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# European Social Work – A Compendium

Barbara Budrich Publishers



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Barbara Budrich Publishers  
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# European Social Work – an Introduction to the Compendium

Fabian Kessl, Walter Lorenz, Hans-Uwe Otto & Sue White

## 1. European Social Work: Opening a Debate on an Existing Phenomenon

Is there such a thing as “European Social Work”? Numerous European associations in the field of social work bear witness to its existence, for instance: the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW); European networks of social work researchers (e.g. European Social Work Research Association, ESWRA); professional organisations (e.g. European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, FEANTSA); or European communication platforms (e.g. in social work research like the European Journal of Social Work, EJSW); not to mention a number of European study programmes in social work. Although these appear to demonstrate the existence of something we can call “European Social Work” (ESW), they do not in themselves imply a common definition. In each case, different national actors are in some way, individually and from a national base, part of that European network or are contributing to a European study program. But these activities do not amount to a converging project or a discipline of “*European Social Work*”.

Such a title can have different meanings from case to case: “European Social Work” can simply be the sum of different national organisations; it can be represented by a network of persons from different European countries, discussing cross-cutting issues that transcend national boundaries such as migration or international adoption; or it can refer to associations that make decisions about social service delivery on a non-national level, like the EU-administration. So it appears that, either we have so far failed to come up with a consistent definition of what we can call “European Social Work”, or such a definition is just *not feasible*, because the subject defies definition and its essence cannot be captured by abstract labels.

Nevertheless, readers of the *European Social Work Compendium* can rightly ask for an empirical and conceptual framework to describe what is meant here by “European Social Work”. Our purpose in engaging on this project is to develop a wider or more fundamental understanding of what being

“European” can mean for social work. This is not meant as a form of specialisation in terms of methods that could be of relevance only to those dealing with cross-border social problems; rather this orientation is meant to highlight some of the core characteristics of social work in terms of the relationship between citizens, welfare and the state. National legislation and provisions are a necessary reference point for social work – but they are not on their own sufficient, and have to be examined constantly and critically. The dynamics of this relationship become particularly visible when we explore the differences and common concerns between national frameworks of social work theory and practice from a European perspective.

If we take a look at available conceptualisations of ESW, a first model defines its terms as a catalogue or set of classifications emerging from comparisons between practice and theory in different European countries. This approach operates with a territorial definition of European Social Work which would imply a distinction from an “Asian”, “African” or “American” manifestation of social work. Such a territorial understanding, however, allows us only to look at social work descriptively by listing organisations or issues in the field of social work that are being shared or exchanged between the countries of the continent of Europe. But what is ultimately the benefit of merely categorising all forms of social work practice, organisations, and strategies between Lisboa and Warsaw or between Bucharest and Trondheim and saying this makes up “European Social Work”? The differences between some social organisations and welfare approaches, e.g. within Romania or Norway, are in a number of cases much bigger than those between the UK and for instance France; and the parallels between the Norwegian and for example some Canadian social policies are in some aspects much more evident than those between the Norwegian and the Romanian context. Therefore conceptually this first option of defining ESW only as ‘all social work in Europe’ is not convincing, because it cannot give a strong enough basis for understanding the meaning of different service and theory phenomena.

A second model is to declare those practices, organisations or politics as constituting “ESW”, which are not national and not local, but supra-national in a European context. This is quite a strong concept that has the potential of freeing social work from the dominance of national regulations and of making European social policy initiatives a tangible reality in European countries. Indeed, tracing the historical development of the EU we find that, in recent decades, it has produced more and more regulations which have had an impact on social work practices, for instance, opening social services to a European cross-border ‘market’. But this is only one way of taking ESW as occupying a supra-national space defined by EU policies. However, firstly empirically there are still not very many areas of practice that can be identified as constituting ESW in that sense. Taking the European Union as a supra-national structure that could create a social policy framework, we can so far only find a relatively

small range of initiatives with relevance for social work, one example being programmes for poverty reduction, and programmes promoted by the Council of Europe have even less impact. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century and sixty years after the signing of the Treaty of Rome that launched the European unification project social work is still regulated and delivered primarily by nation states and operates mostly on the local level; regrettably, this dearth of a European social policy has also contributed to the unification project finding itself in a deep crisis since at least 2010. Secondly the reference point for this second option to define ESW is hard to define: Not everything that has a supra-national dimension is therefore automatically “European”. So using this second option as a parameter for ESW would limit it to supra-national initiatives emanating from, or promoting European organisations.

Enquiring into the meaning of differences or similarities between social work concepts and practices that emerge from European cross-national comparisons raises the more fundamental question of whether social work requires primarily an orientation to national and culture-specific traditions, habits and socio-political conditions or whether these can be questioned critically from reference points which make up a shared and specific European cultural and political agenda and therefore relate to wider social and political developments that manifest themselves in the ongoing attempts to find and strengthen the structural unity of Europe through social and cultural initiatives. It is in such a perspective that the relevance of talking of “European Social Work” can manifest itself with greater clarity both theoretically and practically starting with questions like the following that are of fundamental relevance for social work research: How does the practice of a Greek social worker differ from that of an equivalent Spanish professional and what do they have in common? What characterises social work in a Danish public organisation in comparison to that in a similar Irish one? What do users ask for specifically from a Slovenian non-governmental organisation offering professional support for people in need, compared to what is expected of an Austrian NGO?

However, it becomes immediately evident that these comparative questions require more than descriptive answers and this leads us to the attempt to identify the dynamic relationship between particular conceptual paradigms of social work (Lorenz 2008) and different European welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). Such an analytical perspective goes beyond a territorial understanding of social work in Europe and a merely comparative approach and is not limited to being measured against supra-national policies. Rather it is aimed at understanding on the one hand to what extent social work needs to correspond to universal concepts and principles and in what forms and contexts cultural, legal and social conditions characteristic of particular nation states are legitimate and have to be taken into account on the other. “European Social Work” from that perspective is therefore defined as a forum in an historically defined space for a critical examination of the appropriateness and limitations

of nationally defined principles and practices against an available range of alternatives that can be related back to a common heritage of ideas. These theoretical considerations furthermore lead to practical consequences in as much as they provide occasions, shared between social workers of different countries, to develop competences that address the individual life situations of clients in recognition of their specific circumstances and coping strategies. At the same time they offer alternatives and even pose challenges to those habitual forms of agency from knowledge derived from insights into basic human needs and potentials within a comparative international horizon. Moreover, they enable social workers to question taken-for-granted 'realities' as they are presented in seemingly alternative-less national policies from the knowledge of still existing variations in European approaches to social policy, thus refuting the diagnosis that globalisation exerts pressure towards inevitable convergence (Evans & Kessl 2015).

Consequently, we can define European Social Work as that aspect of social work in Europe, which has a trans- and international dimension and relates to specific policy and methods discourses stemming from typically European traditions that are not limited to single national cultures. Such a concept would open up a dimension of social work that is not restricted to determinants of practice on a national, federal or local level but can question these critically. Social workers operating in cross-border services would obviously benefit explicitly from such a perspective, but our definition is not limited to such agencies and contexts. We hold that ESW refers to all forms of professional social work practice capable of questioning given local or national service and policy frameworks from an intellectual basis that draws on well established, but often not acknowledged, methods and theory exchanges between social work educators and practitioners of different European countries that have characterised the profession and the discipline since its historical inception.

With this approach we take a critical position towards using Europe simply as a geographic umbrella, which can often lead to a hierarchical ranking of national practices that represent 'real social work' in more or less pure forms, without differences and similarities being thereby recognised and examined in substance. Additionally, we take a critical position towards a tendency in the European unification process that privileges economic interests and exerts a hegemonic power over national forms and traditions of expressing and living the specific social dimension of the lifeworld. Instead we want to acknowledge that different manifestations of social work practice in Europe relate appropriately to specific characteristics of the respective European national welfare states. Nevertheless, we want to reaffirm simultaneously the importance of professional knowledge and competence, practised with autonomy and responsibility, which since the beginning of that discipline derive from international exchanges. This reflects a specific horizon of thinking we can call "European thinking", which is the product of humanism and the ideals of the enlighten-

ment with an emphasis on both personal freedom and social equality. Social work as a professional agent regulating, shaping and supporting individual as well as collective well-being from a nation-independent and policy-critical perspective in the interest of a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of social needs and capabilities and corresponding methods would therefore constitute a third and more comprehensive concept of “European Social Work”. It would be the critical form of conceptualising professional acting, independent from nationally determined practice conditions, and without giving importance to the link to a shared territory which would make social work “European”. In this respect, social work in non-European regions could also relate to this sense of ESW just as mainstream European social service fields could be regarded as the context for forms of social work which by necessity must make reference to “European Social Work”. It would not be adequate to make reference to physical borders to differentiate ESW from other theoretical bases for social work but would instead require asking for a much more detailed evaluation of everyday practices and the logic underpinning such practice from the empirical and conceptual perspective of available alternatives.

This third option offers also a more universal reference point for social work being “European” than the ones that derive from the initiatives of the European Union because it draws upon the variety of welfare traditions to be found in Europe. But if we were to understand ESW as an exclusive way of thinking, independent of the place and the context where social work is practised, we would run the risk of this turning into an imperialist project: What can entitle us to tie the conceptual horizon of social work practice in individual and collective forms and the improvements thereby aimed for to a particular form of “European thinking”? A naive reference to the importance of the enlightenment as if it had had only positive connotations for European history ignores that this European story is not only one of elucidation, liberation and progress. The European pathway of enlightenment also implied an enormous accumulation of power for those making technical use of scientific discoveries and those who brutally applied rationality to set up authoritarian regimes and legitimate domination, oppression, colonialism and racism. In addition, In the last 250 years the European ideas of the enlightenment were re-conceptualised, critically re-written and developed, globally exchanged and influenced by ways of thinking and human experiences from other parts of the world so that these ideas have now to be seen as reference points in an ongoing global exchange. So, the third option with its reference to “European thinking” must be cognizant of these dangers and take into account the complexity and indeed contradictory nature of that legacy.

But this is precisely our point when we relate this highly ambiguous history of the European project to the nature of social work. When we take Europe in this sense as an evolving, dynamic and transformative reference point it can help to understand better the ethical, political and methodological tensions in

which all social work finds itself embroiled. It can help us to become more sensitive for the programmatic dimension of a practice perspective we call ESW, because apart from the historical contingency of that dimension it challenges social work not to become locked into given political, legal, cultural and also scientific frameworks. Instead, its social mandate is to engage with these contradictory processes on the one hand at the level of individuals and social groups whose everyday life has become enmeshed in difficulties and contradictions that do not have purely psychological origins, but relate to the social and political conditions in which they live, and on the other hand at the level of policy making in organisations, institutions and political debates where the complexity of these lives is increasingly brought under managerial control that purports to allow no alternative. This is all the more necessary in the face of contemporary political moves to re-structure and re-define welfare in practically all European nation states in the direction of neoliberal principles. These amount to a consistent emphasis on cost reduction in the provision of public welfare assistance and services requiring a correspondent shift towards private provisions of either a civil society or a commercial nature. The privatisation of the concern for social support of every kind implies an emphasis on individual effort and ‘enterprise’ and hence also a return to a culture of ‘blaming the individual’ for not meeting up to his or her responsibilities, a culture which characterised the early charitable welfare provisions in the wake of the industrial revolution. In terms of social work this political context has the effect of prioritising methods that focus on increasingly biologised individual and psychological adjustment problems that have to date been more prevalent in what could be termed an “American model of social casework”. In line with neoliberal welfare approaches and in the context of growing managerial criteria and controls on the cost-efficiency of interventions this model is in the process of establishing itself in Europe backed by the social professions’ preoccupation with ‘evidence based practice’ as an apparent defence against the risk of the deprofessionalisation of the social professions. Against these trends, a critical European approach to social work carries the message, there are alternatives, and they are contained in the unrealised dreams, hopes and coping capacities of people who make up the diversity of a common European heritage together with the repertoire of distinct intellectual and political concepts of a society worth living in which is still inherent in the variety of European “welfare regimes”. ESW constitutes the project of connecting these efforts constructively with each other and with an ongoing debate on how professional responsibility can be made effective under a variety of political conditions. The aim of such a version of ESW is therefore to re-establish the central importance of and the strategies and skills for a sustainable social dimension in human, economic and political relations at all levels, personal, familial, local, regional, national, European and global.

To summarise, our recommendation would be to understand European Social Work as an analytical perspective to be developed in all forms of social work that are being practised in Europe. This would open the horizon to allow for a deeper understanding of specific conflicts, needs, and tasks for professional organisations delivering social services in contexts which can no longer be reduced to the national welfare state given the inter-dependency our societies have reached. Lastly, ESW is to be understood best as relating to our (European) tradition of constituting subjectivity in members of a modern society as a process of emancipation and liberation under conditions of justice and equality which need to be secured at the political level.

## 2. European Social Work – Social Work in Europe: Transforming Perspectives

The *European Social Work Compendium* takes account of fundamental developments transforming social work in Europe at the beginning of the 21st century (see Kessl 2009), namely (i) European unification and particularly the expansion to member countries in Central and Eastern Europe which was bound up with the aspiration to strengthen the social dimension of Europe but was accompanied by a confrontation with profound social and economic uncertainties. Hence, rising social inequalities and the differences in social security systems remain a source of political and social conflicts in all member countries. The traditional welfare state agencies, accountable for social integration within the nation state, have to be re-legitimized and re-arranged in this transformed context and it is unclear whether administrative-political, or social-professional criteria and standards will prevail in this process. (ii) European welfare states have experienced fundamental changes since the last third of the 20th century with the advent of restrictive fiscal policies, an emphasis on economic efficiency and on the responsibility of each individual for reducing their own risks. These changes were intensified by the end of the East-West confrontation in Europe which had until 1989 necessitated giving capitalism a social face. Social work as a social service deliverer both benefits and suffers in this changing context. As a public and political actor, social work is called upon to carry out new prevention and risk reduction policies, like the so-called anti-social behaviour programs in the UK, or programmes for the ‘activation’ of unemployed people as a pre-condition for receiving time-limited benefits in several European countries (Nothdurfter & Olesen 2017). At the same time, social work as a political actor for social justice has lost ground in the European debate. (iii) Since their gradual implementation in the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, European welfare regimes were exemplary for public welfare systems world-

wide. Compared to other regions, like the US and Australia, social work in Europe was a visible and important part of those former welfare states. As Jürgen Habermas (1986) has remarked, this progressive position of European welfare regimes has become defensive. Social policy actors in general and social workers specifically – still based in nation states – are increasingly confronted with trans-national issues of a practical (e.g. migration, adoption, multi-national family relations etc.) and a fundamental socio-political nature (international issues of justice, poverty, inequality, delinquency). (iv) European exchanges are intensifying both at academic and at social service level confronting participants with an often confusing variety of theoretical and service delivery models. Social work and social pedagogy disciplines proved to be among the earliest and most active in the use of the ERASMUS exchange programmes (see Lorenz & Seibel 1999) but have since been caught up in the mechanisms of the Bologna Process which, instead of validating differences in epistemology and didactics tends to promote standardisation and harmonisation.

On account of this, student and staff mobility initiatives are not automatically in line with the agenda of promoting a critical model of ESW as they concentrate on issues of recognition and correspondence and can take little account of the deeper meaning of these transformation processes. Particularly with the retrenchment of public welfare measures and the rising emphasis on national interests also within the European Union there appears to be little incentive to introduce actual European dimensions in social work training, let alone references to European Social Work. Yet those very transformations which impact not only on metropolitan centres but affect societies pervasively, exemplified most vividly with phenomena like demographic changes, social mobility, dispersal of refugees, global connectivity through electronic means and the explosion of social media, indicate the necessity to equip social workers and social work educators with the concepts and tools not only to make those phenomena comprehensible but also to offer theoretically well-grounded practice perspectives. Reflecting on European Social Work through the transversal topics of this compendium provides a contribution to such a re-orientation of social work education which can neither be limited to a national horizon nor be opened to limitless global dimensions, without losing its contours or becoming a rule-following exercise.



### 3. The Aim of the European Social Work Compendium

In recent years a number of publications have taken stock of the bewildering variety of forms of social work practice and education in Europe. Since the first foray into this field in the late 1980s, it was particularly the series edited by Hamburger et al., (2004-2006) which systematically collected information on social work education in every European country. Other comparative publications since then strike a balance between providing insight into educational and practice developments as orientation aids for exchanges and European collaboration initiatives (Munday & Lane 1998; Cannan et al., 1992; Shardlow & Payne 1998; Adams et al., 2003; Campanini, Freitas & Frost 2007). But in all those publications description prevails as the collection of information proved extremely complex because of the conceptual inconsistencies that characterised the social professions in Europe. The publications by Lorenz (1994, 2006) represent a first attempt at developing theoretical perspectives on the interpretation of the differences that exist between systems of and approaches to social service delivery in Europe but they had to remain selective by necessity.

The most important developments in the last decade in terms of the promotion of a deeper conceptual understanding of the importance of European dimensions in social work were the founding of several scholarly journals dedicated to this task – *Social Work in Europe*, the *European Journal of Social Work* and *Social Work and Society*. Their existence and the high academic standing of their contributions bear witness to the widespread recognition of the importance of cross-national analyses in the social professions. This has also had the effect of encouraging other established scientific social work journals to include papers with a cross-national or European dimension. But these publications predominantly operate with an understanding of European Social Work that corresponds to the first and second options introduced above without being able to promote a meta-level of reflection at which a critical and dynamic version can emerge.

In view of these challenges, the ESW Compendium aims at providing a guide, not just for ‘enthusiasts’ of trans-national issues and projects in social work and the growing number of participants in exchanges, but to the ‘mainstream’ social worker whose work is directly and indirectly affected by European and indeed global developments and for whom European reference points assume growing relevance. Beyond providing background information under distinct thematic headings this work aims at rendering social workers capable of, and competent in participating actively in processes of social policy formulation and practice transformation at methodological and organisational levels through knowledge of alternative approaches and reasons for their validity. In

each chapter, European social work experts relate their topics to different aspects of the current transformation process, discuss the visible and invisible changes and, therefore, map out where social work is positioned and where it could be heading in the emerging post-welfare states. The ESW Compendium aspires to facilitate a deeper level of competence.

The ESW Compendium combines theoretical analysis of prevailing trends in European social policies with perspectives on emergent and future forms of professional social work practice. By going beyond description it operates with acknowledged normative premises and thereby seeks to give impulses for the renewal and strengthening of European social policy initiatives in which social workers can be centrally involved. While in no way advocating the standardisation and harmonisation of social work education and methodology, the Compendium nevertheless will represent a positive version of “European Social Work” as a paradigm for the development of culture-specific yet theoretically grounded and universally oriented models of contemporary social work.

Every chapter illustrates, and analyses systematically, differences, contrasts, and similarities between European welfare states under the respective topics. But these reflections are not structured as country reports or national case studies to offer national tools, instruments and concepts for the import into other national contexts. Hence all chapters are based on the understanding that social work, alongside public welfare in general, towards the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to move beyond single nation state agendas. Each chapter therefore focuses the specific issue on the European level and draws on different national contexts as heuristic contexts of explication.

## 4. Acknowledgments

The differences to conceptualise European Social Work had consequences for the production of the “European Social Work – Compendium”. It took quite a while to find an adequate way to represent the topics, relevant for the current developments and debates, which can be called to be “European Social Work” related. Therefore we are very thankful to all our authors, who have agreed to be part of this challenging book project. They had to be quite patient sometimes with us as the editors coordinating this book. We are very thankful to all the work of Martina Lütke-Harmann (Wuppertal), our editorial assistant. And not least we are more than thankful to the publisher, Barbara Budrich, who has made this book possible.

Now it is up to the readers to judge the result before them.

Wuppertal (GER), Prague (CZ), Bielefeld (GER) & Sheffield (UK),  
Fabian Kessl, Walter Lorenz, Hans-Uwe Otto & Sue White

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Analytical Perspectives: Social Work  
in Europe and European Social Work  
in Post-Welfarist Contexts



# Analytical Perspectives: Social Work in Europe and European Social Work in Post-Welfarist Contexts

Fabian Kessl, Walter Lorenz, Hans-Uwe Otto & Sue White

To understand European social work as a contextualised practice in current welfare states, the present stage of development in European welfarism has to be taken into account. The program of 'welfarism' may be seen as an influential historical attempt to implement the necessary inter-connection of equality and liberty, the two main aspects of modern (democratic) societies. However, welfarism has historically been put into practice in a way that equality, liberty or both were always overemphasised or underexposed.

This is at least because social work is crucially related to the historical and political-economical development of the society it is framed by. European social work is also dependent on the European (Economic) Union and the single European nation states as political-economical contexts. At the same time, both scales, trans-national as well as national are influenced by further global developments and other international political decision making. This has most recently resonated in the financial crisis experienced since 2007, not only in Europe, and in the following crises since 2010. The space of "the social" has been reshaped since. "The social" as a political arena of conflicts is re-shaped and social work is part of this contested field of relationships, even though there is no established European social policy thus far.

To understand political struggles, within and related to the field of social work in Europe, it is relevant to consider what "globalisation" as well as "neoliberalism" can mean: What are the consequences of different understandings of these for social policy and social work?

On the level of social work provision, programs and strategies like those for "risk assessment" and "risk management" in the field of child welfare reflect these political struggles. At the same time, they mirror different developments, which correlate, correspond with or contradict each other leading to the establishment of a "risk society", risk calculation as a child protection strategy or new moral modes of avoiding risks like child vulnerability. Historically the focus on risk has characterised professional social work from its beginnings: Social work as a "modern" professionalised agency is oriented to an attempt to rationalise social relations, e.g. by calculating risk. However, the programs

and strategies of risk calculation are currently conspicuously popular, a boom not least linked to a continuing dynamic of individualism.

The focus on the individual, programs and strategies of individualisation, make an important difference between modern and pre-modern situations. Liberal freedom is constitutively based on individualisation: The single person is receiving political as well as social rights. At the same time, citizenship cannot be realised in a society of singularities. There has to be a relation to something beyond the individual, to a level of collectivity. But in times of questioning collectivity or substituting it through new communitarian approaches on a local or national level, the individual has to receive some attention.

Communitarian approaches have sometimes, in recent decades, reduced the question of civil society and self-organisation to the issues of social bonds and community building in the local community. Civil society and self-organisation, particularly in social movements, have been highly relevant notions for social work as a professionalised agency historically and remain important. Activities in civil society have been major strands of the implementation of the professionalised agency of social work, evidenced in civic engagement in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe or the U.S., or in the interventions of the women's movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historically social work was strongly influenced by these civil society initiatives. The extent to which self-organisation will influence the current transformation of European social work and social policy in general is of real interest.

Social structures form the conditions of social work provision: There is a delivery context, within which social work has to be delivered. But even more so, those social structures form the everyday life of the users: Poverty and social exclusion are often one of the reasons (prospective) users ask for social support – as long as there is still a legal basis for at least some level of social inclusion. In times of austerity this becomes obvious almost all over Europe and beyond: If social services are not allocated any more to the amount and/or quality that is necessary, people come to be in “real need” – asking for food aid in a booming charity economy or questioning their life in general. European social work has to be based on a societal and political agreement to guarantee equality and freedom to all citizens.



# Globalisation, neo-liberalism and the European Union

John Clarke

In this chapter I explore the ways in which processes of globalisation and the project of neo-liberalism have reshaped the spaces of the social in the European Union. The social refers to shifting and contested fields of relationships, identities and patterns of living that are also sometimes the objects of governmental policy and practice (from family benefits to social work). I first examine some of the debates around the idea of globalisation. I then consider what is meant by neo-liberalism, since both of these concepts are highly charged and contested, not least because of the ways in which they promise to link academic analysis and political debates. In the final part of the chapter I take up some of the implications of these discussion for the field of the social and interventions into it.

We might see some of the difficulties associated with these ideas by considering a series of propositions that links them in the simplest possible way: Globalisation is the result of the spread of the power of capital across the whole world. Neo-liberalism is the ideology that has enabled that spread of the power of capital by legitimating the rule of markets. The EU is one of the vehicles through which the spread of the power of capital has been enabled and institutionalised. As a result, the field of the social has become increasingly subordinated to the demands of the economy and the power of capital.

This tells a compelling story, linking the three terms under the sign of the power of capital. Despite its compelling quality, it conceals some difficulties. Does the power of capital rule the whole world? Are there no other ways in which parts of the world are connected? Does globalisation mean that everywhere is the same? Similar questions can be asked – and will be asked – about the other terms in the course of this chapter, suggesting a need to think about other stories, other accounts and other sets of connections. However, this compelling story gives an indication of the power of these terms, not least in their capacity to connect analytical and political questions.

## Globalisation

The idea of globalisation points primarily to the changing patterns of economic integration since the 1970s that have involved changes of density, scale, and speed and the social, cultural and political consequences of these dynamics (see, *inter alia*, Stiglitz, 2002; Held et al., 1999; and Castells, 1996 and 2012). *Density* points to an increasing amount of trade and other economic activity that flows across the boundaries of countries, rather than taking place within them. Countries are connected by flows of capital, commodities and people. Capital is mobile, scanning the world for new opportunities to accumulate profit and having an ease of movement that resulted from two almost simultaneous processes. The first was the relaxation of national financial laws during the 1970s and 1980s that enabled the easier and faster movement of money around the globe. The second was the development of new information technologies that enabled the near-instantaneous transfer of money over large distances. Commodities and people also flow across borders, although less quickly and easily. However, the factory production of a range of goods was displaced from the older industrial economies of the Global North (North America and Europe) to other locations as owners sought cheaper and more manageable workforces, better ‘tax regimes’, and the willingness of national and local governments to offer incentives to attract investment. At the same time, people began to move across borders in greater numbers: as economic migrants, as refugees displaced by war and violence, as tourists and as an international managerial class that follows new investment patterns around the world.

Globalisation is also marked by the distinctive *scale* of this mobility of money, commodities and people. Although global trade is not new, most analysts have argued that the scale of these flows and the connections between places that they create is significantly different. More places are more multiply connected in economic relationships with other places than before. Some places – particularly those that have become known as ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 1991) – form particular points of connection or nodes in these global flows because they condense or contain so many connections. For Sassen, global cities developed as strategic points in an emerging network of economic, political and social relationships. They are ‘global’ cities because so much of their attention is devoted to building, managing and enlarging cross border networks. They provide the bases for international, multi-national or transnational capital and rest on an infrastructure of service (office workers, domestic workers, a high level of consumption) that maintains the prestige of this international class of executives, managers and market makers.

Finally, it is the changing and increasing *speed* of these flows that characterises the present pattern of global interconnectedness. This is particularly

visible in the central role played by new Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) (Castells, 1996). Such new technologies have played a core part in enabling the flows of capital around the world, aiding processes of 'financialisation' in particular (Martin, 2007). They have also made easier the challenges of managing 'at a distance', such that corporations can separate head office functions and localised production and distribution processes (for a critical discussion of ideas of managing at a distance, see Allen, 2003). Finally, these technologies have also enabled other aspects of globalisation – particularly in terms of culture and communication (Jameson and Miyoshi, 1998). The rise of global media has changed the relationship between the production, distribution and consumption of both news and entertainment. For some, this has involved the faster and more powerful diffusion of a dominant American (or Anglophone) culture. For others, the trends have been more contradictory, enabling easier access to non-American news, culture and perspectives (from *Al Jazeera* television to African music). These communicative flows are also shaped by the demands of migrant or diasporic populations who seek access to 'country of origin' media content. This sense of global connectedness has been intensified by the combination of personal communication advances (the mobile phone, especially) and social media, enabling forms of stretched social and political connection (from connecting transnational families to linking political activists). The new forms of mediation lead us to one of the characteristic puzzles about globalisation: does the term describe processes that are fundamentally centripetal (concentrating power in economic and political centres) or basically centrifugal (dispersing power to the peripheries). The examples I have used here suggest that globalisation may contain both tendencies – both concentrating and dispersing power (a paradox to which we will return).

As I have suggested this view of globalisation is an economic one: it focuses primarily on the flows of capital, commodities and people (and mostly people understood as actual or potential economic agents). But these processes have cultural, social and political effects. Globalisation changes conditions of cultural production, circulation and consumption. It changes the scales of political order, creating supra-national institutions (the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank); creates the spaces for international organisations to have more power or significance (from global corporations to international non-governmental organisations, dealing in aid or development, such as the George Soros funded Open Society Institutes, for example). Finally, globalisation is associated with what has been called the 'hollowing out' of the nation-state and the growth of multi-level or multi-scale government – including regional organisations such as the European Union (itself originating as a regional economic bloc (The European Free Trade Area, or EFTA)). There is now a substantial and growing literature about the rise of multi-level government and governance (see for example, Bache and Flinders, 2004 and the critique

by Stubbs, 2005) and a strong interest in what has been called the ‘rescaling of the state’ (Brenner, 2004). In these ways, globalisation changes the spaces in which, and scales at which, the world is politically organised.

Indeed, for some, globalisation needs to be understood as a political economic phenomenon or even a ‘world system’, structured by the relationship between powerful core societies and dependent and vulnerable peripheries (Wallerstein, 2004). From a political economy standpoint, the processes of intensified density, scale and speed are essentially about the search of capital for new sources of profitability: new markets, lower costs of production, increased power in relation to labour and reduced constraints (e.g., taxation, environmental legislation or other forms of regulation, etc). David Harvey (1990) famously described globalisation as a process of ‘space-time compression’: marking the greater capacity to exercise power across space more quickly, such that economic and political processes did not need to take place in immediate physical proximity.

For writers working in the political economy (or more accurately Marxist political economy) perspective, globalisation was driven by the desire of capital to throw off a set of restrictions in Europe and North America that limited its power, its flexibility and its ability to accumulate profit. The post-war settlement between labour and capital, linked to systems of mass production and consumption have been sometimes been described as ‘Atlantic Fordism’ (Jessop, 2002). Atlantic Fordism referred to a combination of arrangements designed to secure the accumulation of capital: systems of integrated mass production (hence the Fordism part) with a stable, relatively high-waged, core working class, linked to processes of increased mass consumption, partly sustained by the high wages of core labour and partly by the ‘social wage’ of the enlarged welfare states that were part of the political compromise between labour and capital in post-war Europe and North America (although less developed in the USA). This settlement offered a relatively stable social and political environment in which capital could go about its business.

During the 1960s and 1970s this stability was threatened by a variety of social, political and economic developments, ranging from new social movements (challenging forms of economic, social and political exclusion) to rising industrial militancy; and from the rising costs of the social or welfare state to the dramatic rises in oil prices in the early 1970s brought about by the non-Western oil producing states of OPEC. What some authors called the ‘profits squeeze’ (Armstrong, Glyn and Harrison, 1984), resulting from rising costs of oil, labour and taxation combined with declining or stagnant productivity in ageing factories, led corporate capital to look for new ways to renew profitability. A variety of strategies were developed: changing manufacturing processes (increasing automation); breaking up integrated processes (sub-contracting); finding new, cheaper and less unionised sources of labour; extending managerial control in the work place; and finding ways to re-write the political

settlement on wages, the social wage, and taxes. All of these are carried through in globalisation as capital discovers that both the capacity to move around the globe and the threat to move were effective economic and political strategies.

Globalisation, then, marks the end of ‘Atlantic Fordism’ in many ways. In particular, it called into question the established conceptions of the national economy and the nation-state. It was also implicated in the decline, crisis or transformation of the welfare state (Pierson, 1994; Castles, 2004; Sandermann, 2014; Seelieb-Kaiser, 2008). Let us consider each of these in turn. Both conventional economics and politics assumed the existence of national economies, in which investment, production and consumption were combined and supplemented to a certain extent by international trade of different kinds. But economies were understood, managed and measured as *national* economies (Mitchell, 2002). They were managed (to a greater or lesser extent in different places) by *nation-states*, understood as the institution that combined place/territory, people/population and political/governmental institutions in a coherent and unified entity. Nation-states – at least those involved in Atlantic Fordism – were also *welfare states*, providing forms of social investment, social protection and social wage to members of the national population on a more or less generous and more or less universal basis (see, for example, Esping-Andersen, 1990; Cochrane et al., 2001). By the end of the 1970s, each of these assumptions about nation, state and welfare had been brought into question: economies were increasingly ‘open’ as capital flowed across national borders; nation-states struggled to manage national economies and increasingly abandoned Keynesian strategies for managing demand and employment; and, in the face of increasing unemployment and declining tax revenues, it appeared that nations could no longer afford welfare states.

This account is too simple in many respects. The tendencies towards globalisation are certainly widespread and powerful. These changes are uneven: the most dramatic and leading examples being the USA and the UK (with important implications for neo-liberalism as we will see in the next section). They are also a complex and contested set of changes, not least in the context of the European Union. Perhaps most importantly, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the material changes involved in globalisation (as capital, commodities and people flowed around the globe) and the narrative or discourse of globalisation (Hay, 1998). The narrative of globalisation entered into the political discourse of many countries as a more or less compelling account of the powerlessness of national governments. It legitimated a whole range of political actions: reducing corporate taxation (as a way to attract or retain capital investment); deregulation of laws inhibiting the ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ (from trade union rights to environmental constraints); reducing welfare (to reduce costs) or replacing it with workfare (to encourage ‘active job seekers’); subsidising low wage employment with public funds (to encourage employers to

employ); privatising public goods (to create ‘windfall’ profits); and marketising public services (to make them more efficient, competitive or to promote consumer choice). In the end, of course, it is hard to tell the difference between the material processes of globalisation and the narrative of globalisation since both have the same effects. But it is important to hold on to the difference, since it reminds us that globalisation is both a set of (political economic) processes and a powerful (political/ideological) force that has been used to mobilise desired actions and to de-mobilise opposition through the claim that it is impossible to resist, or, as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once claimed ‘There is no alternative’ (TINA).

This matters because the *narrative* of globalisation’s ‘inevitability’ obscures choices, conflicts and contradictions (Hart, 2003). Globalisation – despite the implications of the ‘global’ scale of things – remains characterised by profound geographical unevenness. Regions and nations occupy very different places in this global economic and political system (and to call it a system may imply too much coherence and integration). The regions and countries not only occupy different places, but they have very different trajectories: think of the emerging BRIC countries: Brazil, Russia, India and China. While they might all be ‘emerging’, they are doing so in very different patterns of political and economic development. Within Europe, there are very different positions and trajectories. While countries may be more connected, those connections are not the same, nor do they have the same consequences. Nations remain permeably bounded territories, with different economic, political and social formations – and their states continue to exercise some influence over lines of development and decline (including what sorts of welfare are being produced, distributed and consumed). This does not mean that globalisation does not exist; but that the simple opposition between the global and the national is not a very helpful one in analytical terms.

That restores questions of choice to the analytical front line: choices made by corporate organisations (financial capital and industrial capital); by political organisations (governments, parties, movements) and by other groups (workers, consumers, those who own or hold land). By choice here, I do not mean to suggest that people make free choices, they are of course constrained by questions of context, capacity and the sorts of calculating frameworks that organise the possibilities of choice (what choices are imaginable?). Nor do I mean to imply that all choices are equivalent or are backed by an equal share of resources to make them come true. That is clearly not the case either: the distribution of power and capacities to realise choices is profoundly unequal – and indeed the processes of globalisation may have deepened those inequalities, just as they have deepened economic inequalities of wealth and income within and between countries.

Despite such reservations, raising the issue of choice brings into visibility the diverse and complicated ways that people inhabit the processes of