

The Challenges of Globalisation and Harmonisation for European Social Work Education

Lena Dominelli*

Introduction

Globalisation has been an important force for development (or its lack) in different parts of the world. Combined with a political ideology of neo-liberalism, it has brought considerable convergence in economic and socio-cultural structures amongst diverse parts of the globe. However, its progression has not been even. Nation-states have embraced some of its tenets and contested others. The same range of responses has been evident amongst individuals and groups. Some geographic locations have been more closely integrated into the global economic system than others. Neither has globalisation been uncontested. Many individuals and environmental groups have been highly vocal in their opposition to it (Goldschmidt, 2001; Chris Skinner, 2004). Thus, globalisation has been both challenging and challenged. In Europe, the forces of globalisation have contributed to regionalisation and harmonisation while at the same time encouraging decentralisation and devolution. Various nation-states have populations which reject the formation of a strong regional identity that might submerge their individual national ones. These developments have also impacted upon the social work profession (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996, 1996a; Wagner, 1997).

For social work educators, the challenges wrought by globalisation are considerable. These have included moves towards harmonisation of qualifications and greater parity of meaning between different awards while simultaneously raising concerns about the loss of national identity in and through education and a drop in standards as nation-states race to the bottom to agree minimum levels that are relevant for all. Additionally, they have also been called upon to respond to the internationalisation of social problems and other forms of social relations popularised by the forces of globalisation. This has occurred within what has been termed the 'mixed economy of welfare' (Wistow *et al.*, 1994) which encompasses state, commercial and voluntary providers. In this paper, I explore the challenges of globalisation and harmonisation for European social work education and the profession's responses to some of the issues these have presented.

* University of Southampton

The challenge of locality within globalisation

Defining globalisation

Globalisation is a system of social organisation that promotes the penetration of capitalist social relations in all aspects of everyday existence in differentiated ways in diverse countries throughout the world. It is a system of domination that uses 'economics as ideology' and involves political choices that support capital accumulation in areas of life traditionally considered exempt from its grasp, including the provision of personal social services. It draws upon 'economics as ideology' (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996, 1996a) to disguise the political choices that are made in fostering the spread of globalising forces across all domains in the human condition. In broadening its reach, globalisation has changed the relationship between the individual (citizen) and the state; the 'client' and the practitioner; and the employer and the employee (Dominelli, 2004).

Globalising the local in European social work education

Globalisation has led to a blurring of boundaries between nation-states and in doing so, encouraged regionalisation, especially in the economic domain, e.g., the EU, NAFTA. As has been documented elsewhere (Marx, 1968), economic change drives other types of change, particularly when it operates through 'economics as ideology'. These global forces have promoted moves towards harmonisation and greater homogeneity particularly in the cultural domain, education and social services. The General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS), endorsed by a substantial number of countries including many European ones, aims to harmonise education and the personal social services using the market as the driver of change. This means that private corporations with global interests will become involved in providing the personal social services. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is responsible for ensuring that GATS is implemented globally and will ensure greater standardisation, consistency and harmonisation in these activities (www.wto.org). Social work educators have yet to address seriously the implications of such developments and include a consideration of their repercussions on their courses.

The processes of globalisation within the educational sphere in Europe are being facilitated at the regional level by the Bologna Process formalised under the Bologna Declaration of June 1999. This requires harmonisation across professional boundaries and in degree levels so that professional labour can move more easily about the region. Already ECTS (the European Credit Transfer System) has become a key instrument for standardising dissimilar educational programmes in all disciplines, not just social work. ECTS recognition requires courses to be formulated in units that identify workload by conforming to a given number of staff-student contact hours reflected as credits, have a student handbook, a learning agreement that identifies what the student will learn and a transcript that records the student's achievements upon the successful completion of each

unit. Comparability is ensured through the Diploma Supplement (DS) which records these details and has been especially created to increase transparency of qualifications across Europe. The DS is essentially a *description* of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies pursued by an individual student.

The EU's educational programmes such as ERASMUS, SOCRATES, and TEMPUS have encouraged student and staff exchanges within Europe. Other programmes exist to fund exchanges with countries in other parts of the world. Through endeavours such as these, the local is being globalised. However, the pressures of globalisation that encourage homogenisation can inhibit the flourishing of those approaches to education and the delivery of services that cater to the different cultural traditions that are relevant in each different locality. Meanwhile, the loss of local specificity has been accompanied by resistance to globalisation as people seek to assert their autonomy and cultural identity. Many environmental movements resisting corporate ventures involve social workers in the mobilisation of local people and communities.

Locality-driven social work education

Social work education has tended to be locality driven, linked to a specific nation-state (Lorenz, 1994) and tied to national legislation and traditions. So, finding ways of linking national requirements to wider regional or international agendas is a major challenge. For the nation-state, education has become an arena of considerable relevance in preparing people for the knowledge society that is going to produce wealth in a globalising world and make the goods and services that a country wishes to sell in an extremely competitive global economic system. The welfare system, as part of the nation-state, has been drawn into meeting these objectives by picking up the casualties of the system. This occurs, for example, when industrial areas decline as has happened in Europe when jobs have been relocated to developing countries with lower costs of production including cheaper wage levels; negligible public welfare provisions; reduced legal protection for labour activists; and social problems such as poverty, the sex trade in children and human trafficking have become internationalised (Wichterich, 2000; Dominelli and Khan, 2000). Additionally, under globalisation, practitioners have to work within the interstices of practice formed through the 'mixed economy of welfare'. These have emphasised market provisions purchased by individuals in the marketplace rather than publicly funded ones available to a citizen as of right. And in so doing, the 'mixed economy of welfare' has contributed to changing the relationship between the individual and the state.

Moreover, the regionalisation agenda and the internationalisation of social problems, particularly those associated with poverty and migration within the context of a globalising world, have generated anxieties amongst considerable segments of Europe's diverse populations. The rise of Far Right parties and neo-liberal restrictionism in the political sphere have given credence to protectionism regarding external borders and toughened European stances towards asylum seekers and refugees (Schuster, 2004). Additionally, the expansion

of the EU to 25 countries to include some previously in the former Soviet bloc in May 2004 has meant that moves towards regionalisation have had to address a more complex and broader set of national issues. Amongst these concerns for social work educators is the imperative of finding ways to increase portability of educational qualifications across national borders, ensure comparability of degree results within diverse educational systems and improve employability amongst graduates.

At the same time, the spread of neo-liberalist policies in the welfare arena has prompted some academics, notably those in social policy, to re-assert the relevance of a 'European model of social welfare' in the world community. This model is rooted in the traditions of social solidarity expressed through publicly funded welfare states that provide individuals with support during hard times on a universalistic or social insurance basis to more fully endorse (regional) citizenship as the criteria for entitlement. This approach is in contrast to the American model which is market-oriented and individualistic, favouring those with economic means over those without. Although arguments favouring a 'European' model can be sustained at high levels of abstraction, its presence has failed to materialise at the level of daily practice for many socially excluded people who live at the margins of European societies.

Moreover, there is currently no *European* identity, but one that is in the making. Many people living in Europe are sceptical about a supranational identity, preferring a loose collaboration of highly sovereign nation-states that agree to work together over specific initiatives. Social work educators and practitioners alike are part of this reality. Moreover, the 25 nation-states that now make up the European Union have a range of welfare systems with differentiated entitlement criteria that have succeeded in defying Esping-Anderson's (1990) classification of welfare systems. These disparities also have to be reconciled. The importance of the European model, if it gathers widespread support, however is that it might offer a pathway for the creation of alternative models to neo-liberal forms of welfare developments that are now sweeping across the world.

In some respects, dealing with the challenges of globalisation poses new problems for social work education. In other senses, it is restating old ones. It is not the case that social work educators have not been concerned either with addressing broader issues or learning from endeavours in other countries prior to discourses focusing on globalisation. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) was created in 1928 at a meeting in Paris of social work professionals from many parts of the world precisely for these purposes (Kendall, 1991). Under its aegis, social work educators have participated in conferences, shared curricula and examined research findings in endeavours aimed at learning from each other and advancing the status of the profession as a knowledge-based discipline with a scientific edge.

During the course of its history, the IASSW has been extensively involved in strengthening collaboration between academics and practitioners who are now organised in what is known as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) to address common concerns and strengthen the voice of the profession in the international arena, particularly in relation to

bodies such as the United Nations and international civil society. More recently, under the Presidency of Lena Dominelli (1996-2004), the IASSW has worked extensively with the IFSW to bring about joint agreement on the definition of social work, an ethics document, and global qualifying standards. Central to their endeavours together have been the principles of equality, mutuality and reciprocity, contributing from the strengths of each organisation, respecting differences, looking for commonalities while acknowledging diversity. Without such principles, it is very easy for larger organisations to dictate the agenda and subordinate smaller ones to their purposes. Similar principles could be effective in bringing countries closer together. Here, these would be supplemented by the principle of interdependence, involving an acknowledgement of the impact that events or policies initiated in one part have on others.

Learning from others

Despite their concern with locality and nation, British social workers in a study undertaken by CISCODEV (1) indicated considerable interest in learning about social work practice in different countries and learning lessons from this for their own work. Below are some of the statements made by these practitioners.

One focused on how local practice could be improved and said:

‘Social workers can raise awareness of day to day problems...to address international issues’.

Another was able to link learning from others with innovations at the local level and commented:

‘It is important for social workers to be aware of what is going on in different countries. Social work is something global. To look at a different country gives you new ideas and values. The whole world is becoming more globally focussed.’

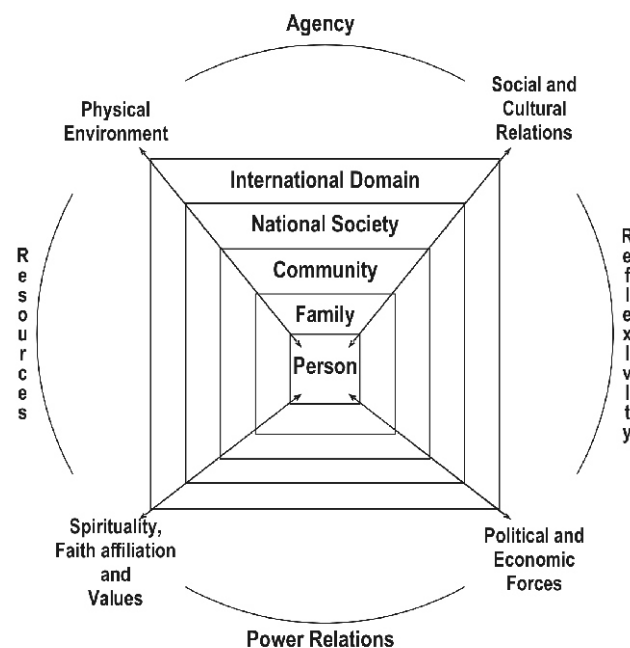
Another emphasized the contribution that learning from others makes to the development of anti-oppressive practice:

‘Comparative studies help place your own work in context. It is tempting to become too ethnocentric and fall into your own comfortable assumptive world without fully understanding the full picture.’

To develop a full picture of the skills and knowledge that are necessary for dealing with

the complexity of issues posed by globalisation requires social work educators to rethink the curricula they offer in both the academy and the field to ensure that social workers are able to understand diverse contexts and capable of working upon different levels. The chart below demonstrates how these might be worked upon in practice. Situating the individual client within their familial, local, national and international contexts enables the practitioner to explore the variety of forces that impact upon an individual's position and affect his or her behaviour and relationships with others. These are in turn altered by the constellation of resources that individuals have to organise their lives in accordance with their own aims and objectives. The inclusion of the international domain is important because social work within a national context is affected by what occurs beyond the borders of the nation-state through the internationalisation of social problems. The growing impact of world-wide poverty, for example, has resulted in the problems associated with poverty in one country being exported to another as poor people seek to improve their living standards by migrating to other more conducive environments. The same dynamics are evident in the migration of people to other countries to mitigate the devastation caused by natural disasters and civil strife, trafficking in people or the sex trade in children.

Holistic Intervention Chart for Anti-Oppressive Practice



Source: Dominelli, L., *Anti-Oppressive Social Work Theory and Practice*, London, Palgrave, 2002.

Practising under globalisation

Under the auspices of neo-liberal forms of globalisation, the citizen has been encouraged to think of welfare provisions in terms of personal responsibility and risk minimisation in order that he or she can pick services from a range of options offered for sale on the market. This has loosened the ties of solidarity through which individuals have pooled their resources together for the greater good of all and produced win-win situations by covering all those who required assistance to a minimal standard. This schema counters the winner (or the one who can afford to buy) takes all mentality of individualistic approaches to welfare.

Meanwhile, the 'new managerialism' has imposed controls on practitioners and academics that have whittled away their professional autonomy and subjected them to bureaucratic regimes that dictate how they will perform their jobs. Employees are also being monitored in how they carry out their tasks by performance indicators and other instruments of accountability (Dominelli, 1996). By introducing Fordist relations of production into the welfare arena, managers following the precepts of the 'new managerialism' have altered the relationship between those who employ professionals and those who work for them (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996, 1996a). A social worker in the CISCODEV study expressed this in the following terms:

'I feel that managerialism and market forces within a supposedly mixed economy of welfare are destroying professional social work practice. Increasingly, the organisation is driven towards creating an expensive, callous bureaucracy which prides itself on delivering resource-led policies as prime measures of its effectiveness and efficiency'.

These comments are also supported in Robinson's (1996, p. 17) study that found that:

'The culture and ideology of global capitalism thus works to depoliticise social behaviour and pre-empt collective action aimed at social change by channelling people's activities into a fixation with the search for individual consumption and survival'.

The advent of case management as a key form of practice is an expression of the globalised market in the provision of the personal social services for older people. Supported by the new managerialism, it has emphasised the 'contract culture' in the provision of services. Known as the *purchaser-provider split*, this arrangement has encouraged the withdrawal of the state as a provider of services (DoH, 1998). However, its restriction to the commissioning side of the equation has not lessened the state's power in determining the kinds of services that become available, nor lessened its role in influencing the policies that shape service provisions (Wistow et al., 1994). These changes in the welfare state have in turn altered the ways in which social workers respond to clients requiring their services. In theory, the

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case management approach was sold as fostering user choice and empowerment in their relationships with social workers. As practitioners, social workers no longer worked with clients, but simply purchased 'packages of care' which were made available by those outside the state system in either the for-profit or the not-for-profit sectors. In reality, social workers responding to the CISCODEV project reported that:

'User consultation and involvement has become a tokenistic exercise flawed by a lack of resource commitment and a misunderstanding of politicians as to the involvement of users' (a social worker).

'Much lip service is paid to consulting users and listening. Often they are told that a service can only be offered in a certain way. Choice is theoretically offered, then taken away' (a social worker).

And as to the role that they now played, one practitioner commented:

'If we become purchasers we will need to change our title and will no longer be social workers but social welfare brokers' (a social worker).

Case management has been central in the technocratisation of social work practice and has led to the creation of the bureau-technocrat (Dominelli, 2004) who merely has practical matters to solve. This approach to service provision has also facilitated the depoliticisation of social work because problems are not political issues to be debated by the entire nation and assessed in terms of their ideological implications but irritants requiring technical Intervention. Respondents to the CISCODEV study echoed this development as:

'We are so busy managing resources we are in danger of ignoring the people who need them'..

The list of social changes that have arisen as a result of globalisation and that carry implications for social work can be summarised as follows. These are:

- Altering the relationship between individual citizens and the state
- Leading to a decline in the state's involvement in providing welfare services
- Increasing the number of private (for-profit) service providers in the welfare arena
- Promoting the growth of personal responsibility for ensuring the welfare of individuals within the framework of family support (which may or may not be available)
- Increasing individual awareness of 'risk' and fostered the development of personal 'risk minimisation' strategies in addressing them

- Exacerbating social exclusion amongst those with few financial resources for the market has no place for those who cannot either trade or work within it
- Decreasing the role of the nation-state as guarantor of a person's human, social, political and civic rights except in the most formal sense
- Further fragmenting social identities that have been encompassed within the nation-state
- Intensifying trends towards the internationalisation of social problems
- Centralising power in the hands of a few elites, especially economic elites and corporations who can now operate across borders with relative impunity, e.g., moving headquarters and facilities if they don't like the constraints imposed upon it by a particular political regime as they search for better opportunities in raising further their profit-margins
- Increasing the militarisation of society and promoting the growth of violence and insecurity across the globe, features that have intensified following the attack on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001.

Each of these trends has implications for the type of social work that can be undertaken in any particular nation-state and the subject matter that social work students should study. These include economics, political science, sociology, social policy, social statistics, psychology, psychiatry and research methodologies. However, social work educators are in the main, poorly prepared to cover these disciplines and so their inclusion presents a challenge that needs an appropriate response, including that of training the trainers. Learning from courses which have begun to teach these topics could be helpful if the principles of equality, reciprocity and mutuality and respect for local strengths and knowledges are embedded with such encounters to ensure that no one model is imposed upon situations whether or not it is relevant. At the micro-level of practice, user empowerment has to become user-centred rather than resource-driven, and involve users in decisions about the kinds of services that are made available as well as how these are delivered and utilised. Their voices have been remarkably absent throughout the process of developing and delivering services while those of policymakers and private corporations have dominated it.

The impact of globalisation on social work practice

Globalisation as an economic and social system that promotes the growth of market mechanisms in areas hitherto deemed outside of its ambit has altered the way in which social work practice is undertaken. The implications of globalisation for social work education are significant. Academics have to understand and address these if they are to set curricula that contain the knowledges and skills required to respond to the challenges that arise from globalisation. These include understanding the implications of and responding to:

- An increased tendency towards the harmonisation of educational qualifications
- The formulation of demands that focus on recognising both diversities and commonalities

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- Moves aimed at establishing common standards and ethics that ensure quality in the services provided regardless of location
- Increased labour mobility and the recognition of qualifications obtained in one country in another
- Demands to mitigate the tedium and costs of having each individual claim for equivalence of qualifications gained in one country in another
- The impact of oppression and the effects of social exclusion on 'clients'
- The new subject matter that has to be introduced into the curriculum in order to respond to contemporary challenges in practice, e.g., globalisation, economics, accounting, anti-oppressive practice, the politics of practice, knowledge of how to handle the media
- A greater need for ensuring that students are skilled in undertaking critical reflective analyses of practice and utilising research to inform and evaluate practice
- Working in empowering ways with 'clients' and encouraging user choice in more than its theoretical base
- Developments yielding innovation in practice, especially those that aim to increase the spread of private providers, or to compensate for the loss of publicly funded state provisions and
- Holistic models of practice that take account of the diverse contexts in which 'clients' live and make claims for services that meet their needs

Conclusion

Globalisation has engendered considerable changes in social work education and practice. These are associated with the growth of privatisation, market-based provisions and the 'new managerialism'. These have changed how social workers respond to clients and how they are treated as employees. Social work educators have to integrate the issues associated with globalisation, the knowledge and skills required to practice in its shifting contexts and the empowerment of service users into the curricula for social work education and training. The academic ledger is on an open page waiting to be inscribed by those interested in education and training for social workers and fully integrating those who use services into their formation and delivery. Europe is set on a path full of opportunities for using globalisation to promote inclusivity, social solidarity and social justice through the practice of social work education. But globalisation also has dangers that have to be guarded against, navigated and transcended.

Notes:

- (1) Workers at CISCODEV undertook a project entitled, 'Globalisation, privatisation and social work practice' between 1999 and 2003. It consisted of three different parts. One focused on the practitioners' experiences of the change processes initiated under globalisation; another on the impact of globalisation on local communities and the third on what local residents thought of these changes. This paper draws on the work undertaken primarily during the first part of the project and written up as Dominelli (2004). In this section of the project, 460 questionnaires were sent out of which 172 were returned, giving a response rate of 37 per cent. I wish to acknowledge the contributions to this project made by Dr Parves Khan and Dr Gary Pattison.

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