

# A FRESH START FOR CONVERGENCE THEORY? IDEAS FOR COMPARING CHANGE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION ACROSS THE EU

## ¿TENDRÁ LA CONVERGENCIA UN NUEVO PUNTO DE PARTIDA? IDEAS PARA COMPARAR LOS CAMBIOS EN LA EDUCACIÓN PARA EL TRABAJO SOCIAL EN LA UNIÓN EUROPEA

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### ABSTRACT

European countries have diverse traditions in terms of social policy, social work practice and social work education. This diversity complicates defining any pan-European social work core. There have been few attempts to describe how social work is defined, delimited and subdivided in national contexts. However, three types of social work can be identified: in countries like the UK, only social work 'proper' is considered as part of social work, in countries like Germany, social work and social pedagogy share the field, and in countries like France, there is a triad of social assistance, special education and socio-cultural animation. This paper uses sociological convergence theory as an explanatory framework to answer some of the questions inevitably prompted by the prospect of the – alleged or real – processes of alignment of the social curriculum across EU countries.

### RESUMEN

Los países europeos tienen diferentes tradiciones en cuanto a política social, trabajo social y educación para el trabajo social. Esta variedad complica el definir un centro teórico concreto en el trabajo social. Fueron muy pocos los que atentaron definir o delimitar el trabajo social en contextos internacionales. Sin embargo, se pueden identificar tres tipos de trabajo social: en países como Gran Bretaña, hay límites estrictos sobre lo que se considera trabajo social; en Alemania, la pedagogía social también se considera en ese ámbito, y en países como Francia, hay tres tipos de práctica, la asistencia social, la educación especial, y la animación socio-cultural. Este artículo usa la teoría sociológica de la convergencia para explicar ciertas preguntas que surgen inevitablemente en el corriente proceso de armonización del currículo en los países europeos.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Armonización, Trabajo social en Europa, Tipos de trabajo social en Europa, Convergencia, Asistencia Social, Pedagogía social. Animación cultural

<sup>1</sup> Opinions expressed in this paper are those of its author. Under no circumstances may they be taken to represent the position of the European Commission.

KEYWORDS: Harmonization, Convergence, Social assistance, Social work, Social, Pedagogy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores theoretical models which may be used to underpin comparative studies dealing with changes in social work education in national systems in the European Union (EU). Convergence theory is revisited and compared with other models, including the 'families of nations' approach. Comparative studies focusing on changes in social work education – whether educational policy or curriculum reform – need to acknowledge the issue of convergence, while at the same time such research needs to include both structural and cultural aspects in a balanced manner.

The Member States of the EU are changing, and so is social work education. Given that the national structures within which social work programmes are offered are subject to change linked to decisions taken at the European level, it is natural to ask whether social work programmes in one Member State shows signs of alignment with similar programmes in other Member States, that is, signs of *convergence*. Within these national contexts, authors have examined convergence between social work, on the one hand, and similar disciplines and professions. Webb's analysis (1992) of British social work and nursing education, for example, revealed numerous commonalities in terms of external, structural constraints. Similar mechanisms may be expected to be at work internationally, yet this still remains to be shown.

More specifically, it might be expected that factors promoting convergence would be largely structural and external to social work education, while factors fostering divergence (i.e., essentially the status quo of nation-state specific patterns) in social work education could be expected to be of a cultural kind (Kornbeck, 2002). Such considerations are a reminder of the role played by cultural determinants (Chamberlayne, et al., 1999), as correctives to the perceived technical imperatives of clinical or, more recently, evidence-based approaches to social work. Internationalisation, increased migration, multicultural realities and, in the EU, the process of European integration have done a great deal to highlight the relevance of culture and prompt questions about convergence and divergence.

Though social workers are not always employed by the state (even in Scandinavian countries, some social workers work for NGO's), their very existence is closely linked to national welfare states: the state not only provides funding (the degree of its financial commitment varies greatly between different parts of Europe), but also sets the legal and administrative frameworks within which professional practice unfolds, even if professionals are not public servants. In Europe, welfare states are traditionally nation states and there is no sign of change in this respect. But nation states can often be clustered according to affinities between them – the *'families of nations' approach*.

Against this backdrop, social work education necessarily reflects the highly nation-state specific nature of social work practice in national contexts (Lorenz, Aluffi Pentini & Kniephoff, 1998). Social work, being dependent not only on national legislation, but also on country-specific cultural forms and values, is by nature less transferable than engineering or medicine. It is therefore not surprising that, in the European Community, social work is not

found among the quasi-harmonised professions whose qualifications are regulated in the framework of the ‘Sectoral System’. Education leading to those professions – architecture, dentistry, medicine, midwifery, nursing, pharmacy and veterinary, each covered by its own directive(s)<sup>2</sup>— is now very similar across Europe. Law is an exception and still remains national in character. Social work is, instead, regulated by the less prescriptive ‘General System’ of Directive 89/48/EEC (1989), for post-secondary programmes of at least three years’ duration, and Directive 92/51/EEC (1992), for programmes of 1-3 years of post-secondary education.<sup>3</sup> These legislative differences have implications at a practical level. As an example, personal communications of stake-holders suggest to me that Erasmus students in medicine are able to have all their credits taken abroad counted toward their home degree. This is frequently problematic in many other education programmes, where a year abroad tends to prolong the length of studies and negatively impact not only bursaries but also paid employment for self-financed students. Though the legal and administrative details of student exchange may seem far away from the realities of professional practice, they point to the nation-state specific nature of social work and its education systems.

Both in education and practice, social work differs substantially from one country to another, which makes it ‘emerge’ as one of the

... profoundly historical entities that do not follow a universal logic or principle. There simply exists no standard that could serve as a unifying paradigm for all of Europe (Lorenz, 2001, p. 9).

Such differences are a powerful corrective to international social work organisations’ claims to a trans-national professional identity with references to common ethical principles. Yet, many social workers favour the trans-national approach holding that the common core of social work exists irrespective of national contexts. In fact, we are faced with a pattern of heavy divergence but also some convergence. Political, social and economic differences among the countries and regions of Europe result in a variety of issues facing local social services and social workers. But there are also common challenges for all social workers’ (Szmagalski, 1999, p. 233). Nevertheless, the ways in which convergence and divergence intermingle are not well known and the relevant literature gives few clues as to how they should be understood.

## 2. SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN NATIONAL CONTEXTS IN THE EU : RESEARCH LITERATURE DIGEST

In the light of the nation-state specific nature of national social work education systems, it should not come as a surprise that there is a shortage of solid comparative literature. There have been some attempts to map realities in national contexts but of the few publications which managed to use a unified matrix, none has escaped the effects

<sup>2</sup> For a complete list of all relevant statutory instruments and for comprehensive explanations, see European Commission (2004), the section titled: ‘Specific Sectors’ with legislation.

<sup>3</sup> For an official introduction to this subject matter, see European Commission (2004), the section titled: ‘Specific Sectors’ with legislation.

of obsolescence. The last big survey (Brauns & Kramer, 1986) will soon be twenty years old. It can be hard, therefore, to make assumptions about realities in national systems. An important task was identified recently by Littlechild & Lyons (2003) who speak of defining the 'occupational space' of social work - i.e., how it is defined and what separates it from similar groups - , yet despite efforts this remains a thinly researched field.

*Literature about the wider context:* The meta-context of professional mobility in the European Community is well catered for in academic literature. An official introduction to the subject matter, which is updated regularly, is offered by the European Commission (2004). A straightforward introduction for non-lawyers can be found in the textbook of Moussis (2000). The relevant case law of the Court of Justice of the European Communities in Luxembourg has been compiled and edited by Carlier & Verwilghen (1998), and papers from a conference in the year 2000 present the developments of the last thirty years (Carlier & Verwilghen, 2000). The specific implications for social work graduates (including the legal aspects of mobility) have been discussed by recently by Kornbeck (2003b, 2004), as well as in the older contributions by Barr (1990) and Harris & Lavan (1992).

*Descriptive studies of social work education:* National social work education systems and their development in Western Europe have received a similar treatment, though a striking feature of this literature is that it commences as early as the years between World Wars I and II, when Alice Salomon, the pioneer of German social work education, published the results of what may have been the world's first survey of social work education programmes (Salomon, 1937). Her publication has recently been rediscovered and commented by Kruse (2002). Another old example, not limited to Europe, is a survey by the United Nations (1958). In the 1980s, a major European project collected descriptions of 21 national systems (Brauns & Kramer, 1986). Though the book is today necessarily outdated, chapters can still be used for reference as regards the foundations and early histories of national programmes and professions. Shortly after that, a study was commissioned by the Commission of the European Communities (the EU executive, today commonly known as the European Commission) with a view to map social work education and training in the Member States of the Community. A postal survey was carried out and the results presented in a unified, systematic way, but the report itself is rather succinct and largely in the form of tables, not allowing for much discussion (Cocozza, 1989). Thus, descriptive publications form a rather small group, there having been only few attempts at comprehensive mapping exercises. Of course, occasional tables and sections presenting facts about education in a handful of countries can be found in various publications, yet such contributions are not part of the comparative literature.

*Literature on mutual recognition of qualifications:* This category covers publications dealing with the effects of the Single Market of the European Community, including professional mobility, mutual recognition of qualifications and related topics. It took off in the 1980s in the context of the Single Market programme. Free movement for workers and self-employed persons is guaranteed under Community law and has been so since the EEC Treaty entered into force in 1958. One of the first achievements of the Community was, then, the establishment of its customs union. Yet national laws remained largely unchanged and could in many cases impede on free movement. Thus, in the 1980s, there was a growing realization of the need to harmonise national rules in as much as they were seen as detrimental to the functioning of the Common Market. During the years when

Jacques Delors was President of the European Commission (he held office for three terms between 1985 and 1994), an ambitious programme was launched and implemented, that of the Single Market (completed on 01/01/1993). Today largely undisputed, it was then a high-profile working area which involved the harmonization of important amounts of national laws. These developments at the political level suddenly made Europe directly relevant to social work education – though harmonization is impossible, given that only Member States can decide about education programmes – and produced some very specific and targeted analyses. In the field of social work in the sense of *Sozialarbeit* and *Service Social* (the *Assistant Social* profession), Barr (1990) as well as Harris & Lavan (1992) looked at the implications of Directives 89/48/EEC and Directive 92/51/EEC for social work graduates' professional mobility, a theme taken up much later by Kornbeck (2003b, 2004). On the side of social pedagogy (the *éducateur* profession), similar work was done by Davies Jones (1994a, 1994b) as well as the conference delegates who contributed to a book edited by Marcon (1988). In 1997, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) commissioned a short study on mobility (Reimavuo, 1997), which unfortunately is very incomplete: it seems as if respondents were not very committed to provide comprehensive information.

*Evaluations of academic exchange activities in social work education:* While it is true that social work education programmes started exchange and collaboration activities as early as the 1920s (see Hering & Waaldijk, 2002), it was not before the establishment of big, generic exchange programmes in the European Community (1980s and 1990s) that exchange activities started to gain momentum. Various Community programmes (Erasmus and others) gave impetus to exchanges and their evaluations. This has produced some edited books with the proceedings from evaluation conferences. While the quality and relevance of individual papers may vary considerably, they are an invaluable source of information for researchers interested in national social work education systems as well as the functioning and effects of exchange activities (Chytil & Seibel, 1999; Chytil, et al., 2000; Seibel & Lorenz, 1998). Similar edited books have been published outside of in the EC framework (Elsen, et al., 2002; Hessle, 2001; Labonté-Roset, et al., 2003; Marynowicz-Hetka, et al., 1999). Studies dealt with in this section are all concerned with differences and similarities, and all have a stated or implied component of contrastive analysis. Yet they do not seem to have attempted to address the basic question of convergence between national social work education systems. This prompts us to ask which theoretical models such investigations are based on.

### 3. LOOKING FOR AND MEASURING CONVERGENCE

#### 3.1. WHY CONVERGENCE THEORY?

It may be expected that converging factors would tend to be of a more structural kind, while divergence would be of a cultural nature. The assumption that transnational structural change will lead to cultural change, is indeed the key element of convergence theory. Yet the choice of convergence theory needs some explanation, as it does not correspond with the current preferences among social scientists. Far from being a programmatic call for a revival of convergence theory to be used in European social work curriculum studies, this paper will, nevertheless, underline the natural relevance of the paradigm to this particular subject matter. So convergence theory has been chosen as one of the elements for this

discussion, although in the social sciences it may not at present be the most supported of paradigms. Indeed, the wide support which it enjoyed in the sociological community in the 1960s cannot be found in the present. Quite naturally, the very basis for present-day thinking – influenced as it is by the practical experience of otherness, seems to lend only limited support to the grand narrative of convergence linked to industrial development. The realisation that the predominance of the ‘West’ and its solutions are no more undisputed in a shrinking, globalising world, and that agendas of diversity in the social sciences and in the social work community are very strong, make structural explanations less popular today.

Nevertheless, without returning to the structuralist positions of the 1960s, the power of structures has to be recognised: it is overwhelmingly direct and imminent. Numerous examples of structurally generated cultural change are provided by new information and communication technologies (ICT). The use of ICT has allowed schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to engage on a journey of rapprochement which would have been unthinkable not long ago (Austin, et al., 2003), and this is no isolated example: social work education is also affected by ICT-generated new teaching practices, so that structural change brings cultural change. In this article, findings from convergence theory will be highlighted. The question raised is whether the paradigm could be given a ‘fresh start’ in the framework of comparative social work education research focusing on the Member States of the EU.

### 3.2. THE IMPLICIT CONVERGENCE PARADIGM IN EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Not only the European Community and the European Union, but indeed all trans-national cooperation seems to rely to some degree on an assumption of convergence. However, it is usually not an explicit paradigm. Though the word is normally not used in the context of EU politics (where it might be perceived as ‘too intellectual’), the idea of convergence is a fact of life for the European Union. It could be described as an implicit, overarching *leitmotiv* which has been accompanying the process of European integration since the early years after World War II. There seems to be an un-stated yet very powerful assumption that structural convergence will generate cultural convergence. Research in the field of comparative welfare studies has pointed in the same direction. Bouget (2003) has claimed that although national welfare systems appear to have developed in a largely autonomous way since 1945, the implicit assumption of the need to align them has been on the agenda for a long time, with the objective of creating a more unified and coherent Europe.

A key passage can be found in the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, which marked the beginning of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the launching of the integrationist approach (as opposed to the classical intergovernmental approach favoured by some countries not involved in the ECSC, and practised by the Council of Europe). The integrationist approach is today sometimes referred to as the ‘*méthode communautaire*’ and denotes the existence of supranational structure with powers to legislate, in certain areas specifically listed in the Treaty, with direct force in Member States. It is one of the elements that make the EC/EU unique and distinguishes its Institutions from classical intergovernmental institutions. In the declaration which the Foreign Minister of France, Robert Schuman, read to his colleagues at the French cabinet meeting of 9

May 1950, he said:

‘Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity’ (Schuman, 1950).

Without using the word ‘convergence’, the declaration clearly spells out the type of thinking described above, and its line of thinking acquired official status. When the ECSC was founded, its Treaty recognised

‘that Europe can be built only through practical achievements which will first of all create real solidarity, and through the establishment of common bases for economic development’ (ECSC Treaty, 1952, Preamble),

When the European Economic Community (EEC) was founded, a now famous phrase—‘Determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe’ (EEC Treaty, 1957, Preamble), found its way into the considerations. While the European Convention was preparing its draft constitution treaty, there was great debate over this phrase. Some were concerned over the decision to omit the ‘Ever closer Union’ phrase (Mahoney, 2003), while others greeted it. The present draft does not contain the famous phrase (see Draft Constitution Treaty, 2004, Preamble).

### 3.3. SOCIOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE THEORIES

However, the process of European integration ought to be seen as part of a much wider, more complex change affecting all societies around the globe: globalisation. Professional education and practice are both affected by the drive toward a ‘runaway world’ (Giddens, 2002). While some would hold that this new situation presents both threats and opportunities to social work, others have been more pessimistic. According to one author,

‘[...] social work has at best a minimal role to play with any new global order, should such an order exist. There are developments within social work that could have global significance, for instance, the spread of actuarial technologies and risk management. However, information networks and the universalization of expert systems hardly support claims for a “global social work”. [...] any notion of a global or transnational social work is little more than a vanity’ (Webb (S.A.) 2003, p. 191).

Speaking in more general terms, curriculum studies in all fields ought to take the effects of globalisation into account (Gough, 1999, 2000).

If social work wants to make sense of what is going on, sociological models can be helpful. In sociology, convergence theories used to be very popular in the 1960s and early 1970s (e.g. Gibbs & Browning, 1966; Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Kerr, et al., 1960; Rostow, 1960). Accounts of their life cycle, merits and shortcomings can be found in the works of Coughlin (2001), Inkeles (1999) and Wilensky (2002). The wide support which they once enjoyed is no more, yet they are still useful sources of inspiration, in that they raise questions of the role of the predominance of ‘the West’ and its solutions.

‘The core notion of convergence theory is that as nations achieve similar levels of economic development they will become more alike in terms of these (and other) aspects of social life’ (Coughlin, 2001).

Early contributions posited that industrialisation would make all societies more similar to ‘the West’ (Kerr, et al., 1960), but this idea was abandoned in the 1970s (Moore, 1979). The idea to use convergence as an analytical tool for the study of welfare regimes is far

from new (O'Connor, 1988). By contrast, it does not seem to have been used for social work or social work education. A recent critique against convergence theory has been voiced by Wilensky (2002) in a study of public policy performance in 'rich democracies'.

Processes like European integration are based, to a large extent, on the belief that legal and economic structural change under common, supra-national agendas will gradually bring socio-cultural convergence. Nevertheless, the assumption of convergence must be dealt with by observing great prudence.

Finally, many contributions to comparative welfare studies have looked at the issue of convergence versus divergence in the development of social policy structures in national systems (O'Connor, 1988; Bouget, 2003).

#### 4. CULTURE-FOCUSED ALTERNATIVES

##### 4.1. THE NEED FOR CULTURE-FOCUSED ALTERNATIVES

While convergence theory relies heavily on structural information to make its point, we may also ask which culture-related paradigms could be used in discussions of change on social work education in the national systems of EU countries. Such paradigms promise a more direct recognition of the diversity of national social work education systems and might help shed light on those 'soft' aspects of curriculum policy and delivery which the 'hard' tools of convergence theory might not grasp. Convergence theory might also be seen as overtly deterministic, though this remains to be proven. Finally, from a methodological perspective it should be emphasized that settling for culture-based alternatives does not imply rejecting convergence theory as such: rather than superseding the convergence paradigm, models based on cultural aspects should be seen as complementary and sometimes as correctives. When the vitality of regions and nations make themselves felt in opposition to convergence-based internationalist agendas (like in some referendums concerning the ratification of new European treaties), these outbursts of popular sentiment and cultural preferences over often well-argued structural arguments act as a corrective: adjustments to the texts proposed are frequently made subsequently to cater for cultural differences. Yet as it was demonstrated above in the case of convergence theory, the cultural models are also very often implicit.

##### 4.2. IMPLICIT 'FAMILIES OF NATIONS' APPROACHES

Grouping countries in clusters is a fairly common and uncontroversial practice in policy studies. Evidence-based policy making like the EU's 'open coordination method' (for employment and social affairs matters) or the 'Lisbon process' of 2000 (intended to make the EU the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy by the year 2010) rely on regular reviews and evaluations of progress made in Member States, and these tasks in turn depend on sets of benchmarks and a certain clustering of countries.

Comparative welfare studies - including the study of 'welfare regimes' - are by definition based on economics and draw heavily on structural aspects. Yet for the last two decades, there have been publications showing a more or less outspoken 'families of nations' approach. This may seem natural given the often interdisciplinary nature of such research,



encompassing elements from history, law, sociology, political science and other disciplines. The most famous example is beyond any doubt Esping-Andersen's 'The Worlds of Welfare Capitalism' with a Scandinavian (social democrat), an Anglo-Saxon (liberal, in the UK sense) and Continental (conservative) family Esping-Andersen (1990). While his model is economic in nature with a central interest in national systems' ability to 'decommodify' what citizens need, it does not disregard cultural factors. Many other comparative welfare studies use similar models with two, three or even four families. Sometimes references are made to Bismarck and Beveridge.

#### 4.3. EXPLICIT 'FAMILIES OF NATIONS' APPROACHES

While the 'families of nations' approach can frequently be found in its implicit form, examples of explicit use are harder to find. They are quite commonplace in social policy and comparative welfare studies but not so well-known in social work literature. One social work author has used a similar technique to that of Esping-Andersen (1990) in a big, comprehensive study of 29 countries' care services for older people (Giarchi, 1996) by drawing on the European family types-model developed by French social historian Emmanuel Todd. Todd used an ethnographic approach, similar to research concerned with overseas cultures, focusing on village structures, agricultural techniques, family structures and succession rules (Todd, 1990). His family types are intriguing and challenging because France and the UK emanate as completely heterogeneous while Belgium is surprisingly homogeneous. This is important for comparative social work education, because 'families of nations' models allow linking the structural with the cultural (which was also what Todd did). This approach is still not visible in relevant social work literature.

The idea[...]that it may be possible to identify *families of nations* defined in terms of shared geographic, linguistic, cultural and/or historical attributes and leading to distinctive patterns of public policy outcomes' (Castles, 1993, p. xiii italics in the original) is not new. It was popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in comparative law but post-1945 political scientists have not favoured it much, being more concerned with structural than with cultural factors. The optimistic view of modernization expressed by Kerr, et al. (1960), Inkeles & Smith (1974) and others is often opposed to this tradition. Yet structural and cultural factors have to be balanced, which even members of the 'families of nations' school are aware of: the example of price stability in the German-speaking countries (Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland) in post-War decades shows that there are specific treats pertaining to this group, but also that there are important differences between them (Busch, 1993). It may be difficult, then, to decide whether a shared culture is more important than structures – a problem that reminds us of the phrase famously attributed to Shaw: that the UK and USA are 'divided by a common language'.

An attempt to classify national social work education traditions and group them in clusters is that of Kornbeck (2001). There, three families of social work can be identified. In countries like the UK, only social work 'proper' is considered as part of social work, in countries like Germany, social work and social pedagogy share the field, and in countries like France, there is a tripartite construction of social assistance, special education and socio-cultural animation. Yet to make the 'families of nations' approach operational, any discipline wanting to avail itself of its methodology needs in parallel to develop its own theoretical concepts of culture. With social work having been at times rather technocratic, it

may be said that the discipline has some theory deficit as regards culture. European welfare states have for too long been claiming they were value- and culture-free, whereas they are now increasingly under pressure to become open to, and conscious of culture. The same applies to social work, being an activity intimately linked to welfare state regimes; hence the same should be the case with social work education. Yet the inclusion of cultural aspects may help social work to understand social reality much better, in particular in societies affected by high immigration levels (Chamberlayne, et al., 1999).

## 5. CONCLUSION

### CONVERGENCE THEORY TO BE BALANCED BY CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL AWARENESS

We have seen some of the advantages and drawbacks of convergence theory. Readers may legitimately ask why social work should take an active interest in a paradigm that had its heyday forty years ago. Nevertheless, there are very good reasons for using convergence theory in this context:

1. The context, within which the disciplines and professions in question have developed, is a comparative one – we are looking at a set of these in a number of EU countries simultaneously – and the question of convergence arises almost spontaneously.

2. Some degree of convergence is a fact. Though Western supremacy and is to be rejected, the closest neighbouring countries (Eastern Europe and the Maghreb) seem to be converging with Europe in many ways. – This may partly be explained because institutional life brings de-facto change as collaboration with the EU and its Member States leads to arrangements focusing on the removal of structural difference.

3. Convergence (although not expressed in the clear-cut form of the theories of the 1960s) is a commonplace theme in comparative welfare research, a discipline of great relevance to social work.

4. Some convergence can in fact be observed worldwide, including a link between alphabetisation and fertility rates (Todd, 2004). (When alphabetisation reaches women, they tend to have fewer children.)

5. Finally, because an underlying assumption of convergence is central to the process of European integration and frequently even stated explicitly, it is very appropriate in a concrete case study to look for evidence of realised convergence.

However, all convergence discourses recall Fukuyama's (1992) vision of the 'end of history' and need to be treated with the utmost care. This is why *cultural awareness* is needed to balance the occasionally too deterministic structuralism expressed in convergence theory. According to a phrase famously attributed to the French statesman and academy member Edouard Herriot (1872-1957), and to the literary critic Emile Henriot (1889-1961), culture is what will remain once everything has been forgotten ('La culture, c'est ce qui reste quand on a tout oublié' and other formulations) (Le Monde Diplomatique, 1998; Musée de la Pensée, 1998). But cultural awareness is not a substitute for solid comparison of structural facts, which is where convergence theory proves its value.

A final pitfall of convergence theory needs a warning here: The frequently underlying assumption of perpetual progress. Our time is not the only one which has experienced migration and convergence. Nineteenth century Froebelian women from England and Germany had remarkable networks and used them to promote their professional status

(Read, 2003). And as the example of Alice Salomon (1937) shows, social work education did not just start its internationalization in the 1980s and 1990s (Kruse, 2002). Therefore, convergence theory also needs to be balanced by a strong *historical awareness*.

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