

Tuula Kähäri

Social work in the context of Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city

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Institut für Vergleichende Sozialarbeitswissenschaft und Interkulturelle/Internationale
Sozialarbeit (ISIS) e.V. Eichstätt

2008

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ISBN

Reihe: Materialien zur vergleichenden Sozialarbeitswissenschaft und Interkulturellen/
Internationalen Sozialarbeit
(Materials for Comparing Social Work Science and Intercultural/International Social
Work)

Volume 10

First Edition

Address:

ISIS Eichstätt e.V.

c/o Prof. Dr. Peter Erath

Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

85071 Eichstätt

Germany

Printed in Czech Republic

Foreword

This publication is based on the author's Master's Thesis in Social Work, written during her studentship in the Master of Arts, International Social Work at the University of Kuopio in Finland. It is being published because we perceive it as having a wide international appeal.

Internationalisation of affairs means new kinds of brow-raising activities on borders. It seems to be connected with new kinds of opportunities and problems in different aspects of social life. Social institutions on both sides of the borders are shaped by these new kinds of "border processes". This concerns social work to a very large degree.

The publication explores the role of social work in the border context, especially from the point of view of fundamental questions involving twin city problems. The twin city of Imatra-Svetogorsk at the Finnish-Russian border is used as an example. The author, Tuula Kähäri, MA, works as a social worker in the Finnish territory of Imatra.

Juha Hämäläinen

Forewords

Writing as part of one's studies is mainly independent, lonely and sometimes tedious work. However, during the five years of studies I was lucky to spend many immensely rewarding and enjoyable moments with fellow students and other people linked with the studies. Special thanks go to Sue Middleton in England, my landlady during the student exchange period and dear friend since that time. My pal Merja, on her part, made it happen that even the Swedish language course became a hilarious session – Heja Sverige!

Writing and completing the pro gradu thesis has taken a lot of work and devotion. I am relatively satisfied with the final outcome and for that I am deeply indebted to my tutors, Professor Juha Hämäläinen and Senior Researcher Terttu Nupponen. Juha Hämäläinen provided critical but supportive and professional comments that helped to keep the text and thought focused on the topic. Under his guidance the thesis was limited to a manageable scope and it got a logical structure. Terttu Nupponen, again, introduced new and refreshing viewpoints to my work when presenting her own ideas, questions and expert knowledge.

I must not forget to thank my employer, superiors and colleagues engaged in social work with adults at the Social Welfare Office for supporting my studies. The City of Imatra, my employer, and all the people at work have been encouraging and flexible with the necessary arrangements to make my studying possible. At the moments when I was losing faith in the work they helped me to restore my confidence in finally completing the studies. Also, I am grateful to the City of Imatra for showing that I am a valued and wanted employee. This, together with the studies, has had a great impact on the positive development of my professional self-esteem.

Sharing my time between studies and work has been a demanding task, and there was very little time to spend with my nearest and dearest. My husband Tapio, though an innocent victim, has had to endure my occasionally very strong feelings of exhaustion and all the “stuff” related with those feelings. But he took it as a man, and our marriage seems to survive in spite of the ordeal of studies. Tapio, you have been supportive, understanding, protective and WONDERFUL in all respects! Thank you for that.

Grandma, mum, dad and my brothers Matti and Markku: You have offered a solid and safe basis to build my life on, and it has been an enormous emotional resource throughout my life. Grandma, with only little education and now at the age of 93, must have found it somewhat difficult to understand the nature of university studies. But she never stopped encouraging me. When I stayed overnight at my childhood home, she always remembered to ask me at night: “Have you done your homework?” Also, it was she who often wished me good luck when I was leaving home to take an exam. Thank you, my dear family members from my childhood home, for being there.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis takes a look at social work as well as the needs and possibilities for cooperation within social work in a border area context. First, I attempt to analyse the importance of the border area context in social work: How does the border area environment influence the content, practices and theory of social work? Second, I try to find out what social work has to offer to the well-being of the residents in a border area: How could social work practices be applied especially to prevent but also to solve the social problems rising in a border area?

The research data consists of research literature on international social work and on the twin city concept as well as a group interview. The theoretical framework comprises the concepts of international social work and twin city cooperation and the theories relating to the self-perception of social work. Through an analysis of the theoretical data I have attempted to form an understanding of how the phenomenon of social work in a twin city links to the concept of international social work.

I approach the topic from the point of view of the Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city. Cooperation within social work between Imatra and Svetogorsk is just emerging and, especially what comes to public sector social work, practical measures have been limited to occasional visits on both sides of the border. In the empirical part of the study, I have interviewed social work management in Imatra about their experiences of cooperation with people involved in social sector work in Svetogorsk and about their opinions concerning the potential benefits of cooperation.

In the case of the Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city, neighbouring area cooperation seems to bring international social work and twin city cooperation together: it provides the material setting for cooperation (funding). In the conclusions, I make an effort to suggest a few ideas about what social work in the Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city could be in practice. I base these ideas on the theories of twin city cooperation and international social work as well as the interview data.

✍ Research topics

1. How does the border area operational environment affect the content, practices and theory of social work?
2. What has social work to offer to the well-being of the residents in the border area?

✍ Theories and framework

1. Research and concepts relating to international social work and twin city cooperation
2. Social orientation within social work
person oriented and structure oriented social work

It is necessary to study these topics as there is very little research literature on the subject. A search was made in Linda and Arto databases, combining search terms “raja-alue/lähialueyhteistyö” (border area/neighbouring area cooperation) with “sosiaalityö” (social work), which produced no results. The combination of “sosiaali” (“social”) and “lähialue” (“neighbouring area”) produced less than 30 references in both databases. None of these references specifically dealt with cooperation within public sector social work. Based on these searches there seems to be more cooperation between associations engaged in social work (e.g. Leppänen 2005).

Also the searches combining “social work” with English terms relating to border areas (border area, cross-border, twin cities, neighbour cities, double cities, bi-national cities, companion cities, sister cities) failed to produce results. Although there is little research literature on the topic, there is some cooperation within the social sector (and social work, too, in particular) in the context of neighbouring area cooperation projects, for instance. Nowadays most of these projects are focused on cooperation in the field of social and health care between Finland and Russia (Suomen sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2005).

The Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city is a unique operational environment as regards social work. It is located on the border of the European Union, and the cultural and socio-economic differences between the cities are huge. All this gives a special character to possible future cooperation within social work between

these cities. Besides the Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city, there is only one other twin city located on the border of the European Union: Narva and Ivangorod on the Estonian-Russian border.

In Finland there are three pairs of cities called twin cities: Helsinki-Tallinn (Finland/Estonia), Tornio-Haparanda (Finland/Sweden) and Imatra-Svetogorsk (Finland/Russia). The Helsinki-Estonia twin city differs from the other two as these cities are the capitals of their respective countries. In most cases border area cooperation takes place between regions outside the fast developing areas. (Heliste ym. 2004).

A border area is an interesting operational environment as regards the practices and development of social work. Cross-national cooperation in the social sector provides an opportunity to compare and exchange experiences. By way of studying different practices and ways of thinking we can gain a new insight into our own work practices and their development. One of the presumptions in this study is that cooperation between the cities of Imatra and Svetogorsk could offer a real-life operational environment for the orientation of international social work.

Research motive

- ✍ There is little research on the topic.
- ✍ Twin city is a new and an interesting operational environment in social work.

The concept of international social work can be defined in different ways. It can be looked at from many viewpoints such as education in international social work, exchange of employees and students, joint projects between two or several countries, or aid and support projects offered by a developed country to a less developed country. One can also approach the topic by comparing social work in different countries. (Geza & Falk 2000.) In some contexts international social work has been defined as multicultural social work among immigrants to a country (Fook 2004). Also various organisations (e.g. IASSW, IFSW, ICSW) are involved in international social work activities such as the development of education and practices in international social work as well as cooperation and

exchange of information in international congresses and in the form of various publications. The organisations for international social work represent the aspects of social work in other international organisations such as the UN. (Lyons 2005.)

One way of looking at internationalism is its inevitability; society is globalising and so is social work. We live in a world where different social, political, ideological and economical trends are intertwined in multiple ways. The discussion on globalisation displays many kinds of tensions and the parties to this discussion often hold totally opposing views on the effects of globalisation. It is difficult, often impossible, to determine and evaluate the cause and effect relations concerning social structures and various phenomena.

Several sociologists appear to share the view that on an average globalisation of the world trade and economy has boosted economic growth, which in turn enhances well-being. However, there is a problem when not everybody can take part in the economic growth. These people seem to fall deeper in their distress and the current trend in sociopolitical measures – from “solidarity” towards “neoliberalism” emphasising the primary role of economic growth – probably will not hold back the increasing differences in well-being (Lorenz 2005).

One of the global phenomena is increasing migration. Multiculturalism, the status of minorities, prejudices and racism are part of social work. A culture-sensitive approach to customer work requires specialist skills and training. An important element in multicultural social work is an awareness of both national and international immigration policies and their effects. (Healy 2001, 219.) We can distinguish two major trends in multicultural social work: a culture-sensitive work orientation, and an anti-racist and anti-discriminative work orientation (Anis 2006, 109).

In this thesis I have looked at the literature on international social work mainly from the point of view of a structuralist approach to social work. Recognition of social structures and phenomena, responding to them in an appropriate manner and relating them to the theory and practices in one's own work belong to the

specialist knowledge of both international and structural social work (Lorenz 1998, 247). Global problems such as ultimate poverty are phenomena that can be influenced by no other means than by structural solutions (Seipel 2003, 199).

It seems that a holistic attention to the customer's interests demands both person oriented measures (mainly skills of communication between the employee and the customer) and a structuralist approach to work, where the political and structural context of social work is considered together with the aspects concerning the individual customer.

International social work is

- ✍ education, exchange of employees and students, joint projects and aid and support projects
- ✍ work in associations
- ✍ exchange and comparing of experiences
- ✍ multicultural social work
- ✍ attentive to the effects of globalisation
- ✍ structural social work

The twin city concept was first introduced to describe the cooperation between pairs of cities on the US - Mexican border (Sparrow 2001, 73). European countries started to emphasise and do research on twin city cooperation in border areas when the expansion of the European Union began in the 1990s. The EU wants to support positive development in the border areas, both within and outside the EU, e.g. in Russia. The aim is to improve living conditions in the border areas and by these means to even out the differences in well-being between fast developing centres and areas further away from these centres. (Ehlers etc. 2001.)

Nowadays there are several European pairs of cities which use the twin city concept to describe their mutual cooperation. The costs of cooperation projects and other joint activities have mainly been covered by EU project funds (Eske-
linen/Kotilainen 2005, 353). Since the majority of funding for twin city cooperation is not provided locally but comes from external sources (e.g. the EU, inter-

national financial institutions and the governments of the countries in question), the European twin city activities are linked to a larger context such as the EU as well as national foreign and security policies and neighbouring area cooperation.

Twin city cooperation is not always supported. Negative attitudes towards twin city cooperation come up repeatedly in research on border area cities (Ehlers, Buursink & Boekema 2001, 1). It is said that true cooperation cannot be built solely on administration and contacts made through official channels, but mutual cooperation is founded on the residents' opinions and attitudes as well as the opportunities and readiness to start communicating with each other. Also it has been considered important that immigrants are involved in twin city cooperation and its development (among others Bucken-Knapp 2001; Lundén/Zalamans 2001). One of the topics in this thesis is to discuss how social work could participate in promoting a more positive attitude towards multiculturalism.

Twin city cooperation

- ✍ is linked to the EU neighbouring area policy in Europe
- ✍ is mainly carried out through neighbouring area cooperation projects
- ✍ puts more and more emphasis on the social dimension of twin cities

2 INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

2.1 Definitions of international social work

The literature on social work uses the following English-language terms, among other terms, to describe the international dimension of social work: cross-cultural, inter-cultural, international, comparative and global social work. *Multicultural social work* emphasises intercultural communication, understanding of cultural differences and paying attention to them in social work. *International social work*, again, considers the social work practices in different countries, global social problems and comparative welfare and social policy, for example. (Geza/Falk 2000, 53–54.)

Discussions about international and multicultural social work also bring up the topics of self-perception and target-setting in social work. According to the definitions of international social work, social work should include both the *person oriented and structure oriented perspectives to social work*. The latter focuses on the notion that social work must aim at participating in activities that have an influence on social structures and political decisions, whereas person oriented social work emphasises the care, rehabilitation and services provided for individual customers and their families. (Geza/Falk 2000, 53–54.)

Healy (2001, 7) defines international social work as follows:

International social work is defined as international professional practice and the capacity for international action by the social work profession and its members. International action has four dimensions: internationally related domestic practice and advocacy, professional exchange, international practice, and international policy development and advocacy.

By this definition Healy wants to emphasise that also local and national scale social work has to face social problems that are universal in nature and that call for an international perspective to social work. The practices, diversity and common ethical values in social work should be strengthened and promoted by arranging opportunities for international exchange of work practices and educa-

3 TWIN CITY

3.1 What is a twin (double) city?

I use the concepts *twin city*, *pair of cities*, *border city*, *border area cooperation* and *neighbouring area cooperation* to describe the context of the subject of this thesis, i.e. social work. The concepts of border area cooperation have not become clarified yet. This explains why, for example, the English-language term *twin city* (*kaksoskaupunki*) is often translated as “kaksoiskaupunki” (*double city*) in Finnish.

Around the world there are several pairs of cities that are situated on state borders and that use the concept *twin city* when referring to mutual cooperation. The concept was originally introduced to describe the cooperation taking place in 14 border cities on the US – Mexican border (Sparrow 2001, 73). Generally, the objective of cooperation is to change the function of the border from a barrier to an opportunity. The unifying of Europe has directed attention and also funding (PHARE, INTERREG) to border area cooperation and research. It has been predicted that the opening of borders and starting border area cooperation will have a favourable impact on the development of economy in border areas. But in many cases we will yet have to wait and see how the prognosis turns out. Also what comes to people’s minds and feelings, we are kept waiting for the “opening of borders”; the borders still divide and have many impacts on people’s everyday lives. (Ehlers et al. 2001, 1; van Houtum/Ernste 2001, 103.)

There are considerable differences between pairs of cities, which makes it problematic to define the concept of twin city. Researchers claim that not all pairs of border cities of approximately the same size and situated within a short distance should be called twin cities. In addition to vicinity, the concept should comprise a social dimension, a sense of togetherness among the residents. (Ehlers et al. 2001, 1). Buursink (2001) has analysed border area cooperation and arrived at the result that in most cases the use of the twin city concept is misleading when considering the level of integration and the nature and depth of cooperation between the so-called twin cities. The word “twin” refers to

4 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH PROCESS

My purpose has been to analyse the research problem – social work in a twin city context – mainly within the framework of theories relating to the research topic and to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How does the border area context influence the content, practices and theory of social work?
2. What does social work have to offer to the well-being of the residents in a border area?

The research data consists of research literature on international social work and the twin city concept as well as a group interview. In addition to the interview data, I have used documents dealing with the Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city and other written materials as well as data gathered by observing various twin city cooperation events (twin city seminars, visits to Svetogorsk and participation in twin city cooperation negotiations).

Research design

- ✍ Research questions
 1. How does the border area operational environment affect the content, practices and theory of social work?
 2. What does social work have to offer to the well-being of the residents in a border area?
- ✍ Theories and framework
 1. Research and concepts relating to international social work and twin city cooperation
 2. Social orientation within social work
 - person oriented and structural social work
- ✍ Choice of research methods
 - Theory-focused: conceptual analysis
 - Empirical study: qualitative research methods
 - data gathering: group interview
 - analysis method: content analysis

Twin city cooperation is discussed in the empirical section of this thesis from the point of view of social work actors in Imatra. The interviewees were chosen based on the criterion that they would have the widest knowledge of social work issues in the context of Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city cooperation accomplished so far. However, such research material can be misleading and biased. When describing twin city cooperation it is significant to determine from whose point of view cooperation is looked at.

The need for cooperation is perceived differently when considering the varying interests of social work actors in Imatra or Svetogorsk, customers, employees, managers, employers, residents or the state, for instance. Naturally, one viewpoint does not suffice when investigating the opportunities for cooperation. This thesis can provide a foundation for further development of cooperation and it is possible to continue the research work by interviewing, for instance, other Finnish social workers, social work actors in Svetogorsk or customers about their views on the needs and opportunities for cooperation.

The interview data is grouped under the following themes: international, multicultural and structural social work, and twin city cooperation. In the conclusions (synthesis), I make an effort to provide an understanding of what social work is as a theoretical concept on the one hand and as practical measures on the other. Due to the theoretical focus of this thesis, I chose to analyse the theories and present the findings in the form of tables, and by these means I have attempted to form an integrated whole linking the literature on international social work and the twin city concept as well as the observations arising from the research data.

5 SOCIAL WORK IN THE IMATRA-SVETOGORSK TWIN CITY

I have discussed international social work in this context both as multicultural social work and as international social work. Multicultural social work puts an emphasis on intercultural communication, understanding and observing cultural differences, and it is often connected with social work with ethnic and national minorities in particular. International social work, again, focuses on social work practices in different countries, global social problems and comparative welfare and social policy, for instance.

The empirical study disclosed three social work orientations in the Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city:

- ? social work with Russian immigrants in Imatra
- ? cross-border cooperation – operational models that are suited for applying both in Imatra and Svetogorsk
- ? humanitarian work / aid and support work (missionary mentality).

The interviewees considered as the most significant orientation the work with Russian immigrants and its development by means of education in multicultural social work and language skills. Also the involvement of immigrants in the planning and practice of social work was seen as a way of developing cross-border cooperation and the work with immigrants. As regards cross-border activities, finding common operational models, professional exchange (consulting) and becoming familiar with the work organisation and practices in the neighbouring city were taken up as possible forms of cooperation. Instead, one-way aid and support work or exporting the Imatra model for social work to Svetogorsk were not considered viable or appropriate.

5.1 Multicultural social work

Culture-sensitivity

Russian and Finnish social services and service cultures are essentially different and it is often difficult for immigrants to understand the Finnish social service system. The problem in immigrant work can become twofold as immigrants may not have the necessary knowledge and skills to use the services and, on

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The focus in this thesis is on social work in the context of the border area. The aim is to analyse the importance of the border area context for social work: What kind of influence does the environment of border area have on content, practices and theory of social work? And on the other hand, what does social work have to offer to the well-being of the citizens in border area?

The data is twofold: it consists of research literature of international social work and twin city together with group interview. In the empirical part the managers of social work are interviewed about their experiences of cooperation with instigators of the social sector in Svetogorsk and their opinions about potential benefits of cooperation. Through theoretical analysis of the main concepts, with empirical data and qualitative approach, I have tried to build up an understanding of the concept of international social work, about social work in the context of twin city as a phenomenon and also how these two are linked.

Social work in Imatra-Svetogorsk twin city can be divided into two levels: national multicultural social work and international border crossing cooperation in social work field. Both multicultural social work and border crossing cooperation can also be divided into two categories: the former into culturally sensitive and antiracist approaches, and the latter into bilateral (Imatra-Svetogorsk) twin city cooperation and multilateral neighbouring area cooperation.

It seems to be obvious that merely the context of border area does not bring out the element of international social work into the practices of social work. Instead, the cultivation of international social work requires both conscious and target-orientated investment of work and open-minded attitude which emphasises the importance of reflection. Respectively, if there is desire for development of international social work, the operational environment of the twin city creates favourable settings for it: geographical vicinity, relatively high proportion of immigrants and the possibility for funding of neighbouring area cooperation.