Chapter One - Methods and Methodologies of Social Work: An introduction

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As a profession with 150 years of history from the Charity Organisation Society in England, Hull House in the US and leading to the early 20th century international aspirations of social work through Alice Salomon in Germany, social work can build on a wide variety of grounded, elaborated and effective forms of interventions. These professional developments were underpinned from an early stage with education as the disciplines of sociology, social administration, psychology and, later, social work itself found traction in the universities (Parker 2005; Payne 2005; Engelke et al. 2016).

The various forms of intervention can be differentiated in terms of methods and methodologies. Methods of social work describe criteria-based frameworks that provide instruction and guidance for concrete interventions in the diverse fields and settings of social work practice and help social workers to develop planned and grounded programmes (for overviews of methods see Healy 2012; Galuske 2013; Parker and Bradley 2014). In a sense methods represent the 'how to...' toolbox element of social work practice, although they do go deeper than this. Methodologies, on the other hand, provide broader and overarching frameworks that can help social workers to understand their general role in the broader network of institutions and actors present within modern societies (Engelke et al. 2014; Payne 2014; Healy 2014). Methodologies represent the 'what is it …' ontological aspect of social work. Both methods and the methodologies are designed to help social workers develop

professional programmes of intervention and hence need to be embedded within the general professional standards of social work and its ethical concepts at national and international levels (Engelke et al. 2016). However, we must not lose sight of the complementary nature of social work as both art and science. Thus if methods conform to the idea of the application of empirically tested strategies integral to 'evidence-based social work', the art of social work relies on the intelligently flexible and organic approach to these applications as evolution of 'tried-and-tested' formulas (Grady and King Keenan 2014).

The context of social work practice has changed over the years. The process of societal modernisation has led to accelerated forms of social change and increasing complexity in people's daily conduct and organisation of life and each individual's lifeworld (Rosa 2010). To intervene appropriately as a social worker in such complex social environments, it seems necessary to build systematic interventions and practice models that can meet these complexities and are grounded in their historic and societal contexts. Hence, methods and methodologies of social work should be developed to meet these situations and need to be reflected in professional debates and discourses concerning the conditions of society and of social work itself. However, a dogmatic attitude to social work does not serve to create *praxis* by which social work advances in both knowledge and skills. This enables efficient exchange to take place about the different ways and forms of intervention employed and the potential effectiveness of various approaches, which are subject to critical interrogation in effectively serving multicultural and multi-faith modern societies.

Such a debate about the social work profession, a contested term in itself, is directed in this volume towards enlarging knowledge and guidance concerning forms of intervention. It provides systematic orientation about how social workers might design appropriate intervention practices in different societal settings and welfare systems. Equally of course, these reflections of social work can be even broader and encompassing if they manage to integrate an international comparative perspective which is something we undertake within this volume. What is clear is that social work intervention has acted on society to change and develop it in as much as society is reflected through social work practices. Social work is socially constructed but also constructs the social world! Thus understanding methods and methodologies help social workers to reflect on their power, influence and, therefore, responsibility to act on society in enabling and facilitative ways that are open to beneficial vectors of influence and change.

This edited volume aims to provide a broader forum for critical discussion of social work methods and methodologies and their underpinning concepts and values. As editors we were pleased to be able to invite contributions from authors from different disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives in social work from eight European countries. Some of the chapters in the book represent our selection of a few of the most inspiring presentations at a SocNet98 International University Week at Hochschule Bremen in April 2015[1]. Further excellent contributions were offered during the International University Week in different locations by members of the SocNet98 network but we focused predominantly on the Bremen experience. Some

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[1] 'SocNet98 – European Network of Schools and Universities of Social Work' consists of currently 14 members from 10 countries. It organises annual International University Weeks as international social work conferences at usually 3-4 parallel host universities since 1998 as well as other activities, teaching exchanges and the publications in the SocNet98 book series at Whiting & Birch publishers. Further information on SocNet98 can be found at www.socnet98.eu.

authors were specifically invited to develop a chapter based on their special expertise in a relevant thematic field that otherwise would have been missing from the book. The selection of chapters that we include aims to provide an overview about the current professional debates on social work methods and methodologies in a genuinely European context.

Methods of social work

The development and discussion of specific methods of social work practice can be traced back to the early days of the development of a more professionalised social work across Europe and the USA beginning at the outset of the 20th century, a social work that was organised, developed its methods of working, value base and purpose. Early methods pioneers can be found for case work, social diagnosis or working with families, represented in such people and the theories of, for example, Mary Richmond, Alice Salomon or Ilse Arlt or for community work with Jane Addams (for an overview see Engelke et al. 2014). These authors began to formulate methods for certain fields and aspects of social work and tried to develop a professional orientation for the first social workers and community development workers.

During the decades of the 1950s and 1960s a classical triad of social work methods was established in many European countries and in the US. Social workers at this time were mostly influenced by the three methods of *case work, group work and community work* (Müller 2013). For each of these three fields of practice, special forms and techniques of intervention had been developed in the different countries or had been imported from other countries, especially the United States. Biestek's

contribution to developing codified professional values drawn from Christian roots provided a strong moral base to the developing profession.

Since the 1960s and 1970s a stronger diversification of methods of social work can be found along with the development of professional ethics, towards deontological professional codes, as derived from Immanuel Kant, the great Enlightenment German philosopher (Banks 2006; Reamer 2006; Shardlow 2009). The growing variety of specialist fields of social work, an increase in the academic debate, the importing of approaches from psychology and psychotherapy and the establishment of social work education programmes at a growing number of universities stimulated a variety of developments in social work methods. This resulted in a much broader spectrum of methods of social work that many newer collections of social work methods now illustrate. As an example, the popular German standard social work methods textbook '*Methoden der Sozialen Arbeit*' by Michael Galuske (2013) provides an overview of 22 different methods of social work. Similar collections of social work methods can be found in other European contexts, for example for the Italian discussion by Silvia Fargion (2013), for the Danish social work discourse by Kirsten Henriksen (2015) or for the United States by Louise Johnsson and Stephen Yanca (2009).

The increase of systematic reflection on methods of social work also led to a terminological diversification in the field. To meet the growing complexity of social work interventions, a more differentiated and nuanced understanding became necessary. For the German debate, Karlheinz Geißler and Marianne Hege started to differentiate between *concepts, methods and techniques* of social work (Geißler and Hege 1992, p.23). They defined *concepts* as more general models of orientation that

organise aims, contents and methods for professional action, *methods* as reflective and systematised plans for intervention and *techniques* as partial elements of methods that are directed to guide and reach certain and smaller aims within interventions. In a practical example, their differentiation is described in the following keynote:

> *Start box*
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> *Keynote*
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> Systems theory is a *concept* for social work, systemic counselling is a *method* for social work guided by the concept of systems theory, and circular questions is a *technique* within the method of systemic counselling, applied to reach a certain aim in an intervention, for example the support for a change in perspectives in members of a certain family.
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> *End box*

For the contemporary social work debate in Germany, the function of methods of social work is defined by Galuske (2013, p.31) to:

(a) provide a plan for intervention

(b) create more transparency on the intervention

(c) make the intervention more controllable

(d) provide criteria for critical reflection and assessment if the intervention meets the demands of the affected subject matter, societal actors, the aims of the intervention, the professional standards of the domain, the institution, the situation and the included persons.

Understood in this way methods of social work contain much more than just directly applicable guidelines or a 'toolkit' for practice. Rather they need to be regarded as 'theories for professional acting' (*Handlungstheorien*), helping to reflect professional decision-making as that which is researched, appropriate for the context, and of the highest possible quality determined by a range of actors and outcomes (Parker and Doel 2013) and interventions based on theories and values of social work (Engelke et al. 2016).

Acting and intervening systematically using methods in social work

Models and descriptions for social work methods might sometimes wrongly suggest that social work can be practised by applying certain standardised methods in specific situations to achieve fully determined and controllable results. Here the newer discourses in professional social work discourse tend to disagree (Parker and Doel 2013). Authors like Hiltrud von Spiegel (2013), Malcolm Payne (2014) and Karen Healy (2012) point out that social work has to deal with very complex and fluid situations that cannot easily be standardised. Arguing for this perspective, von Spiegel (2013, p.25ff) points out that social work is generally characterised by:

a) A *double mandate* between helping and controlling clients that can only be fully met through complex reflections and decisions taking into account all relevant factors, value perspectives and possible outcomes of a given situation.

b) A target group of human *subjects* that need to find their relative autonomy and place in their living context or society by developing their identity, values and actions along an on-going discourse on appropriate and permissible ways of living, life

conditions and democratic negotiations with other subjects on the conditions of a 'good life'.

c) A *technology deficit* that describes how interventions in social work cannot be designed as fully determinable technologies using simple mechanisms and criteria. Rather they need to be regarded as more complex, possibly leading to unexpected outcomes and a variety of effects and side effects that are dependent on a mix of contextual factors and the subjective mental constructs of those people involved.

d) A special type of intervention of human services as *co-production of help* that is characterised by the circumstances in which the help is not actually given by the social worker but is collaboratively produced by the client as 'producer', the social worker as a supporting 'facilitator' and by the quality of relations that these two negotiate and agree.

Facing such complex and non-standardisable situations and conditions, von Spiegel (2013) suggests a mental shift from '*applying methods*' towards '*acting methodically*' in social work. This perspective stresses the need for a process orientation and a discursive negotiation between the social actors involved in the social work relationship concerning how social work interventions are best designed and carried out. The shift towards a model of process orientation is also reflected by other authors, like Malcolm Payne and his model of acting along three axes: *reflective, reflexive* and *critical* (Payne 2014, p.79ff.), or models of process-based professional interventions by Maya Heiner (2010) or Karen Healy (2014, p.29).

The role of methodologies

The shift from 'applying methods' towards 'acting methodically' implies there is a need for a more detailed reflection on the values, roles and functions of social work in society. Models for a reflection on these domains can be found in the field of social work methodologies. Methodologies provide more general frameworks that help to reflect social work interventions in a broader framework and a general process orientation. Hence they provide orientation and references for criteria- and value-based decision-making, can provide general outlines and help to reflect on aims and limits of interventions. Examples of methodologies are approaches like critical social work, reflexivity, user involvement, participation, diversity, cultural competence, sensitive intervention or ethical decision-making. Methodologies of social work describe broader fields than those encompassed within social work methods, but still they are situated below the even more general overarching theories of social work. Theories of social work contain systematic elements of models of social work with a very high complexity and provide approaches for a more general understanding of social work as a whole in all its different fields and approaches (Engelke et al. 2014; Payne 2014).

Methods and methodologies of social work – a contemporary discourse
This book aims to provide a forum for current professional debates on methods and methodologies of social work in a comparative European international perspective. For this purpose we have gathered texts from a range of authors that we arranged in two parts: *Methodologies* – Theoretical reflections on social work, and *Methods* – Professional approaches for social work interventions.

In Part I we start the book with six chapters concerning social work methodologies that contain theoretical and thematic discussions of special relevance in current debates and for the understanding of social work interventions in contemporary societies in various countries and contexts. To commence, Sascha Schierz and Magnus Frampton reflect on the different concepts and ideas of 'being critical' in social work. This is often a concept that social work students struggle with confusing critique with negativity rather than grappling with complex ideas and actions. Social work practitioners too may become rigidly enmeshed within assumed and unquestioned social work worlds. In their chapter, Schierz and Frampton trouble this comfortable acceptance. In chapter three Heinz Lynen von Berg provides analyses on how to deal with values and the formation of values in social work, a central concept which again reflects complex decision-making and practice outcomes as social workers seek to marry professional values with those of their employers. More recently in social work the genuine involvement of people who use social work services has assumed centre stage. Cecilia Heule and Arne Kristiansen introduce the concept of 'gap mending' as an aim and strategy for user involvement in social work. In chapter five, Elisa Matutini considers the terminological backgrounds of the concept of reflexivity and elaborates her conclusions for the relevance of reflexivity for social work education and practice. In the sixth chapter Lennart Sauer analyses the terms of disability and ability within the context of disability studies bringing the concept of methodologies of social work into an area that demands a clear perspective on power, capacity and social challenge. Finally in this section, Jonathan Parker, Sara Ashencaen Crabtree, Emilie Reeks, Daniel Marsh and Ceyda Vasif search for the appropriate place and ranking of religion and spirituality in social work assessment.

They critique current practices in the light of sociological and theological reflections on current societal developments.

Part II considers social work methods, bringing together eight chapters on social work methods dealing with professional approaches to guide social work interventions within current social work tasks and challenges. An emphasis on working with diversity, introduced in the previous chapter, is reinforced in this section. Gabriele Schäfer provides an overview of approaches for analysing conflict and for interventions for conflict resolution. Schäfer's work is topical given the continuation of mass migration in the light of world conflicts and in respect of the cultural shifts necessary when working in the context of asylum and migration. Andrea Pilgerstorfer develops a methodical framework for social work interventions with traumatised target groups and gives insights into the special role of social work in this field. Jitka Vacková follows the important topic of migration and gives an overview of some of the methods of social work that can be employed with immigrants and refugees. The following three chapters again deal with similarly aspects of the modern European world of multiple ethnicities, difference, diversity and migratory movement following trauma. Antje Krueger deals with the concept of participation and reflects its implications for the work with unaccompanied minor refugees, and David Urban and Alena Kajanová describe the special demands of Roma families and develop target group-related forms of social work interventions. Can Aybek and Gaby Straßburger illustrate community and neighbourhood-based approaches of social work with immigrants and offer four practical case studies that illustrate this work. In the final two chapters, Kristiina Vesama and Kari Keuru give an introduction to the activating method of 'One-Minute Video Stories' for creating empowering workshops and

activities of digital storytelling and Maria Luisa Gómez Jiménez describes the method of case studies and its potentials and implications for the law education for social workers in Spain.

We hope this collection of chapters will inspire readers to compare and reflect on social work interventions and, therefore, meet current challenges of the profession. Additionally we would like to see this book's European perspective on social work methods and methodologies as a forum for beginning to question and to meet the variety, challenges and similarities in this field. Optimistically we believe that it can contribute to these purposes and be an inspiring resource for readers in different countries and contexts of social work research, education and practice.

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