

# Urban diversities: Challenges for social work

Course manual



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## 1. Introduction

The project 'Urban diversities: challenges for social work' concerns social work education at European Universities in urban areas. Today's European cities are more diverse than ever. Immigration, socio-economic inequality, increasing diversity of identities, activities, mobilities and lifestyles, all contribute to a state of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007, 2011). This requires special attention from social work in terms of solidarity, social mobility, cohesion and appropriate intercultural responses. Tensions and challenges such as clashing lifestyles, discrimination, radicalisation or conflicts between ethnic and religious groups are emerging, as well as a growing sense of disengagement and disillusionment within marginalised communities. Tensions in urban settings are often biased by (social) media and policy makers, while they express and reinforce the vulnerability of precarious groups and reflect huge challenges for social workers, whose competencies to deal with the complexity of urban tensions are limited.

The partnership between European Schools of Social Work brings together students, residents of superdiverse urban neighbourhoods, practitioners and researchers to co-create a new understanding of urban complexities and tensions, and to identify, create and refine skills for recognising and working effectively with urban tensions and polarisations. We also aim to establish cooperation between education, practice and applied research. This cooperation and co-creation will contribute to innovation in social work education and practice.

'Urban diversities' is an international course. It helps students to cross borders in more than one way. Students work with peers from other countries, communicate in a transnational community and collaborate with professionals, urban residents and lecturers from different institutions. A cross-border perspective helps to understand the construction of social work theory and practice and can thus enable students to reflect on the possibilities of change in their own context.

The following universities participated in the development of the course.

- Odisee University of Applied Sciences, Brussels, Belgium
- Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, the Netherlands
- University of Debrecen, Hungary
- Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

The participating universities conducted a pilot of the course in 2020-2021 and evaluated it, with the financial support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This manual describes the revised version of the course, based on these experiences.

## 2. General course information

<b>Course language</b>	English (and national languages locally)
<b>Credits</b>	3-6 ECTS (national variations possible)
<b>Subject</b>	Social Work, Community work
<b>Methods</b>	Online learning and community service learning
<b>Duration</b>	1 semester

### 3. Learning objectives

The main aim of this course is to strengthen the competences of future social professionals in situations that involve urban tensions and complexities. More concretely, the module has the following learning objectives:

<b>Acquire knowledge of:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Human needs, human rights and social justice</li><li>2. Theories on identity and diversity</li><li>3. Social work approaches to urban complexities</li><li>4. Identify and analyse community needs, assets and interests from various perspectives</li></ol>
<b>Acquire skills to:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Use participatory methods in working with individuals and/or groups</li><li>2. Be creative in finding arenas of participation in communities</li><li>3. Cooperate in interdisciplinary, intercultural and international teams</li><li>4. Develop a practice-based body of knowledge</li></ol>
<b>Develop reflections on:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Inclusion, exclusion, power (im)balances, strengths and challenges</li><li>2. The personal learning processes</li><li>3. The joint development of a practice-based body of knowledge</li></ol>

## 4. Learning and teaching methods

During the course, students participate in international classes, an international student team and a local student team. Transnational exchange takes place in online international classes and meetings of international student teams. The central concept for the local teams is Community Service Learning (see the separate CSL manual). The CSL experiences of students form the input for the transnational exchange and vice versa.

Case descriptions play an important role in these transnational learning processes. They help to articulate and conceptualise the practical experience and to make abstract concepts concrete and therefore easier to understand. To enrich the transnational learning process, there are several web lectures to guide and support the learning activities, as well as discussions and reflection, individually and in groups.

### Local teams

The focus of the local team is on Community Service Learning. The students work together with social professionals, local residents and lecturers. Together they explore the needs and assets within a neighbourhood and find out how they can contribute to the development of the community. In this way, students gain experience in professional practice. Reflecting on this with each other (reflection-in-action) creates a powerful learning process.

Because Community Service Learning is key to the local teams, we have developed a separate guidebook on CSL. The guidebook is complementary to this course description.

The intention of the course is to make a link between these local CSL processes and the development of a transnational theory of practice. This linkage consists of two processes. On the one hand, concrete experiences lead to the development of a transnational theory of practice. This is called inductive learning. On the other hand, the process of translating theoretical insights into practical experiences is called deductive learning. Inductive and deductive learning processes are intertwined. For example, a theoretical concept such as social capital can help to understand one's own experiences in dealing with community residents.

As such, learning leads to the understanding of meaningful relationships and the development of a practice-based body of knowledge (theory in use). These connections occur at many levels: between one's own experiences and the experiences of local residents, between one's own experiences and the experiences of students from other countries, and between practical experiences and theories.

Transnational exchange

Transnational exchange is an important aspect of this course. Transnational exchange takes place in several ways: in international classes, where all students and lecturers are present; through webinars, which provide students with theoretical input; and in international team meetings, where small groups of students under the guidance of a coach exchange and reflect on their experiences with CSL, finding similarities and differences.

International classes

International classes are plenary sessions where the students work together with lecturers and, if possible, with social work professionals and citizens, and exchange their learning experiences. During the course, there are three international classes. The first meeting is the kick-off of the course. During this meeting, the set-up of the course, the online platform, CSL, the webinars and the learning assignments are discussed. The second plenary meeting focuses on exchanges around current learning activities, findings and reflections. The third plenary meeting is intended to present the final results of the international teams (see infra) to each other.

International classes		
A. Introduction of the course: kick-off meeting	B. First feedback, presentation on learning about urban complexities	C. Final presentation: results from the international student teams

Webinars

Webinars are pre-recorded and form a theoretical framework intended to enrich the analyses and reflection on the selected cases by the international student teams. The web lectures are accompanied by a small preparatory assignment that is posted on the online platform by the lecturers.

Webinars	
Set 1	Complexity, tensions and assets of urban diversity Superdiversity and intersectionality

Set 2	Becoming a social professional CSL as an approach in social work education Needs and assets in communities (ABCD)
Set 3	Tacit knowledge Cultural humility
Set 4	Political context on micro, meso and macro level Human Rights

International student team meetings

In international student teams, students exchange and reflect on their experiences with CSL, finding similarities and differences. The meetings have a predetermined structure. Using selected cases, students learn to include multiple transnational perspectives in their reflections (reflection-on-action). The reflections are enriched and deepened with theoretical insights provided in webinars and literature. The insights gained in the international teams are transferred to the local teams, creating an interaction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Students prepare for the international classrooms by reading texts or watching videos that are available on the online platform. The specific preparation required for each meeting is indicated on the website. In total, six international student team meetings take place.

The first meeting takes coincides with the first international class. After the joint kick-off of the course, the focus of the international student team meeting is on getting to know each other and situating the situations of urban diversity in the different countries.

In the table below, we give an overview of the learning process in the international student teams. To structure the learning process, three phases are distinguished. In a first phase, an analysis and reflection is carried out on a case brought in by the coaches, lecturers from the participating universities. The students then exchange their perspectives on the case. They examine how their perspectives match or differ. In a second phase, the students bring in their own case. The team then selects a case which is further elaborated. During the third phase, the students carry out an in-depth reflection on the selected case on the micro, meso and macro level, using the theories from the webinars and insights from CSL. The results are presented during the concluding international class.



International student team meetings		
		<b>Learning activity</b>
1		<p>Preceded by an international class on the same day (kick-off)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The students and coach present themselves to each other</li> <li>• Discuss ideas about urban diversity in different countries</li> </ul>
2		<p>To prepare this meeting, students watch the webinars part 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An analysis of a representative case, presented by the coach</li> <li>• Using webinar set 1 and applying to the case.</li> </ul>
3		<p>To prepare this meeting, students watch the webinars part 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intermediary feedback</li> <li>• Exchange of experience based on needs analysis/knowledge of organisation</li> <li>• Positionality of the professional</li> <li>• Using set 2 of webinars</li> </ul>
4		<p>To prepare this meeting, students watch the webinars part 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSL experience related to tacit knowledge and cultural humility</li> <li>• Choose a case to focus on for the final presentation</li> </ul>
		<p>International class, international student teams present what they have learned so far about urban complexities</p>
5		<p>To prepare this meeting, students watch the webinars part 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of political environment and context of selected case</li> </ul>
6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalisation of presentation in which the students will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Present a case</li> <li>- Discuss its complexity</li> <li>- Present their personal perspective from one's country, experience and body of knowledge</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
		<p>International class, international student teams give their final presentation</p>

## 5. Learning tasks and evaluation

The principle is that a student passes when (s)he participates as a regular student in this course. By attending and actively participating in the various course activities, (s)he receives 3 to 6 ECTS credits, depending on the agreements made at the home institution.

We assume that the students who participate in the programme are committed and involved and work together with the other course participants.

The course will be evaluated on the basis of a presentation by the international student teams at the final meeting of the international class. The presentations will consist of the integration of the following learning tasks: a needs analysis, community service and reflection.

### Needs analysis

#### Objectives

Upon completion of the community needs analysis, students will be able to determine the nature of a particular urban setting and identify the needs and strengths within particular communities or groups living in these urban settings.

#### Instructions

The needs analysis takes place in the local teams and is enriched by the international teams.

When identifying the needs of a community, it is important to look at both the needs and the assets. Assets can be understood as strengths, opportunities, capabilities that enable people to fulfil their own needs and those of others. Needs can be felt by an individual, a group, or a whole community. They can be very concrete (e.g. need for shelter or transport) or as abstract as improved cohesion or integration in the community. By examining communities or particular groups within communities and using the typology of Bradshaw (see the next page), you can structure your analysis from the perspectives of professionals, those who would receive services, the demand for services and comparing this with what is offered to other groups or communities will help you gain a deeper understanding of the community you are dealing with. In doing so, you are looking at the needs of the community or individuals. Do not forget to consider the strengths of individual and communities as well. Each individual or community also has its own strengths and assets, a unique web of relationships, history, tensions, strengths, and conflicts and successes. Be aware also of tensions related to diversity

and polarisation, along with the intersectionality of some of the issues you may find, e.g. possible challenges for a gay young disabled migrant living in a working class neighbourhood.

The assessment process benefits greatly from the participation of neighbourhood residents and community stakeholders (service providers, officials, community activists, business owners). The best way to assess needs and assets is to collect and analyse a range of data and information, including official data in the form of local or national statistics. Reports from local authorities or non-government organisations, interest groups, newspapers articles, social media. This will help you identify gaps and decide which methods you will use to gather information (public forums, interviews, focus groups, observation etc.).

Be aware of local and national guidelines related to safe Covid-19 work.

Bradshaw (1977) famously identified a taxonomy of needs: normative need, felt need, expressed need and comparative need.

- Normative need refers to what an expert, professional or social scientist defines as a need in a given situation. For example, a 'desirable' standard for health outcomes, income or housing. When someone does not meet these standards, they may be defined as needy. Normative need is not absolute, but refers to desirable standards and may even be affected by middle-class standards to judge working-class life, although these may include working-class aspirations that may seem reasonable.
- Felt need is equated with want. In a democracy it seems reasonable to ask people what they need. Felt need is often used in community development and participatory practices and research. By asking service users what they think they need from these services, the offer can better meet their needs.
- Expressed need is felt need that is translated into action. This is when people ask for a service. One would not ask for a service unless there was a need. Expressed need is often used in health care in response to waiting lists but can also be found in relation to services for migrants, needs for play areas for young children, safe communities, etc.
- Comparative need is a measure of need by examining the characteristics of those who receive a service. If people with similar characteristics do not receive a similar service, they may be considered needy. The definition has been used to compare not only individuals but also neighbourhoods and confirms the idea of the 'postcode lottery', namely that if you live in certain neighbourhoods you will receive a higher level of service than people in other neighbourhoods.

## Community service

### Objectives

After being involved in an urban community, collective, or in an organisation, the students are able to

- map, describe and visualise their interventions and actions as fellow citizens

- name and relate key experiences and scenes in which they were challenged, moved and motivated as fellow citizens
- convey what they have learned through these key experiences as fellow citizens.

## Instructions

During the first two international meetings, students will be introduced to the concept of community service learning. Community service learning will take place in the local context of each partner university. The CSL guidebook provides more detailed information on these trajectories.

## Reflection

### Objectives

Students are able to reflect on their experiences, both on a personal and a theoretical level (developing practical knowledge).

### Instructions

The reflection is partly an individual assignment, partly a group assignment for the international teams.

In social work practice, many situations give rise to reflection. For most practical questions there are no ready-made solutions. A good understanding of the situation is necessary in order to choose the right approach. This has to do with instrumental but also ethical perspectives: what is right in this situation and am I doing the right thing?

When you come to implement your plans, reflection does not stop. Social work is a profession in which un situations often occur: complex situations that are difficult to understand and where standard solutions are lacking. Reflection occurs when social workers have doubts about a problem that cannot be solved by logical reasoning. It begins with a problem or a feeling of unease, a situation where further exploration is needed, where the right questions are indispensable for a better understanding.

Reflection is a key element in learning from experience (Moon, 2004) that helps to avoid repetition of the same actions and experiences and helps to learn from and change experiences.

Donald Schön (1974) distinguishes two forms of reflection applicable to social work: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action takes place at the same time as action takes place. Reflection-in-action coincides with executive action, it promotes a different view of a situation, a reframing of a problem with the help of knowledge derived from practical experience (theories in use). Reflection-on-action takes place after action, at times when you have the opportunity to look back on what happened, with more distance, using multiple perspectives.

You can reflect alone and together with others, which brings in multiple perspectives and enriches your own reflection. Joint reflection in international cooperation – which is the case in this course – goes further because you are confronted with other cultural and political contexts that make you aware of your own person and world view. It can contribute to the disappearance of the obviousness of your own frame of reference and instead lead to the emergence of new horizons of meaning. As such, reflection contributes to meaning-oriented learning processes and a revision or reinterpretation of the meaning of previously acquired knowledge.

Reflection can focus on different things. Reflection in social work education is often used to increase self-knowledge and the ability to self-direct the learning process. Reflection in connection with practice increases awareness of one's own actions in practical situations, the implicit assumptions in them and the effect of one's actions on others. Reflection can also be used to become aware of underlying mechanisms such as power structures and exclusion and repression mechanisms.

In other words, reflection contributes to the ability not to take one's own and others' knowledge of situations for granted. It helps you to see that knowledge can be uncertain, often depending on the social context (King & Kitchener, 2004). In social work, it is part of the deliberative processes in which solutions to practical problems are constantly being constructed.

The **three learning tasks** –needs analysis, community service and reflection – come together in the final international class, where the international student teams give a **20-30 minute presentation** consisting of

- A brief description of the case they selected
- An explanation of the complexity of the case at the micro, meso and macro levels using the theories presented in the webinars
- An individual supplement from each student outlining their perspective on the case from their own social work education, practice and policy context of the city/country in question

This presentation will be assessed according to the following criteria

- Quality and depth of:
  - Description of the case
  - Description of urban complexity using theory from webinars
  - Personal perspective on the case
- Creativity of the pitches

- Presentation skills
- Defence (Q&A)

The quality of the English language is not included in the evaluation, unless it hinders the understanding of the presentation.

In addition to this assignment, students are explicitly asked to take their local involvement in Community Service Learning seriously. They will be coached in this by their local mentor through regular feedback sessions.

The course is evaluated with a pass/fail grade.

## 6. Learning materials

The learning resources are partly common and partly different for each partner. These learning resources are made available via the online learning environment, linked to the webinars.

Concepts that are central to this course are:

### Society

- Democratic citizenship
- Social inclusion, social cohesion
- Inequality, segregation, marginalisation
- Human rights, social justice
- Societal tensions and conflict
- Complex needs in deprived, diverse urban settings
- Superdiversity, migration
- Urbanisation
- Poverty
- Social determinants of health

### Social work profession

- The ABCD approach to community development
- Anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices
- Cultural humility in social work
- Conflict resolution (e.g. non-violent communication)
- Participatory action research