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Internationalisation of social work doctoral studies: Experiences and perspectives in the changing context of European higher education

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Abstract

The internationalisation of doctoral education in social work has become a newly developing area particularly in Europe during the last two decades. It has been promoted by two factors: (1) the reform of higher education (Bologna reform), which contributed to the development of doctoral study and (2) the establishment of European funding programmes that would allow international cooperation and ensure the quality of the programmes. Also, in the European Qualification Frame (EQF) the knowledge, skills and competences gained by doctoral qualification are defined. In this article we will analyse three international doctoral projects that were developed in Europe in last ten years. We will focus on what the advantages and obstacles are of these policy frameworks and what their impact on international cooperation is in the development of doctoral programmes. The analysis showed that differences in national terms and conditions of the study remains a major obstacle for joint doctoral programmes, but it is precisely international cooperation that significantly contributes to the quality of doctoral studies. The analysis also showed that current policy framework of higher education in the EU does not solve the problems; on the contrary, it contributes to it.

Keywords: internationalisation, doctoral studies, networks, research, academisation

Introduction

Besides being a profession, social work is also a science, a discipline and a research area that is based on established doctoral education. In this paper we will reflect on doctoral education in social work and analyse the state of its internationalisation in the frame of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). We would like to explore the emerged forms of international cooperation of doctoral education that came about after the Bologna reform¹ as well as the perspectives of the latest reforms of European funding programmes. We argue that the internationalisation of doctoral studies is important for the further academisation of social work and for developing critical social work research, which can contribute to the improved understanding and solving of social problems in European societies. From this perspective, the recent reforms of European higher education and research seem to create new dilemmas for international doctoral studies in social work, which we will discuss in the conclusion.

¹ We use the term Bologna reform to denote the process of the creation of the European Higher Education Area that introduced three cycles of higher education and European credit transfer system to enable mutual recognition of qualifications, based on learning outcomes.

Transferability of credits and Erasmus programmes created a new environment of opportunities to collaborate. Furthermore, it created international open space in the education of social work at all three of its academic levels: in bachelor (BA), master (MA) and doctoral studies. After having established a relatively active internationalisation through the mobility of students and teachers as well as intensive programmes, joint modules and even joint degrees at the BA and MA levels, the social work discipline may reflect upon the perspectives of internationalisation of its doctoral studies. Internationalisation of doctoral studies developed in several directions: (1) including courses on international social work in the curriculum; (2) attracting foreign students to enrol to their programme; (3) attracting foreign teachers and researchers to participate in lectures, supervision or as external examiners; (4) creating informal (not accredited) networks of students and teachers; and (5) creating a common European doctoral programme.

Built on the analysis of available documentation and information of three European collaborative projects in social work doctoral education, we will give some insights into the benefits, obstacles and challenges of the process of internationalisation. The cases we explore are the International Social Work & Society Academy *TiSSA*, the International Doctoral Studies in Social Work *INDOSOW* and the Nordic-Baltic Doctoral Network *NBSW*.

European frame of doctoral studies

In order to set up a formal frame of educational policies we would first like to define the requirements for qualification at the doctoral level of education in the European Qualification Framework (EQF). We also remark on the changes in the options for the funding of European doctoral studies.

Besides the EHEA, the European knowledge society and the integration of the European labour market ought to be promoted by an ambitious EQF. Since 2010 the European Parliament has recommended its member states to relate their national educational systems to the eight levels of the EQF. They should enable the comparability and transferability of the knowledge, skills and competences of their citizens while studying or working in another member state (European Parliament, 2008). While most Member States of the European Union already require a MA degree (level 7) in social work from a university, or are moving towards it, other countries require at least a BA degree (level 6) in social work achieved at a university of applied sciences as the minimum qualification for social workers (Frost & Freitas, 2006; Matthies, 2011). An increasing number of countries are offering doctoral degrees in social work, which relate to level 8 (the highest level) in the EQF. The general formulation of this level actually refers to academic degrees higher than MA, and it can be modified to the social work discipline as in Table 1.

Table 1: European Qualification Frame for doctoral studies (according to European Parliament 2008; Matthies 2011)

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--|
| FRAME | General descriptors defining level 8, European Qualifications Framework (EQF) | Applying to the professional and scientific area of social work |
| <i>Knowledge</i> | Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields | Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of social services, social work and social sciences as well as at the interface between fields |
| <i>Skill</i> | The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice | The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice of social work |
| <i>Competence</i> | Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research | The ability to demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of social services and social work contexts including research |

Although the above described frame has not yet been reflected on to any great degree in the academic world, from the perspective of social work as a particular academic discipline level 8 of the EQF is of interest for several reasons. It establishes a shared European idea of doctoral degrees as offering the ‘most advanced’ knowledge, skills and competences based on research. It expresses that a doctoral qualification can relate both to professional practice and scientific research. Further, persons with a doctoral qualification should be committed to the field and have a capacity to develop it with new ideas and professional authority. To interpret this optimistically, the research capacity gained by a doctoral degree is seen to be a central qualification that enables critical views and needed changes at the forefront of the work in the field concerned. Especially for social work, this sounds highly relevant and corresponds with the discipline’s understanding of both critical practice research (Marthinsen & Julkunen, 2012) and critical realism (Pease, 2010).

The European Commission also promoted internationalisation of doctoral studies until 2013 with the tools of the ERASMUS programme, including teachers' mobility, joint curriculum development (CDA) and intensive programmes (IP), which have often been used for two-week summer schools. However, since 2014 the new ERASMUS+ programme is no longer funding doctoral training, and instead the newly launched Horizon2020 is responsible for doctoral degrees. For social work (as well as for social sciences in common), the tools of this programme comprise new challenges. Doctoral training is no longer regarded as part of educational issues but is now placed in the frame of the 'Research and Innovation' directorate as an initial step towards a career as a researcher. The new accents of the *Innovative Training Networks (ITN) - Marie Curie Actions* (European Commission, 2015) mean for instance that international doctoral education takes places:

- in a partnership between universities, research centres and companies
- in a way that combines scientific excellence with business innovation of industry
- in an interdisciplinary context only
- in the structure of joint European degrees.

These new directions for the internationalisation of doctoral studies clearly follow the through-going neo-liberal turn of various fields of society. This follows the idea that all shared activities in Europe, including research and training, should promote the economic growth and competitiveness of Europe. The value of academia is assessed according to the support it provides to the economy. Because of the increased focus on the economy as the most important sector that generates economic growth and employment and dominates all other sectors, the term market society was coined. Sandel (2012) defines market society as a way of life in which market value seeps into social relations and govern every aspect of human endeavour. It is a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market. The economy is not part of society any more: it is a society.

Increased market orientation enables competition between universities for foreign students that can pay tuition fees. In addition it also strengthens existing hierarchies by measuring performance according to success in the international academic market (publishing in highly-ranked journals, heading EU research projects, etc.) (Stauss, 2013). The social sciences are especially accused of not being oriented towards competing with the natural sciences in delivering products directly useful for the market.

This does not automatically exclude social work, but it does create serious dilemmas, which will be discussed later in this paper. Here we want to point out the contradictory position of the EU's politics that at the same time, after glorifying the role of the market and adopting all policies according to its principles, still speaks about the European social model (e.g. Offe, 2003) as something that Europe should nurture and protect. According to Jepsen and Pascual (2005) the concept is loosely defined and normative with unclear and contradictory meanings, but it is still often used in both theory and policy. There has been noticeable change in the use of the term in recent years. The newspeak (e.g. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001) includes words

like modernisation (as the core term to denote recent changes in the European social model), social investment state (replacing welfare state), activation and so on. In relation to the Bologna reform, new code words are competencies, learning outcomes, skills, knowledge society and flexibility, which are used to enhance individuals' capabilities to enable them to deal with and survive in the economy (Jepsen & Pascual, 2005, 238). As is well known, social work is highly dependent on language and the interpretation of culture and is thus country specific. Social work can be quite fragile inside its own country specific settings, especially in the current times of rapid and extensive changes to the welfare state: "The varying political and social histories of European states have resulted in a diversity of social welfare systems and differences in how social workers are trained, employed, organized, regulated, and deployed" (Jones, 2013, p. 4). Jones continues that this was an important reason why social work was looking for broader international alliances that would enable a common social work identity.

There are new forms of international activity that can support the development of doctoral studies. Since 2011 the European Conference of Social Work Research (ECSWR) has been held, and in this frame a European Social Work Research Association ESWRA was established in 2014. Together with the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) they may also offer opportunities of internationalisation for the doctoral students of social work in Europe. They not only enable PhD students' networking but also offer an exciting platform for training and presenting research to one of the highest levels of international audience.

Development of doctoral studies in Europe

In this chapter we will present an overview of the state of affairs in the area of doctoral studies in social work in European countries. Doctoral studies in social work in Europe do not have a long tradition, which is also reflected in scientific publications on the subject. Most publications are dated within the last 15 to 20 years (Lyons, 2002; Satka, 2000; Ajduković, 2008; Lorenz, 2005). Only a few of them relate to the internationalisation of doctoral studies (Laot, 2000; Lyons, 2003; Završek 2009).

Although our overview will be restricted to Europe, it is important to acknowledge the experiences of the US in doctoral studies. Currently, in addition to science-oriented programmes (doctor of philosophy in clinical social work), practice-oriented doctoral programmes have been developed (doctorate in social work) in order to increase the research competences of practitioners. The introduction of these programmes was partly an answer to the easily accessible, on-line post graduate and doctoral programmes provided by various institutes and other organisations against payment (Anastas & Videka, 2012, p. 269). Put differently, practice-oriented doctoral studies in the US have been a reaction to the commercialisation of higher education. Nevertheless, Anastas and Videka (2012, p. 270) state that up to 40% of doctors of science are employed in other than academic institutions, meaning that their knowledge directly contributes to practice.

The research of Green et al. (1992, p. 444) points out a strong correlation between the excellence of a faculty and the intensity of research. An overview of published articles by

doctoral students during their studies and afterwards showed that the most active in this respect were those who devoted the greatest portion of their time to research. An important characteristic that emerged from the analysis of the academic activity of doctoral students is also their activity outside the field of social work, for example, publishing in non-social-work journals or the publishing of conference papers (Green et al., 1992, p. 457). This is only further proof that borderlines between disciplines are fluid and that individual academic communities extend beyond the borders of their disciplines. Nevertheless, one should not overlook the signs of marketisation, since the pressure towards efficiency and the accumulation of academic points that are a prerequisite for an academic career is much stronger than it was in the past.

Laot (2000) conducted the research on doctoral studies in social work in several European countries before the Bologna reform. The survey raised more questions than it answered, and the project was more than once adjusted to accommodate the peculiarities of various settings, because it turned out that the courses are conducted by various types of institutions either independently or as part of other disciplines. Furthermore, differences have been established according to the time and place allocated to the research in different programmes (for more on this see Lyons, 2003). The analysis of articles on doctoral studies in Europe showed several characteristics that could be condensed into the following points: (1) academisation/scientification, (2) research-based discipline and profession and (3) internationalisation.

Academisation of social work

The academisation of social work has been one of the oldest subjects of debate within social work. In most European countries, social work is today an academic discipline, while in several countries it is considered to be applied professional education, depending on the traditional characteristics of the education system in the specific country (Matthies, 2011). The consequences of various traditions influence the options for the development of independent doctoral studies (Lyons, 2003, p. 558). Wherever social work has been recognised as an independent academic discipline, doctoral courses are well developed. In contrast, in countries where it is part of professional education, doctoral courses do not exist (Zaviršek, 2009; pp. 222–223; Matthies, 2011), or they are limited and left to the resources and creativity of individual educational institutions. In some European countries that follow a so-called ‘dual system’ of education, like in Germany, social work is offered both at universities of applied sciences as a semi-academic practical education and at scientific universities as an academic discipline. However, at most universities it is called social pedagogy or included as one direction inside of educational sciences or sociology.

According to the mainstream of the neoliberal governance of universities, which considers that academia should be managed as a business and as a resource for the economy, academic performance in most countries is measured by quantified indicators. For social work it is increasingly difficult to maintain a balance between being involved in the high quality education of practice-related professionals and academic activities. In this respect, quantification of academic performance acquires the character of a disciplining practice, which

contributes to the perpetuation of specific political agendas. Labonté-Roset (2005) has pointed out that even in countries where social work is not an independent academic discipline, fast and significant changes have been seen. In most of those countries a way has been found to establish a doctoral study in social work either in cooperation with a university or with another academic discipline where social work academics act as supervisors or external examiners of doctoral students. While such practices are efficient on the national level, they can present an obstacle to joint doctoral programmes, as is the case with the INDOSOW doctoral programme described below.

Research based discipline and profession

As the number of publications on this subject confirm, the significance of research for the development of social work as an academic discipline and profession is undoubtedly great. Staub-Bernasconi's analysis of historical sources (2009) showed that during the early stages of social work development the emphasis was put on research, because it not only contributed to the understanding of the practical processes and phenomena of social work but also provided data needed in practice. Labonté-Roset (2005, p. 288) similarly mentions the long tradition in research within social work, which after the Bologna reform has also been practised at universities of applied sciences that used to have a stronger focus on teaching. A contributing factor was precisely the introduction of post-graduate and doctoral courses where research is a significant component. Labonté-Roset (2005) even argues that 'a purely "teaching institution" never fulfils the criteria of an academic education.' (p. 287). Experience has shown that research is now mainly an integral part of educational institutions and that in many European countries researchers in social work can apply for research funds that were previously dedicated to traditional disciplines, although the research subjects are often restricted and do not necessarily reflect actual needs (Labonté-Roset, 2005, p. 291).

To avoid repeating Laot (2000), Lyons (2003), Shaw (2007), Orme and Powell (2007) and so on, we only mention that research options for doctoral students in social work vary depending on the research policies of individual countries. But it has to be acknowledged that they significantly contribute to research excellence in social work, as well as to the development of social work as a discipline and profession. This can be observed at regular European conferences for social work research whose participants include a significant number of doctoral students.

Internationalisation

The Bologna Process was a broadly debated reform of higher education in Europe. The reform has significance for social work, but it should be assessed with a considerable measure of criticism. Knowledge transfer can be hegemonic and culturally blind. EU borders are strict and exclusive especially in regard to Eastern and Southern countries; they result in painful and demanding procedures just to obtain visas and to recognise qualifications (see more in Leskošek, 2011). Lorenz (2005) argues that the documents setting out the reform are vague and enable considerable variations in interpretations (for more on the issue see Marcuallo-Sérvoz,

2014). He points out that while the reform provided the standardisation and quantification of the studies that could result in quality control, it also initiated the following:

widespread resistance against formal harmonisation as this cannot do justice to the character of different disciplines and the corresponding academic traditions that had always emphasised the self-directed character of higher education and scientific research. Above all, a certain degree of mistrust prevails against political agendas behind the reform which speaks of benefits to academic and professional standards while promoting a sub-text of financial cuts and greater external control over an academic world judged by many politicians as being far too autonomous. (Lorenz, 2005, p. 232)

The importance of the introduction of the three levels of studies (Ba, MA, PhD), the credit evaluation system (ECTS) and the unification of the educational models that aimed at achieving common acknowledgment of degrees across the EU, was significant since it increased substantially the mobility of lecturers, students and graduates. Lawrence and Lyons state that the number of joint projects and educational programmes on all education levels has been on the increase; as have various initiatives for international organisation that strive to develop common definitions and standards with the aim to achieve the mutual recognition of qualifications across the EU (Lawrence & Lyons, 2013, pp. 380–381). Labonté-Roset (2005, p. 289) has emphasised the importance of international mobility and cooperation also for doctoral programmes. For students, a semester or two spent at a foreign university is a valuable experience, which enables them to decentralise their personal views and look at their own countries from another perspective.

Three cases of the internationalisation of doctoral studies in Europe

In order to see how EU policies are transferred into practices we compared three international European doctoral programmes/ projects: TiSSA, INDOSOW and NBSW. Even though NBSW is funded mainly by Nordic institutions, it operates in the framework of European educational policy. The mode of operation of the three networks of collaboration will be analysed comparatively, especially in regard to how they maintain their activities, their sustainability and the possible obstacles or threats. We did a brief comparison using published and unpublished material that we obtained from the coordinators of projects (notes of the meetings and academic boards, students' assessments of the programme, etc.), which was complemented with the information already available on-line. We systematised data according to the categories of inquiry and present the results in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of three doctoral programmes

| | TiSSA | INDOSOW | NBSW |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| Type of a Network | Inter-university PhD Network and forum for professionals and academics | A consortium for joint/double doctoral programme or joint modules | Joint network of universities, national doctoral schools and other institutions |
| Founding institutions | Social Work & Society Academy (on-line journal), University of | University of Ljubljana, Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin, | Network of social work university institutions or national research |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | Bielefeld, St. Petersburg State University, Free University of Bolzano and the University of Warwick | Fachhochschule St. Pölten, Anglia Ruskin University, University of Jyväskylä | organisations from the four Nordic and three Baltic countries |
| Starting year | 2002 | 2004 | 2009 |
| Membership | 26 universities, foundations and research units as supporters from more than 15 countries | Consortium agreement between 4 European universities from Slovenia, Germany, Great Britain and Finland | Network of 26 universities and 2 research institutions from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania |
| Funding | TEMPUS-TACIS, ERASMUS CDA, supporters | ERASMUS CDA, ERASMUS IP | Project funding from the NordForsk |
| Forms of Activities | - Annual summer academy for doctoral students - Annual plenum for academics and professionals | - Annual summer school - Supervision of PhD students (double mentorship) - Doctoral students internship at partner universities | - Annual summer school - 1 or 2 annual research courses - Cross-border supervision of doctoral students |
| Main focus | - Critical view of social work profession on social changes - Networking with the post-socialistic countries | - Doctoral education of social work, emphasising theory, diversity and research methodology - To provide doctoral education for students from different countries | - Quality of social work research training in the respective countries by internationalisation -Strengthening regional cooperation between Nordic and Baltic states |
| ECTS | No ECTS for the academy of doctoral students – decision on granting credits is left to home universities | 180 ECTS in full-time accredited programme, 9 – 15 ECTS for the summer school | 4–8 ECTS for participation, paper presentation and further tasks of summer schools |
| Number of students participating in activities | Approx. 40 students from more than 20 countries | 25-30 students enrolled into the programme from approx. 10 countries | Approx. 25 students from 15 countries |
| Teaching/ supervisory staff | Each year a supervisory board is nominated that consists of 6 professors from different countries. | From partner universities, guest lecturers from other countries (Italy, Israel and Austria). | From universities in the network, guest lecturers from Australia, Canada, Germany, UK, USA, Netherlands and Switzerland. |
| Students benefits | Supervision, international peer discussions and | Double supervision, formal doctoral degree, | Supervision, international peer |

| | | | |
|----------------|--|---|--|
| | comments on the doctoral research, the opportunity to present to an international audience as well as their active participation in professional debates. | continuous in-depth cooperation in the international group of students and professors. | discussions and comments to the doctoral research and training in research methodology. |
| Sustainability | Continuation ensured with the successful mode of operation that does not depend on project funding. Annual events organised by universities in different countries and financially accessible, students from Central and Eastern Europe pay reduced fee. | Program is not re-accredited due to a number of problems in connection with different national regulations of higher education. Will continue to operate as informal network offering summer schools for doctoral students. | After the end of funding from NordForsk, the network continues to operate with other forms of funding, incorporating activities into the practices of the included universities. |

The aim of all three projects is to support students, enable them to actively participate in critical debates and to become part of the collectives. Internationality is prioritised by all three networks, which means inviting lecturers and having students from different countries. TiSSA has been able to support especially students from former socialist countries, NBSW has been mainly focussing on the special issues of Nordic and Baltic societies and INDOSOW has been emphasising an inclusive space for a mixture of students from different parts of the world. There is no need to emphasise the importance of the intercultural learning embedded in all three projects (for more see Lévesque, 2006; Lee & Greene, 2004). In all of the cases, students' evaluation shows that they appreciate most the academic atmosphere; by this we mean primarily the high level of lectures, relevant topics and the possibility of critical theoretical discussions. The promotion and supervision of students' research also plays an important place in the explored international projects. Students appreciate the opportunity for critical reading and commenting, in addition to group and individual meetings with lecturers (e.g. Završek, 2011, p. 157).

There are differences in the formal arrangements of the projects. TiSSA ensured sustainability by not depending on project funding. The annual events are financially accessible and the fees are obviously high enough to cover the costs but do not generate any profit for organisers. That is only possible because there are no additional organisational costs significant for formal institutional programmes. In this sense, the mode of operation ensures **independence** from regulations and the demands of different funders and provides autonomy. NBSW integrates events into the activities of the universities in the network and therefore partly depends on project funding.

Discussion

The changes in the EU higher education policy have mostly affected INDOSOW which, as an accredited programme, has to comply with the rules and regulations. At least three dilemmas characterising the EHEA are mirrored as serious obstacles during the run of INDOSOW. First, two of the partners are universities of applied sciences from Germany and Austria that are not eligible to offer doctoral degrees, and as such they need to create cooperation with scientific universities in order to open up access for their students to conduct doctoral studies. While it was possible to find a partner university in Germany (although it was a problematic and very unstable arrangement), they were not successful in Austria; so they were not eligible to become full members of the consortium. Secondly, the original idea to build joint or double degrees could not be applied for several reasons; for instance, due to the missing doctoral degree eligibility of some partners or the rule of others to maintain agreements of double degrees only in individual cases. A third obstacle, the new tools of funding doctoral training by the European Commission, created new types of challenges for running a uni-discipline based training in a discipline which is not directly connected to industry or where private research units are rare (unpublished records of the Academic Boards meetings of the INDOSOW consortium in 2013 and 2014).

One of the main obstacles concerns the students' assessment which has different arrangements in different countries: national regulations of higher education differ substantially. While the form of BA and MA study programmes was unified by the Bologna reform (number of credits per year, 3+2 or 4+1 model, more choice of elective subjects and EQF) all further arrangements are regulated by national states (accreditation of new programmes, enrolment conditions, duration, tuition fees, supervision, obligatory parts of programmes, final viva and so on). As we have already pointed out the differences between countries in the structure of the programmes are still significant (Lorenz, 2005; Lawrence & Lyons, 2013; Labonté-Roset, 2005).

The biggest problem INDOSOW faces is in granting double degrees. In fact, students enroll in one of the partner universities where they complete all the obligations and pay for studies, and if necessary, that university issues a document when a student successfully defends her/his dissertation. However, a degree in accord with the consortium agreement should also be issued by the university where the second supervisor is employed and where students spend a semester abroad. Practice has shown that universities do not want to issue diplomas for someone who is not registered with them and who does not pay tuition fees. They can only issue a diploma supplement that is not the equivalent of a doctoral document, which demonstrates that students have finished their studies. The diploma supplement includes all the obligations that the student has completed the studies and nothing else. These problems have led to the fact that INDOSOW, in its current form, will cease to operate.

Similarities are clear in regard to the European frames for the internationalisation of doctoral education. It is worth paying attention to the fact that all three programmes are facing changes mainly related to the changing conditions of funding. As already mentioned, EU funding of doctoral studies disproportionally supports disciplines that directly contribute to the economy, and as such social work (as well as some other social sciences) will experience serious problems in its efforts for internationalisation. We can support this claim with the results

of the analysis. It seems that the most successful programme is the one least institutionalised: TiSSA. Not only does it successfully organise annual events that attract students and teachers from all over Europe and beyond, but it does so by not depending on any formal institutional arrangements that would limit the autonomy of its operation.

What we have not mentioned yet is that the three existing networks have not been cooperating as networks; in some years their dates for summer schools overlapped, even though the schools addressed pretty much identical participants. This is surprising as the coordinators and partners are rather well connected with each other. This, as well as the respective research association, may offer a perspective for the joint strengthening of the internationalisation of doctoral education. At present, with different changes in each of the programmes, a shared European effort for doctoral education may also be considered as an option.

Conclusion

The different active efforts towards the internationalisation of doctoral education of social work in Europe, that have grown and become quite successful in quite a short period of time, are indeed encouraging. However, the analysis of the three cases shows that formalisation of the programmes is still not possible. Together with further academic activities, like the recently founded European Social Work Research Association, the academisation and research of social work stand at a promising stage where the discipline has several reasons to congratulate itself.

The European Union is heading towards integration of the EHEA through its increasing ambition, which embeds ambiguous perspectives from the point of view of the internationalisation of social work doctoral training. On the one hand, the European Social Model, although not one of the major political goals of Europeanisation, would obviously benefit from the high quality and international cooperation of social work research in the practice-related form as described in the EQF. On the other hand, the changes in the European funding programme of research and doctoral training are not only comprised of a negative technical and financial aspect for social work, they also mirror larger tendencies, which seem to further strengthening the obstacles faced by the three cases of current collaboration in doctoral education.

The main aims of the three cases directly referred to the particular targets of the social work profession or social work research, while those of Horizon2020 for funding doctoral level collaboration of training – as well as those of NordForsk – are more interested in *interdisciplinary research and researcher training*. Interdisciplinarity is no stranger to social work, since in the practice of social work multiprofessionalism and shared problem solving within various fields of knowledge is essential. Also, in academic life, social work is often part of integrated departments of several disciplines. In addition, interdisciplinary research of the problems and questions of social work may be fruitful. The problem with the demanded interdisciplinarity of international doctoral education is that the chance may be missed to promote one's own research tradition to the international scientific community and to help the

disciplinary development of social work; something which the current collaboration has been able to provide.

In regard to the objective of creating European *joint degrees* at the doctoral level, this objective comprises requirements that may be challenging for the discipline of social work. This seems quite unrealistic as many universities have had less than successful experiences in offering international joint degrees between several universities. Only one of the three existing doctoral projects aimed to award joint or double degrees, and it had extreme difficulties in achieving its goal due to different country specific practices and regulations. The aim of the harmonisation of doctoral programmes between countries is indeed quite far from the reality of present practise. The main obstacles are the length of the studies, enrolment conditions, the status of the discipline inside academia and the needs of the host disciplines, such as social pedagogy, sociology or even law in some countries. However, internationalisation can also empower and strengthen the efforts of those social work schools that still struggle to become part of the academic community in their own countries. Networks are collective efforts that provide members with the power to act so they can, for example, use the resources of other partners and also receive support for the actions needed to influence changes in their own country. The greatest advantage of the three cases presented above is having the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences, being supported by others in the process of researching and writing dissertations and establishing friendly and supportive relationships across one's own social and cultural space.

To conclude, there is a contradiction between the definitions of the EQF for doctoral studies that underline a rather more specialised and labour market related expertise and the authority of a professional field and a clear definable area of knowledge. These seem to be related to education taking place in a rather national and uni-discipline frame. But the emphasis in the existing forms of international doctoral education of social work instead lies on a broader holistic development of scientific thinking, critical reflection, ethics, research methods, and internationalisation as well as social and political context and the directions of European social work.

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