

Social work and Challenges of Urban Diversity



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Preview

The booklet in front of you is the result of the collaboration of researchers from six European schools for Social Work. With funding of the EASSW, they were able to carry out a project titled Social work and Challenges of Urban Diversity.

Each partner contributed a practical case study, which was presented, analyzed and reflected during a symposium in Debrecen (2018). Also, a limited literature study was carried out. All this material is brought together in this booklet and edited for use in social work education. We hope to be able to offer a first impulse to teachers and students who are working on this subject.

1. Introduction

Globalization has resulted in growing diversity in urban neighbourhoods, “not only because the number of new identities is growing but also because identities are becoming more complex and fluid than ever” (Taşan-Kok et al., 2017). Big cities in particular are places where differences are negotiated. Colonial heritage, a succession of migration 'waves' and the diaspora of cultural minorities have left their imprint on the social fabric of urban settings in various ways: from urban ghettos over diverse neighbourhoods to arrival areas where newcomers only temporarily settle. People from different cultures and origins are living in the same geographical space, but at the same time, they are mentally moving back and forth between different worlds (their homeland of the past, their actual lived world, their projected world of the future). This multiplicity of lifeworlds make human interaction and a concern for the common good in these urban areas challenging. Of course, urban areas that attract this complex diversity of lifeworlds carry also their own history. Often these quarters already geographically embody dividing lines of social exclusion and deprivation, mainly caused by a combination of failed governance, cuts in public spending and economic transitions.

Some accounts of urban diversities consider them a driver of growth and social progress, whereas others point at increasing anxiety about immigration and segregation. A tangible societal challenge is the existence of tensions between different ethnic groups, between second-generation migrants and newcomers, but also between minority groups and their institutional environment (schools, municipal authorities, social services), which are expected to provide access to their rights and needs. This anxiety grows when social investment aimed at promoting spaces of multicultural cohabitation is scarce or has been cut.

These tensions in urban settings express and intensify vulnerabilities of precarious groups, but they also mirror huge challenges for the social work profession, whose competences need to be further developed to deal with the complexities of such urban tensions. This booklet is a first step towards education aiming at strengthening the (future) social professionals in intervening in urban tensions and celebrating the assets of very- diverse urban areas.

The booklet is the result of a cross-national European seminar (including participants from Belgium, Finland, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain) funded by the EASSW. The aim is to share international experience in which increasing diversity in different national and local contexts can be understood from the perspective of the social professional. It is a modest contribution to an educational approach on social work and the challenges of urban diversity, and hopes to inspire by:

- discussing practice performance and theory building based on case studies;
- presenting an example of how students and professionals can be challenged to map tensions in relation to diversity and polarization, identify strengths and risks and detect and explore the challenges of urban diversity.
- offering an educational approach to compare different case studies with a focus on distinctive urban tensions in diverse European urban settings

2. Different theoretical perspectives on urban diversity

Discussion on the challenges of urban diversity often focuses on migration and newcomers and their unsettling effect on an existing 'homogeneous and coherent' society. Many large European cities however have for decades been moving into the direction of majority-minority cities in which most of the population belongs to minority groups. In this project, different cities are involved with a large variety in how far this process has evolved. This will alter our thinking about what the major culture is and who is 'integrated' and who is 'not integrated'. According to Vertovec (2011), major cities in particular are the places where differences are negotiated. 'Cities are plural spaces, characterised by a superdiversity that demands the particular attention of social work in terms of solidarities, cohesion and appropriate cross-cultural responses'. 'Urban social work' is introduced as a concept to address the challenges for and the responses from the profession in the context of superdiversity as the urban condition of the 21st century.

This also means that first of all, we need a critical perspective on the negotiation of the concepts of 'social integration' and 'social cohesion'. The first contribution (2.1) offers this critical perspective and can be used for educational reasons to discuss and explore how social integration may enhance the wellbeing of both the immigrant and the receiving community.

The second contribution (2.2) describes how urban policies have assumed growing importance for the social inclusion of immigrants and their families. The contributor of this section addresses the need for strategies to make social work practice more reflective of clients' diversity, including the ethno-cultural diversification of staff recruitment and of service providers. In this section the importance of the local level is highlighted: '...it is in the metropolitan areas, that cultural and religious diversity is critically negotiated vis-à-vis the assimilative pressures and expectations of receiving societies'.

Ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is often linked to debates on policies to promote integration while also encouraging people to retain traditions and customs unique to their own group. Multiculturalism is a key concept, often equated with cultural

pluralism. Some societies however promote assimilation or the adaptation of majority norms and cultural traditions.

The different understandings of diversity have a major impact on social work practice. These understandings differ in the various national (historical and political) contexts but also in the different policy orientations that vary from assimilationist policies to the promotion of difference and multicultural policies. In European countries, in general, a weak multiculturalism can be found in which diversity is mainly tolerated within the private sphere, with a focus on antidiscrimination policies to facilitate assimilation. Historically, social work has been viewed as an arm of social control to bring 'others' in line with mainstream norms.

The theories on superdiversity emphasise the need to de-essentialize the understanding of ethnicity and culture and advocate a more structural focus. From this perspective the 'cultural competence' approach has been criticised because it views culture and ethnicity as static and fixed, and views 'culture' as something only people of colour have. It is also criticised as an individualized approach that does not involve institutional barriers.

In the Sage Handbook of Social Work (2012), an interesting overview is presented of different European perspectives and theories on diversity and social work practice (355–368). This overview can be supplemented with the theories on superdiversity, especially as presented in Flanders and the Netherlands (among others) in the work of Geldof (2016) and Crul (2013).

2.1 Social Integration: A concept for Social Work?

Hugh McLaughlin

The movement of people across national borders is not something new, but, has been a feature throughout history. People have crossed borders to achieve better life opportunities whether this be in seeking safety by escaping from intolerable conditions like famine, war and/or improving their work prospects. This happens within national and international structures which govern the available legal and illegal routes, identify who can work legally and who cannot and who has rights to welfare. Migrants' lives are experienced through this interplay of personal agency and structure. When we talk of migration, we generally refer to people from the Global South coming to the Global North, or in more recent years, including those from increases in the size of the European Union e.g. Romania. The EU migrants currently have freedom of movement throughout the EU member states. These migrants are often conceptualised by the media as being a 'burden' on health and welfare services and taking local people's homes. However, it is noticeable that the discourse on migration rarely discusses the issue of migration from wealthy white countries e.g. USA (McLaughlin 20XX).

It is thus not surprising that in city neighbourhoods where many of these migrants live there is hostility amongst the residents and concerns about the safety of all those living within such communities. In our discussions in Debrecen, it was suggested that social integration could act as a conceptual tool and lens for addressing how social workers should act within such urban communities.

Social Integration

Social integration is a contested term but was suggested as a concept that could incorporate the different strands of social worker involvement in urban communities. The use of the term in our discussions was immediately contested saying it had been 'tried in Belgium and it didn't work'. It was claimed the Belgian government had established a process of geographical social integration into housing areas in Brussels but that it had not achieved its goals. Alternatively, it was suggested that social cohesion is often defined as a cohesive society or neighbourhood that works toward the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation whilst creating a sense of belonging and trust. Whilst this paper discusses social integration in terms of migrants

and diversity, we should acknowledge social integration intersects with age, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, employment, income, social class and so on. A neighbourhood or community that meets the needs of young people may be very alienating for older people or parents with young children. To 'integrate' one section of society may ostracise others.

Berry (1997) developed a well-known theoretical framework that has been to understand immigrants' adaptation to a new society and includes four strategies:

1. assimilation – when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures;
2. separation – when individuals hold on to their original culture and wish to avoid interaction with others;
3. marginalization – when there is little cultural maintenance or having relationships with others;
4. integration – when there is maintaining of one's original culture while engaging in daily interactions with other groups

The fourth alternative is considered to be the best approach, this demands that integration is considered a two-way process. It must not only be successfully pursued by migrants, but also by the host society. Thus, the host society must also be open and inclusive and welcoming to social and cultural diversity. Berry (1997) also notes that for this to work, refugees should be provided with equal access to housing, health care, education, training and employment. This also suggests that integration is an interactive concept between individual agency of the immigrant and host society members and structural access to social justice and civil rights.

In 1994, the General Assembly of the United Nations identified social integration as a key construct in structuring social development. However, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD, 1994) noted that social integration was an ambiguous term with at least three meanings. In its positive sense, it can be seen as an inclusionary goal that emphasises equal opportunities and human rights for all. This in many ways is very appealing for a social work audience and reflects the position of some

of our discussants whereby social integration can be seen as inherently good. However, such a perspective ignores the nature of poverty, marginalisation and precarity by assuming all we need to do is to include those who have previously been excluded. Social integration in this perspective ignores structural issues, poverty and inequality and may in effect lead to 'social integration' into an already marginalised, unequal and unjust community or society.

Secondly, social integration can be viewed in a negative sense, whereby social integration implies an imposition of uniformity and denial of diversity. In this perspective it is claimed that the terminology masks a form of social colonisation, whereby it is the migrant who is seen as needing to 'change' or to 'fit in' and to adopt the values and norms of the receiving culture even if these were in contradiction to their previous beliefs. The receiving culture, unsurprisingly, is often viewed as superior; after all, the migrant has moved to live there. It is the new culture that should be aspired to. Mort (2017) also identified that migrants believed a 'good migrant' was someone who kept a low profile, did not create waves and did not contaminate the situation for others. Such a perspective suggests that far from being socially integrated, migrants should be grateful for being in the host country, diversity is bad and what is needed is homogeneity and uniformity. In such a perspective it denies the need for cultural and social diversity or ignores the benefits that migrants can bring to such communities.

Thirdly, for others it just represents the established patterns of human relations in any given society or urban neighbourhood. As such it captures the notions of 'greater' and 'lesser' social integration in which some indicators could be identified as proxy measures e.g. levels of crime or extent of community activities. Nevertheless, such a positive notion of degrees of integration neglects who decides what is 'greater' and 'lesser' and how much social integration is good before it becomes uniformity under another name.

As the discussion above shows it is possible for at least three people talking about social integration to be talking about in totally different ways. The ambiguity of the term also helps in that they can all talk and assume the other is agreeing with them! As such the use of social integration as a lens for examining the social work role in urban communities is flawed, being neither precise nor reflective of social work values.

Robilia (2108) noted that refugees' and migrants' social integration is complex and multidimensional. Social integration is dependent upon factors like integration into the employment, health, education, social and welfare systems. Such processes can be 'bumpy' or 'smooth' depending on the personal experiences migrants and refugees arrive with and the responsiveness of the receiving nation and community.

Conclusions

This short paper suggests that social integration as a lens to examine young people's place in urban communities is inadequate and although it has both positive and negative overtones, even the positive overtones require critical analysis. Whilst positively it suggests inclusion, the question remains inclusion into what? If this is inclusion into discrimination, poverty and exclusion from wider society this can hardly be seen as positive, promoting the status quo potentially masking social inequality and social justice. Other conceptions of social integration emphasised the 'social colonisation' potential of the concept and its drive towards homogenisation and uniformity denying diversity and the benefits it may bring.

In order to be able to use social integration as a lens the concept needs to be tempered with at least one other concept; otherwise it is in danger of meaning everything to everyone and therefore meaning nothing.

One place where such a tempered concept might be identified is from the agreed IFSW and IAASW global definition of social work (IFWS and IAASW, 2014) which states that:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

In order to make social integration meaningful and to avoid its negative consequences and ambiguity it is necessary to understand it in relation to other concepts. In doing this

and using the Global definition of social work it is possible to begin exploring how social integration enhances the wellbeing of both the immigrant and the receiving community. If both of these can be seen to be positive it could be argued that social integration is successful. I am though aware that the nature of enhanced wellbeing requires some unravelling and clearer articulation, it does though begin to move the debate forward.

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2.2 Increasing diversity in urban neighbourhoods

Paulo Boccagni

There is a deep-rooted tradition in social work with immigrants, ethnic and other minorities, wherever social work has been institutionalised as a profession. What is new or distinctive, then, in nowadays' experience of social work in urban multi-ethnic contexts? Some broad trends can be highlighted, here, to address this question, both conceptually and in terms of policies and practices. A shift in the use and significance of some key notions can be traced at a theoretical level. This is paralleled, and to some extent related with, an increasing politicisation of migration and ethnic diversity, a more visible fragmentation of migration trajectories (including circular, stepwise, "stuck" on "in-limbo" ones), an emerging consensus – at least among migration and urban scholars – about the need to acknowledge urban life as a matter of intersecting axes of diversity.

At both a conceptual and a political level, the bulk of the recent debate on immigrant integration has gained or retained a strongly neo-assimilationist tone. An emphasis on the values of identity and national belonging has gained ground in the public debate across Europe, all the more so with the political emergence or consolidation of populist movements and governments. For immigrant newcomers this means, at best, the predominance of regulatory actions and public rhetoric that emphasise language learning, fully-fledged political loyalty and adaptation to national values as pre-requisites for societal membership; and at worst, particularly with asylum seekers, the adoption of highly restrictive social policies, where public support is admitted – if at all – only for those who are assessed to comply with a "real refugee" profile.

However, in a longer time perspective, the jargon of integration in Europe has hardly been a prerogative of anti-immigration agendas. Rather, it has often been advanced to argue for a processual, multi-dimensional and somewhat interactive approach to immigrant incorporation; one that, in the first place, aimed to set itself apart from the US discourse on assimilationism.

It is also important to acknowledge that immigrant or refugee integration primarily occurs at a local level. The same holds for the regulation and management of cultural

diversity. Urban policies have assumed growing importance for the social inclusion of immigrants and their families. It is at the local level, and most notably in metropolitan areas, that cultural and religious diversity is critically negotiated vis-à-vis the assimilative pressures and expectations of receiving societies. And once we scale down at a local level, as many recent studies have done, the range of public policies on majority-minority relations is just irreducible to a simple “backlash” against multiculturalism. While language categories and declared policies have undergone major changes, at the urban level a variety of context- (and path-) dependent practices can still be appreciated, with several aspects of public recognition of cultural differences. The urban arena should then be understood as a policy-making field – indeed, a battlefield – in itself; one that has some degree of freedom from the declared national philosophies of integration. Local public policy is necessarily more sensitive to the problems and social dynamics which result from the settlement of foreign-born populations, rather than to principled statements.

For sure, national or local restrictive policies have a major influence on social welfare provisions, sometimes making for internal borders that reinforce the inter-state ones against (immigrant) newcomers. However, even in relatively inclusive local welfare arrangements, the recent comparative literature has revealed a trend towards de-targetization: a pervasive discursive emphasis on mainstreaming, as part of an apparently de-ethnicised welfare provision. At least at a communicative level, local authorities across different European countries tend to emphasise the need to improve the welfare of the local society as a whole, while watering down any special measure for immigrants and ethnic minorities. The discursive repertoires of social cohesion and community cohesion point exactly to this political agenda.

This development, in turn, connects with the ongoing critical debate on multiculturalism. The relevance of this concept, here, does not involve so much the political philosophy debate, whereby this notion refers to “the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity” (Modood, 2007: 2). Nor does it overlap with multiculturalism as a public idiom, or with the ways in which this notion is evoked in a

variety of political and public discourses, across countries, as supposedly a synonym of ethnic segregation and policy failure in managing inter-group relations.

Instead, multiculturalism can be helpfully used here in a more “modest” and descriptive sense: a way of highlighting that living with diversity is simply an everyday, commonplace experience – with no particular political salience or implications – across multiethnic neighbourhoods on a global scale. The argument of everyday multiculturalism points exactly to all the ways in which migration-driven diversity is normalised and assumed as an ordinary part of grassroots interactions in the public space, rather than standing up as something special, exceptional or in need of further justification.

Interestingly, diversity itself has often taken the place of multiculturalism as a label for projects and initiatives concerning ethnic and cultural minorities. Making diversity an element of attraction – or at least a “commonplace” one – has even become an objective of urban marketing campaigns. While ethnic neighbourhoods are often seen as icons of degradation and segregation, in certain circumstances – and once properly gentrified – they can become tourist attractions, leisure-time destinations and cultural experiences which are close to “home” while reproducing the charm of distant worlds.

Another critical aspect to understand and cope with urban diversity, in a social work perspective, has to do with the role and contribution of civil society. This may result in formal engagement in the urban governance of immigrant and minority settlement, as well as in more spontaneous and grassroots developments. Particularly thorny issues, such as the needs of asylum seekers or unauthorised immigrants, require the formation of relational networks and strategic alliances among different actors. The involvement of civil society may also increase as a side effect of harsher regulation policies, as a way of filling the gaps in public policy provision, or as a reaction – in fact, a buffer – vis-à-vis (native) public opinion. For sure, the category of civil society embraces a broad range of bodies, ranging from formal non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to religious institutions, trade unions, immigrant and ethnic organisations, anti-racist and radical social movements. Their role is often important in policy consultation and service delivery, but also in the protection and advocacy of migrant and minority rights.

A novel optic on the faceted and sometimes contradictory role of civil society comes from the emerging debates on local arrival infrastructures, as well as on “shadow social work”, within the literature on local social welfare – with a particular attention to immigrant newcomers. A comparative focus on the challenges of urban diversity in terms of vulnerability and discrimination requires, therefore, in-depth consideration of the faceted field for political mobilisation at a local level. Civil society and informal initiatives have gained public salience and influence policy choices inside it, just as nativist and anti-immigrant movements have done on the opposite side.

Summing up, urban areas all over Europe provide a laboratory for studying the problems and possibilities stemming from so-called ‘(super)diversity’: contradictions and openings, unprecedented mixes and identity-related claims and conflicts. Nowadays, possibly even more than in the past, multiethnic neighbourhoods are emblematic of the tensions and conflicts around the long-term settlement of immigrant minorities. The notion of diversity is central to make sense of these developments and of their determinants.

Several multicultural stances have been reframed, at an urban level, exactly under the banner of diversity. How far an emphasis on it can reach, without addressing more deep-rooted issues of ethnicised inequality, is of course a different matter. Celebrating the normality of diversity does not necessarily affect the power inequalities that often shape majority-minority relations. Making a strong case for societal diversity, rather than difference, may then results in a paradoxically depoliticised argument. At the same time, in a diversity optic, difference is not just something “out there”, or a prerogative of outsiders, but rather, a relational property, based on any shared attribute “that has a significant impact on group interaction and outcomes” (Di Tomaso et al., 2007, p. 474). Despite its shortcomings, diversity is also a welcome warning against the tendency to (over)categorise difference, and hence to stereotype and essentialise it, which pervades the traditional multicultural discourse. Relative to difference, moreover, diversity has more relational bases, proper of a notion that invites to “a swing from ascribed, group-based attributes to self-attributed, individual characteristics” (Vertovec, 2012, p. 295).

Having said this, the significance of diversity goes well beyond the more instrumental or cosmetic ways of using the term. As a concept, diversity does not stand only for a byword or a principle. Even at that level, its importance should not go unnoticed, as diversity, far from being a simply descriptive notion, has also a strong normative connotation – as a socially meaningful value to be achieved, maintained or contested, depending on the underlying ideological agenda.

However, “diversity” is also a lens upon group and individual interactions between the societal mainstream and a number of minorities, along “ethnic” or other lines (including gender, age, religion, sexuality, legal status, length of stay and life course position). Furthermore, diversity can be appreciated as an empirical attribute of multiethnic societal arrangements, and hence as an object of social research. At its simplest, diversity can then be defined as any “condition of heterogeneity within a certain whole” (van Ewijk, 2011, p. 684), or as “the distribution of differences among members of a unit with respect to common attribute” (Harrison and Klein, 2007); not any attribute, though, but “a meaningful characteristic: one that influences the identity and the way of life of that person” (van Ewijk, 2011, p. 685). What makes diversity “matter” as a concept therefore is not interpersonal or group difference per se, but its social construction as meaningful – that is, as an appropriate basis for category making, and possibly for group making as well. Diversity has to do with external categorizations, as much as with subjective alignments and identifications. It is “not only the amount of variation in a certain attribute, but [it] is also subject to individuals’ reactions to that attribute” (Qin et al., 2013, p. 9). The relative salience of certain forms (or attributes) of diversity, rather than others, is itself a context-dependent and politically meaningful question. At its simplest, then, the emphasis on diversity suggests two simultaneous social developments: a significant ethno-cultural diversification within a particular place or social group, and its interlocking with other axes of societal differentiation.

When it comes to social work practice, research and education, it is important to appreciate how diversity works out in a given context, or with a particular target population, in three respects:

- the ways of framing clients (e.g. immigrant or ethnic minorities) in the light of the interaction between ethnicity or migration background and other axes of diversity (e.g. education, social class, gender);
- the organisational cultures and arrangements of service providers, i.e. their background of experience and their flexibility in dealing with diversity, given the relatively simple and rigid categorisation practices, and the organisational inertias or resistances, which are inherent in any large-scale professional arrangement;
- the ongoing negotiation of street-level relationships with “diverse” clients, as a continuous balancing act between the extremes of over-culturalization and culture blindness. Here again, there is a century-long legacy in social work with immigrants and refugees that can be helpfully recovered, and valued, for research, education and practice in diverse urban neighbourhoods.

3. European case studies

In order to nourish the discussion during the course, students can discuss one or more of the following case studies, which will form the basis of the course. In this chapter six different case-studies from different neighbourhoods, cities and countries will be presented:

1. Madrid (Spain): Dealing with vulnerable people. Minors and cuts in the Hortaleza district.
2. Trento (Italy): Social work and everyday neighbourhood interactions with newcomer asylum seekers.
3. Brussels (Belgium): A constructive approach to radicalisation.
4. Utrecht (The Netherlands): How do social professionals deal with tensions in the neighbourhood, related to diversity?
5. Turku (Finland): 'We foundation and We houses' in Pansio-Perno.
6. Debrecen (Hungary): Nagysándor (Alexander the Great) colony.

All cases will be presented accorded to the following format:

- **Context:** The urban setting and its challenges, policy background, social work background, relevant legal background
- **Case:** What happened? Who was involved? Who did what?
- **Key issues:** Perceived from the perspective of citizens involved, as well as social work professionals
- **Concepts, themes and values:** A short interpretation of basic concepts, themes and values.

3.1 Dealing with vulnerable people. Minors and cuts in the Hortaleza district (Madrid, Spain)

Emilio J. Gomez Ciriano

Context

Hortaleza is one of the 21 districts of Madrid, with a surface of 27,4 sq. Km and a population of 180,000 inhabitants. It is located in the North of Madrid. It comprises six quarters. In one of them, Pinar del Rey – the most populated and the most ancient one – there are two reception facilities with children’s shelters. The first one, called ‘Centro Isabel Clara Eugenia’ is for children up to 15 years old, and the second one ‘Centro de Primera Acogida Hortaleza’ for children up to 18 years old.

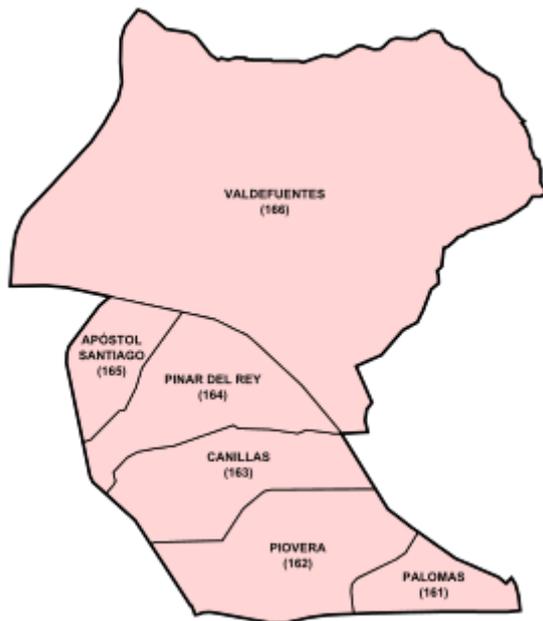
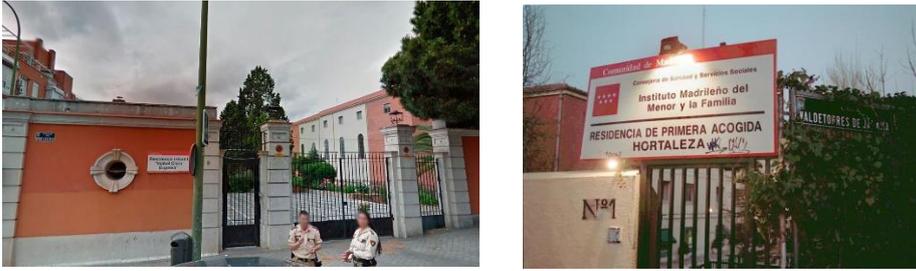


Figure 1. Neighbourhoods in Hortaleza (the two centres are located in ‘Pinar del Rey’)

Both centres were conceived as emergency placements for children entering care. According to the current legislation, children can remain there for a maximum of two months and once their needs have properly been addressed, they would be referred to other facilities more suitable to be cared for (care for babies and very young children centres, group care for children’s homes, therapeutic high support units, residential treatment centres, etc.).



Picture 1. Isabel Clara Eugenia and Hortaleza emergency centres

The fact of the matter is that the abovementioned referral centres for children are overcrowded and do not have capacity for new admissions. Their accommodation capacities were seriously affected by retrenchment policies. It is estimated that more than 300 places were eliminated during the crisis. As a result, minors overstay in both emergency centres waiting for the moment to be referred.

To make things more complex, since the beginning of 2017, a number of unaccompanied minors arriving at the Spanish shores from Africa were also referred to these two reception centres to stay till their identification and registration procedures could be finalised. The reasons given for this decision were that specific facilities for hosting unaccompanied minors did not exist in Madrid. However, no resources were allocated, no specific personnel deployed (translators, intercultural mediators) to cope with this new reality even when it was well known that the situation of unaccompanied minors was completely different from other situations of the minors who lived there.

As a result, there are minors with different needs cohabiting in emergency placements that outnumber by far the accommodation capacities. Neither the personnel is prepared for managing tensions that erupt daily nor are the premises adequate for attending to these children.

This situation has been repeatedly denounced by Save the Children and Fundación Raíces. Both institutions have expressed their concern on aggression and bad treatment of minors, most of whom do not want to stay in the premises and escape to the nearby parks because they do not trust the educators, social workers, nor security guards. In the parks some of them sniff glue because they feel desperate and alone. Some of them also can be observed close to the public library trying to catch the open Wi-Fi

connection. In the last two months six of them disappeared and no one knows where they are.

It is important to highlight that both the Hortaleza and Isabel Clara Eugenia centres are open premises. This means that children are not in custody and can enter and leave freely. However, there are some rules they have to obey and they must also go to school. There is no judicial order to keep them retained. Their custody is under the responsibility of the Community of Madrid (the regional government) who must control and take care of them. There is not enough provision of emotional or psychological support for long stays because the objectives of these centres are just identifying, registering and referring.

The Spanish ombudsman (defensor del pueblo) visited the centres recently and, in his latest annual report, highlighted the situation of vulnerability in which these children lived. He demanded the regional government to adopt measures in relation to these minors by adopting protocols, capacitation of personnel, implementation and improvement of resources, etc.

Case

The presence of a group of children, aged 10 to 16 years in the park, sniffing glue and quarrelling, sometimes in a violent way, was soon denounced by some neighbours who declared to have lived episodes of violence while they were walking through the park and carry their kids to play in the playing zones. Some thefts were also reported to the police. A group of neighbours (still minority) has begun to promote demonstrations and the creation of street patrols to 'protect their streets' against these minors. There are also some initiatives in social media to close the centres.

The two main neighbour associations and NGOs working in the district have joined forces to counter-react and deliver a completely different message. 'We want these children to be integrated'. 'The way regional government is acting does not favour integration, so we demand urgent measures so that children can be attended to and cared for with dignity and full respect of their rights'. They also demand a proper treatment to their addictions.

Social workers, educators of the centres, and NGOs have demanded more resources. They have asked to reopen all the places eliminated in residential facilities during the crisis, so that referrals can be done timely and minors do not need to stay in emergency premises longer than necessary.

At the present moment the situation is, according to the regional government, on the way to being solved. Some more social workers and educators will be employed in the following months, and also the municipality of Madrid – which holds no responsibility for the management of these centres but is responsible for parks and gardens – has sent two street mentors (social workers) to accompany the children whilst in the park. Also, a specialised unit of local police is intervening with them in a pedagogic way.

As Hortaleza is one of the districts on which the feeling of community is stronger, the spreading of xenophobic and racist attitudes has been stopped momentarily. However, more information, more resources and more coordination are still needed for this situation not to be repeated.

Media have played an interesting role in this case.

- On TV: There have been several programmes dealing with this issue. In most of the cases they focussed on portraying minors as criminals with no references to the causes of their vulnerability or to the conditions they lived in at the centres. In the programme the children were nicknamed: ‘the glue band’.
- On radio: There has been a radio broadcast related to the situation of these centres giving voice to all parties: neighbours, workers and associations with the clear purpose of non-stigmatising.
- On press: The local newspaper (El periódico de Hortaleza) portrayed the perspectives of the neighbour associations in favour of a proper integration, rights of the children and respect of their dignity.

Key issues

- Retrenchment policies and how they affect minors at risk
- Care of unaccompanied minors
- Fear and its manipulation for xenophobic purposes
- Criminalisation of the children (particularly if they are foreigners)

- The importance of building up communities
- Intercultural social work
- The role of the media
- Conflict management
- How to transmit messages honestly and transparently when there are cultural contexts?
- Children care networks
- Coordination
- Multiprofessional social work.

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3.2 Social work and everyday neighbourhood interactions with newcomer asylum seekers (Trento, Italy)

Paolo Boccagni

Context

The case study I present here is about the management of, and the community work associated with, a reception centre for asylum seekers. This is located in a semi-peripheral neighbourhood of a middle-sized city in Northern Italy. My choice has to do with an academic interest in social work with refugees, but it also reflects my direct experience, as I am currently doing an ethnographic study inside this centre.

Italy has been the arena of a particularly hostile anti-immigrant discourse over the last two or three years. Yet the most remarkable increase in the inflow of asylum seekers – many of them just “in transit” – has occurred prior to that, between 2014 and 2016. This has broadly overlapped with the so-called refugee crisis all over Europe, resulting in a significant enhancement of the pre-existing schemes of refugee early reception. The relatively well-institutionalised SPRAR (Protection System for Refugees and Asylum seekers), run by local authorities on a voluntary basis, has been paralleled with a more top-down, emergency scheme of “Extraordinary Reception”, managed directly under the aegis of the Ministry of Interiors and involving a larger variety of service providers and, on average, lesser standards of quality and control.

Under the extraordinary reception model, which is especially relevant for my case study, newcomer asylum seekers are allocated to local communities in fixed quotas, nationwide, consistent with demographic and socio-economic variables. As of July 2018, the SPRAR system takes up about 36,000 persons, 10% of them being unaccompanied minors. The Extraordinary Reception system, however, has a much larger arena of clients – almost 180,000. The take-up basically consists of housing and board for a limited time period, with a highly variable set of further provisions related to education (particularly language courses), vocational training and socialisation within the receiving society.¹ As of October 2018, after a new and highly contested law provision (Decree law

¹ More information can be found on the following websites: www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy; www.sprar.it/english; www.unhcr.it; www.openmigration.org.

no. 113/2018), the public resources for asylum seeker reception have been severely curtailed, particularly with respect to recent newcomers.

In the regional area where the Centre is located, policies and services for asylum seekers are centrally managed under one dedicated public agency. This special authority has a role of general coordination and funding for integration initiatives that are mostly implemented by third sector organisations and other local service providers. The Centre itself is an instance of a secondary reception facility. It is dedicated only to asylum seekers that have already formally applied for protection, and have already stayed for several months in larger, more centralised reception facilities. It still falls under the “extraordinary” scheme although, under the integrated reception scheme of the local authority, the difference between ordinary and extraordinary provisions is arguably less visible than elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the local setting up of a number of dedicated housing facilities – even only provisionally, and out of pre-existing and deteriorated buildings – has been a remarkable source of contention, within already marginalised urban neighbourhoods. This is the background for the case study I am about to discuss in the next sections.

Case

The Centre had been built some decades ago as a motel, just behind a gasoline station, not far away from the city centre. It was then turned into a student hall, and after that into a reception facility for asylum seekers (although, significantly, all of the signs at its entrance still refer to a place for students – no mention to refugees, no logo of the relevant local authority or of welfare service providers). From September 2014 onwards, the Centre has been hosting over seventy asylum seekers, all of them male in their earlier 20s. About 80% of them come from West Africa, mostly Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Guinea, with a “minority” of guests coming from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Consistent with the orientation to promote individual autonomy, which informs “secondary reception” facilities, guests have a degree of domestic space of their own. They are hosted in rooms with two beds (and one bathroom) each, plus one kitchenette in every two rooms. A social equipe with one coordinator and five operators is currently employed in the centre, together with a team of porters, thus providing a round-the-clock service. No member of the staff is trained as a professional social worker, although

social workers from the public agency play a pivotal role, together with health and legal advisors, in supervising the “individualised project” of each guest. Such a project typically includes educational, vocational and socio-cultural activities. In fact, it is public social workers – not the Centre operators or the entity employing them – who assign asylum seekers to the Centre, and ultimately decide on their time of permanence there (up to two years or more, in practice, in several of the cases I have observed).

In terms of social work with diversity, however, the internal organisation of the Centre is less interesting than its interactions with the outer environment and the ways of managing them. Since its opening to asylum seekers as guests, the Centre has periodically come to the spotlight of local mass-media, whether for its very existence, as a concentration of black-skinned young males in a relatively homogeneous working class neighbourhood; for the protests occasionally enacted by the guests themselves against the very long processing time of their asylum applications; or sometimes for police round-ups related to drug dealing and, once, to a case of sexual violence occurred elsewhere. All over the years, the Centre has gained a predominantly poor reputation. This, however, seems driven less by specific episodes of deviance or criminality than by the mainstream public representation of asylum seekers as “fake” or undeserving refugees.

The significance of this case for analysis, in fact, has not to do much with one specific episode, but with a more persistent aspect: the contradictory pressures that shape everyday life in the Centre, as experienced by asylum seeker guests. Structural isolation, public invisibility and little spontaneous connections with the outside world are paralleled by periodical, mostly top-down attempts to bridge the gap with the local community, while also trying to make the place itself more hospitable.

In principle, all operators acknowledge the merit of community work at a neighbourhood level, with a view to enabling positive relations between guests and local inhabitants – or at least, with the self-selected minorities of local activists, volunteers, and association members. Yet, the local community public events in which asylum seekers are actively involved are increasingly rare. No doubt, a number of them do participate in community engagement, volunteering and social help, wherever the opportunity arises. They do so more as individuals on their own, though, than as

inhabitants of the Centre, or members of the local community. As interesting, visits to the Centre from outsiders – i.e. native people, as opposed to friends and co-nationals, who do visit the place – are very infrequent. No volunteers attend the Centre, other than two or three people who give classes in Italian. It is as if the guests were living in a parallel, self-secluded reality, at least as long as they are in the Centre (which they may leave any time during the day, but not at night). While this may be not perceived as a problem by the guests, it does clash with the initial orientation to turn the Centre into a hub for inclusive diversity in the neighbourhood, rather than just a temporary container for asylum seekers.

Key issues

As my ongoing ethnography in the Centre suggests, a few issues are particularly salient in the eyes of three categories of stakeholders: the inhabitants of the relevant neighbourhood, asylum seekers guests in the Centre, and the social operators employed in it. Although not all these issues fall in a formal social work remit, it is important to analyse them in order to appreciate the opportunity and risks of community social work in urban areas of new ethno-national diversity.

Emerging perceptions in the local community

As far as the neighbourhood community is concerned, the key issue may have simply to do with an increase in visible and racialised diversity in the public space. While this is not an issue in itself, it can be constructed as such – all the more so under the current political climate in Italy – and be a source of perceived insecurity and mixed emotional reactions. At another level, though, the issue is rather the paucity of opportunities for interaction between the local community and asylum seekers from the Centre. While there are basic everyday interactions in the neighbourhood streets and shops, most of them fall into a frame of parallel lives. It is as if two separate worlds were coexisting with each other, in the Centre or in the public space, with little mutual contact. This may be enough for racialised and “otherised” groups to be perceived as more “normal”, over time, as a part of the local population. It is not enough, though, for relations of mutual support to take off, and for the potential of the local community to be valued accordingly.

Emerging perceptions among asylum seeker guests

From the point of view of asylum seekers themselves, the relationship with the local community (or the lack thereof) is clearly not a priority. As long as it matters, this has more to do with guests' need to "fill" time meaningfully, once mandatory tasks such as language courses, or applications for internships or jobs, have been fulfilled. Under conditions of extended waiting, the key challenge has to do with filling and imbuing with sense what seems to be dead and still time; or indeed, a suspended temporality, between a past existence which is hardly ever discussed explicitly, and is often referred to as a source of troublesome "thoughts", whenever a person is alone; and a highly uncertain and blurred, but potentially very open future ahead of them. Importantly, the Centre guests are strongly encouraged to engage in all sort of recreational, sport and social activities, including forms of volunteering that involve the neighbourhood in which the Centre is located. While a few asylum seekers are active in many of these initiatives, the bulk of them are reluctant to any active involvement – all the more so in what they perceive, with some good reason, as a fundamentally short term and temporary accommodation, both regarding the Centre and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Emerging perceptions among social operators at the Centre

As my ongoing ethnography suggests, social operators working there are well aware of their relatively little achievements, so far, in terms of an active engagement with the local community. They would probably disagree, though, both on the reasons for this, and on the actual merit and importance of community work, relative to other aspects of their mandate in the Centre. Three questions are worth highlighting here: first, the priority given to individualised support strategies – rather than community-oriented ones – with a view to enhancing educational and job-related skills, as enabled by the relatively well-individualised take-up of the Centre guests; second, the day-to-day engagement in all sorts of chores for the maintenance of the Centre itself, a relatively deteriorated infrastructure whose "domestication" makes already for a task in itself; third, and no less important, the provisionality that marks the housing careers of all guests. The latter might stay there one or two years, or even longer, but many have far shorter and hard-to-predict stays. The provisionality of the refugee reception project, hence of the work contracts of most operators, is also an issue.

Based on these remarks, I see this case study as a source of insight into some key concepts. For each of them, interestingly, it unveils some tension between their unequivocal clarity at a theoretical level and the ambiguous complexity they reveal, once it comes to everyday social work practice.

Concepts, themes and values

The first key notion is autonomy, as a value to be cultivated, and an aim to be pursued, with the Centre guests. This aim is well achieved at first sight, considering the remarkable room for manoeuvre asylum seekers have in managing their everyday routines (cooking, attending to domestic chores, or just staying in their rooms). Yet, a more substantive understanding of their autonomy would involve much more than that. It entails overcoming guests' dependence on the Centre itself, as long as they get a job and find an autonomous, non-subsidised accommodation (provided their legal status allows for this). The impact of the Centre as a reception project, in this sense, is far more variable and hard to assess. Furthermore, enhancing autonomy also means facilitating connectedness, i.e. guests' ability to build relationships beyond the circle of co-nationals, whenever this is desired or deemed necessary. The risk exists, though, that a narrow sense of "autonomy" is applied here, based on guests being just left in their rooms all the time, isolated from the external world, rather than encouraged to engage with it. Albeit there may be little new in the tension between autonomy and control, this case study does invite to explore further its implications all over the "social welfare careers" of asylum seekers and refugees.

Another key aspect is social cohesion, less as a direct aim of social work practice than as an expected after-effect of it at a neighbourhood level, and beyond. What this case study shows is that, in a traditionally homogeneous ethnic context, the mediation of specially trained community workers is necessary to create spaces for interethnic gathering and mutual recognition. At the same time, in a relatively affluent urban context such as the one of Northern Italy, the risk for social cohesion has to do less with interethnic conflict than with mutual isolation between different ethnic and racial groups.

Homemaking is another key notion, one that does not belong to the conceptual repertoire of social work but can be employed to advance it further. Rather than just

“managing” the stay of asylum seekers in the Centre, the team of social operators have systematically tried to make the place more home-like to the eyes of guests themselves, through initiatives ranging from beautification of the built environment and its semi-public spaces (TV room, entrance hall etc.), to shared activities such as cultivating urban gardens, doing participatory workshops and organising music events. As my ethnography suggests, the extent to which the Centre is experienced as home-like at all varies with the personal circumstances of every guest. There is huge variation, for instance, in the extent to which their rooms are “domesticated” and personalised, or left instead as empty, transient, ultimately irrelevant places. Again, homemaking cannot be framed as a direct and measurable outcome of social work practice, but it can be appreciated as a meaningful after-effect of successful initiatives. The more significant constraint, which applies to social work with asylum seekers at large, has rather to do with the effect of temporality: how far guests can be motivated to make themselves at home in a typically transient life environment, which may have little to do with their next destinations, remains an open question.

One final point has precisely to do with the chances to cultivate forms of *future-oriented empowerment*, under circumstances of compressed and uncertain temporality. It is quite difficult, as the recent experience shows, to encourage guests’ connections with the local community as an aim in itself. Factors like their very real provisionality, or their imaginaries associated with different and supposedly better places, militate against this possibility. More promising, albeit no less difficult, is to try and activate guests around public and social activities which they perceive as rewarding or useful in themselves, whatever the context in which they take place. In a nutshell, then, the service provider and the operators in the Centre have all interests, and even deontological obligations, to enhance collaborative horizontal ties with the local community, as a matter of mutual recognition, support and development. For most asylum seekers’ guests, instead, the surrounding neighbourhood is unlikely to be perceived as a key interlocutor in the long term – as a source of attachment and belonging there. It can equally be appreciated, though, as a setting for social activities to be learnt and then reproduced elsewhere, and as a source of bridging social capital, potentially reproducible anywhere else in the future.

3.3 A constructive approach to radicalisation (Brussels, Belgium)

Mieke Schrooten and Erik Claes

Context

Brussels is a small world city and the capital of Belgium and of Europe. The European institutions settled in Brussels over fifty years ago. Today the international functions of the city are very important.

Brussels is typified by a complex institutional context dominated by a community split between Flemish and Walloon communities. Various authorities are active on the territory of the Brussels Capital Region: three community committees, one regional authority, two communities, the federal government, nineteen municipal authorities and finally supranational and international institutions. These different governments each exercise their own powers on the same territory but are also interdependent at the same time.

Since the 1960s, migrant populations have increased to the point of outnumbering local populations in almost every municipality, turning the city into a majority-minority city. In 2015, 70% of the (official) citizens had a migration background (looking beyond the actual passport and including people with another nationality when they were born, or with at least one of the parents who had another nationality). In the most diverse municipalities of Brussels, up to 80% of the population has a migration background (Schaarbeek, Brussel inner-city, Sint Gillis, Sint-Jans-Molenbeek), or up to 90% in Sint-Joost-Ten-Node. This makes Brussels one of the most superdiverse cities in the world.

After the Paris and Brussels terrorist attacks, Brussels – and more specifically the municipality of Molenbeek – has struggled with a bad reputation, being displayed as a hotbed of Islamic terrorism. The commune has not yet completely recovered from this, and still faces many police interventions due to the ‘canal plan’ of Belgian interior minister Jan Jambon, who vowed “to clean up Molenbeek”.

Case

Since May 2017, the social work department of Odisee (a Brussels school of higher education) collaborates with two universities (KU Leuven, University of Liège) and a Brussels youth organisation in an action research on radicalisation. The project team bears the acronym CONRAD and refers to its full title: a Constructive Approach to

Radicalisation. The underlying ambition is to develop a critical analysis of the dominant discourse on radicalisation, as well as finding more constructive ways of talking about and discussing this sensitive topic. One of the central tools serving this ambition is participatory action research. Urban youngsters and youth workers, living in the poor canal neighbourhoods, are invited to take part in the research process. Their voices and their lifeworld count, as to the impact of the (de)radicalisation discourse, as well as to the developing of alternative ways of talking on the phenomenon of radicalisation. Another central tool is the use of digital storytelling. This is a methodology that allows participants to convey short, personal stories in the shape of digital images, combined with a voice recording. The personal character of photos, drawings chosen or produced by the narrator itself intensifies the process of ownership. The choice for digital stories issued from the belief that this medium would help to amplify the often-forgotten voice of youngsters and youth workers in the debate about radicalisation.

Promising as these emancipatory tools of Participatory Action Research and digital storytelling may be, intervening as researchers, with a research agenda on radicalisation, appeared to be highly complex, risky, and problematic. The research revealed and intensified multiple tensions, questions, conflicts of values. Researchers faced an immense barrier of distrust due to a strong youth experience of being stigmatised and condemned as migrant, Muslim, criminal, and now with the term 'radicalisation' as a dangerous, potential terrorist. Youngsters and their youth workers see deradicalisation programmes as a political strategy of negative framing and as a vehicle for disciplining and controlling marginalised communities. Researchers are easily seen as part of these strategies. Research findings are also seen as potentially dangerous. Dissemination of these findings may easily contribute to the reproduction of these negative frames.

From February 2018 until now, one of the Odisee researchers and a member of the CONRAD team co-organised a series of interventions with urban youngsters from Molenbeek (study-trip to Istanbul, three weeks' adventure education in the mountains, commemoration of Moroccan soldiers on Belgian ground in the Second World War). In close cooperation with two local youth houses, the Odisee researcher entered into the lifeworld of urban youngsters, he tried to understand what it means for them to bear

the burden of the attacks of Paris and Brussels, to bear fears of radicalisation. What's more, he tried to give a voice to a group of youngsters as fully-fledged actors in research. The active contribution of the youngsters helped the researcher to understand how the topic of radicalisation, and some reactions of institutional actors such as schools, police, politicians, media, tend to polarise urban interactions. At the same time the researcher also noticed how radicalisation panic can affect the inner world of youngsters, how it can wound youngsters at the bottom of their souls. At their turn, these insights raised the issue of disclosing the inner lives of youngsters. How to take their inner voices seriously in the public debate on radicalisation while at the same time protecting their integrity, assuring their privacy, and supporting their resilience?

Here's a story of a young student, participant in the action research. The storytelling process was part of group discussion on four topics: cities in transition, vulnerability, radicalisation and resilience. The youngsters were asked to tell a short urban story that affected them deeply and that they really wanted to share. The group responded after the presentation of each story.

Youngster/Narrator:

I'm a young Muslim.

I'm a student.

And I really care about letting my beard grow. During the period of the attacks, the head of the school and the teachers asked me to shorten my beard. Then they asked me which Mosque I frequented and whether I was already approached by a person to leave for Syria.

Why did they ask all these questions?

Youth worker:

But what bothers you really when someone asks you which Mosque you frequent?

Youngster/Narrator:

What bothers me is that if I want to have this beard, then it's me who decides. It is my face. Nobody has the right to tell me: shorten your beard. It is also frustrating because it

means that one suspects me of being approached by people from Syria. And that I'm playing with the idea of going there.

Researcher:

What emotion is according to you linked with this story?

Narrator:

Powerlessness, because they have this idea of Muslims – terrorists. And you can do nothing about it.

Youth worker:

Can you elaborate on this a bit more?

Youngster/narrator:

When I'm saying powerlessness, I'm saying that they have this idea of you, and you can do nothing about it, because I have always had good remarks, such as he is respectful, he's polite. Apart from that, what can you do more? Do you see what I mean?

I still feel anger, with regard to that. Because I'm saying to myself. At that moment (time of the terrorist attacks), I felt really good. I felt something in me. I felt appeased. I continued doing what I did, because I did nothing wrong. I wore comfortable clothes. I let my beard grow. I really regret having shortened my beard.

Researcher:

If I understand you well. It's just an interpretation. You can say, no, it's wrong. Did you feel to be in a situation where you betrayed yourself?

Youngster/narrator:

Now, at this very moment, I feel as if I betrayed myself. I say to myself, I'm not as I was before. At that moment, I felt good. I really felt the nearness of God. And now, I'm not feeling this nearness as strongly as before.

Educateur A: C'est un peu comme si on te demandait de ne pas être ce que tu veux être.

This is what I aspire, really. I noticed it since a year of two. It is as if I want to get back this past, to catch up this past.

Youth worker:

And did it work out?

Youngster/Narrator.

No.

Key issues

Here are some ethical questions emerging from a variety of perspectives.

From the perspective of citizens:

1. How does the story of the narrator/youngster affect me, as a citizen? What moral intuitions are surfacing? And what are the appropriate ethical attitudes in response to such a story?
2. How far can we, as citizens, act upon and restrict the religious freedom of youngsters for reasons of safety and security of our cities?
3. How do I, as a citizen, expect that schools should act when youngsters personally/bodily affirm and express their religious beliefs?
4. How can I as an engaged citizen help to restore these damaged relations between youngsters and their institutional environment?
5. Which role can I play in a society which connects terrorism with long beards?

From the perspective of social workers

1. How do I respond appropriately to this story of the youngster/narrator? What justifies further examining the inner world of the narrator?
2. Are there good reasons for a social worker to bring this kind of stories into the public, and how and under which conditions is such a decision legitimate?
3. What is my role as a youth worker regarding these kind of school interventions? What mandate do I have?

From the perspective of the researcher

1. Under which conditions is it allowed to bring these research findings into the public?
2. How can I fully do justice of the lifeworld of this youngster in the public sphere, without negatively affecting his vulnerable integrity?

3. What is my role and mandate as an action researcher in the interpretation and dissemination of these research findings, given the existing tensions between academic research and the lifeworld of youngsters and youth workers?

From the perspective of the youngster himself

1. Did I really betray myself in shortening my beard? And if so, how should I live with it?
2. Why is it meaningful to further reflect upon my feelings and emotions regarding this event?
3. What do I expect from the youth worker, researcher with whom I shared my story?
4. Is it ok to come out with this story? And if so, under which conditions?
5. How I should respond to what I see and feel as expressions of Islamophobia?

Concepts, themes and values

Three lenses:

Vulnerability: The story reveals how ambient fears for terrorism cause and produce deep existential vulnerabilities. What are these deep vulnerabilities? How do they affect our humanity? How are they linked to fear and anger? And how should we as a society respond to these vulnerabilities?

Self-reflection and self-expression: The story shows the potentials as well as the risks of self-reflection, especially regarding youngsters. What is the empowering and oppressive potential of self-reflection and self-expression?

Public/private: The story and storytelling balances between public and private sphere. On the one hand it deals with burning public issues regarding the impact of deradicalisation, and ambient Islamophobic feelings. On the other side the story is so intimate/private that it restrains us from making it public. How to deal with this tension?

Some other key concepts: superdiversity, social cohesion, polarisation

3.4 How do social professionals deal with tensions in the neighbourhood, related to diversity? (Utrecht, Netherlands)

Peter Hendriks and Raymond Kloppenburg

Context

The Netherlands can be characterised by its high density of population, increasing urbanisation and as a small country, especially its worldwide dependency on other countries. Globalisation has had an undeniable influence on the composition of the population. The Dutch society becomes more and more a heterogeneous society with a large ethnic and religious diversity and also a society marked by social cultural dividing lines, especially on the level of education and social economic status. At universities and in social work education, a rapid increasing diversity among students and educators can be noticed.

The transformation from welfare state to participatory society. The first transition concerns a development that started several decades ago and can be identified as a move toward 'decentralisation'. Decentralisation of responsibilities for the social domain takes the form of a shift from the national to the municipal level. This shift aims at delegating the responsibility for the implementation of social policies to the market, civil society and the local government level. Another transition pertains to the process of 'deinstitutionalisation', based on the ideal of an inclusive society in which the disabled, the sick and the elderly are taken care of within mainstream society, rather than outside society in institutions. The healthy and able-bodied population is asked to help, and the advantages of inclusion into mainstream society are obvious. Deinstitutionalisation requires active solidarity. The move from the traditional welfare state to a participatory society means that everyone has to participate in providing care, rather than just paying taxes and leaving the actual care to professionals. It implies a reform of public services in favour of voluntary organisations and the promotion of a more active involvement by citizens. This active involvement of citizens and volunteers challenges the professional expertise and may result in an unwanted process of de-professionalisation. Besides all the benefits of the move towards decentralisation, the risks of this process are also becoming more apparent. Margot Trappenburg (2013), a

Dutch professor in social work, points out the risk that active solidarity burdens those who are already burdened. For professionals it means that they will be challenged by the increasing complexity of their work and by the claims and high expectations from others. In the participatory society, which is a strengths-based approach, citizens need to appeal to friends, family and neighbours first, before professional support will be considered. Some paid work that was done professionally in the welfare state has to be done unpaid by others in the participatory society, sometimes receiving an allowance or social benefit in return. In the near future, providing help will increasingly become an activity that all citizens have to undertake. It challenges the boundaries between professionals and non-professionals (such as volunteers) and service users. One of the positive outcomes is that citizens become co-producers of social work on a more equal basis. The knowledge of service users needs to be taken more seriously, as has been advocated for much longer already. It is in this context of transformation that professionals and the profession need to reposition and include 'non-professionals' such as volunteers in their decision-making.

A recent study analysed how professionals and volunteers deal with their potentially blurred boundaries (Bochove et al., 2016). According to this study, demarcation work is performed, emphasising differences between professionals and volunteers (Ibid). However, the study also identifies 'welcoming work', with volunteers being invited to take over certain responsibilities so that professionals can focus on more specialised tasks.

The city of Utrecht in the centre of the Netherlands is the fourth-largest city in the country with a highly diverse population. The city has about 340,000 inhabitants (CBS, 2016) of which 22% derive from a non-western background (Utrecht Monitor, 2015). Since 2000, the numbers of the so-called 'second generation from a non-western background' in Utrecht have increased, especially in the twenties and thirties age bracket (Ibid). Most of the second and third generation migrants live in urban contexts. Of all Muslims in the Netherlands, about 75% are of Turkish or Moroccan origin, and more than 90% of the Turkish and Moroccan-Dutch identify as Muslims (Forum, 2010; SCP, 2012). Many differences exist between and among the Turkish-Dutch and the Moroccan-Dutch population groups, identifiable as 'in-group' and 'inter-group'

differences. In general, the inter- and intra-ethnic diversity of both 'groups' tends to be neglected, which may contribute to processes of homogenisation and stigmatisation (Eijberts, 2013). Studies that examine inter-group differences point to differences in terms of religious behaviour, such as dealing with rules or wearing a headscarf (Van der Valk, 2016). Dagevos and Huijnk (2016) also point out differences relating to command of the Dutch language. According to this study, the Turkish-Dutch more often have difficulty with the Dutch language. The Moroccan-Dutch seem to have fewer problems with Dutch and more often use it in the domestic setting (Ibid: 286). Moroccan-Dutch women tend to embrace traditional gender roles to a lesser extent, marry and have children later and more often continue to work after getting married (Dagevos, 2001; Eijberts, 2013). In both groups there is a tendency to marry someone with the same background, but especially for women with a higher level of education, finding a spouse of the same ethnicity in the Netherlands can be quite a challenge (Bijl et al., 2005).

Case

The context of this case is a community organisation in a neighbourhood in Utrecht, in which social professionals observe increasing tensions with youngsters who operate in groups and seek open confrontation with others.

A group of migrant women of Turkish and Moroccan descent have taken the initiative to organise coffee meetings in the community centre of their neighbourhood. They meet and drink coffee (facilitated by the community centre) and discuss daily worries and experiences. They have decided that men are not welcome, and they draw strict gender and ethnic boundaries; 'there's a specific way to make Turkish soup and it's completely different from Moroccan soup'. They regularly discuss the school experiences of their children and the professional noticed that they were cheering and applauding when they discussed how one of their children bullied a gay couple in their neighbourhood. The women manage to create a strong community bonding and are really supportive and caring to each other. When mentioning these coffee meetings the social professional reports: '...it's really good to see how these women take the initiative to meet and help each other; I support this and it is better to focus on the positive than on the negative (and decides to ignore the cheering and applauding...)'.

Key issues

We (Kloppenborg & Hendriks) were able to run a small pilot in a neighbourhood in the city of Utrecht (spring 2018). The key question of the researchers was as follows: How do social professionals deal with tensions in the neighbourhood related to diversity?

At micro level the dilemma, as described, can be defined as a methodological one. Is the professional wise to support the positive energy in the group to meet and to bond and to give less priority to the exclusion of others? Are there other choices that can be made and what exactly are the risks of ignoring (or postponing any comment on...) exclusion in this context?

At a more abstract level we also may wonder if professionals in social work should represent a respect for moral pluriformity? And how does the ethnic identity of the social professional impact on their perspective (some have a Turkish or Moroccan background themselves)?

From the perspective of the professionals, their main question was: "Give us tools that help us to deal with tensions in the neighbourhood." According to the professionals the cause of the tensions, as felt by them was; opposite groups of Muslims versus non-Muslims, polarisation, identity questions, themes as homosexuality, a general lack of knowledge among citizens on Dutch society and groups that live separately. They also wonder if these tensions are real, or maybe blown up (by politicians, the media, by themselves?). Tensions do not suddenly emerge but also evolve. They are aware that other causes, like poor socio-economic circumstances can cause tensions: low income combined with low level of education. Overall, citizens point at differences between groups, the young and the elderly, the high and the low educated, and predominantly at differences in culture between natives and non-natives.

We did not have the opportunity to involve citizens in this pilot. However, some recent research is available on how the Dutch in general think about increasing diversity in their society (Ipsos, 2017). A majority (64%) is afraid that it 'goes the wrong way'. The Dutch are worried about norms and values (85% has some or serious worries) on themes as migration and about 81% think that there is a relationship between migration and the decay of Dutch values. People think that the arrival of non-western migrants is a threat to Dutch values. The biggest challenge is seen in relationship to Muslims on their views

on the position of women and gays and lesbians. 'Native' Dutch see this phenomenon as a 'value problem'. Many social scientists however criticise this 'culturalisation of citizenship' and criticise that especially migrants are expected to demonstrate feelings of attachment, belonging, connectedness and loyalty to their country of residence. Dutch culture is often presented as white, non-religious, sexually liberated and in need of protection from non-white religious and sexually oppressed others. Although the general liberal idea is that values cannot be imposed and everyone is free within their private sphere to live the life they want to live, migrants are more or less expected to think as the Dutch and to adapt to their values.

Concepts, themes, values

Social capital and social cohesion: in a recently published Dutch research report (De Nieuwe Verscheidenheid: WRR, 2018) the concept of 'social capital' (Putnam, 2007) is quite dominant; referring to three elements in neighbourhoods that cannot be missed: the presence of social networks, the general spread of trust and the reciprocity of norms. Putnam argues (E Pluribus Unum, 2007) that living in ethnic diverse areas impacts negatively on trust and due to that people withdraw from each other and public space. Increasing diversity is also related to 'feelings of loss', 'safety' and this research mainly focusses on the connection between social cohesion and diversity. Citizens seem to assess a diverse neighbourhood as 'less cohesive'. Poor socio-economic circumstances also impact on how social cohesion is assessed, but the impact of increasing diversity seems to be stronger. The concept of 'happy diversity' is introduced (among the richer, highly educated) to show that also in happy diverse neighbourhoods the impact seems to be the same. Dutch citizens express their worries predominantly in terms of the risk of losing 'fought for cultural achievements', and more specifically the position of women and gays and lesbians and the separation of religion and state.

Although there are worries about tensions, segregation, and polarisation another study (KIS: 2017) also shows that the thinking about increasing diversity is not as black and white as often presented in the media. Many respondents are positive about the increasing diversity in Dutch society.

Superdiversity: rests on the growing awareness that over the past two and a half decades the demographic, socio-political, cultural and socio-linguistic face of societies

worldwide has been changing as a result of (a) ever faster and more mobile communication technologies and software infrastructures, along with (b) ever expanding mobility and migration activity related to major geo-political changes around 1990 (Blommaert 2012). The term was introduced 'to address the changing nature of global migration that, over the past thirty years or so, has brought with it a transformative "diversification of diversity"' (Meissner & Vertovec, 2014: 542). In the Netherlands and Flanders, superdiversity emerged mainly in the work of Crul, Schneider and Lelie (2013), and more specifically with regard to social work, in the writings of Geldof (2011, 2013, 2016) and Van Robaeys, Van Ewijk & Dierckx (2016). The 'scenario of hope', as presented in superdiversity, is based on equality and emancipation. The different authors have in common that they question the dominant thinking on who is 'integrated' and who is not, especially in the urban context where soon there will no longer be a majority ethnic grouping. 'Emancipation is seldom the result of compulsion to adjust to the norms of the majority group, but it is possible as a consequence of upward social mobility within your own social group' (Geldof, 2016; 190). The major cities in particular are the places where differences are negotiated. 'Cities are plural spaces, characterised by a superdiversity that demands the particular attention of social work in terms of solidarities, cohesion and appropriate cross-cultural responses' (Vertovec, 2007, 2011). 'Urban social work' is introduced as a concept to address the challenges for and the responses from the profession in the context of superdiversity as the urban condition of the 21st century. Geldof argues that social work is in urgent need of 'interculturalisation' and highlights the danger of the culturalisation of exclusion, used to stigmatise people (Geldof, 2011: 35).

Other relevant concepts.

- Civil society
- In- and out-groups
- Safety/unsafety in neighbourhoods in relation to increasing diversity
- Resilience
- Globalisation (and localisation) and autonomy
- The culturalisation of citizenship: the culturalisation of social problems
- Belonging and entitlement

- Moral diversity and cultural relativism
- Segregation, Polarisation
- Bonding and bridging

3.5 'We foundation and We houses' in Pansio-Perno (Turku, Finland)

Sirppa Kinos

Context

Pansio-Perno is a suburb of 4000 inhabitants, 6–7 kilometres from Turku city centre, in South-West Finland. It is located close to the sea, but for people, there is no access to the coastline, because of facilities of the shipyard industry and a navy base. However, there are lots of green areas and good outdoor sports facilities. Houses are mostly high-rise, rental houses, but also owner-occupied terraced and detached houses are found. Pansio-Perno has more rental houses than any other area in Turku and a lower number of inhabitants with higher education. In recent years, population in the area has decreased and grown older. However, percentage of immigrant families is increasing. Share of inhabitants with multicultural backgrounds and foreign languages is higher than on average in Turku (18%, compared to 11%). The unemployment rate is 18%, which is one of the highest in Turku. The percentage of single-parent families and people living on social benefits is higher than in Turku on average. In the area of Pansio-Perno, a percentage of over-indebted citizens, on credit default register, is the highest in Finland. In the area, 22% of adults have lost their credit worthiness (compared to 8% on average). This often means a wicked circle of payday loans, unpaid bills and cut off electricity as well as economic deprivation and welfare dependence. The area is recognised as an area needing special support and action in Turku, in order to tackle the deepening segregation and marginalisation.

PICTURE 1. Pansio-Perno area in Turku.



There are basic social and health care services in the area. The City of Turku provides social office services like income support, housing and substance abuse services as well as child protection services (non-institutional, e.g. family work). The municipal health care centre is outsourced to a private health care company and it offers basic health care services. However, child welfare clinic services are produced by the Turku municipality. For older people there are two nursing homes and home care services. There is a municipal primary school, but a secondary school and upper secondary school (gymnasium) have moved from the area some years ago. Municipal day care services, youth house and library services are in active use. Family centre Telakka organises free-time activities for parents and children, as well as support and advice. However, immigrant families have not really adopted their services. There is also a municipal youth house and a reception centre for asylum seekers in the area.

Social work in Pansio-Perno, as generally in Finland, takes mainly place in the municipal social office environment, performed by social workers educated at the university (master level). The approach is mainly bureaucratic, based on reserved appointments in office hours. Dismounted practices are commonly missing. Traditionally, community work or a socio-cultural approach have seldom been applied in the context of municipal social work.

PICTURE 2.



Höveli is a service centre, where most social and health care services are located, as well as some commercial services, a café run by Turku parish and Me house, which will be described later in the text.

In addition to municipal actors, there are several active 3rd sector actors – associations and a Lutheran parish in the area. What has been missing, are target-oriented purposeful actions, a coordinating centre and proper facilities for joint activities. That is where Me house turns up.

Case

We foundation (and its background foundation Fingerroos) was established in 2015, by two businessmen from computer games development industry. Its slogan is “it is not we and you – it is only us”. The purpose of the foundation is to reduce social inequality and exclusion of children, youth and families. The aim is to offer children and youth equal opportunities for a good life regardless of their family background or other starting points. It promotes and financially supports different forms of aid work and ventures directed especially at children and youth and their families. Innovative, participative and efficient methods and practices are appreciated, as well as networking. The impact is maximised when working together with many different agents for a common goal. “We are not trying to reinvent the wheel and therefore, it is crucial that municipalities are one of the key agents involved in the majority of our projects”, is emphasised in the foundation rules.

One of the funded activities are Me houses. There are 7 Me houses around Finland, and one of them is located in Pansio, Turku. In Turku, the house activities started in spring 2016. It offers facilities for different associations, an open meeting place for local inhabitants of all ages, activities like courses, clubs and happenings. This autumn there were for example a men’s discussion group, a multicultural women’s group, pop-up service counselling and Finnish courses for immigrants going on. There is also counselling and support available for various challenges in life, on a professional as well as voluntary basis. Me house is running several projects to enable and finance certain activities like “Let’s eat together” for marginalised adults and “Manage your Monday mornings” and “Komppi” for youth (dismounted work). An important resource at Me house is paid staff: a manager, a host of the house, an employment specialist and a family worker. There are constantly also on the job learners and trainees working at Me house.

PICTURE 3. The host of Me house, Miikka Neulaniemi.



Key issues

Key issues in this case are active participation of residents and prospects that Me house has opened to municipal social work, to renew their practices. There are 1900 visitors and 10 000 visits yearly at Me house. The amount is rising constantly. Host Miikka Neulaniemi stated that it would be disastrous for many children and their families, if Me house did not exist. Many of the visitors are children, especially those with an immigrant background. From 2017, the City of Turku became the main funder of Me house. Me foundation finances nowadays only leisure activities for the youth. The municipality of the City of Turku is involved in financing and contributing to Me house activities, especially the welfare division where social work is located, but also the urban environment division and recreation division. A family worker from local municipal social office is working in pairs with the family worker of Me house. A social counsellor from local municipal social office organises group activities together with of Me house staff. The staff of a municipal youth house are also collaborating with Me house staff, e.g. in the "Kompipi" project with youth workers, who have dismantled to the streets where young people meet. Also, from 2017, the employment agency is collaborating with Me house, especially with an employment specialist who works dismantled.

Partnerships with municipal and other authorities resemble co-development partnership as described later in this text. Official municipal social work has managed to find new, community work orientation in addition to traditional bureaucratic work, with the help of partnership of Me house. Me house has gained contacts and trust among

local residents, as well as developed and implemented community work methods, which municipal, traditionally bureaucratic social work can now adopt.

Concepts, themes and values

From bureaucratic to community work orientation in social work, the welfare state is taking a new form in welfare society, where civic society plays a growing role in many aspects. Social work practice needs to be renewed. The International Federation of Social workers defines that “social work practice spans a range of activities including various forms of therapy and counselling, group work, and community work; policy formulation and analysis; and advocacy and political interventions”. From an emancipatory perspective, this definition supports social work strategies aimed at increasing people’s hope, self-esteem and creative potential to confront and challenge oppressive power dynamics and structural sources of injustices, thus incorporating into a coherent whole the micro-macro, personal-political dimension of intervention. In Finland, social work in municipal social offices is provided by social workers, graduated with a university master’s degree. The approach is mainly bureaucratic, based on a reserved appointment in office hours. Community work or socio-cultural approach are seldom applied in the context of municipal social work. In Finland, several official policies and programmes since the 1990s have been targeted to the promotion of active civic society and grass-root level participation. In public services, client-oriented development slowly takes over.

Co-development partnership

In the report “Working together” (Unesco 1986), basic principles of partnership between professionals and citizens and in the broader sense, between professionals and civic society, were described. True partnership requires equality between partners. Partnership may take different forms, but everybody must recognise that each partner has areas of knowledge and skill to contribute to the joint task of working together. It also implies shared activities and decisions. Different associations and organisations are important representatives of civic society and citizens. Key features of partnership:

Mutual respect

The key element in the development and success of partnership is mutual respect of the different qualities and skills which partners bring to the relationship.

Sharing – common purpose

Partnership involves a dialogue and an agreement of common purpose. Through discussion, asking and listening partners can develop a mutual understanding and a common purpose.

Sharing – making joint decisions

The making of decisions is the area from which citizens, clients and service users are most often left out by professionals. They often have been expected to fall in with professionals' opinions and planned programmes, or have been given the opportunity only to agree or disagree with decisions already taken. Regular continuing communication is essential to partnership.

Sharing feelings

Partnership involves sharing, not only of skills and information, but also of feelings. Professionals may lack confidence in how to approach partners and vice versa. The sharing of positive feelings is important.

Flexibility

Flexibility of approach in dealing with individuals is fundamental to partnership. Many recipients of professional services have complained about the generalisations and judgements of professionals. Being flexible takes time, but careful preparation is more likely to avoid wasted efforts in the long run. Partners may have different perspectives, priorities and pressures. These differences pose acute challenges to the partners when they wish to form closer working relationships.

The process of constructing co-development partnership consists of three phases: establishing reciprocity; target setting and definition of strategy in dialogue; joint action.

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3.6 Nagysándor (Alexander the Great)-colony (Debrecen, Hungary)

Judit Csoba

Context

The formerly Brickyard, then Rákosi colony, today holds the name of the commander of the Hungarian team who participated in the Battle of the War of Independence on August 2, 1849. In addition, the Debrecen people are not only sharing their views on the public security of the site, but also where the zone called "Citrus Island" is: here or on the other side of Kishegyesi Road. In the old times, when many Gypsies lived here, and because of this and the Kishegyesi Road brick burner, they called the area Citrus Island. Behind the former factory there are still hovels. A lot of the Roma communities live on the edge of Debrecen. At the beginning they lived in the downtown area, but after that, they moved out, hoping a cheaper livelihood. Nagysándor-telep is known as a confine area of Debrecen, this is a segregation.

Densely populated suburban area

The 82-hectare area of small houses with a four-storey family house, with its 3,000 inhabitants, is one of the most densely populated suburban areas in the city. Its age structure is quite favourable as it is youthful: the proportion of people under the age of 14 is higher than the urban average, while the 15–59-year olds account for 2/3 of the people living there. However, regarding school education, the picture is not very positive. More than half of the people there do not attend more than eight classes. Even worse is the case for highly qualified people: less than 2 percent of the population over 25 years of age were able to graduate. The proportion of disadvantaged (HH) students reaches 60 percent, while the proportion of disadvantaged (HHH) students is 15 percent. Only 40 percent of 15–64-year-olds work, nearly half of the households have no job, and many are living with aid. The Nagysándor colony can therefore be regarded as a very disadvantaged neighbourhood.

This is largely due to the historical development of the area, as "the settlers of the urban area occupy the 19–20th century. At the turn of the century, the poorest social strata were, and the situation that has been conserved over the decades is only slowly changing." In the past, there was no problem with the inland waterway, but in the parts below it often flooded the property. The flat field was almost always covered with water. Earlier, one of the brick factory sports grounds had a similar flood. Only in this part of

town there were four brick factories, and the last one was closed for eight or ten years. Its chimneys are still standing, but they're selling.

The Nagysándor colony, in fact, was in the "old days" a huge facility of the house factory (now many other companies use the property), but at the edge of the town, there are industrial parks, plastic workshops and big stores today.



Picture 1: The Pósa street is the main street of Nagysándor colony

Many streets should be wound up, repaired, and because of the burglaries, it would be useful to pay more attention to the police. It is part of the population, but it likes to live here because everybody knows everybody. They are composed, chess, TV, talk and cook. Sometimes they organized chess competitions, which also contributed to creating a good mood.



Picture 2: The old residential houses of the brick factory



Picture 3: Part of the Nagysándor colony road.

Case

Management of the city has been trying to create many improvements in the recent years, because they wanted to help the poor who live there. The generation issue has been ceased, young people and the elders are also interested in programmes and services here. The city's leadership realised that there is more need for taking actions than saying big words. The city has set the goal of upgrading the underdeveloped part of the city through tendering. Or at least try, because this part is one of the most disadvantaged in the city. It should be noted, however, that since the shopping district was not far from there, much appreciation of the site has been improved.

The aim is to improve the living conditions of the population, to strengthen the local community and raise the level of education. In order to spend quality leisure time, a sports field is planned, hobby groups are formed, sometimes family events are organised, roads are paved, asphaltting the terrain for a bicycle network and reinforcing the identity of the people living there. Héra Family Assistance Association plays a significant role in local development and the management of conflicts between the different (especially Roma and non-Roma) social groups.

Héra Association was established in 1992. Activities of Héra's Family and Child Welfare Service can be divided into two main areas. They provide help for social and mental health problems in the family counselling services. In addition, they deal with solving crisis situations of the community. Conservation of life skills is also considered an important task. The other area of the service is child welfare. They help the physical and mental health of children through the methods and tools of social work. Their further aim is to prevent the child's vulnerability. It is an important service for counselling, case management and community development. The purpose of the foundation is to reduce social inequality.



Picture 4: The headquarters of the Héra Association

Key issues

The Héra Association performs the tasks of the Family Assistance Service as a supply contract with the local government of the Debrecen City (DMJV). The Child Protection Center of the Association plays a central role in the life of the settlement. In addition to Héra Association, in order to satisfy the needs of the entire population, the Street of Pósa with Elders Club of Nagysándor Colony Nursing Service operates as a unit of the Municipal Social Service. They created a free kitchen and a laundry for the people who need it. There is also progress in the field of community development. The Cultural Center in Debrecen, the family help centre, the library, and the media also have a great role. The social workers of these institutions play a significant part in the social life of the city. In recent years, many community development programmes have been organised for every generation. They organise programme during every season for every

holiday. For example, a Christmas party, Carnival, Easter party. In the summer they organise summer camps for children and teenagers. For elders, they have created a day-care home, where they can attend various sessions, like lectures, counselling. It opens the door to create social relationships, and they can ask help for the everyday life.

We can note as a positive point that they have received lots of unexpected feedback from the community, so they have become incredibly cooperative. Recently, people are paying more attention for each other.

Concepts, themes and values

These developments require a lot of work and energy from the leadership and members of the Héra Association and the social workers of the local community. However, their work seems to be useful and cooperative and can bring together the different social groups.

The dimensions of the proposed research:

- promoting the social integration of the Roma population into the community,
- applied methods, techniques,
- the development of cooperation between risk policies and cohabiting communities,
- care and informal education of children in mixed groups,
- fear and its manipulation for xenophobic purposes,
- decriminalisation of the children (particularly if they are Roma) and child protection,
- the importance of building up common goals in the community,
- “interethnic” social work,
- conflict management between the formal and informal structure of the social groups,
- coordination the local development initiated by the citizens,
- multi-professional social work,
- NGO and civil society in the praxis,
- safety/unsafety in neighbourhoods in relation to increasing diversity,
- development of resilience in the socially disadvantaged groups,

- moral diversity and cultural relativism.

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4. Reflection on the case studies

Erik Claes and Mieke Schrooten

In the previous chapters we gave a brief overview of theories and presented five practice examples concerning challenges of increasing diversity in urban neighbourhoods in the different European countries. During the seminar in Debrecen, using the World Café approach, we mapped different kinds of tensions within specific neighbourhoods spread over different European countries, and embedded them in broader social and political environments. In the following paragraphs we will reconstruct the process of reflection and theory building, as it emerged in the network of social work scholars through the different stages of the world café (see also page 68). We will build up our ideas in three stages, according to three leading questions around which the World Café was organised:

1. What do we identify as strengths and risks related to increasing diversity in our neighbourhoods?
2. What do we identify as the greatest challenges for social professionals in relation to the increasing diversity in urban neighbourhoods?
3. Which theories or theoretical concepts can we identify as useful to understand the complexity of the impact of increasing diversity in urban neighbourhoods?

Stage 1. Reflecting on risks and strengths of increasing diversity

A first reflection resulted in four ideas.

Risks

1. Increasing diversity in urban neighbourhoods is considered to be problematic in the light of the precarious socio-economic infrastructure of many of these neighbourhoods. The Hungarian, Dutch, Finnish, and Belgian cases all exemplify how growing diversity through demographic transitions supersede on precarious living conditions caused by unemployment, bad schooling, public budget cuts, and deplorable housing conditions. Increasing migration in these neighbourhoods often result in further weakening the socio-economic infrastructures. Old and new residents are fragilised in their access to

basic human rights. And, correspondingly, basic institutions (public services, schools, health care centres) are fragilised in their capacity to provide access to these rights.

2. The cases of Hungary and Belgium lead to a second idea. These cases show how new middle-class newcomers in these fragilised neighbourhoods risk to strengthen the awareness of the difference between the haves and have nots. The power relations resulting from these socio-economic differences can result in networks of solidarity and empowerment, but it can also amount in growing hostility due to a combination of jealousy and despise.

3. A last and third idea that stems from the mapping of cases revolves around the notion of 'othering'. Diverse neighbourhoods easily attract a variety of social and cultural insecurities and fears among old and new residents, but also among a large part of the population living outside these neighbourhoods. Stereotyped images of these quarters and their residents are circulating through various media channels, and contribute to a dynamic of othering, reducing newcomers or citizens with migration roots to their ethnicity, or religious affiliation. This process of othering frequently reflects in political discourse that opposes cultures and civilisations, and on this basis, culturalises citizenship. Access to fully fledged citizenship, and to basic human rights, is conditioned by assimilation of language, culture and values of the state who accords citizenship rights. This culturisation is seen as conflicting with social work values since it often results in a strengthening of mechanisms of social exclusion.

A second reflection refined the idea of othering, by sketching a broader picture of an impatient society who demands rapidly simple and radical solutions for complex social challenges. Such an impatient society projects high strung expectations onto public officials, social professionals, educational systems, families, communities and individuals. It puts society as a whole under immense pressure. This pressure makes society even more vulnerable for tensions and conflicts.

Strengths

A first reflection resulted in one basic insight: the idea that growing diversity sharpens the awareness of social inequality, and exclusion and the need for respect for one's identity as individual or as a member of group. Reaffirming one's identity and claiming

recognition of one's difference, even provocatively, can contribute to the emancipation of individuals and groups.

A second reflection brought the discussion group to a more abstract level of reflection. In this reflection, social challenges of urban diversity are seen as learning opportunities, as critical mirror, as an invitation to rethink social work, its foundations, dynamics, roots and tensions with state-based expectations of managerial social work. This idea led to the second stage of the world café brainstorming.

Stage 2. Reflecting on the challenges for social work

Concerning social work, the increasing complexity of working with growing diversity relates to the playing field in which the interests of stakeholders can diverge widely. This led to the first reflection that social workers have to deal with:

1. Growing complexities of human interactions, value orientation, need patterns. Deals with lack of knowledge on the field. But also lack of a bigger picture.
2. Othering by authoritarian state response produced internal conflicts between state ideology and basic values of the social profession.
3. Diversity, and authoritarian state response weakens the mandate of social work professionals, creates relation of distrust.

A second reflection added, again, a more overarching idea of fragmentation in the positioning of social work. It also resulted in a strong awareness of making social work more coherent in its response to diversity in urban neighbourhoods.

Stage 3. Towards theory building

In this stage cooperative reflection proceeded in plenum. The point of departure was question 3. Based on the notes of table 1, a first proposition has been made in order to identify a few central notions of a broader conceptual schema. Six conceptual building blocks have been mapped: 1. Transitions. 2. Diversity and tensions. 3. Vulnerabilities. 4. The mandate of social work professionals. 5. The idea of critical mirror. 6. The idea of social cohesion as part of an ethical compass.

In the following paragraphs, we will briefly discuss these six concepts. We will do this in such a way that it could inspire social work scholars, lecturers, social work professionals,

local citizens and stakeholders. Each concept can also be used as a separate theme around which a World Café can be organised.

Societal transitions.

Conflicts in superdiverse urban settings are not issuing exclusively from different cultural backgrounds. The causal dynamics are multifaceted and highly complex. In order to unravel this complexity, it can be useful to study in advance with a group of students which major societal transformations bear their impact on a local urban area. The conceptual World Café in Debrecen led us to define these transformations as transitions in order to stress their fluid, unstable and unpredictable nature. Transitions are also often intertwined, which calls for a dynamic approach. The discussions in Debrecen revealed that the interaction between demographic, cultural, political and economic transitions are crucial to map a broader understanding of the living conditions in a certain urban area. Another important social and political transition revolves around the process of othering, of highlighting and exaggerating cultural differences in order to intensify strategies of exclusion and rejection of certain groups.

One of the advantages of the concept of transitions is that it helps students as well as citizens and social work professionals to grasp the broader societal picture that forge daily conflicts and tensions. This can help in reframing sensitive topics and conflicts. Instead of solely focusing on a specific topic (for example, noisy youngsters), a broader understanding in terms of transitions, can shift the focus to broader transitions (demographic transitions that produce urban density) that are partly responsible for these frictions.

Diversity and tensions

Since diversity and tensions are the central focus of this booklet, both notions play an important role in our conceptual framework. Students are invited to distinguish hidden tensions, from more explicit conflicts and from bursts of violence. We're in a need here of a more refined conceptual grid that allows students to capture different instances of what is commonly understood under the umbrella of tensions. One of the insights gained from the Debrecen reflection is the importance of tensions between newcomers and communities with migration roots, on the one hand, and the surrounding institutional environment on the other hand. This insight can also help in reframing the discussion on diversity, from the focus of conflicts between communities to the

discussing on conflicts between communities and local institutions (police, school direction, local government, social care providers).

Vulnerabilities

Tensions within superdiverse settings tend to produce lack of trust and growing suspicion, and reversely, lack of trust easily feeds tensions and conflicts. Living in conditions of damaged trust make local citizens, as well as their institutions vulnerable regarding their capacity to thrive and flourish. The idea of collective, as well as individual vulnerabilities, presents itself as an interesting lens to reframe certain conflicts in diverse urban neighbourhoods, because it allows to generate a better mutual understanding of the difficulties conflicting parties are dealing with. One of the challenges of the learning process is to identify different types of vulnerabilities, and to map different strategies in order to respond to these vulnerabilities.

Mandate of social work professional

One of the focal points regarding conflicts and tensions in diverse, urban settings revolves around the position of social workers. Discussions during the World Café resulted in a general insight that the position of social work professionals is not located 'outside' the complex field of tensions, and conflicts. Social work professionals are actors in these fields. They are stakeholders in this field. They bear the impact of a complex of transitions. They are also affected by social vulnerabilities, and they are also receivers and producers of conflicting energies. One of the consequences of this discovery is an intense questioning of the position and the mandate of the social work professional. This critical self-reflective attitude can also be seen as a strength, as a source of creativity and innovation. Stimulating this reflective capacity will be a central component in the learning process of social work students, engaged in diverse, urban settings.

Critical mirror

This metaphor allowed us to better grasp the relation between tensions, on the one hand, and transitions, vulnerabilities, and the mandate of social worker on the other hand. Through the metaphor of the critical mirror, tensions and conflicts are seen as a learning opportunity to broaden (focusing on transitions) as well as to deepen the discussion (focusing on individual and collective vulnerabilities).

[Social cohesion](#). Central value for rethinking social work profession?

Four scenarios. At the end of the Debrecen World Café, the participants engaged in vivid discussion on the place of social cohesion regarding a practical understanding of tensions in diverse neighbourhoods. This concept of 'social cohesion' appeared to be highly contested. During the discussion four positions surfaced. 1. Social cohesion is a foundational value, an overarching concept. It is a necessary condition for the survival of society. Dealing with tensions should primarily serve improving or restoring social cohesion. 2. Social cohesion is a value next to other values (autonomy, equality, participation), without any existing hierarchy between these values. It just depends on the concrete case which value prevails. 3. Social cohesion is dependent and subordinate to other central values. It plays a marginal role in conflict transformation. 4. Social cohesion is all too vague to guide and inform the process of conflict transformation. It should be discarded from any efforts to understand and respond to conflicts and tensions in urban neighbourhoods.

The discussion in Debrecen limited itself to the mapping of these positions. At the end of this booklet we are still undecided regarding the place of this notion in our conceptual framework. One option could be to try the notion out with students and stakeholders on the field. A central element of the learning process would be to further articulate to strengths and risks related to the use of 'social cohesion' in responding to conflicts in diverse urban settings. It could be an idea to make this notion a central topic of a World Café and to discover how local communities and social work professionals understand and question this concept regarding their own urban living conditions.

5. Social Work Education and urban diversity

Raymond Kloppenburg, Judith Csoba, Mieke Schrooten and Erik Claes

5.1 Urban Diversity and curriculum development

During the 21st century, new challenges have arisen in European countries. One of the issues discussed in this booklet is the increasing diversity of societies. Depending on the migration history of the countries, this has led to different types of opportunities and challenges. For social work education, this needs to be adequately addressed in the development of the curricula. Related to the migration history and respective political, economic and cultural developments, significant challenges are:

- a.) the global intensification of international mass migration, bringing together representatives of increasingly distant cultures,
 - b.) the proliferation of increasing political populism, which emphasises alienation and search for enemies,
 - c.) whereas social workers only work with people from their own culture, integration in a xenophobic culture can lead to an increase in fears and prejudices against "strangers",
 - d) increasing diversity is not only a feature of society but also of university populations
 - d.) a lack of intercultural competence to help manage and counteract the above.
- This is not only a feature of the average population, but also a widespread phenomenon among professionals (Horewitz et al., 2013; Jensen, 2017; Barát 2019).

For social work education, the above challenges create new tasks: the need to create a new curriculum, which can guarantee the education of social workers, who can effectively communicate in intercultural environments, be prepared to work with people, families and groups from other cultures, living in different social economic circumstances and take into account their value systems. It is also important to take care to incorporate professional content and methods into the changed cultural environment because:

“From its historical origins, social work has struggled with concepts of likeness and difference. Empathy, a necessary starting point in social work relationships, can more naturally be developed with clients with whom social workers can easily identify—clients who are perceived as like the social worker. The more different social worker and client perceive each other to be, the more difficult relationship-building and the helping process become. (Falk 1999:3)

The key issue for developers of Social Work Education is how the development of professional competences can be achieved in the changed environmental conditions (intensification of migration, increasing populism, differentiated education system, etc.).

One of the most important personal and professional skills of social professionals, cultural competence, is by no means a static skill, but a formation in constant movement and change along with social changes. (Barát 2019)

The social worker must know the key elements of his/her own and foreigner culture at the same time, and be aware of the personal and communal conditions that are common to other cultures. Social professionals need to recognise the fears and prejudices against other cultures and be able to deal with them. In addition to this, the social worker has to realise that the ‘culturalisation of social problems’ can cause blindness for the social economic position of people from different backgrounds and opportunities and chances they receive in society.

An international course can be developed that focusses on the way social professionals in different European countries deal with tensions and challenges in urban neighbourhoods related to increasing diversity of the population. Social professionals face polarisation between groups and individuals but also assets, arising in the cohabitation between people from different ethnic cultural backgrounds. The international definition of social work emphasises social cohesion, inclusion, social justice and respect for diversity. But what does this mean in neighbourhoods with sensitive issues such as radicalisation of young people, sexual diversity, religion, discrimination and racism? What is needed from social professionals to adequately deal with these challenges?

Aim of the course

Concerning this topic, the aim of the course in general is to involve students in issues relating to social quality of superdiverse urban neighbourhoods, and to compare social work practices in different countries in Europe. Secondly, it aims to contribute to the development of competences of social work students, focusing on prevention and integrative approaches in which different professionals work together with citizens within urban neighbourhoods.

The key question that will be addressed is: “Which (universal and indigenous) principles (incl.: knowledge, skills) contribute to the social workers’ ability to manage and relate to diversity and polarisation in urban neighbourhoods?” Using case descriptions and practice experiences students will map tensions in relation to diversity: what tensions are perceived by social workers; how do they value these tensions and position themselves as professionals?

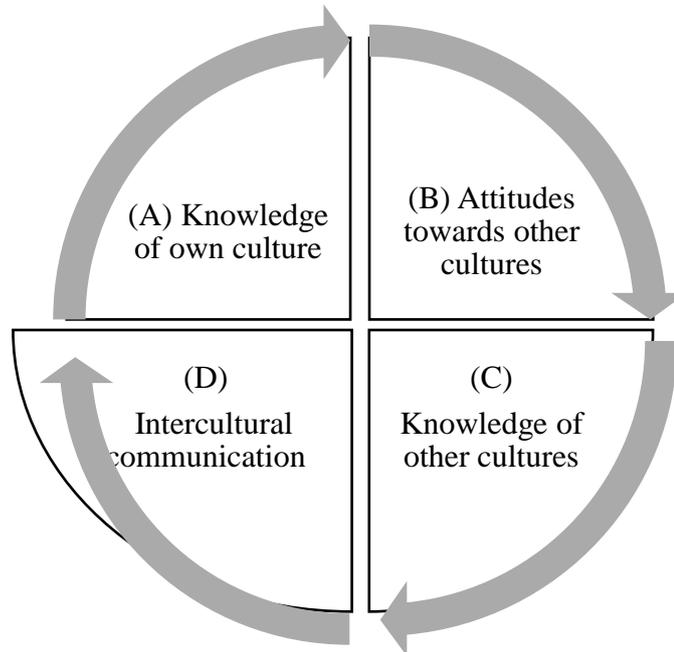
Learning outcomes

- Identifying tensions in the neighbourhood, being able to name them and share them with colleagues and residents.
- Analysing tensions from a multi-actor perspective and the multiple layering of factors that influence them.
- Carrying out a cross-national comparison aimed at a better understanding of one's own local context
- Assessing these tensions according to the core values of the profession, the resolving capacity and assets of the residents, as well as the need for professional intervention.
- Positioning oneself as a professional and deciding in consultation on appropriate interventions that are in line with the assets of the community.

Content

Theories of migration in the urban context are the knowledge base of the programme (see chapter 2) which helps students to reflect from a multi-level perspective. To develop the professional performance, different types of competences and skills are requested related to the empirical cycle: analyses of the practice situation, the decision-making process, intervention and evaluation. A third, and maybe most important component is the development of the professional attitude related to the core values of

Social Work. One of these competences related to intercultural contact and communication is elaborated in Figure 1.



Source: Barát 2012

The development of cultural competence is basically nothing else than an experiential learning process in different arenas, where the content of the word "arena". In this space, as a result of the series of encounters, the social and personal attitudes of the social professionals to other cultures are formed, and their professional competence suited to the changed social space.

Course description

Traditional methods of education – mostly passive, cognitive-based – should be effectively combined with the development of skills, attitudes, active learning methods, or experimental learning forms. These may include e.g.:

- multidimensional approximation of individual social and cultural phenomena,
- providing students with flexible research frameworks (experimental methods),
- exploration of the (inter)cultural, political, economic and social contexts of the problems to be solved,

- reflective learning forms between the students and the teachers and social professionals and clients,
- approaching one's own culture from a different perspective – external eye, questioning self-evident relationships, and creating new contexts.

An implementation of the course can be composed out of the following elements:

- Study of a reader which consists of compulsory and recommended literature and case studies from participating European schools of social work, followed by a group discussion about the meaning of the theory, contribution to a reflection on social work in urban districts with a diverse population and emerging principles for practical use.
- Practice assignment, a group of students contact social professionals and residents of an urban district with a diverse population. They organise a meeting (e.g. a World Café) with verbal and nonverbal (creative) activities to exchange experiences, images, assets and tensions and to develop opportunities to improve the social quality of the neighbourhood.
- Cross-national exchange Students organise a virtual meeting with students of the different partner universities where they present the results of the practical assignment supplemented with a reflection based on the study of literature.
- Paper Students write a paper consisting of a summary of the studied literature and critical reflection, a description of the process and results of the practice assignment and a reflection on the outcomes of the cross-national reflection related to the personal professional development.

Assessment

The assessment of the course may vary from one programme to another in terms of time, content and criteria.

Some general guidelines for the assessment are:

- The assessment product is a paper. It can be written by a student group with visible and assessable individual contributions.

- A condition for the assessment is that the student has contributed to the practice assignment and can provide written feedback from at least one social worker, a fellow student and a resident.

Possible criteria for the assessment of the paper are based on the Dublin descriptors, i.e. the paper shows that:

- The student has mastered the theoretical knowledge studied.
- The student can apply this to a practical situation.
- The student can reflect on the practical assignment leading to his own assessment of the situation in question.
- The student can communicate with teachers, fellow students, practice professionals and residents about the insights gained and moral and methodical considerations.
- The student can relate the gained experiences and insights to his own personal development'.

5.2 The World Café as an inspiring educational approach

The World Café is 'a simple yet powerful conversational process that helps groups of all sizes to engage in constructive dialogue, to build personal relationships, and to foster collaborative learning' (Tan and Brown, 2005). The concept of the World Café originated in 1995 in Mill Valley California, when a small group of academics and business leaders improvised a way of tackling issues by starting their brainstorming in separate discussion tables, but then interrupting conversations by switching tables. Since then, the seminal idea has been multiplied expansively in different contexts and has been examined and refined through action research.

The World Café is a method that allows for exchanging ideas with a large number of people, participating together in evolving rounds of dialogue with varying combinations of others while, at the same time remaining part of a single, larger, whole, to bring forth new insights into questions that deeply matter to their life, work, or community (Steier, Brown & Mesquita da Silva, XXX). The atmosphere is casual and informal, creating a convivial setting with small tables and chairs (typically four to five chairs per table).

The process begins with a welcome of the host, who sets the context and shares the etiquette. Then, a number of rounds of conversation take place for the small groups seated around the tables. At the end of each conversation, the members of the group move to a different new table. One person stays behind as the “table host” for the next round, welcomes the next group and briefly fills them in on what happened in the previous round.

By now, the World Café is considered a well-established, evidence-based methodology of cooperative, creative and deep learning. We are convinced the method of the World Café will prove interesting for discussing the challenges of diversity in superdiverse neighbourhoods in an educational setting. Students can come up with as many ideas as possible, and discuss them, in order to arrive at deeper insights and to look for underlying patterns and systems.

Principles

In their book ‘The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations that Matter’, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (2008) describe seven World Café design principles. These principles are an integrated set of ideas and practices that form the basis of the pattern embodied in the World Café process.

Set the context

A first important step is to pay attention to the reason you are bringing people together, and the goals you want to achieve. A reflection on these issues enables you to decide upon the questions that will be most pertinent, the people who should join the conversation, etc. Moreover, the idea is to make clear the collaborative purpose of a World Café to those invited. The Café designers should strive to enable the participants to engage in the process as ‘their process’.

Create hospitable space

World Café design warrants close attention to the physical and emotional space within which the Café will take place (Steier et al., XXX). The invitation and the physical set-up of a World Café should contribute to a welcoming atmosphere. The environment in which World Cafés take place is often modelled after a café, to create a hospitable space that feels safe and inviting. In most examples, Café hosts use small round tables with four to five chairs at each table.

Explore questions that matter

Each round of conversation is prefaced with a question specially crafted for the specific context and desired purpose of the World Café. The questions posed for conversation are a critical aspect of how a Café dialogue will develop. It is important to find questions that are relevant to the real-life concerns of the participants, as questions that matter help attract collective energy, insight and action. Depending on the timeframe available and the objectives, a Café may use the same questions for more than one round, or they can be built upon each other to focus the conversation or guide its direction. In the Debrecen workshop, for example, we used a progressively deeper line of inquiry through three conversational rounds.

Encourage everyone's contribution

It is important to encourage everyone to contribute their ideas and perspectives, while also allowing anyone who wants to participate by simply listening to do so. Multiple forms of participation can be valued. Encouraging participants' contribution is an ongoing task throughout the whole process of the World Café.

Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives

The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute one's thinking, and link the essence of one's discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the World Café. As participants bring key ideas or themes from previous tables to the next, they exchange perspectives, through intentionally increasing the diversity of connections among perspectives, while retaining a common focus on core questions. These core questions may even evolve as the interactions occur greatly enriching the possibility for surprising new insights.

Listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions

The quality of the listening is perhaps the most important factor determining the success of a World Café. Through practicing shared listening and paying attention to themes, patterns and insights, the host can encourage participants to look for what Bateson (1979) referred to as the patterns that connect, as well as to explore underlying assumptions.

Harvest and share collective discoveries

The World Café process is designed to appreciate the collective contribution to what is created. The last phase of the World Café, often called the “harvest”, makes the pattern of wholeness between the conversations held at the different tables visible to everyone. Toward the end of a World Café, the patterns, themes and deeper questions experienced in the small group conversations are discussed in a large group conversation.

World Café in superdiverse settings.

The conversational process of the World Café is an attractive method for engaging in fruitful discussion on sensitive topics in superdiverse neighbourhoods. It contains also several aspects of conflict transformation without demanding a strong mandate of the organisers, and participants in dealing with urban conflicts. The concept of the World Café is also an interesting way of creating a learning environment for social work students. Students acquire on the spot competencies on sensitive topics, conflicts, tensions, lifeworlds and several ways of dealing with these tensions. Here are a few recommendations that highlight the potentials of a World Café method.

Make it relaxed.

World Cafés are provided in hospitable spaces creating a relaxed atmosphere, which facilitates the tackling of sensitive issues. It is important that people feel free and safe to express themselves and that the informal, conversational environment expresses a sense of solidarity and common concern. The splitting up of the discussion in different tables also tempers the public character of the conversational process, lowering thereby the threshold for a free and safe exchange of thoughts.

Create opportunities

Create opportunities for students to take part and learn. Students can easily take part in the World Café. They can be involved in the preparation and organisation of this conversational method. They can critically reflect on the process or report on the output of the discussions. They can learn their research skills, because every dialogue table can be conceived as a focus group discussion. They can also reflect on ethical issues such as the tension between confidentiality and the public character of the World Café. The discussions during the World Café, the questions, arguments and answers raised, also

directly contribute to the production of knowledge on the types, causes and consequences of conflicts in superdiverse settings. And, finally, World Cafés are attractive settings for outreaching learning in a cooperative setting.

[Optimise a diverse setting.](#)

You can easily organise a World Café for fifty people and more, which enables you to bring together a diversity of cultures, backgrounds, generations. For the organisers, it is important however to manage the process in such a way that diversity is assured per table. Another reminder relates to the invitation of participants. Make sure you can connect different networks through bridge building volunteers who easily move from one network to another. Working with local organisations or collectives is highly recommended in this regard. Organise your World Café in a space (a primary school for example) where different cultures, communities and networks cross and where common concerns easily emerge (violence at school, language barriers, burn out of teachers).

[Ethics is important.](#)

World Cafés are also interesting laboratories to explore and learn how local communities manage their conflicts or lack skills to make them productive. In order to stimulate this process of reflexive learning, it is important to communicate and recall the (ethical) principles of the world cafe at the beginning of the conversational process, especially the principle of appreciation and respect for each contribution. Participants have also to be reminded that difference of opinions and arguments are welcomed and can be productive for creative solutions. As participating observers, students can play here an important reflective, signalising role.

[Start from the life experiences of people.](#)

Start the World Café with stories, witnesses, video fragments, images in order to make your topic concrete, tangible, creating thereby a sense of urgency. The questions formulated during the World Café will gain in relevance, and pertinence.

[Build in a follow-up process.](#)

Participants expect that their views, common ideas are taken seriously on one or another level of decision making. One option could be here to invite a local politician at a World Café and to ask to respond to the outcome of the World Café in a follow-up session.

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