REVISIONING THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK CONCEPT IN UKRAINE

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Ukraine serves as a post-socialist country example where social work as a profession and academic discipline was introduced in the early 1990s. This process had been actively supported by a range of international projects engaging partner universities and NGOs from the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Portugal, Belgium, USA, Canada, etc. Initially the social work concept and approaches were purely international, transferred from other countries. Later these theories and practice skills were indigenized while considering local contexts and practice (mainly the post-socialist paternalistic nature of services), however, the essence of social work, especially in its academic domain, kept its international roots.

Internationalization in Ukraine
The diversity of international projects implemented in Ukraine significantly influenced the understanding of social work practice in various universities across the country. The concept of ‘internationalization’ meant not only obtaining international experience and sharing it with the rest of the faculty, but also having different, sometimes radically opposite views and approaches within the local academic community to social work theorizing, education, research and practice in the local context. This diversity ranges from the post-Soviet understanding of social work through the lenses of a social welfare paradigm and pathology model to the vision that social work core models should be based on American, Canadian, German, UK experience, as well as human rights and critical approaches, and the universal social work values.

As a result of the internationalization, a specific academic course ‘International Social Work’ was developed and introduced in Ukraine in 2011 at the School of Social Work at the National University of ‘Kyiv-Mohyla Academy’ to be equipped with a broad range of tools to practice in international settings and include existing international social work in the students’ own country, the course encourages them to explore features that are similar or different in other countries.

Benefits of the course
The international social work education ensured an opportunity for students of the National University of ‘Kyiv-Mohyla Academy’ to be equipped with a broad range of tools to practice in international settings and with international clients, non-discriminatory and culturally sensitive awareness, and comparative skills.

The course was based on the integrated-perspectives approach (Cox & Pawar, 2006) and included several sections: the global context of social work, its basic programs and strategies, fields of development, poverty, conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, displacement and forced migration, international social work, specific populations, and challenges for international social work in the twenty-first century. Building on knowledge of social work in the students’ own country, the course encourages them to explore features that are similar or different in other countries.

For example, in 2014 the course ‘Experience of the international social work’ had been included into the program of the Academy of Labour, Social Relations and Tourism, a private university educating social work students and other professions. The course was based on the institutional paradigm (DiMaggio & Powel, 1983), concepts of global governance (Rosenau, 1992) and transnational nature of international organizations (Tarrow, 2001). Students prepared presentations on the activities of the transnational governmental structures, (like United Nations Development Program, International Organization of Migration etc.) and global non-governmental organizations involved in solving social problems, including international associations of professional social workers.

Challenges to the international social work course
While introducing the course on international social work in Ukraine, a range of theoretical, methodological and other challenges was encountered by the two Ukrainian universities. These mainly concerned framing the subject boundaries, i.e. what should be regarded as ‘international’ in the Ukrainian academic context of transferred theories and practices of social work. The original concept of international social work of being ‘transnational’ with the activities crossing boundaries (Trippodi & Potocky–Trippodi, 2006) is a contradiction of the existing prevailing local paradigm where international social work refers to social work practiced in foreign countries. In their attempts to ‘internationalize’ social work education, many universities across Ukraine either had an optional course ‘Social Work in Other Countries’ in their curriculum or were bringing international experience into the content of various courses across the curriculum.

Participatory observations and reflections evidenced a range of other challenges faced by the partner Ukrainian and international academics during the process of the course development and introduction, namely: different approaches and models for ‘theorizing’ the social work profession in transition societies; the need for finding a balance between ‘localizing’ international best practices...
Meanwhile, the key question ‘What is international social work?’ is and institutional (focused exclusively on the organizational context (structural and institutional focuses combined within the curriculum). International Social Work course in Ukraine – comprehensive. To sum up, at present there are two approaches to teaching the Ukrainian language articles relevant to the course. On their study. Later on it was possible to form a small pool of Ukrainian language textbooks for the course created challenges for environments for the course students from the different countries. Ukrainian universities making impossible ‘virtual cafe’ learning. A range of challenges created by a lack of technical capacity in work stakeholders. ‘International Social Work’ should not be just about reviewing the picture of current debates on the international scene, but learn to illustrative cases so that students will not only gain the whole on their nature localized and ‘indigenized’. Ukrainian social work education history evidences permanent & Osei-Hwedie, 2011; Webb, 2003) stress, social work practice is by sometimes has a negative effect on social work academization and framing indigenous knowledge into the general international social work practice. As many modern authors (Gray, 2005, Rankopo & Osei-Hwedie, 2011; Webb, 2003) stress, social work practice is by its very nature localized and ‘indigenized’. Ukrainian social work education history evidences permanent localization of the international standards and experiences which sometimes has a negative effect on social work academization through introducing elements which are not relevant to local challenges and needs. Thus, the expectation was that the course ‘International Social Work’ should not be just about reviewing the best social work practices across the world, but rather building knowledge on international programs and strategies and provide illustrative cases so that students will not only gain the whole picture of current debates on the international scene, but learn to frame the local context and practice within the wider international context. They would also be able to build into the general picture their local experience of working with different international social work stakeholders.

A range of challenges created by a lack of technical capacity in Ukrainian universities making impossible virtual cafe learning environments for the course students from the different countries. Final course assignments were changed according to the students’ needs and capacity. As the basic textbooks for the course were in English, the lack of Ukrainian language textbooks for the course created challenges for the students who were not good at English, and that had an impact on their study. Later on it was possible to form a small pool of Ukrainian language articles relevant to the course.

To sum up, at present there are two approaches to teaching the International Social Work course in Ukraine – comprehensive (structural and institutional focuses combined within the curriculum) and institutional (focused exclusively on the organizational context of international social work). However, both of them are based on understanding international social work as transnational activities of social workers and those representing the social work profession in advancing the level of people’s welfare, respect and dignity. Meanwhile, the key question ‘What is international social work?’ is still open in Ukraine, where the whole concept of social work was brought from abroad by international projects and international experts.

References


Experiencing Social Work in a Different Context

International Social Work Training at the Japan College of Social Work: Field Trip to Indonesia

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Training outline and context

As the only school of social work funded by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), the Japan College of Social Work (JCSW) fulfills the role of a national center for social worker training. The Social Work Research Institute (SWRI) of this college has been engaged in international training in the form of field trips. In March 2015, utilizing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) and subsidies from the Federation of Japanese Consumer Co-operatives (FJCC), four undergraduate students, two faculty members and the author visited West Java for one week, aiming to study and learn from the profession there. The delegation was led by SWRI director Prof. Takashi Fujioka. Building on several preliminary study sessions, the program on site consisted of professional presentations and discussions at the ministry, field visits to service agencies, and exchanges at schools of social work.

Through pre-departure study sessions, we learned about the Indonesian context. Compared with Japan, what struck us was the vast diversity. With more than 17,000 islands, some 740 ethnic groups, six official religions, and nearly 600 languages and dialects, Indonesia is probably the most diverse nation on the globe; quite literally, it is still fairly almost homogeneous Japan. Secondly, we had to consider the developing nature of the country. In contrast with contemporary Japan, Indonesia is undergoing rapid economic growth. While per capita GDP and living standards are lower, annual growth is much higher. Also, due to lower taxation, the social expenditure to GDP ratio is smaller (on the other hand, public deficit and debt show better tendencies). As for demographic composition, the third area of comparison, the Indonesian population pyramid is still in the shape of an actual pyramid, unlike the upside down Japanese one. It still has a self-replicating fertility rate and a younger population, with roughly one quarter under 14 years of age. This is really different from an aged and shrinking society like that of Japan, where close to every forth citizen is above 65.

Welcomed by the ministry

At MOSA, participants could learn about programs of the government’s welfare policies. West Java’s main focus is on aging (at least budget wise), MOSA considers poverty as one of the most urgent issues. Although we gained information about policy areas such as child, elderly and disability welfare, we were briefed in detail about the two current flagship programs of the ministry, a conditional cash transfer scheme and a microfinance initiative. Since both concepts are essentially non-existent in the Japanese welfare state, our students and faculty members found this learning most rewarding.

The two explicit conditions in the conditional cash transfer reflect demographic composition. The first one consists of protocols for service usage related to maternity and children’s health, while the second one sets requirements for children’s education. In fact, this system is thought to contribute to the full enrollment rates.

Visits to the field

Agency profiles also covered elderly people, children and disability welfare. These were supplemented by a facility for trauma victims, mainly migrant workers victimized by human trafficking or abuse, and a Muslim organization operating a wide range of services; again, two fields that social work in Japan can learn plenty from.

The trauma center, focusing on returning emigrant workers and trafficking victims, is a type of institution that gets limited attention in the Japanese profession, even though there is an existing need. Hence, it was a good opportunity for participants to reflect. While Indonesia is more of a source country of international migration, Indonesia has a huge number of emigrant workers and a limited immigration country for both. Influenced by this visit, students continued to learn about the Japanese aspects of these issues after coming home.

Social Dialogue Magazine | November 2015

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