CROSS-NATIONAL RESEARCH OF SOCIAL WORK:
Designing Comparative Studies

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Social Work and Social Policies

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Foreword

- This presentation is based on a paper offered in the conference of the European Research Institute of Social Work, 10-12 Oct, 2012

- An extended article **Comparative research in social work: methodological considerations using the 'diachronic-synchronic' distinction in linguistics** has been published online in European Journal of Social Work, 27 Mar, 2013 (DOI:10.1080/13691457.2013.777333)

Introduction

- Reasons for development of cross-national research of social work
  - Developing social work as an international profession
  - Theory building
  - Advancing social work as a science
- Need for methodological innovations for comparative research of social work
- Learning from other disciplines:
  - Linguistics: the distinction between *'diachronic'–'synchronic'* reasoning
  - Biology: building a comprehensive system of the complexity and reconstructing the development of variation
  - Comparative social policy: comparative case analyses, typologies, analyses of complex systems

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Diversity of Social Work

Social Work varies enormously world wide:

- Diversity of social circumstances (economically, politically, culturally etc., especially diversity of welfare systems)

- Diversity of theories and practices

>> How to deal with the diversity in theory, research and practice?
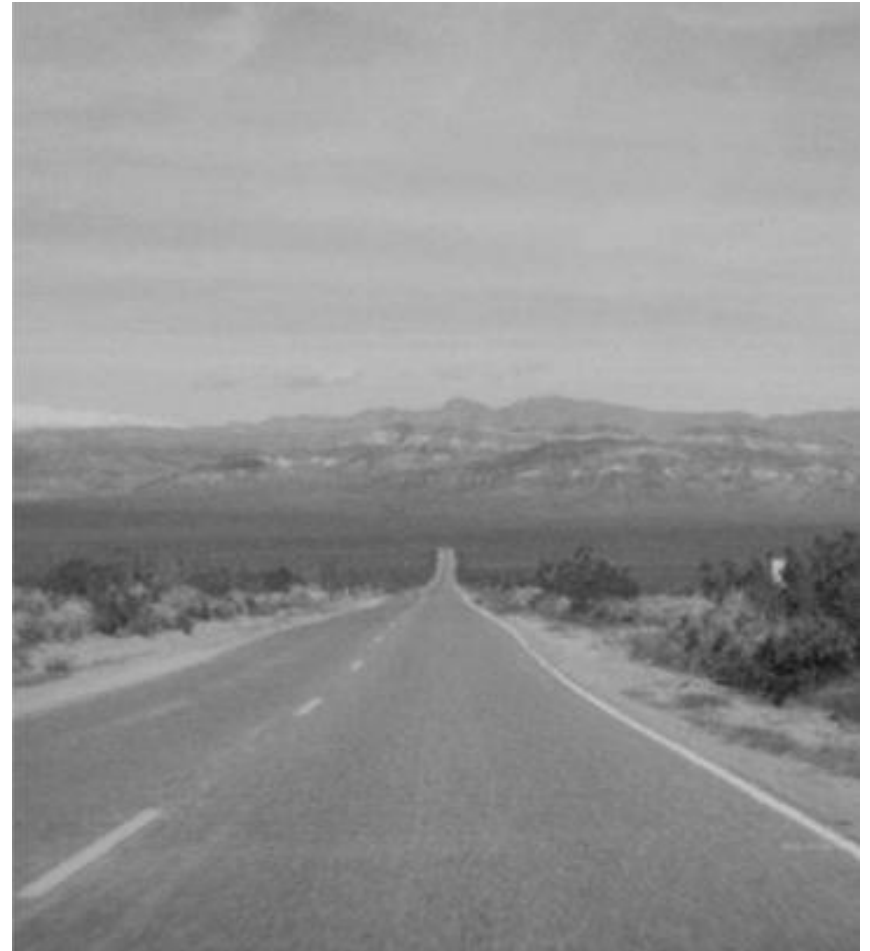
Comparative perspectives

- Identification of similarities and differences
- Defining adequate criteria for comparison and classification of social work traditions and practices
- Making historical explanations in order to understand the traditions
- Seeking common elements in the diversity

Diachronic and Synchronic Reasoning

de Saussure,
Ferdinand (1857–1913)

'Diachronic'–
'Synchronic'

- **The diachronic approach** studies the development of language in time by paying attention to affinity between languages and historical transmutations of sounds and by striving for the reconstruction of principal languages. It produces descriptions how languages are genealogically related.
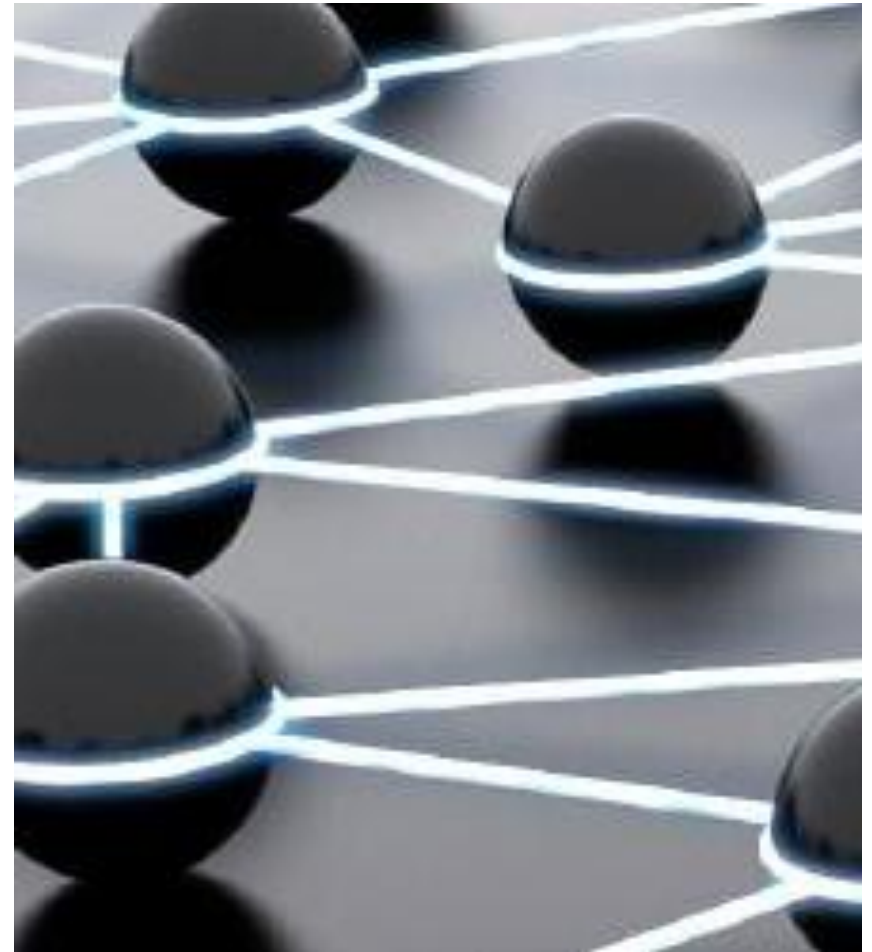
Diachronic and Synchronic Reasoning

de Saussure,
Ferdinand (1857–1913)

'Diachronic'–
'Synchronic'

- **The synchronic approach** analyses the similarities and differences of languages at a given point of time by focusing on their structural features and characteristics and by using phonological, morphological and syntactic explanations including semantic and pragmatic aspects.

'Diachronic' and 'Synchronic' - Logics of Order

	'Diachronic'	'Synchronic'
Focus	Processes, how matters develop	Structures, how matters stand
Analysis	Features of change over time, historical dynamics	State of the systems at a given point of time
Logic of order	Cause and effect chains	Systemic associations
Basic interest	"What comes after what" - historical understanding	"What associates with what" - systemic understanding
Comparison	Solitaries, unique features and processes	Similarities, contrasts, proximities, equalities

Example of Biology

Carl von Linné (1707–1778)

- Synchronic system building based on the idea of hierarchical structure of classification contribute to the development of biology

Charles Darwin (1809–1882)

- Diachronic reconstructions of the development of the variation of the Galapagos' finches advancing the idea of natural selection important to the development of evolution theory

Example of Comparative Social Policy

Richard M. Titmuss (1907–1973)	**Typology of the welfare state (1958):**
	1) Residual, 2) Industrial Achievement Performance, 3) Institutional Redistributive
Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1947–)	**Typology of the welfare states (1990):**
	1) Liberal, 2) Conservative, 3) Social-democratic

"CONSERVATIVE"
-Corporative SP
- The Middle-
European model

**"SOCIAL-
DEMOCRATIC"**
- Institutional SP
- The Nordic model

→ civil society (subsidiarity)
→ social market-economy
→ "natural law"
→ solidarity
→ personality

→ state
→ market socialism
state capitalism
→ social security

"Social Pedagogy"

"LIBERAL"
- Residual SP
- The Anglo-
American model

"Social Policy"

→ individualism
→ pure capitalism, free economy
→ self-determination, individual
freedom

"Social Psychology"

Characteristics of Social Work within Different Welfare Systems

The Anglo-American model	The Continental-European model	The Nordic model
Helping people to solve their every day problems through counselling, quidance and therapies	Strengthening capacity of families, communities, and self-help groups in terms of "Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe"	Advising people to use the massiv systems of social benefits and services they have rights for
Therapy oriented: - therapy, quidance, counselling (services)	Education oriented: - Bildung, pedagogy	Bureaucracy oriented: - benefits and public services fixed by law
Therapeutic working stile, stressing methods and techniques	Educational working stile, stressing "empowerment"	Admistrativ working stile, stressing people's social rights fixed by law
Problem-solving through counselling, quidance and therapy (micro)	Social support through strengthening communities (*Lebenswelt*) (mezzo)	Prevention through the social policy system (macro)

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Designing a Comparative Study

The goals of *comparative historical linguistics* ... are ...

• to identify instances of genetic relatedness among languages
• to explore the history of individual languages
• to develop a theory of linguistics change
•   (Harrison 2005, p. 214)

Comparative-historical analysis is

"a case-study method focused on a small number of regions or states where spatial variation assumes a 'most-similar' format and temporal variation includes the causal factor(s) of special interest" (Gerring 2012, p. 414)

Methods of Argumentation in Comparative Social Work

Comparative research is primarily based on descriptive argumentation aiming

- to identify features of the nature of social work in individual countries
- to create multidimensional categories of diverse attributes for comparisons across cases
- to construct comparisons through typologies and associations

Comparative social work deals with the change through reconstructions in order to understand how two or more traditions of social work relate to each other historically and theoretically

Focusing on Social Work Traditions, Policies and Practices

Linguists: "We may still have more in common with geologists and geo-morphologists than socio-political historians, many of whom in the present intellectual climate appear to feel constrained (or liberated!) to interpret history only on contemporary context".

Comparative social policy: Dealing with social-political infrastructure, i.e. the context in which social work takes place.

Why is there so little comparative research of social work although the comparative perspective plays so important role in many other branches of studies, for example in the modern social policy?

Reasons for Lack of Comparative Social Work

There is lack of persons in the area of social work who have a real scientific interest in comparative research

It is easier to compare systems as to compare work practices and philosophies they are based on, i.e. comparative research of social work is more complicated

There is no real vision in social work to develop a science of social work based on theory formation basing on comparative research

Conclusions

- The distinction between 'diachronic–synchronic' is useful in comparative research of social work and elements of both logics of order can be found in social work literature

- The examples of development of linguistics, biology and comparative social policy inspire to design cross-national social work studies both from historical and structural point of view

For Discussion

- How can and should religion be considered in comparative social work?