

Chapter Title: Introduction

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1 Introduction

In social pedagogy and social work, we deal with the lives of people of different ages, and in empirical research we reflect on the quality of services. Practitioners and researchers shape social interactions and contribute to the development of institutions and infrastructure. Based on ethical orientations, needs and developmental tasks, social pedagogy and social work deal with the pressures and rivalries that people experience, the social, economic and environmental problems that people face, as well as the psychological injuries and discrimination that people suffer. The question for professional social work is how to deal with this in a dynamic between criticism and commitment: What are the problems, in what contexts and cases is criticism justified, and to whom should criticism be directed? How should criticism be expressed in order to be fruitful? How should self-criticism be practised in social education and social work? What kind of commitment is worthwhile and what are the ideas of a successful life? In which movements and processes of re-politicisation does social work participate? Where is the boundary between commitment and self-exploitation?

The contributions of this book are divided into three sections: “Criticism and social transformation”, “The critical voice of the addressees” and “Critical professionalism and practice”. The first section deals with issues such as affordable and inclusive housing, solidarity-based economy, political engagement, and the importance of activation programmes. Precarisation and feminism are also addressed. The second section focuses on the critical voice of addressees and includes contributions that deal with the critique of addressees with learning difficulties, relationships in socio-educational housing groups and the living arrangements of young people. The third section is about critical professionalism and practice. The contributions in this section discuss topics such as child poverty, the role of social work as a critical profession per se, the importance of cooperation in inpatient child and youth welfare and the view of foster children on growing up in foster families. Overall, the book “Criticism and Commitment in Social Work” offers a wide range of perspectives on current issues and challenges in social work. The contributions help to develop an understanding of the critical role of social work in society and show how this role can be implemented in practice.

In line with an international orientation, the book contains English and German contributions. We would especially like to thank Simone Babl, Katharina Deutsch, Celine Hausner and Daniela Gaich for their help. Furthermore, we thank Anneliese Pirs for her support in the preparation of this publication. We would also like to emphasise the good cooperation between the Social Pedagogy Section of the Austrian Society for Pedagogy (ÖFEB Sektion

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