

**EMBRACING EUROPEAN PRACTICES IN SOCIAL WORK  
DOCTORAL EDUCATION – CRITICAL REFLECTIONS  
ON UKRAINE’S EXPERIENCE**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In the Soviet Union, social work did not exist as a distinct profession or academic specialty. Following Ukraine’s declaration of independence, the country embarked on a journey to introduce social work positions, develop educational social work programs, and implement international projects aimed at piloting social work interventions.

Despite Ukraine’s legal adoption of the Bologna Process in 2005, it wasn’t until 2015 that the third level of higher education, namely doctoral education, was introduced. Consequently, the doctoral education in social work was formally established in 2015, with the first licensed programs opening in 2016 and the initial legally recognized defenses of PhD dissertations occurring in 2020.

This chapter critically examines the institutionalization of doctoral education in social work in Ukraine. As noted by Rumyantseva and Logvynenko (2018)<sup>1</sup>, Ukrainian higher education developments inevitably bear traces of path dependency and reliance on the post-Soviet legacy during the initial stages. Thus, this chapter begins by exploring the procedures and peculiarities of research degree attainment in the Soviet Union. It then proceeds to an overview of the intended and unintended changes in doctoral programs in post-socialist Ukraine, addressing structural and procedural challenges related to quality, accountability, and transparency assurance.

To illustrate the issues and challenges faced in doctoral education, this study explores the experiences of several Ukrainian higher educational institutions where doctoral programs in social work were launched. Additionally, it analyzes the content of the first PhD dissertation in social work. The chapter reveals that social work education in Ukraine is still significantly influenced by pedagogical traditions, and despite the newly adopted state standard for doctoral education in social work, it might not fully align with modern European standards or current social work practices. In

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<sup>1</sup> Rumyantseva N.L., Logvynenko O.I. Ukraine: Higher Education Reforms and Dynamics of the Institutional Landscape. *25 Years of Transformations of Higher Education Systems in Post-Soviet Countries. Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education* / Huisman J., Smolentseva A., Froumin I. (Eds). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. URL: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52980-6\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52980-6_16)

conclusion, this chapter presents a set of recommendations to enhance the quality and effectiveness of doctoral education in social work in Ukraine.

### **1. Soviet legacy of academic degrees awarding**

During both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, the Ukrainian system of academic degrees assignment diverged from international norms, including the European system, and operated under a highly centralized framework. The decision-making process regarding academic degrees was tightly controlled by the state (Kotova, 2000<sup>2</sup>; Wynnytsky, 2008<sup>3</sup>). A specialized state body known as the Higher Attestation Commission (*Vyssshaya Attestatsionnaya Komissiya* or *VAK*) oversaw the management of Ukrainian dissertations, operating initially in the capital of the Soviet Union and later in Kyiv.

At the time of the Soviet Union's dissolution, the doctoral education system consisted of a two-tier structure: the Candidate of Science (*Kandidat Nauk*) and the Doctor of Science (*Doktor Nauk*) degrees. Holders of these degrees were expected to be leading researchers or faculty members at the university level.

Prospective Candidates of Science enrolled in the aspirantura, a graduate school based in higher educational institutions (HEIs) or various research institutes under the auspices of the Academy of Science. Alternatively, it was possible to attain the Candidate of Science degree without joining the aspirantura. A necessary prerequisite for defending a thesis was passing a qualifying examination known as the «candidate minimum». In the Soviet Union, this examination included tests in: (1) the research specialty field; (2) a foreign language; and (3) “scientific communism” (which was later replaced by an examination in philosophy in post-Soviet Ukraine).

A strict protocol governed the publication of papers with dissertation results in state-managed research journals. The defense of a dissertation involved presenting it before a committee known as the Dissertation Council, which was accredited by the Ministry of Education for a term of five years. Typically comprising about 20–25 members, the Council reviewed and assessed the dissertation. A summary of the dissertation, in the form of a 20-page “autoreferat”, was disseminated to major research organizations and libraries before the public defense. The dissertation defense process involved a summary presentation, followed by critiques from opponents (officially appointed reviewers) or readings of their references, and finally, responses to the opponents' comments and questions from the degree seeker.

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<sup>2</sup> Котова О.Г. Розвиток системи підготовки і атестації наукових і науково-педагогічних кадрів в Україні (1992–1998 рр.): Дис. ... 25.00.05. Київ: Академія державного управління, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Wynnytsky M. The introduction of the third cycle of higher education – the key to the success of the Bologna process. *High school*. 2008. Vol. 12. P. 20–27.

The Doctor of Science degree was the highest accolade in the Soviet academic system. The duration of doktorantura, the program leading to the Doctor of Science degree, was not fixed but usually took five to fifteen years to complete. Admission to doktorantura was prioritized for those who aspired to excel in research and aimed to make groundbreaking contributions to science.

It is essential to mention that holding an ‘academic degree’ in the Soviet era carried prestige and authority, and often implied the holder’s loyalty to the political regime of the Communist Party (Tazabek, 2018<sup>4</sup>). Moreover, achieving a PhD and then a full doctorate provided scientists with certain benefits, such as higher salaries, additional living space provided by the state, the possibility of attaining higher positions in educational institutions, and elevated social status. It is worth noting that corruption in higher education during the Soviet period was relatively low (Osipian, 2009<sup>5</sup>).

Initially, during the formation of Soviet research institutions, there were numerous innovations. However, over time, research activities became substantially restricted by endless bureaucratic procedures. The scope of PhD dissertations and the thematic content of research were rigidly regulated by the state. The Cabinet of Ministers of the USSR adopted a list of research specialties, each with its own “specialty passport”, which specified the field and directions of research. Dissertations in a particular specialty had to align with these demands, and their compliance had to be demonstrated (Kotova, 2000<sup>6</sup>). This constrained research creativity. Tomusk (2004) points out that the Soviet higher education system, including doctoral programs, was characterized by a lack of free intellectual inquiry and a relatively low level of innovations for the national economy. Eliutin (1984)<sup>7</sup> emphasizes that students in Soviet higher education were trained according to a predetermined formula, with prepared solutions that could be readily applied to industry. These reflections on the Soviet academic community’s mindset are crucial for understanding the legacy of academic degree awarding in post-Soviet countries.

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<sup>4</sup> Tazabek S. From the Soviet System to Bologna: A Critical Analysis of Doctoral Education Reforms in Kazakhstan. *L'Europe en Formation*. 2018. Vol. 1(385). P. 112–120.

<sup>5</sup> Osipian A. Education Corruption, Reform, and Growth: Case of Post-Soviet Russia. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2009. URL: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1476388>

<sup>6</sup> Котова О.Г. Розвиток системи підготовки і атестації наукових і науково-педагогічних кадрів в Україні (1992–1998 рр.): Дис. ... 25.00.05. Київ: Академія державного управління, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Eliutin V. P. Higher education in a country of developed socialism. *Soviet Education*. 1984. Vol. 27(1), 3–115.

## 2. Changes in higher education in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, significant reforms were introduced in higher education across post-socialist countries. Embracing the Bologna discourse, many countries sought inspiration from Western models (Rumyantseva and Logvynenko, 2018). These post-socialist states initiated reforms out of the fear of lagging behind internationally (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012).

However, despite declarations of change, some post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine, experienced incomplete reforms. The Soviet legacy continued to exert its influence on research philosophy, educational management, and the awarding of academic degrees (Kotova, 2000; Tazabek, 2018). Such persistence is understandable as it proved challenging to bring transformative changes to societies that were deeply affected by Soviet ideologies. Regions untouched by the Soviet mentality found it easier to adopt innovative reforms (Tampayeva, 2013<sup>8</sup>). The postcolonial status, along with the focus on Russia as a center and the ‘Soviet Empire,’ and its key hegemonic descendant, contributed to preserving an archaic and hierarchical model in society, policies, and education.

During the transition from the Soviet political order to an open market economy, the Ukrainian higher education system underwent various reforms while attempting to maintain a high level of centralization. New educational institutions, such as private and municipal universities, emerged, and free-of-charge higher education was supplemented by a market-driven fee-for-service model of training.

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian higher education system also became quite corrupted (Bazaluk, 2016<sup>9</sup>), leading to a decline in academic integrity (Karagodina, Semigina, Ditkovska, and Yarmolenko, 2019<sup>10</sup>). The process of PhD preparation and defense became heavily bureaucratic, with the actual defense turning into a sort of ritual involving informal out-of-pocket payments to committee members. This raised concerns about the credibility of academic degrees (Dobko, 2020<sup>11</sup>).

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<sup>8</sup> Tampayeva G. Y. Importing education: Europeanisation and the Bologna Process in Europe’s backyard – The case of Kazakhstan. *European Educational Research Journal*. 2013. Vol. 14(1). P. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Bazaluk O. Corruption in Ukraine: Rulers’ Mentality and the Destiny of the Nation. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Карагодіна О., Семигіна Т., Дітковська Л., Ярмоленко Є. Академічна недоброчесність: проблема поведінки студентів чи інституційних засад вищої освіти? *Вісник АПСВТ*. 2019. № 3. С. 58–74.

<sup>11</sup> Dobko T. Emancipating Higher Education in Ukraine from the Post-Soviet Legacy: A Problem of Trust and Academic Excellence. *Universidade em Debate*. 2013. Vol. 1(1). P. 76–86.

In the post-Soviet era, numerous periodicals emerged, leading to a need to define their status. Eventually, a bureaucratic procedure was established to be included in the “list of scientific journals”. However, ensuring fair compliance with peer review requirements was not always guaranteed.

While Ukraine attempted to align with the Bologna Process, the reforms resulted in a system that was isomorphic to the European one on paper, but still retained (post-)socialist characteristics in practice. Kvit (2020<sup>12</sup>) strongly criticized this period, pointing out the distinct agenda of higher education institutions focused on survival after being abandoned by the state, and adopting a business-oriented perspective where education was viewed through an economic lens.

The Ukrainian political shift in 2014 towards a clear focus on European development set a new stage for educational transformations. A major impetus for these reforms was the aspiration to adopt «European education standards» (Zakharchuk, 2020<sup>13</sup>).

In 2014, the new Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education” was adopted, aligning with the Bologna Process in general, and introducing the third level of education – PhD programs. Some key innovations included structured educational and research programs within aspirantura (similar to a Doctoral School) at HEIs or research institutions, lasting four years; the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and Diploma Supplement, including in PhD programs; and the development of academic mobility, which included the provision of maintenance and financial support during academic mobility periods.

The Law also led to the establishment of a new resolution by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in 2016, outlining the procedures for applicants pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The structured educational and scientific program (ESP) comprised two stages: the training stage (mandatory and elective courses or modules) and the research stage. This emphasis on structured studying was a significant innovation in the regulation of Doctor of Philosophy training.

In 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine agreed to conduct an experiment on awarding the PhD degree through specialized academic councils of higher educational institutions and scientific institutions. While there were some changes at the formal level, the informal practices accompanying the defense procedure remained mostly unchanged.

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<sup>12</sup> Kvit S. Higher Education in Ukraine in the Time of Independence: Between Brownian Motion and Revolutionary Reform. *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, 2020. Vol. 7. P. 141–159.

<sup>13</sup> Zakharchuk N. Contextualizing the Development of Ukrainian Higher Education: Between Soviet Legacies and European Regionalization *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 2020. Vol. 7(2). P. 173–199.

Subsequently, in 2022, a new procedure for awarding the Doctor of Science degree was implemented. This procedure involved publishing defense-related information, including the thesis and opponents' reviews, on a special database in the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. However, the composition of the specialized council and its decision to award the PhD degree are still subject to approval by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Overall, the procedure remains fairly regulated, with strict requirements for the thesis and conditions for admission to the defense.

Despite the expectation that the degree of Candidate of Sciences would be fully replaced by the PhD degree, the Candidate of Sciences degree continues to exist in parallel with the PhD degree due to extended attaining periods.

### **3. The emergency of doctoral social work education in Ukraine**

During the Soviet Union, social work did not exist as a recognized scientific specialty, academic discipline, or practical activity (Vinnikova, 2006<sup>14</sup>). The concept of social challenges was not acknowledged; instead, temporary difficulties and social pathology were perceived as issues that required either treatment or correction through «re-education» (Semigina and Boyko, 2014<sup>15</sup>).

In the post-Soviet era, specifically in 1991–1992, Social Work emerged as an academic discipline at both Bachelor's and Master's levels in Ukraine. Concurrently, Social Pedagogy was introduced as a fully-fledged academic and scientific specialty, where even Candidates of Sciences could defend their research. As a result, the academic personnel mainly received training for social work within the domain of social pedagogy. In the field of post-Soviet social pedagogy, the classical pedagogical experiment, along with the historical and descriptive approach, were the most commonly employed methodological approaches for research.

Subsequently, the scientific specialty “Social Psychology. Social Work Psychology” was institutionalized, having a clear psychological background, and expecting psychological experiments to be conducted to confirm specific research hypotheses. Additionally, the defense of dissertations in social work is also possible within the “Branch Sociology” specialty, which often relies

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<sup>14</sup> Vinnikova, L. (2006). Country Perspectives: Developments in social work and professional education in Ukraine. *European Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 9:4. P. 497–501.

<sup>15</sup> Semigina T., Boyko O. Social work education in the post-socialist and post-modern era: The case of Ukraine. *Global social work education – crossing borders blurring boundaries* / C. Noble, H. Strauss, B. Littlechild (Eds.), Sydney: University Press, 2014. P. 257–269.

on the results of mass surveys or a historical and descriptive approach (Boyko, 2017<sup>16</sup>; Povidaichyk et al., 2022<sup>17</sup>).

**Case 1. National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy**

*The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy implemented an experimental doctoral program titled “Social Work and Social Policy” from 2010 to 2012. This initiative was developed and piloted as part of the “Improving the Three-Level Education System in the ‘Social Work’ Specialty in Six European Countries” project, funded by the European Commission’s Tempus program. The primary focus of this doctoral program was to enhance research activities and foster international cooperation between Ukrainian educators and foreign experts from partner universities. By doing so, the program aimed to uphold European standards in academic education while creating novel opportunities for students and faculty to engage in international collaboration and joint research, leading to the acquisition of new competencies.*

*Regrettably, the continuation of this experiment was not possible as, at the time, the third cycle of higher education had not yet been fully established at the state level in Ukraine (Lucas, 2010<sup>18</sup>; Semigina, Kabachenko and Boyko, 2017<sup>19</sup>).*

The introduction of PhD programs in the «Social Work» specialty in 2016 presented a significant challenge. Unlike other disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, Pedagogy, or Law, there was no prior experience in training Candidates of Sciences in this new academic area within Ukraine.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine licensed the first PhD programs, marking the launch of this new academic endeavor. By February 2017, 15 institutions, including 14 Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) and 1 research institution, were granted the right to train Doctors of Philosophy in the 231 «Social Work» specialty, with a total of 166 licensed places available for candidates (Karagodina and Pozhydaieva, 2017<sup>20</sup>). Over

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<sup>16</sup> Бойко О. М. Професійна підготовка фахівців із соціальної роботи третього рівня вищої освіти у Великій Британії : Дис. .. канд. пед. наук : 13.00.04. Київ: Інститут вищої освіти НАПН України.

<sup>17</sup> Povidaichyk O. et al. Research Activities of Students as a Way to Prepare Them for Social Work: Adopting Foreign Experience in Ukraine. *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională*. 2022. Vol. 14(1Sup1). P. 312–327.

<sup>18</sup> Lucas J. The ‘ACES’ program: Supporting the continued development of social work education in Georgia and Ukraine. *Social Work and Social Policy in Transition*. 2010. Vol. 1(1). P. 16–31.

<sup>19</sup> Semigina T., Kabachenko N., Boyko O. Piloting a social work doctoral programme: Ukraine’s vignette. *European Social Work Journal*. 2017. Vol. 20(2). P. 265–276.

<sup>20</sup> Карагодіна О. Г., Пожидасєва О. В. Запровадження програм підготовки докторів філософії з соціальної роботи: аналіз поточної ситуації. *Вісник АПСВТ*, 2017. № 1. С. 85–91.

time, the number of licensed programs continued to grow (Kolyada, Levchenko, and Zabolotna, 2021<sup>21</sup>).

In 2020, changes in legislation required PhD programs to undergo accreditation for training Doctors of Philosophy through the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. By February 2022, six programs had successfully obtained accreditation, with five being offered by higher educational institutions and one by a research institution. This accreditation process aimed to ensure and maintain the quality of PhD education in the «Social Work» speciality.

#### **4. First PhD educational programmes: content of the programmes**

The establishment of the first PhD programs in Social Work occurred in 2016–2017 when there were no pre-existing educational standards or guidelines for the “Social Work” scientific speciality. Consequently, the requirements for these programs were primarily formal in nature.

According to the National Qualification Framework, individuals who completed education at the third level were expected to demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, a high degree of independence, academic and professional integrity, and a consistent commitment to developing new ideas or processes in advanced professional and scientific contexts. Moreover, the learning outcomes were intended to include the ability for continuous self-development and self-improvement.

Government regulations stipulated that the curriculum of postgraduate (adjunct) studies should encompass a list and scope of academic disciplines (ranging from 30 to 60 ECTS credits), the sequence of their study, the forms of conducting training sessions, their volume, the schedule of the educational process, and the methods of current and final assessment.

Due to the broad requirements outlined above, there were significant variations in the content of PhD programs in Social Work. Furthermore, many of the developers of these programs leaned more toward building on previous experiences in training Candidates of Sciences rather than drawing upon international practices and experiences from doctoral programs in Social Work.

Let's look on the history and content of the one of the first PhD programmes in Ukraine.

##### ***Case 2. Academy of Labour, Social Relations and Tourism***

*In January 2017, the Academy of Labour, Social Relations and Tourism (ALSRT) obtained a license to initiate a PhD educational program in the*

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<sup>21</sup> Коляда Н., Левченко Н., Заболотна О. Підготовка докторів філософії із соціальної роботи в Україні: перший досвід та перспективи розвитку. *Соціальна робота та соціальна освіта*. 2021. № 2. С. 308–321.



specialty of “Social Work”. The program was designed in compliance with relevant Ukrainian laws and governmental regulations.

The program’s primary objective was to equip students with the skills to address complex issues in the field of social work through in-depth research, encouraging new holistic knowledge, and innovative advancements in professional practice. The curriculum consisted of two major components: scientific and research work (192 ECTS credits) and the educational component (48 ECTS credits).

The scientific and research work section aimed to develop students’ expertise in research methodologies related to social work. It fostered their ability to conduct fundamental and applied research, particularly focused on solving social issues in the field of social work practice, as well as developing innovative projects, models, and technologies for social work. On the other hand, the educational component included disciplines that cultivated general competencies (“Philosophy of Science”, “Modern Information and Communication Technologies in Research and Teaching Activities”, “Management of Scientific Projects”, “English Academic Writing”) and professional competencies (“Current Issues of Modern Social Work”, “Empirical Researches in Social Work”, “Innovative Methods of Teaching Social Work”, “Current Trends in Social Work in the Scope (According to the Scientific Research Theme),” “Research of Social Transformations and Social Policy”).

The program also emphasized the importance of teaching competencies. To achieve this, students learned about the essence of the educational process in higher education institutions and teaching methods in social work during the study of the “Innovative Methods of Teaching Social Work” discipline (3 credits) and assistant (pedagogical) practice (6 credits).

By January 2020, eight applicants were enrolled in the PhD program at the Department of Social Work and Practical Psychology of ALSRT. Their research themes were diverse, ranging from training public advisers for social services at the community level to the re-socialization of the elderly in the digitalization context and combatting gender-based violence.

In October 2021, the first PhD thesis on “Shaping Social Workers’ Gender Competence in the Context of Developing Family-Based Care of Orphans and Children Who Lack Parental Care” was successfully defended. Notably, this thesis differed significantly from socio-pedagogical traditions, as it was based on feminist theories and gender analysis, adopting an action research strategy.

However, despite these achievements, the educational and scientific program of ALSRT was not accredited by the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance at the end of 2021. The institution failed to meet the newly established criteria, which did not exist when the program began, and lacked the

*required quality of teaching staff to support the program. Consequently, students were compelled to transfer to other educational institutions that had received accreditation or were in the process of obtaining it.*

As it was mentioned before, by February 2022, 6 educational programmes were accredited by the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, namely the Education Problems Institute of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine; Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University; Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University; Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University; Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy.

During the accredited programs' analysis, it has been revealed that the volume of their educational component is 36–60 ECTS credits (the average value – 50 credits). Additionally, the total number of educational disciplines in these programs ranges from 8 to 22, with an average value of 14.

Five out of the six accredited ESPs were developed and implemented in pedagogical institutions or pedagogical departments. According to the terms of content, they tend more towards pedagogical components and provide the research based on the traditions of social pedagogy, rather than social work as it is. Let's take a closer look at the focus of several accredited PhD programmes, one quite typical for pedagogical universities/scientific institutions and one that does not have a clear social and pedagogical component.

### *Case 3. Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University*

*The educational and scientific programme of Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University provides the formation of 8 general competencies (GC), which are focused on the critical thinking formation among applicants for understanding processes and phenomena in the field of Social Work; the formation of a systematic scientific worldview for conducting complex research in interdisciplinary fields; the introduction of innovations for integrating science and practicing in solving socially significant issues; mastering a foreign language to the extent sufficient for presenting and discussing the results of scientific work in a foreign language; compliance with scientific and professional ethics. The programme also forms 12 professional competencies (PC), 10 of which are aimed at obtaining the ability to identify a scientific issue; develop research methodology; put forward working hypotheses; choose methods of scientific research; independently select and process scientific information and empirical data in the field of Social Work; test the results of scientific research, their dissemination and implementation in the practice of Social Work. In addition, 2 PCs are focused on the formation of the ability to carry out scientific and pedagogical teaching activities, as well as plan and organize the educational process in higher education.*

*The ESP contains 15 program learning outcomes (PLO), in which a significant emphasis is placed on the social and pedagogical components.*

*There are no disciplines in the compulsory professional components' block that would directly reveal current trends in the social work practice. The vast majority of compulsory educational components (total amount of 21 credits) and one of the selected disciplines have a pedagogical direction.*

**Case 4. Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv**

*The program at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv is aimed at obtaining 10 general competencies (GC). Four of them are focused on the abilities for critical thinking formation, scientific analysis, generating new ideas; identifying and setting scientific issues; searching, processing and analyzing information from various sources; conducting personal scientific research.*

*Two GCs consist of proficiency in written and oral communication skills in foreign languages at a highly professional level, and the ability to work in the international scientific space. Three GCs are aimed at knowledge in the subject area and understanding of professional activity; the ability to introduce innovations for integrating science and practice, develop and manage scientific projects. One GC is aimed at the ability to act on the basis of ethical considerations.*

*The programme declares the formation of 10 professional competencies (PC), six of which are focused on the abilities for scientific research formation, the ability to organize and conduct research work (analyze sources, develop methodology, use general scientific and special research methods, develop explanatory and interpretive models for explaining social phenomena and processes, create new professional practices; present research results and justify conclusions). Two PCs focus on the ability to apply the categorical and conceptual apparatus, the concepts of technology and methods necessary for solving complex issues in social work. One PC provides compliance with the ethical aspects and deontological principles in conducting scientific research, and another PC focuses on the ability to teach in formal and non-formal education.*

*The ESP has 31 program learning outcomes (PLO). Their list is divided into several items, in particular, knowledge, skills, communication, autonomy, and responsibility (Semigina, Pozhydaieva and Karagodina, 2022<sup>22</sup>).*

The variances between PhD programmes can be partly explained by the departments' traditions – the programmes' authors and their experience in training Candidates of Sciences, as discussed in previous scientific studies

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<sup>22</sup> Семігіна Т., Пожидаєва О., Карагодіна О. Програми підготовки докторів філософії із соціальної роботи: аналіз змісту. *Graal of science*. 2022. № 12–13. С. 108–114.

(Karagodina and Pozhydaieva, 2017<sup>23</sup>). The identified variations also indicate the departments' orientation to different paradigms of Social Work development, the lack of their developers' attention to international social work standards (Semigina, 2021<sup>24</sup>) and recommendations for PhD programmes in Social Work (Denecke, Kent and McCarthy, 2017<sup>25</sup>; Harrington et. al., 2014<sup>26</sup>). Nevertheless, these programmes formally meet the requirements for the ESP structure, which are taken into account during accreditation.

The adoption of the standard of higher education for Doctor of Philosophy in 231 specialty "Social Work" by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in December 2021 does not solve the issue of the existing content incommensurability and incoherence with international practice. After all, this standard is too general and is formed mainly within the social welfare paradigm, but not in the emancipative, developing nature of modern social work. The standard characterized the theoretical content of the "subject area", as 'the notions, concepts, principles of social development of individuals and communities and their use to explain the patterns of social processes, social protection".

The standard defines expected learning outcomes rather broadly:

- To solve complex problems on the basis of a system scientific outlook, general outlook; to observe the principles of academic integrity and professional ethics.
- To develop and implement scientific and/or innovative projects that make it possible to rethink existing and create new holistic knowledge and/or professional practices and to solve significant scientific problems of social work.
- To work in an international context, including participation in international professional and scientific events; understand and produce foreign scientific texts; communicate in a foreign language both orally and in writing.
- To apply concepts, historical heritage and modern theoretical and methodological achievements in the field of social work.
- To use modern electronic information resources, specialized software in scientific and educational activities for modeling processes and making optimal decisions in the field of social work.

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<sup>23</sup> Карагодіна О. Г., Пожидаєва О. В. Запровадження програм підготовки докторів філософії з соціальної роботи: аналіз поточної ситуації. *Вісник АПСВТ*, 2017. № 1. С. 85–91.

<sup>24</sup> Семигіна Т. Міжнародна соціальна робота: пріоритети та стандарти. Київ: Академія праці, соціальних відносин і туризму. 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Denecke D., Kent J., McCarthy M. T. *Articulating learning outcomes in doctoral education*. Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Harrington D., et. al. Quality guidelines for PhD programs in social work. *Research on Social Work Practice*. 2014. Vol. 24(3). P. 281–286.

– To have advanced conceptual and methodological knowledge in the field of social work and on the verge of subject areas, as well as research skills sufficient to conduct scientific and applied research at the level of the latest world achievements; critically analyze the results of their own research and the results of other researchers in the context of the whole complex of modern knowledge on the studied problem.

– To build explanatory and interpretive models to explain social phenomena and processes, to rethink existing and create new knowledge and/or professional practices in the field of social work.

– Ability to carry out pedagogical and/or scientific and pedagogical activities in pre-tertiary vocational education and higher education institutions.

Despite the fact that the standard states that the HEI independently determines the list of disciplines, internships and other types of educational activities necessary for acquiring the specified standard competence and learning outcomes, in reality compliance with the standards is carefully checked during accreditation in the NAQA. The institutions may specify additional requirements for competences and learning outcomes in the formulation of educational programmes, and is responsible to ensure that the set of requirements of the educational programme fully covers all requirements of the standard. Such requirements limit the autonomy of universities and their ability to provide more targeted training for PhD students in social work. Actually, the state preserves its formal control over the content of doctoral programmes.

### **5. First PhD dissertations in Ukraine: analysis of content**

As of February 1, 2022, data on 18 theses defended in specialized one-time councils under the “Social Work” specialty during 2020–2022 was found in the public domain (on the websites of the HEIs and the Ministry of Education and Science). All works were defended in the HEIs’ councils, where the theses’ authors were studying

Analysis of the theses’ content proved that applicants for PhD degree in social work devoted their researches to a number of topical social issues and objectives of social work in Ukraine, such as improving the status and quality of life of people with functional disabilities, optimizing social services in rural areas, enhancing social workers’ gender competence, facilitating social integration of internally displaced persons, exploring social workers’ poly-professional mobility, and developing strategies to reduce harm from the use of psychoactive substances. However, the majority of works seem to be influenced by the traditions of social pedagogy, with a focus on young target audiences and the socio-pedagogical aspects of solving various tasks, for instance:

*socio-pedagogical conditions of gender socialization of young students with special needs; system of pedagogical support... for the first-time employees...; socio-pedagogical conditions for the poly-professional mobility formation...; conditions... of the greatest efficiency of social and pedagogical support; trends in the development of informal movements as a socio-cultural environment of youth...*

Indeed, the keywords used in the majority of analyzed theses indicate a clear focus on issues related to the training of future social workers in higher educational institutions, socio-pedagogical support for various client groups, and people facing specific social problems who may not necessarily be formal clients of social work:

*socio-pedagogical conditions, higher educational institutions...; pedagogical system, adaptation to management activities...; youth movements, youth subculture...; young students, social and pedagogical leisure activities; conditions of socio-pedagogical support; professional self-determination, choosing the profession.*

A relatively small number of theses on the subject and keywords went beyond the traditional socio-pedagogical research:

*social integration, internally displaced persons, social well-being, community, inclusion; vulnerable categories of the population, social services, organizational and substantive principles for social services' provision; gender analysis, gender stereotypes, family forms of education of orphans and children deprived of parental care; adolescent drug users, harm reduction, daycare center, psychoactive substances, drugs...; patronage service, foster carer, rehabilitation activities of the foster carer; inclusive tourism.*

The information provided suggests that all the theses met the formal requirements set by the Ministry of Education and Science in terms of their structure and content. Each thesis presented data on its relevance, theoretical basis, research methods, characteristics of the sample, research results, general conclusions, and recommendations. This shows that the theses were comprehensive and covered all essential aspects of a research study.

It is also noted that each thesis had both theoretical elaboration on a specific issue and empirical research data. The inclusion of empirical research indicates that the theses were not solely based on theoretical concepts but also had practical relevance by examining real-life situations and interventions. The empirical part of the theses involved the implementation and evaluation of interventions developed by the researchers in favor of a specific client group.

However, the significant variation in theoretical analysis methods and approaches to design, presentation, and results of the empirical research suggests that there might be differences in the quality and rigor of the research

conducted. This variation could be attributed to the individual choices made by the researchers, as well as the guidance and expertise provided by their supervisors.

The majority of the theses' texts were presented in a manner typical of research in domestic social pedagogy. In these works, the methodological approaches were not explicitly defined or formulated as a "systematic approach" or "interdisciplinary analysis" with a clear emphasis on the thematic focus of the study:

– *interdisciplinary analysis of the issue within the socio-pedagogical researches; a systematic approach to the analysis of socio-pedagogical phenomena and processes, particularly in social work with drug addicts.*

In several works, the emphasis in the methodological bases' description is placed on interpretive approaches, in particular, within the neo-positivism traditions.

The definition of specific theories of modern social work, in general, was not typical for the theses being analyzed. The authors usually mentioned about the "fundamental ideas of the philosophy of social work", "provisions of philosophical, psychological, sociological, pedagogical and socio-pedagogical sciences on personality development", "principles of ideological pluralism", "pedagogical and psychological provisions on the theory and practice unity"; "humanistic philosophical ideas about personal development and integration as a value of society."

However, in some studies, theories on which the analysis and intervention are based have been identified more specifically. Thus, the authors relied on the theory of *feminist social work; theories of gender schemes; research theories in action; theories of recovery, attachment, crisis intervention; theories of social work in the community, adaptation to the crisis of life, andragogy* etc.

The theses based on the social pedagogy traditions usually used the "theoretical modeling method" (for the data generalization and scientific and theoretical justification), as well as methods of "observational and formative experiments". Various methods and tools were used for initial diagnosis, further monitoring and evaluation (questionnaire surveys, individual and group interviews, documents' content analysis, standardized psychometric methods, etc.). In only a few works the authors have acted within the "evidence-based" social work approaches, clearly defining the characteristics of the samples and trying to build research in accordance with the inductive statistics principles. In the vast majority of theses, the empirical data analysis was based on the results of descriptive statistics.

The theses' authors relied in their research on various sources (research data, regulations, guidelines of various types), but the works of authors published in Cyrillic were more often used for the theoretical analysis. The bibliographic sections of theses contained lists ranging from 156 to

407 sources, and the number of modern scientific publications in scientific periodicals in English ranged from one to 125.

Only two of the analyzed theses had the defined ethical principles of interventions and (or) certain issues of ethical principles observance in the course of the research were discussed. Neither thesis presents data on preliminary ethical expertise, as such procedures for thesis researches in social work are not standardized in Ukraine.

The application of certain theories and methods in researches depended on the traditions of the departments where the work was performed and was quite clearly associated with the thesis defendant supervisor's professional training direction – thus, the authors preferred philosophical foundations of social work, then pedagogical, sociological or psychological theories and methods, both in theoretical and empirical parts of their own work.

According to the thematic orientation and methodological approaches, a significant part of interventions within the thesis researches were carried out in higher educational institutions and provided the formation of certain professional competencies of students in bachelor's and master's programs in social work. In addition, the results of the researches were tested and implemented in local state administrations, city, and district social services for children, families, and youth, juvenile probation institutions, and non-governmental organizations that provide social services to various groups of clients. A significant part of the researches was devoted to developing new models of working with different groups of clients, which will serve as a basis for training teachers and staff of social services, improving the professional competence of social work institutions' managers and civil servants in social policy at the local level. A small number of theses have presented new intervention algorithms for working with certain categories of clients (internally displaced persons, candidates for family education forms creation; foster carers; adolescent injecting drug users).

The results of the researches are presented by all authors in scientific periodicals, mainly in co-authorship with colleagues and supervisors, including in scientific collections published by Eastern European scientific schools. About a quarter of the authors presented their findings in the journals included into databases of Scopus and Web of Science (Karagodina and Semigina, 2022<sup>27</sup>).

So, the initial Ukrainian dissertations in Social Work primarily followed the local traditions of social pedagogy and focused on enhancing the professional competence of social work practitioners and local authorities. As the field continues to develop, it would be beneficial for researchers to explore more interdisciplinary approaches and incorporate international standards and

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<sup>27</sup> Карагодіна О., Семігіна Т. Перші дисертаційні дослідження із соціальної роботи в Україні: критична оцінка. *Social Work and Education*. 2022. Vol. 9(1). P. 44–55.



best practices to enrich the depth and breadth of social work research in Ukraine.

## 6. Discussions

In 1990s, many post-socialist countries inherited the Soviet centralized model of research degrees awarding. In those countries where political development was inspired by the ideas of “eurointegration”, the full third cycle of higher education had become an integral part of the study within universities (Lyons, 2019<sup>28</sup>; Zavirsek, 2010<sup>29</sup>). While in those countries that are keen striving to freeze Soviet traditions (Belarus, Russian Federation), the *Candidate of Science* degree is still in use (Huisman, Smolentseva and Froumin, 2018<sup>30</sup>).

In Ukraine, moving or the transition from the old (Soviet legacy) to the new (Eurocentric approaches) could be defined as incremental and chaotic. In many stances, up to 2022, this inconsistency reflects the country’s vignette in balancing between the Global North and Global South, between eurointegration and the post-Soviet legacy promoted by Russia with its nepotic culture (Gomilko, Svyrydenko and Terepyshchyi, 2016<sup>31</sup>; Hladchenko, de Boer and Westerheijden, 2016<sup>32</sup>). According to Kvit (2020), ‘Ukraine needs a decisive break with Soviet political culture and practices of social interaction’<sup>33</sup> in order to build an up-to-date educational system, including doctoral education.

So far, changes in the Ukrainian formal regulations about or on attaining PhD degree do not automatically abolish or replace the informal practices in HEI rooted in corruption, nepotism and kinship (Polese, 2010<sup>34</sup>).

The state (the Cabinet of Ministries of Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as the new institution – the NAQA) wants to preserve its controlling power and indirectly limit the real autonomy of universities.

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<sup>28</sup> Lyons K. Social Work Education in Europe: A Retrospective View. *Practice*. 2019. Vol. 31(1). P. 5–19.

<sup>29</sup> Zavirsek, D. Can the development of doctoral studies in social work resist the neo-liberalism within academia? Some comparisons. *Social Policy and Social Work in Transition*, 2010. № 1. P. 76–100.

<sup>30</sup> Huisman J., Smolentseva A., Froumin, I. 25 Years of Transformations of Higher Education Systems in Post-Soviet Countries: Reform and Continuity. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Gomilko O., Svyrydenko D., Terepyshchyi, S. Hybridity in the higher education of Ukraine: global logic or local idiosyncrasy? *Philosophy & Cosmology*. 2016. Vol. 17. P. 177–199.

<sup>32</sup> Hladchenko M., de Boer, H.F., Westerheijden D.F. Establishing research universities in Ukrainian higher education: the incomplete journey of a structural reform. *Journal of higher education policy and management*. 2016. Vol. 38(2). P. 111–125.

<sup>33</sup> Kvit S. Higher Education in Ukraine in the Time of Independence: Between Brownian Motion and Revolutionary Reform. *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, 2020. Vol. 7. P. 158.

<sup>34</sup> Polese A. The formal and the informal: exploring ‘Ukrainian’ education in Ukraine, scenes from Odessa. *Comparative Education*. 2010. Vol. 46(1). P. 47–62.

Notwithstanding joining the Bologna Process, the old-style *Candidate of Science* degrees (with no compulsory educational programme) are awarded in Ukraine at the moment of writing this chapter. In parallel, a PhD degree was introduced in 2015, yet the procedure for dissertation defense did not substantially diverge from the Soviet times. Surveillance of the bureaucratic procedures and supporting formal documents overweight attention to the quality of doctoral research. This dualism has to be stopped and PhD reforms should be finished making the system of attaining doctoral degrees transparent and compatible with EU requirements.

As for doctoral education in social work, it is worth noting that social work in Ukraine is regarded as unfinished ‘professional project’ (Semigina and Boyko, 2017<sup>35</sup>). The unthriving development of doctoral education in the country could be explained by the notion of Povidaichyk et al (2022):

*“Ukraine can be attributed to “the global South”, where the social sphere as a separate form of public consciousness and activity began to professionalize only later and, therefore, remains in a restrictive environment of traditions and stereotypes. All this hinders the integration of all related fields, namely, politics, education, practice and personal motivation”*<sup>36</sup>.

The content of the first PhD educational programmes and defended dissertations in social work confirmed the assumption made earlier by the authors (Karagodina and Pozhydaieva, 2017<sup>37</sup>) about the content and methodology of thesis researches performed within the PhD programmes in social work in Ukraine. The majority of them follow the traditions of domestic social pedagogy, are based mainly on relevant theories and data from local scientific publications, focused on improving the professional competence of teachers and practitioners of social work / local authorities using methods of socio-pedagogical interventions. The desire to focus on social pedagogy correction methods and paternalistic approaches is also obvious. The developing, emancipative paradigms of international social work (Pease, 2009<sup>38</sup>; Stringer, 2014<sup>39</sup>), with rare exceptions, did not become the basis for the domestic specialists’ development. The content of Ukrainian PhD

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<sup>35</sup> Semigina T., Boyko O. Social work education in the post-socialist and post-modern era: The case of Ukraine. *Global social work education – crossing borders blurring boundaries* / C. Noble, H. Strauss, B. Littlechild (Eds.), Sydney: University Press, 2014. P. 257–269.

<sup>36</sup> Povidaichyk O. et al. Research Activities of Students as a Way to Prepare Them for Social Work: Adopting Foreign Experience in Ukraine. *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională*. 2022. Vol. 14(1Sup1). P. 314.

<sup>37</sup> Карагодіна О. Г., Пожидаєва О. В. Запровадження програм підготовки докторів філософії з соціальної роботи: аналіз поточної ситуації. *Вісник АПСБТ*, 2017. № 1. С. 85–91.

<sup>38</sup> Pease B. From Evidence-Based Practice to Critical Knowledge in Post-Positivist Social Work. *Critical Social Work: Theories and Practices for a Socially Just World* / J. Allan, L. Briskman, B. Pease (Eds.). 2d ed. London: Routledge, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Stringer E. T. *Action Research*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Sage Publications, 2014.

programmes are far from those delivered on Global North (Drisko, Hunnicutt and Berenson, 2015<sup>40</sup>; Franklin et al., 2021<sup>41</sup>) where social work has longer tradition of professional institutionalisation.

The quantitative approaches based on descriptive statistics and factor analysis, or historical descriptions, dominate social work research as it used to be before. The evidence-based approaches in domestic thesis research have not been widely used (the culture of this type of research in Ukraine as a whole is not widespread enough). On the other hand, the post-structuralist approaches (Call-Cummings, Hauber-Özer, Ross, 2020<sup>42</sup>; Semigina, 2021<sup>43</sup>) are also not used, have not gained popularity, and are not taught.

As noted by Boyko (2017), the use of certain research methods in doctoral theses on Social Work, which are generally accepted at the international level, such as action research, case study, and life story, were considered in Ukraine to be unacceptable for use in conducting thesis research. Many academic supervisors and dissertation authors are not aware of the specifics of their implementation. There is a lack of academic Ukrainian literature on modern research methodology in Social Work, a lack of awareness of research strategies that have taken a prominent place in international research (action research, research with participation, narrative research, etc.), and evasion from reflexive research practice.

The document on research in Social Work of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (2014)<sup>44</sup> states that such research should have an applied and developmental nature, should be developed together with service users during an interactive, dialogical process, and take into account the specific context of practice. Currently, the Ukrainian dissertation research uses almost no participatory approaches and preserves the researchers' "detached" position tradition, while respondents or informants are mainly viewed as 'objects' (Karagodina & Semigina, 2022<sup>45</sup>).

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<sup>40</sup> Drisko J., Hunnicutt C., Berenson L. A national content analysis of PhD program objectives, structures, and curricula: do programs address the full range of social work's needs? *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. 2015. № 35(1-2). P. 14–28.

<sup>41</sup> Franklin C., Lightfoot E., Nachbar M., Sucher, K. A Study of PhD Courses and Curricula Across Schools of Social Work. *Research on Social Work Practice*. 2022. Vol. 32(1). P. 116–126.

<sup>42</sup> Call-Cummings M., Hauber-Özer M., Ross K. Struggling with/against the unintentional reproduction of power structures in participatory research. *Action Research*. 2020. Vol. 18(2). P. 171–193.

<sup>43</sup> Семігіна Т. Критична парадигма досліджень у сучасній соціальній роботі. *Scholarly disputes in philosophy, sociology, political science, and history amidst globalization and digitalization : conference proceedings*. Riga: Baltija Publishing, 2021. С. 96–99.

<sup>44</sup> *The IASSW Statement on Social Work Research*. URL: <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/the-iassw-statement-on-social-work-research-july-2014/>

<sup>45</sup> Карагодіна О., Семігіна Т. Перші дисертаційні дослідження із соціальної роботи в Україні: критична оцінка. *Social Work and Education*. 2022. Vol. 9(1). P. 44–55.

In the process of take-off doctoral programmes in Social Work, no procedures for ethical evaluation of research protocols have been developed, although such examination is considered to be an integral practice in conducting research on Social Work (Karagodina, Liutyi and Pozhydaieva, 2019<sup>46</sup>) and its mentioning is required in the majority of reputable professional journals. So, the rights of social work clients who are participating in doctoral research are not protected.

The lack of demand for high-quality research from social work practice could be considered a significant limitation of the Ukrainian doctoral programmes. Such demand is viewed by many researchers (Maynard, Vaughn and Sarteschi, 2014<sup>47</sup>; Nurius and Kemp, 2014<sup>48</sup>) as a key driver for quality assurance of the PhD dissertations. Notwithstanding, in Ukraine there is no request for informed solutions and verified interventions aimed at solving problems. Research supplements reporting on a particular state social program or international project implementation. There are also no state research institutions in Ukraine that specialize specifically in social work, the search for scientific solutions in this area, and the development of theoretical justification for social work as a profession. This creates gaps between PhD dissertations and actual social work practices.

The post-colonial status of Ukraine determines its localism and desire to develop its traditions, in particular in the social sphere, to resist the influence of international organizations and global “professional imperialism”. Although the international professional community of social work appreciates local practices (Schmid, Morgenshtern and Turton, 2022<sup>49</sup>), ‘indigenous knowledge’ for doctoral programs in Ukraine is about control and correction, but not about social justice and human rights encompassing the Global Definition of Social Work. Local practices also retain the dominance of formal requirements over quality, the corruption component over transparency, outdated and inadequate methods that came from Soviet traditions of research in other scientific specialties over modern research methodology in social work.

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<sup>46</sup> Карагодіна О. Г., Лютий В. П., Пожидаєва О. В. Етична експертиза наукових досліджень у соціальній роботі: ставлення професійної спільноти. *Актуальні проблеми соціальної педагогіки та соціальної роботи: м-ли Всеукр.наук.-практ. конф.* Умань: ВІЗАБІ, 2019. С. 59–62.

<sup>47</sup> Maynard R. Vaughn M., Sarteschi C. The Empirical Status of Social Work Dissertation Research: Characteristics, Trends and Implications for the Field. *British Journal of Social Work*. 2014. Vol. 44. P. 267–289.

<sup>48</sup> Nurius P. S., Kemp S. P. Transdisciplinarity and translation: preparing social work doctoral students for high impact research. *Research on Social Work Practice*. 2014. Vol. 24(5). P. 625–635.

<sup>49</sup> Schmid J., Morgenshtern M., Turton Y. Contextualized Social Work Education: A Critical Understanding of the Local. *Journal of Social Work Education*. 2022. Vol. 19(6). P. 650–669.

Despite the obligatory component of foreign language training, the share of the modern scientific research data published in international periodicals used in theses remains rather insignificant. However, the opposite trend is noticeable – the separate studies are based on modern scientific theories of social work, their authors use evidence-based methods of social work and post-positivist approaches, publish research results in authoritative scientific periodicals (Karagodina and Semigina, 2022<sup>50</sup>). And this gives hope for gradually bridging the gaps between the domestic and international practice of conducting research on social work and overcoming post-socialist legacies.

In order to overcome such gaps and modernize approaches to doctoral education in Ukrainian social work, basic evidence-based approaches, research strategies inherent to this particular field of scientific search, the formation of such an ethical research culture that meets the global ethical principles of social work, the development of contacts between Ukrainian and foreign scientists, which will allow local researchers to get acquainted with diverse research methods that go beyond the social and pedagogical interventions common in the country require further development.

This chapter was prepared before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Unexpected radical changes in the social work context and new wartime demands might lead to “going beyond” the methodology of social pedagogy. In light of international ties expansion, displacement and participation of Ukrainian academics in joint projects during the war, the post-socialist discourse and traditions could be overcome by turning to up-to-date strategies of social work practice and research.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter delves into the state of doctoral education in social work in Ukraine, offering a comprehensive analysis of its development, challenges, and limitations. The introduction of PhD programs in 2016 marked a significant milestone, yet it brought about serious challenges due to the lack of experience in training Candidates of Sciences in this new academic area. The content and structure of the first PhD programs were developed under broad requirements, resulting in significant variations among different institutions, some of which leaned towards traditional social pedagogy rather than embracing modern international social work standards.

The chapter highlights that the shift from the Soviet legacy to Eurocentric approaches has been incremental and inconsistent, with a need for a decisive break from Soviet political culture to modernize the educational system, including doctoral education. The prevailing methods in theses research were rooted in domestic social pedagogy, and evidence-based and post-structuralist

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<sup>50</sup> Карагодіна О., Семігіна Т. Перші дисертаційні дослідження із соціальної роботи в Україні: критична оцінка. *Social Work and Education*. 2022. Vol. 9(1). P. 44–55.

approaches were rarely utilized. The absence of ethical evaluation and participatory approaches raised concerns about the protection of social work clients' rights and the quality of research.

Despite the challenges, there is hope for progress as some theses have started to incorporate modern scientific theories and evidence-based methods, with research results published in authoritative international journals. Collaborations with foreign scientists and exposure to diverse research methods may help bridge the gap between domestic and international practices in social work research.

In sum, Ukraine's doctoral education in social work stands at a crossroads, facing the choice between retaining traditional approaches or embracing modern international standards. To move forward, evidence-based methodologies, ethical research practices, and a more inclusive and participatory approach must be adopted. By overcoming post-socialist legacies and seeking collaboration with the global social work community, Ukraine can pave the way for a more dynamic and impactful doctoral education in social work.

## **SUMMARY**

Social work as a profession emerged in Ukraine during the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, it was not until 2016, with changes in national educational legislation, that doctoral education in the form of PhD programs was introduced. Prior to this, academic research and degrees related to social work were conducted within pedagogical, psychological, or sociological studies, predominantly under the positivist paradigm.

This chapter delves into the evolution of doctoral education in Ukraine, starting with the procedures and traditions inherited from the Soviet era and subsequently navigating the incremental and often chaotic changes in post-socialist times. The focus is on the first PhD programs, which were found to have a predominantly pedagogical nature, with some shortcomings in alignment with international social work standards.

The content and methodology of the initial PhD dissertations in social work are also reviewed, revealing a tendency to adhere to domestic social pedagogy traditions and a limited adoption of evidence-based and post-structuralist approaches.

Throughout the chapter, the challenges faced by doctoral education in social work are explored, including a lack of ethical evaluation and participatory research practices, limited demand for high-quality research in social work practice, and a struggle to break free from post-socialist legacies.

The chapter concludes with context-specific challenges and recommendations for the development of PhD programs in social work in

Ukraine, emphasizing the need to embrace evidence-based methodologies, ethical research practices, and stronger collaborations with international social work communities. By doing so, Ukraine can lay the groundwork for a more robust and globally relevant doctoral education in social work.

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