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SWaPOL – Social Work and Policing

Professional further training for Social Work and Policing



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“SWaPOL – Social Work and Policing” is an education and training project for improving cooperation between the professional groups of social workers and police prevention officers. The project was supported in the EU programme “ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnerships” and concluded a short while ago. The goal of this project was the development of a curriculum for joint professional further training. SWaPOL thus supports the professional exchange on the mission, organisational structures and working practices of the two professional groups and contributes to better cooperation on the development of prevention projects and day-to-day professional practice. Following pilot training courses in the partner countries Austria, Portugal and Belgium, a curriculum (didactics and teaching material) in English and in the respective national languages is now available at the end of the project. Working strategies such as Community Policing, Streetwork and socio-spatial community work exist at the interface of the two professions and form the basis for developing prevention concepts for substance consumption by young people and general disorder in the public space. The present curriculum of the SWaPOL training course now enables a partnership between policing and social work to be sustainably implemented at local level.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE BACKGROUND TO THE SWaPOL PROJECT¹

Austria has a very long tradition of communal, grass-roots police work, even if the general public is not very aware of this. The first departments were set up back in the 1970s. They performed core policing tasks of intervention on request and crime scene investigation as well as special prevention tasks. The creation of the Criminal Police Advisory Service in 1974 (formerly Department 1 in the Crime Office of the Federal Police Headquarters in Vienna) and the introduction of a Youth Police (formerly Department 2) are considered

the starting point for the systematic formation of crime prevention tasks in policing. These organisational initiatives were supplemented with the introduction of the contact officers in the Wiener Sicherheitswache (Vienna Security Guard Corps) in 1977 and with a further specialisation of the function of the youth contact officers in 1984. While the staff of the Criminal Police Advisory Service were divided into thematically arranged groups and were primarily in charge of providing advice on property protection, violence prevention, sexual offences prevention, addiction prevention, victim protection as well as child and youth protection, the uniformed

contact officers of the Security Guard Corps had to perform prevention tasks alongside the usually more urgent tasks of crime-fighting operations.

Following the introduction of the contact officers, a raft of ambitious, geographically restricted pilot trials was launched in the 1990 particularly in the City of Vienna, which aimed at establishing contact with the population and responding to specific security issues on an ad-hoc basis: however, the “Schwechat Safety Advisory Board” (1991), the “Hietzing Safety Partnership” (1993), the project “Vienna – Safe City” (1994) and also the idea for the “Mobile Police” (1995) were not pursued further for the time being after a short trial run (Stummvoll 2003, 206). Even with the statutory basis created by the new Security Police Act (Art. 25 Sicherheitspolizeigesetz, SPG) in May 1993 and by a decree of the Federal Minister in spring 2002, which published guidelines on crime prevention in accordance with the security policy, it was not possible to put the prevention work on a lasting footing.

Almost 20 years have now passed since these initial attempts at community-level crime prevention in Austria. Crime policy has assumed new contours and is creating new foundations for prevention projects as crime prevention becomes increasingly important. Crime prevention as a new type of control used in policing (Lindenberg/Schmidt-Semisch 1995) is now being combined with municipal regulatory tasks of other organisations in the city. In security partnerships, the creation of social order is distributed between multiple players. Today’s security society is noted, among other things, for the creation of security no longer being a duty of the state alone; instead, private players are increasingly taking on responsibility for minimising risk in general terms (Legnaro 1997).

What is now required is a cooperation between the police and social service providers, which have to be fitted with particular care into the traditional political competencies of a city (Floeting 2015).

The trend of pilot projects taking place at local level has continued. In the more recent past, the “European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research” in Vienna carried out the accompanying research project “AGORA”² in Vienna and Lower Austria, in which the practice of collaboration between individual bodies responsible for creating “healthy order” in public spaces was systematically investigated (Eisenbach-Stangl et al. 2016). The concept of “healthy order” referred to caring for general risk groups, such as young people, but also the population groups of homeless people, alcohol and drug addicts, which often trigger irritation in society and are occasionally perceived as being a threat. The focus lay on everyday problems of public and semi-public (in pubs and restaurants) consumption of psychotropic substances (alcohol, illegal substances, tobacco) and their manifold consequences, such as substance-related violence.

The field work done by AGORA also revealed the deficits and limitations of cooperative practice. For example, the different organisational forms of the two professional groups (police and social work) complicate making contact: in order to exchange information, special bridges are required between the centralised, hierarchical organisation of the police, which forms part of the public administration, and the spatially flexible social work institutions, which have flat hierarchies and are mostly organised as associations. In both professional groups, functional networking mostly takes place on a strategic level. On an operational level, joint projects mostly give rise only to ad-hoc and informal contacts that only last if they are also able to

build on support. The negative flip side of the relationship are persistent prejudices about the professional identities of the respective other cooperation partner such as, for example, the conviction that the partner has a problematic relationship with the client, who is either totally against him (police) or for him (social work).

Although the activating claim in the AGORA project was partially successful, it achieved neither a lasting nor a structural form of cooperation. That could also have to do with the project character of the cooperation, as all projects come to an official end. In any event, it was not possible to assume that the cooperation would persist beyond the life of a project; there was even less hope of momentum systematically transferring the idea behind the cooperation to other state departments in the respective organisations. For this reason, a follow-on project was initiated with the core idea of sustainably anchoring the cooperation between policing and social work in the professional educational systems.

2. SWaPOL – SOCIAL WORK AND POLICING

For the development of an education and training concept, funding was secured for the period from November 2018 to February 2021 in the programme “ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership for Vocational Education and Training” of the European Commission, which was used to prepare, execute and evaluate a joint pilot training course for the two professional groups of Social Work and Policing (specifically for the prevention officers). The project was coordinated in the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research and executed together with partner organisations in Austria, Portugal and Belgium. These countries already have experience of the cooperation between policing and

social work. In each partner country, one police organisation and one university, at which the subjects of Social Work are taught, took part.³ The project resulted in the development of a curriculum and a manual for teaching staff, so that the training concept can be sustainably implemented and also reproduced at other training centres across Europe. Ideally, the result should be a multiplier effect within the professions as well as implementation of the training across Europe. We also expected a lot from the project in terms of content: having the participants on the training course communicate with one another on an equal footing and away from their usual places of work was to create trust and break down prejudices between the professional groups. An improvement in the cooperation between social work and policing is therefore to be implicitly expected in the long term. In SWaPOL, we wanted to work towards professionalising the special interaction between the two professions. Our work focused on the exchange of specialist findings, in order to make the cooperation itself more professional.

The didactics of the SWaPOL training are based on the guidelines for university teaching created by the European Commission. Although no ECTS points can be given in the professional further education, the curriculum follows the paradigm shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach; “Student-centred learning (SCL) represents a qualitative leap for students and other learners in a learning environment that strengthens their independence and critical skills through a results-based approach” (European Commission, 2017).

When conducting SWaPOL training, a good balance is sought between the transfer of information by experts, the playful use of exercises, field trips, discussions and reflections. The topics and didactics of the curricu-

Source: Stummvoll/Reischl/Düeck

DAY 1		DAY 2		DAY 3		DAY 4		DAY 5	
Morning	Afternoon	Morning	Afternoon	Morning	Afternoon	Morning	Afternoon	Morning	Afternoon
Module 1									
		Module 2							
						Module 3			
									Conclusion

Figure 1: SWaPOL course structure

ulum with regard to the situation in Austria are presented below.

2.1 The SWaPOL curriculum

At the first international meeting with all project partners in December 2018, agreement was quickly reached on limiting this professional education and training to five days and on structuring the contents in three parts (modules):

1. The general first part (module 1) focuses on the exchange of organisational principles and professional ethics, in order to better understand the respective professional mission.
2. Module 2 deals with the handling of illegal substance consumption by young people in the public space (in particular nightlife settings) and with possibilities for preventing substance dependency.
3. Module 3 looks at the manifestations of problems related to homelessness as a form of social disorder in urban areas and how to solve them.

Drug consumption and homelessness were therefore selected as the first topics where social work and policing overlap in everyday life.⁴ The arrangement of the modules in the curriculum is shown in Figure 1.

2.2 Module 1: Policing and Social Work in the public space

Module 1 starts from the notion that social services and security agencies are both

concerned with groups on the margins of society, but may take different approaches in their work due to the different ethics of their respective professions. Thus both professional groups have to do with consumers of illegal substances, with one side dealing with the problem of crime and the other with the problem of addiction. On the one hand, citizens complain to the police about the sight of homeless and alcohol-dependent people in public places, while social work fundamentally offers help and assistance to these people. How can the different socio-political missions be reconciled?

One basic requirement is the commitment that order and security management in urban spaces is a joint task in cities and municipalities. In module 1, the participants from both professional groups are asked to explain their working principles and working methods to the respective other group. According to the thesis of this project, knowing about the principles of the other group can lead to an improvement in how social work and policing cooperate and deal with each other. Understanding is the prerequisite for accepting other positions. Yet how can the exchange of these positions be moderated without conflict? How can a disciplined exchange of prejudices between the professional groups be guided onto consensual pathways?

In a second step, each professional group is introduced to the organisational

structure, legal framework conditions, tasks and working methods of the respective other professional group. That can be done by the course participants themselves, e.g. by presenting their training curricula to each other. The working methods that lie at the interface of policing and social work are also presented.

2.2.1 Crime prevention (Community policing)

On the SWaPOL training course, we focus on a strategy for social control that is composed of different concepts of police work and has made its way into the international criminological literature under various terms (Reisig/Kane 2019): “community policing”, “problem-orientated policing”, “order-maintenance policing”, “partnership policing”, “plural policing”. In the German-speaking countries, these concepts are covered by the (translated) terms “community crime prevention” and “citizen-orientated policing”. These concepts take on different forms when applied in the context of national crime policy.

For example, the Austrian initiative “GEMEINSAM.SICHER”⁵ was developed in the sense of “citizen-orientated policing” for nationwide implementation, in order to work in security partnerships with civil society institutions and municipalities on specific problems of public safety. On the other hand, expertise in crime prevention and victim support is provided by specially trained prevention officers, who also perform advisory activities in Provincial Criminal Investigation Departments and police stations. These activities include providing advice on protecting against break-ins, but also prevention projects in schools, preventing violence (including in the context of social media) and preventing addiction and addiction-related crime. Presentations given by specially trained police start by explaining how prevention

work is organisationally embedded in the administrative structures of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and of the Provincial Police Directorates. This makes it clear that prevention tasks take place on different hierarchical levels and that individual offices and departments are entrusted with different responsibilities and tasks.

Apart from this distribution of competencies, the term prevention itself is used in many ways and dealt with by different areas of the police service: radicalisation, cyber crime, domestic violence, conflict management, break-in protection and many others are administered by different offices.

The relaying of national concepts and organisational structures of crime prevention activities performed by the police is vital for understanding on the part of social work.

2.2.2 Social work and social education

Keynote presentations by professional social workers make reference to the globally harmonised definition for the professional field of Social Work:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.” (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).⁶

In many countries, the subject of Social Education is taught in separate educational centres, although social education is very similar to social work in practice and its scientific methodology. Nowadays, social education deals not only with child

and youth work, but with all age groups, and is derived from the increasing importance of the idea of education as a reaction to social problems: “[...] social education here means the epidome of social and state educational care, where this takes place outside of school” (Bäumer 1929). Social education is thus presented as a specific approach that focuses on the individual in their relationship to their social world. One presentation should refer to the different tasks and fields of practice: day care facilities, advice centres, social services, educational support, probation services, out-of-home care, socio-therapeutic facilities and women’s shelters.

2.3 Module 2: Substance consumption of young people in night-life settings

The topic “Substance consumption of young people in night-life settings” has two closely-related aspects: consumption of psychoactive substances and the “night owl” culture of the young population in urban and rural communities. In order to arrive at a better understanding of the problem, the SWaPOL training confronts the participants with the problem of substance consumption by young people from a variety of perspectives. In attempting to look at the problem of drug consumption from the perspective of social work, from the perspective of the police, and from the perspective of young people shall stimulate the participants on a SWaPOL training to discuss the cooperation in practice.

Thereafter, the problem of addiction can be examined in more depth as the interaction of three components. The diverse causes of addictive behaviour, especially in young people, can be presented as a “triad” of person, environment and addictive substance. Then there is also the socio-cultural context, which becomes effective in the respective situation as a framework condition, e.g. with consumption habits, a

lack of prospects and the high demands on performing in society. The triad is shown schematically in Figure 2, page 98.

Discussions on dependency differentiate the following:

(1) “classic addiction”, which is primarily equated with physical, substance-related addiction,

(2) “comprehensive addiction”, which also takes into account mental and social dependency, and

(3) “extended addition”, which also takes into account non-substance-related addictions, such as gambling addiction, internet addiction, TV addiction, shopping addiction, sex addiction, etc. (cf. Institut für Suchtprävention Pro Mente Oberösterreich).⁷

The term “addiction” expresses the problems that exist in the distinction between addiction and physical or mental illnesses as defined in the international classification system (ICD)⁸ of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Police bodies have to refer to legal provisions underpinning executive action in order to clarify the principles of intervention to the participants of social work. With the various forms of addiction, a distinction has to be made between legal and illegal behaviour and between legal and illegal substances. First and foremost are the Narcotic Drugs Act (Suchtmittelgesetz, SMG) and the provisions governing the offences of production, purchase, possession, import and export, transport, offering, supply and procurement of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and drug precursors (Arts. 1, 27 ff SMG). Further provisions of importance for both professional groups in their everyday work are, for example, the definition of “health-related measures” (Art. 11 SMG), the so-called “Schools paragraph” (Art. 13 SMG), which regulates the responsibility of school administrators and district

Source: Kielholz/Ladewig

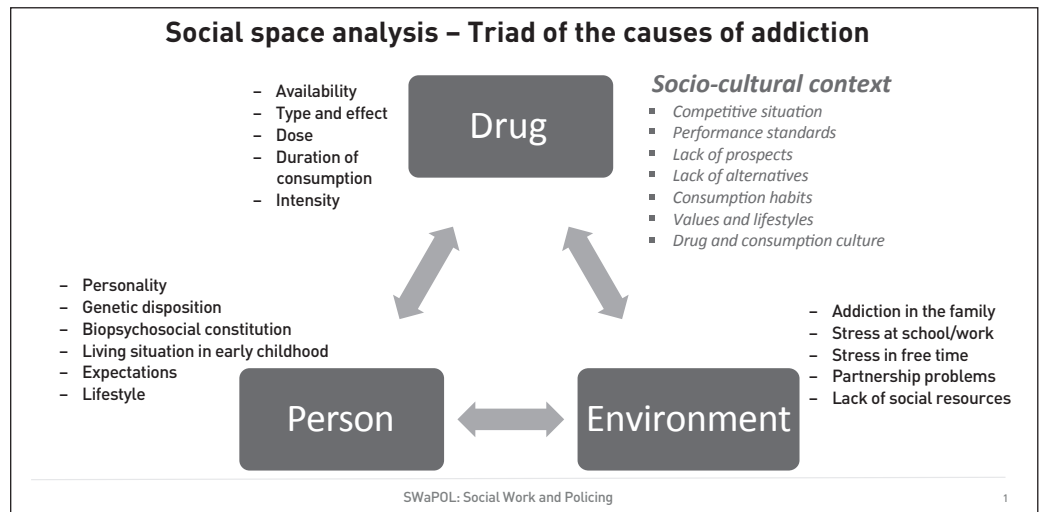


Figure 2: Triad of causes of addiction according to Kielholz and Ladewig (1973)

administrative authorities as health authorities in suspected drug cases, and the limits for narcotic substances and psychotropic substances defined in a regulation (Arts. 28b, 31b SMG).

In Austria, the police suggests using the same material as in the prevention programme “under 18”⁹. As both professional groups already know a great deal about the topic of addiction prevention, basic introductory presentations can be dispensed with. Instead, the participants should be given sufficient time to discuss concrete deployment situations and official actions. For example, knowing the principle of public prosecution (duty to prosecute) that police officers are required to abide by is important for social work. The General Obligation to Render Assistance defined in the Security Police Act (Art. 19 in conjunction with Art. 32 SPG) also applies to the police. A guest presentation on acute medical measures following a suspected overdose is also recommended.

2.4 Module 3: Homelessness

Homelessness appears to many people as an obvious, easily observable and “normal” phenomenon in every city, and yet its causes are complex. The life stories

of homeless people are characterised by a mix of unemployment, mental illness, addiction, flight, loneliness and financial need – a situation that is best expressed through poverty. However, due to the “normalisation” of poverty in anonymous city society, many people also develop a certain blasé attitude to the problem (Simmel 1903; id. 2006). People become immune to the sight of poverty, act condescendingly and show little understanding for alleged disorderly conduct in public places. Begging is increasingly perceived as irritating and annoying, and homeless people are increasingly reported to the police as a security problem.

The term “homelessness” itself is also multifaceted: the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless FEANTSA¹⁰ has developed a “European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion” based on the three basic pillars of living: (1) the physical domaine (building or room); (2) the social domaine (privacy and nurturing relationships); (3) the legal domaine (legal title). From this, four main categories can be derived: roofless, houseless, insecure housing and inadequate housing. In the typology, these conceptual categories are

divided into 13 descriptive subcategories that subsequently express the housing situation. On the basis of this, the situation in a city can be described and corresponding support measures initiated.

On the SWaPOL training course, the professional groups of social work and policing are jointly confronted with these problems. The goal is to explore the diverse processes of social exclusion and marginalisation in the public space together while taking into account the risk factors mentioned above. Building on this, joint work in partnership with homeless associations and intercultural mediators can begin to avoid repressive measures such as the displacement and punishment of homeless people.

The topic of homelessness was deliberately chosen for the joint training because it deals with a problem that can affect the maintenance of public order and falls within the scope of administrative law. The police officers have greater legal autonomy and can proceed according to the principle of proportionality.

3. COURAGE TO ADDRESS THE PROFESSIONAL DILEMMA

The professional fields of social work and policing differ with regard to their objectives, working method, mission and purpose. The goal of the joint training, however, is not only informing each other about their own work ethics, but also the development of ways to cooperate in practice. This also requires addressing sensitive issues at the interface of the two professions.

The interface between social work and policing exists precisely when the principle of opportunity can be applied by the police and social work has to consent to prosecution.

In which situations can the principle of opportunity be applied and a criminal

complaint dispensed with? In which situations, by contrast, is the police officer required to make a criminal complaint. How do the legal answers to these questions impact the practice of prevention work? How do prevention officers, for example, speak with young people in a school about drug consumption without referring to the actual situations from the real lives of the pupils because they would otherwise have to initiate legal proceedings?

On the other hand, how can social workers offer support in the individual casework and at the same time pass on the client’s personal data to the police because of an allegation of drug dealing? There are certainly no ready answers to these and similar questions. Instead, solutions first have to be found on this joint training course.

Source: Stummvoll/Reischl/Dück

	Social work	Policing
Social mission	Solving of social problems Individual and social function	Security policy advisory services
Legal mission	Promoting individual and social development Creating positive living conditions Removing disadvantages	Maintaining public peace, order and security Research into hazards Hazard prevention Preventing criminal offences Clarification of (judicial) criminal offences
Working principles	Ensuring a dignified existence Promoting individual and social development Obtaining and creating positive living conditions Removing or avoiding disadvantages	Principle of legality Principle of public prosecution (law enforcement) Principle of proportionality Principle of opportunity
Working method	Low threshold Outreach Care Advice Support Intensive Care Management	Ad-hoc decisions on a legal basis Longer-term strategic orientations and objectives and subsequent development of preventive measures to suit the situation

Figure 3: Differences between social work and policing, based on Eder (2003)

This joint training provides the opportunity to discuss professional dilemmas beforehand, neutrally and without acute cause, in order to subsequently be able to proceed with the situation on the ground in a more coordinated manner. The topic of “Community Policing” gives cause to reflect on weighing up the principle of legality (Art. 18 B-VG), the principle of public prosecution (law enforcement Art. 2; Arts. 78–80 Austrian Code of Criminal Procedure [Strafprozessordnung, StPO]), the principle of proportionality and the principle of opportunity (principle of autonomy in the event of administrative offences), in order to simultaneously meet the requirements of social work.

Fundamental differences regarding the social mission, the legal mission, working principles and working methods are shown in Figure 3, page 99 based on Eder (Eder 2003).

4. DIDACTICS

The treatment of sensitive issues in the cooperation between policing and social work in the areas of substance consumption by young people and homelessness requires especially creative forms of didactic design for the training course. This programme is therefore designed around current university teaching concepts known as “student-centred learning” (European Commission 2017; Biggs/Tang 2011).

Student-centred learning (SCL) represents a qualitative leap for students and other learners in a learning environment that strengthens their independence and critical skills through a results-based approach. The concept of SCL can be summarised as follows (European Commission 2017)¹¹:

- ▶ Focus on active and less on passive learning,
- ▶ Emphasis on critical and analytical learning and comprehension,

- ▶ Increasing self-responsibility and accountability on the part of the students,
- ▶ Greater autonomy of the students,
- ▶ Reflective approach in the learning and teaching process (on the part of the students and the teachers).

In the case at hand, student-centred learning means that independent, critical engagement with the issues replaces lecture-style instruction.

This training course combines the following didactic elements:

1. Professional keynote presentations,
2. Playful exercises,
3. Excursions.

Keynote presentations are given by professionally trained guest speakers in order to stimulate discussions. This is not dealt with further here. To finish with, however, we give a few examples for the application of creative methods in the classroom and highlight possibilities for excursions.

4.1 Digital word cloud

On certain points students should avoid talking to one another directly. For example, when it comes to elaborating professional biases, the online tool Mentimeter can be used to create a digital word cloud. The participants give their answer to a question online at <https://www.mentimeter.com>. A few moments later, the moderator can project the entered terms onto the wall in a word cloud. This allows one group to anonymously express its associations with the profession of the other group. The result is presented as a group outcome, rather than a personal opinion.

4.2 District tours

Small groups of course participants should be sensitised to physical and social spatial attributes, in order to be able to connect social problems to local structures. In social space analyses, forms of use and appropriation in the public space should

pervised shared accommodation and proceeds via intermediate stages to arrive at an independent living situation with full rental security and a personal rental agreement.

Another possibility for an excursion is offered in Vienna and Graz: the associations “Shade Tours” and “Supertramps” offer city tours on the topics of poverty and homelessness, flight and integration, as well as addiction and drugs, with previously affected people giving insights into precarious living situations. These city walks are impressive for both professional groups and can contribute to taking a human approach to people affected by poverty.

5. CONCLUSION

This joint further training for social workers and police officers aims at a constructive exchange to improve the collaboration, both in the field and in joint prevention projects.

A corresponding pilot course was successfully held in Austria, Portugal and Belgium on the topics of cooperating in the public space and focused on the areas of substance consumption by young people and homelessness. The course is designed so that it can be held in social work training facilities and in police academies within the scope of existing training programmes, but always jointly. A curriculum and a manual for teachers support new consortia with the implementation.

An expansion of the themes to address similar overlapping topics, such as domestic violence, poverty-driven migration, old-age poverty and dementia as well as dealing with people with mental illness, can be considered, as can an expansion of the training to other target groups (public transport companies, urban developers, cultural associations). This training concept is intended to make a contribution to the practice of security partnerships in cities.

¹ We thank Major General Günter Krenn, Head of the Centre for Further Training of the Security Academy (SIAK) of the Federal Ministry of the Interior for his professional suggestions and corrections in the preparation of the text.

² The project AGORA was carried out from 2012 to 2015 under the direction of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in cooperation with the Universities of Applied Sciences Campus Wien and St. Pölten (courses in Social Work); cf. Eisenbach-Stangl et al. 2016.

³ SWaPOL project partners: European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (project management, Austria); FH JOANNEUM Gesellschaft mbH (Austria); University College Gent (Belgium); Lisbon City Council and Lisbon City Policy (Portugal); Universidade de Porto (Portugal). Associated partners: Vienna Provincial Police Directorate (Austria); Polytechnic

Institute of Porto (Portugal); Gent University: Innovation Centre for Security (Belgium); Paulo Police Academy Ghent (Belgium).

⁴ Other topics that overlap social work and policing (and justice) including domestic violence, crowd management, dementia-friendly services, dealing with mentally disabled people and probation services.

⁵ “GEMEINSAM.SICHER” initiative: <https://www.gemeinsamsicher.at/>.

⁶ This definition was approved by the IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW General Meeting in July 2014. See: <https://www.ifsw.org/whatisocialwork/globaldefinitionofsocialwork/>.

⁷ <https://www.praevention.at/suchtundsuchtvorbeugung/begriffsundproblemdefinitionen/suchterweitertesproblemverstaendnis>.

⁸ ICD stands for “International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health

Problems”; cf. <https://icd.who.int/en>.

⁹ Cf. www.under18.at.

¹⁰ FEANTSA stands for “Fédération Européenne d’Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les SansAbri”.

¹¹ https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ectsusersguide_en.pdf.

¹² <http://www.thedrugswheel.com/>.

¹³ <https://kahoot.com/>.

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Links:

FH JOANNEUM, Institut für Soziale Arbeit, Online: <https://www.fh-joanneum.at/soziale-arbeit/bachelor/>.

Informationen zum Projekt „SWaPOL – Social Work and Policing“, Online: www.swapol.eu.

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