International perspective in Social Work – a new challenge?
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Some personal experiences

- 20 years social work in social services in Parma
- 33 years teacher in social work at Parma University
My first time for coming in contact with the idea of “international social work” was in

......IASSW-IFSW International congress in Montpellier 2002
Social work definition (2001)

- The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.
New Social work definition - to be discussed

The social work profession facilitates 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 knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.
An internationally accepted definition of social work is not necessarily international social work

Mohan (2008)
The past

International collaboration has been fundamental for the growth of social work as a profession in different countries:

- Extensive international contacts between the profession’s founders in the United Kingdom, the United States and other industrializing countries in the late nineteenth century
● Innovations such as charity visiting and settlement work in the United Kingdom diffused to the United States.

● Theoretical developments in American social work were adopted in Europe and elsewhere.
Formative exchanges of the early decades of the XX th. Century allowed to increase the number of social work schools

Strong international activity period after the Second World
Katerine Kendall
The present

Social work is expanding in different new countries: eg. former communist nations, in China but is also continuing to grow in the so called developing countries
Some figures

- 2000 schools of social work worldwide (IASSW census 2000)
- 80 countries affiliated to IFSW with more than 470,000 members
Angelina Barretta Herman and Brian Littlechild presenting the research on Census in Durban
Social work has an international relevance and there are some commonalities in extremely diverse examples of practice across most countries of the world.
A the same time we can find difficulties in agreeing “universal” definitions or standards, due to the specific situation, conditions and cultures.
In the wider global context it is possible to find different emphases in education and training, different organizations of services and practice, different views on the role played by the social actors (state, private and informal sector).
International social work

- **Specific field of activity linked with international agencies**
- **Distinct practice oriented towards immigrants and refugees**
- **Academic framework of studies oriented to a systematic comparison of social work in different areas of the world**
International social work includes the “exchanges of ideas by social workers at international meetings as well as inter-country work, or intergovernmental work, and relief work”
Friedlander (1955, 1975) uses the term international social work to refer specifically to the social welfare activities of international agencies such as the Red Cross and the United Nations.
Hokenstad et al. (1992):

international social work is concerned with ‘the profession and practice in different parts of the world . . . the different roles social workers perform, the practice methods they use, the problems they deal with and the challenges they face’
Healy (2001)

- International professional action and the capacity for international action by the social work profession and its members, having four dimension:
- Internationally related domestic practice and advocacy,
- Professional exchange
- International practice
- International policy development and advocacy
International social work can and should play an important role in consolidating democracy, social justice and the implementation of international conventions such as human rights, elimination of discrimination against woman, rights of children and so on, as well as preventing conflicts and supporting peace by promoting global cultural integration.
Lyons, Manion, Carlsen (2006)

- having an increased understanding of global events, influences and problems;
- recognizing the international and cross-cultural dimension of local issues;
- utilizing comparative or internationally derived knowledge to inform their analyses of problem areas and evaluation of possible strategies for intervention
Despite the critical importance of international issues and the efforts of IASSW and IFSW, the profession seems not respond adequately and international social work is still the purview of a small group of experts.
The curricula for social work education don’t focus enough on international issues.

but….

Social work educators have a poorly defined conceptual and practical subject terrain on which to build an adequate curriculum.
Definition is still a tricky point...

Unless the nature and scope of international social work can be defined in concrete terms, it is hardly likely that social workers will hasten to become more involved in the field.
Similarly, if schools of social work are to increase international curriculum content, they need to know what this content should comprise.
Nagy and Falk (2000) point out that the failure to resolve the issue of definition is a formidable barrier to internationalizing the curriculum.
Midgley (2001) purpose a broad definition of international social work that incorporates different approaches recognizing that they all have merit.
With a broad, encompassing perspective based on a global consciousness, it is possible to recognize different dimensions of internationalization that focus, in turn, on comparative enquiry, professional collaboration and specific forms of practice in international agencies that requires appropriate knowledge and skills.
● Mohan (2008) is very critical about the status of theorization and point out that “American literature on international social work is in abundance but much of it lacks substance”.

● However he recognises the importance to have new books directly or indirectly relate to international social work
Why is so important?

The world is complex and interconnected place, with implications for the genesis and manifestation of both old and new problems.
Globalisation is a fact….

- Globalisation and the consolidation of postmodernity leave no nation unaffected by the international impact of economic, political and social problems.
economic point of view

- mobility of production processes from advanced capitalist countries to developing countries
- spread and rising power of Trans National Corporations worldwide
- liberalization of international finance systems
- reductions in transportation and communication costs
socio-political context

- “World peace” and worldwide bodies encourage international dialogue and the establishment of global corporations and trading arrangements
- Development of information and communication technology and transport systems
Cultural level

- Spread of ideas and cultural icons
- Homogeneization of cultures, aesthetic preferences and values
- Consciousness that patterns of behaviour in one country or part of the world can have profound implications for whole populations in other societies or even worldwide
Some direct or indirect effects

- Erosion of citizenship rights
- Effects on living standards and economic security
- Pressure to reduce expenditure on welfare
- Technocratization and resource reduction in social services
Conflicts, poverty, migration, sexual exploitation, woman trafficking, political and religious oppression....

....."man made disasters" and the consequences at environmental level ( Asian tsunami, Carribean hurricanes, Chernobil disaster, China heartquake... )
All social workers need to have some appreciation of international perspectives, some knowledge of global events and processes and cross-cultural issues to feel better equipped for social work activities.
Topic to be reviewed in the light of international perspectives

- Natural and forced migration
- Conflict in communities
- Division of people, based on gender, race, ethnicity, class and religion
- Exploitation of children
- Global spread of diseases
- Etc…
But also…

- Differences in welfare system
- Weakening and inevitable transformation of the welfare state
- New actors participating in the social field
- New conceptions of family, care and responsibility, childhood and old age
New conditions require updated analyses and review the knowledges and skills which are relevant to local and international practice.
It seems more and more important to engage in multi-factor analysis of social problems as well as working cooperatively with other professionals to develop relevant services and programmes which connect personal problems with structural and political aspects.
Social professions need to form alliances at local, regional and international levels to promote policies as well as practices that address fundamental inequalities and injustices within and between societies (see also the IFSW policy statement).
Some advices: in the education context....

- Make a synthesis of social practice and theory with a global outlook
- Overcame local identities and interest towards a wider and deeper view in the social work education
- Increase cross cultural experience beyond national boundaries in internship and fieldwork contents
• Inter-university faculty and students exchanges, contribution to the development of international and comparative social welfare under qualified supervision

• Collaborative researches expanded beyond multiple authorship with mutual support and enhancement of competences
Some advices: at “political” level...

- International social work should strive for the recognition of the idea of an international society, leading to limited global citizenship.
- Develop an idea of social work without borders as a goal of all social welfare organizations and institutions.
• Numerous social work associations and organisations will be helpful in disseminating this message, but also have a vehicle of global voice

• Hook up with the international bodies (e.g. UN) to support and promote causes that are universally constructive
THREE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

IASSW
International Association of Schools of Social Work

ICSW
International Council on Social Welfare

IFSW
International Federation of Social Workers
IASSW
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

- is an international community of schools and educators in social work, promoting quality education, training and research in the theory and practice of social work, administration of social services and formulation of social policies.
- represents 2,000 schools of social work and 500,000 students.
ICSW - is a global, non-governmental organisation which represents tens of thousands of organisations around the world that are actively involved in programmes to promote social welfare, social development and social justice.
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

- is the global federation of national social work organisations in 90 countries representing over 750,000 social workers
IASSW, IFSW and ICSW have decided to cooperate in a stronger way and organise joint international conference. The first was
THE FIRST JOINT CONFERENCE

- To claim/reclaim the priority of ‘political’ action and to develop a collective voice for social development and social work practitioners and social work educators
- To start a collective process of elaborating and setting a common Global Agenda for years to come that can unite those involved in social work and social development
- To strategise around mechanisms for the implementation of common actions and the development of modalities for monitoring our efforts
THE FIRST JOINT CONFERENCE

Over three thousand Social Work Practitioners and Educators were meeting in Hong Kong in June 2010 and have decided to launch a global movement that addresses the major challenges of our societies.

To identify major and relevant social issues that connect within and across our profession.
The three organisations (IASSW, IFSW and ICSW) have set up a common platform to help steer the process and support colleagues around the world towards their deliberations and mobilisation initiatives in relation to the Global Agenda.
Since the Hong Kong conference in June 2010, numerous initiatives have taken place across the globe.

The feedback from the first consultation demonstrates that issues identified in the draft Global Agenda document were endorsed by the majority of the members who provided feedback.
The Second Joint Conference

Social Work Social Development 2012: Action and Impact
8-12 July 2012, Stockholm, Sweden
The Global Agenda

four areas:

- Promoting social and economic equalities
- Promoting the dignity and worth of peoples
- Working toward environmental sustainability
- Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships
Social and economic inequalities within countries and between regions

The recent and continuing economic crises and the modalities chosen by world leaders to deal with them (e.g. using resources to support the financial systems while cutting resources for social support and social development) have led to:
Growing inequalities and their implications
The worsening marginalisation of populations and of the working poor
Increased vulnerability of poor people in countries which do not have an adequate social protection floor
Community disintegration
Dignity and worth of the person

- Human rights issues in relation to social, economic, cultural and political situations
- Respect for diversity and different belief systems, especially indigenous and first people’s voices
- Political instabilities, violence, dominations, and the erosion of peace building processes
- Terrorism and modes of response by states and the modalities of handling global conflicts
- Migration, refugees, trafficking, immigrants, immigration and ways of handling these issues
- The role for social work practice, education and social development
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

- Disasters of natural and human origin, management and prevention
- Involvement of local communities in developing responses
- Implications for sustainable social development
- Protecting the physical environment
- Proactive engagement with social, human and ecological development
Family and relationship issues and challenges across the lifespan emerge as a major concern in relation to the transformation of the world. For example the needs of:

- Children and families
- People with Disabilities
- People needing health and mental health services
- People who are ageing
- People with drugs and substance abuse problems
- People suffering from violence within domestic and intimate relationships
NEW CHALLENGES
CALL FOR NEW STRATEGIES

Extending partnerships
Building capacity and assets
Developing a unified professional voice
Engaging with local, national, regional and global bodies
Strengthening analysis and consolidating evidence to support collective advocacy and action
References


● Mohan B. (2008), Rethinking international social work, International Social Work, 51(1) : 11-24