

Evidence-based Practice – The End of Professional Social Work or Architect of a New Professionalism?

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“**E**vidence-Based Practice” seems to be a new paradigm for Social Work, euphorically welcomed by some, sceptically rejected as a danger to the profession by others. Coming from the health sciences, for some it seems to be a promising approach that opens options for the recognition of Social Work research within the political sphere, and perhaps even for a new and better position of Social Work as a profession. For others it is a direct attack on the autonomy of professional judgement and decision-making. For some it is the way to improve and develop Social Work and its performance, others associate it with at least the end of the emancipatory goals of this profession if not the end of the profession itself. The controversial reception of the “Evidence-Based Practice” approach in the scientific community of Social Work will not be developed further here but this debate raises a lot of questions. Some of them will be raised later. The goal of this chapter is to develop a larger theoretical framework to help understand why this paradigm is having so much success, why we have to tackle the challenges related to it (and cannot ignore them), what challenges there are, and why it is both promising and dangerous at the same time.

The demand for scientific knowledge and empirical evidence as one pillar of knowledge production as the strong foundation of professional action is one of the fundamental assumptions of the “old” professionalisation project

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(Merten & Olk 1996). So what is “new” with this paradigm? It focuses on the “effectiveness” of the professional performance and on the outcome of professional intervention. We all know that “evaluation” has been a key concept since the beginning of Social Work as a profession (Heiner 1996; Baumgartner 1997) as well as concepts of “supervision” (Belardi 1992), or “reflexivity”, “professional competence” (Müller/Otto/Peter & Sünker 1984) or “professional education” (Lüders 1989) which have always been conceptualised in relation to scientific knowledge and empirical evidence. So once again: why should we be excited or even irritated by an approach that heads in the same direction as we always have and even strengthens the role of scientific knowledge and empirical evidence in our profession? To answer these questions we have to look to the context of the evolution of the Evidence-Based Practice movement, i.e. on society and the developmental shifts we can observe there.

Evidence-based Practice, Functional Systems, the Professions and the Modernisation Process – A Sociological View on the Evidence-based Practice Movement

Our societies are marked by a process that has been named “modernisation” by different authors (Schroeder 1998, Weber 1996). In essence, modernisation means rationalisation of both production and reproduction; this means that knowledge plays a prominent role in these modern societies. Knowledge (and knowledge production) can even be thought of as one of the central driving forces in modernisation. “Evidence-Based Practice”, in my perspective, is directly related to the current modernisation of the professions and consequently to the changes of modern society. I would go so far as to say that this seemingly new paradigm is a direct product, and a direct expression, of the ongoing modernisation process. This general process also creates new dynamics for the professionalisation of Social Work. In the following chapters I therefore, want to explore some of the developments in modern societies as far as we can relate them to the professions and to the role of Evidence-Based Practice. For this purpose I will introduce briefly some sociological theory on the structure of current societal developments and reflect from this standpoint on our topic: professional Social Work and Evidence-Based Practice.

Functional Systems

One main characteristic of modern societies is best described by Niklas Luhmann who states that “functional differentiation” is the dominant mode of a self-organising society (Luhmann 1977; Luhmann 1997). Functional differentiation means, in short, that “functional systems” emerge around the

most relevant functions for the reproduction of society. For example, the systems of economics, politics, law, or social work emerge. Emergence is an important notion because the functional systems in Luhmann's view are self-organising or, as he calls it, they are "autopoietic systems". Autopoietic systems are systems that build themselves out of themselves. This means that autopoietic systems are closed systems that work within their own regulations and their own rationale. For example the health system works within the basic operation of observing mental or physical illness in respect of healing (or at least treating) these special phenomena. It has built up an infrastructure of institutions and organisations where the operations of the reproduction of the health system take place. There is a set of roles and social structures that are steering the interactions and even the possibility of taking part in this system. In short, you have to be ill or a physician or a nurse to participate in the health system.

Professions

In many of these functional systems we find professions (Stichweh 1996). Following Abbott (Abbott 1988) there is a constant fight among professional groups for dominance and "jurisdictional claims" inside these systems. In our example of the health system it is the medical profession (the physicians) that has occupied the leading roles. The professions were very successful in becoming the dominant groups inside the functional systems. We find the profession of lawyers in the system of law, the profession of teachers in the education system, the profession of preachers in the system of religion, the profession of managers in the system of economics, the profession of social workers in the system of social care and so on. Why are (or were) the professions so successful? The professions are very closely connected to the modernisation process through their use of knowledge. They were one of the driving forces of rationalisation by making use of specialised knowledge, produced in specialised units: the associated faculties of universities. Specialised knowledge is the main criteria for selection and closing the market to obtain a professional monopoly inside a functional system. Because the professions act on tasks that are necessary for the reproduction of modern society and its citizens, their contribution is usually highly valued, not only in terms of money but above all in terms of status. Members of the acknowledged professions were trusted and respected and the basic assumption was that they were all competent, simply by being a member of that acknowledged profession, even against all empirical evidence to the contrary.

Professions deal with complex problems that usually occur in the form of a crisis. Complexity here points to the fact that the problem and the way to solve it are not evident and that decisions have to be made. This points to the fact that these problems cannot be resolved by some routinely exercised

technologies (Oevermann 1996). Therefore the very nature of the professional art comprises the application of professional knowledge to the single case, and by doing so finding the appropriate intervention and exercising skilfully the chosen treatment to solve the individual problem.

Modernisation and Reflexivity

It is easy to observe that this type of societal structure is a dynamic, but also quite complicated form of organising society because every functional system builds up a complex structure for itself, becoming more and more differentiated. There is a paradoxical effect of this development. As our knowledge becomes more and more differentiated and complex, more and more problems come into the scope of our consciousness. By solving problems we create other, and more complex, ones because we are ameliorating our knowledge and therefore the possibilities of observation, as well as the possibilities of describing the structure of the case in a more differentiated or more complex form. What had been described as a pollution of the blood in the 17th century that had to be treated by bloodletting, today for example is a phenomenon called mucoviscidosis (or cystic fibrosis) caused by a mutation on chromosome seven that has to be treated in a very specific way that includes abortion (because prenatal diagnosis is available) as well as breathing exercises, lung drainage, sympathomimetic drugs, nutritional therapy and psychosocial treatment of both the patient and relatives.

The evolution of modern society, or the ongoing process of modernisation, leads to a dynamic self-generating circle of production of ever greater complexity. Better treatments are only one side of the coin. The other side is the consciousness of the problems and dangers, in short insecurity. Some of the consequences of modernisation are ambivalence, contradictory knowledge and contradictory approaches, and these create more and more uncertainty, and not – as we all sometimes would like to have – more certainty (Bauman 1995).

Reflexive Modernisation, the Political System and the Professions, or from Trust to Accountability

At this point, we can assume that the complex form of organising societal processes creates more complex problems and more uncertainty not only on an individual level but also on the level of society. Society as a whole is confronted with these kinds of complex problems and uncertainties. Or as Ulrich Beck states, this form of society is characterised by risks. This is the reason why he calls this form of society a “risk society” (Beck 2001). The risks Beck is thinking about are risks that typically go beyond the specialised world of one functional system. For example the changing climate as a consequence of our mobility, the consequences of technological developments in general,

global poverty are such risks. The consciousness of these risks, the political debates around them and their dissemination by means of mass media, together with the knowledge that these risks derive from the specific form of our societal organisation and reproduction together with the paradoxical effect of knowledge production creating more complexity described above lead to a phenomenon that Beck calls “reflexive modernisation”. Beck identifies a period of societal development that he calls “reflexive modernisation” (see Beck/Giddens & Lash 1997). The institutions of the modern society, which are the main driving forces of modernisation, are put under pressure by these reflexive processes. Their success turns into their problem because of the never ending process of problem-solving and problem-creating. Debates in the public sphere are an expression of this societal reflexivity. The debates give rise to critique and questions. One central question in this context is: are our main institutions able to solve the problems we are in? Or at least are they really able to work effectively on that part of the problem or crisis they are believed to be competent for? Or put even more briefly: can we really trust them? In sum, the process of the reproduction of modern society itself creates a whirlwind of social change and a constant lack of legitimacy for the modern institutions such as science, politics, and the professions (Heinze/Schmid & Strünck 1999) because modernisation in its essence includes reasoning about the societal order created by modernisation.

If it is true that legitimacy becomes a rare resource for all modern institutions, then this is crucial for the political system. The political system needs legitimacy for its survival like plants need the sun. The political system runs on the basic operation of getting into power and staying there. In democratic (functionally differentiated) societies where the people have the final decision on who gets the power for a period of time, accordance of the legitimacy of political decisions is the major resource of power. The trustworthiness of the political leaders (see Sennett 1994) depends on the legitimacy of their politics and trustworthiness, as well as legitimacy, of today’s political leaders depends on whether they seem competent to solve the problems, or at least to steer competently in heavy weather.

The political system has to produce answers or solutions to the complex problems that modern societies have created and face today. Problem-solving would be the best way to obtain legitimacy but most of the complex problems that have to be solved, like unemployment or climate change or global poverty, cannot be solved in the short periods of time the leaders have before their legitimacy is reassessed at the poll. Another problem is that some of the most important problems are connected to global processes and are therefore out of the control of nation states. Therefore, new answers or new approaches have to be created as a way of demonstrating competence of steering in heavy weather and perhaps as a way of solving the problems. We can observe that new answers and approaches have been implemented almost everywhere in modern western societies. They have been formulated for example by Blair and Schröder (Schröder & Blair 1999) and can be

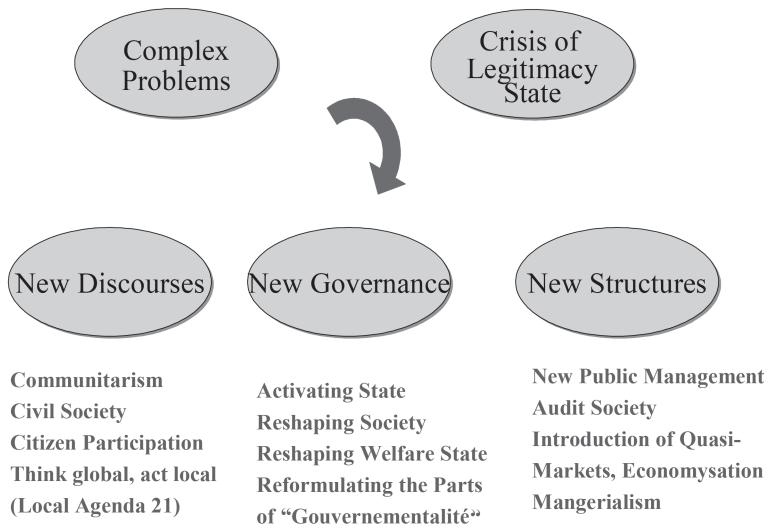


Figure 1: Change of the political system as a product of reflexive modernisation

classified under one label: modernisation. What the political system promotes is in one way just more of the same. We currently are living through a new round of modernisation and this means rationalisation and hence knowledge production. However, it is not completely the same. So what makes the difference? The difference derives from the answer to the following question: How can you show your competence in steering, if the systems are closed and therefore completely autonomous. They are linked together ("*strukturelle Kopplung*" Luhmann 1984; Schimank 1998), but they cannot be directly controlled or steered by another system. They control and steer themselves, if steering is the right expression in terms of autopoietic, or self-organising, systems. The answer is that you have to transform the modes of exchange between the political system and the other systems, at least those of them, which are dependent on financial resources allocated by the state (the political-administrative system). And you have to implement a new kind of communication that is linked to the allocation of resources.

In the following figure I have listed three dimensions in which we can observe changes that I would interpret as a consequence of the new round of (reflexive) modernisation. "New discourses" (for example: Perlas 2000; Wendt 1996), "new governance" (for example: Löffler 2001; Grunwald 2001; Heinze, et al. 1999) and "new structures" (for example: Damkowski 1995; Muetzelfeld 2000). The examples under each dimension may illustrate the range of social change that has taken place. There is no space here to discuss all these keywords and the debates behind them. I will just continue my reconstruction of these processes in the context of the development of modern societies and its effects on the professions, and pursue the question

of how these changes affect the professions in terms of how the political system can realise the power to influence the processes inside the functional systems.

For this purpose I need to introduce some elements of the concept of “*Gouvernementalité*” of Foucault (2000). Foucault’s concern was, again in very brief terms, to understand how power leads to the possibility of gaining control over social processes, over autonomous actors, which led him to his studies about “*disciplinisation*” (see Faubion 2000). Foucault was occupied by the question of how “government” can work, or how power can be realised. How can you make someone do what you want him to do? In his notion of “*gouvernementalité*” Foucault reflects on the contradiction of government and sovereignty, or of leadership and autonomy as I would describe it. Or to put it another way: how can you govern autonomous entities or how can the political system steer closed functional systems? The point Foucault reaches, and that is of interest in our context here, is that you have to develop or to create a “mentality” within the autonomous entities that makes them act finally in the way you want them to act. And in creating such a “mentality” you create a form of communication that can be controlled in a specific way. Foucault developed these thoughts in the 1970s and he then described a possible model of how the political system could gain power in the sense of governing other systems; this way was “*economisation*”, which means to measure social processes that are not economic processes using economic measures. The dimension I called “new structures” is nothing other than what Foucault developed in his analysis: an “*economisation*” of the social processes within the administration and in the relations between the administration and every other system that depends on public funding: science, education, health, and social work.

Because there is an underlying process of seeking legitimacy, the implementation of such a transformation is necessarily linked to ideology. This is the dimension I called above “new discourses”. I will pick out two elements of the ideological part of these processes. The first goes automatically hand in hand with the *economisation*: the implementation of the market ideology into processes where there are no markets. The market in our culture has the image of being the most efficient and the most effective mode of functioning, so this seems to be a good thing with regard to the complex problems to be solved. Once the quasi-markets are introduced into the systems of science, education, health and social work, the state gets a quasi-monopoly on the buyer side of services (because the students, patients and clients, or in economic terminology the “consumers”, do not pay for all of the costs). This gives a lot of direct power to the political-administrative system. However, the power of the state in terms of reflexive modernisation is suspect so the government and the administration not only have to demonstrate that they are steering well in heavy weather, or even better that they are steering

towards the production of better solutions, but they have to show that they do not abuse the power they have. This is where the second route comes into sight: quality or more precisely quality discourses (quality ideology). To wield its power, that derives from the introduction of quasimarkets into the functional systems, the administration has to show that all this is made with the intention of solving complex problems and “steering” means that the administration with respect to its financial and societal responsibilities “buys” only good services and therefore needs evidence. Therefore, production of knowledge or evidence has the double, and partly contradictory, function of producing legitimacy for the political system and knowledge-based solutions at the same time. If the measures are made and interpreted within an economic rationale (by combining efficacy with efficiency or even replacing efficacy by efficiency on the level of measurement), and if the flow of resources depends on the decisions made in the political environment of the system on the basis of these measurements, then the effect of the generated evidence is disciplinisation because the new environmental conditions create a pressure on the processes inside the system and a new “mentality” or a new rationality of regulation is formed. A new structuring of the social processes is implemented inside the closed systems. The term that has been created for this kind of social change is “managerialism” (Clarke/Gewirtz & McLaughlin 2000). In short, this means implementation of the economic or managerial way of thinking (mentality) in the professional systems, to be able to survive in an environment where this kind of thinking is demanded. “What works” goes in the same direction. Here we don’t have economic measures but this approach delivers an extreme reduction of complexity of quality issues to the political system. And reduction of complexity in uncertain times creates legitimacy.

To summarise: the “reflexive” questions raised by the societal process towards the institutions of modernisation such as “Are they able to solve the problems?” and “Can we trust them?” and the crisis of legitimacy of the political-administrative system have been answered by the political system in a “smart” way. The answer is: “You are right, you can’t trust them (the professions), but we (the political system) will take care that they improve the quality of their services, i.e. improve the outcome of their problem-solving processes, so you can trust us.” The crisis of legitimacy of the political system has been solved (temporarily) by claiming the competence to steer towards better solutions and to pass the buck of legitimacy problem to the professions. The mode of communication between the professions inside the functional systems and their societal and political environment has changed from “trust” to “accountability” (Aldridge 1996; Hanlon 1999; Evetts 2003), which is an economic concept and which creates the possibility for an external control by measurement.

Consequences: What Rationale Dominates?

If we were to close the chapter here my conclusion would be: forget about Evidence-Based Social Work. It is just a means of creating legitimacy for the political system; it is just a means of establishing political control over professional work and finally a means of cutting back the welfare state. My thesis from the start, that there is the promise of a new dynamic of the professionalisation of Social Work in the current processes would be meaningless. Unfortunately, or fortunately, things are not so easy, our knowledge goes beyond this conclusion, we have to face more complexity and learn to cope with it. The current processes are still structured by the conditions of “reflexive modernisation”. Here again the processes are building a self-generating dynamic inside the functional systems. The professional rationale is not just replaced by an economic one but still persists and is probably dominant because the problem-solving processes, by their specific structure and their very nature, demand a professional rationale. The political control over the professions’ autonomy is still limited to the extent to which the new “mentality” really works. Different studies we have carried out in the last few years have shown that there is a “cultural struggle”, and perhaps a cultural change, going on in the organisations of Social Work (Sommerfeld & Haller 2003; Nadai & Sommerfeld 2005, Nagel/Kessler & Sommerfeld 2004). The changes in the environment cannot be ignored. Consequently the economic rationale has to be built into the procedures within Social Work organisations. However, together, and simultaneously with the implementation of the accountability mode and the economisation of professional performance, the (reflexive) question is implemented how this really contributes to the problem-solving and how all these changes, reorganisations, implementations of controlling instruments and audits, together with all the costs related to this, really serve the accomplishment of professional responsibility towards the clients and society. We have some evidence that these changes are not efficient and are only modestly effective (Mäder 2001).

The question is raised whether knowledge and Evidence-Based professional Social Work *as a new form of professionalism* could represent a better way of accountable problem-solving than economic and simplifying measures. In a dialectical way the economisation creates, on the other side of the coin, a stronger emphasis on professional identity and creates a stronger need for professional knowledge that could be used as a counterpart to the purely economic or managerial perspective.

To reiterate: the processes in general are basically structured by the “contradictory unit” of legitimacy and problem-solving. External (political) control can, in the long run, maintain legitimate power only if there are solutions for the complex problems. This is why the economic rationale, as well as simple outcome measurements, for the purpose of generating legitimacy for political decisions cannot be sufficient in the long run. In contrast, this is why

professional knowledge and know-how are still systematically required. It is true that without accountability today there is a weak legitimacy and this probably leads to the termination of funding, but without a professional performance there is ultimately nothing to account for.

Knowledge Society and New Forms of Knowledge Production

Besides the processes of economisation of the professions in the context of new governmental strategies there are other elements of what I would interpret as a new round of modernisation. One of these elements is the higher value attributed to applied knowledge. I want to characterise this form of observable social change using the keyword “knowledge society”. This is the background that gives plausibility to my thesis of impending progress for the professionalisation of Social Work together with the Evidence-Based Practice movement beyond its political dimension. As mentioned above, rationalisation is one of the major elements of modernisation. Knowledge and knowledge production are the means for this. Once again: the “new” round of modernisation is “more of the same” but with some new elements that make a difference.

The term “knowledge society” marks a difference with regard to the role and the status of knowledge in society. Knowledge has become, if we follow for example Stehr (Stehr 1994; Foray 2002), the third major factor for the production of goods and problem-solving in general, after the traditional factors of capital and labour. Knowledge makes the difference in modern production processes and creates the decisive advantage in competitive markets. However, knowledge society goes much further. Knowledge as one of the basic forces of modernisation has been upgraded in the last few years and is now highly valued because the complex problems in general demand more complex knowledge. In terms of modernisation we cannot step back and ignore the complexity we have reached. The alternative to knowledge production on a higher level of complexity is religious fundamentalism as preached and practiced in some radical Muslim communities as well as in the Christian Bible belt of the United States. Ignoring the complexity, as well as the knowledge we have acquired so far, will not solve the problems neither will terrorism nor war.

Far beyond any political strategy the modernisation process creates a demand for more appropriate problem-solving knowledge. In so far as this process is a reflexive modernisation process, i.e. that the later processes respond to the former ones, it is not exactly more of the same but there have been qualitative changes created by the self-organising process itself. However, the political system, depending on its legitimacy and therefore its sensitivity to important developments, has adopted this tendency and is now

one of the big promoters of the knowledge society. I want to pick out two of these qualitative changes: The shift from fundamental science as the most acknowledged part of knowledge production to the applied sciences and the “new modes of knowledge production” as described by Gibbons *et al.* (Gibbons/Limoges/Nowotny/Schwartzman/Scott & Trow 1994). I do not want to describe in detail here what is meant exactly by the new modes of knowledge production. I just want to highlight the fact that these new modes of knowledge production react to the need for more complex and applied knowledge by forming new structures of knowledge production. The corresponding forms of knowledge production are fluid, short-term orientated, cooperative, and local. These forms are based on the principle of transdisciplinarity, i.e. the bringing together of different people [specialists from different professions and disciplines as well as stakeholders (politicians, citizens, clients and so on)] to create directly applicable problem-solving knowledge by recombination and integration of the different knowledge horizons of the different actors and by thus reaching a higher level of complexity. The questions to be answered in these knowledge production contexts are not derived from scientific debate but are formulated directly in the context of problem-solving. The primary goal is to produce knowledge that can be used directly in the context of its production. Only in a secondary process, if at all, may the findings be used for theory building and the amelioration of the understanding of the phenomenological world in general (Sommerfeld 2000). Partly this leads to a change of the institutions of knowledge production, partly these new forms are integrated in the classic institutions such as universities and the professional fields. Principally it does not matter where the useful knowledge comes from, but together with these processes, there is a sustainable revaluing of the applied sciences and a switch in appreciation from the fundamental to the applied sciences.

Whatever all the implications of knowledge society may be: for those who have a professional and a scientific view of Social Work, the knowledge society and the added value to applied knowledge represents a tremendous opportunity. Knowledge and Evidence-Based Social Work (and professional structures which refer to knowledge) have never had better chances to be implemented, because the societal environment of the system of Social Work demands evidence and the use of knowledge. In addition, the applied sciences within the social sciences receive more attention and this leads to a growth of research capacities for the discipline of Social Work (at least for Switzerland this is true). The crucial question for the discipline is, what can we make out of this opportunity, and are we able to improve the problem-solving capacity of the profession by cooperating in these new forms of knowledge production or by producing evidence with our traditional methods and procedures. The other question is, are we able to deal with the political demands for reduction of complexity by measurement of outcomes, do we use our methodological and epistemological knowledge and do we take our responsibility in the processes

of decision-making? There are a lot of challenges because the era of “science in an ivory tower” is definitely over, if it ever really existed.

Conclusion

Finally, my conclusion is that what we are experiencing today is structured by economisation as well as by what the “knowledge society” stands for. We have to face the fact that we are living and working in a world that is structured in a complicated and sometimes contradictory or, to quote Bauman, in an “ambivalent” way. This means – at least this is what we are teaching when we educate our students in the intention of becoming good professionals – that the paradoxes we meet in this ambivalent structure cannot be resolved by choosing one or other pole of the paradox (see Schütze 1996). We have to sustain the tension and act wisely, i.e. professionally, with respect to our professional knowledge and professional intentions and professional goals. In the actual situation it cannot be decided whether the steering intentions of the political-administrative system are good or bad, or whether the outcome of this social change will lead to the end of the professions or to a progress in professionalisation in the sense of improving the professional performance or the professional competence at problem-solving. The political system depends on the solutions produced by and inside the functional systems and this performance cannot be replaced by other means. Nothing has more power to create legitimacy than a measured improvement of the problem-solving capacity. Why should we not try to make use of these conditions in our own way, in a way that follows the goals of emancipation, of striving for better living conditions for our clients and for our society?

To me it seems that those who practice Social Work, or at least some of them, understand the *zeitgeist* and are much more open to innovation and development of their professional identity and methods either together with or against the economic measures. Frankly, often enough scientific observation has revealed poor professional performance. There was, and indeed there still is, a great need for innovation and development in Social Work. It is simply not true that new governmental strategies are destroying a perfectly functioning professional system of Social Work. Structured by the new conditions new forms of Social Work have to emerge. Whether these forms just follow the governmental intentions by reducing the complexity to simple economic or outcome measurements or whether this will lead to real innovations and an improvement of professional performance depends above all on the autonomous processes inside the profession (practice and science) of Social Work and only in a second step on the decisions within the political-administrative system (Sommerfeld 2004).

Fook gives a similar description of the actual challenges Social Work and Social Work research have to face in these changing societal contexts and he

points out that we probably have to think in a more far-reaching way that goes beyond a simplifying conception of Evidence-Based Practice as represented by the “what works” agenda. “These challenges, of knowledge, of values and of legitimisation, require research directions which support professionals in developing knowledge which is more flexible and transferable; practice which is value-based and makes a social contribution; and ways of legitimating their social position which also provides accountability” (Fook 2004, 45). The goals of this book and of its different authors point in the same direction. The question is if we are able to face the challenges. For this purpose it is necessary to seize the stimulus of the Evidence-Based Practice debate but to think in a critical, constructive and open-minded manner about the possibilities of and needs for development towards an acknowledged, legitimised, accountable, knowledge and value-based Social Work. Briefly, we have to develop a “New Professionalism” a “third way” between internal self control and external expert control in Social Work (Jary 1998).

There are a lot of different building plots on which different people are working. In a scientific context, building plots are questions. One strong root of “Evidence-Based Social Work” is provided by evaluation research and outcome measurement. Methodological and epistemological questions of course have been of major interest but the discussions have continued and the topic of managerialism versus professionalism has become a central theme. Is “Evidence-Based Social Work” just evaluation research and outcome measurement? Or do we have to think beyond these short-term and, often too simple, conceptions towards the shaping of a new professionalism? And if this could be one of the possibilities, how can “Evidence-Based Social Work” be understood in relation to the old and new modes of knowledge production? Are there specific differences to scientific research in general and if so where? And very loosely related to the questions around professionalism, how is the knowledge transferred into practice or into decision-making or into the public debate? Does the concept of “Evidence-Based Social Work” take into consideration the transfer of knowledge? Are there new models or methods as well? Does evidence have an impact on innovations or decision-making? What are the requirements on the side of the Social Work practice? What is or what could be the benefit for the users (clients) or for the Social Work services? What is the role of the users in knowledge production? Are there innovative methods in creating evidence or in designing transfer processes? What kind of problems are we facing when we try to sustain the tensions deriving from our knowledge and the complexity connected to this? Do we have strategies for maintaining our scientific standards and what standards do we have? And so on.

We are of course a long way from finding final answers to all of the questions and challenges but we are as well far away from being governed only by market ideologies in our thinking. It is an ongoing process, a building plot, where work is going on at different sites, may be towards a “new professionalism”.

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