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Social Work as a Transformative Science: The Importance of Relevance Structures in Knowledge Production

Matthias Drilling*

School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences FHNW, Switzerland

*Correspondence to Matthias Drilling, School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences FHNW, Hofackerstrasse 30, CH-4132 Muttenz, Switzerland. E-mail: *matthias.drilling@fhnw.ch*

Abstract

This article focuses on the question of how cooperative knowledge production takes place and, in particular, how novel knowledge is formed and implemented in organisational action. According to the current state of knowledge, this process, which results in a change in the way an organisation acts, is called social innovation. The framework for argumentation and reflection is provided by studies from the social work sciences on cooperative knowledge production and social innovation, as well as studies on the hybridity of knowledge and its interaction with the knowledge resources of scientific and non-scientific actors. Relevance structures are recognised in this article as a fundamental structure in the field of cooperative knowledge production; they significantly influence the question of how and when new knowledge leads to social innovation. A research project on homelessness serves as an example. Homelessness has been a research topic in Europe for many years. In Switzerland, however, there are hardly any scientifically sound studies and there are also few documented methods of action in practice. From this point of view, homelessness in Switzerland is therefore in need of innovation.

Keywords: knowledge theory, Mode 3, relevance structure, science cooperative knowledge production, social innovation, transformative science

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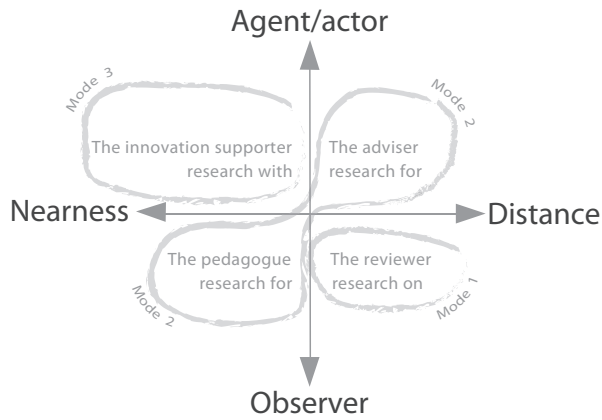
Introduction

If the aim of scientific activity is to generate new knowledge which, as in the case of social work, is also directed towards generating social innovation in the practice, then homelessness is an ideal laboratory: for the development of new services (shelters, street kitchens, outreach teams, etc.), novel methods (participatory counselling, empowerment through co-design of services with peers), and in general for transdisciplinary negotiation processes on the suitability of knowledge for solving social problems and preparing social policy decisions. The following article analyses the interwovenness of forms of knowledge, the relationships between them and their contributions to social innovation in the field of homelessness.

Theoretically, the paper explores knowledge theory concepts, in particular the considerations of knowledge production Modes 1–3 (especially Nowotny *et al.*, 2001, 2003; Gross and Krohn, 2005). Knowledge production in Mode 3, where science meets practice and people, allows social work to be interpreted as a transformative science, i.e. as a science that from the outset intends to bring about change in practice. A perspective is adopted, which discusses the question of the origin of the various forms of knowledge and their subsequent interaction. Here, in particular, aspects of the simultaneity of knowledge production and knowledge transfer come up for discussion together with the question of what is negotiated from an epistemological perspective when scientific and non-scientific actors agree on cooperative knowledge production with the aim of social innovation. Both perspectives should help to further develop existing models of knowledge production through social work science.

Theoretical backbone: knowledge theory

In 2013, Gray and Schubert presented a systematic literature review on the topic 'Knowing what we know about knowledge in social work: the search for a comprehensive model of knowledge production' (Gray and Schubert, 2013). The starting point was the theoretical considerations of Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2001, 2003) on the contribution of science to innovation in society. These publications were understood as a critique of the largely insensitive approach of science to the contextualisation of the knowledge it produces. Gibbons *et al.* (1994) labelled this 'science-driven, discipline-based' approach as *Mode 1* (see Figure 1). Knowledge here is basically managed without the inclusion of societal perspectives, which results in weak contextualisation of knowledge and a homogeneous basis for it (scientific knowledge circulates and is re-interpreted). Alexanderson *et al.* (2009) came to a role description



	Mode 1	Mode 2	Mode 3
Contextualization of knowledge	weak	strong	strong system knowledge | target knowledge | transformative knowledge
Basis of knowledge	homogenous	heterogenous	heterodox
Organization of knowledge	hierarchical	anti-hierarchical	cooperative
Science arrangement	disciplinary	transdisciplinary	transformative
Link research - practice	research on	research for	research with
Role of research	the reviewer	the pedagogue | the adviser	the innovation supporter

Figure 1: Roles of research and ideal types of the relationship between science and practice (after Alexanderson *et al.*, 2009 and Schneidewind and Singer-Brodowski, 2014).

of a scientist as a 'reviewer' who is 'doing research *on*' something/somebody under the understanding of a hierarchical order of knowledge (scientific knowledge, practical knowledge, see Figure 1).

According to Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2001, 2003), in reflexive modern societies with their massive problems around societal crises and economic instabilities, a science is needed that defines itself through close feedback loops with society by involving social actors and their knowledge. They called this type of knowledge production *Mode 2* and described science as inter-disciplinary, engaged, collaborative and continuously reflecting on results.

In a total of ten contributions, Gray and Schubert's (2013) systematic review worked out that social work generally recognises different forms of knowledge and ascribes its own significance to knowledge from practice. The authors refer to research strategies such as 'participatory action research' or 'evidence-based practice' associated with this understanding of a relationship between different knowledge stocks. But Gray and Schubert also locate an idea of linearity in all the approaches they analysed in social work: 'they presume a linear model of knowledge production and transfer (development, dissemination, utilisation)' (Gray and

Schubert, 2013, p. 342). According to the authors' critical remarks, social work seems to assume that the achievement of social innovation is a somewhat technical process, which is less characterised by contradictions, feedback and obstacles, but rather can be planned and is continuous.

The authors proposed an alternative way of thinking in what is above all a more holistic approach that attempts to consider the simultaneity of knowledge production and dissemination and the resulting new form of knowledge, which is neither 'only' scientific knowledge nor 'only' practical knowledge, but something in between (in the sense of a 'third sphere of knowledge'). Or, as Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008, p. 293) state when writing about knowledge in the 'in-between': 'The specific nature of this form is its hybrid character. And this knowledge has a value of its own, it's not simply an addition of scientific knowledge and practical knowledge.' Forms of knowledge are transformed—according to Gredig and Sommerfeld—they meet in a 'field', are negotiated with each other, and scientific knowledge and practical knowledge result in knowledge for professional action. However, this 'field', where different knowledge meets, is not free of power relations; rather, it only emerges in a social process of debate between the actors involved. In this process, practice generates its knowledge from the real world 'in a circular process of pattern formation and pattern recognition in action' (Gredig and Sommerfeld, 2008, p. 295) and includes scientific knowledge as one among many of its inputs. Practice tends towards a balance, a routine from which actions can be predicted and such balances seek stability so that 'new information from outside the real world … tends to be ignored or reinterpreted in the perspective of the pattern' (Gredig and Sommerfeld, 2008, p. 296) Practice, understood as an organisational unit, thus forms structures that ensure this stability and act like a sociocultural system. In this sense, scientific knowledge must always strive for relevance to practical action.

Knowledge production as a democratic process: Mode 3

Following knowledge theory, when understood as a process of producing new knowledge, social innovation is always connected with a turning away from hierarchical organisational structures of knowledge (science versus practice versus experience) and requires reflective attention to the (social) processes of knowledge production. This demand is not new to social work. Social work research in general has already called for equal attention to knowledge. Speaking of theoretical knowledge and theories on the one hand, and practical knowledge and theories of everyday life on the other hand, was seen in this context as one of the forms of domination of a Mode 1 science (Karki, 2016). A distinction

should rather be made among 'theory for practice', 'theory of practice' and 'theory from practice' (Kong, 2016, p. 535). This is because Mode 2 science concedes that practice is itself capable of generating theoretical knowledge from practical experience and practical action. Knowledge production must be designed as a democratic process that is aware of its legitimation between power and knowledge and strives for 'cognitive justice', 'in which the research process is itself a form of giving voice, of challenging power relationships, and of breaking down the dichotomies of the researcher and the researched' (Gaventa and Bivens, 2014, quoted from Heinsch and Cribb, 2019, p. 1729).

The simultaneous production, testing and reformulating of different forms of knowledge has been scientifically profiled in two ways. First, through the reformulation of research strategies such as action research, practice research, intervention research, citizen science, participatory research, emancipative research, etc. These methods work out which existing (and perhaps forgotten or little-noticed) understandings of the relationship between the researcher and the researched can be used to respond to problems recognised as relevant by society. The potential for innovation is seen here above all in the establishment of transdisciplinary research, involving the participation of researchers from various scientific disciplines and actors from the field. Thus, the aim of the research is no longer to prove that scientific actors must work together with non-scientific actors to solve relevant problems (participatory research is thus not questioned), but rather to answer the question of 'how far' this cooperation can go without negative effects such as instrumentalisation or superficiality.

Furthermore, transformation research has become established, tying in with the understanding of the mode of science and extending it to Mode 3. In addition, the Mode 3 approach commits the uncertainty of all knowledge with regard to its content towards the solution of social problems, while also speaking of 'society as experiment' (Gross and Krohn, 2005). 'Laboratories' are favoured as physical spaces, 'in which scientific actors and actors from civil society cooperate in the joint production of knowledge in order to support a more sustainable development' (Schneidewind *et al.*, 2018, p. 12).

Method: the design of the research project on homelessness

The research project 'Homelessness in the Basel Region' (Drilling *et al.*, 2019) was planned at the intersection of Modes 2 and 3. The project started with a six-month upstream pre-phase. All institutions engaged in homeless care in the city were invited to participate. These organisations included urban social welfare departments as well as professional Non

Governmental Organizations (NGO)s. In addition, the city's self-help organisations run by people experiencing homelessness, precarious housing and poverty also participated in the interviews.

A total of twelve guided interviews were conducted. The questionnaire covered the topics 'What are the main questions about homelessness that you think need to be answered urgently?' 'How has homelessness changed in the city in recent years and how do you expect it to develop in the future?' and 'What contribution does your organisation currently provide to tackling homelessness and what contribution would your organisation like to provide?' Based on the results of the pre-phase, a follow-up process of mutual agreements with the organisations resulted in a research design jointly drafted by all partners.

The people affected by homelessness were closely involved in the main research processes over following fourteen months. To set individual priorities and thus give the project its own rhythm in terms of content, a member of the research team worked for several months in homeless services and conducted everyday conversations. The conversations were noted in a field diary and excerpts from it were read together with the people experiencing homelessness and discussed in relation to their meaning.

All academic and non-scientific actors working in the field of homelessness met regularly for workshops. In the course of the fourteen months, a total of four workshops were carried out on the respective issues under research, as well as one workshop each on recommendations/disseminations and lessons learned for the service providers.

Results

On the producer of knowledge and innovation

The aim of the project's pre-phase was to identify and develop a framework of common issues relevant for organisational change and innovation in the field of homelessness. Since there was little information on the organisations' websites that documented professional positions and practical work experiences, an epistemological question became relevant: How to ensure that different knowledge stocks will meet in the field of knowledge production? This was relevant because the initial partition of 'relevant knowledge' frames the potential of innovation. Because initiative for the project was taken by the university following an understanding of its role that Alexanderson *et al.* (2009, p. 131) call 'innovation supporter', the research team redesigned the number and structure of participating organisations by asking certain organisations who had refused to collaborate whether they would reconsider. Through the

systematic request for participation in the project, the theoretical sampling ensured a group of organisations was formed that meets the characteristics of 'knowledge', 'legitimacy' and 'cooperation' (Figure 2).

(1) Knowledge: Trevithick (2008) understands knowledge as 'facts, information and skills' (Alexanderson *et al.*, 2009, p. 1213) and defines it according to whether knowledge is theoretical (theoretical knowledge), whether it is based on information and facts, e.g. on social policy, laws or everyday life (factual knowledge) or whether knowledge is gained from everyday practice and personal experience (practice/personal knowledge). It is important to mention that each form of knowledge is not fixed to the one actor and scientists, professionals and the people themselves are not prevented from contributing from all three angles of knowledge.

(2) Legitimacy: Collins and Evans (2002) point out that knowledge production is primarily generated in a process of high reflection where the knowledge brought in goes beyond pure interest to direct contact and concern. Following this, the research team graded the institutions according to the criteria 'in direct contact with people who are homeless', 'offering support to marginalised groups in general' and 'lobbying institution'. These types of legitimacy ensured the inclusion of the whole range of problem framing, as well as the different socio-political scales (local, city, state).

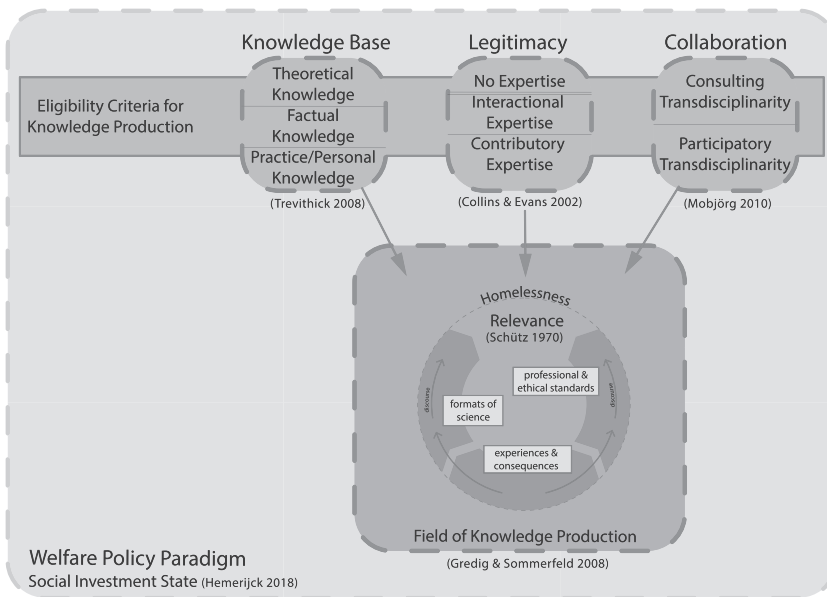


Figure 2: The field of knowledge production, its eligibility criteria and relevance structures. Own representation.

(3) Collaboration: Innovations are promoted through transdisciplinary communication that allows for contradictions, controversies and surprises. Mobjörg (2010) introduced this thesis to underline the fact that knowledge production should avoid a too rapid integration of the various knowledge stocks. Thus, opinions require consultation ('consulting transdisciplinarity'). On the other hand, making the differences visible again and again and cultivating them as crystallisation points for further developments ('participatory transdiciplinarity') will maintain openness, promote processes of ambiguity and thus offer support for the search for the new.

Knowledge production, which is intended to lead to innovations in action, must be built on more than just different stocks of knowledge. The proximity to the problem plays as much a role as the experience of having already reflected on complex problems in comparable situations. Research that aims at innovation cannot assume that this diversity will automatically emerge. At the same time, the responsible researcher cannot simply choose which key people to invite, since this inevitably leads to reinforcing their own opinion and approach. The field of knowledge production therefore needs a prior conception of theoretical sampling and thus criteria that regulate access to the field of knowledge production and innovation. 'Knowledge', 'legitimacy' and 'collaboration', as understood above, can function as a guiding concept.

Path dependency: welfare policy paradigm and knowledge production

> And our mission is clearly to provide food at a very low cost. And if people have no money in the evening, they are allowed to eat soup, salad and dessert... So, we don't have time to advise anyone for an hour on any budgetary or other problems (Representative from a service provider).
>
> We help where we can help, e.g. with finding a room or a home... Sometimes people have the feeling that they are on their own... I think they need more close care. And I know that with many authorities there is not enough time for that... (Representative from a self-help group).

In the joint discussion during the workshops in the main phase of research, the question repeatedly circled around how we can arrive at such different assessments as professionals and whether achieving a common attitude to the question of counselling and social support in homelessness support could already be called an innovation in itself. When analysing the conditions under which the organisations are run, the current welfare state was identified as the moderator of the problems that are described as causing homelessness in the first place (housing market

failures, social rights, etc.). This clarified the fact that knowledge production is subject to a temporal condition.

Europe's social policy is currently described as shifting from a compensatory to an investment-oriented model (Hemerijck, 2018) and is accompanied by segmentation in social policy. People affected by homelessness belong to the group in which investment in labour market-related skills is hardly ever made because the results are not considered promising (and thus not an incentive for investment in human capital). As a result, institutions providing assistance to people affected by homelessness are financed by the state or even foundations to provide warm meals or a place to warm up in winter. Where organisations offer professional counselling, this is mostly their own decision out of respect for the social work task, but almost always beyond the requirements of the subsidy contract. And as time passes, professionals adapt this normativity of the social investment state, they internalise the exclusiveness of the social investment paradigm and represent it as a professional position—as the above quotes indicate.

The workshops showed that only the self-help organisation was 'immune' to this path dependency. As a matter of principle, it refrained from any form of paid employment and it is only the facilities of the centre that were subsidised by a foundation. Based on these findings, the structure and distribution of power (in this case, the power over a classification of homelessness in the social investment paradigm) in the field of cooperative knowledge production requires considerable attention. This power derives less from personal or organisational configurations, but rather from a more general attitude and interwovenness with the welfare state. In consequence, the search for innovation in a transformative setting always takes place in the (narrowing) corridor of current socio-political settings.

Incommensurability in the field of cooperative knowledge production

During the workshops the research team observed a situation in which no discussion was possible and where there was no readiness to understand another position. This happened during a discussion on the role of homeless services in the case of people migrating from Eastern and Central European countries to the city. In the pre-phase of the project this topic was declared to be highly in need of innovation, as the practice institutions felt themselves to be acting more like 'managers' of these people rather than providers of help.

One group of professionals refused to call this group 'destitute' or 'homeless people'. They labelled them as 'welfare tourists' and justified why, for example, they were charged 40 SFr. per night in a municipal

night shelter (compared to the 7.50 SFr. charged to people whose last residence was in the city, or the free access for people receiving social assistance). Their opinion was that a citizenship principle governs the access to services and help. A second group of professionals addressed them as 'migrant workers', referring to Article 12 of the Swiss Federal Constitution. According to this article, individuals in need and unable to provide for themselves are entitled to assistance and care and to those resources that are indispensable for a dignified existence. People from Eastern and Central Europe themselves described their treatment by the institutions as socially unjust, since in one institution they were able to eat and rest free of charge, while in another institution they were expelled.

Two different socio-political positions emerged among the practical institutions: a first attitude placed the issue of homelessness in the context of housing as a human right (see Drilling *et al.*, 2020). This attitude finds arguments in the International Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ratified by Switzerland (UN Covenant I, Article 11). A second position referred in its argumentation to European migration and social policy. It is true that Switzerland, as a participant in the Schengen area, adopts entry regulations that allow EU citizens to stay for ninety-days without a visa. But the social assistance authorities reserve the right to review this right of residence if a person's presence gives rise to social assistance costs (Article 67 (2) of the Aliens and Integration Act). In this context, Article 12 of the Federal Constitution on 'emergency assistance' is interpreted by the cantonal social assistance authorities in such a way that costs will be covered for as long as the emergency situation persists, but at most until the individual's earliest possible departure. When people from Eastern and Central Europe enter the emergency shelters, they can—provided they register with the social welfare authorities—take advantage of the reduced rate. However, registration with the authorities triggers the deportation process.

As the project proceeded and the number of destitute people from CEE countries suddenly increased, the contrast between these positions became an insurmountable basic contradiction, which at the same time influenced co-operation in the field of cooperative knowledge production. The extent to which professional social workers were moving in the 'in-between' space when searching for a mandate specific to social work became apparent. The actors from the academic world tried to enrich this space of uncertainty with new knowledge from European research, for example by clarifying terms and presenting research on Destitute Mobile Citizens from Central and Eastern Europe or projects that had developed special funding for this group of people. However, this rigid attitude persisted in the course of the project, resulting in an unwillingness to co-develop knowledge towards innovation for one of the most important questions asked by the practice organisations.

Discussion: relevance as a central field characteristic

From the perspective of cooperative knowledge production, the aforementioned results give rise to the question of what is talked about when innovation is negotiated, which 'background foils' are activated in the transdisciplinary dialogue and whether—depending on the constancy of attitudes—social innovation is possible at all in transformatively designed research settings.

In the literature on transformative science research, little reflection is given to the ontological characteristics of the field of cooperative knowledge production. Karki (2016, p. 636), for example, says that the knowledge negotiated 'is embedded in people's cultural, social and political lives, and flows from assumptions shaped by such factors as gender, class, race, ethnicity, language and religion'. Other authors point to a 'creativity' in the exchange of knowledge between the various actors and that the knowledge available for exchange 'has to be related to a sound knowledge base and an understanding of human beings in their particular social contexts' (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1231). Overall, all these approaches remain conspicuously unsorted and arbitrary, which points to a blank space in the entire discourse of social work, knowledge production and innovation that needs to be dealt with in principle (see also Kelly, 2017).

Among those studies that discuss structures in the field of cooperative knowledge production and thus conditions for social innovation is the paper by Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008, p. 294f). The authors locate different professional approaches from science and practice as explanatory knowledge for the jointly determined problem; these can be theories, methods, normative positioning or also organisational and process understanding—in short, everything which can be made available from a respective level of knowledge in order to solve a problem innovatively and weave it into practice in a process-oriented manner. The authors also draw attention to the fact that this process must by no means be thought of in a linear way and that contradictory courses of action may occur, as each actor deciphers the information in the field on the basis of his or her knowledge. Innovation can emerge when

> there is a tendency to dynamic equilibrium that means that every new experience is perceived through the established patterns and new information from outside the real world (from outside the immediate context of action) tends to be ignored or reinterpreted in the perspective of the pattern (Gredig and Sommerfeld, 2008, p. 296).

Gredig and Sommerfeld consider disciplinary, profession-specific and praxeological socialisation processes to be the central regulatory mechanisms. In the light of the results presented here, this seems an idealistic concept.

Work with reference to the field structure of cooperative knowledge formation can also be found in interdisciplinary research. The concept of 'formats of action' originates from Schneider. Schneider (1988) used this term to illustrate the movement of disciplinary starting positions in interdisciplinary research cooperation. For him, formats of action are the perception of reality, basic assumptions, professional language and the aims and methods of a discipline. Disciplines use them to structure reality. The ability to reflect on this and to explain the formats of action to members of other disciplines is the beginning of the joint innovation process. However, being able to identify those formats of action does not mean that researchers are aware of them when they enter the field of cooperative knowledge production, because 'the specificity of a discipline is a little reflected network of ways of seeing and acting that are normally merely adopted' (Schneider, 1993, p. 374). Schneider therefore states:

> To be successful, applied science must therefore look beyond the limits of internal relevance criteria and incorporate additional structural references of the respective practical context. However, the barriers separating science and practice must not be regarded as mere obstacles… These barriers simultaneously secure the identity and autonomy of science as a condition of its attractiveness for potential user interests .. (Schneider, 1988, p. 302).

It seems, therefore, that processes of social innovation are conditioned by the structural characteristics of the field of cooperative knowledge formation, and that these structural characteristics influence the willingness to cooperate and the quality of cooperation between the actors in the field and thus determine the degree of openness to transformative processes.

In answering the question of the field's structural characteristics, there is currently a lack of proposals capable of addressing transformative starting points, i.e. the encounter between actors and knowledge from science, practice and the people themselves affected by innovation intentions. What we are looking for, then, is an epistemological foil from which the activation of the knowledge stocks of the individual families of actors (science, practice, addressees) can be justified and which, on the basis of this foil, will give us indications as to when processes of cooperative knowledge production lead to jointly supported innovation processes.

Dewe (2009) has hinted at such a design in his paper on reflexive professionalism. With reference to the position of social work as a science and professional practice, he outlines considerations on the transformation processes related to knowledge. The resulting conflict zones 'between practical and scientific knowledge in professional and/or organisational contexts of social work' (Dewe, 2009, p. 47) are in particular need of investigation, as they point to the problem of the transformation of knowledge stocks. For Dewe, at the end of his analysis, it is

the different relevance structures and social interpretation patterns that determine whether knowledge is shared between different actors and whether knowledge is transformed into skills. For, according to Dewe, it is all too often misjudged that 'scientific knowledge does not have its own practical relevance at all' (Dewe, 2009, p. 49). On the contrary, science and practice are subject to different relevance structures, which must be activated by means of interpretations based on the situation and subject matter (Dewe, 2009, p. 50 and 54). Dewe uses Schütz's concept of relevance here, which in his theory of social meaning not only includes science and practice, but also the relevance structure of the lifeworld (and thus the people themselves). This concept is therefore particularly suitable for the question of the construction principle for the dynamics in the field of cooperative knowledge production and social innovation. For Schütz, relevance is the reason why in certain situations of action and experience certain topics are present and others are not. Relevance is thus responsible for the highlighting of individual meanings as topics of attention and interest. Thus, 'all experiences and all actions are founded in relevance structures' (Schütz and Luckmann, 2003, p. 253). And individuals are stimulated by situational factors or problems that are relevant to interpretation and that elude our habitual routines of interpretation or trigger motivation (see Figure 2, part 'relevance' in the field of knowledge production).

With the idea of justifying meaning, interpretations and actions through relevance structures, it is possible to expand the field of hybrid knowledge of knowledge production to the extent that the question of implementation also becomes more precise. What determines whether a practice institution transforms the scientific results regarding the structure and profile of homelessness into practical action? At what point does research notice the organisational differences in practice, which are expressed in contradictory opinions when recommendations are reflected upon? And at what point do practice organisations and academia perceive the person affected by homelessness not as a person affected, but as an expert in his or her own life? So, when does a subjective stock of knowledge become a social stock of knowledge? The search for the relevance structures of science, practice and lifeworld, as well as their specific patterns of interpretation (synonymous with interpretative relevance, see Schütz and Luckmann, 2003, p. 379) should be a central future challenge for further research on cooperative knowledge formation. For only when relevance structures can be addressed can relevant (hybrid) knowledge become innovation and thus a new kind of action.

Returning to the research project on homelessness, further examples (apart the aforementioned price structure based on citizenship principles) of unsuccessful uncovering of relevance structures, and thus of social innovations that did not take place, can be highlighted here. For example, despite an overview clarifying all the opening hours of the

institutions involved in the homelessness support sector and the information provided by the people concerned, it was not possible to demonstrate to the organisations the relevance of a coordinated opening policy. Even the reports by the people affected by homelessness regarding the consideration of shorter opening hours did not attract attention as 'the unfamiliar .. and caused existing routines to be questioned' (Schütz and Luckmann, 2003, p. 258). Instead, important institutions continued to close from Christmas to New Year and during Easter week or even during the summer months. Nor was it possible during the research project to dissolve the contradiction towards a harmonisation of the cost of meals between the institutions in such a way that prices do not determine whether an institution can be accessed or not.

These findings can be explained with regard to the relevance structures; closing times, food prices and admission conditions are interpreted by the practitioners as an educational measure directed at building self-discipline in people affected by homelessness (see the first quote below), while the self-help organisations underline a form of ignorance (see the second quote below):

> This food costs three francs. We take very strict care … to really charge the three francs. For us, this is like the last autonomous decision-making ability of the people. The decision to put the money for food aside. 95% or more of these people receive welfare, so it's not as if they have nothing. It's not much but it's ultimately their decision whether to use the money for a six-pack of beer or for lunch
> (Social worker).
> Society is beginning to get used to the fact that people are travelling with bags and suitcases. There are sayings like this: here and there they can take a shower, here and there they can wash clothes, here and there they get free food. …. But the homeless people live in fear, in agitation and shame. They need a legitimate roof over their heads
> (Representative of a self-help organisation).

Conclusion

'Social innovation incorporates both idea generation and socially sustainable outcome' according to Nandan et al. (2015, p. 39), whereby 'the introduction of new ideas, services, processes, procedures or structures into a system or organisation is what makes it innovative' (Atkins and Frederico 2017, p. 1724). This demand for the unity of idea and action defines the field of cooperative knowledge production and social innovation, and most scientific studies agree on this. There is far less scientific support to clarifying the question of how transformation into action succeeds or why it does not succeed. Social innovation thus seems—also in

social work—to be closer to a normative vision than a scientifically based concept.

This article has used a recent research project on homelessness in Switzerland to apply the experience gained to the goals of cooperative knowledge production and implementation of new knowledge in the organisations. This was needed, because the practical institutions of social work in the field of homelessness support had expressed that they lacked scientifically founded knowledge on the topic to justify new methods or concepts of action. A research project conceived in accordance with the Mode 3 understanding of science met this call from practice and at the same time was able to include people affected by homelessness.

The process and the field of cooperative knowledge production was the main focus of this contribution, since both are described as the cause of the acquisition of new knowledge and are at the same time the starting point for the implementation of innovation. The research uncovered how strongly the field (in which new, hybrid knowledge is to be generated from the interaction of different forms of knowledge acquired by experts in different social areas under different conditions) is framed in terms of social and professional policy and personal experiences. The results show that the production of knowledge is subject to the rationalities of time, place and power conditions (e.g. in the form of the socio-political paradigm, in this case the social investment state). In the present case study, several objectives for innovation that were defined by scientific and non-scientific actors at the beginning of the project could not be achieved.

The question of how a topic, an outcome, an experience or a problem basically comes to attention and thus enters the process of generating knowledge in the first place led to the theory of relevance structures. From this perspective, considerations then arise for the design of processes of social innovation in complex starting situations, such as those presented by the issue of homelessness (lack of research results, no documented practical knowledge, large diversity of actors, embeddedness in European social policies, etc.). Precisely because, e.g. relevance structures tend to form routines and typologies and these are subject to little reflection, sufficient time must be given to allow for surprise and reflection in cooperative knowledge production.

The thesis that innovation can be 'generated' or planned is certainly questioned by the research results. Rather, the importance of chance has become apparent, which indicates that social innovation (in the case of homelessness) may result from a long-term programme rather than an individual project. The article also shows that current research on social innovation is mainly concerned with procedural issues (how is a process designed? how are co-design and co-evaluation related? etc.). On the other hand, research into relevance structures in science, practice and

the lifeworld, the stocks of knowledge they contain and the possibility of their transformation is not well differentiated and this leads to an invitation to pay more attention to relevance structures in the process of knowledge production.

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