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## INTERNATIONALIZATION OF BACHELOR'S PROGRAMMES IN SOCIAL WORK IN EUROPE

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### ABSTRACT

#### **Internationalization of Bachelor's programmes in Social Work in Europe**

This article presents the results of a survey on the internationalization of Bachelor's education in social work, which was carried out at 33 schools of social work across Europe. Many universities are seeking to "internationalize" their social work curriculum. However, although many social work educators are convinced of the importance of cross-border exchange, others are sceptical about the added value of internationalization for a professional career in social work. The aim of this study is to contribute to the discussion about the significance of internationalizing the curriculum of Bachelor's programmes in social work. Since internationalization in itself is an ideological endeavour, educators must reflect on and formulate their own ideological motives and aspirations. To this end, representatives of schools

of social work completed a questionnaire concerning the aim of internationalization, the structure of the curriculum, student and staff mobility, international policies and challenges. This study demonstrates that all universities have added an international dimension to their curricula. Many educators believe that internationalizing the social work curriculum contributes to qualitatively better future professionals "at home". However, most of the respondents are dissatisfied with what has actually been achieved in terms of their universities' international ambitions. This is due to a lack of language skills and facilities. Above all, we think, that this dissatisfaction is related to the underlying debate on universalism and indigenization in social work practice and education.

### **Keywords**

Internationalization, social work education, universalism, indigenization

### **SAMENVATTING**

#### **De internationalisering van de bachelors sociaal werk in Europa**

In dit artikel worden de uitkomsten gepresenteerd van een survey naar internationalisering van het sociaal werk bachelor onderwijs, uitgevoerd onder 33 opleidingen sociaal werk, verspreid over Europa. Veel universiteiten en hogescholen zijn hun sociaal werk curriculum aan het internationaliseren. Sommige docenten zijn overtuigd van het belang van internationalisering, anderen zijn weer tamelijk sceptisch over de toegevoegde waarde van internationalisering voor een beroeps carrière in het sociaal werk. Het doel van deze studie is om bij te dragen aan de discussie over het belang van internationalisering. Omdat de keuze voor internationalisering een ideologisch karakter heeft, dienen de betrokkenen hun eigen ideologische motieven en ambities te expliciteren. Vertegenwoordigers van opleidingen sociaal werk vulden een vragenlijst in met betrekking tot het doel van internationalisering, de structuur van hun curriculum, studenten- en stafmobiliteit, beleid en de grote uitdagingen op dit terrein. Deze studie toont aan dat op alle universiteiten en hogescholen de internationale dimensie is opgenomen in hun curriculum. Veel docenten "geloven" dat internationalisering bijdraagt aan kwalitatief betere professionals op lokaal niveau. Daarentegen zijn de meeste respondenten ontevreden over hoe hun opleidingen de ambities met betrekking tot internationalisering realiseren. Dit heeft te maken met het gemis aan taalvaardigheden en faciliteiten. Het vermoeden bestaat echter dat deze onvrede vooral te maken heeft met het onderliggende debat over "universalism" en "indigenisation" in het sociaal werk.

## **Trefwoorden**

Internationalisering, sociaal werk onderwijs, "universalism", "indigenisation"

## **INTRODUCTION**

The internationalization of social work education is frequently promoted at international conferences, network meetings and in the policy statements of universities. In some countries, internationalization is a criterion for the accreditation of higher education programmes, not least because of the Bologna Declaration (1999). It is argued that a curriculum with an international dimension prepares students better for a social work practice that is increasingly affected by globalization, and that it gives them access to international theory and knowledge (Lyons, 2006; Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2011; Powell & Robison, 2007; Trygged & Eriksson, 2012).

Nevertheless, there is little information on the extent to which European institutes for social work education have been able to implement the international dimension in their curriculum successfully. This question is rarely addressed in literature and on international fora. Are global and regional perspectives incorporated into social work education? The internationalization of education is less self-evident than it may first appear to be, and there are often multiples challenges to be overcome. For example, students and lecturers may not have sufficient foreign language skills, there may be insufficient resources to participate in international networks, or staff members may not be convinced of the added value of internationalizing the curriculum. For our part, we agree with the view of the authors mentioned above on the significance of the international dimension of social work education, but we note a lack of systematic studies into the importance of the international dimension in social work education and how well it has become established.

This article addresses the challenges of internationalizing the Bachelor's curricula for social work in Europe. The aim of the study is to contribute to the exchange of experiences and to stimulate a discussion on how the internationalization of social work education in Europe could be improved. In the theoretical section of the article, we will discuss the concepts of globalization of social work practice and internationalization of social work programmes of education. We will first explore a local and a global perspective and describe how both perspectives influence the profession of social work and social policy. Then we will discuss the concepts, content and structure of the international dimension of social work education. In the empirical section, we will

present the results of a questionnaire that was completed by 33 staff members from universities across Europe. These staff members were recruited from the member universities of the European association of schools of social work (EASSW). The outcomes give an impression of the level of internationalization of education at the universities concerned and the challenges that they are facing. Finally, in the discussion, we will present the conclusions of this study and offer suggestions for further research.

## **GLOBALIZATION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

Western societies are currently experiencing an era of major transformation; the mobility of goods, information and people has never been greater, both in volume and in impact. The globalized economy and persistent economic malaise has led to severe cutbacks in citizens' provisions in most Western welfare states (Stoesz & Karger, 2012). To address these developments in social work we use the concept of globalization, meaning that social workers, services users and carers are part of a global network and are affected directly or indirectly by what happens in other parts of the world (Williams & Simpson, 2009). "Globalization is affecting the practices of social workers who would previously have seen their work as essentially rooted in local conditions and community needs" (Lyons, 2006, p. 365). We understand the local perspective as everyday life in which local needs require local responses. Yet social work professionals must now acknowledge that the local level does not exist in isolation. To accommodate the forces of globalization, communities must constantly give new meaning to the local level:

Social workers have to recognize that the etiology of social problems in modern societies is as much affected by global forces as by national forces, and that local problems cannot be understood without reference to global economic, political and cultural circumstances (Ife, 2000, p. 3).

In other words, the local is global, and the global is local. Currently, there are signs that social work in many countries is becoming more aware of and alert to its international dimension (Lyons, 2006).

Whether we talk about migration, poverty, trafficking of women and children, drug trafficking or other phenomena, increased skills and knowledge are required from social workers who are better informed about the relevance of international events and processes and the range of resources on which they can draw (Lyons, 2006, p. 377).

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We conclude that globalization has influenced thinking on welfare policies and has implications for social work practices. This means that all social work practice, worldwide, can be considered an arena where the global and the local interacts and impacts people's experiences (Ife, 2000).

The link between the local and the global is described in various ways: as the local-global dialectic (Healy, 2002; Lyons, 2006), as "reconciling the irreconcilable" (Dominelli, 2012), as "glocalization", a combination of both processes of globalization and localization (Robertson, 2012), or as a paradoxical process (Gray, 2005). The latter author distinguishes a tendency towards indigenization and universalism. Indigenization refers to the extent to which social workers tailor their work to local contexts. Universalism refers to the attempt to find commonalities across divergent contexts such that it is possible to talk about a universal social work profession with shared goals and values, wherever it may be practised. Both perspectives have their limitations. Indigenization challenges the lack of universal knowledge and values, and the cultural hegemony of dominant discourses (Wong, 2002). "Universalism should be aware of the dangers of over-standardization by global standards and international definitions and of cultural imperialism if used mainly to promote western social work" (Gray, 2005, p. 236). Particularly when it comes to issues of diversity and cross-cultural practice, the assumption of universality seems to hinder professionals. Social work is a cultural construction, a product of modernity and Western thinking, and this means that the profession has to question the primacy of Western modernist values and to rethink what is universal (Gray, Coates & Yellow Bird, 2008).

## INTERNATIONALIZATION OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Globalization has undeniably had an influence on higher education, and the importance of the internationalization<sup>1</sup> of higher education is visible worldwide. Internationalization is high on the agendas of national governments, international bodies and institutes of higher education (De Wit, 2001). Under the Bologna Declaration of 1999, 29 European countries agreed to "the promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regard to curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research" (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

The idea of internationalization has guided social work education since it was modernized in the 20th century. The International Committee of Schools of Social Work, which can be seen as one of the results of the internationalization process, was founded as early as 1929. Its first president was Alice Salomon, and the importance of international relations in her life and work "can be neither

overlooked nor valued enough" (Feustel, 2006, p. 24). She was convinced that a knowledge of foreign specialist literature enabled students and professionals to recognize domestic problems and issues more clearly. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW, n.d.) formulates its professional mission as follows:

- To develop and promote excellence in social work education, research and scholarship globally in order to enhance human well-being.
- To create and maintain a dynamic community of social work educators and their programs.
- To support and facilitate participation in mutual exchanges of information and expertise.
- To represent social work education at the international level.

Focussing specifically on the internationalization of social work education in Europe, a difference emerges between research universities and universities of applied sciences. Historically, schools of social work that are part of research universities – and in particular faculties of social sciences – are more theory-oriented. Schools of social work that belong to universities of applied sciences – with their roots in vocational education – are more practice-oriented. It is plausible that social work curricula with a stronger theoretical focus, especially on policy issues and macro level in general, may be more influenced by internationalization (for example, due to the use of international literature) than curricula that focus on the practice of social work. The process of internationalization may therefore be even more challenging for universities of applied sciences.

Concerning the significance of the internationalization of social work education, three broad goals can be identified: first, to prepare students for the globalized practice of social work; second, to improve students' learning processes in education; and third, to improve the practice of social work itself. The goal of "preparation" implies that social work education should prepare students for the increasing globalization of social work practice at home and abroad. Students should therefore acquire the appropriate skills and competencies, such as learning foreign languages, and gaining knowledge and insight into other cultures, which will enable them to better function in a multicultural environment or an international setting. The goal of "learning" is based on the idea that internationalization contributes to a specific kind of learning process. Contemporary learning theories show that "new experiences require expanding one's frame of mind and creating new spaces of meaning" (Che, Spearman & Manizade, 2009, p. 103). International exchanges, especially (but not only) when students go abroad, are likely to create a disequilibrium, which can in turn lead to transformative learning processes (Greenfield, Davis & Fedor, 2012). As an

example of the third goal, "preparation", Healy (2002, p. 4) stresses that the internationalization of education contributes to better social work practice – for instance, because it leads to more humane and socially oriented public policies at the national and global levels and an enhanced status for the profession of social work through its increased visibility.

Reflecting on the discussion about the rationales for internationalizing education, Stier (2004) points out various ideologies that easily can be recognized in the above arguments. Firstly, "idealism": this is the normative assumption that internationalization is inherently good. International cooperation and education can contribute to the creation of a more democratic, fair and equal world (e.g. Healy). Secondly, "instrumentalism": internationalization facilitates labour force mobility, which has the pragmatic and economic goals of maximizing profits and achieving sustainable development. Lastly, there is "educationalism": internationalization enriches the overall academic experience of both students and teaching staff through exposure and adaption to an unfamiliar setting, with its unique culture, teaching style, norms and grading system (e.g. Che *et al.*, 2009). Stier (2004, p. 95) states that "because internationalization in itself is an ideological endeavour, educators (teachers and policy makers) must formulate and reflect on their own ideological motives and aspirations".

In this study, we define the internationalization of social work education as the process of incorporating knowledge relating to the impact of globalization on social work practice at home and of social work practices, theories and research abroad.

To obtain further insight, we distinguish the following three dimensions of internationalization: i) an international curriculum, ii) international mobility among students and staff, and iii) international education policy. Exploring the dimension of the international curriculum, we look specifically at aims, content, the use of a foreign language, and the integration of the curriculum within the overall educational programme. The internationalization effort may serve to prepare students for globalized practice of social work at home, or specifically for a career abroad, or it may focus explicitly on providing students with an exceptional learning experience. Concerning the content of the international curriculum, we follow Rothabi, Gammonly, Gamble and Weil (2007), whose description of the use of globalization concepts can help us recognize the content of an international curriculum. In this study, we tentatively distinguish concepts relating to international institutions, international policy (global agenda, human rights, sustainability), international professionalization (international definition of social work), international social

issues (poverty, migration, cross-national social issues, international conflicts and disasters), and international communication (language). We also highlight the use of a foreign language as an indicator of an international curriculum, as well as giving students access to international resources and the opportunity to communicate with students, lecturers, social workers and service users abroad. Finally, regarding the integration of the international curriculum, Healy (Healy, 1986, 1995; Hendriks, Kloppenburg, Gevorgianiene & Jakutiene, 2008) identifies two approaches: "comprehensive" and "minimum". An international curriculum may be an integral part of the curriculum as a whole (comprehensive approach), or it may be offered through more specialized courses, which may be mandatory for all or voluntary for a particular group of students (minimum approach).

The second dimension of student and staff mobility contributes to cross-national cooperation, education and field placements abroad. Different models of student and staff mobility can be identified in literature, varying from a one-off visit to intensive exchange programmes between universities. Activities vary from study, research, conferences, short-term visits and long-term placements. International placements for students require international infrastructure and cooperation, within which qualified supervision is identified, practicum sites are established, and procedures for mutual exchange, funding and administration procedures are regulated (Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2011).

Regarding the third dimension of international education policy, universities differ in the extent to which international policy is in place. Policy statements on internationalization often function as a framework for university institutes and faculties, but these policy statements on internationalization vary in their degree of detail and the activities that they prescribe, and in some cases are lacking altogether. They can take the form of mission statements, objectives, guidelines for education and research, mobility, accreditation, financing and administration. Criticism of universities' internationalization policy statements often pertain to mismatches with actual educational practice, a lack of support among lecturers, and the practical challenges that need to be overcome.

## **SURVEY<sup>2</sup>**

A survey was conducted in 2013 to form a picture of the internationalization of social work education at various universities across Europe, and of the challenges they faced in implementing



internationalization. The survey focused on European schools of social work and was limited to Bachelor's level education, because in most European countries a Bachelor's degree enables people to engage in the practice of social work. Moreover, not all universities (especially universities of applied sciences) offer Master's programmes. Based on a literature study, we operationalized the concept of internationalization in three dimensions: international elements in the curriculum, the international mobility of students and lecturers, and international education policy. We elaborated the first dimension (international curriculum) as follows: aims, content, language and embeddedness. The dimension of mobility was determined by the length of time that students and lecturers spent abroad for – various types of – study purposes. We limited this to domestic students and lecturers because the focus was on education for students following a full degree course at their university, and whether or not this involved international mobility. The policy dimension was determined by the existence of an international education policy and the challenges that this involved in educational practice.

## **Respondents**

We approached staff members at various universities who were engaged in internationalization and active in international networks, in order to gather information on the extent to which those universities had been successful in internationalizing their social work curricula. To cover the widest possible area within Europe, the aim was to include at least one university from every European country with a maximum of two per country. A total of 40 individuals, selected from the member universities of the EASSW, received a digital questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by 33 of those respondents (see Figure 1). They represented universities with a wide range of social work curricula and practices in Europe, with 23 respondents representing a research university and 10 representing a university of applied sciences.

The participating staff members differed in their roles and positions in relation to internationalization. We distinguished three groups of respondents, based on whether their position was a lecturer in education ( $n=13$ ), a management position ( $n=5$ ), or a combination of management and teaching ( $n=15$ ). Using a 10-point scale, we asked the respondents to rate how well-informed they considered themselves to be regarding the international dimension of the Bachelor's programme in social work. On average, the respondents considered themselves to be well-informed ( $m=6.6$ ,  $sd=2.1$ ). Seven respondents rated themselves as insufficiently informed ( $<5$ ). Before actually completing the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to first read the



Figure 1: Countries of participating universities

questions and to collect any relevant information relating to their own university. No definition of the internationalization of social work education was given beforehand. It was assumed that respondents would answer the questions based on their own judgement.

## Questionnaire

Based on the dimensions of the internationalization of social work education, a digital questionnaire was constructed consisting of multiple-choice questions, questions involving giving a scores on a 10-point scale (see Figure 2), and open questions.

The questionnaire was piloted with two staff members from a Dutch and a German university, respectively. We asked them to provide us with feedback on relevance, the clarity of the items and

**22. To what extent does the internationalization of your curriculum match the ambitions of your university (formulated in policy, mission statements, etc.) according to your own opinion?**

	1 Very poor	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Excellent
Give a grade	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give a short explanation of your grade

**Figure 2: Example of a question with a score on a 10-point scale**

the required completion time. We improved validity by rephrasing some of the questions and we also reduced the required completion time.

## Data analysis

A descriptive analysis of the quantitative scores was conducted by computing mean scores and percentages. The answers to the open questions were analysed for commonalities and differences and then interpreted in relation to the scores.

## RESULTS

### Aim of internationalization

A majority of the respondents (n=29), from both research universities and universities of applied sciences, agreed that the internationalization of education contributed to improving the quality of the practice of social work at home. Eighteen of the respondents stated that the purpose of internationalization was also to prepare students for a practice abroad. In elucidating their scores, respondents added, for example, that students who followed an internationalized curriculum could become competent practitioners in different countries, would be better able to adapt to new social and cultural contexts, would develop comparative competencies, would become aware of trans-cultural and global issues and connected to worldwide movements, would develop critical thinking, would be better able to reflect on the national context and would have better foreign language skills.

## Integration into the educational programme

In terms of the approaches distinguished by Healy (1986, 1995), 16 respondents indicated that internationalization was specifically integrated through separate, dedicated modules. Of this group, three respondents said that all the separate modules were mandatory (comprehensive approach); five respondents noted that all were optional (minimum approach); and seven respondents reported a combination of mandatory and elective modules. Twenty-two respondents stated that internationalization was at least partly an integrated and thus a mandatory part of the curriculum for all students.

## Content

Figure 3 shows that more universities offer international subjects as a mandatory part of their curriculum (for all students) than as an optional component (for a selected group of students).

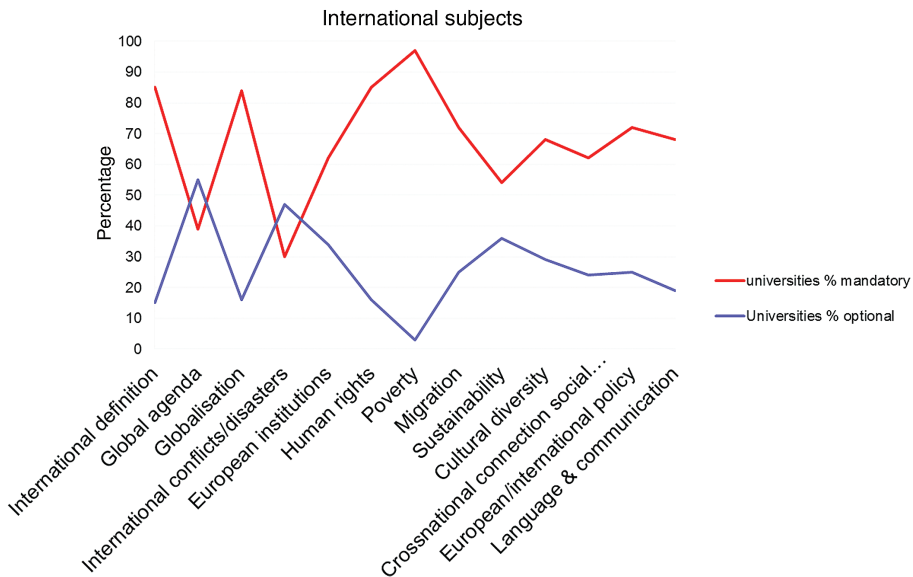


Figure 3: Percentage of universities that offer international subjects as mandatory or optional (n=33)

Exceptions to this were the themes of "global agenda" and "international conflicts and disasters", which are more often offered as part of the optional curriculum. At the majority of universities (n=28), the subjects "international definition of social work", "globalization", "human rights" and "poverty" are offered mandatory for all students.

### **Education in a foreign language**

Regarding foreign language teaching, a distinction can be made between reading, listening, writing and presenting. According to the respondents, and averaging all social work curricula, 25% of the mandatory literature is written in a foreign language, 8% of lectures are given in a foreign language, and 4% of students' oral and written presentations are delivered in a foreign language. Comparing research universities and universities of applied sciences, there is a striking difference in the amount of mandatory literature in a foreign language, with the former prescribing 33% of literature in a foreign language and the latter just 7%.

Two universities reported the use of cross-national e-learning programmes in a foreign language. According to the information provided by 22 respondents, English is the second language at 18 universities, French at two universities, and German and Spanish each at one university.

### **Mobility of domestic students and staff**

Table 1 shows the average percentage of students and staff members who spend time abroad for study or work.

**Table 1: Percentage of mobility of domestic student and staff; population and purpose**

	Students	Staff
Mobility	M 15% of student population spend some time abroad for their studies	M 33% of staff spend some time abroad for their work
Purpose	58% placements 57% study 15% research 14% conferences	33% study 79% teaching 94% conferences 82% networks 46% field visits 64% research

## Policy and ambitions

Of all the respondents, 14 were aware of a mission statement on internationalization in their university's policy documents, whereas 16 reported that no such mission statement existed. Most of the respondents offered a negative assessment of the level of internationalization achieved by their university in relation to its ambitions (see Table 2). The reasons given for these negative assessments included a lack of skills, motivation, funding, or the absence of a mission statement for the Bachelor's programme in social work. The positive assessments mentioned the improvement of educational practice and a collective agreement on the importance of internationalization.

## Challenges

Regarding the main challenges to internationalizing social work education, 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. One of the respondents commented: "As it is now, I have to do

**Table 2: Positive and negative assessment of the level of internationalization achieved in relation to the university's stated ambitions**

Assessment n	Negative (score <5) 26	Positive (score > 5) 6
Reasons given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language knowledge and skills are limited</li> <li>- Too dependent on a handful of motivated individuals</li> <li>- No mission statement</li> <li>- We cannot host international students because we do not have enough classes in English</li> <li>- No funding/finances</li> <li>- It is easier at MA or PhD level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International courses implemented</li> <li>- Increasing student and staff mobility</li> <li>- Students acquire in-depth knowledge of intercultural aspects</li> <li>- Improvement of ICT possibilities</li> <li>- Our approach is pragmatic and flexible</li> <li>- Joining the EU is of great importance</li> </ul>

a lot of pushing and pulling". Finally, a lack of financial resources is also considered a challenge. Cutbacks in Erasmus and other funding programmes are making mobility more difficult.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the theoretical section of this article, we summarized and explored the concepts of globalization in social work practice and the internationalization of social work education. We concluded that globalization has influenced thinking in relation to welfare policies and has implications for social work practices. Social work can be viewed as a local response to a series of challenges, which are also influenced by, if not created and sustained by, global factors. We also elaborated the local-global dialectic on the basis of Gray's distinction (2005) between the two perspectives of universalism and indigenization, concluding that both perspectives are meaningful and not mutually exclusive, but that they also require continuous reflection.

We defined the internationalization of social work education as a process of implementing both knowledge of the impact of globalization on the practice of social work at home and knowledge of social work practices, theories and research abroad. We then identified three dimensions of "internationalization" in social work education: the internationalized curriculum, mobility among students and lecturers, and the specific way in which international education policy is formulated.

Our survey was conducted according to these three dimensions and limited to the Bachelor's programme in social work. All respondents were approached through international networks and selected on the basis of their role and involvement in international work. We can therefore assume that they are not only well-informed but also convinced of the importance of the international dimension of social work education and that the real sceptics were not represented among our respondents. One potential shortcoming of our survey is whether these respondents' opinions may be unrepresentatively optimistic in view of their involvement in promoting the international dimension of social work education.

The survey demonstrates that most respondents agree that the main purpose of the internationalization of social work education is to prepare students for aspects of social work practice at home that are affected by processes of globalization. Some respondents added the importance of preparing for an international career, but indicated that their study programme does not fully achieve this. The survey demonstrates that the international dimension is mainly an integrated and mandatory part of the whole curriculum for all students. Most of the international

subjects presented in the survey are offered as a mandatory part of the curriculum. Somewhat surprisingly, the optional part of the international curriculum includes the subjects of the global agenda, international conflicts or disasters and sustainability. All these themes have a cross-national character and are probably considered to be of interest only for students who specifically wish to focus on the international aspects of social work. It was also striking that research universities make much more use of a second language in their study programmes than universities of applied sciences. However, giving lectures and presentations in a foreign language and cross-national e-learning constitute a minor part of the curriculum at all universities, even though this would seem to be (in our view) a basic requirement for internationalization.

With regard to mobility, one in seven domestic students spends some time abroad for placement or study purposes, while one in three staff members goes abroad, mainly for teaching, conferences, network activities and research. Although these numbers are not disappointing, most of the respondents were dissatisfied regarding the extent to which their universities had achieved their international ambitions. These respondents often mentioned a gap between the policy of the university and the practice of education. Language barriers pose a major challenge on the one hand, with teaching staff needing to improve their English in order to teach in English, develop courses in English and participate in international networks. On the other hand, respondents highlighted a lack of interest in internationalization among both lecturers and students. This may well be related to another challenge, which we describe as a narrow vision on social work as a “local” profession, and a perception that, as such, social work is not affected by globalization. Finally, a basic lack of financial resources due to cutbacks in international funding is perceived as a challenge.

Our respondents represented a wide range of different social work curricula and practices, some more theory-oriented, others more practice-oriented. We postulated at the outset that a curriculum with a stronger theoretical focus on policy issues and the macro level in general would tend more towards internationalization than a curriculum that focuses on local social work practice, and we did indeed find some evidence of the greater extensive use of international literature. However, because of the influence of globalization on local practices, we would argue that the internationalization of practice-orientated curricula is equally important. We realize that the internationalization of these curricula can pose an even greater challenge, due to the narrower approach of indigenization, which disregards global factors.

During this study, we have become increasingly convinced that the extent to which globalization affects social work practice should be a subject of debate. We therefore feel that social work



education and research should aim to reveal the global dimension of practice and explore the opportunities to learn from social work practices abroad.

Gradually, we discovered that the concepts of indigenization and universalism had also coloured our own survey. For example, we avoided giving respondents any particular definition or standard of international social work education beforehand, because of the many different understandings of the concept. On the one hand we realize that, as a consequence, the notion of internationalization in social work education could be interpreted in many different ways, such as preparing students for work in international organizations, working abroad, comparative studies, or advocacy. On the other hand, we remain convinced that if we had worked with a narrower definition, we would not have been able to address the widest possible range of international educational practices.

This study also reveals that many educators believe that internationalizing the social work curriculum contributes to the professionalism of future practitioners and the quality of their work. It is remarkable that the implementation of the international dimension, so many years since Bologna, remains such a challenge. We are convinced that this is mainly due to the tensions between universalism and indigenization in social work practice and education. Referring to Lorenz (2001, p. 12), we believe that not only social work practice but also education needs “the paradigmatic openness that gives the chance to engage with very specific contexts, while at the same time striving for a degree of universality”.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We thank all our international colleagues for giving feedback and answering the questionnaire on internationalization.

## **NOTEN**

- 1 Both the noun “internationalization” and the adjective “international” can be found in literature. We prefer to use the term “internationalization of education” because this better reflects the dynamic nature of the process.
- 2 The results, as presented, are based on the first findings and need further investigation, especially with regard to the differences between curricula with and without an international dimension and how this impacts the work of professionals in practice.

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