Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin
University of Applied Sciences

COBURG UNIVERSITY
of applied sciences and arts

MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPT OF SOCIAL WORK

University of Ljubljana
Faculty of social work

University of Strathclyde
Glasgow

Master of Arts

Social Work as a Human Rights Profession

(MA-SWHR)

Development of the Master Degree

COOPERATIVE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY THE FOLLOWING UNIVERSITIES:

Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin (Germany)
Coburg University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Germany)
Malmö University, Department of Health and Welfare (Sweden)
University of Gothenburg, Department of Social Work (Sweden)
University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work (Slovenia)
University of Strathclyde, School of Applied Social Sciences (Scotland, United Kingdom)

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1 The Development of the Master Degree

The need for an international Master program on Social Work as a Human Rights Profession has often been articulated in meetings of the International Association of School of Social Workers (IASSW) and/ or the conference of the European Network on Social Action (ENSACT). This idea got more concrete during a pre-conference to the ENSACT conference in Brussels in April 2011 organized by Prof. Dr. Staub-Bernasconi and others on the issue of human rights and social work (http://www.zpsa.de/pdf/veranstaltungen/2011/ProgrammENSCAT_HumanRights2011.pdf). The participants were very much interested in developing an international program on the issue of social work and human rights.

Some of the universities that have now developed this program were present in Brussels, others who had programs on social work and human rights were actively invited to participate – if they wanted to do so. The Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences was ready to host the first meeting; as a result four meetings took place in Berlin from October 2011 to October 2012 and the final group of cooperating universities consisted of the following universities:

- Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin (Germany);[1]

- Coburg University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Germany);

- Malmö University, Department of Health and Welfare (Sweden);

- University of Gothenburg, Department of Social Work (Sweden);

- University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work (Slovenia);

- University of Strathclyde, School of Applied Social Sciences (Scotland, United Kingdom).

The following curriculum was mutually developed by all participating universities, who agreed that the program will be offered by the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences in Berlin. The curriculum aims to attract Eastern, Western and non-European students and lecturers hoping to discuss international human rights issues in an international setting.

The object of this Master could be phrased as follows: It is about the translation of the often very abstract and appellative discourse on human rights into the theory and practice of social work. However, this statement takes for granted that such a discourse actually already exists in social work – which in fact has been the case for almost one hundred years. It can be implicitly and explicitly found in the writings of early theorists such as Jane Addams, Alice Salomon and Eglantine Jebb, the latter author of the "Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child" of 1924, unanimously adopted by the League of Nations. In recent times, more in-depth material on the position of human rights in social work has been conceptualized, e.g., the UN manual "Social Work and Human Rights" of 1992, the manual "Social Work and the Rights of the Child – A Professional Training Manual on the UN Convention" of 2002 and the most recent document "Standards in Social Work Practice meeting Human Rights" of 2010 – all of them authored by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the latter by the European regional committee.

In addition, there are the internationally consensual documents of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and IFSW on the "International Definition of the Social Work

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[1] During her one-year guest lectureship at ASH, Dr. Veta Lazarashvili from Ilia State University in Tbilisi, Georgia supported the further development of this Master program.

Profession", the principles of "Ethics in Social Work" as well as the "Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession", all of which introduce human rights as a central regulatory concept for training and practice. However, the demands which resulted from these documents are still far from being common knowledge in the "scientific and professional community" let alone implemented. Wherever they have actually been adopted and integrated into education and training, this is being done in very diverse ways.

The curriculum constitutes an attempt to systematically implement the idea of human rights with all its philosophical, theoretical, ethical and activity-based facets within the scope of a two-year Master degree. Central to this is the following, internationally recognized definition of social work which was newly discussed at the conference of 2012 of the international associations, namely the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW):

> "The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour 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." (Supplement 2007, p. 5)

2 The Objectives of the Master Degree

A university degree does not only have objectives concerning education and practice, but is also embedded in a social context which implies a variety of objective levels.

2.1 Objectives of the Master Program from the Student's Perspective

The main aim is the development of a general *professional self-conception* based on the "*triple mandate of social work",* meaning that the universally known "double mandate of social work" on behalf of the addressees and the society/ providers is complemented by a third mandate on behalf of the profession: This consists of science-based theories of action, intervention as well as the principles of the profession's code of ethics. Among other things, the concept of science includes the professional approach to the questions guiding knowledge and action within the profession, knowledge of its foundations in philosophy and object theory with respect to its area of responsibility as well as the corresponding competences in problem solving. The concept of ethics includes the clear criterion of obligation, even in such cases where institutionalized national mechanisms of sanctioning do not (yet) exist and it can therefore "only" fulfill the purpose of prestige deprivation – analogous to UN recommendations.

Based on Donald Schoen, the role model could be termed "reflective practitioner", someone who does not use his or her knowledge as an expert but shares it within a democratic relationship with the addressees. This also implies that constitutional and democratic measures are undertaken to implement certain norms with clients as well as providers and other authorities of society. The third mandate ensures a relative – scientifically and ethically justified – autonomy of professional judgment and action relating to assignments and, as the case may be, illegitimate impositions on the part of providers as well as addressees. Accordingly, it is a matter of mastering the core competence of organizing knowledge and action with regard to social problems. The UN manual "Social Work and Human Rights" expressly declares – also with regard to autocratic and despotic regimes – that when there is a conflict of interests between a social service organization (or other agents of society) and the addressees, the profession must, in case of doubt, take a stand for the concerns of the addressees (1992, p. 5). This also includes the ability to deal with critical queries, to overcome obstacles, and to get whatever advice may be necessary, if required.

One of the primary objectives of education and training is developing *the competence to recognize issues relevant to human rights in social policies, theory, problem areas, and spheres of activity of social work and consequently in (one's own) practice and organization.* Wherever severe human rights violations occur, one will – in cooperation with lawyers – make use of the special conventions and complaint procedures of the UN as well as those of the European Court of Human Rights. These special treaties are concerned with *vulnerable groups* – children, women, poor people, unemployed and migrants – as potential victims of discrimination, structural racism, sexism, direct violence, political persecution, and torture. Almost without exception they correspond to the clientele of social work.

The second aim is the dissemination of a human rights orientation in education, training, practice and social services by means of *educational projects*. The third objective is to develop self-initiated, human rights-based projects.

All three objectives, i.e., a) general social work geared towards human rights, b) human rights education, particularly social rights education, as well as c) human rights-based projects are implemented in the curriculum of the second year by means of an independently and individually conceptualized research-based project relating to a specific problem area and group of addressees,

with consideration and application of the knowledge acquired in the three module sets. In this process, the aim is to realize a multi-level concept of social work on a theoretical as well as a project-related level which extends from the individual, the family, and small groups to the socio-spatial – local, national as well as international – community level and naturally all the way to the UN as an organization of world society.

Another objective of the Master is to open the chance of obtaining a doctorate in social work.

2.2 Objectives of the Master Program from the Perspective of the Discipline, the Social Services, and Society

Social work is – especially in the context of German speaking countries – a relatively unestablished profession with a vague definition of its purpose. This hinders the definition of a general object base and correspondingly the definition of areas of professional responsibility and necessary competences (Staub-Bernasconi 2010). The national body representing all faculties of social work in Germany explicitly renounces to get a minimal consensus about a "working definition of social work" which refers to the problem area and the basic competences of social work (Bartosch et al. 2010, p.11-13). This is a big obstacle for the social acceptance of the expertise of social work by other professions and society. Therefore, the Master curriculum is aimed at contributing to the enhancement of the profile of social work as a discipline and profession.

From the *perspective of social services* it would be desirable for professionals of social work in general but also with regard to this Master program to be increasingly integrated in those bodies responsible for making decisions on the implications of socio-politics for creating organizational social policies, guiding principles, procedures for participation, and legislative consultation as well as quality management instruments. Without this integration, the participation of professionals of social work in socio-political disputes will probably remain on the current level, which is very low. However, as the organizational guidelines determine, the aim would be to implement a transition from an institutional "top-down-orientation" to a "democratic-participative bottom-up und justice culture" which includes the clientele as well as staff.

From the *perspective of society* the focus is a concept of social work in the 21st century which can no longer evade the inter- and transnationalization of social services because most of the social problems it is concerned with cannot be described and explained without reference to the world society – its structures and dynamics – and increasingly need to be solved within the scope of that approach as well (cf. the aimed-at multi-level concept of social work).

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