

# Social work programmes in the social democratic welfare regime

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In this article we examine the emergence of social worker training in the Nordic countries and discuss the possible effects that the social democratic welfare regime has had on such training. We also discuss the development in recent decades of the academisation of the training and the establishment of social work as a subject of research and teaching. The early history of social worker education is based on archival material, national inquiries and secondary sources. Our presentation of the recent history of social work education is based on the responses to a questionnaire sent to teachers of social work in 33 Nordic social work programmes, and on a survey of course syllabi and prospectuses. It is also based on the reading lists for the social work courses in these programmes.

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## Introduction and aim of the study

Comparative analyses of social work often proceed from a discussion of different welfare regimes or welfare models. Reference is often made to Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology, according to which there are three types of welfare regimes: the liberal, the conservative corporatist and the social democratic. The arguments regarding social welfare regimes are founded on an analysis of specific features of social policy. These features unite some welfare states, and separate them from others.

When models of social policy are applied to social work, it is claimed that the different welfare regimes permeate the practice of social work (Lorenz, 1994). The underlying ideology determines whether social work is viewed as a public duty, as a task for voluntary organisations or as being based on market solutions.

According to this reasoning on welfare regimes, the demands for powerful state responsibility, social rights, universalism and solidarity have meant that the significance of the market and the family for social work is less in the Nordic countries, which belong to the social democratic regime, than in other welfare systems. Instead, the municipalities play a crucial role as producers and organisers of social work and employ many social workers (Lorenz, 1994; Morales & Sheafar, 2004). Social work is pursued in local welfare bureaucracies. It proceeds from a Nordic administrative system based on case management and application of

the law. Social workers acquire a dual role as both helpers and controllers. However, they work not only with the obvious social problems, but also with preventive measures. The preventive orientation is particularly expressed in child welfare (Fox Harding, 1996; Lorenz, 1994).

Although objections can be raised against theories of welfare regimes in general (Wilensky, 2002) and their link to social work in particular, the critique has seldom concerned the Nordic states where social work is so obviously interwoven in the municipal bureaucracies (Meeuwisse & Swärd, 2007).

Against the background of Esping-Anderson's overall perspective, we address in this article questions pertaining to a specific welfare institution: the training of social workers. Is the social democratic welfare regime also reflected in the education of social workers? We investigate the growth of social worker education in the Nordic countries and discuss whether and how it can be said to be influenced by a social democratic welfare regime. We also discuss the development in recent decades of the academisation of social work education and its establishment as a subject of teaching and research. Has this meant any crucial change in the education?

## Method and sources

In this article we use different types of materials and sources. The development of Swedish training of social

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workers has been allowed, to a large extent, to represent the Nordic development. When studying descriptions of the development of social worker training in the Nordic countries, many common traits appear even though the training may have started at slightly different historical points in time (see e.g. Elmér, 1991; Hermansen, 1991; Jonsdóttir, 1991; Koskinen, 1991; Lindholm, 1991; Sundt Rasmussen, 1991). From the very beginning, social workers were trained for the needs of the municipalities, which meant emphasising the role of social workers as civil servants. We have chosen to study the case of Sweden, since it is here that one finds the oldest and most well-documented training programmes for social workers. The early history of social worker education is based on: (i) archival material from the National Association of Social Work, which was the organisation that campaigned for and, for a quarter of a century, ran the first training for social workers in Sweden; and (ii) Swedish national inquiries and secondary sources describing how social worker education has developed in the Nordic countries. This history of social work education of recent years is based on the responses to a questionnaire sent to teachers of social work in 33 Nordic social work programmes and on a survey of course syllabi and prospectuses (Meeuwisse & Swärd, 2005). It is also based on the reading lists for the courses in these programmes.

### **The growth and development of social worker education in Sweden**

Lubove (1965) described the transition from social work as an essentially unpaid, philanthropic undertaking to a paid occupation based on professional training. Although many of the tasks were the same as before, the conditions for performing them were reformulated at the beginning of the 20th century. Piety and a desire to help were no longer considered sufficient; instead, the need for special knowledge and methods to deal with social problems were emphasised. Laymen had to be trained and philanthropists had to be replaced with employed social workers.

The need for special education for social workers was first raised in the late 19th century by American charity associations (Soydan, 1993). The American Social Science Association (ASSA) began to arrange courses for its members at Johns Hopkins University. Around 1900, social work programmes also began to emerge in Europe, chiefly in the UK and The Netherlands. In 1895, the London School of Economics started training for social workers. In the UK and the USA, however, it was not until the 1920s that the programmes reached a scale of any significance, and that is when they began to spread to the Nordic countries.

As in many other countries, the first Nordic social worker programmes came about through private initiative (Heckscher, 1981). In Norway and Sweden they began in 1920 and 1921, respectively, in Denmark in 1937, in Finland in 1941 and in Iceland in 1981. The development has been similar in all the Nordic countries, with a slight chronological shift (Nordisk Sosialt Arbeid, Jubileumsskrift, 1991). The process is described below using examples from Sweden.

We identify three different periods in the history of social worker education. The first period comprises the years 1880–1944. In Scandinavia voices began to be heard calling for a professional education for social workers, but the state still assumed no responsibility for the matter. The first education was mainly run through private initiatives. The second period covers the years 1945–1976 when social worker training was established under state auspices in the form of colleges alongside the ordinary university system. Since the end of the 1970s, this education has been expanded and subjected to competition, and there has also been interest in making the programmes internationally comparable. In addition, the programmes have been academised and postgraduate education in social work has been built up or is being built up in the Nordic countries.

### **The first period: from layman control to a profession in the service of the municipality**

With the founding of the National Association of Social Work (CSA) in Stockholm in 1903, came calls for a social work programme (CSA, 1904). The CSA, like many international models, was an umbrella organisation for various associations, some of them with roots in 19th-century philanthropy (Soydan, 1993; Wisselgren, 2000). Some new women's organisations were also members. Several of the voluntary organisations impelled the development of public welfare by working for reforms or providing service under their own auspices to demonstrate the need for action (Lundström, 1996).

The CSA lobbied the Swedish authorities and various contributors to promote the idea of social worker training. Several representatives of the association also went to the UK and the USA to study the training and published articles about it in Swedish periodicals (see e.g. the article 'En skola för socialt arbete' (A school for social work) in *Social tidskrift*, 1909: 252). But there were also forces acting against the professionalisation of social work. This was due mainly to economic misgivings on the part of the municipalities and the desire to preserve municipal layman control. The municipalities had long had responsibility for their own poor people in need, and for minors and elderly people who could not cope on their own. As Qvarsell (1995) pointed out, the Nordic

1 countries were sparsely populated and the civil aid  
 2 structures in the countryside were not as well developed  
 3 as in some other countries. Laymen in the municipalities  
 4 were relied on to take responsibility for the application  
 5 of the (restrictive) poor-relief ordinances. Many of the  
 6 2,500 municipalities at the time were small and poor.  
 7 They had neither the financial strength nor the interest  
 8 to restrict the layman model and employ trained social  
 9 workers.

10 In the first two decades of the 20th century, however,  
 11 the situation changed, forcing people to rethink. In the  
 12 big cities politicians began to see a need for trained  
 13 staff in the municipal administration. In pace with  
 14 industrialisation and urbanisation, social problems in  
 15 the cities increased (Wisselgren, 2000). Many observers  
 16 noticed serious deficiencies in the efforts of both  
 17 municipal politicians and philanthropists on behalf  
 18 of the poor (Boalt & Bergryd, 1974). The idea in  
 19 traditional philanthropy that social work was best  
 20 performed on a voluntary basis was now modified,  
 21 and many voluntary organisations advocated public  
 22 solutions (Kollind, 2003; Soydan, 1993). There were  
 23 also demands for the state to provide improved  
 24 assistance structures (Olsson Hort, 1993). During the  
 25 first two decades of the 20th century new laws were  
 26 passed that gave the municipalities new duties in  
 27 respect of poor relief, elder care, social child welfare  
 28 and the care of addicts.

29 The CSA's dogged attempts to convince the state and  
 30 the municipalities of the importance of training social  
 31 workers began to yield results in the 1920s (CSA, 1920;  
 32 Svensson, 1982). In 1921 the first training of social  
 33 workers began in Stockholm at the Institute for Social,  
 34 Political and Municipality Education, Training and  
 35 Research (Institutet för socialpolitisk och kommunal  
 36 utbildning och forskning). During the first 25 years, this  
 37 education was provided by the CSA and financed by  
 38 donations and municipal contributions. The principals  
 39 were academics who were simultaneously politically  
 40 active in the Conservative Party in Sweden. The city of  
 41 Stockholm was one of the financiers and was thereby  
 42 also able to influence the direction of the training. The  
 43 programme sought mainly to provide the expanding  
 44 cities with qualified administrators and social workers,  
 45 with an administration course alongside a social course  
 46 (Edebalk, 1997; Hesse, 2007). Another aim of the  
 47 programme was to promote the development of the  
 48 social sciences.

49 The ideas and models for a social work programme  
 50 were borrowed from the USA and the UK, but adapted  
 51 to suit Swedish conditions. Whereas the first American  
 52 programmes were geared to philanthropic aid, the  
 53 programmes in Scandinavia, from the very beginning,  
 54 were intended to train publicly employed officials  
 55 (Lubove, 1965; Soydan, 1993). An important aim was  
 56 to combine theory and practice. Much emphasis was

put on education in law and political science, supple-  
 mented by education in social policy, economics and  
 psychology (Heckscher, 1981). The Swedish social  
 worker education was characterised by a pragmatic  
 attitude and adaptation to the needs of local politicians.  
 According to Swedes who studied at the London School  
 of Economics, British social worker education was  
 influenced in a completely different way by the  
 socialist ideas of Sidney Webb and the Fabian Society  
 (Niskanen, 2007).

### **The second period: social worker programmes à la social democratic welfare state**

After the social democrats came to power in 1932,  
 they began to plan a new welfare policy characterised  
 by universalism through social insurance and non-  
 means-tested allowances, which would be handled by  
 state authorities. The municipalities would be given  
 more duties concerning people who fell through the  
 general systems. They were also given responsibility  
 for social child welfare, the care of addicts and elder  
 care.

The new welfare state outlined by the social democrats  
 presupposed an efficient apparatus and a large number  
 of well-trained officials, especially municipal ones. The  
 statutes on poor relief and coercive laws had formerly  
 been handled by municipal representatives. Now the  
 service and social welfare provided by the many small  
 local authorities had to be made more efficient, and  
 more long-term planning of the municipal tasks was  
 needed (Nyström, 1983; SOU 1945: 38: 10f). Planning  
 of larger and more efficient municipalities began. An  
 important question was how to obtain officials to run  
 them.

The issues of amalgamating municipalities and  
 achieving expanded and more efficient social worker  
 training were pursued in parallel (SOU 1944: 29; SOU  
 1945: 38). This meant that the state after the Second  
 World War began to give grants to social worker  
 training, which also enabled two new programmes to  
 start in the 1940s – one in southern and one in western  
 Sweden – so that local needs could be fairly adequately  
 covered (SOU 1944: 29).

In 1952 the number of municipalities was reduced,  
 through amalgamation, by more than half, from 2,498  
 to 1,037. This has been viewed as a breakthrough for  
 municipal administration by officials, particularly  
 within the social sector (Ighe & Fridén, 1994).

Social workers continued to be trained as civil  
 servants in the new programmes that emerged. Legal  
 knowledge was considered to be important since social  
 workers were supposed to apply legislation that  
 required knowledge of case management and public  
 administration. Similarly, subjects such as political  
 science and social policy are, by tradition, core teaching

1 subjects in the training of Nordic social workers.  
 2 Through practical vocational training the students were  
 3 given an early schooling in municipal bureaucracy  
 4 (Heckscher, 1981; Ighe & Fridén, 1994). But the social  
 5 work curriculum was also influenced by teachers who  
 6 had returned from study trips to the USA and UK and  
 7 were inspired by the casework approach (Hessle, 2007;  
 8 Soydan, 2001).

9 Both social workers and representatives of social  
 10 worker education in Sweden adopted a low profile in  
 11 the public debate during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s  
 12 (Pettersson, 2001). They worked in the shadow of the  
 13 optimism and faith in the future that was being created  
 14 around the general social policy.

15 When the Institutes of Social Work became Social  
 16 Work Colleges in 1964, the social work training  
 17 programme was extended from two and a half to three  
 18 and a half years. Previously, students had been expected  
 19 to do vocational training before entering the study  
 20 programmes, but now study practice was included  
 21 in the programme. The training centred round such  
 22 subjects as social law, social policy, macro economics,  
 23 psychology, sociology, political science, public adminis-  
 24 tration and social and municipal finance (Elmér, 1991;  
 25 Ighe & Fridén, 1994).

26 The 1970s saw the creation of applied subjects with  
 27 designations such as 'social methodology' and 'social  
 28 administration', building on knowledge acquired by the  
 29 students in other subjects such as psychology, sociology  
 30 and law. Yet these practical applied subjects did not  
 31 have the status of academic subjects and lacked links  
 32 to research and postgraduate education.

### 33 **The third period: market adaptation, academisation, 34 expansion, internationalisation**

35 In the last few decades, there have been certain  
 36 reappraisals of the social democratic welfare policy.  
 37 Circumstances such as reduced public resources, high  
 38 unemployment, longer waiting lists for healthcare and  
 39 other deficiencies in the care sector have resulted in  
 40 questions being asked about the provisions of the  
 41 welfare state and the public monopoly for the organisa-  
 42 tion and production of welfare services has been  
 43 gradually weakened (Edebalk, 2007; Sunesson et al.,  
 44 1998). At the same time, there have been demands  
 45 for a scientific foundation for social work and for  
 46 an evaluation of the effects of different types of inter-  
 47 ventions (Bergmark & Lundström, 2006). This develop-  
 48 ment has also made itself felt in some educational  
 49 programmes. First of all, the position of social work in  
 50 the education system has been strengthened in that  
 51 social work has become a separate subject and, at the  
 52 same time, the social worker study programmes are  
 53 being academised (Soydan, 2001). Second, the social  
 54 worker training programmes in some of the Nordic  
 55 countries are being exposed to competition, as market  
 56 forces are allowed to determine how many such pro-  
 grammes there should be. Third, the programmes are  
 being internationalised as a result of the Bologna  
 process – a collaborative project for higher education,  
 the aim of which is to make education in the member  
 countries of the European Union more uniform and to  
 increase international mobility. The emphasis in this  
 section is on academisation and the emergence of social  
 work as a subject of teaching and research.

57 The 1977 higher education reform entailed a radical  
 58 change for Swedish schools of social work. Since 1977  
 59 their number has more than doubled, going from 7 to  
 60 15. The number of students has also increased. The  
 61 old administration programme, established in 1921,  
 62 was separated from the schools of social work and  
 63 transferred to other programmes in higher education.  
 64 At the same time, the training of social workers was  
 65 broadened to include training for staff in the field  
 66 of elder care and social pedagogy. The 1977 higher  
 67 education reform also involved the academisation of  
 68 social worker education. The universities and colleges  
 69 had expanded vigorously in the 1960s and the previous  
 70 organisation of the system, with many independent  
 71 colleges, was considered antiquated. Each city was to  
 72 have only one college/university, and all educational  
 73 programmes were to be linked to research. Many  
 74 lengthy discussions were conducted to decide on which  
 75 areas of research should be pursued at the Swedish  
 76 schools of social work (Edebalk, 1997).

77 Unlike the Nordic situation, social work under  
 78 various designations ('social work', 'social welfare' or  
 79 'social administration') had long been an established  
 80 university subject and area of research in the Anglo-  
 81 Saxon world. Taking inspiration from the USA and  
 82 the high-profile universities that offered both education  
 83 and research in social work – Chicago, Columbia and  
 84 Berkeley – the Swedish parliament decided, in 1977, to  
 85 designate social work as a new subject of study in  
 86 higher education, although there was little unanimity  
 87 about this in the universities and colleges of Sweden.

88 The inquiry that proposed the establishment of social  
 89 work as a subject in higher education stressed how  
 90 important it was that future social workers should be  
 91 trained by social workers who had themselves taken  
 92 further education:

93 In the longer term it is suggested that the majority  
 94 of the present teaching posts should be replaced by  
 95 lectureships in social work. Postgraduate education  
 96 in the subject will be of great significance for the  
 97 education of teachers on the social work programme.  
 98 While awaiting this, lecturers in social work  
 99 should be recruited among people with a different  
 100 background (Sociala linjens utbildning, 1976: 10  
 [Education in social work]).

1 Social work was introduced primarily as a research field  
 2 to promote the scientific status of the discipline and  
 3 the profession. However, there were mixed reactions  
 4 to the introduction of social work as a major in the  
 5 programme for the training of social workers  
 6 (Sunesson, 2003). On the one hand, several leading  
 7 representatives of the schools of social work viewed  
 8 representing social work as a major subject to be a  
 9 means to an independent profile, occupational maturity  
 10 and professionalisation. This stance was shared by  
 11 many occupational representatives and authorities in  
 12 the field who wanted to see their occupation as a sphere  
 13 of science and wanted an education that resembled  
 14 accepted professional courses in the training of doctors  
 15 or psychologists. On the other hand, others were  
 16 critical, believing that education in the classical subjects  
 17 should be broadened instead of introducing a separate  
 18 major. The research departments of the schools of  
 19 social work would then be headed by professors of  
 20 subjects such as sociology, psychology or social  
 21 pedagogy.

### 22 **Social work in today's Nordic social work programmes: 23 a survey**

24 Social work has gradually been established as a major  
 25 subject in all Nordic social worker programmes as a  
 26 stage in the academisation process. Swedish and Danish  
 27 social worker study programmes today are 3.5 years  
 28 long. Sweden offers one-year master's programmes in  
 29 social work at many universities and colleges and, since  
 30 2007, 2-year master's programmes have been offered at  
 31 several universities. Finnish social worker programmes  
 32 take 5 years to complete and include a master's,  
 33 available at all of the six universities in the country.  
 34 In Finland, training for the social sector is also given  
 35 at vocational colleges. In Iceland, social worker pro-  
 36 grammes last 4 years: students take a BA in social  
 37 work and, since 1975, they have qualified as authorised  
 38 social workers. In Norway, the qualification required to  
 39 become a social worker is obtained through a 3-year  
 40 bachelor's programme. Further education is offered in  
 41 a 3-year master's programme. Alongside the training  
 42 of social workers, Norway also has training for 'child  
 43 welfare pedagogues' and 'social educators'; their train-  
 44 ing is closely related to, and in some cases closely  
 45 coordinated with, the training of social workers.  
 46 Postgraduate education in social work is available only  
 47 in Trondheim.

48 What has been the effect of the introduction of social  
 49 work as a major at Nordic schools of social work? In  
 50 Sweden, social work as an area of research has been  
 51 analysed and found to be able to assert itself quite well  
 52 with regard to growth, specialisation, institutionalisation,  
 53 academisation and success in attracting external finance  
 54 (Sunesson, 2003). To obtain an overall analysis of how

the subject of social work had developed in the Nordic  
 countries, we conducted a study in 2002. Our focus of  
 interest was the theoretical content of the subject and  
 the background, education and professional experience  
 of the lecturers who teach social work as a major. We  
 sent a questionnaire to the 33 schools of social work  
 that were members of the Nordic Committee of Schools  
 of Social Work. The questionnaire was sent to the Com-  
 mittee's contact persons at the different institutions,  
 who in turn distributed the questionnaires to the teachers  
 concerned. The selected group consisted of teachers of  
*social work* (or equivalent). The questionnaire was to  
 be given to six teachers in each school: to three persons  
 with long experience of teaching social work, and to  
 three persons with less experience. The selection was  
 considered reasonable considering that academisation is  
 proceeding rapidly and the newly recruited teachers can  
 be expected to have a different educational background  
 than the more experienced teachers.

The questionnaire consisted of 16 items with both  
 open-ended and fixed response alternatives, and inquired  
 about required reading and the content of the teaching.  
 It also had questions about the teachers' backgrounds,  
 education and professional experience. These questions  
 were based on the assumption that the teachers' own  
 experience was significant for the education they  
 provided, for example, if they had mainly academic  
 or practical experience.

We sent a total of 198 questionnaires to 33 schools  
 and received 122 completed questionnaires from 32  
 institutions (12 in Norway, five in Denmark, seven  
 in Finland, seven in Sweden, one in Iceland and one  
 in Greenland), giving a response rate of 62 per cent.  
 Seventy-six questionnaires were not completed. This  
 figure includes both an indirect dropout, which was due  
 to the fact that there were not six teachers of social  
 work at all the schools, and a direct dropout, which was  
 due to the fact that some teachers did not answer the  
 questionnaire. We do not know exactly how large the  
 direct dropout is, but we assume that it is rather small.  
 Only one school (in Norway) sent no response. We  
 received completed questionnaires from all the other  
 institutions contacted, and several contacts explained in  
 letters that all the teachers who met the selection  
 criteria completed the questionnaire.

As a supplement to the questionnaire, we asked the  
 teachers to append syllabi and reading lists for the  
 courses in social work that they taught, and curricula  
 that showed how these courses were incorporated in  
 the education as a whole. After removal of duplicates  
 and incomplete descriptions, there were 51 syllabi and  
 reading lists for us to examine. We judge this to be a  
 reasonable amount of data, except in the case of Finland  
 where we have been able to examine these documents  
 for only two of the six programmes in operation. As  
 several other researchers have observed, the syllabi are

not always concrete. Moreover, we do not know how they are followed in reality.

### The content of the teaching in social work, the lecturers and required reading

Based on the lecturers' respective backgrounds, education and professional experience, we can draw the conclusion that the subject of social work stands with one leg in the academic world and one in practice. Our questionnaire survey showed that it is mostly women who teach social work in the Nordic countries, that they generally have long practical experience of social work, and that the degree of 'self-recruitment' is high; most lecturers had the same educational background (a degree in social work) that the students were working to obtain. Just over 70 per cent of the teachers who completed the questionnaire were women. Roughly 25 per cent of the teachers had taught for more than 15 years; approximately as many had taught between 10 and 15 years. As many as 60 per cent of the teachers had more than 10 years' practical experience of social work, while only 11 per cent totally lacked experience. The majority of the teachers (71%) were graduates in social work, relatively few (29%) had a different academic education.

We also studied the postgraduate education of the teachers (see Table 1). Just over a third of the teachers had a degree from postgraduate research (doctorate or licentiate). This is probably a relatively small share if we compare with teachers of more traditional subjects such as sociology and psychology. Denmark and Norway had the lowest proportion of teachers of social work with doctorates. Finland was the country with the largest share of teachers with doctorates, followed by Sweden. As mentioned before, some Nordic countries lack postgraduate studies in social work. We must also note that this study relates to the educational situation in 2002.

Although only a third of the teachers had doctorates, almost three quarters (72%) said that they had experience of research. Some of the teachers were registered as doctoral students, and others took part in research and development projects in various ways. Twenty-eight

Table 1. The educational background of the Nordic teachers of social work, in addition to their first degree.

	No.	Per cent
PhD (Fil. Dr)	42	34.4
PhLic (Fil. Lic.)	4	3.3
MA (Fil. mag.)	31	25.4
Training as supervisor	6	4.9
Training as therapist	9	7.4
Other	9	7.4
No further education	21	17.2
Total	122	100.0

per cent of the teachers totally lacked experience of research.

Regarding the question of whether there were common features of social work in the Nordic countries that distinguished it from social work in other countries, a majority replied yes (67 per cent). Examples of common features mentioned were: the Nordic model welfare state with a large public sector, distribution of wealth, universal rights, similar laws regarding social welfare and family policy, good care for children and the elderly, trust in governmental engagement in welfare and a sympathetic view of social intervention. Also mentioned were similar values among social workers and similar social problems. Furthermore, it was mentioned, more critically, that Nordic social work was paternalistic, bureaucratic and characterised by a level of social control that could become stigmatising. As compared with the training of social workers in other countries, the Nordic programmes were perceived to be aimed more towards social policy and were less clinically oriented. Training programmes for social workers in the Nordic countries were considered to be more geared towards educating civil servants than in other countries. Those who did not find common features in Nordic social work maintained that social work based on means-testing is fairly similar regardless of welfare model and that there are significant differences in the Nordic countries concerning, for example, drug policy and compulsory legislation.

We also asked the teachers if they found any reason to apply a Nordic perspective in their teaching. Slightly more than a third (39 per cent) replied yes and used the arguments mentioned above. The majority (51.5 per cent) replied that this was motivated only to a certain extent, whereas others saw no reason at all (9.5 per cent). They argued that it was as important to focus on the similarities and differences in social work from a broader, global perspective. Some replied that a Nordic perspective might be relevant regarding issues pertaining to social policy, but hardly regarding theory and the development of methods in social work.

Are these views reflected in the syllabi and the course literature? The syllabi showed that the courses and elements included in social work were a jungle of orientations and fields of knowledge. To some extent the descriptions of Nordic course elements in social work conform to international criteria for the content of the teaching. Such criteria have been drawn up by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and in the proposal presented by an international research group (Hessle, 2001; Payne, 2001). Apart from theories and methods in social work, many programmes emphasise such elements as the history of social work, social work as a discipline and profession, social work and the production of knowledge and the role of social workers in society. Theories about

1 organisations, authority and power, on the other hand,  
2 do not seem to have been given a prominent place in  
3 the Nordic programmes.

4 In the questionnaire we asked the lecturers to state  
5 which of the textbooks used in social work they con-  
6 sidered most important, stating a maximum of three  
7 alternatives. More than 200 books were mentioned, and  
8 there was a wide distribution in the responses.

9 However, quite a few were basic books on social  
10 work, both international and Nordic. Among the four  
11 most popular textbooks in social work there were  
12 two Anglo-Saxon and two Nordic rather broadly-based  
13 primers in social work. These are books with a thorough  
14 analysis of what social work is, its history, the theories  
15 and methods used and so on. An international example  
16 is Malcolm Payne's book *Modern Social Work Theory*  
17 (1997), which is presumably one of the most widely  
18 read textbooks on social work in Europe. The Nordic  
19 basic books on social work were relatively new and had  
20 been included in reading lists in recent years.

21 Also among the textbooks were books about psycho-  
22 social work and guidance, books dealing with different  
23 professional methods in social work, books geared to  
24 target groups (e.g. social work with small children),  
25 books with an orientation to psychology or psychiatry,  
26 books on structurally focused social work and books  
27 about the professional role.

28 In recent years social work has acquired a range of  
29 literature specific to the subject, giving the subject its  
30 own identity. Books by authors from English-speaking  
31 countries were used by almost all lecturers. Judging by  
32 the questionnaire findings, Nordic lecturers in social  
33 work offer a mixture of literature written by authors  
34 from their own country, from other Nordic countries  
35 and from English-speaking countries. Indigenous litera-  
36 ture has a strong position, but it does not dominate.  
37 We found no evidence of any palpable influence from  
38 Anglo-American authors. However, to draw conclusions  
39 about the 'figures of thought' that are conveyed to  
40 students would require an analysis of the content of the  
41 required reading.

42 When it comes to psychological and social science  
43 theory, the programmes have long since displayed  
44 international influences by borrowing theories and text-  
45 books, not least from the USA; for example, theories  
46 about how different client groups should be understood  
47 and handled and how social work should be assessed.  
48 American influence of this kind is not unique to Nordic  
49 programmes, however. In the 1980s, two researchers  
50 examined the training of social workers in 21 countries  
51 in Western Europe. They found that American ideas and  
52 textbooks have played a key role in education through-  
53 out the post-war period (Brauns & Kramer, 1986; see  
54 also Pettersson, 2001).

55 Can one say anything about the total effect of the  
56 introduction of social work as a major in Nordic social

worker programmes? It cannot be denied that it has  
made the education as a whole and the subject of social  
work more scientific. Today there are teachers with  
doctoral degrees in social work, and more are on the  
way or are working with research. The academisation  
of the subject has also meant that new scholarly  
journals and new textbooks on social work have appeared  
in the Nordic countries.

Has this entailed any radical change in the actual  
education? Our study did not find any evidence that  
the Nordic social worker programmes had changed  
drastically since the introduction of social work as a  
major subject. The new subject was generally added to  
existing educational institutions. There was thus already  
teaching activity, an organisational framework and a  
teaching staff with ideas as to how the education should  
be pursued and with established contacts with the muni-  
cipalities who received trainees. The old educational  
structure lived on, although the names of certain  
subjects were sometimes changed and attempts were  
made to adapt them to the subject of social work.  
The programmes continue to train officials for public  
administration. Students learn the laws of their own  
country, the administrative structure and the systems of  
social policy. On the other hand, trends in social work  
such as community service, social mobilisation, radical  
social work and empowerment do not have a strong  
position. Nordic social work programmes, as other  
researchers have pointed out, also devote surprisingly  
little time to issues of organisation, power relations and  
ethics. Such matters should be of the utmost relevance  
since Nordic social workers devote much of their time  
to the exercise of authority and even to implementing  
coercive measures (Pettersson, 2001). These special  
conditions are not reflected in the training programmes,  
which may have to do with implicit and tenacious ideas  
that a good welfare state is benevolent towards its  
citizens.

### Concluding reflections

This analysis of social worker education in the Nordic  
countries has applied a historical perspective, using  
Sweden as an example. We have found three charac-  
teristic features in the development: (i) the programmes  
have displayed pragmatism and have been adapted to  
the needs of the local authorities; (ii) the knowledge  
conveyed has been at the intersection between human  
beings and the legislation; and (iii) the introduction of  
the subject of social work has not yet entailed any radical  
changes in education, but the future social workers, to  
a greater extent than before, are taught by 'their own  
kind', i.e. social workers with a postgraduate education.

Table 2 attempts to sum up the development of Swedish  
social worker education in relation to the growth of the  
welfare state.

Table 2. A model of the development of social worker education in Sweden.

Period	Welfare system	System of social worker education	Ideas/characteristics	Programmes
1880–1944	The state has an unobtrusive role; social measures are the responsibility of local authorities, which often have a weak economy.	Calls for training for social workers come mainly from philanthropists and private actors.	Ideas and models are imported from countries such as the USA and Britain and adapted to local needs and historical traditions in Sweden.	From 1921: A privately run training programme in Stockholm: The Institute for Social, Political and Municipality Education, Training and Research.
1945–1976	The Social Democratic Welfare Regime is developed and consolidated.	Small municipalities are amalgamated to enable municipal administration with employees instead of laymen. The reforms create a need for trained social workers. Social worker education under state auspices emerges. The state regulates the content of the education.	Development is steered by social democratic ideas about the responsibility of the state for the citizens and the desire for administration by public officials.	Six programmes under state auspices are established in Stockholm: Göteborg, Lund, Umeå, Örebro and Östersund. There is also a programme run by the Church of Sweden (Skördalsinstitutet).
1977–	The welfare state under reappraisal: market solutions and private initiatives begin to be incorporated in welfare policy. The social democratic motto that higher education should be accessible for everyone simultaneously leads to a vigorous expansion of higher education. New universities and colleges are instituted.	Social worker education is incorporated into the university system. Each institution is given freedom to decide on the form of the education and the number of places. Differentiation. Broadening. Internationalisation. 'Bologna adaptation.'	Compromises between the municipalities' needs and an aspiration to academise and internationalise the education and achieve greater mobility.	The number of programmes more than doubles (from 7 to 15) during the years 1977–2007.

The first Swedish education started under private auspices in the 1920s, when the government did not wish to become involved in the matter. Right from the beginning, Swedish social worker education consisted of courses preparing future social workers for service in municipal bureaucracies. There were studies in social sciences such as municipal studies, political science, law and social policy, and there were individual-oriented subjects such as psychology and social hygiene. It was precisely this balancing act between 'laws and people' or 'the interests of society and those of the individual' that has been regarded by many researchers as characteristic of Nordic social work, and it has set its stamp on the content of the programmes (Dahl, 1992; Ighe & Fridén, 1994).

In the 1940s the state took over the economic responsibility for social worker education and also began to increase the number of programmes. This expansion was part of the social democratic plans to create larger and more efficient municipalities administered by public officials rather than by laymen. The aim was to train efficient and competent officials for the needs of the municipalities. Although the social democratic visions were based on a universal social policy, it was never the idea that they should cover all situations and all the people in the country. Trained social workers would handle the selective, needs-tested measures.

Although the education of social workers came under state control, there is nothing to suggest that the social democratic policy had any direct influence on the content. The education did not change much; as before, it was focused on satisfying the municipalities' needs for trained social workers. Ever since the introduction of legislation on child welfare and the care of alcoholics at the start of the 20th century, however, the municipalities in Sweden, as in the other Nordic countries, have been given the power to intervene against people's will (Gould, 1988). The fact that more and more social workers have been trained and employed by the local authorities may be seen as an expression of the will of the social state to foster the population and to intervene against the citizens.

When the Swedish social worker programmes were incorporated in the university organisation in 1977, social work was created as a subject. This has enabled research and postgraduate education in social work and has had the result that future social workers are now, to a greater extent, taught by 'their own kind'. It has also meant the introduction of textbooks, journals and various forums where teachers, practitioners and researchers can discuss issues with colleagues. As in other European countries, there is an ongoing reform of higher education in the Nordic countries to make it more uniform and to increase international mobility. But the content of social worker programmes does not



1 appear to have undergone any drastic changes in  
 2 recent years. The programmes are still characterised by  
 3 pragmatic adaptation to the municipalities' needs and  
 4 the knowledge that is taught is still at the intersection  
 5 between people and legislation. Trends such as community  
 6 development, social mobilisation and the organisation  
 7 of citizen opinion have never had any great space in  
 8 social work in the Nordic countries, nor in the educa-  
 9 tion of social workers.

10 Let us return to the question of whether the Nordic  
 11 social work programmes are products of a social  
 12 democratic welfare regime and whether the academisa-  
 13 tion in recent decades has brought about any crucial  
 14 changes in the education. If one can talk of a Nordic  
 15 model for social worker education, it is best described  
 16 as being linked to municipal self-government and the  
 17 Nordic administrative system based on case manage-  
 18 ment and application of the law. The social democratic  
 19 regime assumed a major responsibility for the expan-  
 20 sion of social worker education in order that inhabitants  
 21 of a municipality could meet trained staff, but the actual  
 22 focus and content of the programmes were scarcely  
 23 affected. The educational policy has remained, at all  
 24 times directed towards the needs of the municipalities,  
 25 and it is here that the majority of social workers find  
 26 employment. Development in recent decades has not  
 27 changed that.

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