The effects of globalisation on social work and youth justice

Utjecaj globalizacije na socijalni rad i maloljetničko pravosuđe

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In this paper we discuss Globalisation as a widely spread phenomenon which has brought many changes in all fields of human activities. More specifically we discuss the impact of globalisation on Social work as a profession. We explore the effects of globalisation on social work and its education and practice. Our goal is to examine how social work, as a profession, has responded to the changing climate of the world. Finally we present five ways that could be effective for social work in adapting to such a climate.

Keywords: Youth Justice, Social Work, Globalisation, International Standards, International Social Work

Globalisation has shaped the economic, political and cultural relationships between people across the world. It has become an unstoppable force during the twenty first century and has a profound impact on welfare provision (Ferguson, Lavalette & Whitmore, 2005, pp. i). It is a complex process with both positive and negative sides that affect the environment, culture, policies, economic development and human well-being in societies around the world. Globalisation is often referred to as a process in world economy, and certainly the effect that globali-

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Globalisation has on world economy is certainly the key in shaping all other areas of human activity, including the fields of education and social work. Globalisation imposes the rules and discipline of the global market on governments and nation states and thus limits the effectiveness of developing countries' national policy (Khan, 2008). Therefore, it has a tendency to increase inequalities between individuals and regions, forging imbalances among different human needs because of its focus on material wealth over human and spiritual values, resulting in violence, alienation and despair (ibid). Falk summarises the opinion of many others with the statement that globalisation: 'is occurring within an international order that exhibits gross inequalities of every variety, thereby concentrating the benefits of growth upon already advantaged sectors within societies and worsening the relative and absolute condition of those already most disadvantaged' (ibid, pp. 17). Globalisation has become a major challenge for every profession which deals with disadvantaged, economically and politically excluded social groups. This particularly refers to the profession of social work.

Because of such increasing differences, deep changes in people's lives and the world in general, social work today may be facing the biggest challenge in helping economically and politically excluded social groups that social work mainly deals with (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 106).

Although there are debates as to whether globalisation is a revolution or an evolution (Noble, 2007, pp. 348) there is no doubt that global forces affect social work, its education, practice, workers and service users. Social work, as Ferguson, Lavalette and Whitmore (2005, pp. 81) claim, has lost its way in the era of globalisation. The proof for such statement can be found in Payne and Askeland’s work from 2008, in which the authors bring three (negative) trends within social work, developed as a consequence of globalisation. The first trend is the commodification of welfare provision, with welfare services and education becoming like goods and services in the commercial market rather than as therapeutic services; the second is giving the priority to market mechanisms and economic development over social development to respond to poverty, social exclusion and inequality; and the third is the emphases that managerialism and new public management (NPM) give to the way services and education are provided (Payne and Askeland, 2008, pp.106). These trends derive from wider economic, political and cultural changes and they conflict with the flexibility and openness required of social work to respond to the inequalities of welfare systems (ibidem, pp. 121).

As for youth justice, in Muncie’s paper ‘The Globalisation of crime control- the case of youth and juvenile justice: Neo-liberalism, Policy Convergence and International Conventions’, three trends in youth justice can also be visible. Muncie argues that by the twenty first century youth justice had developed into a complex of competing and contradictory policies, including retribution, responsibility, rights, restoration and rehabilitation due to global processes that occur in the world. The first process or trend is placing less emphasis on the social contexts of crime and measures of state protection and more on prescriptions of individual/family/community responsibility and accountability (Muncie, 2005, pp.37), which Muncie included in title From welfare to neo-liberal governance. The second phase is called Policy transfer and convergence, meaning that is common for nation states to look worldwide in efforts to discover ‘what works’ in preventing crime and to reduce re-offending (ibid, pp. 38). Muncie emphasises policy transfer as multidimensional and multidirectional, rarely direct and complete partial and mediated through national and local cultures. Policy transfer, as Muncie
claims, will probably become a more dominant aspect of juvenile/youth justice only because of growth in international telecommunications. The third phase is all conventions and guidelines adopted by countries (*International conventions*), which can be viewed as tantamount to a growing legal globalisation of juvenile justice (*ibid*, pp. 45).

Reading this, it is clear that social work needs re-organisation and re-construction of its practice and education throughout the world. In order to achieve flexible and open social work, which is a key in responding to globalisation, a lot of changes must be made regarding social work practice and education, including preparation of social workers, social work students and service users for those changes.

Although these changes are present in everyday work, a question of social work practitioner’s awareness of globalisation processes still remains. In her study in 2001, Dominelli (2007) has found that social workers in Great Britain had limited insight of influences of such processes on social work practice at the local level. Even though they recognised greater cross-cultural exposure, enhanced understanding and skills to deal with international social problems, they were still quite pessimistic about the shifts in practice toward commercialisation. Universities didn’t succeed in producing a model of education for training the practitioner since they were unable to grasp the complexity of the shifting context in which courses operate. Hence despite their effort, social work in Britain remains a divided profession, which empowers government to impose its ideas about how social work education and practice should look.

While in the Europe social work struggled to find its place, social work in The United States has always been an independent discipline, with a long history of engaging with international issues. Kondrat and Ramanathan’s study in 1996 was first in the literature empirically to investigate social workers’ practice perceptions and educational needs in America. The results have shown that their social workers had strong interest in global matters and had a desire to learn more about it. The understanding of the impact of globalisation on practice was related to a range of variables and their practice setting and beliefs about the focus of social work affected perceptions of the relevance of globalisation to social work.

The relevance of globalisation in The United States is reflected in The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards issued in 2002. These Standards require all social work baccalaureate and Master’s programs to prepare students to ‘recognise the global context of social work practice’ (CSWE, 2002; in Dominelli, 2007, pp. 359). International issues must be included in the teaching of social policy and students are expected to gain an understanding of the ‘global interconnections of oppression’ in learning about populations at risk and social and economic justice (*ibid*, pp. 359). Despite all the efforts, social workers in America claim that they were often too busy dealing with the day-to-day issues of clients to worry about global policies.

Moving from Europe and America, maybe the most extensive research related to the degrees of recognition of the globalisation processes and their impact on social work and education is Findlay and McCormack’s *A snapshot of Australian practitioners’ views* issued in 2005. This research is focused on exploring the relationship between local and international issues regarding self-reported awareness of globalisation; educational preparedness for global social work; and further global practice educational needs.
The results of this research showed that 39.7% of social workers in Australia had high level of awareness of the impact of globalisation on their profession; 86% stated that relationship between global issues and local practice was clearly observable; 5% of them were unsure of the impact of globalisation; 86% indicated global issues were either fairly relevant or extremely relevant, 7.6% were unsure, 4.5% did not think global issues were very relevant and 1.5% felt that global issues were not at all relevant to their field of practice. However, 100% believe that social work has a role to play in dealing with global issues, with two-thirds (67%) agreeing strongly and one third agreeing partly (Findlay and McCormack, 2007). However, despite the overwhelmingly good results, Australian social work today is increasingly experiencing problems related to the movement of people and opening the country to the world. A congruence with American social workers can be seen here, with practitioners seemingly being too busy dealing with everyday problems to fully explore global issues.

Exploring the questions posed by the literature above, the authors asked some of the participants at IUC School of Social Work Theory and Practice held in 2010 in Dubrovnik, in order to see the level of awareness of globalisation of college professors and social work/ youth justice practitioners that attended this course. Being asked ‘Which force is more relevant to social work and youth justice-globalisation or localisation?’, majority responded to localisation as more relevant, because, as they claim, social work and youth justice are local services delivered locally by sovereign government and/or local government. They argue that there is global influence but in reality all the countries decide about their policies on the national level. Further they argued that youth justice is not out of control under globalisation, arguing that youth justice works on micro level. Good practice often derives from international ideas/ treaties, e.g. restorative justice. However, some participants found it difficult to answer the question of youth justice being under the control of globalisation, and suggesting that influence may be a more helpful term in that context.

‘Is youth justice an international profession or is it a Western idea forced on the rest of the world?’ was probably the most interesting question. Some suggested that youth justice is, and should, be an international profession but it depends on different actors: culture, history, circumstances, geographic conditions etc. Others suggested that the concept of social work with young people in conflict with the law is a western idea ‘imposed’ on the rest of the world.

The last question was ‘What are youth justice practitioner’s perceptions of their awareness of globalisation?’ They were all unanimous in saying that practitioner’s perceptions were very limited. They argued that practitioners in Croatia, for example, perceive themselves as very aware of globalisation, but they aren’t able clearly to see the links between local and global when it comes to examining policy formulation and implementation.

As a conclusion to this, it is clear that social work needs to develop a new framework of action, in which the awareness of globalisation processes will provide a foundation on which to establish new and modern social work. Overall, this framework needs to include cultural, economic, social and political features on theory and practice but also to develop openness to new experiences and paradigms, a commitment to lifelong learning and creation of a morally active and responsible profession aware of globalisation forces. But what do these general guidelines really mean for social work and how can they be implemented in the already existing framework? We suggest five ways which we believe could be effective in adapting social work to global change.
Responding to globalisation

Regardless of social worker’s awareness of globalisation, we can conclude that social work today desperately needs to find a way to respond to global processes. Globalisation itself is neither positive nor negative process. Whether globalisation be a positive or negative process depends on the context in which it is felt. There are various ways to respond to its effects, especially negative ones. Some of the ways could be for example, making a greater effort in protection of citizens’ and workers’ rights, control of global capital movements, management of transnational companies or creation of non-governmental organisations (NGO’s). NGO’s have the capacity to respond to problems and campaign against damaging movements in global capital and transnational companies. NGO’s can also form a counterbalance to transnational companies and their globalizing tendencies (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp.18).

On that basis, we suggest five ways which we believe could be effective in adapting social work to global change.

Critical reflection, an educational and supervision method which combines practice, research and education in a circular process (Payne and Askeland, 2008:33), may help to contribute to a conscious perspective on the consequences of the global movements for social work, being specifically concerned about power, dominance and oppression. It may also help in preventing post-colonialism (ibid, pp. 34) in education and practice and in creating local and global social work ‘knowledges’. In the educational field, it is very important for students to be conscious of the knowledge on which the practice of social work is based. Students need to be reflective and critical; they need to develop professional growth and competence by critical reflection on their own practice, but also to create a knowledge based by practice research. Ford (2005, in Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp.33) argues that critical practitioners are professionals who are aware of their own choices in a social, educational and political context. To make social workers and students critically reflective, the profession needs to be empowered.

Empowerment of and in social work education and practice could be the second way in responding to globalisation. To have an empowered profession, Karvinen, Gould and Baldwin (in Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 95) emphasise that social workers must claim expertise in redefining the issues that clients and communities face; they must develop knowledge about how to transform the situations in which clients and communities find themselves and they need to find new approaches when previous work qualifications are no longer relevant after changes in society. Non-empowered social workers are unable to support clients in their empowering processes. Social workers can empower themselves, for example, by developing the critically self-reflective practitioner, who is able to practice within the value perspective of the social work profession; by recognition of the relationship between personal life experiences and personal value systems and social work practice (IASSW & IFSW, 2003).

Knowledge, however, is empowering when it is produced in a non-oppressive way and used to reduce social inequalities. Therefore, students need to be empowered to stand up for themselves, to find their identity within a constantly changing environment and to influence their own working conditions, but they also need to incorporate new skills to work with newly available information and technology.
In an attempt to respond to globalisation processes, IASSW and IFSW at Conference in Montreal in July 2000 conducted a document that identifies certain universals that may be used as guidelines to develop national standards with regard to social work education and training. The document *Global qualifying standards for social work education and training*, showed what social work represents on a global level and it emphasised an approach to education and training that supports human rights, social justice (IASSW & IFSW, 2003), but it also reflected a commitment to the personal and professional development of student social workers (development of the critically self-reflective practitioner).

The main reasons for the development of such document, according to *International Federation of Social Workers*, were to protect the ‘consumers’ or ‘clients’ of social work services, take an account of the impact of globalisation on social work curricula and practice, facilitate articulation across universities on a global level, facilitate the movement of social workers and partnerships, draw a distinction between social workers and non-social workers, benchmark national standards against international standards, and to enable IASSW and IFSW to play a facilitative role in helping institutions of social work that lack resources to meet the standards (IASSW & IFSW, 2003).

These standards serve as an important link to the empowerment of social workers and students; especially standards with regard to student social workers, such as student recruitment, admission; provision for student advising that is directed toward student orientation, assessment of the student’s motivation, non-discrimination on the basis of race, colour, culture, religion. By implementing these standards in universities students can be empowered in their enrolment in school processes and future profession. In that way, students won't be so passive in learning and making changes in society.

Furthermore, we suggest certain points of guidance in Standards for a global curriculum to be implemented: clear plans for the organisation, implementation and evaluation of the theory and field education components of the programme and constant review and development of the curriculum. We suggest that the curriculum should help students to develop skills of critical thinking of reasoning, openness to new experiences and paradigms, so that student can develop commitment to life-long learning. The curriculum must also be determined by local, national and/or regional needs and priorities and it requires description of the objectives of each of the curriculum components and an explanation of their sequencing.

Even though the forces of globalisation are powerful, their importance and relevance to social work are under-recognised by many educators. Because of that, many obstacles still exist in implementing new conceptual frameworks into the curriculum.

Since it was published, *Global qualifying standards for social work education and training* has had some critiques, suggesting that it should include more practical guidelines, such as multi-tiered classification for the basic qualification (Gray, 2007). Others emphasise that the multi-tiered system is too elitist and argue that there is a possibility of *western domination* (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 4). More obstacles, such as lack of faculty interest and expertise, student interest, resource shortages, administrative support, crowded curriculum, recognition of international content by standard-setting and accreditation bodies within social work shows that the concept Global standards still has a long way to go.

Hokenstad (in Dominelli, 2007, pp. 357) suggests that international collaboration is one potentially effective method for preparing social workers to function in the context of global
realities. Furthermore she argues that training which integrates international perspectives into the social work curriculum (...) provides possibilities for academic staff, students and practitioners to undertake exchanges. Social work teachers need to develop skills for effective professional exchange and need to educate a generation of social workers who will see international communication as normal, with the use of teaching materials from a wide range of origins, on-line discussions with educators and student groups in other countries so they can learn more about their global community.

*International social work* as Dominelli (2007, pp. 353) claims, is an appropriate concept for addressing the threats, challenges and opportunities presented by forces of globalisation. International social work represents a way that could combat the personal, social and political effects of globalisation and that could develop awareness, understanding and analysis to respond to the experience of those effects in the people and communities social workers work with (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 156).

Still, this concept is not widely accepted and it is often viewed as marginal field of interest rather than a concept that has the power to unite the profession/professions in the world.

There have been many different opinions of different authors on whether social work can be defined as an international concept or is it influenced and related exclusively with context of one society (in relation to their norms, values, behaviours, historical elements etc.). Social work can be conceptualised as different activities such as:

- **Working in development agencies in the South** (North and South are mentioned as terms that denote the difference between rich and economically developed nations and those who have poorer and less developed economies)
- Working for official international agencies
- Working for agencies dealing with cross-national issues
- Working for international social work organisations
- Participating in international conferences, educational or professional visits, exchanges and placements and research;
- Working as a social worker in a country that is foreign to them;
- Working with refugees and immigrants in their own country (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 3).

Regardless of the above definitions, it is unavoidable that social workers may experience poverty, inequalities and other problems that have directly arisen as a result of globalisation in their societies. Problems like international migration, asylum seeking, and refugees can be the problems they cope with on daily basis. Therefore, we must aim for a social work that is concerned for both international and local problems and international social work can be the answer to such demand. We claim that social workers need to perceive international social work as part of their (local) profession. Even if they are not international social workers themselves, their daily practice and the needs and problems that users of their services face will be affected by international social trends (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 6).

Even if, as we argue, international social work is possible, there are still a series of questions about international social work in the context of postmodern globalised societies. To
what extent is there an international social work? If there is, is it any more than Western social work influencing the wider world through postcolonial cultural hegemony? Is postcolonial hegemony an outcome of economic, political and cultural globalisation affecting welfare policy, social work knowledge and social work education? What could we do to create an international social work that is more open to local cultural requirements? (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 1).

At this point we argue that every country has its own set of norms, values, behaviours, and every society has its own specific history and cultural background. For example social work in Africa deals with mass poverty, HIV/AIDS, lack of socio-economic infrastructure, conflicts, political insecurity, lack of human rights and social justice, while social work in the West doesn’t have the need to deal with these problems, because they don’t have such them (Payne & Askeland, 2008, pp. 17).

Conclusion

We find it impossible to define social work as an international concept, but one of the possible ways of responding to globalisation would be to find a way to exchange knowledge and information internationally and to use it to improve social work practice.

Globalisation, as a process, has brought many of the positive improvements in fields of economy, science and technology, but it also brought some undesirable consequences like unemployment, poverty and social exclusion that directly concern social work. By causing these undesirable consequences, globalisation imposes a challenge on social work, helping economically and politically excluded social groups.

To respond to these effects social work education and practice should become more open and flexible. Social work educators should strive to create critical self-reflective practitioners who are able to empower both themselves and their clients in a way which seeks to find new approaches, new solutions and new outcomes. The concept of international social work is imposed by commitment of social work to science, and it relies on the assumption that it can develop universal knowledge, implying that social workers can apply this universal knowledge to anyone in the field of their work, independently of their cultural background, values, norms and behaviour patterns.

Social work on a global level emphasises the approach to education and training that supports development and preservation of human rights, pluralism, multiculturalism, anti-racism, social justice and peace. Social workers in this respect must become globally conscientious learners who are empowered by the experience of global education and thus able to respond to effects of globalisation. Social workers should also be committed to lifelong learning, and the way to that is through curriculum which must help students to develop skills of critical thinking, openness to new experiences, new paradigms and new points of view. By inspiring and learning from each other, social workers around the world are transforming the way their profession engage with the world. Social work must not avoid nor ignore the processes that globalisation imposes. As a ‘global profession’, it has to embrace the globalisation, adopt it as positive change and work along with it.
References