

Systemic social work Throughout EuroPe - A project funded by the European Community in the Years 2010-2014

Social work is concerned with people living under conditions that do not comply with the standards of the society or are in danger of not doing so in the future. Its business is to help such people to stabilize their lives.

This is usually done by providing goods, money or re-education. But living conditions are not created simply by the person concerned - surrounding people and organisations are greatly involved in interactions that define the living situation. Therefore this direct helping is often ineffective and followed by relapses.

The systemic approach in social work (systemic social work) broadens the attention from a person in unfavourable circumstances to the environment in which these have developed.

It provides instruments to analyse such situations and to shift modes of interaction.

If this is done successfully, changes in the living conditions of concerned persons become more likely; the intervention becomes more sustainable and relapses become unlikely.

There are some institutions that use the systemic approach already in social work with great success. In psychotherapy, too, the systemic approach is very effective.

However this approach is not yet common in social work. Such institutions are spread over Europe with little contact and their sphere is limited.

The [partners of this project](#) teach, train and apply systemic approach in social work in different fields in:

- Finland
- Great Britain
- Germany
- Austria
- Switzerland

The main goals of the Partnership are:

- Establishing a common European perspective on systemic social work,
- Establishing a network of systemic social work in the EU, and
- Producing, publishing and distributing a manual for systemic approach in social work.

When I published my first article about "[Systemic thoughts concerning social work](#)" in 1988, it was a conclusion I had drawn of my work at the state college for social work in Vienna, where I had been teaching psychology and methods of social work since 1979. As a dedicated systemic thinker I tried to describe social problems from a systemic view and by doing so I found it to be a perfectly applicable concept.

Three years later I started the first advanced training course on systemic thinking and working for social workers in collaboration with my old colleague Anneli Arnold. A few years later we also founded an association for systemic social work in Vienna ([ASYS](#)).

In the same year Peter Lüssi, a Swiss social worker, published a book called "Systemic social work".

Later on there were also publications from German authors about systems theory and social work and 2009 the first master degree program was started by [Johannes Herwig-Lempp](#) in Merseburg. In 2007 German systemic social workers founded the german counterpart to our association.

Looking over the language-fences I found nearly no english literature using both of these words: "social work" and "systemic" or "systems theory" in the title, and so I became curious. The systemic idea came from the United States and would very unlikely spread only in German speaking countries.

By help of systemic associations throughout Europe I got contact to people from other countries doing and/or teaching social work based on systemic thinking. We decided that we would mingle and try to increase awareness for systemic social work throughout Europe and, by help of the "Leonardo-da-Vinci"-branch of the [Lifelong Learning Programme of European Union](#) , we started the project "Systemic Social Work throughout Europe" (STEP) in August 2011 and will publish our ideas, discussions and outcomes on this website.

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