



Social Work, Human Rights and Intercultural Relations

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Introduction

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This e-book edition “Social Work, Human Rights and Intercultural Relations” comes from the Social Work course at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon. This refers to the issue, the International Days of Social Work that was held on 6th and 7th March 2019. That event ran for two working days, with lectures and sessions that were addressed to the Social Work Students (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle) in the morning and open lectures in the afternoon for all of the academic community and practitioner Social Workers.

The group of teachers that were invited, was composed of 6 members. They came from different places, all of them linked to several academic institutions as researchers or as Social Work educators and practitioners. We shall mention that one of the teachers that was invited is an expert in issues dealing with migrants and asylum seekers belonging to the Social Work team from a state organization that works with that population. The other teachers came from Germany, The Netherlands, Ireland and Portuguese Universities.

The high quality of their presentations and lectures, also the questions that they brought up at the debate, have pushed the organizers to share them to a wider audience. This means the pertinence of several themes presented during the lectures and sessions, and the opportunity to enjoy these teachers and experts, new topics for debate, stimulating new studies and researches among a wider number of engaged and interested Social Workers, either practitioners or researchers and teachers. To the organizers of the International Days of Social Work was always a priority, to challenge the oldest and the youngest generations of social intervenors to this pertinent field work. Professionals who address the diverse contexts in a global society, requiring more and more competencies in Intercultural Relations and Human Rights realization are missing.

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The majority of teachers that were invited, belong to a team that has been working for some years now, researching, teaching and organizing international seminars and workshops to research and debate around the concept Social Work as a Human Rights Profession. This concept reports to earlier researches that refer to the basic and universal human needs, identified in everybody, as the bases of Human Rights. The realization of those needs are the fundamental guidelines for Social Work practices, because only with an adequate answer to those needs is it possible to realize Human Rights in each citizen.

All of us have the same basic needs and they should be accomplished as a realization of a right to each citizen, because the emancipation of each human being can only be evaluated as a degree of satisfaction in answer to each human need. (Doyal and Gough, 1991)

In earlier times some of those teachers had cooperated with the Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon and Braga, to teach those themes and others in view of a more qualified and updated education in Human Rights issues, addressed to Social Work students. Also it was a good opportunity to reinforce the interchange of the knowledge and practices with the academics of the Portuguese University.

To link these three subjects, Social Work, Human Rights and Intercultural Relations has been a very challenging topic. In Europe and member states, facing the biggest migration mobility in the last decades, the social and political scientists are debating and researching about the new related situation of the arrival of these new migrant groups. The questions are: who are they, what are they looking for and what can Europe give them in terms of good opportunities. It is urgent to find the best ways to manage this new phenomena. This also implies loyalty to some of European fundamental values like solidarity, equality and justice, respecting the basic needs and Human Rights realization of each citizen.

Antonio Guterres, the General Secretary of the United Nations said in his speech on 1st November 2011, that we should consider the XXI century, the century of people in movement. A lot of answers to basic needs are missing not only because of geopolitical conflicts, but also demographic improvement and climate changes.

For several reasons and in the case of Portugal and for the next generations of Social Workers it is a challenge to develop more competencies in view of Human Rights realization in Intercultural Relations. One of the most recent steps, reported in the last 40 years was when Portugal fostered a large group of refugees and migrants from the ex-Portuguese colonies. Also Portuguese history tells us about the several asylum seekers and refugees from international conflicts, religious abuses, ethnical persecutions, gender violations, that happened in several countries all over the world. Those citizens looked for support from the portuguese state and private organizations or even

voluntary families. Nowadays similar situations are appearing and the Portuguese government is accomplishing the international and regional mandates, implementing new programs for fostering refugees and asylum seekers that are looking for a place to feel safe.

Nowadays, this multicultural context demands good training to social intervenors specifically to Social Workers, which will help them to apply grounded concepts and qualified methodologies.

To work in multicultural contexts implies to have the capacity to establish an *interactive and dialogic relationship*, that means the capacity of the several elements of this relationship, to be conscious of their identities and cultural differences and to be able to develop a good relationship. (Kupka, 2008).

These aspects, in an intervention process, following the thought of Leight (1988), shall be translated in some proceedings such as to use a lot of communication competencies with the other person. Each intervenor has to know how to communicate and to understand how the other person communicates as they come from different cultures. It is not less importante to want to know what their view is about the world. So to show respect to the other person and how much one wishes to establish communication or to make this relationship more empathic and positive, shall be considered a priority. Although, if an intervention is established it is necessary to build a correct diagnosis and to plan an intervention according to the cultural references identified.

Often we have a one-way vision and we forget to give place and time to the other. Relationships can be developed in a good level of participation if each one can feel that their dignity is respected. In this aspect Donna Hicks (2013) a researcher and expert in international conflict mediation calls our attention to some important dimensions that should be considered and which completes the previous authors statements to respect the other's dignity. Hicks refers to some dimensions that are missing in the communication between different people, like the recognition of the other as a unique person, the pertinence to show our understanding to their situation and giving them the opportunity to have a voice, not being parcial, and not pressurizing them . It is fundamental to accept their identity, reinforcing their competencies to live in autonomy.

The invited authors have written about those topics and others, which they found to be emergent and urgent debates nowadays in order to reinforce the general topic of this e-book.

Each author in a specific style brings different visions according to the general theme and to some readers this can bring polemic questions. It is important to note that some concepts that are nowadays present in the debates about Social Work education, such as Human Rights, dignity, social justice, vulnerability, human needs, culture, diversity, interculturality, cooperation and sustainability, are present in the structure

of the several articles.

We hope that in this way it will be possible to reinforce a deeper and wider knowledge about these and other associated concepts. The e-book organizers are confident that it brings a better understanding about the intervention in multicultural contexts and stimulating a new engagement for a real change. Social Work is one of the main agents inside social contexts which are more and more diverse.

By introducing the articles of the authors, it is necessary to advise the readers that according to the thematic orientation of this e-book, several thesis developed crossover with each other ,respecting this book invitation proposal.

Hans Walz with the text *Living together in our common one world in the perspective of human rights and sustainable development*, asks us to be alert to the risk of living and surviving away from narrow relationships with the others. He develops a detailed analysis related with the human beings way of history dealing with very complex situations. This author tells us about several answers that human beings have found in view of defending a speech based on Human Rights values. Hans Walz tries to develop the concept of rights, from its earlier roots. He attempts he best understanding of its sense and shows the demands and the respect for each human being, as a worthy being and with rights. He has done a list of documents, conciliating their religious, cultural, and political dimension, which he considers as guides for the several steps in human history. According to the values that this author supports he is influenced by the most recent genetic scientific reasearches. The establishment of these guidelines towards a more cooperative world and respecting human rights, even if it was not always successful, is his belief. He has finished his article developing the argument that there is a similar exigence of living in cooperation, to Walz living “together”, related to professional and scientific fields. He understands this cooperation like a “must” if each professional wishes to contribute to a sustainable development with which the social intervenors should be engaged. He challenges the practitioners to reinforce the relationship Social Work and Human Rights, working according to an ethic perspective, sharing common values in the multidisciplinary contexts with which the Social Workers interchange in their daily practices.

According to **Andrea Trenkwalders** article, *Human Needs in Social Science and Social Work*, Social Work exists to support the citizens in their relationships and to empower them in their needs realization. The author asks a lot of questions which requires her full attention to some concepts that support her thesis. She works on the concept of multiculturalism that in her opinion is a characteristic of societies nowadays. She

brings our attention to the challenging consequences that appear in the multicultural relationships, if we look for harmonious relationships in its diversity. The Human Rights background will be the ethical bases that can provide for the needs of each citizen in different contexts. Andrea Trenkwalder develops her text in a specified analyses to the concept of human needs according to several researchers that came from the social sciences, leading it to the needs realization as the orientation to Social Work practices. She appoints some authors from the earlier Social Work steps, that have brought important contributions to the vulnerable situations. Nowadays those contributions are understood by the most up-to-date Social Work authors, like a basic framing to the recent theoretical orientations. Trenkwalder refers her thesis to the Systems Theoretical Paradigm of the Discipline and Profession of Social Work , and how important it is to understand that “ everything that exists is either a system or a component of a system” interacting with other systems and an environment. Although she provokes our disappointment asking for our attention, we have a long way to go to reach the human needs realization for all citizens.

The next chapter was written by **Cornelia Niehoff**, under the theme *Diversity, Social Justice and Human Rights in Social Work*, where the author claims our awareness to the Social Workers education, living and working face-to-face with more and more diverse societies. She inquires how it will be possible to bring to the next generations a good education that will give competencies to the students, that will help them understand about their diversity and consequently to be able to understand the diverse characteristics of the others, who are the futur Social Workers intervention purpose. Coming from some basic concepts of International Definition of Social Workers (IFSW, 2014) patent in this article title, she develops and justifies it as an important contribution to the education of those professionals that are fundamental agents to the Human Rights and Social Justice realization. Cornelia Niehoff uses practical situations to illustrate her thesis, reinforcing in this way the exigence of an education process with field experiences, so that there is a narrow and opportune contact with social diversity. Those Social Wotkers should reach the best competencies to manage adequate strategies facing the inequalities they will find in their daily practices. In the last part of the article, Niehoff, leads us to a more theoretical and practical analyses supported in the Silvia Staub Bernasconi model, developing the concept of Social Work as a Human Rights Profession addressing it to the scientific base of the profession and in the urgent realization of the triple mandate which will legitimate the intervention of Social Workers. According to the author, this paradigma brings a real intervention to the change, safeguarding the human being as a worthy and unique being, according to the Statement

of Ethical Principles and Professional Integrity (IFSW , 2018).

Sharon Schneider, in her article, *Asylum Seekers : Advancing critical reflexion on children's rights in undergraduated social work education*, brings us a lot of questions related with the pertinence of the Social Work education at 1st cycle, addressed to children's Human Rights, in this case specifically asylum seekers and refugee children. Her main issue is the pertinence of a more detailed and deep information about the United Nations Convention of Children's Rights, that this author considers a reference in the Social Work education process which the future Social Workers should not ignore. This aspect will be important to guarantee true processes of the social integration and autonomy of this population among their peers. She goes into deep analyses of social problems that are the object of Social Work Intervention, dissecting and linking those problems with the human needs' theory. Schneider mentions some related authors and their thesis, pointing to the importance of understanding each child's needs. This means getting to know their life story, social and cultural contexts, where those children have lived or are living now. She tells us about the importance of each professional to master information about the powerful relations in each community, which are characterized by unequal situations. It is also important to know what the strategies are to control the distribution of resources. This aspect can block the children's needs realization, reinforcing exclusion processes in the diverse communities. Sharon Schneider presents a typical casework, making a list of the several intervention steps, using it to illustrate her earlier theoretical and practical statements. This author shows us how much she is aware of the pertinence of Social Workers to acquire a lot of competences that will allow them to develop good analyses and diagnosis of each situation. They should establish adequate aims and methodologies, with good fundamentals, that come from the scientific bases of this profession. Schneider believes that those conditions will bring successful interventions, in this example, addressed to children in great vulnerable situations because their rights were violated.

The last article is from **Rita Sousa**, that is an expert living a daily professional experience welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, in a Portuguese organization, ACNUR affiliated. She has chosen to develop her article from a grounded reflection in facts that everybody knows. It means linking the violation of Human Rights with refugee victims from climate disasters, with great visibility all over the world. She makes a list of international findings realized in several summits, where climate changes were evaluated as a consequence of the natural resource management not being well planned. This issue is more and more frequent all over the world, bringing very bad consequences

to the populations living in daily risks. She talks about the destruction of villages and towns and also the destruction of means of survival what happens often in the poorest countries which are already missing basic needs realization.

She provides detailed information about what was updated in debates that were held in the European continent looking for adequate answers and sharing her disappointment, for the lack of not finding adequate outcomes. Although the problem was identified, Rita Sousa observes that these affected populations that are the most vulnerable, without any resources and living in great urgency are not considered a priority to top organizations, with responsibility in this kind of issues. She adds some statistic data that shows the problem dimension. The author argues the urgency that international organizations, which say that they support the Human Rights realization, can establish an agreement to the concept of migrant and economic refugee and stop hesitating towards the violated people in climate disasters. Rita Sousa asks what we should think about regarding people that have lost all their goods, the house and their land has disappeared and the right to become an asylum seeker is refused. Are the top organizations conscious about the development of this problem of climate disasters and how the population is affected?

Based on these questions the author develops fundamental arguments asking the international, regional, national and local responsibility of the institutions that should have the appropriate legislation that could support the rights of those populations to go back to their lands in safe conditions. Also, they should provide enough resources so that it would allow them to rebuild their own communities, which the majority of affected populations wish, answering to their basic needs and having dignity in their lives.

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