# International Journal of Social Pedagogy

# Social pedagogy vs social work in Poland

Anna Odrowąż-Coates [1,*], Katarzyna Szostakowska [2,*]

[1] Associate Professor, UNESCO Janusz Korczak Chair in Social Pedagogy, Institute of Education, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Szczesliwicka 40, 02-353 Warsaw, Poland
[2] Assistant Professor, Social Pedagogy Department, Institute of Education, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Szczesliwicka 40, 02-353 Warsaw, Poland
* Correspondence: acoates@aps.edu.pl (A.O.-C.); kszostakowska@aps.edu.pl (K.S.)

**Peer review:**
This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

**Open access:**
*International Journal of Social Pedagogy* is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

## Abstract

This article is a descriptive review of the historical and theoretical conditions of social pedagogy and social work in Poland. It pertains to the definition, tradition and development of social pedagogy and social work in Poland. Using the insiders' expert overview of the latter, it identifies the disciplinary boundaries, commonalities and differences that shape both social work and social pedagogy today. The authors present the academic roots, methodology, research scopes, theoretical framework for practitioners and finally, the practical application for both disciplines. The discussion is based on literary sources and extensive experience in the field presented by an associate professor of social pedagogy and a qualified social worker, both employed at a social pedagogy department. This combination ensures scientific honesty and a double-screening procedure of the content from the perspective of practitioners representing both disciplines. This approach provides a balanced view, since the interdependency and separation of the two fields may be seen as an area of potential negotiation.

**Keywords:** social pedagogy; social work; Poland; theory; practice; discipline; profession

**Intertwined yet separated: a reflection on social pedagogy and social work in Poland**

In this article we write about the differences and commonalities of social work and social pedagogy to describe the relationship of the two against the background of Poland's specific circumstances. This article is a contribution to comparative perspective on relations of social pedagogy and social work in a country-specific, cultural context, when set against individual cases in other countries. The Code of Ethics for Social Workers starts with the statement that social work is a driving force for social change and the conscience of society. The code refers to deep engagement with the social environment which is the operational basis for social pedagogy. Social pedagogy is the pedagogy for social engagement. It is predominantly preoccupied with the connection and interdependency of individuals with their natural, biological, social, cultural and spiritual environments. The core of social pedagogy concerns human rights, community education, the connection with the planet, nature and people, the Bronfenbrennerean environmental character of human existence driven by the belief in the possibility of positive transformations by using social forces. What links Polish social pedagogy to worldwide trends is the emancipatory character of Radlińska's early social pedagogy, comparable to Freirean pedagogy of the oppressed, the role it plays in social awakening, participation and activism, all leading to active citizenship (see Schugurensky, 2016) and its ability to find educational solutions to social problems (Hämäläinen, 2015). The embedment in the international socio-pedagogical landscape was already described by Szmagalski (2018), so we will not expand on this issue. Instead we will remain within the scope of this country-specific case.

Odrowąż-Coates (2018) claimed that:

> social pedagogy in Poland goes beyond social work as it covers a wide range of issues connected to the influences of social environments on individuals and groups of people. Such influences may be intended or unintended. The influences are mutual, acknowledging the agency of individuals to make impact, to change their social environments and through awareness of social conditioning, to bring a notion of liberation. (p. 136)

In support of this view, Lisowska and Łojko (2020) argued that social work is a category of Polish social pedagogy, while they also agreed that social pedagogy can be treated as the theory of social work. The major difference discussed by these authors is that social pedagogy is a wider term and includes phenomena and subjects that are not indicative of being in need or necessarily pertaining to social work, while social work, originating from social philanthropy, deals primarily with challenges, pathological issues, social problems and deficiencies. Mikulski (2005) wrote about social work as a tool of social pedagogy that carries out what social pedagogy envisages in theory, through research studies and into the practical dimension. Therefore, he perceived social work as a function resulting from social pedagogy and also as a tool of social policy, which is affected by social pedagogy. From the historic perspective drawn by Brenk (2007), social work is included in Helena Radlińska's social pedagogy, who is acknowledged as the founder of both fields in Poland, due to her efforts to define, operationalise, professionalise and introduce both disciplines into the academic discourse and professional training. In the Polish scientific tradition, the theory of social work is classified as social pedagogy, and Radlińska uses a wider understanding of social work. 'Helena Radlińska distinguished three sections: the theory of education, the history of social and educational work, and the theory of social work' (Pilch and Lepalczyk, 1995, pp. 111–2). The last section relates directly to the crystallisation of social work, by dealing with recognition of the conditions in which the need for intervention, rescue, help, provision of security or social welfare merge together with finding ways of identifying social forces in order to organise them for creativity in improving life conditions (Radlińska, 1961, p. 362).

**Social pedagogy, a subdiscipline of pedagogy**

Pedagogy, as understood in the Polish context, is the science of education that describes, defines, analyses and researches educational practices. It is divided into a number of scientific subdisciplines dedicated to more specific fields of educational practice. The well-established twentieth-century scholar Stanislaw Kawula classified this science, dividing it in accordance with seven criteria: the fields of

human activity, problematics, institutional, deviation and developmental deficiencies, development, methodological, goals of pedagogical activity (Kwieciński and Śliwerski, 2009, pp. 21–3). Although this categorisation may be seen as outdated, it positions social pedagogy under the methodological criterion and defines it as a discipline rather than a subdiscipline. Kawula argued in favour of this categorisation by virtue of the fact that it deals with educational processes connected to the influence of multiple socio-educational environments, including peer groups, the media, school, family, neighbourhoods and so on. According to a more contemporary social pedagogue, Mariusz Cichosz (2014, pp. 8–12) an alternative classification from 1973 may be more up to date. It splits pedagogy into four main categories: baseline pedagogical disciplines; detail-focused pedagogical disciplines; auxiliary and borderline pedagogical disciplines; and, finally, pedagogical disciplines focused on main areas of human activity, where social pedagogy is assigned together with care and social welfare pedagogy. Odrowąż-Coates (2018) understood social pedagogy as a multidisciplinary bridging capital that uses reciprocal relations between disciplines by being positioned at the edge of them. The classifications presented here contribute to a conclusion that social pedagogy is defined as a discipline within a discipline or a subdiscipline of pedagogy defined as being based on interpersonal relations, highlighting the socio-environmental context. Moreover, these classifications suggest that social work is a narrow term focused on social problems and ways to resolve them, while social pedagogy offers a wider landscape of interests, in turn implying social work as being secondary to social pedagogy.

**The relationship between social pedagogy and social work in Poland**

In the Polish tradition of social pedagogy, we pursue socio-pedagogical conditioning of social work and at the same time this connection enables us to capture and explain the mechanisms of transforming and designing changes in the environment where social work takes place. Thus, social pedagogy provides the educational dimension for social work. In 1980 Aleksander Kaminski wrote about these links, mostly in relation to the practical dimension and, in his view, social work turns social pedagogy into practice (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2009, p. 357).

Social work therefore derives from the tradition of social pedagogy. This is due to the fact that social pedagogy, being a scientific discipline, consists of theoretical constructs based on axiological, ontological and epistemological components. This strong foundation directs the activities of social work in the social environment. However, both social pedagogy and social work can be seen as practical due to characteristic features that they both display: value assignment or normativity, compensation, prevention, dynamism and integrity (Kromolnicka, 2013, p. 76). Normativity is analysed in two dimensions: first, paraphrasing Helena Radlińska, the protagonist of social pedagogy in Poland, as point of reference and the final aim of transforming the social environment with social forces to achieve a societal ideal. Second, normativity is meant to justify the construction of the many assessment tools necessary for social workers in their everyday profession, tools derived from the category of model and expected performance (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2009, p. 35).

Compensation is another feature that defines the horizon of social pedagogy. Helena Radlińska thought that the:

> subject of compensation is not only within the person itself, but also his or her economic situation, psychical and psychological state and the social environment with its specific conditions and sociocultural reality. In all cases, compensation starts with introducing special values of supporting the weaker with the forces of the stronger, creating opportunities for establishing new social bonds and cooperating to achieve the ideals that exist in a given environment. (Cited in Theiss, 1984, p. 72)

This process is connected with the adaptation to the conditions and possibilities that enable the development of individuals. Defining compensation in this way aligns it with prevention. To enable fulfilment of this feature in practice, the social pedagogue or social worker should be knowledgeable about human development, environment and the mechanisms at work. Prevention in this case means inhibiting unfavourable phenomena and behaviours affecting an individual. Moreover, the role of preventive measures is to strengthen positive behaviours that lead to improvement in the quality of life (Theiss, 1984,

p. 72). The dynamics require an open-minded and proactive attitude to reality, which stimulates creative solutions and activities. For a social pedagogue, the centre of attention is the long-term socialisation process and its importance for the local environment. A static description of educational activities and their status in a specific space and time is less important (Kromolnicka, 2013, p. 77). The feature that bonds both social pedagogy and social work is integrity, which means complexity and wholesomeness. Both fields use research from other social sciences in order to collect information on human development and social functioning. This means that social workers and social educators working with an individual take into account their individual characteristics as well as socio-environmental influences. This gives them both a toolkit for taking positive action and eliminating obstacles or offsetting the negative effects resulting from individual characteristics, or those that are produced by the environment.

These features of social pedagogy relate directly to the practical dimension of social work. Social workers are required to be highly qualified and therefore fully aware of the high ethical standards placed on them. They have to be aware of the results of their own actions and how they may affect individuals. They are expected to respect social welfare clients and to be responsible for their well-being by analysing every decision and its possible consequences for the individual and their immediate environment.

From the perspective of social pedagogy and social work, people are perceived as active individuals, striving to transform their own lives and their social environments. In order to evoke change, the only requirement is an internal transformation in line with their values, which leads to overcoming difficult life situations. The role of a social worker is to raise awareness of the fact that the person they work with is co-responsible for building their community and living in harmony with others (Kromolnicka, 2013, p. 78).

When analysing the relationship between Polish social pedagogy and social work, one should answer the questions: what kind of social pedagogy we are looking for and what conditions must be met to claim that it constitutes the genealogical roots for social work? We believe that it will be most appropriate to understand social work as one of the functions of social pedagogy that is constantly open to other disciplines (Marynowicz-Hetka, 1996, p. 141).

Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka (1996) claimed that

> social pedagogy not only points to the pedagogical and social issues of social work understood as a social impact, but above all explains the mechanisms conducive to designing changes and transforming environments. In this sense, its educational dimension and approach to social work are marked, and social pedagogy itself may be one of the disciplines constituting the theoretical foundations of this areas of social activities, which we define as social work. (pp. 141–2)

Social pedagogy and social work interpenetrate, because

> in the practice of social work, theoretical inspiration is sought in the thought of social educators, while social pedagogy itself shows interest in social work as an important area of social practice, not only subjecting it to theoretical examination, but also searching for inspiration of the research within social action. (Piekarski, 1996, p. 172)

One of the fields of work for a social educator is social work, which is implemented from a socio-pedagogical perspective. What is understood as social pedagogy is 'the field of social activity of various entities focused on helping with development and guiding individuals, social groups and communities in overcoming difficult situations' (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2009, p. 356). Social pedagogy in relation to social work is a theoretical, multi-threaded approach. It combines axiological and philosophical aspects, which make it possible to determine the educational foundations, purpose and sense of taking actions. As a result, it is possible to transform reality into two dimensions: social and individual (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2009, p. 357). Despite the links that clearly exist between social pedagogy and social work, social pedagogy plays a dominant role, as it is a recognised discipline of pedagogical science. In order to be selected, a new scientific subdiscipline must meet the following criteria: it must clarify the conceptual system, have characteristic methods of research and formulate initial theories (Kwieciński and Śliwerski, 2009, p. 24). Even though social work is not an independent discipline, it has its own set of concepts and a practical dimension that manifests itself in support programmes and activities. However,

the theory of social work directly emerges from social pedagogy, using the norms and models of pedagogy (Kantowicz, 2001, pp. 31–4). At present, in the Polish context, social work cannot become an independent pedagogical subdiscipline.

## The development of social work in Poland

When writing about the development of social work in Poland, it is impossible to start without mentioning its founder – Helena Radlińska (1875–1954). She devoted many years of her research activity to developing the foundations for social pedagogy (Wroczyński, 1974, p. 58). According to Radlińska, 'social pedagogy is an interdisciplinary theory. For its purposes, it uses basic research in biological and psychological sciences, building thesis bordering with philosophy, the history of education, didactics for adult learning and the theory of physical education and hygiene' (cited in Theiss, 1984, p. 73). Thanks to the use of this diversity of sciences, social educators constantly improve their knowledge and update their educational activities to achieve effectiveness. In her works, Radlińska focused mainly on the relationship between educational work and the impact of the environment on an individual. The basic thesis of her work is the assumption that 'the environment, as a set of developmental conditions and stimuli, determines the effectiveness of all educational activities' (Wroczyński, 1974, p. 59). Thus, educators should constantly understand the environment in which they work. This is essential if they seek to achieve educational success. According to her, a pedagogue is a manager, an organiser and a researcher of educational processes. Two concepts are associated with this understanding of the educator's mission: transformation of the environment and compensation. Referring to the first concept, it consists of finding social forces in the environment that will enable inherent change. Transformation of the environment is also planning its organisation. The concept of compensation was understood by Radlińska (1961) as 'deliberately compensating for deficiencies, supplementing or replacing unfavorable components of a personal or group situation, creating living conditions considered a social norm' (pp. 370–1). The term social service is most closely related to this concept, which later became synonymous with the term social work. It represented planned social assistance.

The concept of social work for the purpose of social pedagogy has been borrowed from other disciplines related to the practice of social life, because in the works of Helena Radlińska we do not find a specific description or characteristics of the concept of social work. This may be because the concept of social pedagogy according to Radlińska was very open, allowing for a number of interpretations. Contemporary social educators understand these concepts in two ways. First, social work as an area of the practical applications of social pedagogy. Second, social work is identified with many areas of social practice, used as a synonym for social services, social welfare or social aid (Marynowicz-Hetka, 1996, pp. 138–9). Conversely, Barbara Smolińska-Theiss and Wiesław Smolińska-Theiss and Theiss (2019) defined the concept of social assistance in two dimensions: narrow and broad. The narrow dimension concerns assistance as a social activity that provides families and individuals with appropriate tools, resources and conditions, enabling them to overcome a difficult situation. In the broader sense, this term means all social policy institutions operating in the local environment. Their overarching goal is to enable groups or individuals to resolve difficult situations that they themselves are unable to overcome using their own resources (Smolińska-Theiss and Theiss, 2019, p. 342). From the outset the concept of social work is vague and ambiguous because, on the one hand, it represents a profession that consists of providing help to people, but, on the other hand, it is an aid activity carried out through social welfare centres (Pilch and Lepalczyk, 1995, p. 108).

The theory of Polish social work was formed by the same traditions and ideas that shaped social pedagogy. Educational institutions, associations, care and educational centres were created under the influence of positivist ideas that drove both disciplines. Their existence during the partitions (when Poland ceased to exist for over 100 years as a single country and was divided by three powerful neighbours) played two roles. First of all, these centres compensated for the lack of a national education system and the corresponding lack of a Polish cultural socialisation system. There was also a lack of social security for Poles who were forced into a culture of being Polish diaspora in their own country. Second, people who took up this subject at that time spread awareness among wider social groups about the existence of such

phenomena as lack of life opportunities, cultural deprivation and extreme poverty. The current concepts of social work were shaped by the ideas emerging at the turn of the twentieth century. Helena Radlińska based them on three pillars: assumptions and practical principles that define social work; epistemological assumptions relating to the sources of knowledge about reality and available possibilities; and ontological assumptions related to the essence of existence for both the whole society and for individuals (Pilch and Lepalczyk, 1995, p. 115). These descriptions remain perfectly in line with the modern definition of social work.

**Social work as a profession in Poland**

In order to standardise the concept of social work and to enable its practical application, in 1990 the concept of social work was codified in the Act on Social Assistance, later amended in 2004 and still in force today. According to this act, social work is 'professional activity aimed at helping individuals and families to strengthen or regain the ability to function in society by fulfilling appropriate social roles and creating conditions conducive to this goal' (Kancelaria Sejmu, 2020, vol. 1, art. 6, § 12; all translations by A Odrowaz-Coates). There is no strictly defined group of social welfare clients in this definition. Such clarification is made later in Article 7, in which the legislator defines the conditions for providing assistance to individuals who need it:

> Social assistance is granted to individuals and families due to: (1) poverty; (2) orphanhood; (3) homelessness; (4) unemployment; (5) disability; (6) long-term or severe illness; (7) domestic violence; (7a) the need to protect victims of human trafficking; (8) the need to protect pregnant women and large families; (9) assistance in care, educational matters and running a household, especially in single-parent families or in families with many children; (10) difficulties in the integration of foreigners who have obtained refugee status in the Republic of Poland, subsidiary protection or a temporary residence permit granted in connection with ...; (11) difficulties in adapting to life after release from prison; (12) alcoholism and drug addiction; (13) unplanned events and crisis situations; (14) natural or ecological disasters. (Kancelaria Sejmu, 2020, vol. 1, art. 7)

A significant difference between Helena Radlińska's approach to social work in general and social work in the Act is the departure from the values that a professional social worker should follow. On 5 October 1925, Helena Radlińska established in Warsaw at the Free Polish University (Wolna Wszechnica Polska), which was then a non-state university, the Social and Educational Work Department (in 1935 the name was changed to the Social and Educational Labour Section of the Pedagogical Faculty) (Theiss, 1984, pp. 58–9), and in 1945 the Department of Social Pedagogy was established at the University of Lodz (Czarnecki, 2013, p. 64). As a result, many education workers became officially qualified for the first time, including those working in the field of education, politics and social services. The latter group included educators, probation officers of the juvenile court and labour protection inspectors. According to Helena Radlińska, they constituted the professional forces that perfectly reflected the contemporary mission of social work, because they were people who, on the one hand, had relevant education (today we would say those who possess the qualifications for the occupation of social worker) and on the other, wanted to help other people and were able to establish contacts within the social environment (Theiss, 1984, p. 58). At that time, Radlińska wrote her main works, which formed the basis for formulating the methodology and the issues forming social pedagogy today (Wroczyński, 1974, p. 59).

One of the theories she formulated was the concept of social work. She understood it as shaping the environment with social forces to achieve the desired ideal (Radlińska, 1961, p. 254), working together with the organised care activities of the state, social organisations and local governments (Theiss, 1984, p. 72). When describing community work, she discussed three of its components: care, rescue and assistance. Care was the most important path to transforming the environment, as it referred to individuals incapable of independent existence, such as people a severe disability or illness, children and adolescents, pregnant women, orphans and the elderly (see Theiss, 1984, pp. 101–6). Social groups identified by Radlińska as requiring care match the premise of social assistance contained in Article 7 of the Act on Social Assistance, as today, if an individual is unable to function independently, the state is required

provide help in the form of community care. 'Rescue is sometimes understood as emergency aid that should be provided in the event of a natural disaster and it covers the entire population of the endangered area' (Theiss, 1984, p. 101). In this case, the concept overlaps with point 14 of Article 7. In the event that people require financial assistance, the amount of support for individuals and families experiencing natural or ecological disasters is decided by the Commune, which then allocates funds from the Voivode (Wydział Polityki Społecznej, 2019). The last concept falling within the scope of how we understand social work is assistance 'manifested in various areas and forms (e.g. providing material resources, labour, advice and spiritual support). It is aimed at the reinforcement of individual strength in difficult times, removing obstacles too great to overcome without such aid' (Cichosz, 2014, p. 67).

The professionalisation of social work was related to the dynamic development of schools for social work and the emergence of social work specialities at the faculties of pedagogy, sociology or economics, followed by the separation of social work as an independent field of study. The practical professional activity of social workers focuses on four tasks and goals: maintenance and constant improvement of efficiency and quality of services and benefits dedicated to social welfare clients; provision of therapeutic services; identification of needs and effective distribution of help; and active operations leading to the development of social welfare institutions. Constant updating and improvement of qualifications for social workers and the training of professional staff prepared to work with families and individuals experiencing many social problems is the most important condition for the development of social assistance institutions (Radziewicz-Winnicki, 2008, pp. 98–9).

The definition of the profession of a social worker took 40 years to develop. In 1923, the term social worker was first used in the Act on Social Assistance. From 1966, the social worker profession was introduced into the official terminology and meant 'a specialist, professionally involved in satisfying social needs using methods of social work' (Hanyga-Janczak, 2008, p. 106). The Act on Social Assistance of 12 March 2004 strictly defines what conditions must be met in order to become a social worker:

> a social worker must meet at least one of the following conditions: (1) has a social service college diploma; (2) has graduated from a higher education institution in the field of social work; (3) by 31 December 2013, has graduated from higher education institution with a specialization preparing for social work in one of the fields of: (a) pedagogy, (b) special education, (c) political science, (d) social policy, (e) psychology, (f) sociology, (g) family studies. (Kancelaria Sejmu, 2020, vol. 2, art. 116, §1)

The Act also defines two levels of professional specialisation, which are awarded by the Central Examination Commission for social workers. The first level is to complete and deepen the general knowledge necessary to start working as a social worker. The second level is a degree of specialization, which is undertaken by people who want to develop and acquire new qualifications aimed at working with a specific group of clients, for example, the elderly, homeless or refugees (Czarnecki, 2013, p. 238). Apart from social welfare institutions, a social worker may also work in other institutions, such as prisons, care and educational facilities or hospitals (Pilch and Lepalczyk, 1995, p. 120). In her books, Helena Radlińska repeatedly emphasised the heavy responsibilities of a social worker. She wrote about the profession in these words:

> Social workers are sometimes called social engineers. This comparison is partially correct. A social worker must be a good technician in his or her scope when planning change, formulating methods to affect the change, organizing social devices and devising appropriate methods of efficient operation. Therefore the engineer should also take people into account. (Radlińska, 1961, p. 355)

The profession of a social worker in Poland is not a status-driven profession, it has low prestige, low pay and is underestimated by the general public disproportionately to the expectations placed on the outcomes. It is believed that a social worker should be competent in using the methods of social work and thus have a wide knowledge of social problems and ways of solving them. An important feature of a social worker is communicativeness and the ability to listen actively. Social workers in Poland are predominantly female. The numerous requirements associated with this profession contribute to a high

employee turnover in social welfare institutions (Pilch and Lepalczyk, 1995, p. 121). This is due to the fact that social workers are exposed to high levels of stress in their work, suffer professional burnout, contradictory expectations on the part of social welfare clients and the institutions supervising them and endure excessive administration related to filling out documentation limiting actual time to help individuals in their environment. This is compounded by low wages and the lack of appreciation for this profession among Polish society (Czarnecki, 2013, pp. 211–28). The profession is inextricably linked to appropriate qualifications, and to life experience. According to a survey among social workers carried out in 2010, 54 per cent of respondents indicated life experience, and 32.4 per cent vocational preparation as the source of knowledge needed in their profession (Piątek, 2013, p. 31). It shows that social workers value their work experience more than the knowledge acquired during the course of their academic education. Helena Radlińska (1961, p. 384), writing about educating social workers, emphasised that in addition to obtaining qualifications at high level, it is very important to constantly self-educate and supplement one's knowledge about new social phenomena.

## Social work in academic terms

In the Act on Social Assistance of 12 March 2004, there is a provision that sets out detailed requirements that universities in Poland must meet in order to educate social workers to perform their professional duties:

> The minister responsible for social security, in consultation with the minister responsible for higher education, will determine, in a regulation, the required skills, the list of subjects, the minimum number of classes as well as the scope and number of apprenticeships for the specialization preparing for the profession of social work taught at university level. (Kancelaria Sejmu, 2020, vol. 1, art. 116, § 1a)

From 2007, social work became an independent field of bachelor level studies, while earlier it was only possible to obtain a graduation diploma in social work within the following fields of study: pedagogy, political science, social policy, psychology, sociology or family studies (Kancelaria Sejmu, 2020, vol. 2, art. 116, § 1). According to the Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on 25 January 2008, students pursuing a degree in social work should acquire appropriate skills, which are related to, among others, recognising the difficult situations of families and people applying for social assistance, planning forms of work, monitoring their activities, cooperation with other specialists, counteracting professional burnout and compliance with the Code of Ethics for Social Workers. The Ordinance contains a detailed list of subjects and the minimum number of 330 teaching hours and 240 hours of apprenticeship during which the student should:

> 1. Become familiar with the specificity of the functioning of organizational units of social assistance and institutions dealing with aid and social work for people and families requiring support. 2. Actively participate in activities undertaken in welfare institutions. ... 3. Make contact with people and families who use social assistance provided by institutions. 4. Cooperate in identifying, satisfying and activating individual and the social needs of people and families who require support. 5. Collect materials enabling the development and implementation of social projects. (Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2018)

It is important to mention that the above regulation refers to narrowly defined social work and does not apply to some professions bordering on social work, such as family assistant, community worker, youth worker or a representative of an non-governmental organisation dealing with social issues.

Nevertheless, in Poland, the practical aspects of social pedagogy dominate in pedagogical faculties. It is an expression of the Polish tradition resulting from the inseparable connections of the two sciences (Piątek, 2013, p. 23). Moreover, it is also an expression of the various work specialisations for social workers, during the programmes of academic education that take into account the interdisciplinary nature of social work. The curricula include subjects in the fields of: psychology (psychology of human development), sociology (sociology of social problems, sociology of social workers), law (administrative

law, family and welfare law), social sciences (social pedagogy, social policy), methodology of social work and diagnostics (environmental and family diagnosis, diagnostic skills workshops) (APS, 2019), or sciences on the border of biomedical foundations of human development, geriatrics and gerontology, thanks to which students have the opportunity to acquire general and specialist knowledge as well as practical skills enabling professional performance (Hanyga-Janczak, 2008, pp. 107–9).

There are 44 universities in Poland, including two non-public universities and many of them offer studies in social work at bachelor's level. A master's degree in social work is available at 14 universities (OtoUczelnie, 2020). Most frequently, social work is offered at pedagogical or sociological faculties. Within this field of study, it is possible to obtain additional specialisations. For instance, at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL, 2020), one can study social diagnosis and strategy building, and readaptation and social integration; meanwhile, at the University of Gdańsk (UG, n.d.), family assistantship in social work, environmental social work is offered: animation, integration, community development. The Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM, n.d.) in Poznań provides social assistantship and mediation, organisation of social services and animation of local communities. The Jan Kochanowski University (UJK, 2017) in Kielce offers social work in aid institutions and social work with the family. The University of Silesia (UŚ, 2020) has courses in social work, social gerontology, revitalisation and organising the local community, mediation and negotiation, European social work and social economy studies. The aim of the vocational training of social workers, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, is to equip participants with a set of competences that will enable them to perform their work reliably and effectively. A graduate in the field of social work should strive to solve social problems (Czarnecki, 2013, p. 191). The above-mentioned specialities show that in Poland special emphasis is placed on working with families and the ability to work in the local environment. This is important in the context of socio-cultural changes that take place globally and locally. A social worker should be able to reliably support an individual and their family in difficult life situations, as well as plan and organise help, while emphasising independence in achieving these objectives. An analysis of academic education in the field of social pedagogy currently reveals that no university offers courses in the profession of social pedagogue, as it does not yet officially exist as a profession. Nevertheless, academics who receive degrees at the doctoral level and above in the field of social pedagogy may be considered social pedagogues. Social work is not an academic discipline and therefore doctoral titles and above cannot be awarded. Dissertations pertaining to social work issues are often written as a thesis within social pedagogy. However, social pedagogy as a course subject or university course, is taught at bachelor's and master's level in the fields of pedagogy, social work, sociology, psychology and special education.

**Research in the fields of social pedagogy and social work**

The scope of socio-pedagogical research is wider than that pertaining to social work. It relates to any type of issue affecting communities and individuals, their development, well-being, lifestyle, educational attainments, citizenship, and problems or obstacles in their environment. It is mainly focused on issues of socialisation and education, including the concepts of lifelong learning, social policy and the mechanisms of reproduction of social systems. It is interested in all age groups: school children, youths, adults and the elderly. Despite promising beginnings with Radlińska's and Korczak's interest in childbirth and infant care, early childhood and infant issues have been neglected in socio-pedagogical discourse during the last few decades and have only just been reintroduced by Odrowąż-Coates and Vucic (2017) into academic discourse.

Researchers operating in the field of social work primarily strive to know and to fully understand the surrounding reality. Based on this knowledge, they often plan and lead change within the social environment in order to improve living conditions and encourage social development. Therefore, research is mainly of a practical and social nature. The aims of such research are first to describe then diagnose issues of social problems that concern groups and individuals. The last stage should be to propose solutions to the problem, forecast the direction it may progress in and try to resolve it by reduction or elimination mechanisms. In social work, referring to research issues and in particular the type of questions to which answers are sought, we can distinguish action research conducted while actively doing

social work, research on social work and research for social work. The methodology used in social work depends on the social work method (method of individual cases, method of group work, method of organising the environment) and the research problem. These include social vetting, sociometric techniques, questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and observation (Pilch and Lepalczyk, 1995, pp. 113–5).

Traditionally, social pedagogy uses, inter alia, methods and techniques taken from the sociology of education, making the necessary transformations that will enable an individual approach to the problem under study. One such method is a community interview. It is used to diagnose the social environment in which the individual lives. Nowadays, this method is also the basic tool used by a social worker, who has the opportunity to learn about the social and living conditions of an individual. In Poland, interviews are completed using the community interview questionnaire, the model of which is set out in the Announcement of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy of 31 August 2017 on the publication of the uniform text of the regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy about gathering intelligence about family environment (Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2017). Other methods specific to social pedagogy and social work are participant observation and the case-by-case method, or individual case study. Thus, a feature of the methods and techniques used by these social sciences is their practical dimension, because through them the researcher may gather information to enable supportive action and the delivery of aid (Wroczyński, 1974, p. 66).

Both disciplines are actively engaged in the international methodological discourse and therefore have developed a number of tools for data collection and analysis, used across social sciences. In the past four decades focusing on interpretative paradigms that go deep into the social imaginarium and individual intersectional situation, representatives of the disciplines use more and more widely the methods of participatory action research, critical discourse analysis, grounded theory and many more.

## Challenges for social pedagogy and social work in Poland

Social pedagogy and social work in Poland in the twenty-first century, face numerous challenges. There is an ever-growing need for qualified, well-prepared employees in the field of social work. In Poland, we deal with the phenomenon of growing gaps in social stratification. This is fuelled by the so-called learned helplessness syndrome. It is enforced by the fact that many clients of social welfare agencies assume in advance that they will receive social aid. Besides, many of them have a feeling of entitlement and a demanding attitude towards social workers, expecting help from them without putting any effort into improving their own situation. Poverty generates many of the social problems experienced by social welfare clients that social workers have to deal with, such as domestic violence, drug addiction, alcoholism or homelessness (Krajewska, 2007, p. 34). The issues of urban regeneration (see Żukiewicz, 2017) and gentrification of city spaces (Mendel, 2010) has been also an emerging theme since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Contemporary Polish society struggles with many of the problems typical of a modern society, including loneliness and the pathologising of individuals and groups. Also there are considerable problems with marginalisation of the elderly, the disabled, refugees, mentally ill people or people addicted to electronic devices and the internet (Kantowicz, 2001, p. 74). Moreover, 'othering' discourses, fuelled by politicians and the media, often aimed at minority groups, the LGBTQ+ community, migrants or recently the issues of women's rights, call for action. The Association of Social Pedagogues continues to address them not only by letters and petitions to politicians but also by community action and through raising awareness via research projects. In addition, the professions continue to develop new areas of activity, related to interprofessional cooperation. New social issues arise that have not existed before. The development of media and internet, and new technologies facilitate the life and functioning of individuals, although they are associated with many threats, especially for children and young people. Social workers often face the questions: are they able to deal with new problems in a systemic manner? Will they cope with new tasks entrusted to them? (Krajewska, 2007, p. 33). One of the tasks of social work is to perform an integrative function in society and to normalise social relations. In order for these tasks to be fulfilled, it is necessary to broaden the impact of social work by teaching new specialisations (Krajewska, 2007, p. 33). Moreover, a growing number of universities prepare social workers to work with

the elderly. In Poland, the number of people aged 65 and over is consistently growing, and consequently the number of elderly people who require care is also on the rise. Data from the Central Statistical Office indicates that 31 per cent of people living in Poland are in the age bracket 55–100 in 2018 (*Rocznik statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, 2019). Therefore, the number of people aged over 55 constitutes almost one-third of the total population, and this number is increasing, bringing numerous challenges for the social policy of the state, social work, as well as for families with elderly people in need of care.

**Attempts to define social pedagogy in Poland and reflections for its future**

Social pedagogy in Poland provides a theoretical and methodological framework for social work. Although both disciplines are rooted in Helena Radlińska's work, they have evolved into separate fields, which remain interdependent and complementary to one another. Social work is taught as a profession at bachelor's and master's level, while social pedagogy is an academic subject and is not recognised as a profession by potential employers. However, in academia, there are professors and doctors of social pedagogy, who identify as social pedagogues.

> The most complete characteristics and the main theoretical and practical sense of social pedagogy are captured by its classics. It turns out that the mere passage of time and the variability of external conditions – especially economic, civilization, educational, cultural or even natural – do not mechanically change the ways of relating to the practical and scientific characteristics of this pedagogical subdiscipline. (Pilch, 2005, p. 277)

In the era of information technology and rapid development in bioengineering, inequalities increase, and economic and cultural stratification is simultaneously widening gaps between the rich and the poor. While areas of poverty and cultural marginalisation are increasing, there is a huge need for social action. This action may be evoked by social pedagogy in the research and theory aspects and implemented in practice by social work action.

**Declarations and conflicts of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest with their work.

**References**

APS (Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej). (2019). im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej w Warszawie. Accessed 24 November 2020. http://www.aps.edu.pl/media/2356380/19467_zalacznik_7b_do_uchwaly_199_2019_plan_stac_dzpe.pdf.

Brenk, M. (2007). Praca socjalna w pedagogice społecznej Heleny Radlińskiej. Zarys tematu. In W. Jamrożek, K. Ratajczak & D. Żołądź-Strzelczyk (Eds.), *Ad novum fructum. Z okazji jubileuszu poznańskich historyków wychowania* (pp. 85–94). Poznań: Wydawcnitwo Poznańskie.

Cichosz, M. (2014). *Pedagogika społeczna. Zarys problematyki*. Kraków: Impuls.

Czarnecki, P. S. (2013). *Praca socjalna*. Warsaw: Difin.

Hämäläinen, J. (2015). Defining social pedagogy: Historical, theoretical and practical considerations. *British Journal of Social Work*, *45*, 1022–38.

Hanyga-Janczak, P. (2008). Profesjonalne działanie w obszarze pracy socjalnej. Kształcenie do zawodu pracownika socjalnego w Polsce. In B. Matyjas & M. Porąbaniec (Eds.), *W drodze ku profesjonalizacji zawodu pracownika socjalnego* (pp. 105–12). Kielce: Akademii Świętokrzyskiej.

Ustawa o pomocy społecznej. Stan prawny na dzień 28 stycznia 2020 r. Accessed 23 February 2021. https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20040640593/U/D20040593Lj.pdf.

Kantowicz, E. (2001). *Elementy teorii i praktyki pracy socjalnej*. Olsztyn: Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego.

Krajewska, B. (2007). *Elementarne zagadnienia pracy socjalnej. Wybór tekstów*. Płock: Naukowe NOVUM.

Kromolnicka, B. (2013). Pedagogiczne aspekty pracy socjalnej. In A. Kotlarska-Michalska & K. Piątek (Eds.), Praca socjalna – Jej dyskursy, usytuowania i profile (pp. 75–89). Toruń-Bydgoszcz: Edukacyjne Akapit.

KUL (Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski). 2020. 'Praca socjalna' [Social work]. Accessed 23 November 2020. http://kandydat.kul.pl/strona-glowna/studia-i-stopnia/praca-socjalna/.

Kwieciński, Z., & Śliwerski, B. (Eds.). (2009). *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*. Warsaw: Naukowe PWN SA.

Lisowska, K., & Łojko, M. (2020). Social work as a category of social pedagogy. *Kwartalnik naukowy Fides et Ratio*, *2*(42), 395–405.

Marynowicz-Hetka, E. (1996). Koncepcja pracy społecznej w polskiej tradycji pedagogiki społecznej. In Danuta Urbaniak-Zając, Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka & Jacek Piekarski (Eds.), *Pedagogika społeczna i praca socjalna – Przegląd stanowisk i komentarze* (pp. 155–69). Warsaw: Interart.

Marynowicz-Hetka, E. (2009). *Pedagogika społeczna. Podręcznik akademicki, cz.1*. Warsaw: Naukowe PWN SA.

Mendel, M. (2010). Nauczyciel sprzymierzeniec. Upiększanie miast, gentyfikacja i rewitalizacja jako wyzwana animacyjne dla szkoły. In K. Surzykiewicz (Ed.), *Ciągłość i zmiana w edukacji szkolnej – społecznej i wychowawcze obszary napięć* (pp. 255–87). Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

Mikulski, J. (2005). Związki pedagogiki społecznej z polityką i pedagogiką społeczną. *Polityka Społeczna*, *8*, 15–19.

Obwieszczenie Ministra Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 31 sierpnia 2017 roku w sprawie ogłoszenia jednolitego tekstu rozporządzenia Ministra Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej w sprawie rodzinnego wywiadu środowiskowego. Accessed 27 November 2020. http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/api/isap/deeds/WDU/2017/1788/text.pdf.

Rozporządzenie Ministra Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 25 stycznia 2008 r. w sprawie specjalności przygotowującej do zawodu pracownika socjalnego realizowanej w szkołach wyższych. Accessed 23 February 2021. http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20080270158.

Odrowąż-Coates, A. (2018). Social pedagogy in Poland – a discipline on the edge or an edge of disciplines?. In D. Keller, K. O'Neil, H. Nicolaisen, D. Schugurensky, & K. Villaseñor (Eds.), *Social pedagogy and social education: Bridging traditions and innovations* (pp. 134–44). Phoenix, AZ: Social Pedagogy Association.

Odrowąż-Coates, A., & Vucic, B. (2017). The infant, early childhood development and child rights: Re-awakening opportunities for social pedagogy. *Pedagogika Społeczna [Social Pedagogy]*, *2*, 35–58.

OtoUczelnie. Praca socjalna. Accessed 24 November 2020. https://www.otouczelnie.pl/artykul/1345/Praca-socjalna.

Piątek, K. (2013). Praca socjalna w szkolnictwie wyższym – Przykłady aktualnych pytań i wybrane odpowiedzi ze strony przedstawicieli służb społecznych. In A Kotlarska-Michalska & K. Piątek (Eds.), *Praca socjalna – Jej dyskursy, usytuowania i profile* (pp. 21–32). Toruń-Bydgoszcz: Edukacyjne Akapit.

Piekarski, J. (1996). Zamiast zakończenia: Uwagi o relacji pedagogika społeczna – Praca socjalna. In E. Marynowicz-Hetka (Ed.), *Biblioteka Pracownika Socjalnego. Pedagogika społeczna i praca socjalna. Przegląd stanowisk i komentarze* (pp. 171–4). Warsaw: Interart.

Pilch, T. (Ed.). (2005). *Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna XXI wieku, tom IV, hasło: Pedagogika społeczna*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak.

Pilch, T., & Lepalczyk, I. (Eds.) (1995). *Pedagogika społeczna*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak.

Radlińska, H. (1961). *Pedagogika społeczna*. Wrocław, Warsaw and Kraków: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich.

Radziewicz-Winnicki, A. (Ed.). (2008). *Pedagogika społeczna*. Warsaw: Akademickie i Profesjonalne.

*Rocznik statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*. 2019. Warsaw. Accessed 23 February 2021. https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/rocznik-statystyczny-rzeczypospolitej-polskiej-2019,2,19.html.

Schugurensky, D. (2016). Social pedagogy in North America: Historical background and current developments. *Pedagogía Social: Revista Interuniversitaria*, *27*, 225–51.

Smolińska-Theiss, B., & Theiss, W. (2019). Pedagogika społeczna. In Z. Kwieciński & B. Śliwerski (Eds.), *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki* (pp. 331–45). Warsaw: Naukowe PWN SA.

Szmagalski, J. (2018). Social pedagogy: The directions of spreading across the world. *Pedagogika Społeczna [Social Pedagogy]*, *2*(68), 135–56.

Theiss, W. (1984). *Radlińska*. Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna.

UAM (Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu). n.d. Praca socjalna. Accessed 24 November 2020. https://amu.edu.pl/kandydaci/kierunki-studiow/kierunki-na-litere-p/praca-socjalna..

UG (Uniwersytet Gdański). n.d. Praca socjalna. Accessed 24 November 2020. https://wns.ug.edu.pl/strona/34264/praca_socjalna_-_studia_ii_stopnia.

UJK (Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach. Kierunek). (2017). Praca socjalna. Accessed 24 November 2020. https://www.ujk.edu.pl/rekrutacja2017/wyszukiwarka.php?page=0&id_wydzialu=71&id_kierunku=6&id_specjalnosci=0&stacjonarne=0&id_typu_studiow=0.

UŚ (Uniwersytet Śląski). Praca socjalna. Accessed 24 November 2020. https://us.edu.pl/wydzial/wns/studiuj/kierunki-studiow/.

Wroczyński, R. (1974). *Pedagogika społeczna*. Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Procedura udzielania pomocy finansowej z budżetu państwa dla osób lub rodzin poszkodowanych w wyniku katastrof naturalnych, zdarzeń noszących znamiona klęski żywiołowej [Emergency Procedure] (2019). Accessed 23 November 2020. https://www.gov.pl/attachment/24f49f15-6148-469d-be04-2ef6d56ae753.

Żukiewicz, A. (2017). *Pedagog społeczny. Teoria i praktyka działalności społecznej*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.