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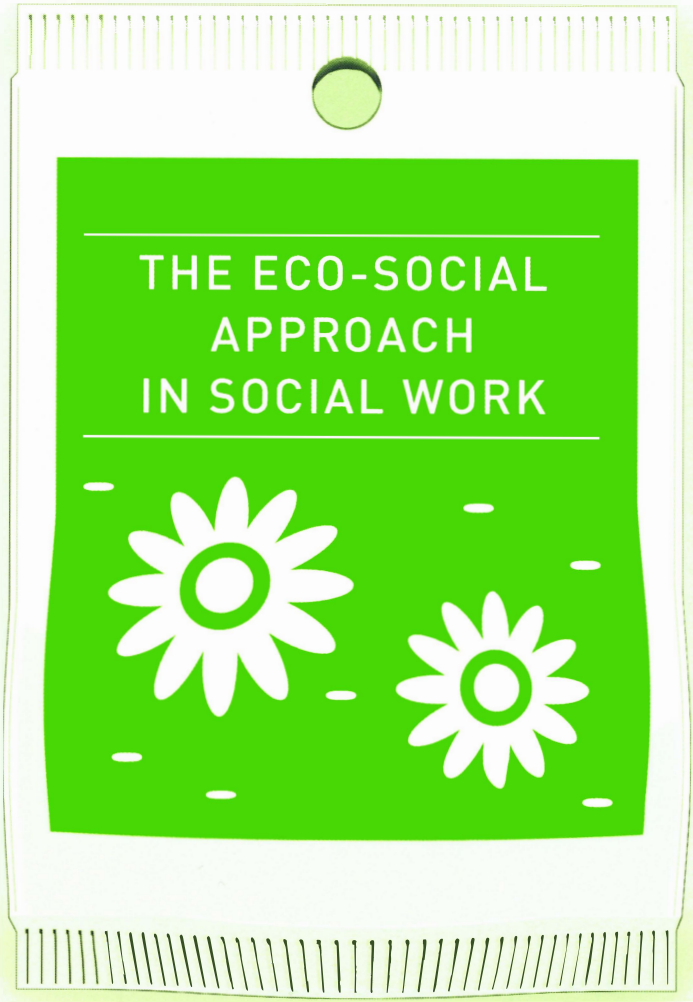

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THE ECO-SOCIAL APPROACH IN SOCIAL WORK

Aila-Leena Matthies, Kati Närhi and Dave Ward (eds.)

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TAKING THE ECO-SOCIAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL WORK

Reflections on three European countries

Introduction

Ever since social work first took its place as a unique theoretically reflected field among others, new theoretical conceptions and approaches have continually appeared within it (see e.g. Payne 1997; Rauschenbach 1999; Karvinen et al. 1999). So frequently, in fact, that one could even see this as posing a risk to the value of its theoretical tools, which are, as such, being threatened by value inflation. Thus, not all "new" concepts are genuinely new. In addition to this problem, the distinction between a concept's normative-ideological content and its scientific-analytical content often remains insufficiently reflected upon and explicated.

Our awareness of these risks gives us a certain dubious feeling – especially now, as we are in the process of writing a new book within the frame of the so-called "eco-social approach in social work," which is a rather unknown theoretical concept at the European level. However, the ambivalence has not discouraged us but has, on the contrary, helped to clarify the particular position of the approach we introduce. For us, the appropriation of a new approach or a new theoretical conception does not constitute an end in itself, but, rather, provides us with a chance to explore some of the new perspectives and challenges in contemporary societies. The eco-social approach, as a concept, is most common in German (especially Wendt 1990; Puch 1988; also Opielka 1985) and Finnish (Matthies 1991, 1993; Närhi 1995, 1996; Matthies & Närhi 1998) literature on social work. The value of the eco-social approach is not in its being a new approach as such, but, rather, lies in its ability to function as a general frame that incorporates various views and

combines environmental and social questions in social work. So far, the eco-social approach has renewed and reconstructed these particular discussions of social work. However, we would like to argue that the connection between social and environmental issues has acquired a new urgency and significance at the dawn of the 21st century. There are several problematic tendencies in current local and global development concerning the social and ecological structures of our living environments. We consider negative social development and the risks it poses to sustainable development in the frame of late modern society as a very significant spatial dimension in the urban context of the living environment[1]. Consequently, it is highly legitimate to explore the concepts and theoretical tools used in social work to face these challenges.

Our particular eco-social focus centres on the analysis of the current phenomenon of social exclusion in the context of the urban living environment, based on an action research study carried out in three European cities. What is special about the way we discuss the theoretical approach in this book is that we simultaneously present the empirical implications of the research study. We analyse our explorations and examine how the eco-social approach has been created and used in a dialectic process between the actions of conducting practical field projects and the construction of theoretical tools of social and community work.

Over the past couple of years the connection between exclusion, urban poverty, civil society and sustainability have increasingly become the focus of empirical and theoretical attention and activity in social work (e.g. Mingione 1996; Washington and Paylor 1998; Helne 2000; Karjalainen & Seppänen 1998). The European Union stresses that the element of better social quality in society is what differentiates Europe from the Third World, Asia and the United States. However, European societies can no longer remain captivated by the illusion that their advanced welfare states, or even a special "European social model" (EU Presidency Conclusion 2000, 2), provide automatic protection against the erosion of social cohesion and inner solidarity in society. Europe also houses growing differences in the quality of life, the increasing acceptance of inequality, and a widening gap between the material resources to which various groups of the population have access. This contradiction poses a specific challenge to social work to reflect on its function at the local and the European level. There is a risk that social work will remain a body whose sole function is to take care of the poor in a given society. It is, thus, unclear whether social work will have the capacity to actually empower the poorest citizens by breaking up the structures that sustain poverty and keep people from gaining equal opportunities to pursue a better quality of life. In addition to knowledge about how social exclusion is structurally predeter-

mined by the living environment, social work also needs models and guidelines as to how to promote citizen participation, how to influence local policies and how to establish analytical ways of preventing social exclusion processes.

The background of this book

This book combines the central theoretical concepts utilised in a joint three years research project of social and community work research conducted in three European cities. Our research project "Making New Local Policies Against Social Exclusion in European Cities" was an attempt to further develop social work and community work specifically from the eco-social perspective. The emphasis was on both preventing and combating social exclusion in order to promote the idea of sustainable living environments. (see also Matthies et al. 2000a; Matthies et al. 2000b; Turunen 1999.)

The research project was financed by the EU (Targeted Socio-Economic Research-Programme). The European Union continues to underlines the fact that "the best safeguard against social exclusion is a job" (EU presidency Conclusion 2000, 11). However, we would suggest – with a slight degree of cynicism in our voices – that while waiting for full employment or a new definition of work in Europe to be reached, other forms of social integration external to the labour market are absolutely necessary. One basic assumption of our project has been that the central integrative function of the labour market in most European post-industrial societies has continued to become increasingly weaker. Consequently, new kinds of opportunities for active individual life politics are required in social and ecological living environments. However, the living areas in European cities, once built for the working population of the industrial society, structurally ignore the different comprehensive social needs of today's citizens. The current destructive development of European suburbs is already forming "third cities," underdeveloped and marginalized areas of poverty (Häußermann 1997; Oelschlägel 1996). However, at the same time, it has been proven that opportunities for one to become actively engaged in one's own living environment help prevent social exclusion and ignorance, as well as promote positive social and economic development (Turunen 1992; Ward and Harrison 1990; see also Matthies et al. 2000a, 2000b).

The research has taken place at the European and local levels and has included co-operation between universities, city authorities and citizens in three European Cities: Jyväskylä (Finland), Leicester (Great Britain) and Magdeburg (Germany). The idea of the research has been to combine the

competencies of the various European partners. The main objectives of the project have been to develop knowledge in the field of social work and to influence local policy-making by giving weight to marginalized people's point of view with regard to their eco-social environment, which can be either a risk or a resource for social integration. More specifically, the aims have been:

- To provide methods of social and community work, which enable citizens to improve their environment through participation (Social Action);
- To develop social impact assessment (SIA) by applying social work knowledge in influencing social sustainability in city planning and local political decision-making;
- To promote social work's theoretical discussion on the eco-social dimensions of exclusion processes in different urban contexts.

The main concepts

The research project utilises three main concepts. They are: the eco-social approach in social work, social impact assessment (SIA) and social action (SA). We explore these concepts here at the theoretical level.

The eco-social approach

In general, the eco-social approach unites the different theoretical approaches and roots of social work, which date back to the 1970's and originally emerged as a response to the ecological crisis of modern society (e.g. Beck 1986; Hoff and McNutt 1994). In the Anglo-American tradition, the ecological approach emphasises the importance of adopting a holistic and systemic view to social problems and the reciprocal relationship between people's living system and their environment (Germain and Gitterman 1980; see also Payne 1997). The German ecological movement initiated the discussion and practical solutions of eco-social policy, i.e. the social and ecological sustainability of modern societies (Blanke and Sachße 1987; Opielka and Ostner 1987). In Finland, this discussion has been quite intense in the forums of social policy (e.g. Massa 1992; Järvelä 2000) and social work (Matthies and Närhi 1998). In this research project the eco-social approach in social work is understood as providing a holistic means of viewing living environments, as a concrete step for increasing involvement in local policy and city planning, and as an attempt to formulate theoretical conceptions of social work that are consistent with the demands of sustainability (Matthies 1993).

Social impact assessment

Our project operationalises the eco-social approach by making use of the new legal provisions for environmental impact assessment (EIA) that are required in public planning processes in most West-European societies. We have used social impact assessment (SIA), one element of EIA, as both an analytical tool of preventive social work and a political tool for citizens. The principle in EIA and SIA is to combine different perspectives, aspects and professional opinions in planning and development processes (Stubenrauch & Ernst 1994; also Juslén 1995). In Jyväskylä, the eco-social initiative has been developed into an "SIA-Checklist" of eco-social sustainability in the living environment (Närhi 1995; 1996). It is based on the idea that social workers, accumulating practical knowledge through their interactions within the communities in which they work, can provide valuable input and insight when collaborating with city-planners and other local actors and policy makers. (see also Matthies et al. 2000a, 2000b.)

Social Action

One of the central approaches in our research has been the social action approach, which is presented by the British contributors as a critical approach to practice, training and evaluation within youth work, community work and social work. Social action emphasises the importance of having respect for and a positive view of service-users, particularly in the cases of poor and marginalised members of a given society. It stresses that one of the key responsibilities of workers is to facilitate a process of learning, development, and change. This involves specific skills and knowledge, which should be available and accessible to all citizens. (Mullender & Ward 1991; Ward & Boeck 2000; see also Matthies et al. 2000a)

Figure 1 portrays the relationship between the concepts used here. All the concepts share the social action concept of empowerment and citizen-oriented practice. Social impact assessment is seen as a tool for the realisation and implementation of those ideas by making the voices of citizens heard on issues concerning their local living environments and by emphasising social aspects in the general framework of sustainable development. In this context, the eco-social approach in social work is then seen as "an umbrella concept," which encompasses both social impact assessment and social action, and which functions as a general framework stressing the significance of both ecological and social sustainability for the creation of sustainable social work practices and sustainable living environments.

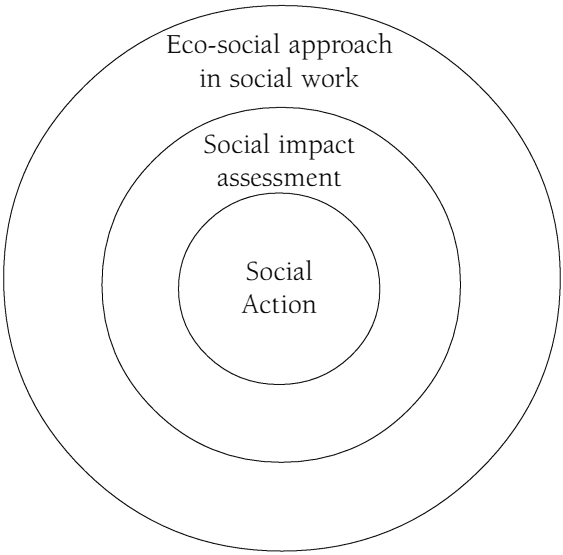

Figure 1. The relationship between the concepts used in the research project

The articles

This book is a collection of five articles, each of which reflects on the theoretical conceptions of the project. The first article, by *Kati Närhi* and *Aila-Leena Matthies*, presents perspectives on the relationship between social work and ecology. The article presents a conceptual and historical overview of the roots of ecological social work through German, Anglo-American and Finnish discussions concerning ecological social work by asking: How have ecology and social work been understood as being interconnected in social work literature? And how have the concepts of ecology and the environment then been understood? First, the article looks at the classics of social work and studies their commitments in the discussions of the environment vs. social work. Närhi and Matthies divide the roots of ecological social work into two dimensions: the systems theoretical approach and the eco-critical approach. In addition, the article analyses the tasks and roles that the different discussions attribute to social work, and, in conclusion, the article draws some conclusions about what the ecological orientation in social work means on the basis of the literature and asks what today's social work could learn from it in general.

The second article, by *Kati Närhi*, introduces social impact assessment (SIA), as it is related to environmental impact assessment (EIA), as one tool

of structural and preventive social work and concentrates on describing SIA and its relation to eco-social social work. The article also analyses the challenges that SIA poses to social work practise and expertise. Using and applying SIA requires reflective expertise that emphasises principles such as the holistic perspective, multi-professional networks, and the service-user and citizen oriented approach. It also requires social workers to become political actors and to form a general field of common knowledge about the relationship between one's welfare and the quality of the local living environment. The article is based on an action research project conducted in Jyväskylä, Finland, which made use of social workers' know-how in community planning processes. Two case studies and a proposal for a list of criteria for identifying eco-socially sustainable living environments are introduced in the article.

The third article, by *Thilo Boeck, Patrick McCullough* and *Dave Ward*, explores the issue of increasing social capital to combat social exclusion. Contemporary policies for addressing deprivation, failure and social disengagement are built around the concept of social exclusion. One can find that a deficit perspective regarding the capacities of the local populations to be targeted is implicitly embedded in these policies. The British research in Leicester indicates that this does not reflect residents' views of themselves, and instead stresses the significance of social networks, support and personal capacities in such communities. An alternative and potentially more positive and respectful concept is that of social capital. Social action is an approach that, like social capital, values the capacities and abilities of the most disadvantaged and "excluded" people to understand their own problems and take action in order to resolve them. In this article, the authors examine the conceptual and practical foundations of social action and explore what implications there are for local initiatives to be able to increase the level of social capital in combating social exclusion.

The article by *Päivi Turunen, Aila-Leena Matthies, Kati Närhi, Thilo Boeck and Steffi Albers* focuses on practical models and theoretical findings in combating social exclusion in living environments from a comparative perspective. The emphasis of the article is on local views and experiences within action research in three cities: Jyväskylä, Magdeburg and Leicester. The article describes the practical models of social work developed in the field projects. In addition, it summarises the common theoretical aspects of the relationship between social exclusion and living environment as understood in the research study.

Aila-Leena Matthies' concluding article presents conceptual and empirical reflections on sustainability in connection to the eco-social approach. The article demands that social work should define its position regarding the

various understandings of sustainable development at both the local and the global levels. The author points out the central ideas of the eco-social approach and analyses how their implementations can be interpreted under the criteria of sustainability. The article presents critical findings regarding the issues of eco-social practices and policies. Based on that, it eventually opens up questions about the sustainability of social work for the promotion of eco-social policies regarding post-industrial urban development in Europe.

Promoting eco-social sustainability

Eco-social sustainability is not easy to define. In our research project eco-socially sustainable development implies a developmental direction that takes ecological and social sustainability into account as a whole. In this sense, eco-social sustainability is about critically assessing the current direction of development in society. It has already been commonly agreed upon that the reasons behind ecological problems can often be linked to issues of social development, and sometimes also visa versa. Regarding the concept of eco-social development, the main emphasis is on the social aspect of the concept of sustainable development as a whole.

The theoretical objective of our research project has been to enhance the existing knowledge of the eco-social dimension of social exclusion. In order to do so, we have compared the significance of the living environment in each local research context. With regard to the level of urbanisation and modernisation, each of the three cities and their life styles is in its own unique stage. Thus, the relative significance of the ecological and the social environment differs accordingly within each context. (see also Matthies et al. 2000a.)

Based on the research project, the eco-social approach in social work consists of several dimensions. All of them, however, share the common goal of promoting eco-social sustainability. In addition, all of them share the goal of reaching a balanced relationship between the living environment and human welfare and, accordingly, uncovering strategies or policies that can help prevent exclusion processes and promote integration processes in European living environments. In this sense, we hope, that the eco-social approach in social work provides new and relevant steps toward enhancing the theoretical and practical development of critical social work, which aims at both re-questioning the mainstream policies of a society and scrutinising social work's own models of thinking.

Note

1 Not to mention the parallel negative consequences for development in rural areas.

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Kati Närhi and Aila-Leena Matthies

WHAT IS THE ECOLOGICAL (SELF-)CONSCIOUSNESS OF SOCIAL WORK?

Perspectives on the relationship between social work and ecology

Introduction

In today's world, the old wisdom of social work that both social problems and their solutions can be traced to and located in the environment is becoming increasingly self-evident. Social injustice, social exclusion and the issue of human resources cannot be dealt with without taking the environment into account. In the theoretical discussions of social work the so-called "ecological" or "eco-social approach" appears ever present. What, though, does ecology and the environment actually mean in the framework of social work? The theoretical, national and historical contexts of the ecological discussion of social work vary widely and approach this question in different ways. Since our own research is also related to the ecological traditions of social work (Matthies and Närhi 1998; Matthies et al. 2000a; Matthies et al. 2000b), we have repeatedly found ourselves faced with the question: What does ecology have to do with social work? In this article we will explore this question by analytically re-constructing the various lines of ecological traditions in social work.

The concepts of ecology and the concept of the environment connote many different and mutually inconsistent definitions. This confusion makes finding a mutual understanding difficult, and we see this as hindering us from being able to make full use of the ecological approaches. It is imperative that we reach a common understanding of the meanings of these concepts, and they must be defined more clearly in order for us to be able to make optimal

use of the combined views of ecological and social perspectives. For this purpose, we will analyse discussions in social work that deal with the concepts of ecology and the environment. We do not attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis of all the literature on this topic, nor do we aim at repeating the theoretical overviews already produced by several other authors (for example Puch 1988; Kuchermann 1994; Payne 1997; Barber 1991 etc.). Rather, we will compare the main lines of discussion through two main subquestions. In sections 2-4 we ask what the concepts of ecology and the environment mean in social work. Secondly, in section 5 we will try to identify the role or task of social work in relation to the environment. Finally, in our conclusion of the comparison we will offer some perspectives on how to improve the application of the ecological approaches in social work. Hence, we present the question of whether the possibility of creating a unified and theoretical basis that would ensure better application of the combined ecological and social views in social work exists.

Two rather different understandings of the meaning of ecology in social work seem to prevail. The first, and more typical one, is related to human ecology and systems theoretical thinking. Its main emphasis is on the social environment (see for example Germain & Gitterman 1980; Meyer 1983; Wendt 1994). Here, we will refer to it simply as *systems theoretical thinking*. The other view has its roots in the ecological criticism of modern industrial society and the ecological movements, and we will refer to it here as *the eco-critical approach*[1]. It aims at combining ecological and social questions (eco-social question) and asks what kind of social work can be considered sustainable. (For example, Opielka 1984; Opielka 1985; Opielka & Ostner 1987; Blanke & Sachsse 1987; Kuchhermann 1994; Hoff & Mc Nutt 1994).

We concentrate mainly on Anglo-American and German discussions, but we also look at how the discussions have been understood in Finnish social work. We are aware that our interpretations are socially constructed, because the act of selecting certain literature in itself leads to emphasising certain aspects and points of view, which influence the interpretations. We want to emphasise the thoughts and ideas of writers commonly referred to in analyses of the ecological traditions of social work. With this article we argue that we must take the relationship of ecology and social work seriously in order to be able to understand and react to different phenomena in late modern societies. Further, we see that in order to promote self-understanding in social work, social work must be aware of its own ecological traditions in an era in which environmental questions have become the focal point of larger public discussions.

The early roots of the ecological traditions in social work

When looking at the classics of social work history and studying their contributions to discussions surrounding the environment and social work, it is easy to see that in social work the living environment has mainly been understood as the social environment (Payne 1997; Lovell & Johnson 1994, 202-203; Shubert 1994, 225). However, two rather different ways of understanding and emphasising the relationship between social work and the environment can be discerned in writings from the early days of social work. By simplifying them they can be crystallised into two lines of thought, one representing that of Mary Richmond and the other of Jane Addams.

Both of these leading pioneers of social work emphasised the significance that the social environment had for human welfare. However, according to Richmond (1922), the relationship is understood more as a constellation of "person-in-environment". A human being was to be comprehended as part of his/her environment, meaning the social aspects of the environment. In Richmond's thinking, social psychological aspects (see also Karvinen 1996, 1993, 1992) mainly emphasised the importance of social interaction and social networks in the human condition, which together formed a whole. Richmond saw social work's expertise as encompassing the conscious and holistic development of a person's personality through social relations. The social worker cannot decide which one is "bad" or abnormal – the individual or society – but, rather, she/he must understand the meaning of this relationship (between a person and the environment) in each case individually. (see Karvinen 1992, 142-143; Karvinen 1996.)

While Mary Richmond confined the concept of the human environment mainly to social relationships, Jane Addams understood the environment in a broader sense, as the "urban environment". In addition to the social environment, the living environment also contains the physical and built environment (housing conditions, pollution etc.) and local services (sanitation, hygiene etc.).[2] (See Addams 1910/1961 in Staub-Bernasconi 1989, 296; also Matthies 1993, 240-241.)

Both authors considered social problems to be, to a certain extent, problems in the relationship between the human being and the environment. The concept of the environment is extremely significant for social work, since it impacts answers to the everlasting debate over how to solve the social question: Does it happen through social change, reformer, through individual assessment, through "adaptation"? This perspective also defines the way in which the relationship between humans and the environment/nature is seen. Mary Richmond's social diagnosis was to analyse the individual's unique situ-

ation in his/her social environment. Conversely, Jane Addams and the settlement movement emphasised the effects that living conditions and the living environment (as a broad concept) had on human welfare, and she saw reform[3] as the solution.

Mary Richmond did not use the exact concept of "ecology" in her writings, although she did write about the "social situation" in the social environment (Toikko 1998; Karvinen 1993, 141-145). For Jane Addams, who was from the Chicago School of Sociology, the concept of urban ecology was central. But Addams's ecological research approach and her conception of urban ecology differed from the general view within the Chicago School (see also Deegan 1998), which distanced her from social ecology, which viewed urban development as analogical to biological development processes. Ecological sociologists considered the counterbalancing processes of conflicts, application, assimilation and competition between various classes and ethnic groups as natural courses of development for human communities. Addams tried to argue against this approach by presenting and referring to the differences in the backgrounds of the inhabitants. She argued that the weaknesses of certain groups are not "biological characteristics" but instead are the result of certain social circumstances. Therefore, people should be described and understood within the contexts of their own environments. (Addams 1910/1961 according to Staub-Bernasconi 1989, 287).

In the late 19th century Alice Salomon, who had introduced education in social work in Berlin, brought especially the ideas of Richmond, but also those of Addams and the settlement movement, to Germany. According to Hubert Oppl, (1986, 178; and Puch 1988, 148) Salomon applied the radical new thinking of causality in her analysis of the problems of poor people. By taking the environment into account she was able to see that the causes behind the problems may well have been the result of something other than the people themselves. This evoked in her an understanding of the deep complexity of the relationship between the environment and human behaviour[4].

To summarise, it seems that the concept of the environment has always been considered to be an important element in the theory and practice of social work, and the roots of environmental thinking can be traced back to the very first days of social work itself. What is surprising is that the diverging perspectives of Mary Richmond and Jane Addams regarding their theoretical conceptualisations of the environment still seem to prevail to a certain extent. The fact that there are differences in how the concept of the environment is understood does, in our view, have an impact on social work practice and the definition of its roles and tasks.

Systems theoretical thinking in social work

It is quite clear that in main stream discussions of social work the concepts of the environment and ecology refer to a more abstract form of the term environment than referring to nature; it refers to the social, physical and cultural environment. The discussion is based on the systems theory oriented way of perceiving humans and their environment as a holistic system in which all things affect each other. (see Payne 1991, 134-136; Payne 1997, 137-139).

The systems theory had a major impact on social work in the 1970's. Two particular interpretations of the application of systems theory (Goldstein 1973, Pincus and Minahan 1973) had the greatest impact in the United Kingdom. The eventual development of the ecological systems theory by Siporin (1975) and Germain and Gitterman (1980) gained ground especially in the United States. (Payne 1997, 139.) The impact of systems theories on ecological social work can also be attributed to James Barber (1991, 26-28) and his phase of expanding social work, which can be traced back to Goldstein's (1973) unified social work model, the system theoretical model of Allen Pincus and Anne Minaham (1973), the life model of Carel Germain and Alex Gitterman (1980), and the eco-systems perspective of Carol H. Meyer (1983) (see also Karvinen 1993, 148-149).

When it was first introduced, the systems approach was understood not just as a conceptual framework but also as a symbol of unification that would promote the power and influence of the social work profession (Payne 1994, 8). According to Meyer (1983, 27-28), the awareness of rapid social change, the new and multiple demands of the profession, and the availability of new knowledge regarding general systems theory, ego psychology, and ecology all helped bring about a new era in social work practice[5].

The general systems view draws an analogy between the way society operates and the way biological systems operate. The interdependence or interaction between the parts of the systems forms the basic insight of the general systems theory. The system view ensures that people are not thought of as isolated individuals but as elements within a social system, which both includes and excludes them. (Barber 1991, 5.)

The life model of Germain and Gitterman (1980) is considered to be one major formulation of the ecological systems theory (see Payne 1991, 138-146) and was further developed by Germain (e.g.1991). An alternative formulation of the ecological theory is Meyer's (1983) eco-systems perspective. Meyer (1995) has also developed the application of the eco-systems perspective. In this article, we will mainly concentrate on these two applications,

since they are the most recent and most widely referred to systems theory applications that deal with the concept of environment, ecology and social work in the same context.

In the life model of Germain and Gitterman (1980, 4-5; also Germain 1991, 15-16) ecology is seen as the science that studies the relationships between organisms and their environments, and it uses ecology as a practice metaphor. It is a holistic view of people and their environments, which considers them to form an entity in which neither can be fully understood as existing in isolation from the other. That relationship is characterised "by continuous reciprocal exchanges or transactions in which people and environments influence, shape and sometimes change each other". (Germain 1991, 16.)

In the eco-systems perspective, according to Meyer (1983, 31), "ecological ideas refer to the relationship of man to the environment, and this may be understood as the natural milieu for a social worker's definition of a case situation". Meyer (1995, 19) uses the term eco-system, which refers to two sets of ideas: ecology and the general systems theory (GST). Still, the eco-systems perspective is a meta-theory, which has been influenced more by the general systems theory than by the ecological systems theory. Taken from biology, "ecological ideas refer to the transactional processes that exist in nature and the term serves as a metaphor for human relatedness through mutual adaptation" (ibid. 1995, 19). Meyer (1983, 1995) uses ecology merely to illuminate the way in which all variables are adaptively related to each other.

Ecology is a metaphor of both the life model and the eco-systems perspective. However, the life model attempts to apply the metaphor directly, through intervention, and through the goals it sets, as an instrument of the direct practice of social work. Germain and Gitterman (1980, 5) use ecology to define problems, and they use it as serving particular practical purposes, especially that of improving the adaptive fit between people and their environment. The eco-systems perspective uses the metaphor as a context, analogously and abstractly "applying it only for purposes of cognitive orientation toward case problems on the presumption that adaptive fit is only one of the focuses of the social work practice". (Meyer 1983, 28-29.) The life model, using ecology as a metaphor, defines the problems as having to do with living as life transitions, environmental pressures and interpersonal processes. The eco-systems perspective provides a way of grasping case phenomena without having to classify it beforehand. (ibid., 28.)

In the Anglo-American systems theories the relationship between humans and the environment is conceived of from within the framework of classical person-environment thinking. The life model (Germain & Gitterman 1980;

Germain 1991, 4-5) assumes that the purpose of social work in society is related to its historical person-in-environment perspective. A person and the environment are considered to form a unitary system in which each is influenced and shaped by the other. The model sees people as constantly and interchangeably adapting to many different aspects of their environment. (ibid.1991, 16.) The life model claims that the each person negotiates his/her relationship with the environment on an individual basis. When transactions upset the adaptive balance, this results in stress, which, in turn, produces problems in the fit between our needs and resources and the environment. (ibid. 1980, 7; ibid. 1991, 16.)

An alternative formulation of the ecological theory of social work is Meyer's (1983) eco-systems perspective. The perspective enables one to comprehend the interconnectedness of case phenomena (the person-in-environment), and it accommodates complexity while simultaneously avoiding oversimplification and reductionism. According to Meyer, systems thinking is supposed to accommodate multiplicity, complexity, and uncertainty, which is why the eco-systems perspective helps place conceptual boundaries around a case, provide limits, and define practices concerning individuals, families, groups and communities. (Meyer 1995, 20-21.)

Both the life model and the eco-systems perspective emphasise person-in-environment thinking. It is thought that the problems in these relationships can be solved through individualisation under the laws of systems theory. The life model (Germain & Gitterman 1980, 5; Germain 1991, 28-31) understands that the environment comprises the physical and social settings that interact with each other. In addition, it states that "the distinction between the natural and built worlds is artificial because environments constructed by humans are just as natural as those constructed by other forms of life, such as animal burrows and birds' nests"(ibid. 1991, 29). Still, Germain (1991, 29) refers to Dubos (1968), who believes that the problems of civilisation are consequences of our neglecting our relationship to nature, which is where our biological and psychological elements are, nevertheless, rooted. Because of this neglect, people have lost their connection with the natural world. In this sense, one can argue that the life model views people as also being part of nature.

In the life model the concept of the environment comprises the physical environment and nature, although the emphasis is on the social and abstract systemic environment. Germain and Gitterman, however, bring forth and make a distinction between the life model's conceptions of the social and the physical environment, which they see as a tool of analysis. In the eco-systems theory Meyer does not take a stand as to the specific type of environment she is referring to. According to her texts, the environment is an ab-

stract and holistic systemic environment in the person-in-environment frame of reference, which is defined by the logic of the systems theory.

In the German ecological discussions of social work, Wolf Rainer Wendt (1982, 1986, 1990) represents the systems theoretical perspective. On the basis of our having compared his ideas to those of the Anglo-American authors, his thinking is more closely associated to Meyer's more general eco-systems model than to the life model of Germain and Gitterman (see also Puch 1988, 144). Then again, Meyer does not intend to create an overall eco-theory, as Wendt did in 1982. Wendt's main idea was to replace the unclear and segmented interdisciplinary scientific basis of social work with a meta-theory of "human ecology," which was considered to be applicable to all areas of life. He argued that human ecology could connect various areas to a basic theory of social work: the inner psychological life of the human being, biology, economy, culture, medicine, politics, and so on. Without it, he stated, it would not be possible to find a holistic view and explanation for the very different working areas and circumstances of clients in social work (elderly people, alcohol abusers, the homeless, youth groups).

Interestingly, Wendt distances himself from the discussion of the person-environment-relationship (Mensch-Umwelt-Beziehung). He says that: "to view something ecologically means to conceive of it in the entire context to which it belongs". This "belonging" enables one to eliminate the dichotomy, which is implicated in the person-environment-relationship." (Wendt 1990, 4; also in Puch 1988, 156-157). This seems to be one of the key differences between the various systems theoretical approaches: Is a human being understood as part of the environment or only in relation to it?

Some years later, Albert Mühlum (1986, 208 ff.) tried to integrate ecology into social work, and in doing so he continued Wendt's discussions. He claims that the practice of social work has always been in conflict with the socio-ecological perspective – with the reciprocal influence of social systems and their environments, and he thinks that the theoretical development of social work have been very rare.

For Mühlum, it is important that social work incorporates the environment, although he adds that this integration should encompass not only "social relationships in a limited sense but the entire environment which is relevant for human behaviour, the life context" (ibid. 220). Social work interventions should influence social behaviour and the social environment as well as their mutual relationship as a whole. Both Wendt and Mühlum regard urban sociology as relevant for social work due to its human ecology perspective. Mühlum explicitly refers to the Chicago School of Sociology, in which "human ecology" was developed (ibid., 219)[6].

All in all, as stated at the beginning of this article, in the systems theoretical approach to social work it is essential that the environment of the client, the service user, the person, the human being, be taken into account. The focus is on the relationship between the person and the environment. However, systems theoretical approaches diverge on the question of what is meant by the environment and how it is to be dealt with. All in all, Germain and Gitterman use ecology as a practice metaphor while Meyer uses ecology simply as a context metaphor. The German discussion of Wendt and Mühlum is close to human ecology and social ecology, which are connected to social work primarily through cognitive construction. The Anglo-Americans, Germain and Gitterman and Meyer, do not explicitly use the concepts of human or social ecology.

The eco-critical approach

The other discussion of ecological social work, which we have named the eco-critical approach, has been influenced by environmental movements and environmental sociology. In the 1970's, especially Germany experienced the rise of forceful ideological movements, alternative movements commonly referred to as the "ecological" or "green" movement. Through modern environmental consciousness[7] (see Massa 1993), this discussion has also been influenced by environmental sociology and by the concept and notion of sustainable development. (see Our Common Future, 198). Since the 1970's, awareness of ecological crises and risks has spread, leading to ecological discussions in many social science and societal arenas. In social policy and social work, especially in Germany, this paradigm shift was embodied in the transformation of the "social question" into the "eco-social question" (Opielka 1985; Matthies 1990; also Massa 1992). It searches for models of ecologically and socially sustainable social policy and social work (Matthies 1987, 1990). The German discussion deals with eco-social policy (Opielka & Ostner 1987), while the Anglo-American discussion deals with the effects of the environmental question on social welfare and social work (Hoff & Mc Nutt 1994). In these discussions people are seen as a part of nature, and that is why if people want to survive they have to consider their actions in relation to the effects they have on nature. One characteristic of the eco-critical approach is that it demonstrates the critical analysis of the entire industrial modernisation process of society from the ecological point of view. Ulrich Beck's theory of "risk society" (1986) advanced this thinking in the social sciences. Conversely to the systems theoretical approach, the eco-critical approach takes the natural environment as its point of departure in its analy-

sis of human societies.

The first explicit discussion about the connection between social work and ecology in Germany can be found in the 1981 publication *Alternative Movement, Ecology and Social Work (Alternativbewegung, Ökologie und Sozialarbeit)*. It was published by Informationsdienst Sozialarbeit, which was an organisation of various left and alternative movements. One of the authors' key questions was: What can social workers learn from ecological issues and how can they make use of what they learn? When applied to social work, "the discomfort (Unbehagen) experienced by the ecological and the alternative movement against the current model of (capitalistic) civilisation evokes into criticism of bureaucratisation, centralisation, social technology, the control and administration of people, and a demand for self help, de-professionalisation or even the naive return to "natural humanity" (natürliche Menschlichkeit) (ibid. 4).

At the same time, there was a discussion in Germany about the role of social work as "social lubricating oil" in promoting unsustainable development. The legitimacy of the state was questioned, since it was seen as maintaining unsustainable projects and, later, as trying to balance the consequences with social political actions. However, the movement wanted to re-establish the connection between alternative and institutional social work and enable social workers to practise more politically oriented work. As Roland Roth (1981, 103) also has stated, although the concrete ecological projects of social work, like workshops producing bikes or solar collectors, have been major factors enhancing the relationship between social work and the environmental movement in particular, the chances for political learning concerning the questions of institutions, autonomy and ecology have been influential. Here, to some extent, ecological social work means supporting autonomous living policies (housing groups, workshop collectives, youth working groups on various political issues) and grass-root level political learning. It was seen as a possibility to re-connect personal everyday life and political practice (ibid., 3).

For Rolf Schwendter (1981), ecology and social work are connected to one another especially through self-help and self-organisation, which became widespread in West Germany in the 1970's and 1980's. All in all, this discussion of the more left and alternative wing of German social work has had a very interesting and special impact on the connection between social work and ecology. In addition to making social work aware of ecological problems, or encouraging social work to participate in environmental conflicts, it also means that the demands of the ecological and the alternative movement should be applied directly in social work, these demands being: self help, decentralisation, subjectivity and de-professionalisation. But the

main aspect lies in the chance of re-politicising social work according to the model of the environmental movement (e.g. the participation of citizens, greater trust in movements than in institutional politics). So far, these authors have not discussed the content of the word "environment", but it is self-evident that it refers to concrete nature and its preservation, since it deals with issues such as anti-nuclear energy or campaigns against enormous traffic projects. However, it also deals very intensively with the question of the ecological style of every day life, encompassing themes like cycling, living communities, recycling and organic food (Informationsdienst Sozialarbeit 1981).

In the German discussion the criticism presented by the environmental movements is aimed at the development processes of modernisation in society. "The growth of industrial production also means an increase in control over societal issues and the increase of demands for technical exploitation, and this has severe social effects. The division of labour, specialisation, and individualisation will lead to the destruction of holistic social forms of living, especially those of the family and the neighbourhood. These then will have to be fixed using specialised and professional services". (Blanke & Sachsse 1987, 36.) In other words, the same economic exploitation that threatens the physical structures of life also shapes our social living environment and its communicative structures.

The new aspect in this line of thinking is the analogy between environmental problems and problems in social work, and their respective solutions. It directs general criticism against industrial modernisation, which not only destroys the natural elements of human life but also other elements that are necessary for sustaining the autonomy of human beings. In the discussion of the new German social movements, this approach has been systematically developed in to the concept of *eco-social policy* (Opielka 1985, see also Opielka 1984, Opielka and Ostner 1987). Here, the social and ecological costs of economic growth were thematised and an ecological turn in social policy was demanded (Opielka 1985, 10). The concept "eco-social approach" was introduced by Opielka to "bring the social and ecological problems of the outgoing 20th century together, systematically, under one useful concept" (ibid. 11). Applying the eco-social approach in social policy resulted in numerous reforms and programmes, which were conceptualised under the criterion of sustainability. These criterion include the concept of basic income as well as various models of supporting third sector activities (e.g. Opielka 1998; Opielka and Zander 1988). Hence, the eco-social approach is basically all about sustainability, which combines aspects of social and ecological (natural) resources.

In the Anglo-American discussion the eco-critical approach type of discus-

sion is quite rare. However, one can find an interesting discussion – one that is somewhat similar to the German discussion (although there are no common references) – in the Northern American discourse of the 1990's (Hoff & McNutt 1994). In the United Kingdom one would be hard pressed to locate any such discussion within the frame of social work (see Fitzpatrick 1998).

Authors of this Northern American discussion (Hoff & McNutt 1994) have combined some ideas and influences from both environmental sociology and systems theoretical thinking. There are discussions about different systemic levels and systemic thought, which are used in some articles as objects of criticism and in others as good examples of the presence of an ecological dimension in social work. Authors refer mainly to the life model of Germain and Gitterman (1980) and to the later works of Germain (1991).

The starting point in the book (Hoff & McNutt 1994) is basically comprised of the ideas of Madeline Lovell and Douglas Johnson (1994, 200-201), who state that the values and beliefs of social work must be examined with reference to the social and cultural milieu of the industrial age during which the profession has been developed. They see that the reasons behind environmental problems can be found in the values and assumptions about the relationship of humans to nature. There are two critical beliefs in western culture that have shaped society's response to the environment. The first belief is that humans are separate from the natural world. The second is the belief that natural resources are available purely for human exploitation. The authors see that because these beliefs have changed, the social work profession, which developed in the era of the old beliefs, should also change. (Hoff & McNutt 1994, 1-2; Lovell & Johnson 1994, 201.)

The authors of the book present a critical stance toward the traditional way of understanding the environment in social work. They state that though social work, which is fundamentally concerned with improving the human condition, has emphasised the social environment of individuals and families, it has simultaneously ignored the context of the non-human environment. Jan Shubert (1994, 255) claims that it is time to broaden the concept of environment "to include the physical environment and nature – the water, soil, and air, without which individuals and society will cease to exit". Frank Tester (1994, 76) states that most social workers associate the concepts of ecology and environment (especially in the United States) with the ecological model of practice attributed to Germain and Gitterman's (1980) work on human behaviour in the social environment (also Germain 1991), and also to the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) in the field of developmental psychology. He traces these works back to the structural/functional sociological tradition, which, in social work practice, is associated with the earlier work of Pincus and Minahan (1973).

Tester (1994, 76-78) is especially critical of the life model of German and Gitterman, which was formulated on the basis of the systems theory. According to Tester, life model treats the physical environment as a natural given fact, in a manner commonly associated with classical biology. He sees Germain (1991) as acknowledging the fact that pollution and oppression are created by society and require societal solutions. Still, according to Tester (1994, 76), the concept of societal solutions remains undeveloped in ecological theory, perhaps because it invokes normative questions that systems theory is unable to handle. Germain acknowledges that abuse of power accounts for what she calls "social pollution," which means amongst other things poverty, militarism, and inadequate housing – as well as technological pollution, such as hazardous waste and their effect on human populations (Germain 1991, 24). But according to Tester, the authors, who use the ecological or systems approach in social work practice, do not include an analysis of this abuse. He further criticises the systems theory for not analysing the situation of society in relation to environmental problems. According to the systems theory, the only solution is adaptation. Tester, however, argues instead that ecological issues require a proactive stance. (Tester 1994, 76-78.)

Marie Hoff & John McNutt (1994, 1-2) argue that the well being of both the environment and humans correlate positively with each other. Although they see that human beings are not biologically or environmentally predetermined, there is an essential interdependence between human life and the natural environment. They bring forth the concept of sustainable development, which represents an alternative vision of the relation of humans to the natural world. (Hoff and McNutt 1994.) Especially McNutt sees that current models of social welfare policy, which were developed during the period of industrialisation, do not consider the natural environment and the resource base as a vital social policy issue. He argues that sustainable development suggests new institutional arrangements that incorporate the costs of environmental degradation and account for the use of non-renewable resources in assessing development. (McNutt 1994, 36-37, 42-43.) As a solution to solving the problem of the relationship between people and the environment, McNutt suggests that societies should support small, human-scale development with an emphasis on the local level. He also emphasises the importance of reducing consumption, promoting production that is environmentally friendly, increasing recycling and promoting the use of soft path energy. The grass-roots focus, social justice, participation, prevention, and the developmental focus form principles that would change the institutional structure of society into a sustainable one. (McNutt 1994, 42-49.)

Altogether, it seems that the German ecological and eco-social discussions of the green movement are substantially similar to the Anglo-American eco-

logical perspective on social work conceptualised by Hoff & McNutt et al. The American authors are even more direct in their criticism of the systems theoretical approach, while the German authors take a more concrete stance in developing programmes of social and ecologically sustainable politics. The German authors criticise modernisation holistically. In addition, the Northern American discussion criticises the basic assumptions of Western culture. Both discourses bring forth the concept of sustainable development as a new solution for solving the problems in the relationship between humans and nature. In the eco-critical approach it is considered imperative that nature be protected from the destructive tendencies of modern civilisation. The basic argument underlying the necessity for environmental crisis prevention is that of ensuring human welfare. Both German and Anglo-American eco-critical discussions argue that social work has not yet discovered the concept of dynamic interaction with the non-human environment. They use the concept of ecology when referring to ecological issues that encompass the biophysical environment and its destruction. At the same time, they talk about the political aspects of environmental questions and state that cultural assumptions should be changed according to the ideas of sustainable development.

The ecological (self-)commitment of social work

In this chapter, we aim to identify how the traditions of ecological social work understand the roles and tasks of social work in relation to the environment. What implications do the different understandings of the concepts of the environment and ecology have for social work? What is the role of the social worker in solving problems related to the relationship between people and the environment?

In the life model, Germain and Gitterman instruct the worker to simultaneously assess the client's problems on three levels: first, the worker must determine the life transitional problems and needs of the client; second, the client's interpersonal relationships have to be assessed; and third, the environmental problems and needs must be identified. The aim of this multilevel problem analysis is to find ways to increase the person's adaptive capacities simultaneously with an increase in the environment's responsiveness to the person. (Germain & Gitterman 1980, 7; see also Payne 1997, 145-146.) "Professional action is directed toward helping people and their environments overcome obstacles that inhibit growth, development and adaptive functioning" (Germain & Gitterman 1980, 10). The life model empha-

sises that the social worker should maintain a dual focus on both the person and the environment.

Although the life model underlines that each person faces the relationship between the environment and human beings on an individual basis, it sees that certain life stressors remain beyond the influence of the individual. The solution is for small groups and communities to initiate collective action, although there are still other stressors (such as structural unemployment, poverty, inflation, and nuclear dangers) that are societal in nature, and which, according to the life model, require societal solutions. Forming coalitions for political action provides one channel for change. For the social worker, societal and institutional stressors become the subject of social policy analysis and legislative advocacy. (Germain 1991, 23-24.)

According to Meyer, the eco-systems perspective is not a theory about social systems, environments or people – unlike the life model of Germain and Gitterman – but is, rather, a perspective that can help social workers examine the real complexity of people's lives and ask the "what" (problem-definition) and the "how" (methodology) questions in practice (Meyer 1983, 28-32). Meyer sees the eco-systems idea as directing social work practitioners to focus on the complex variables in the cases they handle, enabling him or her to connect them to each other and recognise their interaction. Once the practitioner has done so, his or her choice of intervention will be guided by the theories of practice, the knowledge and the values the practitioner has acquired. "It offers a tool for a social worker to think, to analyse and to assess the relatedness of people and their environment". (Meyer 1983, 29.)[8]

Meyer argues (1995, 18) that: "a fundamental purpose of all professional practice, including social work, is to individualise people". In the case of social work this individualising process applies to individuals, families, groups and communities. No person can be understood separately from his or her defining social context. The eco-map illustrates the idea of the eco-systems perspective and is an important tool for assessment, which is the process by which all cases, according to Meyer (1995, 18), are individualised.

In brief, the life model is a model of practice, and the eco-systems perspective provides a conceptual framework for multiple practical models. "The life model is a practice approach that not only defines problems in a particular way but also crosses traditional methodological boundaries and develops, instead, a temporal framework as a structure for the processes of engaging and contracting a repertoire of practice rules and skills. The eco-systems perspective, on the contrary, has no commitment to any method construction, being simply an instrument of perception, assessment and intervening planning. It allows for the use of all practice approach methods." (Meyer 1983, 28-29.) Both applications emphasise that the social worker's role is to

find the fit between the person and his or her environment on a case-by-case basis. It seems that systems theoretical thinking understands the environment as the one disturbing factor in the system that should be repaired, although it refrains from taking a stand on the cause of the disturbance.

In Germany, especially Wendt defines the "ecological tasks of social work" (211 ff.) in very general terms. He primarily re-defines the existing functions of social work instead of shaping new normative programmes. He mentions the importance of the tasks of guaranteeing general reproduction in the context of industrial production, of balancing the unbalanced resources between different living areas in the context of urban ecology, of supporting self-help and rebuilding communities in the areas of health care and social life. But, in eco-theory in general, in the holistic context of his eco-system, he assigns to social work the role of "a servant in the household of the human community" (ibid. 211-212). As such, the social worker's task is to eliminate the disturbances in the system of human co-existence, to mobilise resources in combating harmful influences and to maintain a balance in the system. A social worker takes care of the social subsistence of human beings in their network of relationships and (...) also looks after the networks as such... (ibid. 212). Eco-social support becomes a central element in the book he published in 1990 (Wendt). He argues that the main task of social work is to compensate for the weaknesses of individuals in maintaining a self-sufficient life. This perspective is not that far removed from the eco-social approach of the alternative movements in Germany, which emphasise the pre-conditions for independent and autonomous life in the case of individual human beings. However, ecological social work, as it is here – developed by Wendt, limits the tasks of social work to exactly what the radical members of the environmental movement critically refer to as "social lubricating oil". Wendt's concept of "ecological social work" does not create new tasks for social work, but instead contextualises the role of social work in a broad theory of society as a system, or even as a "social body" (Sozialkorpus). It is not a new programme or innovative perspective for social work but, rather, an explanation or description of social work as related to a functional idea of society.

Joachim Puch (1988), who has brilliantly analysed the German ecological approach to social work, assigns the eco-social tasks of social work to three main action models. First, he refers to the life model of Germain and Gitterman as a model of initiating change in the life of the individual. Second, he talks about "networking" as a method of analysis and intervention in practical social work. The third complex perspective is the "active re-construction of life conditions". Here, he refers especially to the political tasks of social work: to become involved in local planning processes, to influence housing policies and to enable the participation of citizens, as well as to support the

identification of citizens with small communities. (ibid. 154-168).

According to Blanke and Sachße (1987, 320), the movements that fostered the ecological approach also assigned a similar role to social work. They underline that social work can better influence the everyday life of the client by addressing the structural issues of the living environment rather than by using conventional methods: "The building and traffic constitution of neighbourhoods and living quarters, (...) as well as the place and space supporting the self help potentials in reproductive areas determinate the life conditions of the people more significantly than the service offers of social work can do" (ibid.). Hence, social work should get involved in urban planning and policies.

The role social work played in industrial society was criticised in the early German eco-critical texts, and this criticism was directed at the tools and techniques of intervention applied in social work (the system colonises the living world). It is not criticism toward social work itself, which is indeed considered to be a necessary institution. As an alternative, the ecological movement promotes the idea of collective self-help. (Blanke & Sachsse 1987, 37-41.) Thus, instead of professional work the movement has developed self-help projects and alternative social work. The environmental movement's position toward the role of social work is linked to the idea of encouraging the utilisation of the resources people themselves have access to by mobilising the so-called living world (Lebenswelt) instead of turning to the artificial interventions of modern society and modern social work. (ibid. 1987).

The Anglo-American eco-critical approach emphasises the conceptual level of ecologically oriented social work. It states that the global environmental crisis challenges the foundations of knowledge, beliefs and values that guide the development of the social welfare sector, and also raises profound questions about the policy, practice and educational approaches of the social work profession. The social workers' role is to help advance the development of more inspiring environments for their clients by focusing on the physical environment, which has largely been neglected. (Hoff & McNutt 1994.) Tester (1994, 93) argues that: "existential questions – rather than technical ones – and the critical examination of personal and social values are at the core of environmental social practices". In the ever-increasing ecological age in which we live, social workers must become more familiar with the historical and cultural contexts from within which these problems arise (ibid., 93).

Hoff & McNutt et al. (1994) claim that social policy and social work cannot be sustainable unless the society that supports it is sustainable. The authors support the new community-based agency structure and are against regionalisation – in other words, large-scale unsustainable agencies. According to McNutt (1994, 43), the social profession must take a proactive stance to-

ward the environmental crisis and create models of social policy that encourage the move toward sustainable social development. This implies a level of social and political organisation that goes far beyond the intimate adaptive responses (a form of coping) with which they see the systems theory and the ecological model of practice as being concerned. Social professions, because of their intimate knowledge of the human condition, can be opinion leaders in the development of sustainable society. Social work has also a unique methodology of multilevel intervention, and the profession is well positioned to bridge the gap between the natural and social environments. (McNutt 1994.)

Anglo-American eco-critics emphasise the traditions of advocacy, social action and social change and challenge social workers to become political in their practice of social work at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. In addition, co-operation with other professions is considered important. The authors see participation and empowerment as important for both worker and client, and they also claim that social workers and social administrators must develop expertise in demonstrating the social impacts of planning and development. Skills and political influence will be needed in areas such as zoning, housing patterns, and the creation of transportation paths. Finally, the authors see that social work can and should encourage take leadership to develop and publish research on social needs and conditions at the local, regional, national and international levels, which demonstrates the linkages between the quality of environmental conditions, social and health conditions and the operation of the economy. (Hoff & McNutt 1994, 297-304.)

To summarise, according to the literature on the Anglo-American systems theoretical thinking, the task of social work is to individualise each case and assess the transactions of the relationship between person and environment. The perspective is holistic and the emphasis is on choosing and applying different methods in order to accomplish a given task. In both the German and Anglo-American discussions, the role of social work is to remove the disturbing factors from the relationship between person and environment.

In the discussions of both the German and the Anglo-American eco-critics, the main point stressed is that social workers can and should act as political actors, and that they should have a political agenda and the possibility to guide society in the direction of sustainable development. The Anglo-American discussion suggests that the social profession could provide solutions if it so desired. The German discussion mainly emphasises the importance of non-institutional actors. Thus, the Anglo-American discussion is not as radical as the German discussion because it aims at reaching solutions by institutional means, the significant role of movements is also acknowledged.

The Finnish tradition

In Finland, social work as an academic discipline has been strongly connected to the social sciences, especially to social policy (see also Satka & Karvinen 1999). Therefore, it is impossible to analyse the ecological approaches of Finnish social work without also taking into account social policy. In Finland, discussions have mainly dealt with the relationship between sustainable development, the general social sciences and environmental policy. (Massa 1990, 1992; Järvelä & Kuvaja-Puumalainen 1998; Järvelä 2000.) Additionally, in social work, the ecological discussion of social work, or, rather, the eco-social approach in social work, has been mainly influenced by the German eco-critical approach (Matthies 1987; 1990; 1993). We will only outline the main points of the discussions in order to provide a context for our own implementations.

According to Ilmo Massa (1992, 370), who has explored the Finnish roots of ecological social policy, the first discussions about the relationship between ecology and social policy were initiated in the 1970's. At that time Olavi Riihinen (1972) presented a model of social policy that also took environmental issues into account.[9] But as Massa (1998, 79-80) states, these studies are preceded by other interesting "ecological" studies of working class living conditions in Helsinki in the early 20th century by Heikki Waris, the scientific "founding father" of Finnish social policy[10] (Waris 1932, 1934). Waris combined urban ecology and the social policy perspective in a new way. During the 1930's, Waris introduced in Finland the ideas of urban ecology or human ecology (see Hawley 1950) developed by the Chicago School during the 1920's. In the context of human ecology the environment was used to refer to the social and cultural environment that influences human behaviour (Massa, 1990, 220-221; 1998, 84.).[11] In the frame of human ecology of that time, the concept of "ecology" was associated with the approach that nowadays is referred to as "urban geography" or "urban sociology" (Massa 1998; Allardt & Littunen 1958, 1964, 1972).

In the 1970's Briitta Koskiaho (1972; 1974) wrote that social policy had more or less repaired the negative impacts of industrialisation, but she added that the expansion of industrialisation would also have consequences for the physical environment. She argued (according to Massa 1998, 90) that it was necessary for the social sciences to incorporate the bio-ecologist approach. Later, Koskiaho has studied issues related to urban research and the ecopolis, eco city, and features of the sustainable city. (Koskiaho 1995, 1997).

Marja Järvelä (1996, 2000) has drawn attention to the environmental policy oriented discussion and to discussions of ecological modernisation that are

related to eco-social social policy. She refers to the discussions of the French authors Serres (1990) and Morin (1997) and writes about the perspective of eco-social morality in dealing with global environmental questions.

The German influence of ecological social policy and social work discussions on Finnish social policy and social work was quite crucial. The first discussions dealt with the "Öko-soziale Frage" and "Öko-soziale Politik" (Opielka 1985) of the German eco-critical approach, introduced in Finland by Aila-Leena Matthies (1987). Next, the sociological analysis of modern society that introduced Ulrich Beck's (1986) concept of "risk society" evoked important discussion in Finland. Beck integrated environmental risks into the new critical overall theory of the development of industrial society. This had a significant influence on the development of Finnish social policy and social work discussions, enabling one to take environmental risks into account in discussions dealing with future social policy and social work.

Practical implications

Over the past ten years, a specific eco-social approach has been developed in social work at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. In addition to being crystallised as theoretical formulations it has also been translated into a practical working model. The objective of the research has been to promote the ecological (self-)consciousness of social work by analysing the relationship between social work and ecology. Formally, the research was connected to the further education of social workers, and it functioned as an arena for various practical projects (Matthies and Närhi 1998; Närhi 1995, 1996). At a later point, a European research project was initiated following the same theoretical base (Matthies et. al. 2000a; Matthies et. al. 2000b).

The basic challenge for the research group, consisting of both social workers and researchers, has been to consider what kind of social work is sustainable from the eco-social point of view. Eco-social social work in Jyväskylä has been based on the idea that social work and social workers[12] have authentic and fresh evidence about the problems inherent in the relationships between human communities and nature. From our perspective the ecological or eco-social approach in social work emphasises the reciprocal relationship between the living environment and human welfare. (Matthies & Närhi 1998; Närhi 1996; see also Järvelä & Kuvaja-Puumalainen 1998). The living environment is seen as a holistic human environment, which, in addition to physical and social environments also comprises cultural-historical and societal elements and the actions of individuals. (see e.g. Aura et. al 1997). Welfare can be defined through Allardt's (1967) classification, according to which quality of life tai quality of living is as important an element as stand-

ard of living. The concept of the eco-social places the emphasis on the social aspect of the entire definition of sustainable development.

For us, eco-social social work is, generally speaking, about developing local social political action strategies in an ecologically and socially sustainable way. In addition, the local aspect is emphasised, and from this point of view ecological social work can be seen as an attempt to locate local models of welfare from within local communities. We see the contribution of eco-social thinking as lying in its provision of a holistic and reflective perspective to social work methods. Eco-social social work is a theoretical-methodological approach, and as such it is not a new method. Rather, its aim is to unite all methodological levels of social work. At the same time, the eco-social approach to social work is a point of view that can be applied to any level of social work methods (Matthies 1993; Närhi 1995, 1996; Matthies & Närhi 1998). There is no doubt that our research is mostly rooted in the traditions of the German eco-critical approach, but it also incorporates elements from the systems theoretical thinking and from urban ecology and human ecology, which provide a particularly holistic perspective on the living environment (see Matthies & Närhi 1998).

In the eco-social approach, developed in Jyväskylä, the social workers have created small practical field projects within their own working areas. The idea has been for them to implement eco-social thinking in their work, which has turned out to be a mixture of various ecological and eco-social theoretical approaches. (Matthies & Närhi 1998.)

The incorporation of the eco-social approach into social work practice frequently results in a new type of holistic analysis in the working areas of the social workers of social services. This takes advantage of various methods of sampling the various types of analytical data collected in the areas from which the service users of social work hail. We refer to it as "*eco-social area analysis*". Exploring the area by using different methods and criteria developed by the social workers that indicate the level of eco-social sustainability of the residential areas has enabled them to perceive their working area from a fresh perspective. A deeper and broader picture of the working area has been formed as a tool for improving the contextualisation of the service users' situations. Eco-social area analysis is also very useful in promoting structural changes and political involvement. For this purpose, the analyses of the social workers have been developed into *social impact assessment* (SIA) (see Närhi 1995, 1996) and have been used as a tool in urban planning processes. Via SIA, social work has gained a legitimate position as a field influencing local policy at the city level. However, social impact assessment is not only about conveying the knowledge of social workers in planning processes, but it also attempts to enable citizens to participate in local

policy-making practices (see Närhi 2001). During the research, SIA has become concretised through actions that have improved the social sustainability of the living areas under re-construction. These actions include influencing the planning of a new housing area, as well as, in one particular case, assessing the social impacts of a super market (see Närhi 2001). The eco-social policy view has also been applied in an analysis dealing with the degree to which the social benefit system promotes an ecologically unsustainable lifestyle.

Some of the field projects have been developed upon the traditions of systems theoretical thinking. They concern, for example *the case studies of the social environment of service users* ("person-in-environment thinking"), networking or even critical analysis of the *co-operation network between various service systems* (schools, and social and health care). Finally, some of the social workers have developed concrete action programmes for young people. The idea was to use the means of *adventure pedagogy* in order to create tailored networks between various service systems for the promotion of life politics and young people's opportunities. (see Matthies & Närhi 1998.)

To summarise, we claim that almost all of the theoretical approaches of the ecological and eco-social discussions have been present in the field projects of eco-social research carried out in Jyväskylä. While considering how to increase the quality of their work, the social workers were able to combine several different approaches. It seems that the conflicts between the various understandings of the ecological perspective tend to disappear at the practical level. However, the variety of ecological traditions is not only an academic issue, because the traditions differ particularly in terms of the ways in which they understand the role of social work.

Conclusion: convergence and remaining differences

Our aim in this article has been to explore the different traditions of ecological social work. Due to the eclectic theory-base of social work and the influence of the different fields of sociology, psychology and the natural sciences, it has been possible for various ecological approaches to exist side by side.

In Table 1 we summarise the ecological traditions of social work in an historical overview. Mary Richmond and Jane Adams can be seen as representing "the roots of ecological traditions," but not in the sense that they are strictly representative of the two different traditions we have identified from the literature. Rather, our view is that Richmond and Addams had somewhat different views on the concepts of ecology and the environment, and we

Table 1. The roots of the ecological social work traditions.

Time	Addams Urban ecology Community work	Richmond Holistic person-in-environment thinking	Finnish discussion
1880-1940 beginning of the industrialisation			Waris (1932, 1934)
1950- 1960 enlightenment, positivism, emphasising natural sciences, on the other hand the development of the new environmental conscience	Eco-critical approach	Systems theoretical thinking	(discussion stopped due to the construction of the welfare state, see Massa 1992)
1970 - 1980 alternative movements and radicalism		Pincus & Minahan (1973), Goldstein (1973) Siporin (1975) Germain & Gitterman (1980)	Riihinen (1972) Koskiaho (1972, 1974)
	"Alternative movement, ecology and social work (1981)	Wendt (1982) Meyer (1983)	
1985 - risk society discussions	Opielka (1984, 1985)	Mühlum (1986)	
	Beck (1986, 1988) Blanke & Sachsse (1987), Opielka & Ostner (1987) Puch (1988)		Matthies (1987)
1990s late modern society, discussion of contingency, ambivalence, segregation etc.	Hoff & McNutt et al. (1994)	Wendt (1990) Germain (1991) Meyer (1995)	Matthies (1990) Massa (1990, 1992, 1993) Matthies (1993) Koskiaho (1995, 1997) Järvelä (1996) Massa (1998) Matthies & Närhi (1998)
	Convergence of different perspectives		

consider the two traditions presented in this article as having both been influenced by the "classics of social work". Although the natural sciences were given greater emphasis during the 1950's and 1960's, the period also experienced the rise and development of "new" forms of environmental consciousness (see also Massa 1993). During the 1970's and 1980's the Anglo-American discussions on social work gave systems theoretical thinking greater weight. In addition, the emphasis on the natural sciences played an important role in tipping the scales regarding the orientation of social work toward systems theoretical thinking (see e.g. Payne 1994). Parallel to this, especially in the beginning of the 1980's, the new German social movements evoked radical discussion about the "eco-social question" and eco-social politics due to the growing awareness of the environmental crisis. Ulrich Beck's (1986) concept and theory of "risk society" affected the ways of understanding the environment and the ecological questions in the social sciences and social work. The uncertainty of environmental issues influenced society in a radically new way. The 1990's can be said to have marked the transformation of society into late modern society, during which time uncertainty, ambivalence, contingency and segregation etc. (see also Beck 1994; Giddens 1994) simultaneously began to increasingly define our ways of living and the practices of social work.

One can perceive that during the 1990's there was an increasing convergence between the two different traditions of ecological social work – that is, the systems theoretical approach and the eco-critical approach. The reason for this is that the holistic systems theoretical approach had also begun to consider ecological questions and the element of nature as disturbing factors for the system. Although the life model of Germain and Gitterman acknowledges nature and its pollution, and has done so from the very beginning of their theory development (see Germain & Gitterman 1980, 5), they still want to point out that their latest version of the life model incorporates both nature and environmental issues[13].

Against this, for example, Hoff and McNutt et al. (1994), who can be identified as representing the eco-critical approach, use systemic thinking in their formulations concerning the issue of sustainable society. On the one hand, the eco-critical approach centres on the limits of the eco-system but on the other hand, it also considers social sustainability and social and cultural elements as important factors in solving the problematic relationship between human beings and the earth. The tendency of these two different traditions to converge is also concretised in the practical field projects of eco-social approach applied in Finland (see Matthies & Närhi 1998).

Next, we will compare and draw our own conclusions as to the ways in which the concepts of ecology and the environment are understood, and we

will also compare the ways in which the various approaches conceive of the role of social work. In doing so, our aim is to analyse the convergence and remaining differences of the various traditions of ecological social work.

When comparing the different traditions one must also acknowledge that the systems theory was created during a particular era — the era of the natural sciences. Its applications in social work illustrate an attempt to develop social work's own social systems theory, which has not been developed as far as it has in other disciplines (see e.g. Payne 1994, 12). The tradition of the eco-critical approach was developed later alongside the so-called "new environmental consciousness" (see Massa 1993). These elements of historical tradition and connection have also had an impact on understanding the concepts.

In the systems theoretical applications ecology is a metaphor for the holistic perspective. As such, it refers mainly to the understanding the role of social work from a holistic perspective as a part of the environment or ecosystem. For the eco-critical approach, ecology means seeing the relationship between humans and the environment as interconnected. The eco-critics emphasise a kind of understanding, which in addition to exploring the impacts of social and cultural environments also examines the impact of the biophysical environment on human welfare. One can also find elements of systemic and holistic thinking in the notions associated with the eco-critical approach.

The eco-critical approach is a criticism of modernisation, as it asserts that neither the planet nor therefore humans will be able to sustain the exploitation of nature due to the fact that humans themselves are a part of nature. The Northern American discussion has tended to support the view that society should be altered according to the principles of ecologically sustainable development. According to Yrjö Haila (1995), there are no ecologically sustainable principles that nature could provide or define for us. People themselves have to define the principles and contexts of sustainability. As such the eco-critical approach is also about the limits of the world. At the same time, though, one can also detect a level of discussion regarding the importance of social sustainability and social and cultural elements. This emphasises the idea that environmental issues can be solved only by changing people's values and cultural assumptions, or, in other words, by means of contracts between people.

In systems theory applications, the environment refers to an abstract systemic environment. Then again, at least the life model also recognises the environment as a biophysical element and as nature. The eco-systems perspective is not interested in which form of environment one is being referred to, as it is merely a tool for the social worker to use in the process of creating more holistic practice. Still, the perspective does not exclude nature from its

holistic framework either. In the eco-critical approach the environment is primarily thought to mean nature. Then again, however, the eco-critical approach also comes close to systems theoretical thinking. At least in the Anglo-American eco-critical discussion, systems theory is considered to be simultaneously both a threat and a possibility. It is criticised for not being able to handle normative issues, and according to the authors, environmental problems are problems having to do with values and normative structures. The strength of the systems theory is that it could be developed further to take global environmental issues into account. (Hoff & McNutt 1994; Tester 1994.) Is it possible, then, that in some sense the eco-critical approach could be seen as a continuum or extension of systems theoretical thinking?

In both traditions the relationship between humans and the environment is regarded as interactive. The systems theory begins from the individual perspective, or, rather, sees the person as a part of a holistic system. The eco-critical approach views the individual, the person, as a part of nature, which, in turn, is itself a part of the holistic system of the planet earth. In this sense, the traditions share the same perspective, and their main differences lie mainly in the emphasis that each one puts on the concept of the environment. In the eco-critical approach the environmental crisis concerns nature and the environment, but it also encompasses human beings and their relationships, values and cultural assumptions. Systemic thinking does not take a stand on environmental questions, that is, it sees them simply as disturbing factors in the system and does not criticise modern society, which produces these disturbances.

A new view emerges when one combines the systems theoretical traditions with their holistic ideas to the eco-critical approach. In doing so, the living environment, as an object of social work, can also be perceived as a larger unity, extending into the realm of nature. The human being is then merely one part of the holistic system – that is the planet earth. The systems theory's demand for the incorporation of a holistic perspective does not explicitly diminish the possibility of striving toward sustainable development. The eco-critical approach emphasises the need for development that is in balance with the present and future.

When comparing the two main ecological perspectives of social work to each other according to the roles and tasks they assign to social work, they can be narrowed down to strategies of social change and social adaptation, with these strategies having been key questions of social work since its inception. In more simple terms, the systems theory can be said to represent a strategy of adaptation and the eco-critical approach a strategy of social change. However, one should keep in mind that the perspectives actually have different functions. As Payne (1997, 140) states, one reason behind the success of

the systems theory is that it accepts existing social orders and, unlike radical theory, refrains from analysing and rejecting them. Systems theory emphasises the importance of the various aspects that are integrated into the system and assumes that all these aspects are important for the functioning of the system. Therefore, systems should be protected and a balance maintained instead of changed. Thus, systems theory considers integration and stability as being more desirable than conflicts. It does not take a stand on political issues, and it assumes the results of social work to be local and non-political in nature. (Payne 1997, 154-155.)

For example, in the life model of Germain and Gitterman (1980, 10) the main aim of social work is to strengthen people's adaptive capacities and influence their environments in order to ensure that transactions are more adaptive. While, according to Payne (1991, 142), "this does include environmental change, the emphasis on adaptiveness illustrates the way ecological theories assume a fundamental social order, and, rather, play down possible radical social change." In addition, Tester (1994) argues that regardless of protests by Germain (1991) the term adaptation carries a conservative meaning of "fitting in". "Fitting into the world where the pursuit of production, consumption, material wealth, and individual initiative is the ultimate goal of life" is something that according to Tester (1994, 77) "must be challenged". Meyer's eco-systems model does not take a stand on how a social worker should act but, rather, the model aims to disclose the inherent complexity of things to the practitioner. It is merely an instrument of understanding. (Meyer 1983, 1995.)

Wolf Rainer Wendt, the German systems theoretician in social work, increasingly begins to integrate the natural environment into his thinking and continues to adapt the concept of "eco-social" from the green movement. However, while Germain and Gitterman accept that social workers should participate in political efforts in order to preserve the fit between human beings and the environment, which might include elements of nature, Wendt (1990) cannot accept the German movement's integration of nature preservation into social work. He distances himself from the environmental movement: "The coverage of ecological thinking is greater than that of the particular case of environmental problems (Sonderfall der Umweltproblematik), as they are discussed today" (1986, 11). His concept of "eco-social" refers to the "principal orientation of human beings and nature towards the household, considering their shared space of life (Lebensraum)" (ibid. 1986)[14] , or toward the "field and space of human life" (1990, 10). Wendt even explicitly states that for him the eco-social approach is: "not about integrating nature preservation into social work nor about combining the environment and society to each other" (ibid.). According to Wendt, in terms of social work,

eco-social thinking and working means theoretically connecting the various modern methods of social work to a holistic human ecology perspective (ibid.). Mühlum also (1986, 233) confines the system-theoretical idea of the eco-social approach to the role of a theoretical diagnostic tool as opposed to considering it a new, politically relevant tool for social work. It seems that for Wendt and Mühlum the eco-social approach of the environmental movement is too political and too "limited" in terms of the question of sustainability[15].

However, originally, the eco-social approach was known as something characterising the social political programmes of the environmental movement (see e.g. Opielka 1985). For the movements, the connection between ecology, social policy and social work is not only that of an abstract metaphor but, rather, also has to do with the very concrete issue of developing society in a direction that gives priority to social and ecological aspects.

So, in our view, the basic remaining difference between the two main approaches has to do with the position that each attributes to social work in society in a functional and political sense. There is no doubt that in spite of the light "greening" of the systems theoretical perspective, it basically remains quite consensus oriented. There is no radical criticism of modern capitalistic society with all its contradictions but, rather, there are only dysfunctions that must be corrected and solved. Conversely, the eco-critical approach is conflict-oriented in criticising the entire development of modernisation. Political involvement is seen as the key tool of social work.

While the systems theoretical approach is considered incapable of handling the normative dimensions of society, this forms the main task of the eco-critical approach. Generally speaking, it focuses on taking a stand on the question of what direction society should be developed toward in order to save the planet. The eco-critical line of thinking is based on the assumption that culture and nature are profoundly united and that this is why the societal agenda has to be renewed. However, since nature, as such, does not provide any strict norms for us to follow, the decisions have to be negotiated amongst human beings (see e.g. Haila 1995, 2000). Finally, it is also a question of personal life politics and personal agreements with nature (see Serres 1990; also Järvelä 1996).

Although the systems theoretical approach avoids taking a stand in the normative discussion, it can still promote a holistic view from within which to explain the complex interconnections between the systems, including those between society and nature. Therefore, we consider it to have the potential to direct development according to the demands of social change and sustainable development.

Methodologically, both the systems theory and the eco-critical approach

tend to shift from the individual level and incorporate other methods of social work as relevant instruments for solving the problems of the relationship between humans and their environments (see also Payne 1994; Lovell & Johnsson 1994). This gives rise to the possibility of bridging the wide gap between the individual and societal change perspectives. Uniting ecological traditions leads, from our point of view, to the re-conceptualisation and re-evaluation of the current structures and ways of working, which is why it can also be understood as a form of reflective social work practice.

In table 2 we summarise the main conceptual and programme related dimensions of the two approaches.

Table 2. The main conceptual and programme dimensions of the two approaches of ecological social work

Concepts/approaches	Systems theoretical thinking	Eco-critical approach
Ecology	· Human ecology concept, analogy between social and biological ecology (Wendt) · Ecology as a practice metaphor, metaphor as an instrument (Germain & Gitterman) · Metaphor as a context (Meyer) ·Holistic view in social work	·Ecology as a normative demand (movements) · Ecology as sustainability including social sustainability: eco-social question (Opielka) ·Model for politicisation of ecology (Hoff &McNutt)
Environment	· Social networks as an abstract systemic environment, but also a cultural and bio-physical environment · Person-environment constellation	·Nature as the bio-physical pre-condition for human life · Holistic understanding, including cultural and social aspects ·Nature as a source of well-being
Tasks and role of social work	· Acknowledging the holistic view and the system of various environmental factors ·" To maintain a dual focus on both person and environment" (Germain & Gitterman) ·Mutual adaptation in the person-and-environment relationship	·Promoting sustainable development by integrating ecological and social elements ·Politically-oriented social work, pro-active stance ·Stabiliser between the bio-physical environment and human welfare

Perspectives

In our overall conclusion we see that the two different traditions presented in the article benefit theoretical understanding and practical developments in social work in certain ways, although only if it is possible to unite the perspectives. The recent course of development, which tends to fuse the systems theoretical thinking and eco-critical approaches, is, in this sense, encouraging. In short, we see that the different ecological social work approaches are most compatible at the level of implementation.

However, there remains one basic difference between the two traditions, which can be traced back to the value-base and normative position and particularly to the political implementations of ecological social work. Although we comprehend the value of systems theoretical thinking, we think its political vacuity should be questioned. We believe that social work is unable to solve environmental questions and problems on its own, but if it merely adapts disturbing factors to the system instead of trying to solve the problems it ends up increases them.

In conclusion, we want to underline that the development of social work, since the late 19th century has been accompanied by a variety of ecological approaches. How the environment and ecology in social work have historically and socially been understood depends on the context and societal situation in which the concepts have been used and studied. To us, this means that the development of ecological social work is still continuing and that it should reflect the current situation of civilisation as well as the scientific discourses of our time.

Due to the recent global characteristics of the "risk society" and uncertainty, it becomes clear that it is impossible to separate politics and ecology from one another either at the theoretical or the practical level. The idea that societies should change according to the principle of ecologically sustainable development (see e.g. Our Common Future 1987) is already a quite agreed upon notion. However, nature does not provide us with any principles for sustaining such development (e.g. Haila 1995). People themselves have to define the principles and contexts of sustainability. The discussion of the politicisation of nature is important, as nature is becoming increasingly understood as an object of political conflicts, and as a result nature, or the environment, is becoming an essential part of political, cultural and social processes – it is becoming a social construction. The social development of communities and the earth is not biological, the decisions concerning nature are not predetermined, but, rather, take place within socially, culturally and politically constructed situations. The core of the politicisation of nature is,

then, not that of the natural sciences but, rather, symbolic. (e.g. Haila 2000, 90.)

Since natural resources are identified as essential to human life, these resources will increasingly become the object of political campaigns. As a factor in the construction of modern society, social work is inevitably involved in these campaigns, whether consciously or unconsciously. However, it is not only a collective political fight having to do with natural and social resources, but also a question of individual lifestyles and practical solutions, which ultimately are all ecological and social questions. The personal becomes the political.

Ecological problems arise occasionally within radical contexts. There is no way to predict their emergence or determine their significance. Therefore, it is important that people be able to deal with uncertainty and act autonomously when faced with unexpected and problematic situations. According to Haila, in order for communities to be prepared for forthcoming ecological problems it is important that they incorporate new forms of "normative," mutual solidarity and take initiative into their own hands. (ibid., 92.)

We agree with the idea of the politicisation of ecology. We could even imagine ourselves implementing the same arguments regarding the issues of social problems and the role of social work in solving them. Social work, as an institution, is part of these cultural construction processes, which promote either human survival or exploitation. Thus, we conclude that the process of identifying the connections between social work and ecology is not yet complete, but is at a new beginning.

Notes

1 By the eco-critical approach we mean an environmental critical orientation toward the entire development of modernisation. This line of thinking has promoted the awareness of ecological crises and environmental questions. The increasing gravity of the situation of environmental problems has lead to environmental discussions permeating society, which means that environmental questions are connected to the very fundamentals of society: its structures, its ways of life and values. (see also Massa 1990, 217.)

2 The problems identified by Addams in the Chicago slum areas are connected to both the environment and people's dependency upon it: "unhealthy living conditions, mountains of waste in the back yards, poisonous waste water, spoilt foodstuffs, dirty milk, insects carrying illnesses, unbearable smog in the air of the living districts, the worst air in the factories, highly dangerous working places and so on." (Addams 1910/1961, 113 ff. according to Staub-Bernasconi

1989, 285). Staub-Bernasconi even speaks about the "ecological turn a hundred years before the ecological crisis" when referring to Jane Addams.

3 However, in some recent discussions about Mary Richmond it has been discovered that even she emphasised social reform (and at the same time a broader concept of the environment) as a means of promoting human welfare in her later writings. (see e.g. Toikko 1998, 398).

4 While reconstructing the origins of environmental thinking in German social work one should also acknowledge the so- called "Youth Movement" (Jugendbewegung) of the 1920's, which was significant for the development of the social pedagogical line of German social work. Its concept of environment was also very particular. The main idea of the Youth Movement was to escape urban life – and the authoritarian world of adults - to free nature and create autonomous youth groups (see Sachße 1986). This is perhaps the first case in Germany in which the significance of pure nature as such has been theoretically and practically connected to social work. A direct connection to nature and natural life was seen as something promoting the personal and social development of adolescents.

5 It was at this point that the biophysical environment was excluded from the understanding of systems theoretical thinking in the social sciences and social work. The social sciences developed a systems theory, which emphasised the social environment in order to distinguish itself from other disciplines. (see Payne 1994; see also Massa 1990, 221)

6 Surprisingly, when referring to the Chicago School of Urban Sociology he states that its potential impulses were overlooked in the theory of social work (Mühlum 1986, 219). In expressing this view Mühlum illustrates that he is unaware of Jane Addams' significance in the history of social work theory (see also Staub-Bernasconi 1989).

7 Ilmo Massa divides environmental consciousness into so-called "new" and "old" environmental consciousness. Unless one understands the different phases one cannot analyse the ecological tradition and history of social policy and social work. The old environmental consciousness existed before the Second World War. Afterwards, the environment was seen almost solely as the object of natural protection. The new themes regarding the environment arose during the 1950's and 1960's during the revolution of environmental consciousness. According to Massa, the revolution refers to the era during which environmental questions quickly became the focus of public discussions. The revolution of the environmental consciousness created a radical environmental movement in which environmental questions became connected to visions of a "greener" society. The most important message was that environmental crisis can only be avoided if the values and institutions of the industrialised societies are changed. (Massa 1993; Massa 1998, 76.)

8 Karvinen (1993, 154) argues that this perspective of questioning and the fact that one is conscious of the thought that leads one's action as a basis of

methodology brings the eco-systems perspective conceptually very close to the concept of reflective social work.

9 In the decades following the Second World War, the ideology of economic growth, the belief in technological development and the construction of the welfare state deferred the development of ideas related to the relationship between ecological discussions and social policy and social work (Massa 1998).

10 In this context it has to be noted that Waris was also highly influenced by the settlement movement.

11 The social sciences have been criticised for their concepts and theories of human ecology and urban ecology, which have been considered as conceptually impeding the development of modern social scientific environmental research (Catton & Dunlap 1980, 21 according to Massa 1990, 210). In the name of conceptual progress and sociological autonomy, the social and cultural environment, on the one hand, and the physical and biological environment, on the other, were separated from each other in order to deflect geographical determinism and biologicalism. The social scientific conception of the ecological and physical basis of human action became distorted and limited. This resulted in an ecologically mangled conceptual mess consisting of various orientations of the humanities and the social sciences. (Dunlap & Catton 1979 according to Massa 1990.) Right up to the early 1960's "social ecology" was defined in this traditional sense. "Criticism of the paradigm has helped liberate us from this conceptual soup". (Massa 1990, 221.)

12 In this article, social work is defined as work that is done especially in social offices in residential areas in Finland. Social workers conduct so-called "community based" social work in suburbs and residential areas. Community based social work means re-organising services in such a way that they are handled on the local level instead of by the centralised office in Finland. This model was adopted in many municipalities in the mid 1980's. (Salo & Niemelä 1991.)

13 In the preface to the new German version in 1988, Germain and Gitterman express the idea that there are two additional dimensions to be acknowledged as "negative person-in-environment relationships: firstly, the political pressure maintained by dominating groups. (...)" Secondly, there is the "pollution of the environment, including the *socially pre-conditioned pollution* of the environment like tribulation, unemployment, nuclear weapons placement, injustice in the distribution of housing space, medical care, educational resources and income; as well as the *technologically pre-conditioned pollution* of the air, the water and nutrition, poisoned substances at working places, schools and living areas as well as the risky waste deposits of communities." (Germain & Gitterman 1988, VIII-IX) (Also Germain in later texts in 1991.)

14 Here one might get the impression that Wendt has merely replaced the word ecological with eco-social. He does not refer to Michael Opielka, who had already published some texts about the concept of the eco-social question (Öko-soziale Frage) in 1985.

15 Staub-Bernasconi (1989, 297) criticises Wendt and Mühlum. One of the main points of criticism is that of biologicalism, the comparison of society to a biological system. The second issue deals with their "value free" and undifferentiated view of society. There are no conflicts, no classes and no problems with the distribution of resources. She claims that Wendt and Mühlum's eco-social approach represents an unreflected holism, which, for example, considers the interests of the economy, social work and individuals as identical in the eco-system. (Staub-Bernasconi 1989.)

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Kati Närhi

SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

New challenges for social work?

Introduction

Over the past few years there has been a growing interest in environmental issues – in sustainability and in improving the management of development in harmony with the environment. This enthusiasm has been accompanied by the introduction of new legislation that seeks to influence the relationship between development and the environment. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is an important example of this legislation. (e.g. Glasson et al. 1994), and a social aspect of EIA (SIA) has also been introduced.

Because environmental and social impact assessment (EIA and SIA) legislation draws attention to the broad aspect of the living environment, it has become necessary to ask what significance this has in the realm of social work? What kinds of challenges is social work faced with? In other words, what are the connections between social work and the concept of sustainable development and environmental questions? We can often find a link between environmental problems and social problems, inequality and social crises at both the local and global level. It has even been said that the challenge is not related to the destruction of the environment as much as to the aspects which produce that destruction i.e. modern culture and the modern way of life. Therefore, environmental questions are very much also social questions. This is also the reason why the social sciences encompassing the field of social work cannot afford to look the other way when talking about ecological issues in either local or global contexts.

Social workers are confronted with the social impacts of change in society on a concrete level. The world we live in has been described as complex, contingent and pluralistic (see e.g. Beck 1994; Giddens 1994). Konttinen

(1997) sees that, in the context of late modern society, the characteristics of modern society are continually gaining more emphasis. This necessitates the ability to transcend the traditional professional perspective and move toward a more holistic orientation. It requires greater co-operation between different professions on the one hand, and between experts and lay people on the other. For many experts, especially social workers as street level intellectuals[1] (see Ife 1997; Satka 1999), gaining access to the expertise of lay people and knowledge about the structures of the meaning of everyday life is essential. Simultaneously, as awareness of the risk society grows, the pressure on experts to act politically also increases (see Konttinen 1997). In addition, knowledge is becoming more contextual in the sense that the universal "great narratives" and explanations in society are increasingly losing their credibility. Beck (1994) sees that the process of emerging sub-politics calls the concept of expertise and expert knowledge in general into question, and he predicts that this will encourage the development of a form of a discussion society. He regards round table discussions as one solution to the problems present in late modern society.

Societal changes put special demands on the content of expertise and on citizens. The ability to act in a complex, contingent and pluralistic world requires that one reflect on the relationship between oneself and one's surrounding reality (Satka & Karvinen 1999, 122; also Karvinen 1999). In relation to this discussion the concepts of reflective practitioner and reflective social work has been brought forward (see e.g. Schön 1983; Karvinen 1993). In fact, it has been proposed that in late modern society it will be necessary to acquire a new kind of expertise, which presupposes a new kind of reciprocal, evaluative and communicative relationship between different ways of knowing and different types of knowledge (e.g. Satka & Karvinen 1999, 122; also Karvinen 1999).

Matthies (1993) notes that in the discussion of social work one can find clues hinting at the way in which modernisation is changing; they question the development (Enlightenment) of modern society and define the relationship of social work to citizens in a new way. Beck (1994) talks about "simple" and reflective modern society. The "simple" modern functions within the logic of something being "exceedingly the same," while the reflective modern necessitates the appropriation of a new logic of functions and ways of practice.

One could say that the new challenges of social work are related to service-user and citizen-centred working orientations, the requirement of reflectivity and becoming, in some sense, political. My argument is that social impact assessment (SIA) is one potential means of facing these challenges. Furthermore, SIA could become a tool for encouraging social workers to

both participate in round table discussions about sustainable society and act as mediators between citizens, especially marginalised people, city planners and politicians, when creating future city structures and politics.

In this article, I will describe experiences acquired through the use and application of social impact assessment in social work. I will discuss the significance of SIA for social work on the basis of our eco-social research project in Jyväskylä, Finland, which began in 1995. First, I will briefly introduce the concepts of environmental impact assessment (EIA) and social impact assessment (SIA) and discuss how and why social impact assessment has been applied at the practical level. After that, I will introduce the social impact assessment criteria developed in Jyväskylä and present two cases in which both the criteria and principles of social impact assessment have been concretised. Finally, I will discuss the significance of SIA in social work practice. Could it be a tool for concretising a new type of expertise of social work, a reflective social work? Could it be a possible tool for helping social workers influence local policy making?

Environmental impact assessment

Environmental impact assessment emerged in response to the problems of modern technological development. (e.g. Sairinen 1993, 88). EIA was mentioned for the first time in the NEPA Act (National Environmental Policy Act) of 1969 in the United States. One major factor leading to the development of EIA in Europe has been those EC directives, which require each European country to have environmental impact assessment systems. (see Sairinen 1992, 1993; Kaskinen 1998.) During the course of the 1980's environmental impact assessment was introduced in almost all European countries. In Finland the EIA legislation was introduced in 1994. The particularities of specific EIA-systems vary from country to country in relation to their different cultural, social, political, and historical settings. The legislation is aimed at advancing the assessment of environmental impacts in planning and decision-making, in increasing the possibilities for citizens to access information and in the advancement of their participation in the planning process.

Environmental impact statements are based on future projections, or expectations, about changes that are likely to occur as the consequence of development or action. Therefore, the purpose of the assessment is to assess and present the impacts of various actions (project, plan, and policy), which may significantly affect the natural, built or social environment. (Sairinen 1993, 87.) One objective of EIA is to discern the impacts of development on residents – including indigenous people and minority groups, who are often

excluded from the planning process (Matsuoka & McGregor 1994).

There are different assessment concepts and methods of impact assessment in use today. They consist of environmental impact assessment (EIA), technology assessment (TA), social impact assessment (SIA), and risk assessment (RA) (e.g. Sairinen 1991,6). Furthermore, in addition to project level EIA, there have been discussions about EIA at the strategic level (e.g. Glasson 1995).

Strategic environmental impact assessment expands the scope of evaluation to cover policy-making and programme planning. The advantage of strategic EIA in comparison to project EIA is that it in SIA it is possible to develop actions that more adeptly prevent deficiencies than at the project EIA level, where the emphasis is on actions taken in order to minimise possible defects. In addition, strategic EIA can be applied to the study of non-physical projects (see Glasson 1995; also Kaskinen 1998).

Social impact assessment

Development actions may, and often do, have an impact, not only on the physical environment in which environmental impact assessment is interested, but also on the social environment. Typically, employment opportunities, services, community structures, life-styles and values may be affected. According to the broader concept of EIA, social impact assessment (SIA) is a part of EIA, as SIA was originally created as part of EIA in the United States and Canada in the 1970s. Socail impact assessment was developed in response to the criticism of cost-benefit analysis, and it has been both conceptually and theoretically influenced by the sociology of social problems. As SIA has established itself, more attention has been paid to the assessment of socio-cultural and psychological impacts, an addition to those that are socio-economical and demographic in origin. (e.g. Kaskinen 1998, 58.) There is a strong tradition of SIA in North America, which over the years has developed into a divergent form (Sairinen 1992; Juslén 1995). In Finland SIA is regarded mainly as an integral part of EIA, although there have been a number of experiments in which SIA has been considered a separate process of its own (see Juslén 1995; Kauppinen 1997; Närhi 1996).

As in the case of EIA, there are also many definitions of SIA to be found. At the general level, social impact assessment is seen as a process of identifying the future consequences of current or proposed action concerning individuals, organisations and social macro-systems (Becker 1997). Social impact assessment studies people, communities and society, and usually concerns itself with the effects of changes such as the construction of a new road

or power station. In addition, it typically concentrates on the local level, as social impacts affect the welfare of people through changes in distribution. The change can either be for the better or the worse, depending on whose viewpoint and values are incorporated in the assessment. (Juslén 1995). Finally, social impact assessment is about examining who "wins" and who "loses" in the planning processes, and it is, thus, also about equality and justice concerning the costs, risks and benefits to different groups in society (Wolf 1983). SIA estimates and appraises the conditions of the community as it is organised and changed by development (Matsuoka & McGregor 1994).

Because social impact assessment aims to predict and evaluate the impacts and outcomes of planned actions, the issue of the "right" interpretation or the "truth" has no place within it, and as such it must be understood within its local context. Against the notion of universal truths or causalities, the underlying principles of SIA embrace a new and unique form of discussion between experts and lay people regarding the qualities that constitute a good living environment. The aim is to create an evaluation process that is capable of recognising and appropriating the different available bodies of knowledge. (Juslén 1995.) This is why the critical branch of EIA and SIA is concerned with the shift from scientific-data-based impact assessment to a value-based assessment of environmental change (see Sairinen 1993, 90). The SIA process should voice the shared or controversial values of the community and create a value-based process of mitigation serving the interests of the local community (see e.g. Järvelä & Puumalainen 1998).

The aim of social impact assessment is to produce material for political decision-makers. Traditional "rational decision-making" is based on "objective" and strict facts. Consequently, SIAs tend to use quantitative methods rather than qualitative ones. Decisions are then easier to anchor to "neutral" information and calculations rather than to intuition and analyses, which disclose conflicting ideologies or interests. (Burningham 1995, 102.) As a consequence, many difficult issues have been ignored in evaluation processes, one of which being that a distinction has been made between "objective" and "subjective" impacts, thus causing the separation of "objective" and "subjective" data. According to Burningham (1995, 102), this distinction is closely connected to the distinction made between qualitative and quantitative analysis methods used in planning.

Social impacts are frequently neglected, excluding factors such as community culture, vulnerable populations and quality of life from the equation used to determine the approval of proposed changes (Rogge 1994). However, the aim is for social issues to be incorporated into the formal decision-making process when social impact assessments are done.

All in all, the discussion and the development of EIA emerged from the

need to better manage the environment, and quite soon it also became clear that social aspects of the environment had to be taken into account in the assessments. Still, even when project EIAs were implemented, it often became clear that the project type assessments had come too late in order for them to have any substantial influence on the planning processes, which is what ultimately led to the discovery of strategic EIA. Recently, interest in strategic evaluation and ways to concretise the social aspect has increased significantly in Finland.

The basis of SIA in social work in Finland

How do social work and social workers fit into this picture? One typical feature of the Scandinavian welfare state is the fact that most social workers work in the public sector in the public services of municipalities. Due to the shear size of the public services and the fact that social work education in Finland has been highly academic since 1981, bound strongly to the social policy discipline (see also Karvinen & Satka 1999), Finnish social work has been rather socio-politically and sociologically orientated. Perhaps this is why in Finnish social work it is quite easy to understand that in addition to social problems ecological risks also influence people's ability to manage their everyday lives. One could say that this discussion is about how the "social question" of social work and social policy has developed into an "eco-social question" (see e.g. Matthies & Närhi 1998; Järvelä 1996; Massa 1992; Matthies 1987, 1990, 1993; also Opielka 1994).

An effort has always been made in social work to evaluate and predict factors that influence the welfare of citizens. Social workers make "social impact assessments" every day, and every decision includes some kind of assessment of social impacts. As such, there is nothing inherently new about SIA for Finnish social workers. In Finland, social and health care legislation – especially social welfare legislation and child protection legislation - actually obliges social workers to follow and influence city planning and decision-making in a way that also takes social aspects into account. This is possible due to the fact that in Finland social workers engage in so-called *community based social work*, in which social services are localised and situated in the living areas of citizens. After the decentralisation of social services in the middle of the 1980's there have also been changes regarding the responsibility for the production of communal services. The liberty and the responsibility to offer certain services has shifted from the government to the local level, and further to the municipality level since the beginning of 1990's. In fact, it has been stated that governmental social policy has been shifted to

the realm of local social policy (see e.g. Kananoja 1997).

In my opinion, the aforementioned elements constitute the main reasons for advancing social impact assessment as a useful tool for social workers in the quest to secure sustainable living environments. I will now discuss how social impact assessment has been applied in order to accomplish more structural and preventive social work on the basis of the eco-social research project in Jyväskylä, Finland. The research project was initially a part of the "Preventative Social Policy" project financed by the Ministry of Social and Health Affairs (see also Pajukoski 1998). Since the beginning of 1998, SIA processes have been studied in conjunction with the European Union financed research project (TSER) "New Local Policies against Social Exclusion" (see e.g. Turunen 1999; Matthies et. al. 2000a; Matthies et. al. 2000b).

The main actors in this research project have been so-called community-based social workers, and they have, to a certain extent, co-operated with city planners. In addition, social work students from the University of Jyväskylä have also participated in the study. The project has been conducted through the use of an action research type of orientation. The goal of the research has been to deepen the understanding of the role of the environment in social work practice and in theoretical thinking, and to incorporate the body of knowledge accumulated in social work and the understanding of social sustainability into policy making and wider forums.

So, why has the use of social impact assessment been considered so important in the work done in Jyväskylä? The primary answer to this question is that legislation and the concept of sustainable development oblige its use. Yet, SIA is also related to many important questions and concepts, such as democracy, the discussion society (Beck 1994) and participatory and collaborative planning (e.g. Healey 1997). SIA could help to construct the kind of discussion society that Beck considers as one way of approaching the problems of modern society. According to Beck, differentiated subsystems, different population groups and organisations of society should have the possibility to communicate with each other. This way it would be possible to outline the dualistic role of expertise as a keeper of the monopoly of knowledge on the one hand, and deconstructor of that monopoly on the other. (Beck 1994.) It is also said that evaluations promote democracy in planning processes, help to decrease appeals and conflicts and, in the long run, help to curb costs. Furthermore, SIA is about qualitative welfare research in the sense that it emphasises qualitative analysis, a local perspective and a holistic way of thinking that is the opposite of the "sectored" perspective. (Juslén 1995.)

The focus of the research has been on attempting to apply and develop social impact assessment processes from the point of view of social work. The purpose of SIA has been to concretise sustainable development and so-

called structural social work (e.g. Viirkorpi 1990). It has also helped social workers to participate in the planning processes in a preventative way. The theoretical orientation of the study has been based on reflective and research-oriented social work, which emphasises learning from experience and questioning solutions that appear self-evident.

The reflective approach tries to bridge the gap between theory and practice by taking into account the experiences that spring out of everyday work in addition to aspects related to theoretical thinking; the principle of practical knowledge which forms the core of professional action in its relationship with service-users. This kind of knowledge is procedural rather than deterministic, and in addition to careful thinking it also includes experience based on action tai action-based experience and the potential to become aware of the possibility to act "differently". (Mutka 1998, 46-47.)

The study in Jyväskylä has examined what the potential role of social workers in conducting SIAs could be, and has also looked at what kind of "new knowledge" or information social workers could bring to community planning. The main principle behind both EIA and SIA is to connect different perspectives and professional options within the planning processes. Social workers gain knowledge of "social" issues from their educational experiences and within their everyday work environment. Social workers are constantly confronted with the consequences of rapid social change and "short-term planning" on the everyday lives of people.

Figure 1 (see following page) shows the relationship between the concepts and goals of the research project. Using SIA as one tool, the eco-social approach[2] (see also Matthies & Närhi 1998) aims at concretising the relationship between physical and social phenomena and tries to influence local community planning and decision-making in a preventive way. The eco-social approach examines the relationship between the living environment and social consequences and looks at the effects of the so-called "project of modernisation", and ways of life at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. The goal is to foster socially and ecologically sustainable development in the living environment.

Indicators for an eco-socially sustainable living environment

Social impact assessment is based on the notion that there are no universal truths or causalities according to which we can form a good living environment. Nevertheless, the research study had the hypothesis that it is possible to find some "basic rules" according to which it could be possible for social work to gain a wider outlook of social aspects. However, because

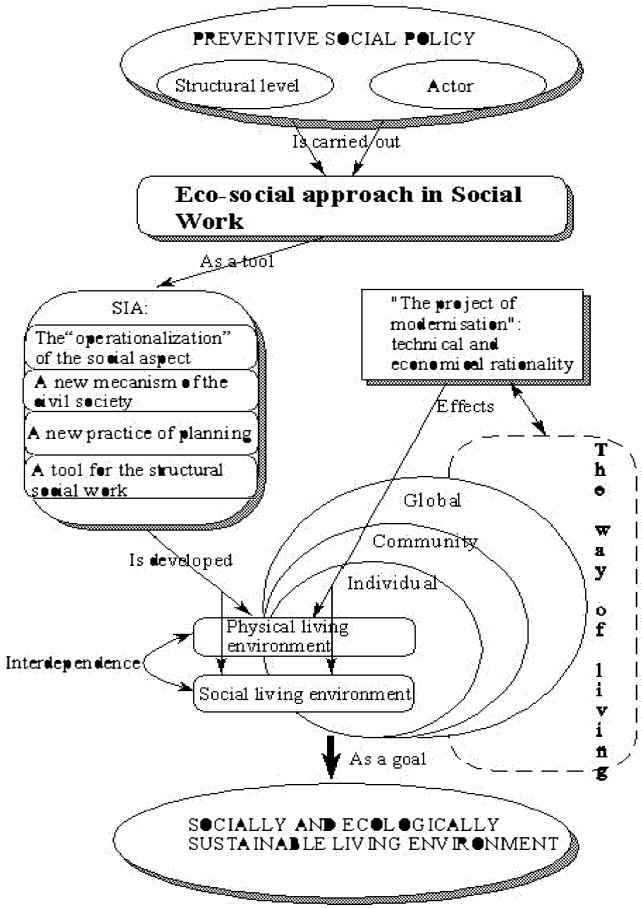


Figure 1. SIA as a part of the eco-social approach in social work.

of the wide range of social impacts, the assessments and conclusions should be conducted and reached from a local perspective and respecting the particularities of the evaluated region, plan and/or project.

One task in the initial phase of the project was to develop a "checklist" or criteria indicating an eco-socially sustainable living environment as understood from the point of view of social workers. A wide variety of checklists and lists of impacts have been created in and around SIA (see e.g. Finsterbuch et. al. 1983; Sairinen 1992; Juslén 1995). Yet, with this particular criteria social workers aimed at pinpointing the main features that should be taken into account as minimum requirements in sustainable planning. The outline

of these criteria was constructed in a training course that involved about 25 social workers, ten social work students and eight city planners. During the spring of 1995 the group discussed and defined the SIA criteria framework as the model for the city of Jyväskylä (see appendix 1).

Both the social workers and city planners primarily emphasised values such as a sense of community, equality and pluralism. In addition, the comfort and security of one's living environment, and nature as a value in itself were considered important. From these jointly shared values they proceeded to a more concrete level and eventually reached a conclusion about the main quality factors, which consisted of three aspects (Närhi 1995):

1. The social and ecological diversity of the environment (including criteria like the diversity of the population structure and diversity of the community structure).
2. Coping in one's everyday life and access to activities (including criteria like the possibility to form a sense of community and social networks, the availability of services, and the minimisation of physical and social risks in the living environment).
3. The quality and state of the environment in a broad sense (including criteria connected to the physical, psycho-social and cultural living environment).

These quality factor criteria can be further divided into qualitative and quantitative "indicators". To promote an eco-socially sustainable living environment it is necessary to examine how the concrete indicators suggest the possible conditions of sustainability. "The social and ecological diversity of the environment" is divided into two separate categories. The first includes the demographic elements of the population structure, such as the quantity, age structure and socio-economic status of the population and the course of one's life. The second deals with the diversity of the community structure, which can be measured by analysing the both the diversity of different types of housing and employment opportunities in the area and public spaces related to leisure time and activities.

"Coping in one's everyday life and access to activities" is divided into three broader elements. One is the sense of community; social networks can be either within families, residentially based or networks and connections to other communities outside the residential area in question. The sense of community is measured qualitatively through experiences. In other words, residents' experiences of comfort, permanence and opportunities to influence local issues are assessed. Quantitative information is gathered, for example, by collecting information about residential activities and the number of participants in these activities.

"Coping in one's everyday life and access to activities" can also be characterised as the availability of services and the minimisation of safety risks in the residential area. Experiences about safety can be related to both the social and physical environment. Experiences related to the physical environment are, for example, the physical structures in the area, noise and pollution. Information about the accumulation of social problems for example can be deduced from the statistics of social services and through social workers' contacts with their service users.

The third element in the criteria list is "the quality and state of the environment in a broad sense". The physical environment is analysed by dividing it into the categories of the built and natural environment. In addition, the phycho-social environment, which refers to the distinguishing features of the area and the sense of identity of the local people, is taken into account. The cultural environment is linked to the history of the residential area. (Närhi 1995.)

The Jyväskylä framework is based on the reference points of social workers that it emphasises the diversity of the living environment in a broad sense as a means of supporting one's ability to cope in one's everyday life. The criteria are based on the everyday knowledge and experiences of social workers, and one of the essential aspects of the framework is that both "objective" measurements and "subjective" experiences are considered important. The model is based on the notion that there is no absolute model of a good living environment, because a good living environment is based on values and is dependent on the experiences of the person who evaluates it. Also, different quality factors are emphasised in different residential areas and between different stakeholders.

Concrete examples

Next, I will describe one example of how the social workers have applied social impact assessments at a practical level. The first case represents long-term community planning as part of social work. The social workers participated in the community planning process and tried to implement the framework of eco-social sustainability in the context of a housing project. It can also be seen as an attempt to practise structural social work. The second case represents an attempt to answer to a more radical environmental question. The social workers made an SIA of a shopping centre, which was also an attempt to see how sustainable development was defined in planning at the city level.

From the fiction to the "round table" of discussion

The project was initiated in 1995, when a group of social workers and students of social work evaluated the town plan for a new housing project. The social workers had reason to expect that the area would not turn out the way it was originally planned – as a "Manhattan" of Jyväskylä – a symbol of modern city life, which city planners said was lacking in Jyväskylä. The group approached the plan from the viewpoints of different population groups.

Because at that particular point there were no residents yet living in the area, social workers began to imagine and write fictional stories about future residents in the area in order to create some future visions about the quality of the living environment from the social workers' point of view. The fictional stories were set in the year 2006, by which time it was assumed that the area would be completed and all the planned buildings constructed. The stories told about the lives of a single, unemployed man, a family with two children, an elderly lady and a single mother with two children. The stories represented the standpoints of ordinary people and their lives in the housing area; the threats facing and the opportunities available to different stages of life. The stories were based on the experiences and knowledge social workers had acquired in similar residential areas.

Although the stories were fictional, some important factors came up from the social workers' point of view, which should have been taken into consideration when establishing the town plan. The social workers drew up a list of important points, which was presented to the landowner, the city planners and the constructors. The social workers' opinion was that in order to secure the diversity of the population structure, the rent level should be reasonable and a variety of apartments should be included. In order to ensure the "ability to cope in everyday life and access to activities," public services like schools and day-care centres should be made available to all residents right from the start. Future residents should also have the opportunity to influence the planning of their own apartments and public spaces. Furthermore, the social workers considered the community centre that was planned for the area to be of great importance to the residents. The community centre represents a local meeting point, which is why they thought it should be ready by the time the first residents moved into the area. Also, the old buildings that were already in use (a disco for young people and a community centre for the unemployed) should be preserved. In order to secure the diversity of the living environment, the social workers felt there should also be a park large enough to reduce harmful noise and pollution caused by possible heavy traffic passing through the area. The social workers were also concerned that

the 12 story buildings to be built near the lakeshore would not be popular among area residents. (Hotanen et al. 1997.)

Since the time the first inhabitants moved into the area in the summer of 1996 social workers and students of social work conducted three inquiries in which they asked residents about their views and experiences of living in the area. The assessment of social impacts necessarily requires that the views of the people affected by a given plan be heard. The inquiries were considered to form the basis of discussions surrounding the plans for the area, to provide a tool the inhabitants could use in assessing the plan, and to provide the social workers with background information on the basis of which they could initiate more concrete cooperation with area residents.

The residents' views and evaluations about whether the area was a good living environment did not change much over the course of the period (1996-98) during which the inquiries were conducted. The residents feared that the area would be too densely built, and they were also afraid that the buildings would be too high. They wanted more green areas, larger parks and more efficiently organised traffic lights and signs in the area. They felt that they were lacking basic services like a corner shop, a post office, bank services, and a day-care centre. The service-users of social work expressed also similar concerns and experiences. In addition to conducting inquiries and interviews with the residents, the social workers also began interviewing their own service-users about the quality of their living environment. Their goal was to simultaneously apply and develop social impact assessment at the casework level.

When looking back at the first assessment made by the social workers regarding the town plan it can be stated that the social workers were quite right in their evaluations regarding the types of social impacts that the construction of the area would have on the lives of the local people (see also Kojo et al. 2000):

1. Residents' opportunities to influence the planning of the area have been minimal. This is partly due to the fact that the permitted building volume had already been decided when making the contract agreement with the landowners.
2. The old buildings, a disco for young people and the community centre for the unemployed, are to be demolished even though some parts of the old factory have been renovated.
3. Paths on the lakeshore, parks and green areas have constantly been decreased during the planning and construction.
4. There will be heavy traffic through the area, which especially concerns the families with children living in the area.

5. Most of the residents are positive about the congress centre situated in the area, although residents do not have any opportunity to use the centre for their own needs.
6. The original idea of the community centre has not been realised as planned in terms of scale, schedule or location.
7. There are no services in the area at the moment, but there is a possibility that commercial services will arrive once the population in the area increases.

One would be justified in asking how good a tool social impact assessment has actually been in this case in the development of a residential area or, rather, how has the existing knowledge about a sustainable living area been used when making decisions about city plans. Information and assessments about the social impacts of plans and constructions were available from the beginning of the process but were barely used at all in the development of the residential area. The short-term interest of economic profits is still given priority over the long-term interests of a sustainable living environment. Because the most significant decisions concerning the city plans in the area had already been made, the question becomes how to minimise the negative effects.

One solution could be the block association meetings, which have been arranged twice a year and which have evolved into meetings in which residents and authorities (city planners, land owners, constructors, social workers etc.) have had a chance to discuss matters, issue complaints and request and pass on information to one another. One can say that the project of fictional residents has evolved into a "round table" project (see Beck 1994), which promotes discussion between different stakeholders. Still, there are difficulties in making the discussion equal. One resident put it like this: "Since the meeting in autumn, I have not noticed any action or event, and already in the block association meeting, city planners had clear conceptions about the superiority of their ideas compared to ours". According to Healey (1997), residents in planning processes often lack any chance to influence the issues that are important to them. Instead, the authorities of municipalities limit the possibilities of residents to influence their own local environments. Afterwards, authorities then tend to wonder why residents did not want to participate in the decision-making process of issues advanced by the authorities and subsequently label them as "passive actors".

SIA was seen in this project as aiming to promote multi-professional co-operation between, for example, city planners, landowners and other local actors. The main aim was to give residents a voice, inform them and undertake discussions with them about the latest development plans, and help their voices to be heard by others. The aim of SIA was also to highlight and

utilise the practical knowledge gained by the social workers in their previous experiences with "good" and "bad" planning solutions. This meant reflecting on one's own work and knowledge. Fictional stories and questions in the inquiries were based on the SIA criteria developed in the project. (see Appendix 1). The evaluation of social impacts experienced by residents was seen as a learning process in which a better understanding of the qualities characteristic of a good living environment according to different stakeholders in the Lutakko area would be reached through inquiries, interviews and discussions carried out with residents.

The SIA of the shopping centre

The second project concerned the plan to construct a large shopping centre in the Rural Municipality of Jyväskylä. A statement was requested by the Board of Social and Health Care regarding the potential social impact of the planned shopping centre, especially with regard to the specific impact on different population groups. A community based social worker made the assessment by applying the criteria developed in the project.

The information used in the assessment included SIA reports on shopping centres carried out in other countries and in other parts of Finland. A general social profile had already been done on the area in question, and the assessment was also based on the social workers' knowledge about the everyday life in neighbouring residential areas. Interviews were carried out among different population groups, districts and authorities. One social worker conducted 34 interviews, including interviews with handicapped people, elderly people, couples with children, unemployed people and young people. The authorities that were interviewed were people working with handicapped people, workers from home services and day-care centres, as well as youth workers and social workers. The social worker asked questions concerning daily shopping habits, social relations, and the impacts of the supermarket on citizens' daily life and on their living environment.

The interviews showed that the residents' views about the shopping centre were based on a fairly egoistic and "here and now" way of thinking. In other words, those interviewees who had a job and owned a car had great difficulty putting themselves into the shoes of elderly or unemployed people, or of people who did not own a car. From the point of view of social work, building a shopping centre is connected with values. Social workers asked whether the construction of a shopping centre would promote a kind of societal structure that is equal from the perspective of all population groups; whether it would promote societal networks and the independence of resi-

dents; and whether it would decrease public services and the social risks of the living environment and support residents in influencing their own local environment. (Salpakoski 1996; Salpakoski 1998.)

The social worker analysed the impact of the shopping centre on the lives of elderly people, handicapped people, unemployed people and people who did not own a car. It was concluded that there would be impacts from which some people would benefit and others would not. For example as shopping distances increase, the need for public home care simultaneously increases alongside it. Large shopping centres also decrease the amount of normal interaction between people. All in all, the social impacts were seen mainly as negative. (ibid. 1996, 1998.)

In the assessment, an attempt was made to identify the "winners" and "losers" of the construction process. For example, from the perspective of the long-term environmental impacts, the winners were the present generation and the losers were future generations. From the point of view of mobility and independence in everyday life, the winners were car owners and young people, while the losers were the handicapped and the elderly, and people not in possession of a car. (ibid.1996, 1998.)

The report was presented to the Board of Social and Health Care of the Rural Municipality of Jyväskylä, which never even considered the option of not going ahead with plans to build the shopping centre. Nor did they weigh the pros and cons of these options or their potential impact on various population groups. The board simply stated that it could be a more "social" shopping centre.

The City Planning Board commented on the SIA report as follows: "The report was meritorious considering that it was pioneering work. Still, it can be stated that it only takes into account the situation of today and did not study the potential impacts ten years down the road. The decisions in city planning aim at studying a longer period." The Government of the Rural Municipality of Jyväskylä and the Municipality Council ratified the plan in their meetings during 1996. The decision created a great deal of discussion in local newspapers, and three appeals were made to the local Supreme Court on the matter. Nevertheless, the Environmental Centre of Central Finland ratified the plan in February of 1997.

The social workers viewed social impact assessment as intended to influence local policy making from a preventive point of view. The aim was also to inspire the discussion of the socially sustainable features of community planning in the public forum. SIA was seen as a project level assessment in a traditional sense, and the need for a more preventive strategic SIA was established. Influence at the project level is often too late in projects such as the development of large shopping centres. Questions also arose as to the sig-

nificance of the meaning of EIA/SIA processes and reports if they are not taken seriously. Policy makers undervalued the assessment of social impacts because of its use of qualitative research methods. There were also some critics who said that the SIA report was based on "subjective" information provided by the interviewees and the social workers, as opposed to being based on "neutral" and "objective" facts (cf. Burningham 1995.)

Following the completion of the assessment the social worker wrote an article about the process. According to Salpakoski (1998), the main issue in making social impact assessments becomes the practical co-operation between city planners and social workers. It is also very important that there be some degree of common knowledge and a common view of SIA at the practical level. Does this mean that there should be a separate report of SIA on the city plan that is attached to the other relevant documents? Or is social impact assessment a process in which the knowledge of social workers is a part of the whole city planning process? Salpakoski believes that perhaps both of these elements are necessary in order for social impact assessments to have a relevant role in city planning processes and decisions.

Social work expertise as seen through the cases

In both of these cases one can identify some elements of a "different" kind of social work expertise. One could even state that elements of reflective practice can be discerned in the cases. The basic point of departure in the field projects was service-user and resident oriented work. The social workers asked people what they thought should be done and what their ideas and interpretations on the construction and planning processes were by using questionnaires and conducting interviews and via discussions. The social workers had decided to take a stand and speak up for the local people and convey the residents' ideas about a good and comfortable living environment in discussions within the public arena. One can identify an effort to influence, in a preventive way, the local level of the city structures. In fact, in these cases, one can say that the social workers did become political actors in a sense. However, what significance these interventions actually had in terms of the welfare of the residents is an entirely separate question. The social workers also used their expertise to analyse and reflect on the information and knowledge they received from different sources and, in fact, conducted the social impact assessments based on this expertise. In their analyses the social workers used the information they acquired from the residents, service-users and other local actors and made use of their own special knowledge, based on their experiences of daily work in various residential areas.

SIA as understood by social workers in Jyväskylä

How, then, do social workers understand social impact assessment in Jyväskylä? Environmental impact assessment legislation and its application to social work formed the point of origin in the research project. The research group, consisting of social workers and myself, has conducted SIA mostly in the context of construction and building projects (Närhi 1995, 1996). Based on these experiences we have learned that SIA should be understood in a broad sense in order for its application to social work to actually be beneficial. Thus, instead of understanding SIA as a limited process related to certain legislation (SIA as a technical process), we have tried to highlight and apply the basic ideas of SIA (SIA as a principle), which include the attempt to mobilise the social action resources of the civil society and reciprocal communication with people at the local level. At the same time, assessments have come closer to strategic SIAs. Social impact assessment was defined as an assessment method that should be applied not only to construction projects but also to other processes and changes – for example, in evaluating the effects cutbacks have in the youth sector and what influence they have on youth behaviour, as well as in evaluating the long-term "advantages" of those cuts for the economy of the city in question (see Närhi 1996). However, the project orientation often arrives "too late," because the real decisions have already been made during earlier stages and in other forums, which are often beyond the grasp of democratic decision-making. The choice of whether to conduct or refrain from conducting SIAs is an issue of power (Kaskinen 1998), as is the choice of whether or not to take social aspects into account in planning processes.

Secondly, there is the question of who should conduct the assessments. SIA is not just about hearing people out but also includes the systematic evaluation of the social impacts experienced by them. On the basis of our experiences, the information that is accumulated through social work about the everyday life of inhabitants and service-users, as well as the problems and resources of each residential area, can be used to some degree in order to identify the processes that create unsustainable environments. As such, SIA can become a working tool for social workers, which helps them analyse and evaluate the impacts and outcomes of actions while they are still in the planning stages. The analysis can be concretised via a framework developed within this particular project and introduced in this article. Through this framework social workers and other local participants can evaluate the sustainability of a particular living environment. The criteria can be used to help analyse the different definitions of a good living environment from the perspectives

of service-users and residents. These viewpoints may then be compared to each other.

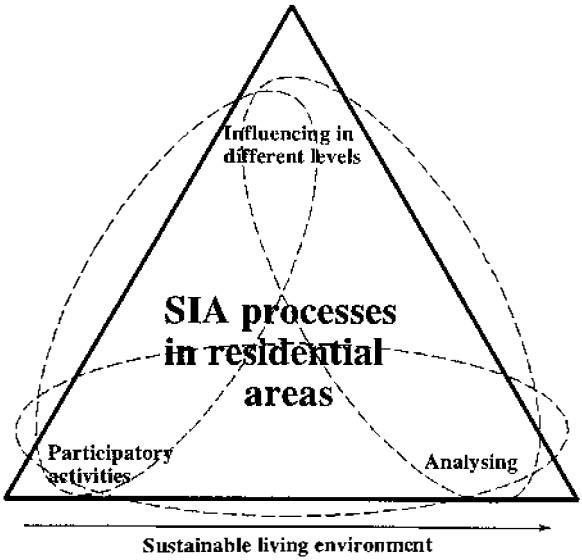
On the basis of our project, the problems regarding the issues of whom the assessments should be made by and what the division of labour should be could be resolved by creating a model that accounts for the whole city structure. This is not an easy task, however, because of basic problems regarding, for example, co-operation between social workers and city planners due to the inherent differences in their work orientation. City planners are used to working on a long-term basis while social workers shift from one actual crisis to another. From the social workers' point of view, it is important to be in constant contact with city planners, developers and policy-makers, because the social environment in residential areas changes over time. This kind of constant communication would also guarantee a long-term basis for co-operation in strategic SIAs. The boundaries between different administrative sectors are rigid, and the establishment of organisational changes geared toward more open co-operation is a very slow process. Yet, the knowledge that is produced in this kind of multi-professional co-operation process is important and often even more crucial than the "final results" themselves.

Third, in our understanding, SIA is about much more than just participatory activities and being a possible analytical working tool in social work. SIA is also about influencing the local policies related to decisions made about the sustainability of residential areas. This perspective brings forth three possible levels of influence, which should be taken into account in SIA processes:

- the traditional policy-making level of municipality policy-makers,
- co-operation with local people and stakeholders,
- the subject level (aim of influencing issues in one's own life so that one can cope better in everyday life)

Social workers and other local actors in SIA processes must influence all these levels in order to be able to influence the issues they have analysed and deemed important for the creation of sustainable living environments.

Figure 2 (see following page) presents different ways of viewing the various dimensions of SIA processes in residential areas. Social impact assessment is a possible tool for the development of a more participatory and influential social work, incorporating issues and ideas formed around the discussion table. However, the knowledge that is produced through these issues and in the discussions has to be analysed. Only then can one conceive of the possibility of influencing local policy-making in order to create sustainable living environments. (Närhi 1999.)



Närhi 1999.

Figure 2. Different dimensions of SIA in residential areas.

SIA and the question of expertise

One could ask, then, what all this means for social work. In social workers' understanding, social impact assessment is about the transparent co-operation between citizens and different experts with the aim of bringing forth the social aspect of various development projects (Närhi 1996). Using and applying SIA in social work facilitates the development of a new kind of expertise in social work. It attempts to question the traditional beliefs of planning. It is a critical perspective geared toward rational and technical planning and traditional modern expertise. One could argue that the concept behind both EIA and SIA – as ways of managing development – is itself based on the world of modern rational thinking. But principles like participatory activities, transparency, rethinking the knowledge-base, emphasising subjective and qualitative information, reciprocal communication etc. represent new ways of trying to understand and act when encountering the phenomena of late modern society. In this sense, social impact assessment should be developed as a value-based assessment tool instead of a form of technical analysis (see Sairinen 1993).

Social impact assessment demands an appropriate reflective working method in the sense that it emphases principles such as a holistic perspective

in social work, multi-professional networks, polyphony and analysing one's own work. In this sense, the underlying ideas of SIA approximate the notion of the "ecomap" in Meyer's (1995) ecosystems perspective. SIA also requires that social workers become "political" and form a common body of knowledge regarding the relationship between welfare and the quality of the local living environment.

For social work, taking on the challenge of social impact assessment seriously necessitates the will to participate and create the new role of an active actor and active policy-maker in planning processes in place of that of passive policy-taker (see Gelb 1990, also Turunen 1992). It poses the new challenge of broadening the perspective toward a more holistic working orientation. At the casework level it means that social work should advance the kind of living environment that encourages one to lead an active and independent life. The original goal of social work has always been to aim for social change (see e.g. Karvinen 1996). In this sense, SIA can be seen as a new, legitimate tool for the achievement of the old goals of social work by trying to influence and change the relationship between a person and his/her living environment.

SIA requires the incorporation of both academic research education and the practical knowledge acquired in everyday social work. According to Karvinen, the idea that the knowledge base of social work must be constructed by uniting experiential knowledge, practice wisdom and scientific knowledge as equals was already present in the work of Mary Richmond and Jane Addams (Karvinen 1996; Satka 1997).

The special advantage to be gained by social workers conducting SIAs could be that they bring forth the knowledge of those service-users and residents who are not able to make their voices heard otherwise. It requires the will to amplify the voice of marginalised people and to influence and prevent the creation of socially unsustainable living environments and socially unsustainable decisions made at the local and municipal level. It also requires the will to reflect on one's own work in order to be able to create solutions in a more complex and pluralistic society. In other words, it requires a will to act as a "street level intellectual" (see Ife 1997; Satka 1999).

This research project has included a process aimed at achieving a new kind of social work expertise. In one sense, the social workers have succeeded, although in another sense they still have a lot to learn. On the basis of the study, the process of using social impact assessment as a tool in social work practice can be characterised as slow and full of multiplicity and conflict – not the least of all problems being the hectic time schedule and the large number of service-users encountered within the everyday practice of social work. In Finland, social workers have often been said to have a dual-

istic role – acting as the controller of service-users on the one hand and as their partner on the other. By participating in the planning processes together with local residents and service-users it is possible to strengthen the role of partnership in the practice of social work.

There are still many questions that have to be answered before social impact assessment can become a useful tool in and for social work practice. For example, how is it possible to evaluate and influence social impacts years in advance when the world we live in is so contingent and complex? Yet one fact remains – the old planning processes need new reflective orientations and a new type of reflective politics, and in this process the knowledge of social workers and their service-users can constitute one of a number of perspectives.

From the point of view of social work, the most important task of SIA is to introduce polyphonism, which has a certain preventative aspect inscribed in it, into planning. However, the question of how the discussion society or civil society develops in practice is completely separate. SIA is a decision and action model that demands courage from political decision-makers and the readiness of authorities to act according to the principles of an eco-socially sustainable development. In the end, the issue boils down to the question of which values underlie the actions chosen and which values are given priority in local policy making, community planning and – from a broader perspective – social policy. At the same time, it is ultimately a question of what kind of knowledge, and type of knowing, political decision-makers are interested in – numbers and percentages or qualitative information concerning the everyday lives of citizens?

Finally, on the basis of the research project, the relationship between social work, ecology and environmental questions, can be crystallised as follows: What kind of a world and way of living is social work supporting and constructing? Do we support the current direction of development by ignoring the perspective of eco-socially sustainable development and excluding it from our professional thinking and skills? One possible answer concerns the relationship between the ethics and politics that guide our way of thinking about society and our way of life. Perhaps the knowledge of social workers offers, or at least should offer, one choice or one opinion on ethics and politics in relation to social and ecological phenomena.

Notes

1 Ife (1997) states that defining social workers as street level intellectuals instead of street level bureaucrats (Lipsy 1980) emphasises the importance of the analysis of and critical reflection toward current policies and practices in social work (see Satka 1999).

2 The concept of eco-social social work or "ecological social work" has yet to be fully established. The discussion about the relationship between the human living environment and the welfare of its inhabitants can basically be divided into two main traditions (see Närhi & Matthies in this book). On the one hand, ecological social work is considered as a systems theoretical approach, where the emphasis is on the social environment (for example, Germain & Gitterman 1980; Germain 1991; Meyer 1983; Meyer 1995; Payne 1997). On the other hand, ecological social work can be seen as an eco-social question; the ecological way of thinking is penetrating the whole frame of reference of social policy. The aim is to transform the whole social and welfare policy according to the ideas of sustainable development. (for example, Opielka 1984; Opielka & Ostner 1987; Blanke & Sachsse 1987; Hoff & McNutt 1994). The research project described in this article also attempted to define eco-social social work on the basis of social work practise and the social workers' point of view.

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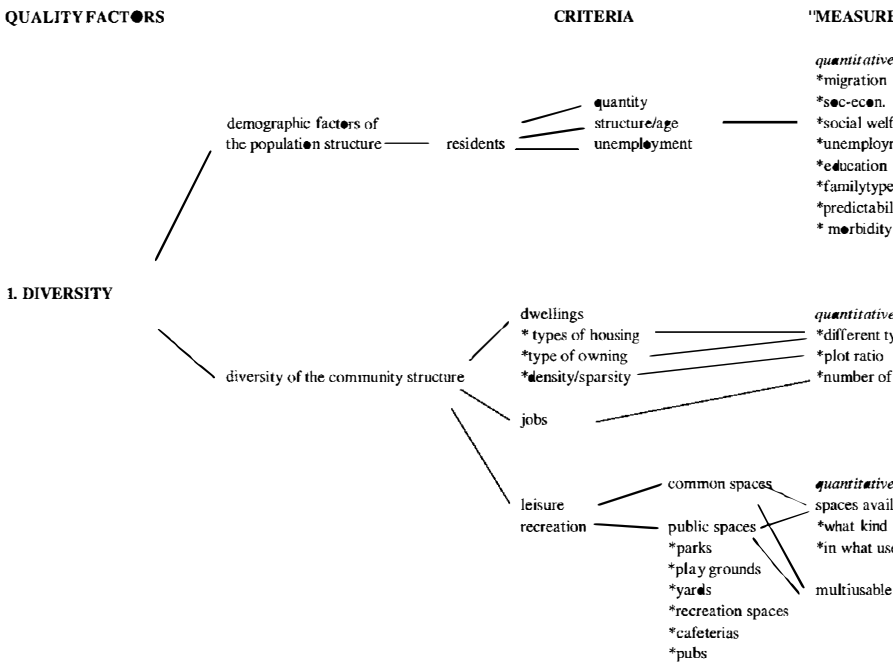
Appendix 1.

SIA- CRITERIA PROPOSAL ACCORDING TO THE JYVÄSKYLÄ MODEL:



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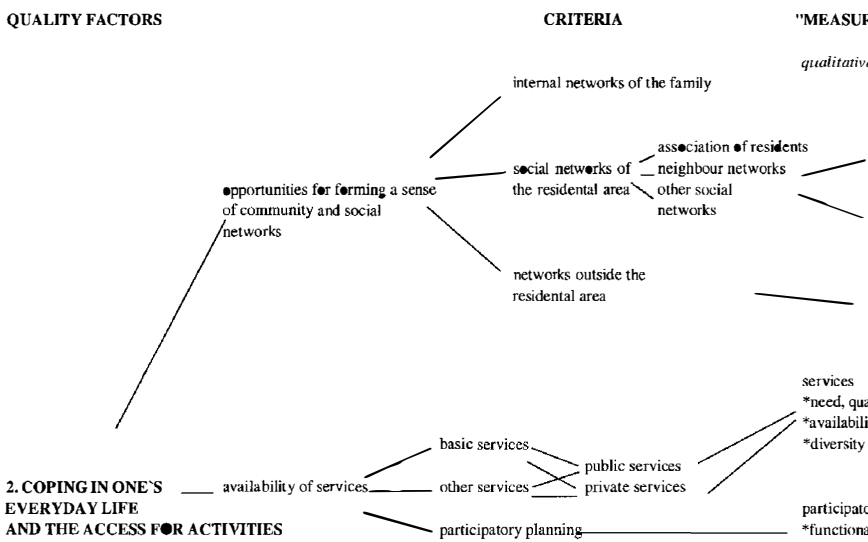
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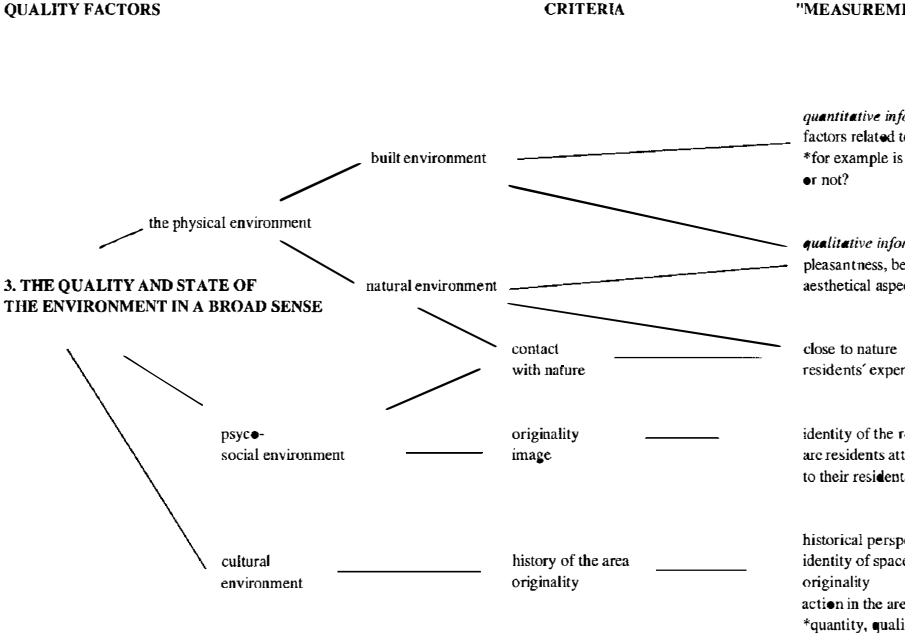
Appendix 1.



AIM: ECO-SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE RESIDENTIAL AREA

Thilo Boeck, Patrick McCullough and Dave Ward

INCREASING SOCIAL CAPITAL TO COMBAT SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The Social Action Contribution

Introduction

Increasing social exclusion has emerged as one of the major critical problems for advanced societies. The forms and processes of social exclusion are numerous and diversified by country, social groups, age, sex, sexuality, nationality and ethnic origin. Combating social exclusion to create effective processes of social integration has become a major priority in the public agenda in all member countries of the EU.

The research in Leicester[1] on the Saffron Lane Estate[2], has the objectives to provide policy makers with a better knowledge of the impact of social and economic change on the dynamics of social and welfare systems as well as working closely with communities to build on and improve existing resources to combat social exclusion. It focuses on the interplay between state solutions and their implementation by local government, and initiatives driven by local communities. The need to understand the cause as well as the necessity to propose new solutions is a core element of this project.

In this article we will explore the concept 'social exclusion' through which contemporary policies to address deprivation, failure and social disengagement are being built. Implicitly embedded in these policies is a deficit perspective regarding the capacities of the local populations to be targeted. However, our research in Leicester indicates that this does not reflect residents' views of themselves, which stress the social networks, support and personal capacities in such communities. An alternative, potentially more positive and respectful concept is that of social capital. We will argue that social capital offers potentially a productive alternative focus, especially linked with

Social Action[3], a practice approach which, like social capital, values the capacities and abilities of the most disadvantaged and 'excluded' people, for their understanding of their problems and taking action on them.

Social exclusion

The term of social exclusion is increasingly used within the EU and influences the area of social policy (Abrahamson in Washington & Paylor 1997, 14; Turunen 1999). For social and community workers this means that within their work they will be confronted by policies to tackle social exclusion, stemming from particular political and ideological perspectives. An understanding of the concept could help practitioners to analyse the issues faced by the community in the wider perspective of social processes and direct their work within that perspective. Related concepts to social exclusion are social inequality and poverty. Social inequality constitutes a key overarching structural dynamic, which can operate at interpersonal, local, national and international levels in a wide variety of social, economic, political and cultural spheres. In this sense social exclusion would be a consequent process though not a necessary outcome of social inequality. Poverty[4] is a state or condition linked to both social inequality and social exclusion. Social exclusion always means inequality whereas poverty does not (Heikkilä 1995, 63).

There are two major intellectual traditions concerning the methods of analysis and definition of the 'social exclusion phenomena'(Bruto Da Costa 1995; Turunen 1999):

1. The analysis that focuses on the resources and the redistribution of resources (the Anglo-Saxon, mainly British tradition),
2. The one that stresses on social links, more concerned with relational aspects of exclusion (the Continental, mainly French tradition)

These two intellectual traditions should not be seen as alternative, but as complementary being rather a question of emphasis on one of these two aspects (resources and social relations).

The concept of 'social exclusion' is not neutral and according to Boughanemi and Dewandre (1995, 1) there is a discrepancy between " the acceptance of the term in the political field and the shortcomings of it in the scientific analysis. Social science has to help elucidate this discrepancy and put light not only on what social exclusion is, but also on what is meant by or through social exclusion".

Vranken (1995) refers to three definitions of social exclusion:

1. In relation to *social rights* and the processes by which people are excluded from these rights. Social exclusion is then analysed in terms of the denial or non realisation of these rights. "What social rights do citizens have to employment, housing, health care etc, and how effectively national policies enable citizens to secure these rights and what the barriers and processes are, which exclude people from these rights? " (Fridberg 1995, 19). This relation to social rights is intimately linked with the notion of 'citizenship'.[5]
2. A dynamic concept for the processes that express a gradual or sudden reduction of *social integration*. This process is specified through a series of stages that represent an intensification of the degree of social exclusion: integration, vulnerability, assistance, and disaffiliation.
3. Social exclusion as an extreme form of *marginalisation*, as a situation of discontinuity, as a 'catastrophic rupture' with the rest of society. In this meaning it refers to both, a specific social condition and to poverty as a multi-facetal phenomenon. Social exclusion in matters of education then is illiteracy and concerning 'housing' it is homelessness; poverty then is by definition a form of social exclusion. A number of issues reflect conditions of poverty both directly and indirectly: employment, income levels, housing, environment, education, transport, health and welfare services. Exclusion from a cluster of these resources or services implies exclusion from mainstream society.
4. A fourth definition has to be added in relation to *discrimination*. Social exclusion as the consequence of oppression build into the structures of society regarding particularly ethnic minorities, women, elderly people, young people, gay and lesbians and disabled people.

The concept is a *dynamic* one in the sense that it is referring both to the processes of social exclusion and to the consequent situations. It also states the *multidimensional* nature of the mechanisms whereby individuals and groups are excluded from taking part in social exchanges and/or excluded from the fair distribution of resources. It also points to the nature of the processes of exclusion, which have *cumulative* effects on individuals, groups of the population, regions or urban areas and on society as a whole. (Fridberg 1995; Heikkilä 1995; Washington & Paylor 1997.)

Social exclusion points to the existence of economic, cultural, political and social forces outside the control of the individual. It implies that a process is taking place as a result of decisions and non-decisions of many institutions. Another aspect is that exclusion relates to groups of people - ethnic minorities, women, elderly people, young people, disabled people, gay and lesbians – who, on a definition of poverty based only on income, would otherwise not be considered to be outside the main currents of society (Henderson 1997). Therefore it encompasses the *processes* of discrimination, marginalisation and deprivation. It occurs in particular circumstances and

environments, but the attack on dignity and the sense of powerlessness and exclusion applies across the board.

A further perspective addresses the ascription of 'roles' within society. Exclusion/inclusion into society takes place through different roles, and leads to different theories (Lorentzen 1995):

1. The consumer approach: focuses on the ways identities are created through consumption of goods and services. Inclusion would take place through participation in the consumer culture, where dreams, images and status are created. The concept of poverty is usually connected to a certain degree of consumer marginalisation; where the income per household is less than x per cent of average income, the household may be described as "poor".
2. The citizenship approach: this either focuses on rights and responsibilities (classical concept of citizenship) of the members of the nation state, or it is often labelled "social citizenship" (modern concept of citizenship) and describes the welfare activities of the state.[6]
3. The community approach: the context is the community as a social or territorial unit and inclusion refers to processes where common identities and norms are developed or weakened within this context. Being "integrated" implies normative ties between the individual and the community. Relations are most often treated as "social", that is a result of kinship, common beliefs, neighbourhood or common interests or tasks.

The merge of the consumer approach and the modern version of citizenship relates to the analysis that focuses on resources and redistribution. They both stress money (incomes, transfers) as the most important individual precondition for inclusion in society. However, these two approaches differ in their perception of what money can buy: identity as a 'consumer'; 'welfare' or material living standards as a 'citizen'.

On the other hand, the classical citizenship, as well as the community approach focuses on social, non-economical preconditions for integration and therefore relates to the analysis of Social Exclusion that stresses social links and is more concerned with relational aspects of exclusion. Participation becomes a key word: "Disintegration usually is connected to processes of modernisation, like increase in mobility, dissolution of community and family ties, urbanisation, social and ethnic segregation. The US 'communitarians' attempt to transform a moral ethic into applicable policies, strengthening the community networks in urban areas" (Lorentzen 1995, 151)

It seems to be important to highlight that some authors would argue that the concept of 'social exclusion' at least implicitly refers to a Durkheimian frame of reference (see Vranken 1995; Levitas 1996). Related notions such as

'social integration' or 'anomie' imply a state of isolation from other members of society. It is also related to social norms, which are accepted in society as descriptions of integration through moral commitments. Within this discourse social exclusion is not contrasted with social inclusion but with social integration, construed mainly as integration into the labour market.[7]

Recognising the value and importance of trying to conceptualise social exclusion, the research on the Saffron Lane Estate, has demonstrated that there is a need to look beyond definitions at the processes lying behind the phenomena. A common position would appear to be that it is both, a process and a state of affairs. Social exclusion is a new label, which has replaced deprivation, disadvantage and poverty. But how would local people articulate their experience? Do they define themselves as being disadvantaged, excluded or whatever? If so, in what terms would they articulate themselves as having social problems or having experienced exclusionary processes? This is not only about having or not having; it is being engaged within a process. So what we are describing is more than an issue about relative deprivation described in terms of possessions or income.

Using a socio-structural analysis of the issues identified by local people, we would argue, that these structures of poverty are related to the relative economic status, thus locating social exclusion within the nature of socio-economic conditions. It is both a 'state of affairs' and a 'process' through which access to economic and social opportunity is denied.

When we speak about social exclusion in this article, we have to make clear that none of the contacted residents would use the term or identify themselves as 'socially excluded'. Residents of the Saffron Lane Estate will identify that there are difficult situations and as we illustrate later on, there are several issues, which have, been identified, but mainly people feel that 'life goes on'.

Unhappiness, dissatisfaction, lack of control and involvement are all issues mentioned by residents, which reflect the complexity of social exclusion. All these feelings can be the cause of social exclusion but also an effect of it. We would argue that these aspects quite often are underestimated and need careful consideration:

> "It's miserable living on the Saff. It is not a happy environment. In the 70s people were more friendly."
>
> "There could be done a lot to improve the look of the estate. There is nothing for the very young children on the estate".

The negative feelings towards the estate often lead to the desire to get away from the place hoping that somewhere else life will be more tolerable.

"You don't need a survey, it is a crap area and I can't wait to get out."

People talk directly about what they 'don't have', what they need, what is wrong with or lacking in their lives and the environment that they, their families and neighbours live in. Nor do they 'tackle' social exclusion – rather they do their bit, they get involved in committees, voluntary work, campaigns, classes and so on. Most of the times they simply just get on with their lives:

"We keep ourselves to ourselves!"

In these normal and apparently 'pedestrian' activities there is another side which the discourse of 'exclusion' should not be allowed to obscure. As the Saffron residents highlight, this is to be seen in the manifest evidence of strengths, capacities and success revealed and achieved in the most unpromising circumstances, by apparently 'excluded' citizens. Fundamental for this dynamic is that in a community like the Saffron Estate local residents seem to have a whole set of patterns of interchange and communication, which are more organic than structural.

"On the Saff to establish the relationships was quite easy. I started to chat with people on the street. People are very friendly and just talk to one. They are just so open. They don't have any inhibitions."
"We look out for each other around here. If I am ill, my neighbour helps out with the shopping and I do the same…"

This does not mean that a community like the Saff is a demi-paradise and some residents express their negative views quite vehemently:
"I am trying to get out of the area. This is a shit place."
"I hate this estate. I would like to get off it. I keep myself to myself."

But it is certainly not an estate where only negatives like crime, dysfunctional families, educational underachievement, apathy, indifference, violence, etc. should be attached to it.

Social capital

In order to have a more holistic picture of the several dynamics and processes within an estate we would like to introduce the concept of social capital as developed by Onyx and Bullen (1998) and which is influenced by the work of Robert Putnam (e.g. 1993). They conceptualise 'social capital' as a 'bottom-

up' phenomenon. It originates with people forming connections and networks based on principles of trust, mutual reciprocity and norms of action. It depends on a propensity for sociability, a capacity to form new associations and networks: 'The development of social capital requires the active and willing engagement of citizens... social capital refers to people as creators not victims' (Onyx and Bullen 1998).

Rather than stressing the negatives, the sociological analysis around the concept of social capital looks at the quality of social relations and their impact on the lives of their participants. James Coleman (1990) saw social capital as an ingredient of the functioning of social relations among individuals. Relations of trust and confidence in each other, enable social groups to become successful in social, cultural, and political terms.

Putnam (1993) re-defined social capital by referring to social organisations and institutions and the ways and means how they collaborate in common projects. According to him, trust and confidence, as a result of historical processes, are major ingredients of successful performance of these organisations when it comes to political and governmental reform.

Social capital is created from the complexity of everyday interactions between people. It is not located within the individual person or within the social structure, but in the space between people. It is not the property of the organisation, the market or state, though all can engage in its production. What is implicit is a sense of personal and collective efficacy. The development of social capital requires the active and willing engagement of citizens within a participative community. This is quite different from the receipt of services, or even of rights to the receipt of services, though these are unquestionably important. Social capital refers to people as creators, not as victims. As a woman the Saff says:

"I don't want things done to me. I want to do things…"

Critics would see the discourse of 'social capital' incompatible with the 'empowerment' discourse (see Erben et al. 1999). The argument being that social capital assumes "that all of us sit in one boat aiming at the same objectives with the same strategies in mind" and empowerment "refers to social change in societies characterised by conflicting interests of different groups and organisations, and realised in social action". The philosophical difference according to these authors lies in the distinction of social harmony and social conflicts.

We would agree that there is a danger in using the concept of 'social capital' assuming that people are 'stakeholders' in a society where everybody has equal access to all resources needed for mutual collaboration, and that every-

body will equally benefit from the collaboration. By informing the discourse of 'social capital' with the principles and perspectives of 'Social Action' we will explore how the apparent contradictions (between 'social capital and 'empowerment') can be overcome.

Social Action: A practical approach to empowerment

Over the past twenty years the Centre for Social Action has developed as a partnership among users, practitioners and academics. In the course of its activities in fieldwork, training and research, a distinctive model of empowerment known as Social Action has evolved and over time has been articulated. The approach has been recognised as distinctive (Williamson 1995), as offering "a clear view of empowerment theory" (Payne 1997, 280), as effective in a wide range of human services and to have "advanced our knowledge of practice developments and their conceptualisation" (Brown 1996, 92). It is also seen to have wide international currency (Jakobsson 1995; Treu et al. 1993; Lee 1994; Breton 1994).

Social Action is rooted in notions of empowerment which in the UK has become the 'catch-word of the 1990s. Adams (1996, 33) believes the term represents a fundamental 'paradigm shift' taking the practice of social work away decisively from the medical/pathological model. It directly challenges the focus on self-blame created by the ideological repackaging of public ills as private troubles (Wright Mills 1970) by right wing conservative governments in America, Australasia and the UK. Empowerment, although it starts with individual concerns, moves the spotlight to an analysis of the structures in which they exist. Drawing from the *Dictionary of Social Work* (Thomas and Pierson 1995) empowerment is concerned with how people gain a collective control over their lives to achieve their interests and is the method by which social workers seek to enhance the power of people who lack it. It represents a change of focus from social work *on* people to social work *with* people.

Staples (1990, 30) identifies key themes in empowerment as: 'participation of people in their own empowerment', 'the importance of recognising existing competencies' and 'building on individual and collective strengths'. Empowerment is the process by which power is developed or gained by the powerless themselves. Empowerment practice also seeks to offer people the chance to try out and experience new ways of influencing their life chances through transforming power relationships, looking to share power between workers and service users and to challenge the both to use it non-oppressively (Mullender and Ward 1991):

> In the face of more and more severe problems, the normal and understandable reaction of caring and dedicated professionals is to become more and more expert, and develop better and better technologies .... if empowerment is the goal that reaction is exactly the one professionals should not have. What social workers need to adopt in empowerment work are 'bottom-up' strategies whereby they learn from the oppressed, from whose who, more or less effectively, deal first hand with the problems of racism, poverty, sexism, ageism etc.; then bringing the best of social work knowledge and expertise, collaborate with the oppressed to build more just societies. (Breton 1994, 35).

There is a dialectic here, some would say contradiction (Barry 1996), between the inherent power of workers undertaking this facilitating process (Ward and Mullender 1991) and the requisite that people cannot be given power but must gain it for themselves (Braye and Preston-Shoot 1995). In social theory terms, to see this as a contradiction implies a 'duality' (Layder 1994) or 'zero sum' concept of power (Lukes 1974) which, it has been argued, does not reflect the realities of social life (Foucault 1980; Lukes 1974; Giddens 1984). More prosaically, the process of change has to start somewhere (Batsleer and Humphries 2000). If workers skills are employed through a 'dialogue' rather than a 'banking' process (Freire 1972), potentially they have the skills to promote the gaining of power and, concurrently, within the process, to transform the nature of power relationships.

What this means for service users is the opportunity to break "the internal bridles and perceived powerlessness which underpin their sense of self and guide their actions in the world" (Young 1999, 88). Especially where affiliated to groupwork, empowerment can be tremendously powerful in moving people towards more humane and emancipatory relationships (Mistry 1989).

Social Action has three central characteristics. First, the model was specifically designed to distance from the 'deficit' and 'blaming the victim' approaches which we perceived to be dominating thinking around social welfare work. Models of individual pathology were viewed as no substitute for serious consideration of the collective or social condition of service users. (Williamson 1995, 11). Thus Social Action is based on a commitment to people having the right to be heard, to define the issues facing them, to set the agenda for action and, importantly, to take action on their own behalf. We noted that in much existing community development and social education practice, once an issue is raised, the workers make the assumptions about how it should be addressed or even define the issues without previous discussions with the community. Between the what? and the how? the crucial question of why? is usually left out.

Therefore, secondly, Social Action advocates that only through the careful

understanding of the reasons 'why', can the question of 'how' be tackled. In asking the question 'why', people participate in consideration of underlying causes and through this process they can gain greater understanding of their circumstances and hence, empower themselves.

Asking the question *why* is the key that unlocks the process. We encourage people to pursue the question *why* until the root causes of a problem have been identified. Leaving out this stage and this way of looking at problems confines explanations and responsibilities and the scope of the solutions to the private world around people and within their existing knowledge and experience. These have been fashioned by their position on the social ladder and by the processes of social control, education and socialisation, which keep this in place.

Through the process of asking the question *why* people have the opportunity to widen their horizons of what is possible, to break out of the demoralising and self-perpetuating narrowness of vision, introspection and 'victim blaming' induced through poverty, lack of opportunity and exclusion. It enables them to conceive of new explanations in the wider social, political and economic context and to consider how they can identify and engage with these, in fact to challenge the taken-for-granted explanations or discourses which serve vested interests (Foucault 1980) in which they are trapped. It turns the spotlight round from people as a problem in themselves, to the problems they encounter, and enables them to see opportunities to develop a much wider range of options for action and change. (For further explanation and detail of this process, please see Mullender and Ward 1991; Ward and Mullender 1991; Kidd and Kumar 1982).

Thirdly, Social Action is process orientated rather than outcome orientated. The empowering action has its locus on the processes of change, which means that the underlying dynamics are not predetermined by an anticipated end result of certain projects or activities. Empowerment is a way forward of discovery and liberation, of dialogue and conscientisation. This is why Social Action focuses on the processes. It moves away from an approach that is managerial and business orientated.

By focusing on process, the focus is on the agenda of the people and in particular the awareness raising, learning and the liberating activity of 'taking charge of the situation' in all the stages of the development. In this sense, the underlying processes continuously redefine the outcomes, which become flexible and not predetermined by those who hold the power.

For the purpose of this research project, Social Action is offered as an 'ideal type', not as a definitive and completed model of practice. In some settings (e.g. in Magdeburg), Social Action can provide a starting point for a new and innovatory approach to practice. In Jyväskylä and Leicester, where

Ecosocial and Community Action methods are well established, Social Action acts as a comparator which enables us to specify more clearly what is actually going on.

Social capital and social exclusion

By adopting the Social Action approach aimed at empowerment, learning, development and change, the process of measuring social capital should not only aim to create valuable information and findings but to be central in creating or helping to create new opportunities for participation for local people. Because of this aim, a social capital survey seemed to be compatible with the desire to break the vicious circle of exclusion and disenfranchisement by actively including and supporting the local community in focusing, prioritising and developing programmes for community-based sustainable regeneration.

Contrary to social exclusion, the social capital paradigm does not stress only on the negatives within a community but looks at the skills, capacities and the remarkable ability of some people to cope in extreme circumstances: e.g. caring for large family, for one or more relatives other than children; low income; housing in state of disrepair; no knowledge of how to tackle problems, lack of support, low self esteem; being categorised by authority as troublesome, 'sponger', useless; being 'dumped' in problem areas as the standard solution, being made afraid of the area and other residents, mistrust.

There are strong links between the levels of social capital and social exclusion/inclusion. In order to explore these links we carried out a social capital survey on the Saffron Lane estate.

The social capital survey

The Saffron social capital survey was modelled on one carried out by Onyx and Bullen (1998) in New South Wales, Australia, with one or two minor amendments that the university researcher, discussed with Paul Bullen. It was designed to measure:

- Feelings of trust and safety
- Family and friends connections
- Neighbourhood connections
- Proactivity in a social context
- Value of life

- Tolerance of diversity
- Participation in the local community

Combining all of these elements gave us a measure of the overall level of social capital of the area.

Following discussions with the local residents and professional workers, we agreed to make the necessary amendments and to add an additional section. This would explore knowledge about local projects, use of these services and satisfaction with services generally. We also agreed to conduct the survey by visiting people in their homes with a target sample of 235 residents (a 10 percent sample).

Having finalised our version the researchers piloted the survey to check how long it would take, test their prepared introduction and look for any potential difficulties. We recruited a small team including local residents, a local voluntary worker and a student working in the area to work and took them through a brief training and induction process.

The survey started in October 1999 and was finalised in February 2000. The survey team worked in pairs, one to complete the survey form and one to make field notes. This gave us the opportunity to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Although Saffron Lane Estate had been described as 'surveyed to death', (quote from local worker) the survey team felt that they were welcomed by the participants and were not seen to be imposing 'yet another survey'. Many participants had much more to say and enjoyed having the opportunity to say it.

The researchers agreed that this was because the survey had a very personal approach. Our team consisted of local residents, volunteers and workers who retained the connection with the area when the survey was completed. We went beyond simply asking questions and marking scores – we listened to and recorded people's views.

The research team also provided information and answered questions where possible. For example, several people asked about projects on the estate, how they could get advice about problems. The researchers were able to provide addresses, contact numbers etc.

The field notes (over 800 separate comments and opinions from 235 people recorded) were organised into categories for qualitative analysis. The quantitative data from the survey itself were analysed using the SPSS package, by organising the questions into blocks, each of them referring to one category of social capital. The survey was followed up with another 10 percent sample of the 10 percent. This was to verify findings and to further explore the different elements of social capital with the benefit of the survey results and highlighting areas for attention.

Before going into each of its elements we have to be aware, that if a score in one category is high, this might mean that because of this other people feel excluded. So, for example, when in an estate, family and friends connections are high, a newcomer to the estate might feel isolated exactly because of that.

Feelings of trust and safety

The feeling of safety is linked with the reputation of the estate. Feelings of safety are often a very subjective matter and relate to the way people interact with each other, the ability to leave a place without fear and therefore participate in social, political and economic activities.

Our survey showed that 75 percent of respondents scored below the mid-point in this category of "feelings of trust and safety". Our qualitative data has confirmed this and we can draw a distinction between different groups. Women and the elderly would on average feel more insecure than men. Quite often parents would be very concerned about the safety of their children.

> "I feel safe but I fear for my daughter. She is 16 and I don't let her out after dark. I am always wary about the safety of my family." (male respondent)

Because of the different reputations of some sectors of the Saff, some people would not cross certain areas. Some people would not access services because of the fear of going through an area they find unsafe, especially in the evenings.

We have found that safety is related to burglaries, drug misuse, joy riding and rapes which leads to people not wanting to leave their homes alone or not going out especially after dark. An unsafe living environment contributes to social exclusion. This is not only because of the fact itself but also because of the effects of hindering access to social, cultural and political activities and the psychological pressures it creates.

Family and friends connections

Generally identified as being fundamental to the well being of individuals is the relationship with family and with friends. Our survey showed that only 25 percent of respondents felt that they had low levels of family and friends connections. The other 75 percent tend to range from average to high levels of connections. This is about emotional and practical support. High family and friends connections contribute to social inclusion.

> "I have a supportive family…I can cope. I wouldn't think I've got to turn to anybody else for support…" (single mother)

"I have got my kids and grandchildren…The family is your life….You find your strengths in your kids…"

The problem in an Estate where these connections are very high is, when people lack them, their experience of exclusion and isolation will be much higher.

"I have no family nor friends. I've got one friend. I don't go out, he comes to see me…I feel quite lonely…"(elderly man)

We have seen that this is the case of many elderly people, disabled people and young single mothers who are newcomers to the estate. In this case, a high score has the side effect to exclude some members of the community.

Neighbourhood connections

In an estate, which scores highly in neighbourhood connections, it is understandable that this will be a core part of the living environment. Local residents tend to know their neighbours and rely quite often on their help. This does not mean that the relationship with the immediate neighbours is always good. Sometimes it is the cause of huge disputes and emotional pressures to the extent that some people ask for relocation.

Neighbourhood connections are another area, which scored high in our survey. It was not as high as the family and friends connections but it seems well established (also confirmed by our qualitative data). When speaking to people, they would identify that whilst they can rely on the neighbours, mostly the relationships are kept to a minimum.

"We just talk over the fence"
and again "we keep ourselves to ourselves."

For some people the neighbours are vital and there are groups or networks, which support each other. Some of them are 'Neighbourhood Watch', mothers who come together and care for children, help with shopping when somebody is ill, and support for the elderly.

"We look out for each other around here. If I am ill, my neighbour helps out with the shopping and I do the same…"
"We are a close little community here…I feel able to leave the keys of my house with any of these people. There are several old neighbours from before and the newer people fit into our community."

"We keep an eye on one another in this little bit."

Again as we pointed out, in an area where neighbourhood connections are high, the lack of it contributes to isolation especially for the elderly, disabled people and newcomers to the area. Another complicating factor is, how to act when people have problems with the neighbours. Mostly identified were, loud music, mess, shouting ('anti-social behaviour').

"I am unemployed… it all happened because of the tension and lack of sleep because of the behaviour of my neighbours. I could not perform any more at work…" (young man)

Proactivity in a social context

This measure uses some basic questions to discover how outgoing people are in different situations, such as seeking support and advice, social activities and caring for their environment. The survey showed that residents of the Saff are more inclined to be proactive.

Value of life

This section was about satisfaction of life and about the feeling of being valued by society. The overall level in this category was low. Majority of people feel satisfied with what their life has meant but over 60 percent do not feel valued by society. Often this had to do with not being in employment. This was especially the case for unemployed people, disabled people, pensioners and lone parents.

"I don't feel valued, because society only values people who are at work. I am a pensioner. Society does not value us any more."

Multiculturalism, tolerance of diversity

Part of a make up of an estate is its diversity of people living in it. How tolerant people are within this diversity will influence the aptitude of people to live together. Generally people felt that the Saff was a tolerant estate to live in:

"I like different lifestyles: you learn, they learn…"
"It is not about what people look like, it's how they behave, isn't it?
"Different cultures make things better."

But there have been cases where people experienced overt racism.

"I am a racist."
"People round here don't really get on with them (Asian people). We get on alright with them."
"Here it does not work, people are so aggressive to them."

The experience of one interviewee was that because of the racism he experienced he had to leave the area. It seems that because the Saff is a mainly 'white' estate not enough attention has been given to this aspect.

Participation in the local community

In relation to 'living environment', the local community refers to the community buildings and community activities. These will give people support for different needs but also create spaces for cultural and social activity.

"If it wouldn't have been for the Linwood centre I wouldn't have gone to University."
"In the Community Centre people actually care…"
"When I get stuck, I go to the Resource Centre."
Services for the elderly in the Community Centre: "absolutely marvellous!"

But also there are negative comments about the centre, some based on the lack of quality services and others because of the culture of the place.

"Goldhill is useless. You daren't put your kids there…"
"They can't control the kids, there's always trouble there…we never get any information, the same kids that are the favourites get picked every year…"
"Kingfisher has a bad reputation."
"The Resource Centre gave me poor advice."
"Community Centre lunches are too cliquey…and it is the only thing on the estate…"
"I don't go to the Linwood centre, because it is rubbish."
"When I go to the Linwood, they are smoking and they make me cough."

In our survey people scored very low in the participation in the local community. In analysing this data, we have to be careful to understand what participation in the local community means. As we have highlighted people are active in all sort of ways, but they might not use the established community organisations. Sometimes it is because people think that they can not offer anything to them, sometimes it is because they feel patronised.

"I don't want things done to me. I want to do things…"

And other times it is because of lack of information about the existing facilities. Here we have to ask what does involvement really mean? What are we trying to do: involving people, making things attractive or creating social citizens? Who defines the level of involvement? In the last section of this paper we will explore this further.

The above discussions and examples demonstrate the complexity of the experiences of people's life. The social exclusion discourse fails to respond to these complexities focusing too often on single issues rather looking beyond to what lies in between. Social capital, with its focus on community processes contributes to make these complexities more transparent and highlights the fact that there are no single answers for complex situations.

Conclusion: Social exclusion, social capital and Social Action

Before adapting any community/social work approach, we have to understand and clarify if we see the social/community workers as extended arms of the government assuming a fundamental social order or if the role of the worker is amongst others and in long term, to pursue radical change. Given the actual policy environment in the United Kingdom, we also have to ask how realistic the pursuit of radical change is for the individual worker who is part of institutions bound by governmental legislation.

The areas to tackle social exclusion identified by the government have a direct impact on our work. As workers we can not dismiss the social policy arena in which we are moving. The macro level of policy making has to be integrated critically in our practice. 'Joined up' policies, which make links between different areas such as regional development, planning, transport, health, housing, regeneration, and local government are clearly significant. However, we see from our research that whilst the government identifies the problems and priority areas and establishes appropriate policies, approaches to meeting these priorities and objectives on the ground are weak and underdeveloped at the point of practice. There is a vital link, which is missing in the policy delivery, this being the link between the meso level and the micro level. If policies are imposed in a fairly autocratic way, there is no real space for community participation. To give people the chance to play their part in shaping change might be a catchy phrase, but what would it mean actually for people living in deprived areas such as the Saff?

Programmes to tackle social exclusion will be wasted if they can not achieve to meet the needs of local people and to promote real participation. Simply

establishing integrated policies and stronger institutions, which can take a cross-cutting approach to sustainable development objectives, misses out that institutions often have in themselves an exclusionary character especially if they can not reach the lives of the poorest people in our society. This means that firstly attention has to be given to the complexity of the interrelationships of the living environment with social policy and secondly it has to promote the principles of Social Action. In this sense policy and practice have to encourage a structural, institutional and cultural change, meaning that workers would not simply implement the policies of the government, they would involve, inform and advocate for the so called 'socially excluded' people.

In congruence with this model the eco-social social work searches for an ecologically and socially sustainable model of social policy and social work. Sustainability, it is recognised, is not about maintaining the status quo. It is about creating an environment in which all the component parts contribute to the whole and balance each other while creating a better quality of life. Economic regeneration is one of those component parts; education, for adults as well as young people, is another; as is work to support families and children; youth work; initiatives to promote health and healthy living; housing and work to support the elderly.

Sustainable development will demand changes in almost all aspects of human decision-making and behaviour. It will require changes in economic systems, legal systems, education systems and more. It will require changes of every person as well, from business people to consumers, from politicians to voters. Such systemic change requires action-oriented visionaries with intimate local knowledge and broad global perspective as well as an ability to identify the root causes of human problems.

In this way eco-social social work can contribute to the benefit of the living environment only if it starts to question the connection between the different levels of interaction (referring to micro, meso, macro). As Aila-Leena Matthies (2000) states it: "…social and community work has to promote local policies, which enable people in risk of social exclusion to influence their living environment and to be active participants in community processes. Issues like local economies, nature preservation, traffic and housing policy and community planning are crucial challenges for structural and preventive social work."

We would like to see the eco-social work practice informed by an 'realistic radical' approach. Too often workers say that they are against the oppressive structures of society and that they want to change it. But the reality is that the local authority employs them or that they have to seek funding through government programmes. We have seen workers who in meetings and area forums criticise the lack of community participation and consultation but when

setting up projects collude with the authoritarian very processes of the macro social policy agenda. This means that they collude with the autocratic nature of government social policies, which seem to normalise and legitimate current structures, practices and attitudes leading towards a 'normative consensus': "The concept of social exclusion legitimises the moralising dynamic of New Labour… The socially excluded are not longer allowed to be the passive recipients of benefits; they are obliged to participate in their moral reintegration." (Langan, 1999, xi.)

This seeps into professionals' interactions with local people and they become a process of exclusion in their own right. The argument quite often is that in order to get the funding 'you have to play the game'.

'Realistic radicalism' is aware of the structures of society and it makes them transparent to local residents. It is about honesty and about not creating an ideological empire in which information gets manipulated. Empowerment, participation and capacity release are core elements recognising that whilst using the structures set up by the government in benefit for the most deprived people in our society one is still able to be critical and able to promote structural and cultural change. This is where the eco-social social work practice can make a substantial contribution by focusing on social capital and being informed by the principles of Social Action.

Notes

1 The TSER Project "Making New Local Policies Against Social In European Cities" is based on European and local networks. Focused field projects are being carried out co-operatively with "scientific actors" (researchers and educators) and "end users" (social and community workers, local authorities and local residents) in three centres: Leicester (Great Britain), Magdeburg (Germany) and Jyväskylä (Finland).

The main objective of the project is to work together with residents and local networks to build on existing resources and develop new ones and therefore strive to influence policy making from local people's point of view as it impacts at local level. It is intended that local people can benefit from and utilise any findings and learning in both the process and output of the project.

2 The Saffron Estate (the Saff), although unique in many ways, represents an outer city public housing estate, as evidenced by its location, isolation, income deprivation, unemployment, publicly owned housing etc. In this sense, the structures of Saffron portray the structures of relative poverty in an advanced capitalist society.

3 The formulation of Social Action differs from others' usage of the term, for example in North America where it is an umbrella term covering a range of forms of "professional effort to bring into public discourse issues which, according to the consensus between power holders and the public, should remain in the shadow of public debate". (Staub-Bernasconi 1991, 36). In this usage social action is a generic term for practice and activity which are committed to social change and social justice (Breton 1995). In contrast, Social Action as developed by the Centre for Social Action and its Associates in the U.K. has evolved as an explicitly articulated practice theory and methodology. It sits within the 'radical social work' tradition (Bailey and Brake et. al. 1975), and today is making a prime contribution to the debates about empowerment and associated working practices (see for example, Barry 1996; Barry et. al. 1998, in response). Self-directed groupwork (Mullender and Ward 1991) is a particular application (and, conceptually, the earliest) of this articulation of Social Action; Social Action Research (SAR) has evolved more recently out of this praxis.

4 Interesting discussions relating to poverty and social exclusion can be found in Turunen (1999) and Williams (1998): "…the concept of social exclusion makes it possible to move the focus from poverty as a relative condition resolved through distributional mechanisms, to a better understanding of poverty as a relational dynamic." (Williams 1998, 15)

5 For a discussion around citizenship as a status and active citizenship as a right of participation (see Lister (1998a, 6): "The ongoing dialectic between agency and structure is reflected in that between citizenship as a status and a practice. Citizenship is thus conceived of as a dynamic concept in which process and outcome stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. Rights are not set in stone; they are always open to re-interpretation and re-negotiation and need to be defended and extended through political and social action" .

6 Interesting for further reading; Lister (1998b, 215) discusses the developments in New Labour's thinking on the welfare state. It argues that "there has been something of a paradigm shift from the concern with equality to a focus on social exclusion and equality of opportunity, together with an emphasis on social obligations rather than social rights" .

7 Any government, which focuses social inclusion around employment, should take a number of factors into account. Promises of job creation, and therefore reducing social exclusion, are unrealistic given the current situation in the job market. Late modernity is characterised by a risk culture (France 1997, 65) and job insecurity. Whilst people and institutions try more and more to reduce risks, the nature of the society in which they live continually throws up new risks. Giddens (in France 1997, 65) identifies that the labour market is one of the key areas where risk has increased. Three main trends are evident:

1. Whereas modernity at its height believed full employment could be achieved and maintained, late modern societies are now characterised by unpredictable levels of employment and unemployment.
2. The notion that employment careers are for life and that mobility is within a company career structure has diminished. Instead, citizens negotiate their way through life by changing direction at different points in time.
3. New jobs are predominantly within the service sector rather than in manufacturing. Service jobs, however, have traditionally offered limited job security, are often part-time, sometimes subcontracted, often unskilled, and provide limited opportunities for career advancement and development.

This government is no more invulnerable to an economic downturn than any other. Economists have warned the government that the risk of Britain sliding into a full recession was growing stronger daily and up to a quarter of a million jobs could be lost. David Blunkett, the Employment Secretary admitted that the growing world crisis could hit the Government's flagship Welfare to Work programme. (Glow 1998.)

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PRACTICAL MODELS AND THEORETICAL FINDINGS IN COMBATING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

A comparative perspective

As a result of the three years of action research conducted from 1998-2000 we would like to conclude that combating social exclusion locally requires new kinds of holistic, contextual and citizen-orientated approaches that are adequate for each societal context. In this chapter, we discuss our research results from an eco-social perspective, linked to both socio-political and life–political issues of our time. We will pay attention to the relationship between human welfare and living environments, approaching social exclusion and social inclusion from the perspective of a holistic understanding of a living environment and citizens-orientated community practices. The main emphasis is on local views and experiences within the action-research projects in Jyväskylä, Leicester and Magdeburg[1] .

In the first part of this chapter the practical models of social work used in the field projects in each city are described from a comparative perspective. In the second part, the common theoretical aspects of the relationship between social exclusion and the living environment examined during the research process are summarised. Finally, in the last part, we will draw conclusions regarding what we see as the dynamic interdependence between social exclusion and social inclusion.

The eco-social approach as a holistic perspective

In our view, in a societal situation in which the integrative function of the labour market in late modern societies is seriously weakening, the significance of citizens' living environments and citizen orientation is becoming a key element not only for social workers but for anyone who is interested in promoting local policies for social (re)integration, e.g. social inclusion. In our research we have used eco-social thought as an umbrella concept and action research as a research approach for studying social exclusion and combating it in practice. The approaches developed have transcended research, theory and practice in order to develop a greater understanding of the relationship between the phenomena of social exclusion and practical efforts to combat it in three local contexts. The action research carried out has engaged all participants (researchers, social workers, community workers as well as citizens) in active collaboration and joint self-reflection at all stages of the research project. This collaboration and self-reflection resulted in three types of action research, which are characterised as a professional Nordic type (Jyväskylä), the Anglo-Saxon empowerment mode (Leicester) and the experimental mode of East-German action research (Magdeburg), which is still seeking its own profile. Compared to the tradition of community work in social work, the local practices can be classified in accordance with Jack Rothman's (1968) classic division as follows: The Magdeburg model most closely resembles Locality Development, the Jyväskylä model of Social Planning, and the Leicester model of Social Action. Nevertheless, the local models each have specific traits of their own due to the national and local contexts in which they have been developed at the end of the 20th century. One of the new aspects of the local models was the aim to develop local practices from an eco-social social work perspective. How this was done in practice is accounted for in this chapter.[2]

According to Aila-Leena Matthies (2000), the eco-social approach means studying and promoting eco-social sustainability in ecological and social aims from a holistic perspective. In our research, the most crucial eco-social aspect seemed to be the aim of developing a cross-sector social work perspective from which the participants can study the relationship between the living environment and the practices of the holistic perspective, including its ecological, economic, existential, cultural, historical, political, psycho-social and aesthetic aspects. The demand of the formation of a holistic and an environmental view in social work is not in itself new. What we want to stress is that this continues to pose a challenge to social workers working in urban environments – possibly even to a higher degree than in the past. The com-

plex problems and needs of our time require a holistic perspective on knowledge and cross-sectoral strategies for both social policy and city politics in urban environments. What we also found over the course of our research is that the image of a living environment and the role of the media in reporting the current social problems of living environments in decline have a strong impact on social exclusion. This phenomenon has not received a sufficient amount of focus, and it is also quite obvious that more inquiries than we could achieve in the context of our research must be done in the future.

Citizen-orientated community models

With regard to the development of social work methods for combating social exclusion and promoting social inclusion, a variety of community practices were located in each city. In general, the development of methods included the following types of community-based approaches under various labels:

- action research
- community work
- community social work
- city and community planning
- multi-agency co-operation
- decentralised social services and social work
- community-based forums, planning groups and teams
- neighbourhood work
- self-help groups and self-mobilisation of citizens
- self-directed community and action groups

All these practices were conducted cross-sectorally in varying degrees of co-operation with local actors and under the specific national and local circumstances that existed in each city during 1998-2000.

The aim of combining research and actions aimed at development and change in close co-operation with university researchers, city researchers, social workers, community workers and citizens was a common factor in the action research conducted in each city. All of the researchers focused on studying the interrelationship between social exclusion and its eradication from urban living environments. Steffi Albers and Claudia Ziegler (2000) studied social exclusion and community practices from an eco-social perspective in the form of case study of the residential area of Neu-Olvenstedt in Magdeburg. They used quantitative and qualitative interviews, and also acted as action researchers and community workers in experimental ways in this suburb in

close co-operation with local authorities and citizens. Thilo Boeck, Patrick McCullough and Dave Ward (2001) used social capital surveys within the Social Action approach in examining community processes at the Saffron Lane Estate in Leicester. In Jyväskylä, Kati Närhi and Eija Hiekka (2000) studied social exclusion and knowledge formation within eco-socially orientated community-based social work in close co-operation with social workers who were working and conducting field research in four residential areas in Jyväskylä (Lutakko, Huhtasuo, Keltinmäki and Pupuhuhta[3]). At the European level, the local experiences of social exclusion and inclusion were compared and exchanged in a learning process orientated partnership.

The complexity of social exclusion

Theoretically, we have discussed social exclusion in terms of three main types of exclusion: elimination (e.g. mass unemployment), rejection (e.g. discrimination) and individual withdrawal due to various factors, in which the excluder can be society, the market, the media, the community, other people or oneself (Matthies et al. 2000; Turunen 1999[4]). Within these three main types of social exclusion one can find a number of marginal positions in which people move between being included and risking social exclusion. In local research contexts, social exclusion was addressed as a multidimensional concept referring to both the social and spatial erosion of living conditions and environments in local societies and communities exposed to impoverishment, deterioration and deprivation. In none of the cases, however, were the "socially excluded" understood as a homogenous mass. Additionally, the concept of social exclusion turned out to be a concept used by politicians and researchers rather than by ordinary people.

At the general level the most crucial aspects of social exclusion were locally linked to segregation, marginalisation and polarisation, as well as to the stigmatisation of a residential area or a suburb within it. "Glocally,"[5] social exclusion was linked to global and local market forces for profit making. The stigmatisation was mentioned as a factor that tended to accentuate the negative spiral of social exclusion. It was also noted that residential areas and their suburbs risked stigmatisation by outsiders, such as the media, particularly if the following factors existed:

- high unemployment;
- a concentration of rented blocks of flats, and council accommodations;
- residents with low income;
- a high number of welfare support recipients;

- a high concentration of ethnic groups;
- a dilapidated and vandalised physical living environment;
- deviant behaviour (criminal activity, violence, insobriety, drug abuse, neo-Nazism, etc).

In stigmatised living environments a number of people, if not all, tend to simultaneously bear multi-burdens of social exclusion (elimination, rejection and withdrawal). (Cf. Albers & Ziegler 2000; Närhi 2000c; Boeck 2000.)

Social exclusion was discussed in slightly different ways in each local research context, depending on the national and local circumstances of the city in question. Even the theoretical and ideological perspectives influenced ways of viewing social exclusion and combating it. In Jyväskylä, social exclusion was primarily discussed as a negative spiral of a number of exclusionary factors (mass unemployment, socio-economic and spatial segregation, and individual incapacity) in the form of an accumulated number of negative events or an abrupt life crisis in residential areas with high unemployment. In spite of the relative good condition of blocks of flats, the physical environment, services, and the social security systems in Jyväskylä, there are residential sub-areas and living situations in which the most vulnerable groups of adults, young people and children are exposed to social exclusion. Among those most exposed to social exclusion were unprivileged groups, such as the long-term unemployed, income-based social insurance system drop-outs, families and individuals in life crisis, as well as service users of social work. In addition to other exclusionary factors, lack of education, particularly that of young people, was also found to be a major factor in exclusion. Due to the complexity of social exclusion the social workers stressed that the prevention of social exclusion must encompass all levels (structural, community, group and individual) of society from a cross-sectoral perspective with eco-social aims (see further, Närhi & Hiekka 2000; Närhi 2000a, b and c).

Within the Leicester research context (Boeck 2000; Boeck & McCullough 2000; Boeck & Ward 2000; Boeck, McCullough & Ward 2000), social exclusion pointed to the existence of economic, political and social forces outside the control of the individual. Emphasis was laid on institutional aspect of social exclusion, implying that an exclusionary process is taking place as a result of the decisions and indecision of many institutions. Another aspect was that exclusion relates to groups of people – ethnic minorities, women, the elderly, young people, the disabled, as well as gays and lesbians. Locally, the lack of education and day care, as well as the lack of transportation, were found to be particularly prevalent exclusionary factors. Social exclusion in this context encompassed the processes of discrimination, marginalisation

and deprivation. It was regarded as a combination of factors that made it more likely that some people would be socially excluded. The residents of the Saffron Lane Estate, however, did not use the term social exclusion or identify themselves as socially excluded. Rather, the residents simply described their situations as "difficult". Unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and a lack of control and involvement were issues mentioned by residents when discussing social exclusion. The research in Leicester also pointed out that there is another side to the discourse of "exclusion" that should not be obscured – namely, the manifest evidence of strength, capacity and success revealed and achieved in the most unpromising circumstances by apparently excluded citizens. A number of community activities at the Saffron Lane Estate were seen as examples of this (see ibid).

Within the research context of Magdeburg, mass unemployment and other consequences of unification in 1990 were considered as factors contributing to exclusionary processes at the local level in Neu-Olvenstedt. Due to the fundamental changes of society and increase in unemployment particularly in the Eastern part of Germany, a number of individuals became excluded from the labour market and consequently from social relationships linked to work during the 1990's. The loss of labour identity and life orientation increased exclusionary life processes in Neu-Olvenstedt, where social isolation was especially mentioned as new type of poverty in addition to economic poverty. Moreover, the international blackmailing of Neu-Olvenstedt as a problem suburb has affected the entire suburb negatively, not only those addressed. Even innocent children have been called Nazis by children and adults from other cities when leaving Magdeburg to join other children outside the city. In 1997, active citizens in the suburb mobilised themselves against the negative image and founded a citizens' initiative (Bürgerinitiative). One of the main tasks of the Magdeburgian research group was to support this movement, and its members were integrated into the action research from the beginning in 1998.

Local models

Action research in social work is a way to begin tackling social exclusion by means of uniting research and action for sustainable eco-social development. The contribution of the three local models to European social work can be summarised as follows:

Table 1. Exchange of knowledge and experiences within the TSER-research project

	Jyväskylä, Finland	Leicester, Britain	Magdeburg, Germany
Starting point	Social impact approach (SIA) within community-based social work in four residential areas	Social Action (SA) within community processes at Saffron Lane Estate	Eco-social theory and community work in Neu-Olvenstedt
Model	Finnish/Nordic Professionalism	British/Anglo-Saxon Empowerment	Eastern German Experiments
Process	Research co-operation and actions for sustainable development and change in order to study and combat social exclusion in local contexts during 1998-2000		
Local impatcs	Knowledge creation and influence on social and city planning using eco-social thought and SA through community projects	Social Capital Survey: capacity building within community processes at Saffron Lane Estate using Social Action principles and eco-social ideas	Community work and social actions in community co-operation in Neu-Olvenstadt using eco-social thought, SIA and SA
Euro-local contribution	Euro-local knowledge about various modes of action research within citizen-orientated community strategies against social exclusion: - advancing an eco-social perspective combining ideas from Social Action and social impact assessment - holistic knowledge and capacity building in everyday practices - learning and process orientated community partnership - creating local policies for eco-social sustainability at different levels (macro, meso and micro levels of society)		

In the beginning, the local action research modes and models of social work were understood as opposites to each other, especially when discussing the professional top-down model in relation to the empowering bottom-up model. Questions were also raised as to how these different approaches could be compared at all on the European level. However, the main idea of the European comparison was not to create identical local "laboratories" (see Matthies et al. 2000) but to ask how the shared research objectives (local policies against social exclusion, exchange of knowledge, mutual learning processes and

theory building) could be reached by means of the three different approaches in three different contexts. At the end of the research project it became clear that in reality the local practices were not either exclusively top-down or bottom-up models, but, in fact, were much more mixed in reality than in theory. Despite some differences, all the networks tended to create similar types of practical solutions and conceptualisations about the relationship between social exclusion and social inclusion in living environments, even if the perspectives and concrete means differed. The research results also told us that if the risk of social exclusion is to be taken seriously the strategies against it must be created in close co-operation with citizens and their living environments from a holistic perspective and at various levels of society.

The professional model of Jyväskylä

As is described in the above figure, the specific contribution of Jyväskylä to the Euro-local exchange was social impact assessment, a form of eco-socially orientated social planning. In accordance with this model, the action research was focused on a professional type of action research in order to develop new type of professional expertise for studying and combating social exclusion in a cross-sectoral community partnership between social workers and other local actors (authorities, community organisations, service users and citizens). In this model, social workers gathered data by means of interviewing service users and residents, as well as by writing about their own experiences of carrying out field work. The experiences were then reflected in relation to how eco-social thought and the British type of Social Action could be used in social workers' everyday work. The reflections were carried out in co-operation with researchers at the social workers' discussion forum. The concrete practices used in combating social exclusion encompassed the creation of holistic knowledge and skills for participatory activities and eco-socially sustainable planning. Some of the social workers' strategies were "tailored" and targeted to the individual needs of coping and surviving in everyday life, e.g. youth projects with the goal of finding routes to education and employment. Some of the strategies were preventive group work and interventions at the community level, such as negotiations and discussion about community planning and local issues with citizens in residential areas. Some of the strategies reached the level of city politics, in which case for example the social workers made social impacts assessments on the supplementary planning processes of the city of Jyväskylä. City planners have continued co-operating with the social workers even after the research project

ended. All in all, the holistic approach used in Jyväskylä encompassed ideas of traditional social work combined with structural and influential social work from eco-social perspectives as they were conceived in Jyväskylä. In this context, the social workers preferred to use the concept of horizontal expertise instead of using the dualistic concepts of top-down or bottom-up. The Jyväskylä type of community-based eco-social social work was regarded by the social workers as a continuum of the kind of community work and structural social work developed within the field of professional social work in Finland. According to social workers in Jyväskylä, community work mainly emphasises communities, the structural work surrounding co-operation between the authorities and the kind of eco-social work is based on a new kind of eco-social interest for the living environment as a whole. (See further Närhi 2000b and c).

The empowerment model of Leicester

At the Saffron Lane Estate, the emphasis of Social Action within community work was put on community processes, not on intersectoral co-operation, researchers and local people as forming connections and networks in order to research and develop new practices together. The Social Action in Leicester is based on the principles of trust, reciprocation and action. Compared with the North-American umbrella concept of social action, which covers a range of theoretical thought and practices, the mode of Social Action in Leicester has its own particular characteristics. The self-directed group work and Social Action research carried out on the Saffron Lane Estate are particular implementations of the Leicester type of Social Action (see further Ward & Boeck 2000). The research on Saffron Lane during 1998-2000 was based on the active and willing engagement of the citizens in gathering data and shaping initiatives, plans and actions. The researchers undertook a social capital survey, which contributed to the formation of an understanding of the nature of social exclusion and to the exploration of the notion of social capital, firstly by focusing on the complexity of the interrelationships of the living environment with social policy and secondly by promoting the principles of Social Action. In this sense, it aimed at promoting a structural, institutional and cultural change, meaning that workers would not simply implement the policies of the government but, rather, would involve, inform and advocate for these so-called "socially excluded" people. The concrete practices included informing the community by establishing and developing a new local newspaper, in which 50 percent of the material is written by local residents, initi-

ating local projects (BMX-bike track for youth and the proposal of a Credit Union), and establishing connections to governmental programmes and existing community projects and processes, such as Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and various types of community centres and projects. The new aspect of Social Action in this context was the formation of the social capital survey together with researchers, community workers and citizens, as well as discussions about eco-social ideas within community work (see further Boeck 2000; Boeck, McCullough & Ward 2001).

The experimental model of Magdeburg

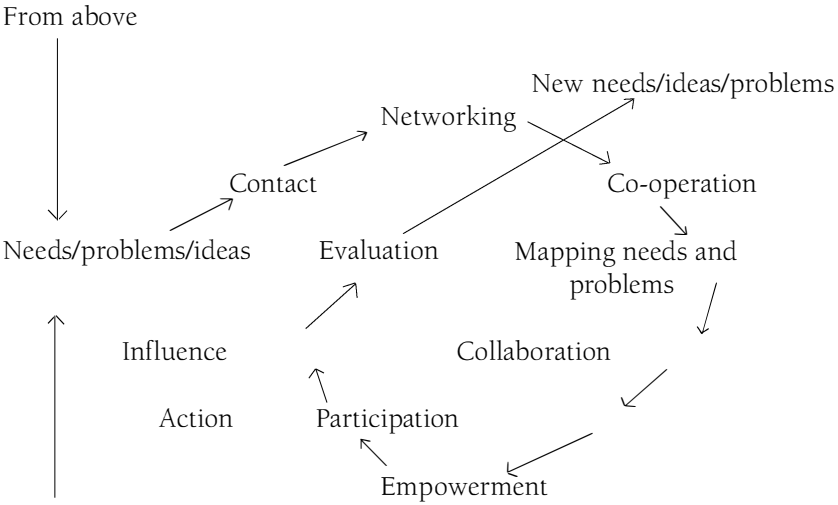
The specific contribution of Magdeburg to the Euro-local exchange was the use of eco-social thought and the experimental mode of action research, combining the research and eco-socially orientated community work of three partners: the Fachhochschule, city partners and citizens. All of them were active partners in gathering knowledge and initiating community development and social action in Neu-Olvenstedt (See further Albers 2000; Albers & Ziegler 2000). The use of this type of community work in Neu-Olvenstedt meant transcending the institutional borderlines of responsibility, networking and co-operating, as well as mobilising new initiatives and resources for reintegration and self-directed citizen activities. The concrete practices came to encompass a number of new local initiatives and projects. First of all, a new type of citizens-directed community centre called Lebensmitte(l) was created. This initiative differed radically from the existing activities of the suburb by offering a new perspective on social work and a chance for male and female adult unemployed residents to change their every day life. With hardly any external financial support, mainly basing its economic stability on economic recycling, the Lebensmitte(l) was able to revitalise both personal and community resources and re-integrate people at risk of social exclusion. The media portrayed Lebensmitte(l) as a symbol of a new kind of social development in disadvantaged residential areas in Magdeburg. It also became a challenge to the (in)ability of bureaucratic institutions in dealing with this new type of citizen based grass-roots activity in Neu-Olvenstedt. Another significant impact of the Euro-local exchange in Magdeburg was the creation of the new inter-sectoral community groups (GWG), which were established in 18 suburbs. This action was supported by the Municipal Department of Child and Youth Care. The GWG became a local network that initiated various individual actions that explored the problems of the area, promoted the quality of the living environment, and created citizens' forums

and organised cultural events. In the Magdeburgian context, it is important to recall that the aforementioned community activities have not been self-evident, nor have they been merely new phenomena for the promotion of direct local democracy within the Eastern-German context.

Toward reciprocal Euro-local learning

The kind of Euro-local learning we developed in each local context can be illustrated in the form of a hermeneutic circle[6] as follows:

Figure 1. A process and reciprocal learning orientated action in a community partnership.



According to this conceptualisation, needs, ideas and problems within a learning-orientated community partnership between authorities, citizens, other local actors and researchers can be addressed both from the direction of top-down and bottom-up. The working process in itself does not differ from the processes previously described in the literature of community work. What we have learned from the practices developed at the end of the 20th century is that in order to be able to empower both material and personal resources

in a community partnership, a research network must find alliances with authorities, citizens and other local actors by means of collaboration. Nevertheless, the co-operation in itself is not enough – one must also work on concrete tasks and activities with a sense of respect and trust for all partners, e.g. collaborate with each other. This, in turn, creates possibilities for participation, empowerment and action in order to influence local policies in combating social exclusion and promoting eco-socially sustainable living areas.

Eco-social perspective from a holistic perspective

Factors that increase risks of social exclusion

There is no simple means of escaping from social exclusion to social inclusion. In contemporary societies, social exclusion poses a significant challenge to all politicians, companies, citizens, researchers and occupational groups concerning labour, housing and social politics, including social work and especially in living environments lacking sustainability (liveable environments, resources, social and commercial services, cultural activities, information, possibilities for jobs and transport, as well as a good image). A residential area with a reputation for having severe social problems is just one example of a number of exclusionary factors. On a more personal level, being employed is still one of the most central factors in receiving resources and having access to social security systems and personal socio-economic security in contemporary welfare states. Simply stated, a lack of resources leads to a reduction of choices, and, consequently, also to risks of social exclusion.

Within the three research contexts, the physical environment itself was not regarded as an exclusionary factor, but in combination with high unemployment, concentration of rented blocks of flats/council accommodations and unprivileged populations groups, it was a factor that increased exclusion. The exclusionary picture of a physical environment was strengthened by abandoned shops and flats, as well as by a degenerated or vandalised environment. The un-aesthetic aspects of a living environment, too, contributed indirectly to increased segregation, since people with better resources are able to leave the area.

The psycho-social and existential aspects of social exclusion dealt with well-being and social security – more explicitly, it dealt with feelings of boredom, dissatisfaction, frustration, isolation, meaninglessness, mistrust, powerlessness, fear, as well as with feelings of being unsafe. For example, the future for an unemployed women was in many cases seen as full of hopeless-

ness: "When you are 40 years old, you don't get a job," as one woman in Magdeburg put it (Albers & Ziegler 2000). Factors that increased the sense of not being safe in one's own living environment were the appearance of deviant behaviour in the forms of crime, violence, burglaries, drug and alcohol misuse, and rapes found in Leicester (Boeck 2000). Even if the entire suburb was not an unsafe place to live, certain sub-areas were pointed to as being so. An unsafe sub-area could also be a playground in which intoxicated adults tended to gather, which resulted in parents keeping their children from going outdoors, as was the case in one of the studied areas in Jyväskylä (Närhi 2000c).

On Saffron Lane in Leicester, women and the elderly seemed to feel more unsafe than men. In the case of Leicester, even racism was mentioned among factors leading to social exclusion. In Magdeburg, the appearance of neo-Nazism was recognised as a stigmatising problem that had increased social exclusion. Among groups that were vulnerable to social isolation, those especially mentioned were new-comers, the unemployed, the elderly, disabled people, and young mothers. Friend and family connections were seen as very important to the resident of Saffron Lane Estate in Leicester, while data from Jyväskylä revealed that family relations were not that important to residents. Finns put more importance on connections to friends and acquaintances, obviously because relatives do not usually live in the same suburbs. In Neu-Olvenstedt, the loss of employment following German unification had led to the loss of social relationships, and consequently also to increased isolation. In this context, it is also important to recall that Saffron Lane Estate is a residential area with a history dating back to the 1920's, while the suburbs studied in Jyväskylä were built in the late 1960's, 1970's and 1990's, and Neu-Olvenstedt in Magdeburg was built at the beginning of the 1980's during the GDR-period.

Factors that promote eco-social sustainability and social inclusion

In accordance with our research results, among the more structural factors that promoted eco-social stability we were able to observe that following factors tended to promote sustainability and social inclusion in living environments:

- diverse residential areas with a population comprised of various income levels;
- access to social rights and services;
- flats and houses meeting high standards with low rent;
- possibilities for jobs with a good salary;

- access to transportation, cultural activities, shopping opportunities;
- community membership and activities;
- possibilities for participation and influence;
- healthy, comfortable, safe and tolerant environments;
- strong sense of community.

A strong sense of community did not only mean contacts with neighbours. It also included the following phenomena:

- possibilities for the identification of a local identity;
- interest in the local living environment and its development;
- recognising neighbours;
- ability to rely on mutual connections;
- access to community building and activities;
- social networks embodying social control and mutual help;
- self-help, involvement, and participation.

Diversity also meant the comprehensive planning of a residential area, also taking into account the specific needs of families with children, disabled people and the elderly. It even meant tolerance of difference (multiculturalism) – a community that was free from racism or others forms of discrimination. Both urban renewal and the creation of new community activities were mentioned as factors having an integrative impact. All the aforementioned aspects were understood as fundamental needs of human well-being and as an integral part of the living environment, e.g. prerequisites of a "good life". In all three of the research contexts, a good living environment was regarded as a crucial factor that also provided a sense of safety and security. Viewed from the eco-social perspective, diverse living environments referred to societies and communities in which people could meet, interact, live and work together in ecologically and socially safe living environments.

In conclusion, the eco-social perspective on social work requires a holistic and multidimensional perspective on the relationship between human well-being and the living environment in the discussion of the relationship between social exclusion and social inclusion. The eco-social perspective transcends a number of areas of politics within contemporary welfare states, including building, housing, labour, social and health policy, culture and leisure, as well as the aspects of ecology and the role of the media. Consequently, this diversity of aspects makes demands on cross-sectoral co-operation and citizen-oriented practices. The eco-social social work perspective raises questions not only about the material side of life but also about the personal one. In many respects eco-social issues are linked to life-political questions in late modern societies, especially in terms of ecological, existen-

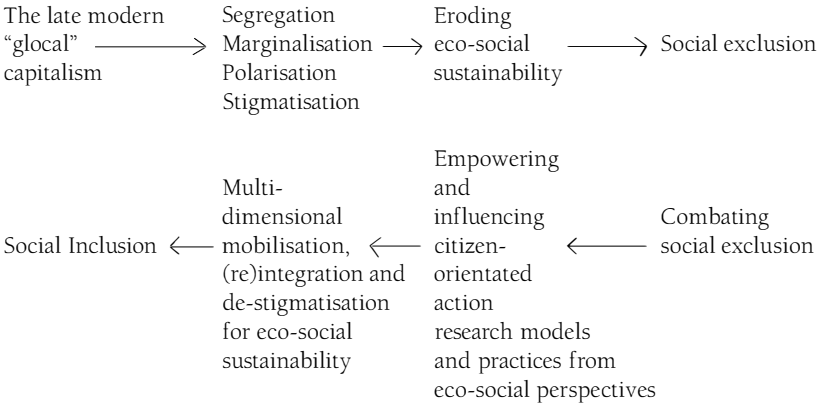
tial and ethical aspects. How should living environments and other conditions of life be formed in the future in order to rescue human life? How can we create morally justifiable policies and lifestyles that will promote sustainable living environments and self-actualisation as citizens in the context of global interdependence? (Cf. Giddens 1991).

The dynamic interdependence between living environment and quality of life

In the aforementioned ways, all of the partners contributed to the European exchange in the discussion of eco-social aspects in the living environment and citizen-orientated community practices from various perspectives involving university researchers, city partners and citizens during 1998-2000. In each city, local interlinks were also established – to Agenda 21 and city politics in Jyväskylä, URBAN 21 and "Soziale Stadt" (a Social City) in Magdeburg, and the Health Action Zone (HAZ), the Educational Action Zone (EAZ) and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) in Leicester – addressing the same types of aims as those in eco-social sustainability and social inclusion, both of which were outlined here.

Based on the aforementioned action research projects, the relationship between social exclusion and social inclusion described above can be summarised in the following figure:

Figure 2. The relationship between social exclusion and social inclusion



When referring to the word "glocal" capitalism we mean transcending processes for profit making between global and local interactions on various markets and in everyday life. The eroding eco-social sustainability in the figure 2 encompasses the segregation, marginalisation and polarisation of living environments and clusters of populations. It also refers to the eroding ecological processes of nature. The downward development of a living environment is strengthened through stigmatisation that is mediated by outsiders, particularly by the media. In our case, combating social exclusion from eco-social perspectives has included the creation of a holistic type of knowledge and skills by means of action-research in a process-orientated and reciprocal community partnership between university researchers, city partners and citizens. The concrete eco-social practices in each city included community and social planning, community-based social work and community work, which were influenced by British Social Action, Finnish social impact assessment and German eco-social thought and experiments. Action research that is done from eco-social perspectives within social work aims to study social exclusion from a holistic perspective on the living environment on the one hand and increase quality of life by mobilising both material and personal resources for social (re)integration on the other. However, it is impossible to provide any kind of "grand model", because in each local context there are specific national and local circumstances that must be taken into account in renewing social work. Each local society or group must therefore create its own models.

There is no doubt that the combating of social exclusion refers to political aims. Nevertheless, we do not want to create any new utopian beliefs that social workers and community workers have the potential to solve the "glocal" causes of social exclusion by themselves. By acknowledging this, our experience tells us that social and community workers can indeed contribute to the initiation of the reversal of the negative spiral of social exclusion in a learning and reciprocal community partnership in local contexts. We can also conclude that the Euro-local exchange of knowledge and experiences in the form of comparative action research is a recommendable way of renewing social work in order to create more empowering, influential and eco-socially orientated practices for combating social exclusion, in which citizen participation and influence are focused on as tools for development and change.

Notes

1 See the previous readings of the entire projects: Matthies et al. (2000); Matthies, Järvelä & Ward (2000) and Turunen (1999).
2 For more detailed information see the reports by Albers (2000), Albers & Ziegler (2000); Boeck (2000); Boeck & Ward (2000); Boeck & McCullough (2000); Boeck, McCullough & Ward (2001); Matthies et al. (2000); Närhi & Hiekka (2000); Närhi (1998, 2000a, b and c); Turunen (2000a, b and c).
3 Pupuhuhta is a suburb within Huhtasuo, but it is considered to be its own territory.
4 See also Albers (1999), Boeck and Ward (1999) and Närhi (1999).
5 The world "glocal" is used here in the meaning of transcending processes between globalism and localism.
6 The same kind of hermeneutic process concerning social development and social work has been described by Harald Swedner (1983).

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Aila-Leena Matthies

PERSPECTIVES OF ECO-SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN SOCIAL WORK

The question: "Will I be able to look in the eyes of my grandchildren without being ashamed" has been a classic criteria of ecologically responsible behaviour in the context of environmental movements. The key definition of sustainability since the 1980s has been "a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (e.g. Gilpin 1996, 206; Hauff 1987 in 1997, 13). Karl-Werner Brand (1997, 22) postulates that the current discussion of environmental, economic and social sustainability can be divided into three main perspectives. The first standpoint underlines a "go ahead"-type of *extension of economic growth*. Its opposite implies the demand of a consequential *turn and correction of the industrial model of civilisation*. Between these positions there is the typically reformist attempt to achieve *social and ecological modernisation*. In my article I would like to open some connections to this discussion from the perspective of social work. Whether consciously or not, social work is a part of the process of civilisation and modern society with all of its conflicts and, as such, cannot remain outside the front lines. I would like to argue that social work must define its position and reflect on its contribution to the notion of sustainable development on both the local and global level (see also Payne 2000).

In general it is not difficult to recognise that environmental risks are very often connected to social problems, social inequality and social changes on the local as well as on the global level. As already defined in this book (Närhi and Matthies), we view the eco-social approach as one possibility of understanding sustainability in social work. In this paper I would like to discuss the more practical application of eco-social thinking within the current context of social exclusion processes from the perspective of sustainable social and community work. I have found that combining social exclusion and the

eco-social approach can open views in two different directions. The conceptual discussion of the eco-social approach (see Närhi and Matthies in this book) has gained more political relevance and actuality through the concrete focus on social exclusion. In addition, the analysis of social exclusion processes and the strategies used against it are better targeted, since they are strictly connected to the dimensions of the living environment through the eco-social approach. Hence my initial thesis considers social exclusion as an "eco-social" problem, a problem to be re-located in the concrete social and ecological context of the people in question.

Social and ecological problems, which are connected to economic problems, also pose demanding challenges to the sustainability of European cities. My interpretations are mainly rooted in the experiences of the research project "New Local Policies," which was carried out in three European cities, Leicester, (UK), Jyväskylä (FIN) and Magdeburg (DE) (Matthies et al. 2000). One of our basic theses was that the traditional labour market is losing its ability to integrate all people (Matthies 1997). Consequently, the assumption that work is the only tool against social exclusion can no longer be made (see Beck 2000, too). On the contrary, we argue that the significance of the living environment in the wider sense is increasing. Issues like the opportunity to participate in one's living area, the quality of suburbs and access to political decisions are becoming increasingly important aspects of social inclusion, especially in the case of unemployment. When exploring the social sustainability of societies, the entire multidimensional living environment must be taken account, not just employment and other economic aspects.

The strategies of social inclusion, which we developed in the action research project, are more or less related to the living environment. The intention of our action research project was to develop new models of social and community work through various field projects (see Turunen in this book). The relevance of the eco-social approach can be interpreted in the findings of these empirical experiences. Some of the key theses of the eco-social approach are pointed out in my paper and are examined with regard to social work on the practical level. One might say that the paper is an eco-social interpretation or re-construction of the various aspects of the project's results. On the other hand, this is also a way to critically interpret the question of what factors have the potential to hinder ecologically and socially sustainable urban development. In conclusion, as is visible through the variety of central aspects of the discussion, the criteria of sustainability are not given but produced in the cultural norms regarding the "correct lifestyle" (Gestring et al. 1997, 10; also Närhi and Matthies in this book).

The living environment and social exclusion are interconnected

As Martin O'Brien and Sue Penna (1998, 183) state, the environment is not something that exists somewhere beyond the bounds of human life and merely affects people's experiences. Rather, environmental changes are part of society and its political-ecological processes, in which risks and benefits are redistributed. People with a greater capacity to use power have more influence on these processes and on their environment, while others suffer more from decisions that are causing risks and hazards. The quality of the living environment, whether in terms of the natural environment or more in the sense of social and built environment, is a highly social and political issue.

In all of the three cities in which we carried out our research, the ongoing social segregation of living areas could be identified as a factor that deepens marginalisation processes (Albers 2000a; Boeck and Ward 2000; Närhi 2000a). The local authorities, social workers and researchers in the field projects were able to clearly observe this phenomenon, which is a topic of intense discussion in the social sciences in Europe (see e.g. Häußermann 2000, 13-15). However, there are differences between the three cities. In Finland, the majority of the population live in privately owned houses or apartments. Consequently, in the Finnish research city of Jyväskylä, there are generally only small areas or single apartment buildings in public or private company ownership, in which a risk of marginalisation could be identified. Rented flats tend mainly to be inhabited by people who do not have a regular income with which to buy there own flats. Rents are usually lower in these areas, although companies sometimes charge high rents, especially for newly built apartments, since residents who do not have sufficient income have the possibility to receive a rent subsidy from the city. As a result, there is a concentration of unemployed people, single parents, immigrants, elderly people with small pensions and young families in certain tenements, while people with higher regular income have the freedom to move to other living areas (Närhi 1999; Närhi 2000b). In the eastern part of Germany, where Magdeburg is located, a very particular type of social segregation rapidly took place following German unification. It led to the stigmatisation of entire large living areas comprised of blocks of houses dating back to the time of the GDR (Albers 2000a). These living areas, which were once seen as high quality and modern, and were popular among all citizens, had now become unpopular living areas. In Leicester, there exists a more classic type of segregation of older working-class areas, where the rents are lower and the services are not very advanced. In all the research cities, however, there was still evidence of

a particular type of segregation, a smaller "island of problems within an estate" (Boeck 2000, 11): a concentrated microstructure of deprivation, which stigmatised the whole suburb.

I would like to add that it is not only the attained quality of living environment, as such, that reflects the process of social inclusion and exclusion, but indeed also the possibility to have influence on one's living environment. The Western ideal of personal freedom and independence typically also includes citizens' free choice of living environment. For an increasing number of people at risk of marginalisation, there are no real alternatives with regard to living accommodations. It is self-evident that the person's relationship with and attitude toward his or her environment is basically determined by whether he or she is living there voluntarily or involuntarily. In all three cities we were able to observe that a significant number of the residents in each of the research areas had not been allowed to choose their living area according to their individual priorities, but, rather, the decisions were based on a number of other criteria (finances) and were made by other bodies (e.g. municipal authorities). However, the phenomenon cannot be simplified and described only as involuntary placements because there were always a number of people who were quite satisfied with their living area for many different reasons.

As Kati Närhi states (2000b), there are also theories arguing that space has lost its significance in the post-modern society of mobility and virtual connections. In the critical discussion of community work, arguments have been made that it would be better to enable frequent movement in and out of the stigmatised area than to try to bind the people to their locality with community work (Roivainen 1998).

But as our research shows, especially for those who are for various reasons not very mobile, the concrete environment of daily life is of great importance. Similarly, it seems that, for example, young residents living in single households are more independent of their living environment than families with children, or old and disabled people. For those who are less mobile, dimensions of the living environment like safety, space for activities, contacts as well as social atmosphere become significant. For instance, in all three cities the field researchers were confronted with groups of children and young people who have no place for their own activities, something that seems to be a constant problem in urban living areas. Therefore, the option of mobility in the form of a frequent and low-priced public traffic network is crucial.

As Thilo Boeck (2000, 4) discovered, the reputation of the living environment is really key aspect of people's relationship to where they live. However, the reputation can be seen very differently and is extremely dependent upon individual experiences. Although people might well be quite satisfied

with their living area, they sometimes experience negative reactions when they give someone their address (Albers 2000a, 2000b, 12). All of the local researchers in our project underlined the aspect of feeling safe (e.g. crime rate, insufficient illumination), and it was the most commonly sited issue in the Social Capital Survey done in the Leicester research area (Boeck 2000b). In the Magdeburgian research area it was common for especially female residents to express feeling as though they could not go outside in the dark (Albers 2000b). This also hinders their participation in various meetings, which usually take place in the evening. In Jyväskylä, safety was also a primary concern amongst residents (Närhi 2000b). Feeling safe is a good example of a dimension of the living environment that consists both of physical and social elements. (see also Leinonen 1998).

All three local researchers (Albers 2000b, Boeck 2000 and Närhi 2000b) have stated that the social environment is the main component of social integration, while the physical dimensions of the environment have a secondary impact. The residents of disadvantaged living areas can view their living environments quite positively as a result of their social contacts to neighbours, friends and relatives in the area. Others say that social contacts help them to survive despite the poor state of the physical environment in which they live. Several residents remarked that their friends and relatives are the only reason why they had not moved to a better area. One consequence is that if the new local policies aim at stopping social segregation and the residents' escape from certain areas, a variety of policies for the improvement of social conditions must be extended and expanded.

The connection between social exclusion and the living area is certainly also verified in this research. There are clear tendencies of social marginalisation, which are concentrated in certain geographically limited areas in each city. However, the connection is more a complicated mixture of physical elements (e.g. quality of buildings and yards, traffic, level of housing, access to services and nature) and the social environment (economics, image, social networks, activities, atmosphere) than a linear causality. All three cities have started various programmes geared against marginalisation, which take the spatial dimension of social exclusion into account. But our impression is that it is precisely because of the complexity of the process of social exclusion that the strategies must be more specifically targeted and must be based on a better knowledge of the microstructure of the areas in question.

It is self-evident that in a pluralistic society housing types are also variable according to the life situation and values of the citizens. However, the current increasing segregation and social differentiation of living areas – especially in cities – creates a deepening inequality, which must not be accepted. In addition, the constitutions of most Western societies presuppose the state

and municipalities to guarantee equal quality – not similarity – of living conditions for all citizens (e.g. Dangchat 1998, 178). So far, segregation has remained a political as opposed to a "natural" process.

One-sided short-term profit orientation causes environmental and social problems

The radical environmental movements argued that there are basic similarities between the origins of social and environmental problems (e.g. Opielka 1984). To a certain degree this connection can only be reconstructed as a metaphor (e.g. Wendt 1980), while in more critical thinking a direct connection is discussed. Through globalisation this connection has become even more transparent: the unlimited and one-sided orientation toward economic profit and growth destroys not only natural resources, but also the social environment. Human beings are treated as the material of "production" – to be used and eventually discarded. Natural environmental resources are being used despite the fact that doing so destroys the social and cultural traditions of local communities. The environmental conflicts in developing countries illustrate this connection very clearly. But also in several (former) industrial cities in Europe, like in Magdeburg, the ruins of buildings, of nature and even of human beings are left over, since they are no longer useful in the economic sense. As Norbert Gestring (et al. 1997, 9) states, the ecological re-construction of urban living environment faces not only the challenges of creating sustainable future models, but also must solve the problems left by the industrial past. At the local and global level, the exploitation of natural resources and the re-placement of investments also causes new social problems, such as unemployment, and also destroys balanced living conditions. What is significant in the concept of sustainable development is that it insists on a joint and simultaneous assessment of economic stability, nature preservation and social equality (Dangschat 1997, 170).

It is especially the dominance of economic profitability that exploits natural and social resources according to a similar pattern, as the radical critics of capitalism belonging to green movements used to argue. Especially unemployment – with all its ramifications – plays a huge role in the dominance of a narrow-minded economic culture of decision-making, although housing policies and ignorance regarding the quality of poor people's living areas are also major factors. This was evident in one of the Finnish cases, in which a new area under construction was researched and the residents were supported by the social workers. In order to increase the profits accumulated by

landowners, new apartment blocs are still being built too close together, and the resident's quality of life is significantly reduced due to the lack of green areas and insufficient services and public space. (see Närhi in this book).

If we assume that economic profit orientation is indifferent to social and ecological sustainability, we have to ask how social work is functioning in this context. According to the critics of alternative movements, social work and social policy are constantly prone to remaining only in a corrective function when dealing with the consequences of exploitation processes. What's worse, the professional and technical means used by social work often cause further destruction of people's own resources (Blanke and Sachße 1987). Critics like these have inspired our research agenda in many ways. In action research about social exclusion both the dimension of unemployment as a "loss of human resources" and the unsustainable development of urban living areas are relevant. Most of the field projects dealing with these questions are located in urban areas, which are characterised by high long-term and youth unemployment, with an unstable social structure and a poor physical environment comprised of buildings desperately in need of reconstruction.

We could also consider that social work projects aimed at eradicating social exclusion can hardly locate the reasons for exclusion, and instead only attempt to treat the symptoms. However, as will become clear later, in Jyväskylä, new tools of social work for intervening in urban planning processes and for dealing with the structural problems of living areas were developed and applied with remarkable success. The means of social and community work are usually limited and are not in congruence with the object to be changed, especially with regard to structural unemployment. Therefore, it is quite an achievement that, for example, models for a new kind of employment and the enlargement of the concept of meaningful activity were developed in Magdeburg in the self-organised meeting-point of "Lebensmitte(l)" ("Centre/Middle of Life"). Also the new networking of institutions and citizens' groups in 18 living areas of Magdeburg, which was initiated by this project, is an option in combating the more structural problems of living areas. The Social Action Research of Leicester (Ward and Boeck 2000), too, has been a constructive base for the identification of structurally caused problems of the area in question.

On the global level, even from the side of economic interests, the number of voices demanding that social and ecological risks may not be ignored is increasing. In this context it is possible to understand the arguments that also consider globalisation as a chance for better social and ecological development (e.g. Midgley 2000). The preservation of nature and of the social capital of communities is increasingly seen as an important condition for economic investment. The environmental movements have already had some

(surely contradictory) success in building coalitions with economic power. It is self-evident that sustainable social development demands an analogous global lobby in order to be successful. If there is no such lobby, social work will continue treating the symptoms as opposed to the causes of social exclusion.

Sustainable development includes also social sustainability instead of ritualisation of corrections

There is no exact definition of social sustainability, but it is mostly seen as an aspect of ecological or holistic sustainability. For me, the concept of sustainability is comprised of a two-fold possibility for social work – and external possibility and an internal possibility. Externally, social work has a legalised possibility to demand that social aspects are taken seriously in the overall development of communities. Secondly, by applying the criteria of sustainability social work can internally reflect on its own influence on the social environments of human beings. Especially the intra-generational point of view in the concept of sustainability leads social work to question the direction in which it is developing itself, which I will return to and discuss in the conclusion.

The question of sustainability has become significant and concrete in our project, especially over the course of our involvement in various urban development projects[1]. All three cities in question – Magdeburg (Germany), Jyväskylä (Finland) and Leicester (Great Britain) – are currently involved in various programmes of urban development. The key challenge is to discover how the knowledge of social work and the voices of the residents can be brought together in the planning and development processes. In our project, a basic tool of social work regarding the promotion of sustainability, *social impact assessment,* has been developed and tested (see Närhi in this book). We argue that social dimensions, like sufficient services, a balanced structure of inhabitants and a settled atmosphere, are essential elements of sustainable suburbs. The eco-social approach deals with the sustainability of the development of urban living areas by connecting social, physical, cultural, labour and economical development.

In the Finnish part of the research, social workers have developed an analytical list of criteria for the sustainability of a living area on the basis of their experiences of working in the communities in the project (Närhi in this book, Närhi 2000b). They underline mainly social aspects, which are often connected to natural and physical aspects. The diversity of community struc-

ture, easy access to services, well functioning traffic and the built environment comprise the framework of the physical environment, which determine the frame of social aspects. The aspects of the social environment, like the social and age diversity of the population, social stability, social control and a sense of community (e.g. neighbourhood help, local co-operation, commitment to the area) are not independent of the manner in which the area is planned and built (ibid.). It is precisely this dynamic in the interdependence of the social and physical environment that is not sufficiently taken into account in local policies.

But the residents' opportunities to influence the re-construction, to realise their ideas and to participate in local decision-making, is as important as the other criteria of sustainability, for this is the factor which makes the area one's own and enables the implementation of improvements in the living area. Participation then promotes identification with the area, encourages taking more responsibility and prevents migration. We made the critical discovery that "the residents in need" were not really involved. Women, old people, the disabled, children the unemployed, who know the area the best, who spend a lot of time there, and who do not leave the area very often, are usually excluded from the planning processes. These people and these problems, which usually seem to be the "disturbing factors," very often are also the key to the implementation of the necessary changes if their demands are taken seriously. According to our experiences, social sustainability can be achieved only through the maximisation of the negotiation processes, with as large a variety of partners as possible.

Over the course of the research project, in all three cities, we constantly discovered the significance of connecting various political sectors with one another (business, social, health, culture, technical) in order to achieve sustainability. The interdependence of physical, economic, social and cultural deficits or resources becomes very concrete when observing community work in a limited geographic area with various problems.

However, in almost all the urban development projects in the three cities, we quickly discovered that the purpose of including social dimension was often misused in order to legitimate the re-building projects, and was not genuinely developed. In some cases one could even put forth the thesis that social discrimination was not seriously combated, but instead rhetorically misused in order to legitimise (reconstruction) projects. Social action and community projects were accompanied by urban development projects. But little or no financial resources were available for social purposes, although millions of marks were provided for the reconstruction of the physical environment. Secondly, it is typical that "social impacts" and demands are heard, that the citizens and social workers are allowed to speak up, but their sug-

gestions are not incorporated into the reconstruction process. They only legitimise the epithet "social" in the description of projects, since it was required by the financial sources. These experiences indicate the *ritualisation* of urban development projects (see Merton 1979). According to Merton, ritualisation refers to a discrepancy between goals and the means of attaining them. In the case of ritualisation, the goal is neither achieved nor really accepted, and has lost its importance. Simultaneously, however, the means of achieving the goals are still accepted and utilised. The actors concentrate a great deal of attention on the means. Therefore, ritualisation means that using the means becomes the goal and the original goal loses its significance. Applied to several urban development programmes ritualisation means that the attribute "social" or sustainable development is used as an expressed goal in order to gain finances, but is actually not pursued. The actors do not seriously want to change their conventional thinking, and the accepted aim is to use the means – the often enormous financial resources – for re-constructing underprivileged areas. Nor could we identify any process of self-reflection after a completed reconstruction project and before starting a new one. Only a few follow-up explorations were done, only few of the lessons learnt were incorporated into the next area, and mistakes were repeated. This ritualisation was observed quite evidently in some cases in Magdeburg and in Jyväskylä, while the British researchers were not as involved in the overall evaluation of the reconstruction processes in several suburbs.

There is surely even a risk of misusing and ritualising the social impact assessment (SIA). In the case of Jyväskylä, social workers provided SIA information during the planning process of a new area. However, while constructing the area, the main social impacts were ignored. The green areas were reduced, the community centres were diminished and postponed, and existing venues for community activity were set to be demolished in order to extend the parking areas. (Kojo et al. 2000; see also Närhi in this book).

It is due to these kinds of observations that it is understandable that the real meaning of the concept of sustainability suffers under inflation and misuse. But our experience is also that, step-by-step during the years of intensive co-operation, the planning authorities have shown a growing sensibility to the social dimensions of urban development. They are really eager to hear more about the social aspects of the areas in question. Especially in Jyväskylä, the research project was able to inspire a new orientation, and the city planners are even going to continue the SIA-development in their own project (Närhi 2000b). From a European perspective, the established co-operation between social workers and city planners in Jyväskylä is a significant step toward sustainability. However, it is still very difficult to convince capital investment companies to take sustainability into account. It is rare that they

see the need to take time to engage in continuous negotiation processes with residents and social workers.

With the exception of the field projects in Jyväskylä, social work in general does not have an established tradition of intervention in planning processes. Nor do European social workers at the local level usually express their critical point of view concerning the structural changes that can be influenced by political decision-making. Therefore, the analysis made through the social impact assessment, as well as the new practices in planning developed in this project, can be tools for a more offensive level of structural social work.

Social problems can be politicised similarly to environmental problems

The environmental movement has influenced social work, not only regarding the similar content of their goals, but also regarding the means of reaching them and their means of operation. Therefore, the eco-social approach is not only about the analogy of social and ecological problems. Furthermore, the impact of green movements on social work projects concerns a new model of political practices, as the movements and action groups have developed a political culture of action that was also discovered by radical and alternative social workers. The key question was how to use action and the media in order to bring urgent issues to the public and political arenas. Now, not only the conventional political parties but also movements with direct action agendas become the means of change. This was an especially prevalent phenomenon in West-Germany in the 1970's and 1980's (see Roth 1981).

I would even go so far as to say that the theories of social movements dating back to the 70's have once again become relevant in the current contexts of social exclusion at the beginning of the 21st century. In Western societies since the 1970's there has been a certain degree of acceptance of action groups and movements outside political parties and parliamentary structures. This tradition is especially established in dealing with environmental issues, but is also increasingly beginning to emerge in handling social issues. When speaking about social exclusion in an urban environment, politicians very often mention the importance of the citizens' own engagement. On the other hand, we have also very often experienced that political parties and local authorities only begin to act under the pressure of public and local activity groups (see e.g. Bourdieu 1999).

Trust in traditional politics and in local authorities is rapidly decreasing in ecological conflicts, as well as in handling the questions of social exclusion and urban development. Citizens' direct participation, local groups and initiatives, publicity and a new culture of expertise are the tools we attempted to develop in the field projects in each city. We were delighted to see that several decision-makers were honestly interested in supporting new activities. However, new forms of democratic influence are needed. These observations are connected with the larger European scientific discussion about new forms of democracy, active citizenship and global civil society (see for example Evers 1999; Roth 2000). As opposed to the condition of "static citizenship," in which one receives something from the state and can insist on one's achieved rights, ecological citizenship is a dynamic concept (according to Steward in O'Brian and Penna 1998, 178). It implies that people have an active role and an ethic of caring for nature. The authors underline that ecological citizenship is characterised mainly by definition disputes. For example, in contemporary environmental conflicts (e.g. food production) each citizen has to gather information him or herself in order to form an individual opinion, since the trust in scientific and political experts is diminished. Ecological citizenship is connected to the awareness that environmental issues are highly political processes and not "provided by nature".

The profile and demands of several non-governmental and non-profit organisations demonstrate the co-existence and interdependence of social and environmental aspects at the local and global levels. O'Brian and Penna (1998, 179) report that environmental activism is overwhelmingly conducted by women. Environmental issues are often connected to women's work, i.e. to the areas where women are responsible for their families and communities (food, housing, energy, consumer affairs, community management).

The title of our research project, "New Local Policies," particularly emphasises the new forms of direct participation developed in the field projects. In addition, we were able to quite concretely determine that without engaged citizens, interested media and small active groups only few issues can really be changed in local policies. However, neither pressure from the bottom up nor from the media alone is sufficient, as interested authorities and politicians are also necessary in order to facilitate change. They have power and can decide to support the new ideas. Consequently, personal engagement and responsibility among professionals and local authorities is becoming more important than their formal positions. Social work must also take a clear position because it is a well-known fact that citizens' own engagement hardly springs out of significantly deprived living areas, but instead also needs external support.

Throughout the European research project we have constantly discussed the moral legitimacy of activating citizens in the field projects. The Finnish social workers started this discussion by themselves, asking whether they had the right to push the residents to be active if they did not want to (Haikola and Hiekka 2000). The German students also scrutinised the ideal picture of active citizens as a prerequisite in deprived areas (Selig, Franzelius, Reimann 2000). The British researchers criticised this kind of "from the top down" strategy (Boeck 2000). But since we have continuously discussed this during the project, we have learned from each other and from our own experiences that there are various ways of opening opportunities with respect to residents' autonomy and their own interests. In Leicester, the researchers discovered that people were willing to participate, but the lack of information about opportunities kept them from doing so (Boeck 2000). In all three of the research areas the significance of local grass root level newspapers and other informational channels was recognised. Surely it is no accident that all of the three local projects contributed to the information policies regarding local opportunities for activity mainly by promoting the suburb's own newspaper and co-operating with it. Even the local residents were encouraged to participate in the completion of the editions of local papers.

It is also very important to recognise that regardless of whether the goal of the action can be reached immediately or not, the action as such is significant to the participants. Social exclusion can be reduced step by step when actions create open possibilities for participation. The Magdeburg field project demonstrated this very clearly. In the scope of the research we could find active unemployed residents, who established a self-organised meeting point in their living area and ran it by themselves daily (Albers 2000b). During the establishment process the participation was very concrete and made personal experiences political. For many of the residents it was the first time in their lives that they engaged in discussions with local politicians, with higher authorities and the press. The small successes achieved (room for the meeting point, donations for reconstructing it, positive press, job creation) inspired new hopeful attitudes toward democracy, too. But shared activities and learning processes as such are also important. On the other hand, if decision makers are brought into direct dialogue with unemployed people with practical ideas for their own engagement, a new view emerges that politics can also be influenced by citizens' involvement. However, the question of whether the citizens' activation is legitimate, and whether it is limited only to the marginal issues of symptoms instead of structural changes remains.

This classic dilemma of social work described above should not hinder new attempts at inspiring action, but instead should support continuous self-reflection. Hence, there is a constant discrepancy between the risk of

professionals' tendency to "over-activate," especially in the case of unemployed people, and the people's lack of opportunities to participate, including the lack of information about such opportunities. It could also be stated that people usually participate under very specific conditions, which should be respected: if they are personally invited, if they can have maximum autonomy in their activities and if they have the realistic hope that the activity will advance their living conditions. For example, in Magdeburg, the more we got involved in direct co-operation with activated residents, the more we learned to value their knowledge and their own achievements. In social work, we have perhaps neglected the significance of clients' participation as such. The experiences of the field project should be developed further in order to make a contribution to social work's methodological models and to combat isolation and to support citizens' involvement.

It is necessary to add in this context that different kinds of citizens' movements are currently emerging, although not all are in accordance with the goals of social work. At the same time as the legal democratic structure continues to lose its legitimacy, there are not only positive and harmless social work groups, but also, for instance, extreme antidemocratic political groups, which are constantly seeking new means of action. In almost all of the East-German field studies we quite clearly detected the connection between people's sympathy for anti-democratic groups and their lack of positive experiences with democratic structures in deprived living areas. These phenomena already belong to the category of "environmental risks," which require new concepts of action in order to be tackled. In short, there are no simple solutions to social and environmental problems, however their politicisation creates a new negotiation culture in local policies, which creates new options for marginalised people.

"Person-in-Environment" means holistic environment analysis and enabling participation

While combating social exclusion, the old advice of professional social work, beginning with Mary Richmond and systems theories, is still relevant: We must look at the person in his/her environment (see Payne 1997; Närhi and Matthies in this book). However, there are a number of different ways in which ecological and eco-social approaches of social work have implicated the demand Person-in-Environment. In our research project the aforementioned slogan actually means to understand the impact of the living environment while supporting people. Secondly, it includes the aspect of participa-

tion: Human beings become part of their environment through participation and while achieving influence over their environment. Thirdly, we see Person-in-Environment as implying a commitment to a better networking between various actors. (See Närhi and Matthies in this book).

The precondition for understanding the residents' environment is to be aware of what the area is really all about. In accordance with this principle, the main shared dimension of the field projects in the three cities has been the various elements of community work and community based social work. Within the scope of the research, various holistic analyses of the living areas were undertaken and developed. In Jyväskylä, Social Impact Assessment (SIA) was further developed into an analytical tool for engaging in community based social work. It is especially worth mentioning that throughout the research project, the city planning authorities have accepted the social workers as important allies in co-operation, and a system of regular co-operation was established (Närhi 2000a; Närhi and Hiekka 2000; Mäkinen-Kanerva 2000). In Leicester, a larger survey about the "social capital" of the area was done in co-operation with citizens (Boeck and McCoullough 2000). In Magdeburg, the "social space analysis" (Sozialraumananalyse) has been a tool of social planning. The city of Magdeburg also introduced a comprehensive network of eighteen small-scale and inter-institutional community working-groups (Arbeitsgruppen Gemeinwesen) from all over the city, integrating also local NGOs (Stechbarth and Ziegler 2000).

The researchers in each city discovered that without these actions neither the professionals nor the residents were aware of exactly what kind of services, groups and activities were available in the area. Through this eco-social approach, embedded within the field research, we have illustrated that it is possible to increase the awareness and sensitivity of local actors as to the conditions in living areas. Person-in-Environment means that a new multi-dimensional and holistic way of working can re-build connections between service users, decisions and politics in a given living area.

However, the slogan Person-in-Environment does not only refer to a particular method of analysing peoples living context. The means of intervention must also respect people's authentic cultural circumstances. "To take the people like they are and where they are" (Albers 2000) became a decisive new orientation for the field project in Magdeburg, while supporting the citizens in constructing and running their new self-directed communication centre. Person-in-Environment is a principle of creating conditions in which people themselves can become part of their environment in the sense of identifying themselves through active participation.

In the frame of the European research network we also discussed the balance between self-help on the one hand and providing quality social services

for the citizens on the other. Several programs in each country have shown that social exclusion can undoubtedly be prevented with well-organised services for a suburb's inhabitants. This is an important strategy, which I would not like to abandon. However, especially in the societies in which public services are still maintained on a large scale, we as professionals are often unable to see that the key question is not access to them, but the feeling of achieving improvements alone and together with others. There is a significant qualitative difference in personal well-being between "receiving" services and being able to do something by oneself, because a person can use several services and still feel excluded. To see oneself as a member of a community, to be part of life, requires personal activity. Finally, the fact that not everyone has the desire to be active within his or her own local environment must be accepted.

However, it is necessary to be aware that not every environment is one with which people would like to necessarily be identified. A continuous challenge in research against social exclusion is that targeting this kind of research project at certain areas can embody the risk of even greater stigmatisation of the areas in question. During the research – and independent of it – we were able to observe the extent to which the stigmatisation of an area remains once it has been defamed by the mass media. It increases the social exclusion of the residents very concretely. The Person-in-Environment approach poses two challenges to the sensitivity of social work and research. On the one hand, it challenges us to understand how the stigma influences the everyday lives of the residents. On the other hand, it challenges reflection on one's own attitudes toward and avoidance of further stigmatisation through one's own behaviour.

Our research enabled us to verify the importance of networking as a strategy against the increasing complexity and differentiation of late modern society. To paraphrase Niklas Luhmann (1989), ecological crisis arises, since each sub-system of the society is working only for itself, referring to itself and communicating only inside its own system. Each sub-system is functioning according to its own logic, and all together, it ends up as an uncontrolled complexity of single developments. Systems theoretical "ecological thinking" argues in favour of necessary networking between the different systems. It is not difficult to understand that a lack of co-operation between various subsystems of services and local policies – not to mention global – policies increases social exclusion.

Networking became a central question in the field projects, especially concerning inter-institutional co-operation for the purpose of improving living conditions in the various areas. The research groups were connected to various local planning groups, forums and working groups, and in all three of

the research areas there were also other projects connected with them. On the one hand, the working groups were experienced as new elements of local democracy from the bottom up. They gave hope and created solutions to small-scale problems and allowed for small-scale improvements in living conditions (enabling a better exchange of information, shared use of resources and equipment, the organisation of activities, rooms for young people, e.g. Ziegler 2000). On the other hand, the attempts to network various partners and projects in a particular living area illustrated that such an endeavour includes a number of obstacles. Competition and envy regarding finances and ideas, limited interest and the bureaucratisation of co-operation were just some of the obstacles identified. Each system works independently and tens to pass off problems to other systems. However, one can conclude that the field projects allowed us to collect important evidence to support the thesis that social exclusion really can be reduced with attempts that use a holistic view and which bring various resources together in a shared living environment. The best aspect of new local policies against social exclusion is, perhaps, that they enable meaningful participation in one's living environment and the possibility to improve it by oneself. However, accomplishing this goal requires not only political will but also financial support, as well as carefully reflected support and tolerance for a variety of cultures and lifestyles.

Significance of nature in living environment

The eco-social approach can also be understood as a "greening of social work," in the sense that it implements ideas of the ecological movement, like nature preservation, recycling and small-scale projects (Närhi and Matthies in this book). However, the significance of nature as such becomes a new perspective when analysed from the perspective of impoverished living areas. One can even cynically state that poor people without a car, without opportunities to travel and with a low consumption level come very close to living an ecologically sustainable lifestyle. Therefore, it is important to carefully distinguish between ecological consciousness and poverty. The basic ecological elements of life, such as water, food and housing, are increasingly issues of societal and political decision-making, from which people with minor capacity are often excluded.

The significance of nature as a part of one's living environment differs according to the culture of living and the priority of various needs. Nature as such has an important meaning as a place of rest and leisure time activities.

Although nature is not directly connected to social exclusion, it is self-evident that there is not equal access to the natural environment for urban citizens.

In many cases nature is seen as having some kind of "healing" impact. The first spring meeting of unemployed people in Magdeburg demonstrated the importance of nature to the participants, especially to those living in blocs of flats. Outdoor activities, picnics, help from neighbours with the gardening and the planning of the flowers and plants for the yard of the meeting point increased rapidly and changed the structure of the daily life of these unemployed people. Surely, however, one cannot compare this to the Finns' relationship to nature, which is very specific and significant. It is of special importance to the Finns that they retreat to (original) nature (forest, lake side, fishing, summer cottage) – alone, isolated and in silence. The interviews made by the social workers in Jyväskylä (Närhi 2000b) also revealed that especially unemployed residents considered their immediate access to nature upon exiting their flat as extremely important. For the German unemployed people, the enjoyment of nature (although cultivated), particularly in the summer, also was seen as an extended space in everyday life, although it was mainly connected to social events, such as barbeques, picnics, community building in small private gardens where residents spend their free time together. In Leicester (Boeck 2000), nature as such was hardly mentioned by the residents of the estate. In fact, some Leicester residents even expressed the view that, for example, the tree-lined streets typical to the area were traffic hazards. However, also in the British case, the residents strongly identified themselves with their gardens, considering them to be the most important natural environments in their everyday lives. Parks and playgrounds were also seen as essential in terms of quality of life. (ibid.).

In all of the research cities small projects and initiatives began to appear that were related to ecological thinking and to nature as a resource of recreation and as a space for new activities, especially for young people. We have already mentioned activities of environmental pedagogy, such as the work party cleaning of parks, also involving children (Ziegler 2000b). In Leicester the local researchers supported a group of young people in their initiative to build a bike track and to simultaneously become involved with the political process surrounding a project like that (Boeck 2000). In the Jyväskylä field projects, for example, space for outdoor activities, such as playgrounds, were important, and the residents experienced a great deal of anxiety at the thought of loosing such green areas over the course of the planning process (Närhi 2000b). Various forms of recycling are also quite often connected to community work projects (flea markets, re-using furniture and other equipment,

repairing bikes). When seeking out options for the creation of some kind of local economy, projects usually begin with recycling handicrafts, services and other small facilities lacking in the area. Although these examples of improving the living area are only minor aspects of social exclusion, the indifference toward and vandalism within the newly re-constructed environment, for example in playgrounds, green areas and house yards, increase the depressing feeling associated with the area. It also promotes families' decisions to move away from the area (Albers 1999; Närhi 2000b).

The environmental movements promoted ideas like "small is beautiful," and that big and expensive interventions do not always have positive effects. What could this mean in terms of projects aimed against social exclusion? It was quite clear to us that the idea of "from the bottom up" goes hand in hand with the idea that small is beautiful. Small local initiative groups, recycling projects, and step-by-step advances in residents' life circumstances were not only a consciously chosen strategy, but for most were the only option, since the projects rarely had the finances needed for "something big". It was important to enter into these projects from the "street level". For example, in Magdeburg we could compare the small success of our recycling-based self-organised meeting point with expensive centres without frequent visitors. Furthermore, we could demonstrate that it is possible to actually achieve something even without money, while the city had calculated that a new meeting point for residents in a former child day care centre would cost 2.2 million German marks (Albers 2000a). It was also evident in the other field projects that a significant improvement in the quality of life can be achieved with small financial support if the plan is well targeted and if the people are given the opportunity to take things into their own hands (targeted training projects, handicraft equipment, sport facilities, limited travel). On the other hand, we were able to observe that mainstream politics seems to only value projects that have budgets running into the millions. But there is also a real risk of misusing unpaid work and recycling conditions can be used as legitimisation to cut the financial means of other social projects, too.

Perspectives on the eco-social approach as sustainability

Social work's ability to honestly look into the eyes of forthcoming generations depends on its contribution to maintain systems, which guarantee social justice and sufficient quality of life in balance with ecological demands. In other words, I see, that social work's intra-generational responsibility certainly primarily concerns social issues, but such issues are increasingly con-

nected to environmental aspects of future societies. For example, social political systems, the means of organising social services and the rate of social cohesion and participation, are linked with the utilisation of the natural resources of global and local communities. The various understandings of social sustainability and the sustainability of social work can be interpreted in terms of the three front lines of sustainable development, which I mentioned at the beginning of this essay (see Brand 1997, 22):

1. *Social work's "sustainability" as continuous growth in the same direction* ("go ahead") means that social rights and income security are based increasingly on labour and economic growth. The institutional systems of social work are continuously expanding and becoming increasingly professionalised and dependent upon economic growth. Everything that has been achieved should be maintained, and the main changes are taking place through the expansion of services.
2. *Social work's sustainability as social and ecological modernisation* means that the direction of development in social policy and social work will remain the same as today, although there would be improvements in terms of modernisation, specialisation, economic effectiveness, ecological aspects and more equal re-distribution. This could also include the reduction of services, cuts and reorganisation of the existing system and only few new additional services. It means changes within the given frame of current possibilities, but not a rethinking tai re-conceptualisation of the entire existing logic of social work.
3. *Social work's sustainability as a fundamental correction of the industrial model of civilisation* is based on a consciousness regarding the natural limits of the current industrial development of societies. It sounds as though it is radical and difficult to apply in social work. A new model of social sufficiency should be achieved with less exploitation of nature, but while still enabling social justice and meeting the needs of all people. Its key terms are the self-limitation of professional systems and interventions in order to support self-organisation and self-help, and the autonomy and mobilisation of renewable social resources. It is not so much about saving the existing institutions of social work but about a social work that supports the maximisation of people's self-sufficiency in meeting their own needs. So far there is nothing inherently new about this direction, as these aspects are already present in discussions on, for example, basic income, social impact assessment, Local Agenda 21, new expertise and citizens' engagement.

The third alternative seems to be best legitimated while attempting to map out a framework of sustainable social work. To answer the question of whether and why social work should accept the third alternative, the idea of self-limitation, I would like to refer to Brand's (ibid. 14) ethical notion of the

"self-limitation of the exploitation of natural resources". Brand sites three different ethical reasons for supporting societal self-limitation. Firstly, it gives the forthcoming generations a chance, and secondly, it commits for a better justice of development chances on the global level. Thirdly, he mentions an "egoistic" aspect of self-limitation – it enables better development of systems themselves in terms of holistic networking, new co-ordination between social, economic and ecological aspects, prevention and the possibility to meet the variety of pluralistic interests. (Brand ibid.) It is also very clear that all these arguments are relevant in outlining the perspectives of social work's sustainability. I actually cannot see that the first alternative – continuous growth and expansion – is a realistic or meaningful perspective for social work. What has to be discussed is how far the strategy of self-limitation is realistic without first taking steps of ecological modernization, i.e. by using the second alternative.

Finally, I would like to conclude by trying to point out how far the practical implications of the eco-social approach in the social and community work done in our field projects can be seen as either a form of ecological modernisation or a self-limitation of social work. The interdependence and need for co-ordination between social and environmental aspects can be verified quite clearly in the ongoing deep social segregation of urban space. However, this linkage is very complicated. It varies according to individual factors, and the microstructure of the deprived living environment must be acknowledged. This is not very well documented in the various urban development and reconstruction projects. The plans are usually designed on the large scale macro-level, with large-scale finances and an overly ambitious time frame. If one really wants to attempt to reconstruct social sustainability in urban areas, one should be prepared to invest a great deal of time, especially in terms of handling the details and engaging in patient negotiations with local residents. Those who are most dependent on the area – women, children, the unemployed, the elderly and the disabled – very often come up with the best questions and solutions, since they tend to be the most familiar with the risks and resources in the area.

My particular learning process concerns the significant positive effect of the participation of the marginalised residents themselves. Only projects and attempts (whether individual or collective) that are accepted and led by the people themselves are sustainable in the long run. For me this is the element which social work must re-think and develop in order to aim for the creation of new local policies against social exclusion. Being aware of the critical concerns about "organising participation from above," I still believe that enabling participation improves the quality of life of the participants and also simultaneously contributes to the living environment as such. However, the

main achievement of strategies that enable real participation is their impact on a new kind of democratisation from the bottom up. In this case, participation is not only limited to compensatory voluntary activities, which are undoubtedly also important. However, at the moment I cannot see any other realistic means for creating access to major political and economic issues than to begin to deal with them on a very concrete local level – for example in terms of the question of a youth centre or a new workshop for unemployed residents in a suburb. If the experiences of action are empowering to the participants, the hope of improvement by democratic means can become a bit more credible.

On the other hand, however, several critical findings were also discovered – and not only in terms of the way other actors, such as political decision makers or the non-personal "economical interest" work. Regarding social work methods, for example, we still lack practicable methods for the support of citizens' engagement in a coherent way. Nor do the professionals use the opportunities inherent in their position as a link between citizens and institutions to their full potential. During the project it became clear that the tasks of professionals are increasingly focussed on the inter-mediation between the issues of citizens' living environment and complicated institutions.

Surprisingly, many of the characteristics of the sustainable forms of action (Brand 1997, 15) that have been identified over the course of the various experiments of sustainable development are also relevant in the eco-social approach to social work. Many of them correspond exactly with the experiences in the community field projects. Women's engagement in their social living environment, the benefits of integrative and cross-institutional working patterns, networking as well as a communicative processing of decisions are just a few examples. On the institutional side, however, the inability of administration to combine the resources of various budgets or to trust citizens' engagement strongly hinders the use of sustainable strategies.

To return finally to the initial question about the three development strategies, it must be stated that there are hardy any societies in today's world in which social work is allowed to follow an unsustainable strategy of unlimited growth and expansion. In the current situation, in which social work is under a great deal of economic pressure, and many areas remain underprofessionalised, it would be difficult to shift to self-limitation without risking the wellbeing of the most vulnerable people and without deepening social injustice. Unfortunately this argument is often misused in order to excuse the tendency toward the self-expansion of social work instead of clever self-limitation and the reflection of goals. An ecological modernisation as a "mediate" solution therefore sounds more acceptable. However, this alternative will also not be seen as impartial in the eyes of our grandchildren. The

strategies of qualitative modernisation in the given quantitative frames – which might be the most typical in contemporary social work – can be evaluated by the criteria of social and ecological sustainability. Even as tiny steps of everyday action, they either tend to maintain the status quo of the industrial model of society, which still indicates indirect support of exploitation and injustice in the intragenerational and global sense, or the modernisation of social work critically reflects its own interests and way of using resources. It seeks creative and experimental solutions across a number of systems and groups in order to support people in gaining and renewing democracy and in stabilising their self-sufficiency. The question of sustainability cannot be restricted to the dimension of expansion or limitation, i.e. *whether* there will be social work or not. Although it inevitably sounds pathetic, the commitment to sustainability demands that we ask on a daily basis: *What kind of future* is social work working for?

Note

1 Urban-Project of the EU, Soziale Stadt and Re-construction of Olvenstedt in Magdeburg; Sustainable Saffron in Leicester; Building the new area of Lutakko, the re-construction of Pupuhuhta, and the Community Development Project of Huhtasuo in Jyväskylä.

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