With the inclusion of new countries to SOCRATES and the impending accession of more countries to the European Union it is time to take stock of the achievements of the social professions in transcending a national frame of reference. The expansion of the EU will probably be handled in such a way that the new countries will have to accept the conditions laid down by the existing EU partner countries. This approach, the so-called acquis, has good reasons in as much as it would weaken the union considerably if countries could opt into parts of the conditions which the existing member countries have argued over so ardenty. As far as the EU is concerned, à la carte membership is not on, and the benchmark criteria for membership have been set and will be adhered to by the candidate countries.

Will the same be true for SOCRATES and the conditions under which cooperation in the social professions will take place? Perhaps somebody in the European Commission had the idea that the Thematic Networks under SOCRATES, the counter-weight to the institutional contracts, would also establish a kind of common standard as the condition under which courses and departments in newly eligible countries could cooperate with existing networks. The Thematic Network for the Social Professions ECSPRESS had been set up to examine the possibilities of a shared European perspective in the social professions. However, all partners in this consortium, which comprises the major European organisations in the training and practice of social work and social pedagogy, had always been critical of any harmonisation of courses and the imposition of European standards. At the end of the second year of ECSPRESS we recognise even more clearly, that such standards do not exist and that it would not be desirable to work towards them. The work of ECSPRESS during its second year consisted of the evaluation of existing collaboration and exchange programmes under three thematic headings: the role of the social professions in the fight against exclusion in Europe; their analysis of and responses to social policy shifts and the different ways in which European aspects can be incorporated into training. The reports from the working parties show that establishing and maintaining networks poses constantly new challenges, that the issues of compatibility and transferability of knowledge and skills are much more complex than anybody had anticipated, that conditions in all welfare states are changing so rapidly that it is difficult to keep up with a national agenda, let alone pay attention to all the global developments.

And yet, and this is the second major finding, the necessity to place course and curriculum developments in a wider international perspective, has become ever more obvious. This is probably the way in which globalisation becomes quite tangible for the social professions. Its effects can be felt especially in the increased complexity of social issues in terms of the international nature of causes, the inter-relationship between cultural and economic issues, the fragmentation of social responsibilities and the relativity and subjectivity of ethical positions available (Trevillion, 1997). Globalisation, like European integration, can be both a source of new opportunities and a threat to existing practices and identities. I want to briefly highlight three aspects of its relevance to our work.

Globalisation affects our perceptions of identity, both at the personal and at the professional level. Identities have never been straight forward, simple and fixed, but the reference points which helped to establish packages of identity, such as nationality, gender, education, political affiliation etc. are becoming much more fluid and change their character rapidly (Aronowitz, 1995). This means for instance that it can no longer be taken for granted that there is a clear professional dividing line between nursing and social work, teaching and counselling. Identities must justify themselves,
derive their legitimation from contemporary arguments rather than from established norms. The professions, which have so far been sheltered from the impact of market principles, find themselves in competition with each other, and the opening of international frontiers and the promotion of labour and service mobility increases the sense of uncertainty. Much of this competition has been ‘orchestrated’ by governments and social policy makers for the sole purpose of cutting costs, of quantifying services and itemising the cost-benefit calculations, particularly in the health-related areas. But this does not mean that the social professions should reject all measures of making them more accountable. They should be able to declare openly what their ‘products’ are and how they account for their decisions and interventions. Their response requires an international dimension, as has been well recognised by the pioneers of our professions who invariably recognised the value of underpinning their work with international contacts and organisations. Only through international comparisons can universal principles be established and be distinguished from nationally bounded habits and conventions. What distinguishes our situation however from that of those pioneers is our profound sense of scepticism as to whether universal principles can be achieved at all, whether they are not always the principles of a powerful, dominant elite that manages to give its values the appearance of objectivity. This scepticism, or realism, has a sobering effect and accounts for much of the disillusionment we discovered in the work of ECSPRESS. And yet it is necessary to confront head on the issues and challenges posed by globalisation and post-modern thinking and not to lose sight of the need for at least temporary, cautious certainties.

Globalisation imparts also a sense of powerlessness, a feeling that social and political developments are the inevitable consequences of ‘iron laws’, this time not of history (for the end of the millennium is also being heralded as the end of history), but of economics. It seems paradoxical to state this at a conference held in a country where a mere thirty years ago the iron laws of history were so brutally enforced by the iron laws of the tanks and bullets which put a bloody end to the people’s attempts to define their own political system and to make their own history. The new powerlessness, though not unaffected by military threats, seems to almost come from within us rather than from a defined external enemy. The margins of our decision making at all political levels have been narrowed down to some minor modifications of a grand scheme that is best exemplified by the stock exchange mechanisms. We feel powerless to prevent the re-location of industries and the displacement of workers and skills, powerless to stop the relentless cuts in public expenditure, powerless to refute the logic of cuts in social benefits when they are presented as work incentives, powerless to stop the steep rise in prison populations. In seeming contradiction to the scepticism concerning the universality of principles, economic criteria and principles appear to have a legitimate universal logic behind them, seem to describe human behaviour ‘as it really is’, everywhere on the globe, in every culture (Dominelli, 1997). Again, the effects of those considerations are sobering for the social professions in as much as they force us to take our social policy skills much more seriously, to enter into economic arguments much more competently and to seek to unlight their seemingly irrefutable logic. The threat of disempowerment brings new strategies on the scene, a new awareness of the means of taking power. Examples of projects which show what happens when people take power in the face of overwhelming economic arguments can be seen in the display at the “Agora”, the market place of possibilities that accompanies this conference.

Globalisation also has the effect of transforming established political processes. The system of voting for established parties in elections, of associating distinct ideological positions with a political agenda polarised between left and right, is giving way to a myriad of under-currents, lobbies, tests of popularity which fragment the party political programmes (Giddens, 1994). Small lobby groups can often gain influence totally disproportionate to their size and do so frequently by forging international networks, by using the media skilfully and by targeting human emotions. The networking which the social professions are so actively engaged in is not unrelated to these processes; they are themselves a sign of the renewed importance of civil society, with all its promises and pitfalls. For instance, the efforts to give the training structures in some European countries a higher profile are more likely to succeed on the strength of international comparisons and arguments. But does the drive to higher educational status and recognition not again exclude potential students from entering the social professions? This change in the political culture is fraught with dangers, linked again to the issue of
accountability. The co-operation networks established under ERASMUS and SOCRATES are not really lobbies, but they can have the effect of creating new realities for a country for instance through the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad. Often the national accreditation system is unable to cope with and to understand them fully and this might adversely affect standards. On the other hand, foreign qualifications can become important catalysts for the reform of training structures by posing new, long overdue and fundamental questions.

These effects can be summarised in figure 1 below.

The work of ECSPRESS has explored these dangers and opportunities quite extensively in a European context. The aim has been right from the beginning to develop a critical view of the impact of European integration on the social professions, to make social practitioners more skilled in negotiating the impending changes in their professional practice and to ensure that European integration does not cause greater fragmentation and new forms of exclusion. ECSPRESS aims at ensuring that the European project has a strong social dimension. This is exactly the challenge posed by globalisation: it can mean on the one hand the total dismantling of social relationships and their replacement with profit and other economic calculations, or on the other hand it can form the basis of a new understanding of social solidarity, a solidarity no longer tied to national solidarity but to the development of multiple, negotiated identities that span across different countries and different cultural and ethnic boundaries. For us the process of European integration is in a sense the test case for the development of social commitments that do have a global dimension, equivalent to an ecological awareness, but have immediate local relevance at the same time. The emerging ‘ECSPRESS approach’ is not a standardised method but a set of key reference points for the development of intervention strategies, course modules and structures that take account of the fundamentally changed social and political context in which the social professions operate at the dawn of the new millennium.

However, it was difficult to translate this overall aim, on which there was a broad and firm consensus among all the constituent member organisations, into a viable practice of cooperation, of teaching and development within ECSPRESS, and it is in practice where the real nuances and differences begin to assert themselves. The fact that these findings are as yet incomplete in many ways should be seen as an invitation to seek the completion, or at least the continuation, in the many projects and networks which will emerge from this conference. In the lack of harmonisation and standardisation lies the real opportunity for participation and change (Bradley & Firth, 1998).

I find it therefore appropriate to dwell very explicitly on the scepticism to which our experiences have given rise, on the noticeable sense of disillusionment with European exchange programmes that is setting in among Western European partners, on the realism about the actual parameters within which changes of the intended kind can be achieved. This is not meant to dampen the enthusiasm for cooperation of partners in central and eastern European countries which is so obviously growing. On the contrary, it is meant to say that European co-operation in the social professions is not a process that rolls off according

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1. The impact of globalisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>risks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>market driven competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic dictates suspend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>democratic policy making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populism, politics of self-interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volume 5 Number 3
to an established formula, but an open process to which all participants, old and new, have equally much to contribute. In discussing the difficulties we want to open up the debate and tap into the experience of our new partners, with their rich traditions and the diversity of their experiences, recognising that the social professions have an equally long and important tradition in central and eastern Europe as they have in the west.

I therefore want to deal with a few examples which have raised problematic issues for the work of ECSPRESS (the account of the achievements will be published in the conference proceedings later), in the hope that they demonstrate not the futility of seeking to develop a broad European alliance in the social professions, but to encourage more detailed and imaginative work, in the full knowledge of the difficulties it will lead to. I hope to be able to indicate that each of those complications contains also the outlines of an important new development, an added dimension and perhaps the key to how to deal with the tension between universalism and specificity.

Processes of building up networks and working relationships take much longer than anticipated and require a commitment to a ‘common cause’ if they are to succeed. There was certainly no lack of enthusiasm in the social professions in launching into European co-operation. As the research presented at the conference in Koblenz in 1996 indicated, the social professions were among the first academic disciplines to use the opportunities offered by the ERASMUS programme (Lorenz, 1997) and showed very active participation since. But building a network is not a mechanical process; it requires attention to personal relations, a readiness to deal openly with emerging conflicts, sensitivity for the affective investment made in achieving a particular course structure, in a terminology, in a project. This should not be surprising for the social professions because it re-affirms the centrality of issues around social solidarity, which cannot be achieved as the sum of self-interests. To put it very bluntly, those partners, individuals or institutions that are only concerned with furthering their self-interests by participating in European exchange and collaboration schemes ultimately obstruct the process of collaboration. In many networks this process of sifting and sorting has taken considerable time, and has caused at times great anguish. But at some stage the alternatives have to be posed very explicitly: why are we involved in collaboration projects, is it for career purposes, to score extra points on performance indicator scales which now quantify academic work more and more. Or is it to build something new from which other partners stand to benefit also, which requires an investment in time and resources and above all of personal commitment of which no immediate return can be expected.

The reverse side of these observations is that resources are indeed a crucial ingredient for the success of a network. The funding allocated to exchanges overall, at both the European and the national level, continues to be small and insufficient and in addition requires an inordinate amount of administrative efforts to raise and to account for. Good will and idealism, by both staff and students, has its limitations - people wear and bum out very easily in times of heightened stress. European involvements are now regarded in a highly ambivalent manner; on the one hand there is the suspicion (mainly on the part of non-participating colleagues), that European programmes offer free European holidays and excursions to exciting locations, that money is being squandered on lavish journeys. Those who have experience in EU financed travel know that this is far from the truth and that funding conditions mean endless weekends away from home, tight working schedules which do not even allow time for modest sight-seeing and the extensive use of home hospitality. On the other hand the efforts of obtaining these modest subsidies are still so cumbersome that many colleagues simply do not find it worth their while to apply and use other schemes and means to finance contacts through travel and research grants. ECSPRESS itself is so starved of EU resources that it could not complete its commitments without the generous financial assistance of academic institutions like the Fachhochschule Koblenz.

Issues related to language differences, the complexity and costs of translations, the importance of working within a certain linguistic geography all have much greater significance than partnerships had allowed themselves to admit in their original enthusiasm. It is no coincidence that networks are frequently developing around people with considerable linguistic talents and that student exchange programmes are used most extensively by students with existing foreign language skills. The actual difficulties, the resources required in acquiring a foreign language during the course of studies in non-language oriented subjects, the complexity of obtaining competent and meaningful
translators have been totally miscalculated at all levels, including the Commission. This has led to a pragmatism of settling for more commonly spoken languages and of course among them especially for the English language with all the associated exclusionary consequences. These dilemmas can not be resolved within the present resource constraints and ECSPRESS has failed to address them sufficiently. There is always the need to get results within a given time span, to be pragmatic, to overcome language differences as barriers, and not enough time and space to explore the subtleties of discovering meaning through non-comprehension, through the pain not only of working through interpreters but of clarifying terminology so that it can be used reliably by interpreters and shared among all participants. Staying with difficulties seems to hold up the works, those representing lesser spoken languages are made to regard the need for translation as their personal problem, their personal deficit, and the whole language project is tilted and distorted. And yet, it would be precisely the non-understanding which could give us the most valuable clues to differences in meaning, the need for further clarification of familiar terms and concepts, to the transformation of taken-for-granted perspectives into creative, shared knowledge.

Course structures and academic and professional recognition structures turn out to be much more resistant to change and accommodation to the interests of partner institutions than anticipated by most networks. In most exchange programmes the extent of the idiosyncrasies contained in any national education system only become apparent when it is being applied and not at the planning stage. This has had a deterring effect, but it has also led to a series of highly imaginative recognition arrangements which cut across or unhinge the normal regulations. It is not easy to gauge the extent to which students choose to participate in programmes and exchanges out of fairly pragmatic motives since the tangible benefits that accrue to them are not always apparent. Cross-national qualifications have yet to establish their own ‘currency’, and this is also an opportunity, a reminder to all participants that they cannot fall back on the safety of career speculations but that they are engaged in the pioneering of something new.

Changes in social policy (in terms of the deregulation of social services and a general curtailment of the role of the state in the provision of services) are much harder to respond to than anticipated. While the results of comparative studies and analyses of social policy developments in different countries provided astounding results concerning the direction and the impact of neoliberal and monetarist thinking across all different ‘welfare regimes’, it is probably at this point where the biggest discrepancy between theory and practice emerges. Academic staff might have reservations about some of those developments on principle and because they cause greater inequality. But this perspective is not necessarily shared by practitioners who might want to seize the opportunities the changes offer to them and their professional group to gain in status and recognition. The one-sided concentration of SOCRATES programmes on academic exchanges masked those discrepancies and impeded a much fuller overview of possible responses to new social policy conditions. It remains to be seen if the experience and the interests of practitioners, and hopefully also those of users of social services, can be incorporated into exchange programmes. Nevertheless, as the report by the working party on social policy shows, academic colleagues have often very close links to the practice field even without getting recognition for this part of their work by appropriate funding. Yet it is also noticeable that many of the projects monitored which have a strong innovatory social policy impact frequently lack European contacts or contain European dimensions only implicitly.

Many of the ECSPRESS contacts and studies confirmed that the role of the social professions in relation to the growing danger of exclusion and racism remains crucial for the achievement of a Social Europe. Nevertheless, the issues around the development of anti-racism / anti-discrimination / anti-exclusion approaches caused probably the most controversy in terms of their applicability across different national and cultural traditions. Here the discrepancy between a universal challenge, closely related to the various aspects of globalisation and their impact on identity, and highly localised responses became very apparent and the dialectics between universal principles and specific, localised strategies are most dynamic. On the one hand, it would be clearly inappropriate to ‘export’ a strategy developed in a specific historical and political context to other contexts, no matter how ‘advanced’ it might appear. On the other hand, the fragmentation of approaches, the retreat to ‘localised solutions’, to the isolation of different methods and worlds can easily yield the initiative to
a political agenda which regards these concerns by social professionals as an undue meddling in political affairs anyway. This task contains many unresolved challenges, and it is becoming clear that those can only be met constructively with openness, trust, a commitment to core principles and values and a well worked-out understanding of cultural processes and of inter-cultural communication. Glossing over discrepancies does not promote the cause of anti-discriminatory approaches, and yet the appeal to tolerance and understanding alone does not do justice to the nature of these differences in approach either. What is at stake in this detail, as much as in all the work of ECSPRESS, is the realisation of truly democratic principles (Laclau, 1995).

Lastly, inter-professional suspicion, which has always been a feature of the social professions and therefore is a feature that ECSPRESS has ‘inherited’ in its organisational set-up, is still around and again cannot be eliminated with appeals to tolerance. The fears and anxieties that underlie the suspicion that one group, be that social work or social pedagogy, may gain advantage over the other through more effective European networking, refer to the wider social policy scenario. This sets up much stronger competitive conditions in which the distribution of opportunities will certainly not follow old established professional pathways. Each professional grouping is confronted with the need to define its boundaries and competencies anew, to prove itself under market conditions, to demonstrate its ability to deal with new challenges. European contacts are likely to increase those tensions rather than eliminate them, even though the differences between professional groups show their relativity more clearly.

The new sense of realism that lies behind these, at times uncomfortable and even painful realisations, is healthy, specially on the threshold of the new collaboration arrangements with partners in central and eastern Europe. The question is not, how to avoid these difficult issues, but how to confront them constructively. One of the conditions for such a constructive approach is that we develop an understanding for the nature of these difficulties. It would be all too easy to attribute them to culturally entrenched norms, old, inflexible habits, or intransigent personalities. Instead, I would like to suggest five axes from which any network or collaboration project needs to derive its bearings in order to find its proper location.

**Resources** - It seems trivial to emphasise that resources are important and that good will alone does not suffice to establish a collaborative venture. But many projects are struggling not just with the question of inadequate funding (and the members are in danger of exploiting themselves to the point where resentment builds up), but also with the nature of the source of funding and the conditions that attach to it. It has often been overlooked that the terms under which funding is being provided determine the direction of the project to a large extent. This can best be illustrated by the conditions imposed on ECSPRESS itself which apply very strict criteria of ‘eligible expenses’. But the encounter with these limitations was an essential part of the work of ECSPRESS, the strategies we developed to overcome them (and this evaluation event was held at a location which only became eligible a few days after the end of the conference) are important moments of learning, the realisation of our failure to go further will become the point of departure for new joint projects. For instance, it must be clear to us now that we need to develop a much more sophisticated understanding of European funding programmes in order to be able to utilise a combination of sources. Some of the projects monitored by ECSPRESS are pioneering such combinations, for instance with LEONARDO, very successfully.

**People** - At the same time, resources are not everything; networks are always more than the administration of funds. Enthusiasm and commitment and, dare I say it, sacrifice are essential ingredients of a partnership which can never be compensated by resources. The people who make up a network are not irreplaceable and there is a danger of partnerships becoming too closely tied up with personalities, of becoming a clique to which other colleagues never gain access. On the other hand, personal contacts and friendships are the motor of successful programmes, and we should openly acknowledge and celebrate this rather than feeling coy and guilty about it. It is very much at the personal level of such relationships that issues of exclusion, of inequality, of solidarity develop an important dimension which is relevant to the overall process of learning and development of a project. We in the social professions should be well equipped to deal with the complex issues arising from this, although as academics and as professionals we sometimes feel obliged to ignore this dimension, to externalise it deliberately, to consider ourselves above feelings.
such as envy, intolerance, passion. Instead it should be the hallmark of our professionalism to incorporate this dimension explicitly and to include ourselves in a personal and inter-personal process of learning and reflection through encounters with ‘others’, strangers, alter egos.

Course structures - It has been the aim of ECSPRESS all along to ‘anchor’ the course elements that focus on European dimensions more directly in course structures. Nothing would be more undesirable than to let these concerns become a matter for specialists, become marginalised in the curriculum context, remain options for Euro-enthusiasts. But it is also true to say that many collaboration programmes succeeded only because they found a niche in the regulations which would accommodate exchanges or intensive seminars without affecting the whole curriculum. These dynamics require great sensitivity and a longer term perspective of developments. In some institutions the change to SOCRATES has helped to put the European orientation higher on the list of priorities of course planning teams, but this is not just a matter of formally demonstrating that European exchanges take place on a course. The real changes often cannot be institutionalised because you cannot force colleagues to teach subjects of which they do not see the relevance. But the work of the various teams of ECSPRESS has confirmed that while there are quantifiable curriculum changes which can and need to be identified, a commitment to a comprehensive re-orientation of training towards an international, intercultural perspective needs to get hold of a course and its staff at all ends, needs to infuse everything a staff team does, from selection procedures, staff meetings, research programmes to placement policies and exam structures.

Conceptual clarity - Despite decades of exchanges and collaboration it is still almost impossible to make English-speaking colleagues and students in social work understand the nature of social pedagogy. It is of little comfort to know that for many German speakers the difference between social work and social pedagogy is equally mysterious - there is a difference, whether or not this is reflected in the actual practice or title. This very common example illustrates that conceptual precision does and does not matter at one and the same time, that the linguistic aspect cannot be separated out from the substantive, professional concern for context-specific meaning. Such simple issues as the translation of titles and qualifications can give rise to very fundamental debates and to a dialectic process of distantiation and understanding. The numerous efforts at developing subject specificc dictionaries in the social professions provide important instruments for this task, but the responsibility does not lie just with the linguistic experts. International encounters force us to be precise about the meaning of terms we use, and at the same time invite us to develop them further and not to get locked into definitions. The responsibility for these clarifications cannot be delegated to a distant bureaucratic institution, nor must it give rise to indifference for nuances. The social professions’ working tool is language, and exchange programmes are a vital moment in developing this tool to the level not only of multi-lingual, but also of inter-cultural competence. This is perhaps the biggest challenge facing us in the social professions, and the most crucial test for our ability to avert becoming instrumental in setting up new forms of oppression, discrimination and exclusion through the unreflected use of language.

Ethical commitment - The question of language immediately leads to the question of ethics, to the issue of how to deal with the diversity of values contained in conceptual differences, to the concern to act responsibly and accountably. The dilemmas arising from this are well rehearsed, particularly in the inter-cultural context: how to reconcile sensitivity for cultural differences with the realisation of universal criteria for right and wrong. For participants in international exchange programmes these are not abstract speculations but everyday questions that range from matters of tact and courtesy to those of integrity and conscience. Increasingly, the social professions are being fashioned into custodians of public morality at the same time as morality is being privatised and ‘subjectivised’. This means however, that the issues arising in inter-cultural collaboration, for instance how best to deal with issues of suspected child sexual abuse, matter not only as exercises in comparative methodology but as occasions for the critical examinations of one’s own national forms of practice. International encounters force us to go back to basic principles. In this sense it is a great help that many of our partner organisations are engaged in formulating detailed statements on matters of principle, children’s rights, confidentiality, social exclusion etc. But practitioners know how difficult it is often to translate those universal statements into everyday practice, when a post-modern climate facilitates a resorting to uncritical subjectivity and a facile
pluralism. European exchange and collaboration programmes need to focus much more specifically on matters of values and ethics; they need to develop a level of trust and openness that makes it possible to go beyond mere politeness and tolerance for the traditions and customs of others and engage in real argument and criticism.

These sketchy details cannot and must not amount to a blueprint for the ECSPRESS approach. But they are meant to indicate some of the questions which old and new networks have to confront in order to locate their work in a wider context and in order for the social professions as a whole to benefit from them. What I would like to suggest is that European networks need to assume the quality of ‘transnational communities’ which the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz has suggested as a positive response to the phenomenon of globalisation (Hannerz 1996, p. 98). The paradox in this term is a challenge to the ‘cosiness’ of our received notion of community as a ‘given’ entity, determined by birth, cultural background and geography, which could easily reproduce itself in friendship patterns among like-minded academics or professionals. It is at the same time an invitation to go beyond the mere ‘mechanics’ of seeking transnational contacts, of affirming positively the value of friendship and personal commitment. Human relations are more important than bureaucratic arrangements, and this should be particularly so in the social professions. But human relations are more than mere sentimentality. They need to be secured in material resources, in contractual arrangements, in the development of a body of shared knowledge and experience, in interpersonal and inter-cultural competencies of communication and in a commitment to a negotiated, professional set of values. If this seems old fashioned, I am proud to be placing the ECSPRESS programme in the historical context of the professions’ pioneers who were linked through personal friendships, a commitment to universal scientific principles and values and above all to the ideal of peaceful global human solidarity.

References


