I. Introduction

Earlier papers have indicated the existence of doctorates in social work in Europe. Just how many doctorates are there? What do they consist of? What career prospects do they have to offer and for what kind of student? Could we consider developing European exchanges based on these studies? These questions formed the basis for a proposed paper on doctorates in social work in Europe, which was mapped out in 1997 and presented to the European Social Fund who agreed to finance it.

The project linked two French partners, the Higher College of Social Work (l’École Supérieure de Travail Social, known as ETSUP) and the Liaison Board for Social Work Education (le Comité de Liaison pour les Formations Supérieures en Travail Social) with associated partner colleges and universities in Spain (the University of Valencia), Portugal (the Higher Institute of Social Service of Lisbon) and the Netherlands (the Hogeschool of Maastricht).

The initiative for the project and the responsibility for its co-ordination was undertaken by ETSUP.

At a first glance this proposal for study might seem quite straightforward. In fact it was very ambitious. During the first exploratory investigations, many difficulties arose and the complexity of the project became evident. In fact ‘social work’ and ‘social workers’ are terms which cover differing practices and professions from one country to the next. In several European countries, social work is synonymous with ‘social service’ and therefore only represents a part (that part historically being older) of that which is covered in France in the field of social work.

We therefore decided upon a very open position which consisted of not responding ourselves in giving a preliminary definition of social work, but of turning the question around by asking, for each doctoral programme studied, what the definition of ‘social work’ signifies for the initiators themselves and by trying to understand the circumstances to which doctorate is responding.

Ultimately this position proved significant on several accounts. Firstly it forced us to discard preconceived ideas and to keep an open mind regarding all the information we received. This prevented us from rejecting out of hand some programmes, which turned out to be very worthwhile. Secondly, and as a direct result, it helped us to obtain an understanding of the extent of the subtlety of the subject and its complexities, which a more focused approach would not have allowed.

As a consequence, our paper must be understood as the first stage of a long-term process, whose aim is to study further a global consideration of the questions of education and research in social work.

II. The doctorates studied

Numerous methodological impediments and the difficulties of inter-cultural communication, prevented us from compiling an exhaustive list of all the doctorates specialising in one particular field of social work. Therefore we gave greater importance to an in-depth understanding of a few programmes, which we selected according to several combined criteria to be presented in a French paper. These criteria consist of: a) doctorates; b) presenting an institutional publication in a field of social work; c) within the geographic area of Europe. Our investigation was carried out by interviews with those responsible for doctoral education and completed by a documentary study.

Each doctoral programme included in our paper must be considered as an individual example and not necessarily as illustrative of a particular national policy of higher education in social work. We have

2. In Spring, 2000. A publication translated into English is anticipated at a later date.
3. The interviews were carried out by a team consisting of Anne Dauvergne, Aline Fino-Dhers, Anne Marie Doucet-Dahlgren, Joao Fatela and Françoise F. Laot.
however been obliged to assemble more general information on education in social work for each country in order to place each of these programmes in its context.

1. The doctorate of social work of the higher Institute of Social Work of Lisbon, Portugal, in partnership with the Catholic University of Sao Paula, Brazil (interview with Maria Augusta Negreiros).

2. The doctorates of the chair of social work of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. The doctorate of Arts, specialisation in Social Work and Social Politics. The doctorate of Sociology, specialisation in Social problems (interview with Marc-Henry Soulet).

3. The doctorate of social work of the department of Social Work of the University of Goteborg, Sweden (interview with Marareta Back-Wiklund).

4. The doctorate of research in sociology, theory and methodology of social services University of Trieste, Italy (interview with Guiliano Giorio).

5. The doctorate seminars of Alice-Salomon School of Berlin, Germany (interview with Christine Labonate-Roset).

6. Towards a doctorate in “Family and Community Development” at the University of Mons-Hainaut, French-speaking Belgium (interview with Jean-Pierre Pourtois).

7. The doctorate of social science of the chair of social pedagogy of the faculty of Educational Science of the University of Lodz, Poland, and the project for a doctoral level in Social Work interview with Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka).

8. The doctorate of research (PhD) in social policy, social work and community development of the department of Applied Social Science of the University of Cork, Ireland (interview with Fred Powell).

9. The doctorate of social work of the department of social policy and social work of the University of Tampere and the doctorate of the department of social science and philosophy of Jyvaskyla, Finland (interview with Tarja Poso and with Mirja Satka).

10. The doctorate of social work (DSW) of the University of East Anglia (UEA) at Norwich, United Kingdom (interview with June Thoburn).

11. The Doctorate of Social policy and Social work of the University Eotvos Lorand (ELTE) of Budapest, Hungary (interview with Agnes Simonyi).

For each doctorate, we examined in particular:
- the conditions of creation;
- the objectives, contents and organisation of programmes, as well as the career prospects they offer;
- the composition of the audience it addresses;
- its production.

### III. Very varied doctoral programmes.

A very great variety in the concepts and implementation methods of doctorates is expressed through these works and this is shown on all levels of analysis. We propose a reading based on several themes:

- the origin and the indicators of doctorates;
- the institutional replies and their positions on the question of the discipline of study;
- the objectives of doctoral education and its career prospects.

#### a) The origin and the initiators of doctorates

Let us first of all highlight the fact that doctoral education takes place at university; except in the single case of the ISSSL of Lisbon4 where it occurs in the form of an agreement between a college and a university. But universally, it is the university exclusively, which issues awards according to their own particular criteria. To a greater or lesser extent, universities throughout Europe are in a state of change. In many places, reform has just taken place, is occurring now, or is imminent. Several of these reforms involve a restriction in the length of time allowed to complete a doctorate. This change carries real consequences for working professionals enrolling in a doctorate. Except in those places where the duration of a doctorate is still unrestricted (as at Fribourg, Berlin, and Mons, where the doctorate is a very individualised programme of study) the community of doctor students is tending to be younger and therefore losing its foundations in the professional field.

According to the situations studied, there are two main scenarios as far as the source of the creation of doctorates is concerned: either the university

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4. It must be noted that in Berlin, where the programme also results from a partnership with ‘classic’ universities, the College of Social Work does have university status, even if it is not that of a ‘classic’ university.
itself suggests a new branch of study, or it responds to pressure from the field. The distinction between these two scenarios however is subtle, especially if the demand for education is considered as ‘pressure from the field’, which it obviously is, but not necessarily in the organised or collective way being defined here.

In the first case therefore, it is the university itself, at different levels of authority, which proposes a new area of study. Even if it is not always easy to trace the source of the decision and to understand exactly by whom and why these projects are approved, it is clear that the economic stake carries a lot of weight. Universities find a gap they can exploit in the competitive sector of the market for training. The demand does exist among those with a professional diploma to continue their studies: many colleges do not cater for higher education or their diplomas do not carry the same ‘prestige’.

For the university, some accompanying secondary effects of this are also important, notably in terms of image or of strategic positioning in a field.

In the second case, it is the ‘field’ in the wider sense, which collaborates to put pressure on the university authorities to develop new subjects for study or to deliver new higher awards. The source and the motivation for the programmes of study are very different from one example to the next and depend greatly on the history of the development of the field. Thus the strategic fight of Portuguese social workers to get their diploma recognised as equivalent to university standard is exemplary. And the same preoccupations are to be found among their Italian and German counterparts. The latter lean on their professional organisations or on the network of social colleges.

Pressure from the field is also organised at the instigation of those responsible for making social policies where new problems emerge. We are referring here to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which have been undergoing profound change for the last ten or so years. In this light, projects for developing doctoral studies acquire an economic and political legitimacy and herald important developments for the coming years.

b) The institutional replies and their positions on the question of the discipline of study

We have distinguished the host discipline of the institution from the discipline (or disciplines) which, for the majority of cases, provide a framework for the field of research from a theoretical and epistemological point of view.

We are calling ‘host discipline’ that discipline which gives its name to the university department, which offers the doctorate to be studied. These are varied. Thus six programmes are headed by ‘Professional Chairs’, in departments of various disciplines:

- sociology (1),
- social pedagogy (1),
- applied social sciences (1),
- social sciences and philosophy (1),
- education and psychology (1),
- social policy (1).

For the remaining six, the host discipline is social work (the institutional department being a ‘school’ or a department of social work).

As for the actual disciplines studied, they are not always those which are named in the title of the award nor sometimes even in that of the host discipline. The Doctorate of Arts of the University of Fribourg is a good example of this. The disciplinary, theoretical and methodological approach of research undertaken there is in fact clearly sociological.

The question of the discipline of the doctoral programme is one of the fundamental questions raised by our study. It shows the diversity of positions on this subject throughout Europe and the diversity of the output which follows as a result.

Where the discipline ‘social work’ does not exist within the university (Germany, Belgium, Italy, Poland), some of our interviewees see the interest in continuing to develop research in the field of social work within the framework of existing disciplines. In their opinion the latter either offer a wide enough scope or some, such as education, social pedagogy or sociology appear legitimate enough to embrace works of specialised research.

In the opinion of those who think it desirable ultimately for a specific doctorate or a discipline to be created, the decision should not be implemented in an abrupt manner, at the risk of marginalising students, or even cutting off teacher-researchers from their roots by forcing them to leave their current discipline. The risk would then be that of creating an empty shell, a discipline devoid of history and therefore of perspective. It would seem preferable to them to pass via an intermediary
stage. This would allow the necessary time to find people able to carry out the in-depth study and the necessary time for mentalities to change.

This is not the stance taken by the Institute of Lisbon which chose the strategic route of trying to impose a social work discipline on the Portuguese university by looking, for a short while, for a scientific legitimacy across the Atlantic. A successful outcome is not a foregone conclusion, but this ‘tough’ method has already born fruit as far as recognition of professional diplomas at a university level is concerned.

Those responsible for the association of professionals of social work in Finland have also taken this stance. Here a long struggle (started ten years ago), for the recognition of social work as a discipline and its liberation from social policy and recently succeeded in August 1999, despite the resistance of universities. It has been put into practice however via a global reform of university studies in which each discipline has been encouraged to open up to the practical and to come down from its ivory tower. In this battle it was a question of opening up to women (the profession being made up of a majority of women) both university access and ‘science’ which had traditionally been regulated by men. This question of sexual politics in the field of social work is not greatly debated in France whilst it is analysed frequently and appears as the subject of publications in other countries, such as Germany, the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries.

Even in those places where social work is institutionally recognised at university via chairs, university-level ‘schools’ or departments specialised in training and research in social work, this does not necessarily mean that the question of the recognition and the legitimacy of the discipline are definitively settled. In particular, in those countries where the institutional body offering studies to doctoral level is the only one available, as for example in Switzerland and in Hungary, there inevitably arises the question of its relationship on the one hand to the schools providing the professional training of social workers, and on the other hand, to the other disciplines which constitute the university. In countries where social work has existed as a discipline in its own right for many years, such as in Ireland, the United Kingdom and Sweden, it is still necessary to argue, to make a mark, to be assertive.

However, at least two important factors in the present circumstances do seem to favour the emergence of a ‘social work’ discipline.

The first of these factors is that universities are increasingly being encouraged to rethink their aims, notably in relation to the professions. It is highly likely that in the light of this, disciplines associated with practising professional fields, such as social work, should find it easier to find a place in those universities where they do not already have a presence.

The second factor is the increasing awareness of the complexity of reality which has come about during the second half of the twentieth century. This has brought about the assertion of the unavoidably multidimensional nature of knowledge (Morin, 1994) and consequently, the idea that any discipline, considered as a section of knowledge, soon reaches its limits ‘in speaking clearly’ (Devereux, 1980). From this stems the increase in multidisciplinary research teams and the advance of interdisciplinary or multireferential approaches.

Nevertheless not all approaches are identical and there are different mechanisms and methods.

c) The aims of doctoral education and its career prospects

The creation of doctorates devised specifically to meet the expectations of the professional arena is a fast-developing trend both in social work and in other fields. The initiative of the University of Norwich in creating the first doctorate in British social work (DSW) is following this trend. It is however important to emphasise that this initiative does not amount to reducing the role of research in doctoral training: this is a professional research doctorate. The stated aim is to train those high-ranking professionals who wish to develop their careers in the social field, those who are in a position of responsibility or expertise and not researchers who have extricated themselves from the practising field.

The initiative of the University of Norwich may perhaps be indicative of an alternative way of considering the relationship between research and active practice. In fact it is clear that the career

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5. For example, in education, in psychology.
prospects for the other programmes examined are for the most part and indeed in certain cases exclusively, those of teaching and associated research. It follows from this therefore that most commonly, the promotion of the bearer of a doctorate in social work involves a ‘disengagement’ from actually practising in the professional domain and integration either into social colleges or into the university itself. This disengagement should however be seen in its true perspective, in the context of the fact that the professionals enrolling for a doctorate are often already teachers of social work.

In some extreme cases (notably in Trieste) the very fact of enrolling for a doctorate amounts to choosing a university career. No other path is then conceivable. Elsewhere, in Goteborg for example, a doctorate may open up the path to other ways of practising as a professional, and to new posts in consultancy services. Some doctors are able to work as professionals purely in the research sector (without teaching duties) and outside the university system. This however is rare, as research is almost universally poorly funded, except perhaps in Sweden where a network of community and university-level research centres regularly employ social workers within the framework of specific programmes.

Quite obviously, the doctorate is not (yet?) the golden path which leads to executive posts in social work. Some employers of social workers would even be wary of qualified doctors in social work and would hesitate in taking them on (as suggested in a study by the German association of social work). Moreover, the question of recognition in terms of salary of this level of qualification remains open.

IV. Very recent programmes which seem to be spreading

With the exceptions of Lodz and Goteborg, the other programmes date from the 1990s and four of these from the later years of the decade. A movement clearly started ten years ago and it seems to be spreading. In fact the recent creation of new programmes and the fact that projects for setting up specialised doctorates in the field of social work are emerging in different parts of Europe, would seem to herald a significant development for the coming years.

Given that the average duration of doctoral studies is about 4 - 5 years, it is easy to see why there are as yet very few doctors in social work.

However, the current trend towards something new and towards change must not make us lose sight of the fact that research in social work has a history extending back more than thirty years or more. While the Doctorate in Social Work was only created in 1998 in the United Kingdom, research work into the questions of social work carried out for over twenty years by PhD students in thirty university departments are no less valid. Even if each establishment has only produced a few theses, the total number produced must now be significant. Would it be possible to compile a directory of them?

Some Swedish theses, or those produced by students of social pedagogy at Lodz are also now quite old. Finally 80 to 90 students are enrolled for doctorates in the programmes studied alone. There is therefore a substantial amount of material existing and in preparation which can be analysed.

The first question that comes to mind is this: what do all these works have in common? Do they present specialisations in relation to other research works? If so, what are these specialisations? Consequently, how can we define what research is in social work?

V. By way of a conclusion

Our study is restricted to the question of the actual production of doctorates. In fact some of the information which we thought we would be able to obtain relatively easily, ultimately proved very difficult to gather.

This mainly involves information concerning:

a) the candidates for doctorates and their career paths. Very few statistics are kept. Where they exist, they include a few details, especially on points which to us seem important, such as the previous careers of those studying doctorates or the subsequent career paths taken by doctors. Even the exact number of qualified has in several cases been difficult to establish. Collating this kind of data required searching for scattered pieces of information;

b) the theses. We thought we would easily be able to obtain titles, summaries and keywords for both completed theses and for those in progress.
In fact this would correspond to the type of information provided by the central catalogue of French theses. Even this would have been inadequate in order to get a good idea of the actual or planned contents of the theses. However, the equivalent of our central catalogue of theses does not appear to exist in any other country, at least not to our knowledge.

We have mostly had to make do with just the titles, and where possible, with a very brief description provided for the occasion by our interviewees. Translating the titles into French posed further problems. In fact, the subject matter of some research work has no equivalent in France, or calls on very specific concepts and theoretical approaches, which we would be in danger of distorting through an inability to properly understand them. Wherever possible such work was discussed verbally and/or in writing with our contacts at the institutions in question.

We acknowledge that the level of information on this subject is quite inadequate to give the reader a precise idea of the research carried out in the framework of doctoral education. However, to study the question further would require a completely separate investigation, which would involve an in-depth analysis of a sizeable number of theses. Such a project would by far exceed the scope of this initial paper.

Nevertheless we are not losing sight of this idea and as a logical follow-up to this study, are committed to further thought on the central theme of research in social work, through the organisation of European seminars. A first research seminar entitled Epistemological Problems in Research in Social Work took place in March 2000 in Paris, with representatives from over ten European countries, and further events are planned.

Translated by Tania Slade

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