
Article

Social pedagogy in Bulgaria

Sofia Rönkkö

Research assistant/doctoral student, Department of Social Sciences, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio campus, P.O. Box 111, 80101 Joensuu, Finland; sofia.ronkko@uef.fi

How to Cite: Rönkkö, S. (2021). Social pedagogy in Bulgaria. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 10(1): 2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2021.v10.x.002>.

Submission date: 8 July 2020; Acceptance date: 15 February 2021; Publication date: 5 March 2021

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.

Copyright:

© 2021, Sofia Rönkkö. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2021.v10.x.002>.

Open access:

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

Abstract

Social pedagogy in Bulgaria has a long and interesting tradition that has remained hidden from the international world of the subject. In Bulgaria, social pedagogy is a unique mixture of the German social pedagogical tradition, the Bulgarian pedagogical system and Russian pedagogical influence. Social pedagogy affirmed its position within the Bulgarian pedagogical space around the same time as Karl Mager used the term for the first time. In spite of the tight grip social pedagogy had on the Bulgarian education system, during the time of communism it was branded as 'bourgeois science' and was forbidden, but not forgotten. The second phase of the development of Bulgarian social pedagogy started at the beginning of the 1990s, as a result of the democratisation and liberalisation changes that took place following the fall of communism. Since that time, social pedagogy in the Bulgarian context has evolved into the remarkable science and practical field it is today. This article attempts to spread the knowledge of Bulgarian social pedagogy's origins, traditions, concepts, theories and practices, and to open the door for further cooperation between Bulgaria and the international social pedagogical community.

Keywords: Bulgaria; social pedagogy; origins; traditions; concepts; theories; practices

Introduction

In spite of its long practical and academic tradition, little is known about social pedagogy in Bulgaria outside the country. Very few social pedagogical articles have actually been written in English for international academic circles. It is a well-known fact that social pedagogy affirmed its position within the Bulgarian pedagogical space around the same time that Karl Mager (1810–1858) used the term ‘social pedagogy’ for the first time. In this article, I attempt to spread the knowledge of Bulgarian social pedagogy’s origins, traditions, concepts, theories and practices. In Bulgaria, the social pedagogical field has developed as a combination of the German tradition, with Russian influence and the dominant Bulgarian pedagogical system at the time. Each one has had its own impact on how social pedagogy was accepted and how it has progressed to this point. Nowadays, social pedagogy in Bulgaria looks rather different from the social pedagogical approaches in Western Europe. While in Western Europe – and especially in the German tradition of social pedagogy – we recognise two lines of development which are intertwined, in Bulgaria the general line of development is almost unknown. Indeed, only in recent years have Karl Mager’s ideas been considered worth exploring. The main direction of Bulgarian social pedagogy was inspired by Adolph Diesterweg (1790–1866), known in Bulgaria as the ‘creator’ of social pedagogy as a concept and practical field of work.

The ability of social pedagogy to ‘educate society’ was the main characteristic of Bulgarian social pedagogy in the early twentieth century. Nowadays social pedagogy is understood as knowledge, experience and methods that can be used in the social sphere. Naturally, as humans, we learn individually, but also as part of a community. Social pedagogy is an element of every human activity, which presupposes purposeful external support for the development of individual and human communities. Social pedagogy in the Bulgarian context deals with the consequences of social inequality and the processes of marginalisation in society. The aim of the social pedagogical intervention is to improve life opportunities, training and competence for the development of the most at-risk individuals. The purpose is to examine the conditions for social pedagogy and social inclusion intervention, including the possible effects of reform in social and educational policy initiatives.

In the past, teachers were involved in all this and a psychologist would have been specially invited to participate in more complex cases. Now the specialist in this profession is in great demand in schools, kindergartens, social services and other institutions working with young children. Social pedagogy as a professional field has only recently become an official part of the Bulgarian labour market. The social pedagogue strives to promote the best acclimatisation of children and youngsters into school and social life and to offer them assistance to achieve full social integration and subsequent realisation in society.

This article describes the basics of Bulgarian social pedagogy and presents an example of the social pedagogical profession in school. Starting with the beginning of social pedagogy in Bulgaria and coming up to the present day, the science has undergone changes in tradition, in subject, in task and as an academic field. Because social pedagogy in any given country is a rather broad subject, whether that be in the academic field (Finland, Sweden), the field of practice (UK, Germany) or way of thinking (Finland), in this article I focus on the basics of the Bulgarian social pedagogy.

Fellow social pedagogues may not recognise the example of the social pedagogical profession in schools described in this article. However, Bulgarian social pedagogy’s focus is mainly on work with school children. The few English-language articles from Bulgarian social pedagogues that can be found online concentrate specifically on school social pedagogy, but there is an already visible shift towards a wider exploration of the social pedagogical field in Bulgaria. It is hoped that this ongoing shift would serve as a topic for further social pedagogical articles from fellow Bulgarian social pedagogues or through a research collaboration.

Social pedagogical articles published by Bulgarian academics in English are rare, and by writing this article, I hope to further the conversation within the Bulgarian social pedagogical community towards a more open and frequent international publishing culture. The main purpose of this article is to promote Bulgarian social pedagogy to international readers and academics, as well as to elevate the interest between Bulgaria, Europe and the rest of the world towards a better and more active professional relationship in the future.

Development of social pedagogy in Bulgaria

Social pedagogy arrived in Bulgaria both directly and indirectly. Translations of the works of such German educators and philosophers as Paul Natorp (1854–1924), Paul Bergemann (1862–1946), Robert Rissmann (1851–1913) and Wilhelm Rain (1847–1929) formed the so-called direct influence of the German social pedagogical tradition. Rissmann's book on individual and social pedagogy (Rissman, 1892), Bergemann's writings on social pedagogy as universal and cultural pedagogy (Bergemann, 1900) and Natorp's view on how education should be aimed at everyone's complete integration into society built the foundation for the development of social pedagogy as a practical work field in Bulgaria (Manov, 1905). The social pedagogical ideas that concerned Mager and Adolph Diesterweg during the time of increasing industrialisation and the social problems that arose from it infiltrated into Bulgaria. These ideas were seen as a way to propagate new and radical pedagogical ideas from Europe with collaboration from the already existing educational system (Sapundjieva, 2014a). Thus, in the early twentieth century, the social pedagogical ideas, theories and practice in Bulgaria were in accordance with Western European standards. At the same time, however, the influence of Russian social pedagogical development made an inherent and indirect breakthrough via the works of E. Lovich and I. Gorodetski. The two Russian educators' focus was on Bergemann's writing on social pedagogy and their work, *Scientific Pedagogy* (Gorodetski, 1899), laid the path for further social pedagogical advancement in Russia and Bulgaria.

Representatives of Bulgarian pedagogical thought also got involved in social pedagogical ideas imported from Germany and Russia. The most influential and most criticised German philosopher in Bulgaria at the time was Paul Bergemann, whose concept of social pedagogy as a counterpart of individual pedagogy was widely accepted as well as critically analysed. It should be noted, however, that Natorp's social pedagogical ideas in particular were imported into Bulgaria through the translations of Russian educators and mainly via the writings of Bergemann (1900). Natorp's *Sozialpädagogik* of 1899, for example, was never translated into Bulgarian; his ideas became known through Russian translations and writings on Bergemann. Some educators, such as Vasil Manov (1875–1946), embraced the ideas of Natorp, Bergemann and Rain, while others, such as T. Malinov, criticised Bergemann's pedagogical system as 'social pedagogical utopia that lacks the scientific and the inductive element in order to leave tangible traces into the pedagogical practice' (quoted in Sapundjieva, 2014b, p. 51). In the meantime, there was discussion over the benefits and shortcomings of social pedagogy's place in the Bulgarian pedagogical sphere; educators and philosophers throughout the country were contemplating how to achieve moderation, relevance and correlation between the individualistic and social pedagogy.

From very early on, social pedagogy in Bulgaria was also influenced also by reformative pedagogy – characterised by the implementation of structural reforms such as improving existing school and education systems, and incorporating new and unorthodox methods and practices into the pedagogical dimension. Reformative pedagogy was depicted as an aggregation of ideas, theories, processes and practices that seek to incorporate change into the purpose, contents, forms and means of education. Early social pedagogy in Bulgaria incorporated features of reformative pedagogy with the aim to resolve social conflicts by pedagogical means, as well as opposing individualism by emphasising the role of community and society. Thus, in its first phase of development, Bulgarian social pedagogy was a combination of reformative pedagogy with its characteristics and social pedagogical tradition imported from Germany. At the time, Bulgarian social pedagogy had unique particularities, which I have listed below as additional to the characteristics of the reformative pedagogy. Early social pedagogy in Bulgaria:

- emphasised the social character of pedagogy – on the one hand it denied interaction between social and educational activity, while on the other it searched for new fields of distribution outside the pedagogical dimension
- was seen as 'pedagogy of need' – social pedagogues worked mainly with vulnerable communities and people, who were seeking different types of societal support outside the already established institutional aid; 'pedagogy of need' strongly opposed the individualisation of the educational process
- had an unspecified relationship with pedagogy – as a science social pedagogy did not have a definite object, subject and methodology

- was concerned with activities aimed at improving the social conditions of socially disadvantaged and underprivileged individuals by reintegrating them into society
- overrated the role of education as a mechanism for improving social reality and increasing societal well-being.

Early Bulgarian social pedagogy was accepted by educators rather openly. One of the first publications in the field was written by Professor Naiden Chakarov (1907–1990) in 1946, who, in his article ‘Social pedagogy in Bulgaria’, named the pioneers and developers of Bulgarian social pedagogy (Atanasov and Chakarov, 2008). In the 1920s social pedagogy in Bulgaria became the dominant pedagogy in the country. During the years of socialist rule (1946–1989), social pedagogy – due to its ideological burden – was declared ‘bourgeois’ and was presented as an idea of Western society to oppose the communist pedagogical model. After the changes in Bulgaria in 1989, public attention was again focused on social pedagogy as a science and an academic discipline. As early as the beginning of the 1990s, there was an urgent need for social pedagogues and social pedagogical specialists to work in the social work sphere.

Contemporary social pedagogy in Bulgaria

According to Radev (2017), social pedagogy in the Bulgarian context is a science that studies the content methodology of the social education of children, whether they be healthy, underprivileged, with disabilities or socially disadvantaged. The subject of social pedagogy is everything that can be defined as having pedagogical qualities, trends and patterns of social education and social integration. That includes the conscious and organised purposeful activity of society to assist the individual in overcoming different kinds of social problems and difficulties. As an integrated science, social pedagogy deals with the problems of education and re-education, socialisation and re-socialisation, integration and reintegration, adaptation and readaptation of socially disadvantaged and underprivileged individuals, and their inclusion in social structures and values of modern society. The object of research in social pedagogy is the process of transmission and assimilation of a certain socially determined system of aggregate knowledge, skills, habits and qualities at the macrosocial level. Thus, social pedagogy in Bulgarian context is: a counterpart to individual pedagogy; an education through and for society; a care for upbringing outside the school and the family; a theory and practice of social work; a directed impact on the path of socialisation of each individual; a theory and practice of social formation, improvement and development of the individual, group and community; and a concept, theory and system of concepts, representing the processes of social formation and development of the individual, group and society that takes into account factors of the internal and external environment.

Thus, according to the definitions above, social pedagogy is a science encompassing:

- social education and social integration
- the problems of education and re-education, socialisation and re-socialisation, integration and reintegration, adaptation and readaptation of socially isolated, socially disadvantaged and underprivileged individuals
- different types of activity of state and public structures and institutions for the creation of concepts and policies related to the social pedagogical realisation and development of the individual
- theory and practice of social formation, improvement and development of the individual, group and community
- theory and practice of social work – according to the National Classification of Occupations and Positions, the field of professional realisation for social pedagogue and social worker overlap, based on the integrative nature of social work and necessity of variety of knowledge and skills (Zdravkova, 2009)
- improvement and development of the individual, group and community, taking into account the factors of the social environment
- purposeful and organised practical activity
- academic disciplines for training social pedagogues and social pedagogical academics.

Contemporary Bulgarian social pedagogy works at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, social pedagogy is helping to solve a given social problem of an individual, a group or a community. The macro level covers participation in the political life of the country in order to build a social policy and structure, influencing the environment and living conditions of every individual, group and community. Since social pedagogy deals with the social problems of individuals, groups, communities and society as a whole, it is logical that it should interact on multiple levels – with all spheres of activity in society, all educational sciences, sociology, all sciences studying human biological and mental structure, behavioural sciences, social sciences and social political sciences.

Tasks of social pedagogy in the Bulgarian context

The basic theory of social pedagogy in Bulgaria is best described via the tasks set for it. Social pedagogy can achieve its goal through the following seven tasks. The first task of social pedagogy is the study of the regularities and the conditions under which different types and degrees of social deficit occur, as well as the mechanisms that contribute to overcoming this phenomenon. Usually, systematic knowledge regarding the above and the typology of forms of deficit are developed from various human sciences, but the classification of these phenomena in social pedagogy is still missing. The second task relates to the development of methodology and methods for reliable diagnosis (especially early) and prognosis of social deficit(s), its patterns as a process and content as socio-psychological qualities. It is necessary to specify the criteria for assessing the degrees of bio- and social psychological destruction and their systematisation in order to create conditions for prediction and early detection of the risks of social deficits (Karagiozov, 1996; Stamatova, 2008; Todorova, 2020). The third task focuses on the adaptation, creation and approbation of methods for effective correction and compensation of social deficit(s), and for complete re-socialisation of individuals in need of support and assistance. This can be accomplished through: (a) development of their adaptive and re-adaptive capabilities; (b) harmonisation and development of personal structures; (c) education and influence in the social and human sciences; and (d) developing the need for broader social communication and interaction. The fourth task is about expanding the system of social, psychological and pedagogical methods, developing new ones for studying and analysing the set of significant problems of individuals experiencing social deficits, both hindering or stimulating their re-socialisation. The methods of preventing social deficits require special attention. Important for social pedagogy is the theoretical development of the stages, content and variants of the re-socialisation process as described by the fifth task. By developing adequate strategies within the social pedagogical approach, differentiating the stages of impact, striving to achieve flexibility of re-socialising as a process, and by using a multivariate analysis of the combined effect, it is possible to make this process predictable. This particular feature of the social pedagogical process allows not only the socialisation and the re-socialisation of individuals, but it has also an important significance for turning social pedagogy from theory into practice, a vital element of the social educational forces and a tangible power for human communities (Karagiozov, 1996; Todorova, 2020; Tsoneva, 2019). The sixth task of social pedagogy is to expand its influence as an educational force for society. Social pedagogy's aim is to become the core of the educational dimension by synthesising knowledge and methods from other scientific and practical fields and other social activities aimed at individual and public welfare. The seventh task is to develop its own theory and practice, and to establish itself as an independent scientific and practical social activity. As a combination of all these tasks, social pedagogy should be one of the determinants of prosocial development of social individuals at the individual, group and societal level (Stamatova, 2008; Todorova, 2020; Tsoneva, 2019). The tasks of Bulgarian social pedagogy constitute a basic study subject at university level (Konstantin Preslavski University of Shumen), but are also used as guidelines in social pedagogical practice. The aim of Bulgarian social pedagogy is mostly consistent with social pedagogy's special purpose of development – to satisfy the social needs of individuals experiencing well-being, welfare and/or social difficulties. This allows for the creation of opportunities, conditions and prerequisites for the social development of the individual. The ruling social policy in any given society is one of the most important requirements for determining the level of well-being and social needs satisfaction of disadvantaged people. The policy governing the social rules within a given society is

seen as a prerequisite for the level of satisfaction of social needs of disadvantaged people. According to Bulgarian social pedagogy, this level is measured by:

- acquisition of social knowledge regarding social policy of the state, its social structure, legal regulations, political structures, citizens' rights, duties and responsibilities
- building of social skills, related to communication and mutual assistance between people, and conflict prevention
- forming social attitudes, such as a sense of solidarity, responsibility to oneself and others
- building social capacity through the acquisition of social roles (for example, parental, occupational, civic or consumer) and qualities.

Thus, the purpose of social pedagogy is related to the explanation and interpretation of the processes of socialisation and social learning, as well as the substantiation of different systems for social education and integration, depending on the differentiated social needs and typological features of the individuals. The goal is to satisfy the social needs of disadvantaged individuals. In this way, opportunities, conditions and prerequisites for social development of the personality are created. As [Hristova \(2017\)](#) described it, social pedagogy's aim is to preserve the human rights of disadvantaged or/and underprivileged individuals. The main goal is not to support the welfare and prosperity of society as a whole and its citizens, but rather to assess the opportunities for correcting any social deficiencies and flaws in the society. These shortcomings are often seen as the root of disadvantaged and underprivileged individuals' social problems.

The subject of social pedagogy in Bulgaria

The subject of social pedagogy in the Bulgarian context features everything that we can define as pedagogical attribute, tendency and regularity of social education and social integration. This results from the fact that social pedagogy is also relevant to other aspects of social education and social integration – individual, psychological, legal, medical and psychotherapeutic – that need to be explored and studied. Social pedagogy is also concerned with social relations of a specific pedagogical nature, arising between disadvantaged individual(s) and the rest of society during the process of their interaction and which ensures proper socialisation, integration, adaptation and re-socialisation. Ultimately, the expected outcome of these processes is associated with developing a personal maturity close to the publicly defined one, and shaped by the social status and determination of the individual ([Stamatova, 2008](#)).

The key points of social pedagogy in Bulgaria are the pedagogical properties, features, tendencies and regularities of social education and social integration, as well as the aim to harmonise the relations between the individual and their social environment. This is achieved through social education on an individual level in all areas of human life – family, community, school, university, military and others ([Kouteva-Tsvetkova, 2008](#)). When combined, social education and integration form the subject of social pedagogy. As a science, however, social pedagogy deals with objects as well. Philosophically, the object can be seen as a reflection of the transformation and influence by the subject. Generally, the objects of a human science are the people occupying a certain social status and the conditions in which their activities are carried out. Thus, the objects of social pedagogy are individuals with their personal, educational, legal, health, economic, household and social problems ([Yosifova, 2020](#)), as well as the principles of social education of an individual in all stages of their development, in all forms of their life and activities, respecting individuals' psychological, physical and age peculiarities ([Kouteva-Tsvetkova, 2008](#)).

Bulgarian social pedagogy as academic field

The arrival of social pedagogy as part of the academic field in Bulgaria was marked by active discussion in 1980s and 1990s regarding the right to its independent status. The academics on the defending side drew attention to the need to highlight the science of social education and social integration that would overcome the academic tradition of understanding pedagogy as school pedagogy, teacher training, and so on. Thus, the responsible scientific task delegated to social pedagogy is to present the concept of what is pedagogical in a broad social context. The opposition expressed doubts about the conditionality of the definition of 'social' and the fundamentally correct, but provocative and insidious

argument that any pedagogy is 'social'. The modern notion of social pedagogy as an academic field in Bulgaria gravitates around two main semantic approaches: (1) the area of pedagogical science that deals with the social education and social integration of children, families and adults; (2) the interdisciplinary field, different from the traditional pedagogy. As Sapundjieva (2014a, pp. 13–14) described it:

The idea of social pedagogy as an integrative science leads to the idea of its possible position as a metascience, as a theory and methodology of social pedagogical activities and work with children, adults, families, and communities, and as a basis for various manifestations and areas of social education and theoretical support model.

Social pedagogical education in Bulgaria was established as early as 1990 in Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. In the following years, at least six more universities started their own social pedagogy programmes (at bachelor's, master's and doctorate levels). The curriculum emphasis on specialised training and its practical orientation focuses on the specifics of the university programme (Boyadzieva, 2017). The majority of the bachelor's degree curricula seek a reasonable balance between traditional pedagogical theory and its applied disciplines, based on the formation of practical competencies on the one hand, and the theory and practice of social work on the other. The difference between them comes from the measure of this balance. In some cases, social pedagogy as speciality has developed more as a 'private social work'. That is why some universities have included in the social pedagogy curriculum courses typical for social work such as 'fundamentals of social work', 'methods of social work', as well as 'family pedagogy' and 'special pedagogy'. Some universities also offer an introductory course in social pedagogy as a speciality. Others definitely prefer the pedagogical context itself. In the curriculum of their bachelor's specialities in social pedagogy, basic disciplines are 'theory of education', 'history of social pedagogy', 'preventive pedagogy', 'art pedagogy', 'pedagogy of deviant behavior' and 'civic education' among others. There is a tendency in general to cover the broadest possible range of practical fields in both areas – education and social work – while further overlapping the boundaries between semantic and practical. This is most prominent in the qualification characteristics of trained social pedagogical specialists, both bachelors and masters. Their graduates have fully readiness to work with individuals of all ages, to support and resolve their problems by all possible means, such as professional-consultative, psycho-therapeutic, legal and medical social. Most of the bachelor's degree programmes are oriented to train specialists who work with the three main categories of clients – social protection clients individuals with social disabilities and those with health (Nikolaeva, 2012).

The master's level education addresses more concrete needs into the training of social pedagogues. Some master's programmes have adopted a more common approach such as Preventive Pedagogy (University of Plovdiv), Social Prevention, Pedagogy of Abnormal Behaviour (University of Sofia), Pedagogical Intervention and Interaction for Children with Problematic Behaviour and Social Pedagogical Help for Individuals in Risk Groups (South-West University). Other programmes offer an education in specific areas of social pedagogy with a focus on consulting activities and competencies, social upbringing and integration and non-formal free-time educational activities. Some examples are Extracurricular Non-formal Education (University of Veliko Tarnovo), Art Pedagogy (University of Plovdiv), Civil and Multicultural Education (University of Plovdiv, University of Shumen), Intercultural Education (South-West University) and Educational and Therapeutic Aspects of Art (University of Veliko Tarnovo). One of the most significant master's programmes in social pedagogy is Education in Management of Social Pedagogical Activities, Services, and Institutions, offered by several of the universities listed above. The wide range of practical fields in Bulgarian social pedagogy has resulted in a variety of master's programmes. The fundamental description of what type of training the future masters in social pedagogy in Bulgaria are receiving is best described, however, in the following:

- social pedagogical education is interlinked with the implementation of pedagogical, methodological and research activity within the frames of the educational dimension and system;
- social pedagogical work is support and intervention primarily for: individuals with deviant and delinquent behaviour; family work; risk groups; people with disabilities, but also those gifted and in need of special protection; as well as work with the institutions responsible for these target groups;

- social pedagogy represents methodologies and techniques for working with target groups, namely for social pedagogical intervention in training and education; rehabilitation, adaptation, integration and reintegration; and professional orientation and choice of educational programmes;
- the professional competencies of a social pedagogue should cover a set of pedagogical practices such as pedagogical psychological, analytical diagnostic, correctional rehabilitative, organisational communicative, analytical, social preventive and others;
- social pedagogues have to perform quite different activities: social pedagogical, scientific methodological, cultural educational, correctional developmental, organisational managerial, cooperation and joint work with institutions working with children and adults. (Kuteva-Tsetkova, 2014; Nikolaeva, 2012)

According to Kuteva-Tsetkova (2014), the bachelor's and master's programmes in Bulgarian universities do not differentiate clearly enough between the different levels of education in Bulgarian universities, neither do they offer strictly social pedagogical qualifications that would provide employment advantages to those who go on to undertake a master's in social pedagogy. An example of this is matching courses included in the curriculum of a bachelor's degree in some universities and in the master's degree in others. There is a wide variety of social pedagogical courses in Bulgarian universities, which on the one hand could be seen as a rather positive attribute. Conversely, due to the lack of standards for certain professions, such as a social pedagogue in a school, this diversity stands in the way of specialised training in a given area of social pedagogy.

Social pedagogy as a profession in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, social pedagogy as a profession is a relatively young concept that has successfully entered the working sphere and has effectively met the current market needs. It has taken its rightful place among the variety of professions with auxiliary pedagogical functions, successfully differentiating its own from those of other related professions – pedagogue, psychologist, therapist, social worker and others. Up until the mid-twentieth century, before the influence of the Russian pedagogical system was felt, the Bulgarian educational system and the pedagogues in particular were focused mainly on 'subject–subject' interaction. In the early 1990s with the change of social economic politics from communism to democracy, the educational climate in Bulgaria returned itself to the changes and demands of society in response to the market economy. The change in the political, economic and educational environment resulted in problems in terms of supporting the interaction between 'subject–subject' and the newly appeared 'subject–object' relation. The Bulgarian universities were the first to respond to those issues by opening up the speciality of social pedagogy (Punto Marinero, 2019).

The main function of social pedagogues in the Bulgarian context is to create optimal conditions for the development of students, the protection of their rights and establishment of relations between the school/institution and the child/student's family. Key tasks for social pedagogues are the protection of children's rights, providing an inspiration of culture, traditions and humanism to the younger generations and creating optimal conditions for the professional and social development of younger generations. The job description of a social pedagogue implies that they are versed in the Bulgarian constitution, its laws and policies, as well as those of local authorities dealing with educational issues and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, they are required to know the basics of social policy, the family and labour code and civil and state law (Zdravkova, 2009). Moreover, the social pedagogue's task is to create personality-affirming situations which reinforce the child's capability for self-development. The benefit of creating such an opportunity as an educational method lies in the fact that every personality-affirming situation is different for each individual. It opens a way for the social pedagogue to try to identify the most concealed information regarding the child's inner world. Often this can be difficult or simply impossible through questionnaires, interviews and/or observations. Only a social pedagogue who possesses the necessary set of personal traits such as empathy, faith in their own abilities and the abilities of each child, keeps an open mind and sees every child as a unique person, can implement this personal approach. The results of the personality-affirming upbringing are expressed in the connection between the social pedagogue and the student to the common and shared activity, cooperation with each other, psychological

well-being, self-confidence, and the growth of personal achievements of each person (Petrova, 2020). When working with children the social pedagogue is drawing on their expertise on integrating individuals into society as part of the social pedagogical process. This in turn makes it possible to develop children's social skills further by building contacts, gathering information regarding the impact of society on children and creating an environment for building relationships between children and adults. The social educator's task includes the possibility of positive change in communication between the family and society, and the potential elimination of any negative impact. They create and implement prevention systems so that the child does not deviate in behaviour in any negative or criminal direction. The prevention system consists of stimulating a sense of morality and resilience, supports the development of self-confidence, self-organisation, self-knowledge and self-realisation, and helps to protect the rights of the child or family (Punto Marinero, 2019).

Social pedagogy as work has two main approaches – *analytical-diagnostic* and *predictive*. The analytical diagnostic approach includes the studying of individual's personal characteristics, as well as their social and living conditions – their environment. In addition, the social pedagogue determines any possible educational and/or social problems and evaluates what in an individual's environment has a negative and positive impact on the individual's development. That implies searching for the causes of the problems and the factors that affect any potential solutions. The predictive approach includes anticipating, planning and programming educational processes for development of individual's personal qualities, determining the prospects for self-development and building an action plan to work with each individual, based on previous analysis (Kuzmanova-Kartalova, 2006; Zdravkova, 2015).

Up until 2016, social pedagogue as a profession in Bulgaria did not exist in spite of the qualification requirements mentioned above. As Sapundjieva (2014a) argued, the social pedagogical profession was sidetracked by the lack of a state-regulated solution to standardising the profession. Despite the needs of the labour market, in terms of employment social pedagogues were faced with unequal competition for primarily social pedagogical areas. In Bulgaria, such areas are, for example, pedagogical advisor, consultant and expert in the system of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Labor and Social Politics, Commissions for Combating Anti-social Behavior, schools, social and probation services, homes for children, juvenile detention centres and so on. In 2016, the National Statistical Institute (NSI, 2016) revised their Standard Classification of Occupations and Positions. In the appendix, the profession of social pedagogue was clearly classified with its own tasks, responsibilities and qualifications to it (Radev, 2017). Nowadays in Bulgaria, social pedagogues have found their way into institutions and they are highly sought after as professionals. Pedagogical advisors in schools have the highest employment rate among social pedagogues; they also have the widest range of professional duties and requirements assigned to them.

Social pedagogues in schools

Social pedagogues in schools in Bulgaria work under the professional name of *pedagogical advisor*. The main task of a pedagogical advisor is to help students overcome difficulties in school, at home and in society at large, as well as to provide the necessary conditions for shaping a highly educated individual, well-prepared for life as part of society (Zdravkova, 2015). To begin with, the pedagogical advisor studies and supports the psychological and social development of the students, regulates the 'individual-school system' relationship, encouraging and supporting the students in their adaptation into the educational and social systems. The evaluation of students' intellectual and personal development for each level of school activity, defining any difficulties the youngsters might experience, searching for solutions for those problems, identifying gifted children and helping the students in their educational and professional orientation, are all seen as part of the social pedagogical work of pedagogical advisor (Kuzmanova-Kartalova, 2006).

Social pedagogical work in school is characterised by two dimensions, pre-emptive and correctional, as described in Figure 1. The *pre-emptive social pedagogical work* of a pedagogical advisor consists of various methods targeted at evaluating and analysing the requirements and personal characteristics of each student in need of social pedagogical help, as well as planning, informing, consulting and advising teachers

and parents, and providing psycho-social and pedagogical aid. In the phase of pre-emptive social work the main channel for information for the pedagogical advisor are the group classes dedicated to current topics for every respective age – professional orientation, civil/political rights and responsibilities, prevention of aggression and violence, prevention of trafficking, different types of addictions, conflicts and so on. *Correctional social pedagogical work* involves a tight and complex cooperation between institutions depending on the types of problem and the individual or group in need of social pedagogical assistance. A student displaying anti-social behaviour, for example, could be subject to the services of the pedagogical advisor, the school committee against anti-social behaviour, the Local Commission for Combating Anti-Social Behaviour of Minors and the inspector of Child Protection Services (Zdravkova, 2015).

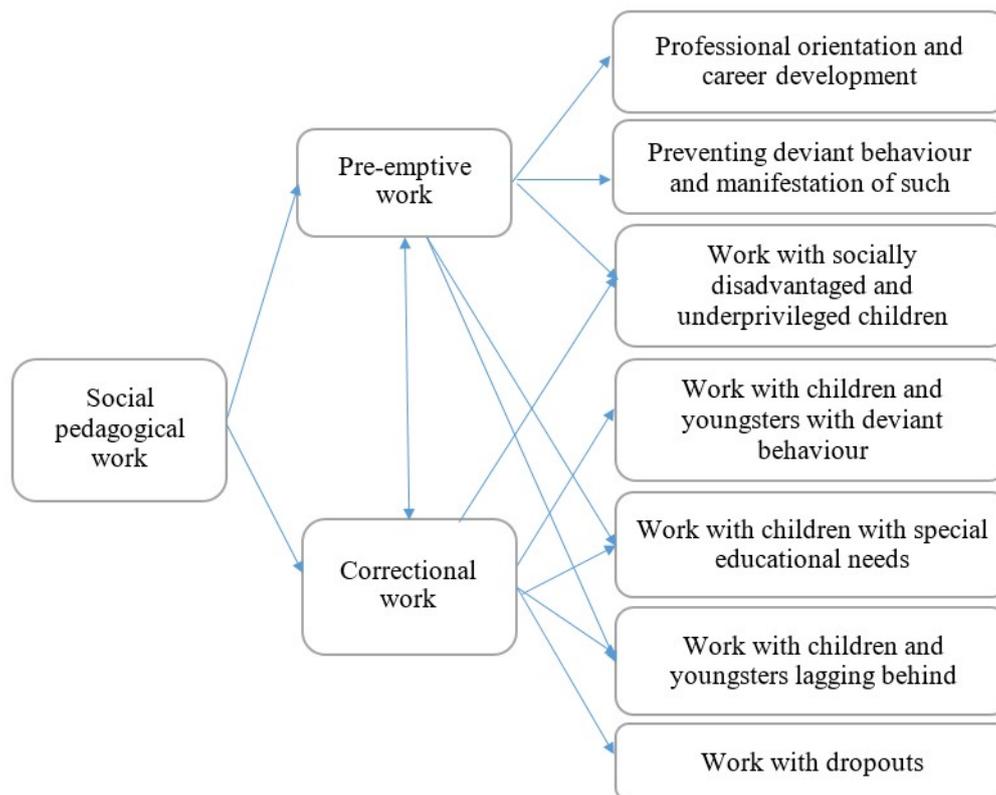


Figure 1. Social pedagogical work in school (Source: Author, 2021, based on Zdravkova, 2015).

The main functions of pedagogical advisor are outlined in the work description of the profession. These are compensatory, cooperative and supplemental. Compensatory functions are linked with supporting students and teachers in the common learning process and assisting in overcoming problems of different natures, such as social, educational and behavioural. The cooperative function is related to cooperation and effective interaction between school, family and other educational institutions. The supplemental function relates to the organisation and holding of thematic meetings, training initiatives, visits to various events and other social activities (Bizkov, 2007).

There are four general activities associated with the social pedagogical work of pedagogical advisor in Bulgarian schools: analytic, consultative, intermediary and group classes. Analytic activities include recognising and identifying any learning difficulties, problems with adaptation in school, behavioural disorders and mental and cognitive retardation, among others. Consultative activities consist of individual or group counselling of students on specific issues, as well as information and guidance in connection with educational and professional choices, and counselling of teachers and parents with any problems, conflicts and needs. The intermediary activity is aimed at ensuring effective interaction between the various subjects (actors) in the educational process in school and the extracurricular environment. The group activities consist of training or other types of class, mainly of an educational or developmental nature, related to the

acquisition of educational and work skills and habits, the acquisition of social competencies and so on (Kuzmanova-Kartalova, 2006; Zdravkova, 2015).

Conclusion

Bulgarian social pedagogy has a lot to offer the international world. It is a unique mixture of German social pedagogical tradition, Bulgarian pedagogical system and Russian pedagogical influence. The concepts of Paul Natorp and the special line of social pedagogy's development are still present and dominant within the fields of social pedagogy in Bulgaria, whether they be social pedagogical studies, work or research. Social pedagogy as science has found its place within the Bulgarian pedagogical space. As an academic field it has been present since the early 1990s. Social pedagogues in Bulgaria are tackling not only numerous social problems, but also sociological, socio-psychological, psychological and often mental ones. Even though Bulgarian social pedagogy started as a practical science aimed to help mostly children and adolescents, it is gradually moving towards the Western European and US understanding of social pedagogy for everyone. This progress is seen nowadays in the published articles, where the focus is increasingly shifting towards the subject of the social integration of adults (e.g. Nikolaeva, 2012; Petrova, 2020).

In this article, I set out to promote Bulgarian social pedagogy to the wider world of social pedagogy. Little did I know that this venture would turn out to represent real 'investigative research'. To begin with, in Bulgaria, open science is a completely unknown concept. Every article is kept by its writer as if it is a top-secret document never to be read by anyone but the chosen few. During my research for this article, I contacted several professors of social pedagogy from multiple Bulgarian universities. I am not sure whether it was because I asked for help or the fact that I am 'merely a doctoral student', but I did not receive one single answer; not even to let me know that they would not be able or willing to help me. Another obstacle was that in Bulgaria the majority of scientific publishing is not available online. Those articles that *are* online are extremely hard to corroborate. Which leads me to the next problem – almost every scientific article is based on the authors' own experience and knowledge and very few are based on previous research. There are two possible explanations to this phenomenon: research on social pedagogy is still in infancy and the scientists are writing articles as they go; or research in Bulgaria has its own scientific rules and regulations that are quite different to those in other countries.

Let us consider for a moment that research in social pedagogy is still so young that it is literally on the same level it was in Western Europe in the 1800s. Bulgarian social pedagogy has its roots in that time and in the Bulgarian research papers, we find prominent Bulgarian social pedagogues. The only way we have come to know about these people is if they have left something behind – namely written literature. Moreover, since social pedagogy has been a scientific field since the 1990s, it is hard to believe that scientific papers only started to appear at the beginning of the 2000s. It is possible, however, that research in Bulgaria follows its own scientific rules and regulations and that I am being overly critical. My enthusiasm to write an article about Bulgarian social pedagogy matched my desire to integrate Bulgarian social pedagogues and university staff into the worldwide family of social pedagogy. My hope is to see more social pedagogical articles in English coming from Bulgaria, greater social pedagogical cooperation and more exchange students and staff between Bulgaria and the rest of the social pedagogical world.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Atanasov, C., & Chakarov, N. (2008). History of Bulgarian education. Accessed 18 February 2021. http://berberian11.tripod.com/atanasov_education.htm.
- Bergemann, P. (1900). *Soziale Pädagogik auf erfahrungswissenschaftlicher Grundlage und mit Hilfe der induktiven Methode als universalistische oder Kultur-Pädagogik* [Social pedagogy based on empirical science and using the inductive method as universalistic or cultural pedagogy]. Gera: Hofmann.

- Bizkov, G. (2007). Социалнопедагогическа работа в училище [Social pedagogical work in school]. *Pedagogy*, 2, 13–33.
- Boyadziewa, N. (2017). Growth of specialty ‘social pedagogy’ at Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’. *Pedagogy*, 89(4), 449–61.
- Gorodetski, I. D. (1899). *Научная педагогика* [Scientific pedagogy]. Moscow: n.p.
- Hristova, Z. (2017). Application of the academic training of the social pedagogy student in a center for rehabilitation and re-socialization. *Student Almanac*, 4, 96–101.
- Karagiozov, I. (1996). *Увод в социалната педагогика* [Introduction to social pedagogy]. Veliko Tarnovo: Slovo.
- Kouteva-Tsvetkova, V. (2008). On the scientific status of the social pedagogy. *Journal Pedagogical Almanac*, 16(2), 7–33.
- Kuteva-Tsetkova, V. (2014). Formation of social pedagogical competences through the curriculum in higher education institutions. *Journal Pedagogical Almanac*, 1, 175–97.
- Kuzmanova-Kartalova, R. (2006). The social pedagogue and the teacher: Partners in the personal building of the student. *Pedagogical Almanac*, 12(1–2), 7–16. Accessed 18 February 2021. <http://journals.uni-vt.bg/getarticle.aspx?aid=2234&type=.pdf>.
- Манов, В. А. (1905). Социално педагогически идеи в историята на педагогиката [Social pedagogical ideas in the history of pedagogy]. *Учител [Uchitel]*, XII(VII), n.p.
- Nikolaeva, S. (2012). *Социалните дискурси към образованието – неизбежни и недоразбрани* [Social discourses to the education – Inevitable and misunderstood] (First Anniversary Collection of Academic Lectures). Sofia: University Publishing House St Kliment Ohridski.
- NSI (National Statistical Institute). (2016). Национална квалификация на професиите и длъжностите [Standard classification of occupations and positions (STOP). Appendix to Order №RD01-931/27.12.2010. Necessary changes to STOP-2011, enforced on 1 August 2016]. Accessed 7 July 2020. <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/261/basic-page/национална-класификация-на-професиите-и-длъжностите>.
- Petrova, S. (2020). Някои характеристики на професията социален педагог [Characteristics on the profession social pedagogue]. Accessed 6 July 2020. <http://www.referati.org/nqkoi-harakteristiki-na-profesiata-socialen-pedagog-1/89250/ref>.
- Punto Marinero. (2019). Social pedagogue: Job description and responsibilities. Accessed 6 July 2020. <https://bg.puntomarinerо.com/social-educator-job-description-and/>.
- Radev, P. (2017). Social pedagogy between chaos and system. *Sofia: Pedagogy, Bulgarian Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 89(4), n.p.
- Rissman, R. (1892). *Individualismus und Sozialismus in der pädagogischen Entwicklung Jahrhunderts* [Individualism and socialism in the pedagogical development of the twentieth century]. Gotha: H. Haacke.
- Sapundjieva, K. (2014a). *Academic status of social education*. Sofia: University of Sofia.
- Sapundjieva, K. (2014b). Ideas about social education in Bulgarian periodicals at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. In K. Sapundjieva, N. Boyadjieva & M. Pironkova (Eds.), *Academic fields of social pedagogy*. Sofia: University Publishing House St. Kliment Ohridski, n.p.
- Stamatova, T. (2008). Предмет, обект, цел и задачи на социалната педагогика [Social pedagogy: Subject, object, aim, and tasks]. Accessed 23 June 2020. <https://download.pomagalo.com/224226/predmet+obekt+cel+i+zadachi+na+socialnata+pedagogika/>.
- Todorova, M. (2020). Цели и задачи на социалната педагогика [Social pedagogy]. Accessed 23 June 2020. <http://www.referati.org/cei-i-zadachi-na-socialnata-pedagogika/60920/ref/p3>.
- Tsoneva, R. (2019). Цели и задачи на социалната педагогика [Social pedagogy: Purpose and tasks]. Accessed 23 June 2020. <https://referatite.org/cei-i-zadachi-na-socialnata-pedagogika-1/145392/ref>.
- Yosifova, T. (2020). Предмет, обект, цел и задачи на социалната педагогика [Subject of social pedagogy]. Accessed 24 June 2020. <http://www.referati.org/predmet-obekt-cel-i-zadachi-na-socialnata-pedagogika/63110/ref>.

- Zdravkova, B. (2009). Практическото обучение на социалните педагози в контекста на професионалното образование [The practical training of social pedagogues in the context of professional education]. Veliko Tarnovo: St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo Press. Accessed 18 February 2021. http://da.uni-vt.bg/u/430/pub/4151/doklad-praktika_studenti_final%201.pdf.
- Zdravkova, B. (2015). Social pedagogical work in school: Current conditions and perspectives for development. *Pedagogical Almanac*, 2, 311–37. Accessed 18 February 2021. <http://journals.uni-vt.bg/getarticle.aspx?aid=352&type=.pdf>.