending choice and driving down costs. With these social strategies have come not only changes in the economy of welfare but new

structures and a new management culture based on primary values of efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. These may collide with the person-centered ethos of social work and create difficult professional and ethical dilemmas.

The task of a modern social worker reaches beyond a pacification of social conflicts and a mere fulfillment of elementary needs: social professions are always inherently political professions and thus it is necessary for social work to act on a political level. This requirement may be called social work policy, which has in particular to be based on a local level. But it is also necessary and possible to link the role of a researcher to the other professional roles of a social worker.

The body of knowledge may not function as a constant, but on the basis of research and critical practice, it will, by definition, have to change. The core issue in the training of social workers is therefore the education of students, turning them into reflective, critical and creative professionals who are capable of critical reflection on the role of social work in society and their own functioning, and who will contribute creatively to innovation and quality improvements of social care and services.

Although social work is practical compared to other academic professions, acquisition of practical skills is not enough to master this field. For a constructive working process to take place, the specialist must acquire the basic theoretical elements, which requires in-depth study and analysis of various theories, proceeding from one's own as well as others' experiences in the case of practical work. The learning process does not end after degree's is acquired; rather, knowledge continues to be added and integrated into everyday work in order for one to contribute through practical activity to creating new research directions. In addition to developing the field, and intensifying the scholarship of social work, practitioners doing everyday work should also be able to supplement the system in which his own activity is taking place. It is important that one, through education, develop personal competence in this work. Practice as part of the education is a way for students to associate the theoretical subjects with their own personal development.

Social work should be a stimulus, providing the catalytic growth in the change process. The practice of social work, however, has to keep in step with changes in the knowledge-based economy. Technology has progressed and lifestyles have changed, yet social work's mandate must include an active concern for those left behind in the grinding action of social forces. Social work will be more and more visible as it becomes more relevant to society. While social work explores changes and adapts to various demands, it must review the basic core of the profession. With the commitment to the ideals for the improved well-being of individuals and societies as set in social work values, it needs to rally with other partners of change and professionals to turn the values and ideals into reality. The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice will vary from country to country and from time to time depending on cultural, historical, and socio-economic conditions.

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# SUMMARY IN ESTONIA

## Sotsiaaltöö võtmeteemad ja taust Eestis

Sotsiaaltöö on üks nendest Eesti riigile tähtsatest tegevusvaldkondadest, kus pärast taasiseseisvumist (1991) tuli alustada peaaegu tühjalt kohalt. Nõukogude Eestis ei pööratud sotsiaaltöö ja selle tegijatele vajalikku tähelepanu. Ei toimunud sotsiaaltöötajate erialast ettevalmistamist ning nende ülesandeid olid pandud täitma teiste erialade esindajad nagu ametühingu — ja parteitöötajad, õpetajad ning kaadriosakondade töötajad.

90-ndatel aastatel toimusid suured muutused Eesti ühiskonna arengus, mis avaldasid mõju ka Eesti sotsiaalelule. Eestis taasavastati mõiste *sotsiaaltöö* ja *sotsiaaltöötaja*. Sotsiaaltöö on seotud konkreetse ühiskonnaga konkreetsetes elusituatsioonides ja ajas. See on valdkond, mille puhul ei saa varasemaid ega teiste ühiskondade kogemusi üle tuua või otse rakendada. Küll on võimalik õppida varasematest ja ka teiste kogemustest, kuid silmas tuleb pidada oma keskkonna ja ühiskonna spetsiifikat (I).

Mõiste *sotsiaaltöö* on lai ja väga mitmetahuline. Ma armastan näidet, kus ma võrdlen sotsiaaltööd kummipaelaga, mida on võimalik venitada 5 cm kuni meetrini ja vahel ehk veelgi rohkem. Ning kuna sotsiaaltöö puhul on tegemist suhteliselt uue erialaga, siis mõistete kujunemine ja nendest arusaamine on veel kujunemise järgus.

Sotsiaaltöö sisu muutub areneva ühiskonnaga, sotsiaaltöö iseloom on muutunud tunduvalt keerulisemaks. Sellest tulenevalt esitatakse ka kõrgemaid nõudmisi, mis puudutavad kogemusi, kompetentsust ja vastutust. Selle valdkonna esindajatelt nõutakse äärmiselt kõrget professionaalsust.

Sotsiaaltöötaja kutsestandardis on sotsiaaltöötajat defineeritud kui erialase kõrgharidusega spetsialisti, kelle tegevus on suunatud indiviidide, perede ja rühmade toimetuleku toetamisele ning kogukonna ja ühiskonna vastavusse viimisele tema liikmete vajadustega. Sotsiaaltöö üldeesmärgiks on parandada indiviidi toimetulekut sotsiaalses keskkonnas, et paraneks tema üldine elukvaliteet.

Mujal maailmas seostatakse sotsiaaltööd kutselise sotsiaaltöötaja eesmärgistatud tegevusega, mille täitmisel teadlikult kasutatakse mitmesuguseid vahendeid ja meetodeid (II, III, IV). Seejuures on suunajateks teatud väärtused ja teadmised, kus on laialdaselt kasutatud erinevaid teoreetilisi teadmisi ja praktilisi kogemusi. Eriti olulised on need teadmised, mis saadakse ühiskonnaja käitumisteadustest. Kuid ükski mainitud teguritest ei tee siiski üksi sellest tegevusest sotsiaaltööd. Sotsiaaltöö kujuneb tervikust, kus ühinevad ja integreeruvad väärtused, teadmised, eesmärgid, ülesanded, meetodid ja vahendid.

Sotsiaaltöö olemust kirjeldab kõige paremini temale esitatavate nõudmiste ja ülesannete rohkus, nende mitmekesisus ning muutmine. Sotsiaaltöö on oma olemuselt rehabiliteeriv (III; IV), ennetav (I) või praktilistele uuendustele (II)

pürgiv tegevus. Praktiline sotsiaaltöö on algusest peale keskendunud inimlike vajaduste rahuldamisele ning inimliku potentsiaali ja võimekuse arendamisele.

Sotsiaaltöö on otseses sõltuvuses riigi sotsiaalpoliitikast: nad on läbi põimunud nii teoorias kui ka praktikas. Sotsiaaltöö tegemine eeldab sotsiaalpoliitika tundmist, ühiskonna reaalsete võimaluste hindamise oskust. Sotsiaaltöö on paljuski poliitiline eriala. Sotsiaaltöötajad tulevad oma klientidele, tarbijatele lähemale kui teiste erialade esindajad (joonis 1). Hea praktika elluviimise eelduseks on sotsiaalpoliitilise konteksti ja sellest tulenevate raamide mõistmine.

Sotsiaaltöötajad tulevad oma klientidele, tarbijatele lähemale kui mõnd teised eriala esindajad. Professionaalne sotsiaaltöö on teatud mõttes ka ametnike töö, mis peaks kindlustama elanikkonnale õigused, siis kui nad seda vajavad. Seetõttu lasub sotsiaaltöötajatel suurem vastutus võrreldes tavakodanikega. Nad kasutavad ühiskonna mandaati ja ühiskonna vahendeid aitamaks abivajajaid.

Väitekirja keskendub täpsemalt neljale teemale:

- sotsiaaltöö eriala ajalooline areng ja kujunemine taasiseseisvunud Eestis (**I**);
- sotsiaaltöö õpetamine ja sotsiaaltööalased uurimused (**II**);
- sotsiaaltöö ja elukvaliteedi küsimused hospiitsi teenuse pakkumisel (**III**);
- sotsiaaltöö kodututega Tartu linnas (**IV**)

Esitatud teemadest lähtuvalt on väitekirja põhiseisukohad järgmised:

1. Sotsiaaltöös kui ametis toimub pidev muutumine, absoluutseid teadmisi ei ole — kõik on suhteline, dünaamiline ja muutuv. Iga tegevuse (k.a. sotsiaaltöö) edukuseks on vajalikud mitme eeldused. Üks tähtsamaid nendest on professionaalne tegija, põhjaliku ettevalmistusega töötaja.
2. Sotsiaaltöö teooria luuakse sotsiaaltöös suhtes selle tegevuse praktikaga, mis omakorda on seotud laiemal sotsiaalpoliitilise kontekstiga, siinjuures on oluline roll sotsiaaltööalastel uurimustel.
3. Sotsiaaltöö praktikas on oluline holistlik lähenemine. Tegevuse muutuv iseloom eeldab sotsiaaltöötaja reflektiivsust, oma tegevuse ja selle lähtekohtade hindamist ning saadud kogemustest õppimist.
4. Juhtumitöö on sotsiaaltöös olulisel kohal. Aga sotsiaalseid probleeme ei ole alati võimalik lahendada mikrotasandi sotsiaaltööd tehes, tuleb näha võimalusi ka makrotasandi sotsiaaltöös.

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Magistriseminar sotsiaaltöös  
Sotsiaaltöö hindamine ja arnedamine  
Sotsiaaltöö sihtrühmad

## **Teadustöö**

Peamised teemad: vananemine ja vanuripoliitika  
vabatahtlik sotsiaaltöö  
sotsiaaltöö hindamine  
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