

## Chapter European Dimensions

### Introduction:

The PRAISE project has been created and developed by pedagogical partners of many different European countries: Iceland and Scotland, Spain and Italy, France and Germany and by technological partners from also different European countries like Italy and Scotland. This co-operation really seems to be an innovation, because the co-operation of institutions working in the social field or in the formation of social workers and educators with technical partners is rather rare and if it happens then perhaps more on the national level.

These different partners all have:

- installed **virtuous circles** of more or less different types (see chapter “Local Experience”)
  - o in relation to their institutions (like universities, schools, see chapter “Partner Description”),
  - o their different target-groups (like students, social workers, trainees...),
  - o in connection with their different formative needs (see chapter “Formative needs to formative modules”)
  - o and the situation in their countries or cities.

-They have worked on **case-studies** for which they have agreed on a field of work:

--- work with children and young people (minors) with or without special needs---

and have written them down in a specific, shared modus, so that a comparable basis could be identified, then translated their case-studies into English and located them on a common web-site.

([www.cable.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.cable.uhi.ac.uk)), which was produced by the technical partners for the CABLE-project.

-Each partner has started to identify **important terms** to build a shared semantic network in order to make the case-study-collection readable and useful, to give information to each other and later on to everybody who visits this certain website in order to find clues, ideas and hints about social work in different countries and in different fields of social work.

-The technical partners have created an e-learning platform and the pedagogical partners have begun to develop and realize formative plans based on and deriving from the work of the virtuous circles and the case-studies

-This work has in great parts included the possibilities of the **new media / IT-technology** (communication via internet and newly created web-sites) and on the other hand face to face meetings of the partners in the different countries and disseminations to partners and students of the institutions who work in the social field through virtuous circles and other forms of public relations.

### I. The European perspective

The PRAISE project has started with the objective to take a step in the direction of a process of learning from each other and knowing more about each other concerning the social field in Europe and to share experiences about formation in the social field. As it has been outlined in the various chapters above, these objectives have been followed in very different ways.

One result of the project up to now is, that there is a huge amount of interest in each other and each other's social work. But – like probably in other fields too - the European perspective is not easy to be found and to work on.

The European perspective points to various dimensions, with which some experiences have been made, others could indicate possibilities for the future:

**First dimension:**

**to share information about the questions and the work-approaches which are in the focus of social work in the different countries and in the formation of social workers and educators, to get information about projects, ideas, institutions, but also about problems and difficulties important in the present social field, to get to know various case-studies to find out the shared and the different approaches to persons (children and parents), to social problems and social needs in the different countries**

The PRAISE partners have learned from each other in what different ways they have built their virtuous circles in connection with the needs of their institutions and the social field they are working for. For all partners this was an experimentation with a new approach. And of course they have learnt a lot from the different case-studies out of 6 European countries. So one can say, that a European communication network has been created, using the possibilities of the internet (and in connection with the CABLE. Project).

You can easily see, that many social problems in the various countries are focussed on similar contents: drug-problems, problems which follow migration, participation of minors in social institutions, broken homes, problems of certain groups of minors with special needs and so on. It is not so easy to find out, if and how theories and experiential knowledge can be shared among the pedagogical partners in the different countries.

Working on case-studies from other countries (in a local virtuous circle or in the circle of the partners during the meetings) means something different from working on those of your own country; so this kind of work with case studies would have a **different function** and would need a different **methodological approach**.

This kind of discussion would not so much have the function to directly improve the work of social workers or educators or students in the field or in the formative process, because there is no directly shared social work or formation as a basis.

It would have the function of an intercultural exchange “far away” from normal daily work, with all the positive points of such a privileged situation, in order to find out the social problems, themes and approaches in the different countries and then maybe in the second step: learn something from each other.

It is a form of intercultural learning and needs a great amount of sensitivity and empathy and a tolerant access to each other as a basis, because the examples of “good practice” written down by the partners are points of identification and they contain cultural concepts of what somebody in some country or some institution of social work evaluates as “good practice” They include - as short as they may be - parts of the systems of value of the partners.

So it is not easy to handle the situation, where you would find out, that maybe certain case-studies you read and discuss may define social help in a way you consider as not sufficient, or you would choose another way to work with a certain child or you think some activities as very “strange” in connection to your point of view.

The openness needed for such kinds of discussions is not easy to establish - most of all it needs time to get in contact and to reach a basis of a relationship at least when you discuss in a face to face modus.

Of course also **inside** each of the countries combined in the PRAISE project there are many differences in the way social problems get solved. So probably there is not **one** German or Italian approach to drug problems or to get along with the problems migration is accompanied with, as we all live in countries with a more or less greater range of competition in the social field connected with value decisions or philosophies of life or different theoretical approaches. You could show this in many parts of social work and as a teacher you teach your students different

approaches so that they will have to find their own way to act in social work. So what is judged as “good” practice maybe is not generally accepted inside the European countries themselves.

But among the different countries this problem gets a far bigger dimension: at least one country has for example more or less the same history, the same language, the same legal system, similar kinds of funding social projects, the same scientific exchange and you can work in the south and the north of the country with the same degrees.

In Europe or among the countries included in the PRAISE projects all this is up to now really very different and the discussions between exponents of countries can only be a small impulse to realize the European perspective.

In one of our meetings our colleague Dr. Vito di Chio suggested an idea to work on case-studies from different countries. He suggested to look at each of them (or at a choice) in three different ways:

1. The analysis of the self-perception of the acting persons in the case study
2. The analysis of the interaction between the activities and the socio-cultural context
3. the analysis of the ideas of the process of a European integration

The last point includes the question of the possibilities of a transfer of a certain social activity in the social field into the other countries- what would be possible, what would certainly not be possible and what would be wanted?

And the discussion of and approximation to the visible differences that will be clearly seen and perceived must be led without trying to compete for the better way of social work but to start an open dialogue.

### **second dimension**

**to communicate about concepts standing behind certain terms which are used in the social field (Do we mean the same thing when we talk about.... ?)**

This part of the European perspective points to the ontology, which is also necessary to link the case studies, to find the examples which you want to find. But of course it also points to the European exchange about topics, theories and approaches. And this is not a small a problem either:

Talking about words means talking about concepts and talking about concepts means talking about your professional identity.

So it was very important in the project to identify key-words which guide you to certain case-studies and to begin to define the “real” meaning of some of the words.

Sometimes the surprise was big, when one found out, that words like social-pedagogic is used in some, social work is used in other countries, or that the term “new media” has a totally different meaning in some European countries.

Social work is on great parts based on words, the person of the social worker or educator works with his person and his possibilities and competences, which are often shown in words (as one also realizes in the method of narration).

## **II. Some difficulties for the European perspective**

### **Language and Translation**

Again and again the problem that a European language does not exist, leaves its marks – on the level of international meetings, all the concepts and ideas must be translated into English or French in order to be understood – and this takes time, energy and patience, - on the level of intercultural exchange the virtuous circles themselves would have to use the English language to gain directly from the examples from the international partners.

**Time**

Another hindrance for the straightforward step to a European perspective is the time all the partners need to do all the kind of work besides daily work in their own institutions as at the moment it is still a bit isolated from the questions of everyday work in the institutions themselves.

**Relationship between project management and discussions on social work**

At least at the beginning of the project the relationship between management tasks and discussions about social work in Europe were not really balanced. Too much of the time had to be consumed on financial aspects, reports that had to be written, etc so that not much was left for a European discussion on social work.

**Necessity of personal contacts in order to find a basis for open discussion**

As hinted at above, the topic of “good practice”-case-studies implies personal identification which can more easily be dealt with when the project partners have come into contact with each other. This was necessary at the beginning of the project and in the course of the project this factor has improved the discussions.

**III. Conclusion:**

For all the PRAISE partners the European “insight” has started to become more relevant. On all levels of the complicated project there have been small steps towards each other and a European consciousness, the thinking about European dimensions has reached students and social workers in all the participating countries, the existing interest in “neighbouring” activities in the social field has been increased. What could be done is to turn the mere curiosity into a deeply founded discussion of experts – and the PRAISE methodology could be a working tool to support this.