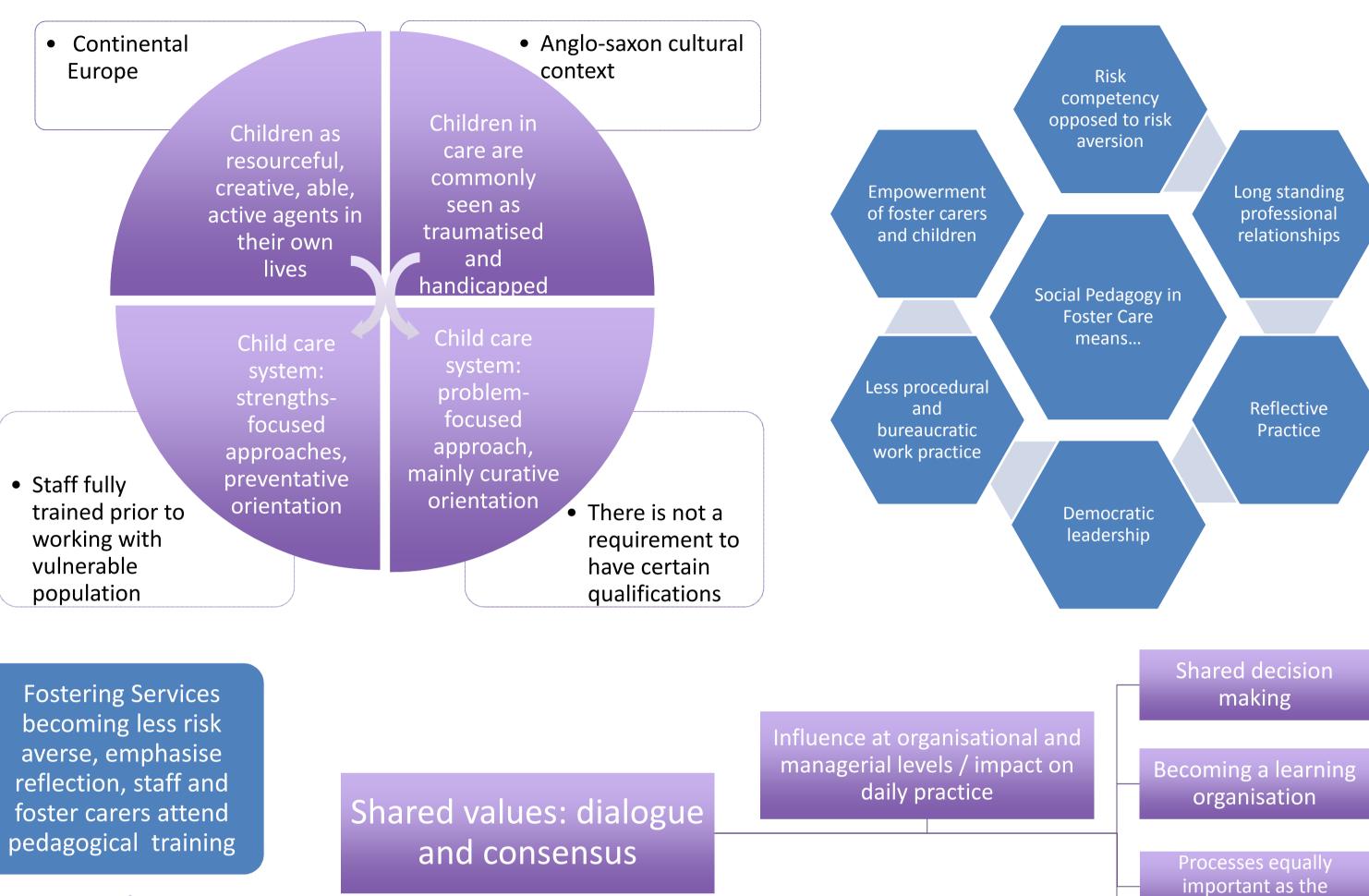
The meeting of two cultures: reflections from the Head, Heart, Hands programme

From 2012 to 2015 thirteen European social pedagogues worked in the UK as part of the Head, Heart, Hands programme to demonstrate how social pedagogy can have a positive impact on fostering services. The group reflections from their experience forms the basis of two academic articles.



Social pedagogues working in Fostering Services

Foster Carers and children feeling empowered and more part of the team

Discussion:

Both cultural traditions acknowledge that children in care should have an environment that allows them to live a 'normalised life', having the same developmental opportunities as the rest of the children in society. The social pedagogues argue that "the 'what' is the same, what differs is the 'how'". Social Pedagogy offers a renewed perspective to some of the dilemmas that the care system is facing, such as the over-protective nature of many fostering and residential environments which can often hinder the child's development; as well as the fact that where there is a blame culture the system becomes reactive, so there is no room for improvement. In contrast, when the responsibility of the decisions are shared by the whole system, problems are shared and can be seen as learning opportunities, therefore solutions and consensus can be found.

Challenges

- High staff turnover hinders building longstanding relationships
 - Some activities foster carers wanted to undertake with children were still perceived as 'too risky' and thus overruled
 - Hierarchical structures and bureaucratic processes hinder professionals 'thinking outside the box'
- The general recognition that foster carers should be treated as professionals does not always materialise in practice

Opportunities

outcomes

Relational practice

- Allows to practice in a much more intuitive way, to do 'what works'
- Group reflection helps social workers to seek support from their colleagues
- Foster Carers are encouraged to talk about their feelings and reflect on children's behaviour
 - Enhanced collaboration and relationships between social workers and foster carers
 - Children are included in decisions that concern them