

# 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.

From 1990-2000s, the Ukrainian schools of social work were responsible for building their academic capacity and the content of their training by themselves while bringing various experiences of international academic cooperation, and, in parallel, enriching the training content with valuable indigenous knowledge. The School of Social Work at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' staff was trained mainly by UK academic staff and thus it is more oriented towards UK social work approaches. The challenging experience of creating social work education in Ukraine had been described by UK, Portuguese and Ukrainian authors (Ramon, 2000) who stress the complex balance between what was offered by the Western partners and what was taken up by the Eastern partners.

## International social work course

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 v, as part of an international Tempus project 'Advancing the third cycle of social work education' (ACES). This ACES project involved six European countries. It is worthwhile mentioning that while working on the course, the international team led by the expert lead of Janet Williams from Sheffield Hallam University, UK, was able to avoid 'professional imperialism' (the behavior of international experts vividly described by Midgley in 1981) by having regular meeting and discussions, email advice and consultations with local educators.

The course was of lively interest for the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' social work students and lecturers, and integrated existing educational efforts to bridge and contextualize local and international practice and theory. The suggested structure of the course by the UK lead professionals, was found sometimes not to reflect local needs in international practice knowledge.

The course was based on the integrated-perspectives approach (Cox & Pawar, 2006) and included several sections – the global context of international social work, its basic programs and strategies, fields of development, poverty, conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, displacement and forced migration, international social work with 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.

## 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. It assisted the formation of their self-awareness as global citizens and stimulated their critical thinking beyond the domestic practices with those affected most by globalization, including the poorest, migrants and



asylum seekers. The new academic course empowered some of them to participate in specialized practice abroad; for example one of the students applied successfully for 'The Global International Social Work Course' (joint European Master's program run by universities in five countries), and a range of the course graduates found internships and jobs in international organizations working in Ukraine and are well equipped therefore to work within international settings.

The course was based on the ideas expressed by many internationally recognized scholars (Lyons, Manion & Carlsen, 2006; Payne & Askeland, 2008; Lalayants, Doel & Kachkachishvili, 2014) who acknowledge the need for social work education and practice to reflect the current challenges faced by the community. Globalization makes this even more necessary. Social workers' activities in international practice and policy development, advocacy, internationally related domestic practice, professional exchange are within the current local, national and international agendas. The document 'The Global Standards for the Social Work Education and Training of the Social Work Profession' (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004) claims that the international component should be incorporated into the core purposes of the social work profession as well as into the core curricula.

Later, by the initiative of the Ukrainian project team, the International Social Work course had been promoted and included in the Bachelor program in social work as a mandatory element for all the social work educational institutions in Ukraine.

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 (Tripodi & Potocky-Tripodi, 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





and framing indigenous knowledge into the general international social work picture. 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.

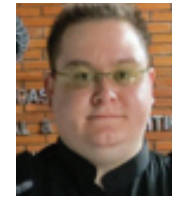
To sum up, at present there are two approaches to teaching the International Social Work course in Ukraine – comprehensive (structural and institutional focuses combined within the curriculum) and institutional (focused exclusively on the organizational context of international social work). However, 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. 🌐

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# 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, and aimed 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 first was the vast diversity. With more than 17,000 islands, some 740 ethnic groups, six official religions, and nearly 600 hundred languages and dialects, Indonesia is probably the most diverse nation on the globe; quite the opposite of a diversifying but 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 fourth citizen is above 65.

## Welcomed by the ministry

At MOSA, participants could learn about programs of the government. While the MHLW’s main focus is on aging (at least budget-wise), MOSA considers poverty as one of the most urging 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 program is contributing to at least five of the UN Millennium Development Goals. It is quite different from the Japanese livelihood assistance (the closest thing participants were comparing with) where goals, expectations towards recipients and outcomes tend to be short-term and more pessimistic. The objective of the microfinance initiative is also poverty alleviation achieved by grouping ten households and providing them with funding, training and advice to start a business. This way it builds solidarity among community members and after profit-generation the initial amount of stimulant is expected to be re-circulated and ready for provision to another unit. Participants were comparing this program with Japanese public loans for livelihood. Again, the conclusion was that there is more focus on immediate assistance in Japan and less focus on long term outcomes, such as escaping poverty and future self-reliance.

## 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 and human trafficking, Japan is a destination country for both. Influenced by this visit, students continued to learn about the Japanese aspects of these issues after coming home.