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Internationalization “At Home”: Fostering Inter- and Transnational Perspectives in the Social Work Curriculum

Andrea Nagy, Urban Nothdurfter

Abstract: The article addresses questions of internationalization of social work education programs with a particular focus on internationalization “at home” as the engagement with inter- and transnational perspectives and content within curriculum elements available to all students. Two approaches to internationalization will be presented, that were developed in accordance with the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training, defined by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), over the years in the social work degree program at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (UNIBZ). The approaches include a mandatory course in “Inter- and Transnational Social Work” and a project of collaboration with the California State University in San Bernardino (CSUSB), in which UNIBZ hosts a summer school that combines lectures with field visits and activities, including local services and social work organizations. The article will discuss the experiences with the two approaches in the light of current debates on the internationalization of social work education, addressing some of the shadows and challenges of social work education in Italy, and offer insights – based on an empirical-analysis of students’ papers and evaluations of the curricular course in “Inter- and Transnational Social Work” – on how students deal with international course content, and on the question of which value they give to that content in the context of their social work studies. The results highlight the potential of integrating international social work as mandatory module as opportunity for an internationalization “at home” available to all social work students, and provide indications for a learner-centered approach to implementation.

Keywords: Social work education, internationalization, international social work, transnational social work, knowledge exchange

Introduction

Internationalization has increasingly become a central imperative in most higher education programs (OECD/European Union, 2019). This trend is driven by different global rationales based on economic, political, socio-cultural and academic arguments. From an academic point of view, internationalization, also in social work education, is seen as being important for improving education capacity and quality as well as prestige and academic competitiveness of higher education institutions. From both a political and a socio-cultural perspective internationalization points to global citizenship education, to international awareness and deeper engagement with global problems such as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Seeber et al., 2016). In social work education, the engagement with global problems is a crucial element not just for students interested in careers in international organizations and contexts, but mainly due to the fact that future social workers will be inevitably dealing both with service users affected by global processes and impacts of global processes and transnational challenges on local conditions and organizations of social work practice (Lawrence et. al., 2009, Lyons, 2006). International social work debates and documents have been underlining the tradition of internationalization in social work history and the importance to take into account in social work education the increasing globalization of social problems and the preparation of students to deal with global problems in social work practice at home and abroad (Healy, 2001; Lyons, 2006; Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2011; Nagy & Fake, 2011).

However, although internationalization is increasingly emphasized, looking closer at definitions and conceptualizations of what internationalization means in social work education and of what should be its contents and benefits is needed in order to better conceptualize elements of internationalization and to understand why and how to make them available to all students. A minimal claim to internationalization in academic education, including social work, concerns cross border activities between nation states (Teichler, 2004). This is often discussed in terms of physical mobility of students and academic staff, academic cooperation, knowledge transfer and reflection on international standards and differences, whereas globalization means the increased process of interdependence and convergence of economies along with the liberation of markets and trade, that has political and cultural dimensions (Enders, 2004). The debate on the internationalization of social work education largely agrees that internationalization cannot be limited to describe and compare social work in different contexts, but that internationalization requires a deeper and transversal engagement with 'international and cross-cultural content' based on common denominators identified in human rights and social justice frameworks and in the engagement with global

issues. One option to include international content into the social work curriculum, is to teach the subject of "International Social Work". This can serve as an element of internationalizing social work education, by addressing a social work practice within the context of globalization, which requires students to adapt an expanded worldview (Raymond, 2014, p.143). Even though Healy (2008, 7) finds that the definition of international social work is not settled yet, she presents a common understanding, that helps to define what the subject would contain:

International social work is generally understood to encompass global social problems and policy issues, comparative social policy, international professional organizations, social work practice focused on development of human rights, or migration, especially that in international agencies. It is potentially a vast subject area if one considers international social work to include comparative and global perspectives on each area of social work expertise and concern (Healy, 2009).

A maximum claim to internationalization in the curriculum of social work could consequently mean a comprehensive and integrated approach in order to "encourage students and faculty to take a global perspective as a matter of course" (Asamoah, Healy & Mayadas, 1997, p. 393), which in turn would perhaps obviate the need for a separately taught subject related to international social work.

Looking at professional needs from a global perspective, internationalization in social work education should primarily contribute to future social workers' engagement for the improvement of practices and policies at the local, national and global level (Healy, 2002). This requires that social workers develop a professional identity rooted in a global understanding of social work and oriented by principles of social justice and human rights, as outlined in the Global Definition of Social Work defining that "(p)rinciples of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work" (IFSW, 2014). This definition and understanding implies the importance for social work practitioners to be guided by universal values, such as social justice and human rights, and international practices of freedom such as advocacy, empowerment, auto-determination, participation and activism with local communities and groups (Carroll & Minkler, 2000). The ethical discourse within a human rights framework can encourage students to consider universality and cultural relativism (Reichert 2003, 2006; Katiuzhinsky & Okech, 2014) and consequently to explore the philosophy of ethics, which is crucial to the social work profession, in a broader context of cultural and welfare traditions. In this sense, internationalization can contribute to the development of interdependent and integrated knowledge in social work education based on the combination of context sensitivity with a global outlook and the engagement with international pro-

fessional practices beyond national welfare contexts and interests (Dominelli & Hackett, 2011; Nuttman-Shwartz, 2017).

Nevertheless, the development of study programs and the design of curricula in social work education often do not yet adequately reflect this requirement of internationalization. Healy & Link (2012, p.330) state that "social work education is increasingly responding to these calls for recognition of the international and global responsibilities of higher education, but more work remains", as well as that "current patterns, barriers, and opportunities for optimal curricula will vary in diverse parts of the world." This article addresses this topic and shows challenges and approaches for implementing internationalization as both conceptual and didactic requirement. For this purpose, the article first points out general conceptual foundations and challenges as well as critical remarks on the degree of internationalization in social work education programs, both from a comparative perspective and in relation to social work education in Italy. Against this background, the article outlines specific challenges and potentials of social work education in border regions presenting the case of the social work program at the Free University of Bolzano-Bozen (UNIBZ). The article then focuses on the question of curriculum design in accordance with the Global Standards of Social Work Education and Training as opportunity for internationalization "at home" presenting didactic elements and initiatives promoting internationalization piloted at UNIBZ. In its empirical part, the article presents the findings of an in depth-analysis of students' papers and evaluations of the curricular course in "Inter- and Transnational Social Work" taught in the BA program in Social Work at UNIBZ. To conclude, the article highlights potentials of integrating the subject as mandatory module and as important opportunity for internationalization "at home" available to all social work students.

The internationalization of social work education: from optional to essential?

Lorenz (2017, p.319) stresses that "(t)he professionalization of social work brought with it the impetus to go continuously beyond boundaries. Social work is a profession that by necessity transcends boundaries of academic disciplines, of professional exclusivity, of national legal and cultural specificities. Social work is international and interdisciplinary, or it is not social work." The necessity to go beyond boundaries in finding solutions to social problems has led social work to develop cross-cultural knowledge and global awareness as well as to foster interventions in the international realm in order to influence to political agenda and contribute to social development worldwide (IASSW, IFSW & ICSW, 2012). However, social work's concep-

tual heritage is at the same time contextual and even fragmented due to different professional and academic traditions alongside with national and regional policies and organizational rules and procedures. Different contexts and welfare regimes show different traditions of social work (Lorenz, 2001, 2008) and a strong professional identity rooted in globally shared values, theories and practices is still lacking, despite attempts to find a common denominator of social work as human rights profession (Mapp et al., 2019). Proponents of social work as a human rights profession emphasize the historical connection of social work with human rights and argue for a human rights framework as basic concept for an internationally shared professional identity and cornerstone framework for social work education (Healy, 2008; Staub-Bernasconi, 2011; Laidlaw et al., 2020).

There is a strong overlapping between ideas of internationalization and the engagement with global problems and with human rights and social justice as underpinning a global understanding of social work's foundation and its agenda with all the risks that internationalization is stressed as a relevant ideological and theoretical reference but lacking detailed discussion on the content and implementation in the training of future social workers. Some universities have begun to emphasize a human rights framework as the base of their social work education programs. A recent scoping review of theoretical frameworks in social work education highlights different examples of universities (e.g. in the Netherlands and in Newcastle, Australia) basing their social work curricula on explicit human rights and social justice frameworks (Cox et al., 2020). While according to Cox et al. this would come close to a comprehensive and integrated whole curriculum approach, the authors also highlight frequent "institutional barriers to the implementation of whole curriculum theoretical frameworks" (p.18), not only in respect to internationalization, but in respect to any kind of coherent theoretical orientation. However, even though a whole curriculum approach is not (yet?) in sight, it is at least interesting to evaluate to what extent international content as a common base has been integrated in social work curricula in different contexts. Rothabi et al. (2007) addressed the issue of integrating globalization into social work curricula and defined several key concepts related to an international definition of social work based in human rights and social justice approaches, a critical view about (global) capitalism and inequalities and the role of social policy and empowering practices in community development and liberation. Furthermore, they highlight several topics that refer to these key concepts and should be covered by social work curricula in a globalized world, such as social justice, human rights, the Global North/South divide, inequality, cultural competence, empowerment, multinational corporations, global interdependence, liberation and the Human Development Index (p. 169). Hendricks and Kloppenburg (2016) analyzed the state of internation-

alization of bachelor's programs in Social Work in Europe using Rothabi et al.'s (2007) framework for a questionnaire to investigate how international content has been integrated in European social work curricula. The questionnaire was answered by 33 member universities of the EASSW, at least one university from every European country. The authors report that "(t)wenty-two respondents stated that internationalization was at least partly an integrated and thus a mandatory part of the curriculum" (Hendricks & Kloppenburg, 2016, p. 39). Four of the elements of international content as defined by Rothabi et al. – namely the international definition of social work, globalization, human rights and poverty – were reported to be addressed in 28 universities within courses mandatory for all students. However, only 16 respondents indicated that internationalization was specifically integrated through separate, dedicated modules. Among these, three respondents reported that all these modules were mandatory (comprehensive approach) while five respondents noted that all were optional (minimum approach) and seven respondents reported a combination of mandatory and elective modules (Hendricks & Kloppenburg, 2016). As to challenges in internationalization of social work education, the authors highlight that "respondents firstly mentioned language barriers. Teaching staff have to improve their English in order to teach in English, develop courses in English and participate in international networks. Secondly, respondents reported an apparent lack of interest among both lecturers and students. According to some of the respondents, this was down to the dominant vision of social work as a 'local' profession. Implementing the international dimension as an integral and regular part of the curriculum was mentioned as a third challenge" (Hendricks & Kloppenburg, 2016, p. 41). Furthermore, social work curriculum content is not only being created by professional and academic requirements. The design of a social work curriculum is a highly complex affair taking into account "the multiplicity of stakeholders, the combination of academic and professional requirements, the politicized context and the range of delivery modes", as Burgess notes (2004, p. 181). These factors further contribute to difficulties in the implementation of internationalization in social work education. Against this background, internationalization often remains an optional or limited to experiences of international exchange within the Erasmus+ program or other opportunities for students able to go abroad or interested in an international experience on their own initiative.

As to the Italian context, recent studies on social work education report some shadows and challenges linked to deficiencies in internationalization. Campanini (2020) states that despite the fact that Italian social work professors are actively engaged in international social work organizations and many initiatives have been put forward in recent years, "limitations inherent in curricula make it very difficult to internationalize curricula, build up a

strong knowledge base on human rights and social justice, and ensure social workers have a clear understanding of the effects of globalization on local practice and be able to play a political role in society” (p. 637). Similarly, Bertotti suggests (2021) in her critical analysis of social work education in Italy that “(t)he lack of subjects such as human rights, social justice, research, advanced courses in ethics and critical thinking is of great concern, and it is considered a threat to the preparedness of future social workers”(p. 130). Those circumstances exist also due to obstacles for the development of the academic discipline of social work, e.g. in the recruitment of academic social work staff and in the definition of course content in the interest of social work as a profession and discipline rather than exclusively according to the dictates of dominant neighboring disciplines (Fazzi & Rosignoli, 2020; Campanini, 2020).

The social work program at the Free University of Bolzano-Bozen (UNIBZ) shares these challenges of social work education in Italy. At the same time it is faced with specific challenges of social work education in a multilingual border region. Social work in border regions is particularly challenging not only by overcoming language barriers but also by the need to refer to and to integrate different professional and academic traditions of social work in the context of different welfare systems and cultural context (Elsen et al., 2021). Since its foundation some twenty years ago, the social work program at UNIBZ has been concerned with bringing together and fostering the exchange between different perspectives, traditions, and languages of social work as both a profession and an academic discipline. In this context, trying to find common denominators while taking into account local knowledge and contextualizing professional practice against the background of local needs, conditions and welfare traditions is a daily effort and an important transversal challenge within the trilingual study program. The program at UNIBZ was explicitly founded with this mediation task, which is a necessary feature both in the specific context of this border region and for the development of a distinctive European and international orientation of social work and social work education (Nothdurfter, 2021). In this, sense, UNIBZ has shown both to be a privileged context and an opportunity to pay particular attention to, and emphasizing a European and international dimension of social work education. This has been done not only by trying to hire as both contract teachers and faculty staff social work scholars and researchers from different contexts and with experiences in European and international exchange, but also by trying to foster the idea of internationalization as an important dimension of social work education to be taken into account and promoted by a concept of internationalization “at home”, that combines both mandatory and optional curriculum elements open for all students. In this context, a particularly important element of the social

work curriculum at UNIBZ is the mandatory course "Inter- and Transnational Social Work" taught in the second year of the undergraduate program. This course is flanked by a collaboration program with the California State University in San Bernardino (CSUSB), in which UNIBZ hosts a local summer school combining lectures with field visits and activities including local services and social work organizations. Both didactic elements focus on the commitment to human rights and social justice, and intend to open a space for reflection and supportive learning of transcultural awareness as an important requirement for more informed and appropriate professional action. The following paragraph will – after some general remarks on the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training – present these two didactic elements as good practices of fostering internationalization "at home". The experiences will then be discussed on the bases of 'outcomes' in form of students' papers and evaluations.

Internationalization and Social Work Curriculum design: experiences at UNIBZ

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) have jointly updated the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training in 2020. Taking context specific elements and diversity into account in many respects, these standards intend at the same time to promote consistency in social work education across the globe. Such consistency of social work education makes it easier to collaborate in the trans- and international sphere, but it cannot be imposed upon different context and configurations of social work. On the contrary, the acknowledgement and respect of diversity should "(n)urture a spirit of collaboration and knowledge transfer between different social work schools and between social work education, practice and research"(IFSW, 2020, Preamble). Furthermore, according to the Global Standards schools should aspire to develop curricula that "(h)elp social work students to develop skills of critical thinking and scholarly attitudes of reasoning, openness to new experiences and paradigms and commitment to lifelong learning" based on human rights principles and the pursuit of social justice (IFSW, 2020, 3. Curriculum).

This stance and respective aims have oriented the development of the internationalization at home concept at UNIBZ. As already mentioned, the social work curriculum at UNIBZ includes a mandatory course on Inter- and Transnational Social Work which is flanked by the optional attendance of an international summer school organized in collaboration with the California State University in San Bernardino (CSUSB). The content of the course in Inter- and Transnational Social Work focuses

- a. on the internationalization of social work pointing out its history, the development of international social work organizations and the critical analysis of internationalization processes of social work between out-reaching solidarity, colonialization and professional imperialism in a Global North – Global South perspective (Dominelli, 2012);
- b. International Social Work as a multidimensional concept and reference point for the development of human rights and social justice based theory and practice with a particular focus on theories of empowerment, decolonization and indigenization (Badwall & Razack, 2012),
- c. different welfare systems and analytical tools for the analysis of (social) policies in different country contexts and their impact on social work practice and service delivery (Payne, 2012).

The lecture on Inter- and Transnational Social Work is part of a module, that aims at the introduction of ‘Social Work in historical, inter- and transnational contexts’ and upon successful completion students earn 10 ECTS at second year bachelor level of the social work program. The historical contexts and inter- and transnational contexts each take up 50% of the module content, and are taught by two lecturers - the authors of this article - in weekly meetings throughout the semester. 30 hours of a mix of frontal lectures, exercises and discussions are given by each professor, in close collaboration with each other, as students are encouraged to link contents throughout the courses. The assessment of the module-part of Inter- and Transnational Social Work consists of three written exams during the semester on the readings, that accompany the lecture (in form of multiple choice and short answers), a speech given on either a global problem or an international organization, upon the students own choices (which have previously to be approved by the professor), and a written final paper at the end of the semester, in which students are asked to incorporate the feedback, they have gotten on their presentation, and develop the presented topic further, so that they can connect it properly to the macro, meso and micro level of analysis. For the research of their topic students are encouraged to work in small groups up to a maximum of four people, and exchange their findings, the final work has to be turned in individually, and has to comprise 5000 words except index and bibliography.

The summer school activities on the other hand offer experience based learning and exchange, and bring together practitioners, students and professors from the U.S. and students from UNIBZ, discussing about social services and social work practice in the region, and providing insights into competencies and skills needed to implement knowledge and attitudes. The summer school combines lectures and workshops with field visits in different social services of the region. The active participation gives UNIBZ

students the opportunity to critically reflect upon existing practices, based on what they have learned, and to do this in close interaction with students who come from a different country context. Ideas and different understandings have to be expressed and exchanged during this process. The program in 2019, running for ten days, included five field visits to social work institutions, relevant to different fields of social work: district social-services, social work with migrants, social work in women's shelters, social work with jobless people in a cooperative and youth residential care. The program was planned collaboratively between professors of UNIBZ and CSUSB, but was also dependent on the cooperation of the regional organizations and their time resources. The lectures and events at the university, to which the collaborating social work institutions were invited as well, comprised for example a presentation by professors from the CSUSB, who introduced their school of social work and its initiatives that reach into the community. Lectures held by UNIBZ staff contained research results upon the health and social system cooperating in the hospital, an introduction to social pedagogy, which was asked for by the CSUSB students as the concept is very marginally known in the U.S., and a lecture that addressed sustainable development at the micro, meso, and macro levels in relation to the Sustainable Developmental Goals (United Nations 2019). In a World Café, UNIBZ students and CSUSB students presented their respective internship experiences that they have had as part of their studies and discussed them based on previously created poster presentations.

The gained experience showed for instance, that UNIBZ students also had to mediate between the U.S. American guests and local social workers, which is a challenging translation task that needs not just language skills but also contextual knowledge application. Comparisons and discussions touched the historical development of different welfare traditions and policies and raised awareness on their impact on professional practices.

Inter- and Transnational Social Work: an analysis of students' final papers and evaluations

This section of the paper presents the analysis of students' final papers and evaluations of the mandatory Inter- and Transnational Social Work course. The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are global problems and international organizations described with respect to a human rights and social justice perspective?
2. How are global, international and transnational perspectives depicted and combined with regional and local perspectives?

3. How can the course contribute to the understanding of international and transnational dimensions of social work and inspire the development of professional practices?

Table 1: Title of students' final works and categorization of topics

No.	Title	Categories
1	International Social Work: Prostitution	Prostitution/Sex Trafficking/Sex Tourism
2	International Social Work: Children on the borders of the USA and Italy	Migration
3	From commitment to action: Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – Italy and the SDGs at a glance	Sustainable Development Goals
4	Amnesty International and the fight against the death penalty	International organizations
5	War & Conflict - Children on the run	War and conflict
6	"Bad for the body, bad for the heart"- International, regional, local prostitution	Prostitution/Sex Trafficking/Sex Tourism
7	International Social Work: Sexual and Reproductive Rights	Human Rights
8	Violence against women during war and conflict	War and conflict
9	Multinational Corporation - ENI	Multinational corporations
10	Amnesty International and migrants, refugees and asylum seekers	International organizations
11	The Power of Multinational Corporations: A Guideline for Costumers	Multinational corporations
12	When different cultures have to live together as a consequence of War	War and conflict
13	Drug prevention projects in Italy and worldwide	Drug prevention
14	Catholic Church - Multinational organizations	International organizations
15	Human Rights and Human Rights Violation in the Syria of today	Human Rights
16	Human Trafficking: Social workers in local and international practice	Human Trafficking
17	International Social Work: LGBT rights	Human Rights
18	Interventions of international organizations in developmental projects in Sub-Sahara	International organizations
19	Children's rights and child soldiers	Human Rights
20	Prostitution: a global problem	Prostitution/Sex Trafficking/Sex Tourism
21	Human Trafficking	Human Trafficking
22	Sex-Tourism as a global problem	Prostitution/Sex Trafficking/Sex Tourism

23	Amnesty International	Intranational organizations
24	Trafficking in Human Beings	Human Trafficking
25	Homelessness as a global problem	Homelessness/Poverty
26	Homelessness and the Housing First Approach	Homelessness/Poverty
27	Sex Trafficking	Prostitution/Sex Trafficking/Sex Tourism
28	International and local impacts of climate change	Climate Change
29	Sexual orientation and gender identity: Discrimination and rights	Human Rights
30	Human trafficking	Human Trafficking
31	Poverty	Homelessness/Poverty
32	Violence against women	Violence against women
33	Homelessness among young adults in Berlin	Homelessness/Poverty
34	Sex trafficking as a global issue	Prostitution/Sex Trafficking/Sex Tourism

The analysis can be defined as explorative document analysis, that uses a grounded theory approach to conceptualize assumptions from the data by using also the researcher's contextual knowledge (Titschner et al., 2000). Data consists of the final papers (from three consecutive years of study) and comments of students in an evaluation of the Inter and Transnational Social Work course (from two consecutive years of study). The qualitative document analysis was based on 34 final assignment papers. The analysis focused on the way students describe and discuss issues related to inter- and transnational social work. In applying a grounded theory approach each paper was considered as an independent unit of investigation and as one case reconstructed accordingly to its own logic (Titschner et al., 2000). The aim was to answer the research questions based on the reconstructed meaning emerging from students' papers. Although no personal data of students were processed, students were asked their permission for the use of their final papers for this analysis. Table 1 shows the titles of the students' final papers. The topics were categorized in broader categories reported in the column on the right hand side of the table. The titles show a broad variety of interests and concerns students addressed in their final papers.

The students' papers differed in their scientific quality and grading. Although these aspects were not the subject of the analysis, papers of better quality and with good literature references were also more informative for the analysis. One paper was not included in the analysis because it did not take into account neither an inter- or transnational nor a comparative perspective. The reconstruction of the single cases (regardless of the chosen topic) showed a variety of approaches to international content. By reconstruct-

ing an overall structuring principle in each paper, the analysis finally arrived at the distinction of six different approaches to process international content. These structuring principles can be considered as different approaching strategies or access points to international content developed in students' final papers. They represent students' different approaches, starting points and competences to address the complexities of an international perspective and to deal with complex issues of inter- and transnational social work. Table 2 gives an overview of the six approaches to international content, reconstructed through the analysis.

Table 2 Final papers distinguished in groups accordingly to an overall structuring principle

Group	Papers according to their approach to international content	Number of papers
1	Global citizenship papers	2
2	Social work interest-led papers	16
3	Social work in a Global South perspective papers	1
4	Experience-led papers	7
5	Hidden motive papers	2
6	Approximating papers	5

The *global-citizenship papers* present a critical analysis of multinational corporations, that includes a social justice perspective and a global-local connection, but do not consider any social work perspectives. One paper focused on critical consumer guidelines to limit the power of multinational corporations, the other one presented a critical report on the activities of an international corporation, both globally and locally. The shown competences involve taking a critical global citizenship perspective, that might have been developed also before or outside social work education, but is not yet rooted in an understanding of social work.

The *social work interest-led papers* present comprehensive and well-argued papers that are social work related and confirm the competence to structure an issue on the bases of a specific professional and academic interest. These papers explore a global social problem (using data and statistical evidence) taking, however, clearly into account also a human rights and social justice perspective related either to social work's professional mandate and ethics or to specific policies and welfare contexts, in some papers even in a comparative perspective. These papers also address the position of the author in a reflexive way and relate both to their geographic position but also to their position as social work student and future professional. Some papers engage individual case examples or demonstrate empathy and understanding to individuals or groups affected by the problem they explored, however

the reasoning reflects an understanding of a social work perspective and agenda in relation to global problems.

The *social work in a Global South perspective paper* is equally comprehensive and well-argued, but explores a development perspective in the Global North/Global South dichotomy, and looks more closely into development projects in the Sub-Saharan Region. While the paper reflects as well an understanding of a social work perspective and agenda in relation to global problems, the 'local' perspective is in this case the point of view of a student of African descent. The paper ends with a cautious criticism towards the intervention by international organizations, informed by theoretical concepts addressed in the course.

The idea of this course has been to introduce me to how social work is internationally practiced and the major concepts that need to be carefully evaluated. And so far with this paper I have nominated how the various international organizations intervene on the problems which concern Sub Saharan Africa, and the assistance rendered. As we can see the various areas that need intervention in the Sub Saharan Region are so vast and as such it makes sense that other stakeholders intervene, but in my opinion isn't the concept of whiteness being continuously enforced? Do the solutions to problems of the Global North really solve problems in the Global South? Is it really ever possible to solve all the problems of the world? I don't have full answers to these questions, but it gives me more reasons to further my studies into this area. (student paper no 18, concluding reflection)

This paper also reflects an understanding of a social work agenda towards global problems but paired with a critical stance towards dominant perspectives in the Global North/Global South dichotomy and risks of neo-colonial practices and professional imperialism.

The *experience-led papers* are structured in a different way, using as access point an own experience from which the paper evolves an exploration around this very strong – in personal or professional experience based – event. These papers are most likely written by students who have gained more direct experiences with global problems or inter- and transnational perspectives either in international volunteering or in professional perspectives where they have experienced the impact of global problems on their work with service users. Besides being informed by precise factual knowledge, these papers also reflect competences related to experiential learning. For example in this paper on human trafficking the author states:

Social workers can play an important role asking for a private and direct interview with the support of a mediator, preferably that knows the dialect of the migrant. During the interview they need also to pay strong attention on the non-verbal communication and remember

that some women are also victim of sexual violence and abuses during their long journey through the desert and Libya. Other indicators can emerge during the interview, for example some migrants claim that they have not paid anything for the journey because someone else paid for their travel to Italy. This can be an important indicator of a possible case of human trafficking. In fact some women are supposed to work (they don't know yet how) and pay back their travel to a madame o boga... (student paper no 16)

The author proceeds with concrete action, even providing procedures with concrete telephone numbers. The action is informed by intercultural knowledge, knowledge about international treaties, national law, transnational cooperation, and an awareness of the crucial role of the social worker against human trafficking connected to the concrete practice of interviewing migrant women.

The *hidden motive papers* seem to evolve their exploration around a strong (personal?) motive as well, but the motive stays rather hidden and is not made explicit. In those cases there seem also to be obstacles to reflect the content in a broader picture or connect it fully to international social work agendas, although the attempt is traceable, and the claim to social justice (for minority rights) and against oppressive power structures is very explicit and engaged. For example in this paper about the catholic church as multinational organization, although it is focused on the prevention of human welfare, the critique seems a bit one-sided or biased, as if an unmentioned own negative experience in the context with the church might have dominated the outline of the paper:

Many of the church's actions are either kept secret, concealed or portrayed and twisted in such a way that the church keeps its face in public. I will show here two different events that are against the human welfare that the church has caused and that refer to South Tyrol. From minor exclusions of persons to major offences that began in the name of the church. (student paper no. 14)

The *approximating papers* seem to follow a structure most likely taken from a source students used for the exploration of the chosen topic without developing a self-defined structure and argumentation that confirms an independent and coherent examination of the issue. Authors of these papers seem to have explored a whole lot of things, but they have not yet proceeded to put them into an order and to develop a knowledge base on international content they can use for an academic or professional argumentation. According to the competences involved, these papers reflect the stage of a very first approach to international content in social work.

The analysis shows six different access points to process information and structure content related to inter- and transnational social work. As they

most likely relate to different competences students have acquired, the access points accordingly differ to the extent to which they allow students to develop an integrated view rooted in an understanding of an inter- and transnational social work perspective and able to orient their future social work practice. While the approximating papers demonstrate a first approach to the subject, the global citizenship papers and the hidden motive papers already show a more informed involvement. The social work and experience based access points show to be the most useful ones in order to reach an integrated view. Vice versa the findings suggest that students can apply international social work content, related to their stage of both personal and professional development, on different levels.

As to the research question (1) of *how global problems and international organizations are described with respect to a human rights and social justice perspective*, the analysis has shown, that students referred to human rights and social justice frameworks and international human rights treaties, but also very concretely to unjust conditions, oppressive power structures and discriminatory practices. This shows that students are able to connect abstract concepts and formal declarations with analyses of substantive meaning and violations of human rights in social contexts and practices, including social work practice, on the base of an understanding of social work as a human rights profession. The final works show an awareness that global social problems need collaborative action and interventions by international (social work) organizations which are, however, also seen critically in some papers. Some papers link a social justice perspective to the claims of social movements such as the women's rights movement or to LGBT movements. However, references, conceptual frameworks and the quality of analysis in student papers vary accordingly to the overall structuring principles or access points pointed out above. While some papers remain on the level of a personal positioning, other papers develop their critical analysis from an explicit social work perspective.

As to the question (2) of *how global, international and transnational perspectives are combined with regional and local perspectives*, students papers either start from international regulations and norms or from local practices to refer and link them to macro, meso and micro perspectives and to a critical understanding of bottom-up and top-down creation of policies and interventions including social work practices. Although from the evaluation questionnaire arrives that some students are unsure how to "access international job opportunities, and how to get in contact with international social work organizations". Cultural awareness was shown also through the use of language including code switching to connect different social work debates, levels and concepts and to express arguments as accurately as possible.

Finally, the analysis took into account also students comments in the final evaluation questionnaire of the course, which was handed to them in the last lecture. The evaluation questionnaire included in two of the three consecutive years (22 answers to this question could be analyzed) an open question, asking students to evaluate the meaning and benefits of the course in the context of their social work education. Analyzing these comments aimed at assessing students' perspectives on the research question (3) on *how the course can contribute to the understanding of international and transnational dimensions of social work and inspire the development of professional practices*. The comments were analyzed using content analysis (Titschner et al., 2000) to identify common concepts and categories. All students evaluate the course as an important element in their curriculum, either through short comments such as 'interesting and useful' or through more explicit descriptions of their learning outcomes. In 14 of the 22 answers an international perspective is formulated as an essential dimension of social work education ("*Every future social worker needs to understand global social problems and their impact on social work practice*"). The other eight answers indicate a benefit of the course for their professional development and highlight different aspects important to them, such as the connection of global and local perspectives ("*It was very helpful for my future as a social worker to learn about global problems and to connect them on the local level.*"), or potential benefits for their envisioned career plans ("*As I will go to the international context one day – I want to work abroad – I can say that the lecture was useful to me.*"). Students' evaluations show that the course on Inter- and Transnational Social Work

- a.) has an orientation function (in the curriculum), and
- b.) promotes critical thinking and reflection.

Those who claim inter- and transnational social work being an essential part of social work education, underline that social work must per se be understood as a "*border crossing project*", as "*the world is getting more and more connected*". Addressing inter- and transnational perspectives in social work is seen as a means of being informed adequately, expressed through comments such as the following: "*We cannot allow ourselves not to be prepared about international issues and transnational relations since they influence not only service users, but also social work itself*". As to the orientation function of the course, students stated that inter- and transnational perspectives helped them to better understand social work itself, its contextual character and its role in society. Furthermore, some students pointed out that opening to inter- and transnational perspectives was important to them in order to make better connections to neighboring disciplines and to integrate different curriculum elements ("*I think that now we are able to make more links to other lectures. And we learned about subjects concerning other topics like politics, systems of government and governance, international relations,*

history ecc. which I find very useful to better connect/understand social work within these topics.). As to the promotion of critical thinking, students evaluate the course, especially in the connection with historical perspectives, as helpful for the development of a critical stance that is able to connect and integrate different perspectives and positions. This is seen as a rise of the quality of social work as emphasized in the following statement: *"The course is an essential part to become a good social worker, because we learned about critical aspects of social work and discussed how social work can be seen from other points of view"*. In this context, especially addressing colonial practices and post-colonial perspectives serves as an important eye-opener to understand that social work can be practiced in different ways and that it can run the risk of contributing to oppressional practices, if practiced unreflexively. Students evaluations confirm that the course gave them *"a lot of inputs for reflection"* and is seen as useful in *"looking in a critical way"* on the perpetuation of oppressive practices, although some remarks indicate, that students would need more input on *"how we can influence social work on a global level, once we will work as social workers"*. Improvements from the point of view of the students would furthermore be to deepen the insights into global problems, and that more knowledge should be provided *"on social work practices used in other countries"* and *"more concrete case examples from «around the world»"*. From the prospective of the teachers, and authors of this article, the summer school and the mandatory lecture could be even better accorded in the future, concerning the respective contents. At best including explicit case examples on how the international vision of social work can guide daily social work in the difficult balance between the different social work mandates, and what the concrete challenges are in this effort.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to present and critically evaluate potentials of integrating elements of internationalization as a separate, dedicated, mandatory curriculum element and as an opportunity for internationalization "at home", available for all social work students. The presented findings provide a nuanced picture of how future social workers approach and access international content and of how they understand and evaluate the potential of the subject of inter- and transnational social work. The findings suggest that there are different access points for students to deal with inter- and transnational issues, and to develop an understanding of human rights and social justice perspectives, although not going abroad. These different access points can serve as starting points for the development or refinement of learner centered strategies, that involve students with their personal experiences and motivations, as engaged (global) citizens and

as future social workers, who need an understanding of the complexities of a globalized world and a professional identity based on a human rights and social justice orientation as both an unifying global element and a local mandate for critical analysis and action. Even though the presented didactic elements and strategies cannot guarantee and are not even intended as a whole curriculum approach, which is discussed in social work education literature, they can contribute to overcome an international/local dichotomy and gap in social work education and encourage students to broaden their views and approaches, link local conditions with international developments and analyze practice challenges in a broader context, without forgetting a clear orientation and the specific mission of social work as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline. This is important not just for students to get along in their puzzling of social work education but establishes the engagement with global, inter- and transnational perspectives as a matter of educational and professional quality in social work as well as an important dimension for the critical self-reflection of the profession.

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