



■ The International ■
Social Work & Society Academy

Book of Abstracts Plenum Conference

1 – 3 September

TISSA 2025

Welcome to Porto, Portugal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Protest in context – re-imagining the relationship between Social Movements and Social Work – <i>Havard Aaslund</i>	8
Search movements of social work organizations for governance arrangements in the field of communal housing – <i>Monika Alisch & Martina Ritter</i>	11
Preferred Interventions Seen Through the Perspective of Young Women with Eating Disorders Behavior (ED) – <i>Pia Vedel Ankersen</i>	12
Politicisation and social work with illegalised migrants: affect, precariousness and breathing in suffocating conditions – <i>Soline Ballet</i>	13
Reflective mapping of the professional actions of social workers in the reintegration of people with addictive behaviors and dependencies: a multi-case study in Portugal – <i>Jorge Barbosa</i>	14
Against Asymmetry – On Symmetrical Subject Construction and Circulating Reflection in Social Work – <i>Pascal Bastian</i>	15
Critical Analysis or Positivist Legitimization? Implementation Research at a crossroads – <i>Frank Bauer</i>	16
Experiential knowledge as a missing link for the theory-practice-nexus in Social Work? Results of and thoughts on the research project of „Experienced Involvement in Socialpsychiatric Care in Germany“ – <i>Susanne Iris Bauer</i>	17
The Heroic Pursuit of Making a Difference in Child Protection – <i>Teresa Bertotti & Giulia Turrina</i>	18
Gender equality in Croatia: good laws, bad implementation – <i>Anita Blagojević & Ivana Tucak</i>	19
Addressing Social Exclusion: Self-Critical Reflection In Research with Family Carers of Children with Special Needs – <i>Laura Blasius & Johanna Krieser</i>	20
Democracy under pressure and the consequences for young people's voluntary commitment – <i>Karin Böllert & Dominik Ringler</i>	21
Reproductive justice in social work practice: Empirical Findings on Professional Counseling in the Context of Unintended Pregnancies – <i>Christiane Bomert</i>	22
Unpaid caring in communal housing projects: Negotiation processes and transformative potential – <i>Madeline Brandt</i>	23
Precarity is not enough for alliance: between divide and solidarity in social work – <i>Zuzana Broskevičová</i>	24
CLAIM – Local Support Center for Migrant Integration: A Step Towards a More Inclusive and Intercultural Community – <i>Elisabete Pinto da Costa, Hélia Bracons & Anna Paula Caetano</i>	25
Social work and political violence: reflections on three seminars held in Nicosia, Belfast and Sarajevo – <i>Jim Campbell & Vasilios Iakomidis</i>	26
Towards socio-spatial approaches in social work: Transforming knowledge, intervention and theory-practice nexus – <i>Marisa Candeias & Elisete Diogo</i>	27
Technological Advancements in Healthcare: A Normative Perspective on Promoting Social Justice – <i>Riu Cascão</i>	28

Towards a democratizing 'collective': rethinking intersectional collaboration – <i>Dries Cautreels & Elke Plovie</i>	29
Ageing in Prison. Challenges and Support Programs for Aging in Prisons – A Literature Review – <i>Eva Chaves, Monica Teixeira, Anna Paula Caetano, Cristiana de Almeida</i>	30
The involvement of the police through social work as a materialisation of normative ideas of integration – <i>Zoe Clark & Moana Kahrmann</i>	31
Reproductive Justice, wāhine Māori (Māori women) and the child protection system in Aotearoa – <i>Kerri Cleaver</i>	32
Exhaustion and Distancing: A Study of Burnout in Social Workers – <i>Cristiana de Almeida & Jacqueline Marques</i>	33
The ecological & the social looking forward to finally meet eco-social justice – <i>Luc De Droogh & Frank Monsecour</i>	34
“My child is born and raised here. He’s from here.” Mothering as everyday practice of contestation by irregularized women – <i>Pascal Debruyne, Sylvie Van Dam & Kaat Van Acker</i>	35
Researching the relationship between Child Welfare and Protection (in Flanders – Dutch part of Belgium) and poverty – <i>John William Decoene</i>	36
Exploring Adolescent & Youth Worker Perspectives in Co-Creating a Smoking Prevention Intervention – <i>Babette Demeester, Maité Verloigne, Sara Willems, Kenji Leta, Lieve Bradt, Emelien Lauwerier</i>	37
Hidden Harm: Utilising the Ethics of Care for Theory Development – <i>Sarah Donnelly, Louise Isham, Kathryn Mackay, Alisoun Milne, Lorna Montgomery, Fiona Sherwood-Johnson, and Sarah Wydall</i>	38
Human Rights and Older People – Challenges and Opportunities for Gerontological Social Work – <i>Sarah Donnelly, Zurab Tatanashvili, Laurine Bourgonjon, Freda Quinlan & Griet Roets</i>	39
Relational transparency in practice: Injustice in social work comes not from what is openly communicated, but from what remains implicit and unspoken – <i>Gretl Dons</i>	41
Streets of Memories: Homelessness, Social Work and the Emotional Geographies of Urban Space – <i>Ippokratis Efstathiou & Sofia Dedotsi</i>	42
Media Education in Residential Child and Youth Care – <i>Marvin Fendt</i>	43
The Hidden Continuum: Transgenerational Consequences of Sexualized Violence Against Women and the Role of Social Work – <i>Andrea Fleckinger & Daniela Gruber</i>	44
Let’s talk about eco-justice: disruptive voices as a driver for system change – <i>Birgit Goris, Caro Bridts, Saskia Jacobs & Saskia De Bruyn</i>	45
Teaching to Transgress? Challenges and opportunities for social work and social work education – <i>Dawn Belkin Martinez, Kim Robinson & Anna Gupta</i>	46
From the Street to Social Inclusion: Technical and Human-Centered Approaches in SCMP's Work with Homeless Populations – <i>Alfredo Figueiredo Costa & João Belchior</i>	48
Mark Philp’s Notes on the form of knowledge in Social Work revisited – <i>Hans Grymonprez, Denoix Kerger & Dieter Oorlynck</i>	49
The Causes of Uncertainty- Child Protection Decision-making under increased organizational complexity – <i>Teres Hjärpe</i>	50

Understandings of effect and quality in social work research and its implications for social work practice – <i>Nynne Højland Ingebrigtsen</i>	51
If we do not translate scientific theory into professional practice, we get de-intellectualisation and hostility towards science: two examples – <i>Hubert Höllmüller</i>	52
Action research: a collaborative action approach to developing a grounded theory in social work – <i>Gordana Horvat</i>	54
"Sometimes, doing nothing is the most violent thing to do" – Theory as a Practice of Refusal: A Perspective on the Theory-Practice Relationship in Social Work – <i>Mark Humme</i>	55
Potentials and Pitfalls of International Comparisons in Child and Youth Welfare: A Systems Theory Approach – <i>Onno Husen</i>	56
Tracking Injustice: The Social Work at Risk Database (SWoRD) and the Criminalisation of Care – <i>Vasilios Ioakimidis & Konstantinos Roussos</i>	57
EBP in high gear: politicization and scientification of social work in Sweden – <i>Katarina Jacobsson & Anna Meeuwisse</i>	58
Confining the homeless in times of covid-19 crisis: simplifying public action and atomizing the State – <i>Nicolas Jacquet, Jean-François Orianne, Martin Wagener, Lore Dewanckel, Koen Hermans, Laure-Lise Robben, Griet Roets</i>	59
Mobilizing network support for homeless people – <i>Samuel Jones</i>	60
Understanding pressure in social welfare management: the role of individual and organisational factors – <i>Sirpa Kannasojä, Janissa Miettinen, Riitta Vornanen, Johanna Lammintakanen, Kati Närhi, & Sanna Laulainen</i>	61
Theory and practice nexus in social work education: Antinomy of Similarities and Contradictions – <i>Anke Karber & Anna Bobe</i>	62
Dissenting theory for algorithms in social work: producing critical practitioners through interrogating the algorithmic lifepath – <i>Emily Keddell</i>	63
More Justice in Social Work through Self-Advocacy? Yes, but no. What we learn from the Practice of Social Movements and Social Closure Theory – <i>Alexandra Klein & Kathrin Schulze</i>	64
(Peer) knowledge as a nexus between theory, practice and dissent in queer youth work – <i>Nils Klevermann</i>	65
Cross-cultural Social Work meets Ethnographic research on the field: Exploring Narratives of Refugee Women in Greece, Survivors of Gendered Based Violence – <i>Kostantinos Kolovos</i>	66
Challenging and Promoting Social Justice for Victims of Labour Trafficking through Critical Social Work – <i>Christina Kösl</i>	67
Between Theory and Practice: Political Interventions in Social Work with Refugees as an Act for Social Justice – <i>Gesa Langhoop</i>	68
Riots, Race, and Resilience: The Role of Youth Workers in Divided Communities – <i>Erika Laredo & Mick Charlton</i>	69
Health Risk Social-Science-Research-Project? Health-related Aspects of participatory Teaching and Learnings on the empirical Basis of Students Research Diaries – <i>Markus Lohse & Katrin Naumann</i>	70

Climate change and the vulnerability of older persons in Croatia: Risks and challenges for the social welfare system – <i>Mira Lulić, Davor Muhvić & Ivana Rešetar Čulo</i>	71
How doing research as a former practitioner can contribute to reduce hegemonic interlinkages between theory and practice – <i>Melissa Manzel & Katrin Hermesen</i>	72
Building the Professional Image: Analysis of Social Work's Presence in the Portuguese Press – <i>Jacqueline Marques & Paula Ferreira</i>	73
Bridging Gaps in Disability Services: A European Social Registry for Enhanced Mobility and Inclusion – <i>Konrad Meisner, Klaus Miesenberger, Maximilian Punz, Martin F. Reichstein, Melanie Schaur</i>	74
Integrating theory and practice in social work internships: a critical pedagogical approach – <i>Daniela Monteiro, Carla Tralhão, Antonela Jesus & Maria Irene Carvalho</i>	75
Positional struggles in research practices that address 'the political' in social work – <i>Jan Naert, Denoix Kerger, Delphine Levrouw, Bart Van Bouchaute, Hans Grymonprez, Didier Boost, Elke Plovie</i>	76
A Discourse Analysis of Young Carers Providing Care for Family Members in Japan: Revealing Discrepancies between Public Policy and Lived Experiences – <i>Karin-Ulrike Nennstiel, Tomoo Nakata, Masami Nakata & Yusuke Ohara</i>	77
Digital arrangements of Bildung as spaces of distributed practices of negotiating inclusion and exclusion – <i>Klara-Marie Niemann & Nadia Kutscher</i>	78
Allies in Community Advocacy: Social Workers and grassroots initiatives in the political struggle for post disaster justice – <i>Dimitra Papadopoulou</i>	79
The role of degrowth in ecosocial work: A scoping review and research agenda – <i>Luca Pavani & Amy Shackelford</i>	80
The (In)Visible Faces of Alcoholism: the role of Social Work in social services – <i>Inês Pinto</i>	81
Participatory Methods in Socio-technical Transformations: A Social Work Perspective on a Practice Research Project in Social Robotics for Health Promotion in Long-Term Care – <i>Elisabeth Rass</i>	82
Towards a Systemic Understanding of Complex Support Needs – Reflections on and From the Disability Field – <i>Martin F. Reichstein</i>	83
Exploring Students' Motivations for Pursuing a BA in Social Work – <i>Georgiana-Cristina Rentea</i>	86
Enabling Spaces as Counter-Hegemonic Practice: Social Work between Structure and Emancipation – <i>Christian Reutlinger & Carlo Fabian</i>	87
(De-)Institutionalisation of family in the horizon of social transformation and social justice – <i>Martina Richter</i>	88
Constructing a Community Diagnosis: Lessons learned from socio-spatial knowledge creation in social work and primary health care education – <i>Griet Roets, Sara Willems, Matthias Blondia & Tineke Schiettecat</i>	89
Social justice through temporal practices of exclusion of children from education in schools in Germany. Critical perspectives on social work in schools – <i>Pia Rother</i>	90
Dissent through Conspiracy – Counternarratives of the Far Right Challenging Social Work Practice – <i>Jana Sämann & Zoë Clark</i>	91
A practice research to foster critical reflection on interventions to tackle housing crises – <i>Mara Sanfelici</i>	92

Participation, partnership, and sharing: Young women's suggestions for social work practices with adolescent girls in care – <i>Nour Shimei</i>	93
Social Work and Revolutionary Change: The Role of Portuguese Social Workers in the Aftermath of the April 25 Revolution (1974-1976) – <i>Pedro Gabriel Silva</i>	94
Knowing to bridge: Portuguese social workers' perspectives on the gap between theory and practice – <i>Paula Sousa & José Luís Almeida</i>	95
Mapping Theory in Social Work: An Analysis of Theoretical Frameworks in Quantitative Studies – <i>Luka Stanić, Tea Ritoša & Vanja Branica</i>	96
Navigating Compliance and Dissent: The Impact of Standardized Methods in Child Welfare Investigations – <i>Tonje Steen, Edda Stang, Hilde A. Aamodt and Marianne Buen Sommerfeldt</i>	97
Rethinking Access and Power in Research with Vulnerable Youth: A Challenging Path Towards Intellectual Dissent – <i>Signe Steensbæk</i>	98
Doing Social Work: Ethnographic research as theory development and critical reflection of practice – <i>Rebekka Streck, Kathrin Aghamiri & Ursula Unterkofler</i>	99
Mission (Im)Possible: Deinstitutionalization Against All Odds – <i>Mitja Svete, Kaja Zoran, Juš Škraban, Aida Hajdarević Novak & Polona Kopmajer</i>	100
Minorities' Attitudes toward Social Work: Acculturation, Social Worker's Group Belongingness and Social Work Service Use – <i>Eugene Tartakovsky</i>	101
The Evolution of Human Rights and Gerontological Social Work in Georgia: Historical Path Dependency and Development of Social Services – <i>Zurab Tatanashvili</i>	102
To grapple with dualisms of theory and practice? Displaying children's rights as a standard in residential childcare – <i>Elisabeth Thomas & Claudia Equit</i>	103
Critical social work in working with older people – what happens in practice? <i>Suzana Tomašević</i>	104
Migration in an Era of Climate Change and Environmental Disasters – <i>Mariza Tzortzi</i>	105
Re-imagining young caring: towards an inclusive definition and support practices – <i>Lena Van Bergen</i>	106
Community building and social spatial quality of the living environment – <i>Chantal Van Lieshout</i>	107
Doing democracy: the relationship between the work of Jane Addams and Albert Dzur – <i>Mariël van Pelt & Marcel Spierts</i>	108
Moral distress: (self-) care-aspects for young social workers – <i>Susanne Vaudt, Katja Weidtmann & Gunter Groen</i>	109
Digitalization in Social Work: A quality framework for socially just and inclusive digital support and care – <i>Jana Verplancke & Tom Seymoens</i>	110
Positions of social work(ers) in a (shrinking?) civil space – <i>Griet Verschelden, Shana Sabbe, Nathan Hermans, Siebren Nachtergaele, Lieze De Middeleir, Cis Dewaele, Mart Willekens & Veerle De Schrijver</i>	111
Transforming Welfare: The Role of Social Shops in Dignity, Sustainability, and Social Inclusion in Portugal – <i>Catarina Vieira da Silva & Ana Oliveira</i>	114

What to know and what to assess in kinship foster care? – <i>Kaisa Vuolukka</i>	115
Revealing, Critiquing, and Moving Beyond Hegemonic Thinking and Practice: A Haraway-Inspired Approach – <i>Hanne Warming & Sarah Alminde</i>	116
Kraft-Copilot - a joint project across institutional boundaries to strengthen self-care and resilience – <i>Barbara Wedler, Sandra Schulz & Katrin Naumann</i>	117

Protest in context – re-imagining the relationship between Social Movements and Social Work – Havard Aaslund

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The 2010s have been referred to as the decade of protests. Solidarity with vulnerable groups and the fight against poverty and for social justice are important elements of social work. To meet the challenges of the welfare state, several scholars have argued that social work needs to move beyond the foundation of the welfare state and seek a foundation in human rights, social justice and new social movements. However, the inherent contradictions and challenges in such a grounding have not been discussed. Several protests or movements challenge social work values, and research has shown that institutional values hamper social workers possibilities for activism. There is a vast literature on social movements, collective action and protest that is highly unrecognized within social work research, and the suggested relationship between social work, social justice and social movements are seldom scrutinized contextually, beyond normative and generative assumptions.

This paper presents preliminary results from the project “PROTEXT: Protest in context. Social workers, protest and social change in different welfare regimes” The project focuses on the relationship between social work and collective action and will contribute new empirical and theoretical knowledge in the field and explore collective action among groups that are not organised, or considered illegitimate or disruptive. The project seeks to understand the history and political opportunities of collective action in the different countries and how attitudes to collective action among social workers relates to institutional bodies, framework and national contexts?

The project builds on welfare state theory and social movement theories; social psychological theories (supply and demand of protest), political process theories, resource mobilization theories and identity-oriented theories, to encompass the multi-level phenomenon of social workers responses to protest, including national and institutional contexts. The project is planning an edited volume on protest, consisting of theoretical and empirical examples from around the world.

The paper will present preliminary findings from a literature review to explore the political and cultural opportunities for collective action, and three ongoing case examples of mobilization from PROTEXT:

- During the pandemic, we saw a revitalization of mutual aid, self-organization, and informal services that imitated professional social work.
- "Public Housing, Place & Solidarity" investigates the political opportunities for tenant organization among municipal tenants in Oslo, Malmö and Quebec.
- “Rage Against the System. Protests and Demonstrations Against the Child Welfare Services” is a PhD project set out to examine social workers attitudes and participation in protests against child protection services in Norway and Sweden.

How to practice openness? Moving in between the institutions of museum, neighborhood and psychiatry – *Simon Allemeersch, Hanne Dewinter & Caroline Vandekinderen*

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The Guislain Asylum opened in 1857, following the principles of its founder, the alienist Dr. Joseph Guislain, who was influenced by the principles of the moral treatment. ‘Moral’ in this sense meant that the treatment of the psychiatric patients would aim at influencing their sensory experience. The meticulous design and surroundings of the hospital, as well as its location outside of the city, would serve this purpose. A combination of safety and refined aesthetics prevailed, and the original symmetric lay out of the hospital was formed by the different wings, forming enclosed court yards with monastery-like galleries around the central gardens. Nowadays, the modern psychiatric hospital consists of 8 different specialized units – ranging from day care, a crisis unit, adult units to residential care. At the heart of this site, there is the Museum Dr. Guislain. The museum hosts a unique collection of psychiatric utensils, art brut or ‘outsiders art’ picturing the evolution of psychiatry and the cumbersome origins of modern psychiatry.

This professionalization of the museum may have pushed its link with the psychiatric hospital to the background. For years, the museum had minimal connections with the hospital itself and its neighborhood. Paradoxically, the museum - the most public part of the site - is at the heart of the hospital. This leads to a confusing number of entrances, a confusing spatial organization, and an unclear relation between the site and its wider surroundings.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the city caught up with the idea of quiet and green surroundings. The Guislain site is nowadays situated amidst a super diverse, and one of the most densely populated neighborhoods of Ghent, affected by the ill-born consequences of de-industrialization and migration – marked by poverty, poor housing conditions and a lack of public space.

In their own way, museum, psychiatry and neighborhood have professionalized, divided not only by high brick walls but also by professional expertise and specialization. Yet, in recent years several issues have surfaced which ask for a more subtle understanding of space, circulation and openness. These issues first of all include the question by the city that the site should be traversable for the neighborhood residents, which led to a discussion on what this porosity actually means. Secondly, the new artistic team in the museum wants to speak up about lived experience of patients, and re-affirm the link with the surrounding hospital units.

Thirdly, new built psychiatric units for youngsters and children have prompted the hospital and the museum to think about circulation of these young patients. And finally, lacking decent housing solutions, homeless ex-patients try to find a place to sleep on the site illegally.

We present three research projects that happened on site – as critical exercises to understand, practice and explore what openness and circulation may be about.

Museums as spaces of care? The missed potential of “caring with”

In recent years, cultural heritage institutions have been increasingly called upon to position themselves as spaces of care, developing programs that address the wellbeing and care needs of diverse audiences. Although these initiatives often align with social justice aims, they also prompt museums to critically reflect on the role of culture in care: how is care defined, and can museums contribute meaningfully to care practices?

This presentation critically examines ErfGoedVoelen, a three-year wellbeing-oriented cultural heritage project involving the Museum dr. Guislain, engaging with children and adolescents receiving support from a psychiatric institution. Weekly museum sessions employed cultural heritage methods such as object handling, storytelling, and creative design.

We focus on Joan Tronto’s concept of “caring with”, which interrogates the equal distribution of care in society. Although such museum programs hold promise, we argue that they often fail to fully embrace “caring with”, thereby diminishing museums’ potential as sites of social justice.

The arrival of the youngsters: Who is educating who?

Following from the exposition ‘Circonstances’ about the French pedagogue Fernand Deligny at the Dr. Guislain Museum, a socio-spatial action research was conducted – instigated by the construction of two new units for youngsters who combine a moderate mental disability combined with the need for psychiatric care.

The new architecture, and the arrival of these youngsters provoked a series of interesting questions about risk, circulation and what openness actually means. Within the scope of this action research, for more than two years, a think tank functioned with various actors involved in and around the site – both management and units of the hospital, the Museum, The City of Ghent, architects, the hospital school, and the artists of the Lucinda Ra collective. What does the site’s traversability mean? What meaning do interstitial spaces hold for the participants involved? Why are we organizing a free jazz festival?

The (ir)relevance of the institute in Tony’s welfare bricolage

In reconstructing the biographical pathway of a former patient – Tony, who is homeless and occasionally appears on the site of Guislain – from a multi-actor perspective, we experiment with the concept of ‘welfare bricolage’. We use it as a mechanism to explore the structures and rationales underpinning needs and actions of institutional actors. Moreover, it is an inspiring concept to map how Tony gleans and connects (in)formal material and social resources through hybrid welfare constructions. We address the potential role of the institute Guislain in this welfare bricolage, to realize qualitative care and support for people with ‘mental health problems’ who do not always fit current recovery-oriented interventions revolving around the logic of empowerment and self-responsibility.

Search movements of social work organizations for governance arrangements in the field of communal housing – *Monika Alisch & Martina Ritter*

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Housing means more than just providing living space. Housing is closely linked to identity, social participation and social cohesion. While access to housing is subject to market principles, shared housing can offer a forward-looking alternative. It enables new forms of solidarity and collective care work. Shared forms of housing can be understood as social spaces that strengthen social networks and promote collective action.

In German-speaking countries, there is an intensive scientific discussion about such future-oriented forms of housing, which would be particularly relevant for social groups that can hardly provide themselves with adequate housing on the housing market.

Social work as a profession and as a scientific discipline has not yet found its role in the field of housing, even though housing as the core of the living environment affects every target group of social work. The middle class is also strongly represented in housing policy movements, but social work and its clientele have hardly been visible to date.

The symposium ties in with the concept of “Dissenting Social Work” (Garrett 2021), which deals with social work in the field of tension between hegemonic adaptation and resistant practice and can be understood as critical social work.

Social work - according to our thesis - is called upon to adopt its own political position on the basis of scientific findings in order to overcome structural inequalities and to advocate for fair access to innovative forms of housing for disadvantaged groups. What is needed is a political commitment that goes beyond the function of social work as a socio-political instrument and also stands in contradiction to institutional guidelines and professionalization claims.

The symposium will present three different perspectives on how social work can position itself in the context of communal, sustainable forms of housing.

In view of growing social inequalities, the question arises as to whether social work must also act more as a formative force. This tension is particularly evident in the housing issue: without an explicit mandate or institutional anchoring, the scope of social work remains limited - but without active intervention, the structural hurdles that make access to future-oriented housing difficult for the target groups of social work cannot be overcome.

Nevertheless, it is possible to trace the “search movements” of social work organizations to become an actor in the governance of communal living on a local or a regional level. To this end, the first interim results of a survey of experts on forms of communal living in Germany are presented for discussion. The aim is to understand the tension between structural support, systemic change and political intervention not as an obstacle, but as a field of action.

Preferred Interventions Seen Through the Perspective of Young Women with Eating Disorders Behavior (ED) – Pia Vedel Ankersen

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Eating disorders (ED) are classified as severe mental health conditions, with high mortality rates being a hallmark feature. Recovery frequently necessitates intensive and multifaceted treatment, in conjunction with a persistent personal endeavor. In this context, the Non-Take-Up literature underscores the importance of perceived meaningfulness in support for its efficacy. For interventions to be regarded as meaningful, they must also be regarded as legitimate, aligning with a perspective of justice and empowerment. A fundamental tenet of this perspective is the perception that inpatient emergency department (ED) treatment is characterized by elements of intimidation and a predominant focus on somatic symptoms, with a dearth of attention to psychological distress. Consequently, it is often perceived as intimidating and illegitimate. The mechanism through which treatment counteracts recovery.

Methods: Inscribed in an ambition of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPACR), a qualitative analysis of 14 interviews with women exhibiting ED behaviors was conducted using an existential-phenomenological approach. This analysis was facilitated using Nvivo, with the objective of elucidating the subjects' expressed wishes for interventions and treatment.

The results of the study indicate a desire for home-based treatment, scalability in care, and integrated interventions. These preferences closely align with the principles of Youth Flexible Assertive Community Treatment (F-ACT). Youth F-ACT teams are comprised of multidisciplinary professionals, with social workers serving a pivotal function as boundary spanners in orchestrating treatment and interventions.

However, the implementation of Youth F-ACT is limited, especially in Denmark, indicating a notable absence of recovery-oriented, home-based care options. From the perspective of the women, the elements are central to the effective management of psychological distress and the enhancement of the perceived legitimacy and meaningfulness of the support provided. Consequently, home-based treatment is preferred, where young women are in their own environment and receive help to redirect triggers for eating disorder behaviors to non-pathological behaviors. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of designing meaningful and empowering treatment options for ED behaviors. Expanding Youth F-ACT treatments can improve recovery outcomes by aligning with young women's preferences and experiences. The analysis stresses the need for broader implementation of Youth F-ACT.

The discussion addresses the contributions of social workers operating within ACT, and the meaningful treatment they provide to women with ED. The contributions are significant in that they empower women and promote social justice, thereby helping young women realize their potential within the broader social justice discourse.

Politicisation and social work with illegalised migrants: affect, precariousness and breathing in suffocating conditions – Soline Ballet

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Amidst restrictive immigration laws and policies that illegalise migrants and reinforce regimes of racialisation and precarity, combined with the shrinking of the welfare state, social work in support of migrants struggles finds itself in a suffocating atmosphere. This article, based on ethnographic research with a grassroots association in Brussels, Belgium, examines how affect operates as a politicising force at the intersection of critical social work practices and migrant struggles. Drawing on Butler's (2006, 2009) and Khosravi's (2023) work, the article introduces "breathing" as a metaphor to capture the struggle for endurance and the creation of new affective relationalities within systems of slow violence and racialised dispossession.

Three modes of breathing emerge as forms of affective resistance in the face of this suffocating atmosphere: breathing from, breathing with, and breathing in. Breathing from centres the affirmation of individual and collective desires — desires that defy the limiting, state-sanctioned frames of legality and return that dominate social work interventions. By validating migrants' desires, even when they appear unintelligible or erratic, social workers engage in an affective practice that challenges the racialised politics of desire (Glissant, 1997; Moten, 2003; Tazzioli, 2021).

Breathing with underscores the shared yet differential condition of precariousness and precarity, emphasising relationality and mutual recognition between social workers and illegalised migrants. The grassroots association's participatory practices foster collective belonging beyond citizenship that transcend mere survival, creating a radical form of togetherness rooted in shared vulnerability (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013).

Breathing in captures moments of joy — both as survival and as an act of refusal. Joy, whether embodied in mundane acts or through performativity, emerges as a fleeting yet powerful mode of resistance. These moments of joy offer an ephemeral escape from the oppressive rhythms of illegality and precarity, enacting a fugitive breath that asserts life beyond structures of racial and legal exclusion (Muñoz, 2009).

This paper contributes to ongoing debates in social work scholarship on politicisation (Garrett, 2021; Bečević & Herz, 2023; Naert et al., 2024), offering an empirically grounded account of how grassroots associations and migrants navigate enduring forms of racialised precarity. In such a suffocation atmosphere, the politicisation of social work is embedded in the affective encounters between social workers and migrants. It foregrounds the vital role of social work in sustaining collective endurance, demonstrating that even among exhaustion, "breathing" reveals the deeply embodied nature of surviving within and transforming these conditions, so that new political possibilities remain imaginable.

Reflective mapping of the professional actions of social workers in the reintegration of people with addictive behaviors and dependencies: a multi-case study in Portugal – Jorge Barbosa

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The present project proposes as central object of investigation the reflexive mapping of the professional action of social workers in the reintegration of people with addictive behaviors and dependencies (ABD), namely with regard to issues of discretion, professional reflexivity in structuring processes and instrumental rationality versus substantive rationality, through the theoretical lens of “street bureaucracy” (Lipsky, 1980), “structuring” (Giddens, 2003) and “risk society” (Beck, 2015).

Supported by these sociological theories, that provide benefits for the professional reflexivity of Social Work in the structuring processes, this study aims to understand how social workers, as frontline professionals and political actors in the field, act with knowledge of the facts within the health structures to develop actions that promote solidary inclusion and make a (positive) difference in the lives of people with ABD.

Starting from the adoption of a qualitative approach, through an exploratory study of multiple cases, which will focus on the interpretation and understanding of the discursive constructions of social workers about the professional way of acting in the health units of the national public assistance network dedicated to intervention in the ABD, it is intended to determine the contribution of Social Work in the reconfiguration of renewed citizenship rights in health – right to reintegration – of people with ABD, in contexts of social risk management in contemporary neoliberal society.

We conclude that the professional actions of social workers in the reintegration processes of people with ABD are guided by a dual position: one, oriented towards control and responsibility in risk management, through management skills centered on the task and on processes of minimizing risk factors; and the other, directed towards reflective practices concerned with democratic and humanist values, citizenship and social solidarity.

Against Asymmetry – On Symmetrical Subject Construction and Circulating Reflection in Social Work – *Pascal Bastian*

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In my presentation, I explore the concepts of symmetry and circulation as proposed by Bruno Latour, and their implications for the construction of professional subjects in social work. Traditionally, professional subjects are viewed asymmetrically, with a strong professional subject on one side and a weaker addressed subject on the other. This dichotomy extends to the separation between the acting subject and the surrounding context, which includes external influencing factors.

Evidence-based approaches construct a strong professional subject responsible for rational decision-making, often influenced by external conditions such as workload, resources, and media coverage. These approaches tend to create a deficit-oriented view of professional subjects, who are seen as responsible for optimizing their actions through correct methodological application and professional development.

My thesis is that attributing professional deficits to individual practitioners obscures other aspects of the complex interplay in professional practice. I argue for a symmetrical construction of subjects, where both professional and clients are seen as interconnected within a network of human and non-human actors. This perspective aligns with Latour's notion of action as dislocal and circulating, involving various actors that translate, modify, and transform meanings.

I propose that reflection in professional practice should be viewed as a circulating process of mediation and translation among different actors. This shifts the focus from individual practitioners to the entire professional field, emphasizing the collective nature of reflection. Based on empirical examples, I show how professional actions and decisions are co-constructed within a network and become autonomous facts through the successful mobilization of different actors.

In conclusion, I advocate for a relational understanding of reflection that does not burden individual professionals with strong subjectivity. Instead, I emphasise the importance of creating environments that facilitate successful reflection and transform it into a tangible and investigable part of the actor-network.

Critical Analysis or Positivist Legitimization? Implementation Research at a crossroads – Frank Bauer

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The paper argues that implementation research can serve as a critical social voice in social policy practice and theory if the following four conditions are met.

First, scientific freedom, and freedom of publication must be institutionally guaranteed (Oevermann, 1996; Bauer, 2016). Researchers must have the autonomy to determine their research focus and publish their findings without restrictions imposed by potential clients or financial sponsors.

Second, the normative nature of social policy programs must be adequately considered. These programs function as social interventions designed to “intervene in an ongoing social process for the purpose of solving a problem or providing a service” (Chen, 1990, p. 35). Social interventions are inherently normative and prescriptive. Their “action orientation” highlights that program theories contain prescriptions—specific actions intended to address undesirable social conditions. They are explicitly or implicitly embedded within the program and must be reconstructed (Donaldson, 2007). Consequently, an analysis should not only explicate the concept of “social justice” embodied in the program but also critically assess its limitations and constraints.

Third, research must acknowledge that laws are implemented through direct interactions with citizens, primarily by street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010). Therefore the actual practices of these frontline workers have to be reconstructed. They are not merely passive functionaries executing policies; rather, they are moral agents who must navigate competing obligations and ethical tensions in their daily interactions (Zacka, 2017). Social workers exemplify this role, as they operate at the intersection of policy implementation and individual needs. As frontline professionals, social workers must balance institutional mandates with the complexities of real-life cases, often making discretionary decisions that shape how policies affect beneficiaries. On one hand, they enforce regulations, eligibility criteria, and compliance measures dictated by social policy frameworks. On the other hand, they uphold professional ethics centered on empathy, care, and social justice (Evans & Harris, 2004). This tension underscores the necessity of reconstructing their decision-making practices

In morally significant decision-making situations, actors do not typically rely on grand, critical social theories. When justifications for their decisions are explicitly articulated, they tend to take a case-based (casuistic) form; however, in most instances, these justifications remain implicit and are embedded in habitual practices.

Fourth, it is essential to employ a methodological approach (“Structural Hermeneutics”, Oevermann 2000) capable of hermeneutically reconstructing and elucidating implicit patterns of interpretation and habitus. Nomological-deductive science and computational-positivist perspectives fail to capture this dimension of reality.

Experiential knowledge as a missing link for the theory-practice-nexus in Social Work? Results of and thoughts on the research project of „Experienced Involvement in Socialpsychiatric Care in Germany“ – Susanne Iris Bauer

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To address social justice and inclusion in practice of social work needs solid fundamentation of theoretical knowledge in the process of education is required, but to really do transformative, progressive social work, both, practice and education do need reflection and connection: The PhD project „Experienced Involvement (EX-IN) in Socialpsychiatric Care of Germany“ aimed at the anchoring of EX-IN Peers in Germany, using a mixed methods design with full survey on the scope of implementation and semi-structured guideline interviews on changes, barriers and what is needed to succeed. Experienced Involvement (EX-IN) is going back to the European Leonardo Da Vinci Project 2005-2007 of the same name, which developed a curriculum to professionalize peers for deployment as colleagues in social services in mental health supply. The findings show the scope and fields of deployment as well as potentials, but also severe barriers in the act of pioneering, such as prejudice. At the same time, taken from the analysis of 19 semistructured guideline interviews with EX-IN Peers and their teamcolleagues, improvements in quality of services, effects on staff and service users and a unique contribution brought to the table by the EXIN-Peers are to be reported. Beneath the direct impact on psychiatric care units the factors for successfully implementing progressive interventions is discussed: What are the means for education? Is theoretical knowledge and expertise enough and what would utilizing experiential knowledge as a third resource for education, practice and research contribute? How can participatory approaches and acknowledgement of expertise by experience strengthen professionalization instead of leading to de-professionalizing Social Work, as well as contributing to theory-practice-transfer and nexus?

The Heroic Pursuit of Making a Difference in Child Protection – Teresa Bertotti & Giulia Turrina

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The work of social workers in child protection is often subject to criticism and disputes, mainly because they operate in a complex web that intersects socio-cultural representations of family responsibilities, child welfare, the role of the State (Bertotti, 2017). To address some of these criticisms, in 2017, the Italian National Foundation of Social Workers launched a national study on the "Role and Quality of Social Work in Child Protection System" (FNAS, CNOAS, CROAS, 2020), exploring three different aspects of the role. This presentation focuses on one research module exploring the enacted role and investigating social workers' perceptions of their ability to make a difference.

In this module, 12 social workers were invited to share situations where they believed their intervention had decisively influenced children's conditions.

Although practitioners acknowledge and critique the contradictions and fatigues of the CPS, these challenges are viewed as unchangeable. As a result, attempts to make a difference appear as practices rooted in an individualistic and personalised approach

On one hand, practitioners often resort to personal acts of resistance within the constraints of bureaucratic structures. They justify this disregard of rules, institutional protocols or consolidated practices asserting their professional autonomy, and leveraging personal discretion to navigate complex cases. This exercise of discretion is frequently portrayed through what we name as a 'heroic' narrative - where practitioners describe themselves as lonely struggling against limitations to advocate for the well-being of children. Within this personal resistance, actions are narrated being shaped and guided by two main forces; values on the one hand and intuition and feelings on the other. Drawing from the analysis of the interviews we will outline the characters of this attitude, showing how the theoretical keys within a broader meso-macro frame disappear, replaced by calls to values or to intuition, based on emotional contact.

On the other hand, typically centred around the individual service user, interventions are constructed with a focus on the person in need of protection, often neglecting broader social, institutional, or structural factors. Neglecting these factors, we argue, practitioners are stuck in the binary and adversarial perspective and the systemic and contextual nature of family relationships disappears.

This dual focus on individual agency - both in terms of practitioner discretion and the targets of intervention - highlights the need for a critical, dissenting approach that moves beyond individual resistance, fosters a wider understanding of child protection interventions and promotes collaborative strategies aimed at structural change.

Gender equality in Croatia: good laws, bad implementation – Anita Blagojević & Ivana Tucak

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This paper deals with the evolution of the legal framework for gender equality in Croatia, established during the last two decades, and with the implementation of this framework. Our main hypothesis is that the interplay of various factors (international, regional, and national), resulted in a relatively good gender equality acquis, but also with many bad practices. In the evolution of the gender equality framework, we will identify the most important legal moments. As we will show, most of them were positive steps forward, while some represented a step backward. Despite all these efforts, in reality, all indications are that we are still miles away from real equality between women and men. The key findings of the paper are that numerous challenges and gaps in the implementation process are still evident throughout many fields: women in Croatia still make up the majority of the unemployed, they are underrepresented in management positions, they do not have equal opportunities for advancement, they have lower salaries and pensions, men in Croatia use maternity and parental benefits the least of all in the European Union, there are more and more reported cases of sexual harassment of women, there are more and more misdemeanor and criminal acts of domestic violence (and women are still, in the vast majority, victims of this violence), women are deprived of an adequate level of protection of their reproductive rights, and they are underrepresented at all levels of political participation. A special focus in areas of bad implementation will be given to the problem of access to abortion.

Addressing Social Exclusion: Self-Critical Reflection In Research with Family Carers of Children with Special Needs – Laura Blasius & Johanna Krieser

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We report on the ongoing research and development project "care treasures". The following critically reflects on two aspects. Firstly, the empirical investigation of the question of how parents of a child with special needs manage their everyday lives. Secondly, the question of how this knowledge can be responsibly made accessible to the general public. Within the prevailing social and political reality in Germany, parents who care for a child with special needs must primarily organise the care of their children themselves. In doing so, they face personal, organisational, social, and structural challenges. On one hand, they are affected by marginalisation, exclusion, and stigmatisation, partly due to a lack of social representation. On the other hand, despite or precisely because of this, they develop innovative solutions for a wide range of specific challenges to cope with their everyday lives. One aim of the research and development project is to identify the individual knowledge gained through coping behaviour. Initial results of the empirical study indicate that a central task of the welfare state is being transferred to individual responsibility: parents (have to) develop methods in order to enable themselves and their children to lead as self-determined a life and participate as possible. Considering the inherent socio-critical and political mandate of social work research, the originally planned research question and data analysis strategy needed adaptation. In addition to the question of how parents of a child with special needs manage their everyday lives, we now include analysing challenges due to socio-economic and socio-cultural impacts. Another aim is to support the visibility of family carers' expertise-by-experience and to present it to the general public in an accessible and low-threshold manner. However, the postulated triple mandate in social work highlights the fact that within the existing structures there is a danger that social work contributes to the individualisation of problem situations, including within the project. The structural conditions in which individual care takes place must be considered within the framework of the project, and the approach and objectives of the project must be constantly reflected upon in this respect, which is challenging due to the logic behind the allocation of project funding. As a consequence of this reflection, the necessity for political demands in two areas is emphasised. Firstly in the subject of research and secondly in research funding structures. By considering parents as experts-by-experience (empowerment), involving as many different family carers as possible in the production of knowledge (co-production), and contributing to the accessibility of knowledge for as many people as possible (democratisation of knowledge), social justice is taken into account. This approach may help deconstruct hegemonic notions of norms, knowledge order, and resource distribution.

Democracy under pressure and the consequences for young people's voluntary commitment – Karin Böllert & Dominik Ringler

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The research project “Democracy under pressure and the consequences for young people's willingness to get involved” is investigating how the perception and experience of an endangered democracy influences young people's involvement in East and West Germany, in rural and urban regions and in areas where right-wing parties are particularly active. In view of the increase in right-wing extremist and nationalist threats, research is being conducted into the barriers and risks that affect volunteering. The findings of the research project will be used to develop practice-oriented solutions that increase understanding of the barriers to volunteering among young people and at the same time offer concrete strategies and measures to strengthen and protect against right-wing tendencies. Based on the research findings, measures and workshops will be developed that not only provide information and training, but also strengthen young people's resilience.

Reproductive justice in social work practice: Empirical Findings on Professional Counseling in the Context of Unintended Pregnancies – *Christiane Bomert*

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The concept of reproductive justice integrates social justice, reproduction, and human rights. At its core, it encompasses the right not to have children - including access to contraception and abortion - the right to have children, and the right to raise children in a safe and healthy environment. It advocates sexual autonomy and gender self-determination for all individuals (Ross & Solinger, 2017). Moving beyond an individualistic notion of autonomy, reproductive justice explicitly incorporates structural inequalities and is fundamentally based on an intersectional perspective.

Access to reproductive health care-including counseling on pregnancy, family planning, abortion, and contraception-is an area where social work inevitably intersects with reproductive justice claims. This presentation examines this intersection in the German context, focusing on mandatory abortion counseling as an empirical case study.

In Germany, abortion is illegal in principle under § 218 of the German Criminal Code (StGB), but remains exempt from punishment under certain conditions, including mandatory counseling, usually provided by social workers.

Based on 16 interviews with counseling professionals in Germany, this study explores how principles of reproductive justice are implemented in counseling practice. The main research questions include: What are counselors' attitudes toward abortion? What structural and institutional power dynamics shape the counseling process? How are societal norms and values (e.g., religious or moral beliefs) negotiated in counseling sessions?

Using an intersectional analytical perspective, this presentation examines how counselors' attitudes toward mandatory counseling shape the counseling process, the role of gender, age, and migration background, and the extent to which social stigma and taboos influence counseling conversations and decision-making processes.

The presentation aims to challenge hegemonic narratives by contextualizing the political and social implications of abortion criminalization on social inequalities and promoting alternative approaches that emphasize self-determination and justice.

Unpaid caring in communal housing projects: Negotiation processes and transformative potential – Madeline Brandt

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Housing means more than just providing living space. Housing is closely linked to identity, social participation and social cohesion. While access to housing is subject to market principles, shared housing can offer a forward-looking alternative. It enables new forms of solidarity and collective care work. Shared forms of housing can be understood as social spaces that strengthen social networks and promote collective action.

In German-speaking countries, there is an intensive scientific discussion about such future-oriented forms of housing, which would be particularly relevant for social groups that can hardly provide themselves with adequate housing on the housing market.

Social work as a profession and as a scientific discipline has not yet found its role in the field of housing, even though housing as the core of the living environment affects every target group of social work. The middle class is also strongly represented in housing policy movements, but social work and its clientele have hardly been visible to date.

The symposium ties in with the concept of “Dissenting Social Work” (Garrett 2021), which deals with social work in the field of tension between hegemonic adaptation and resistant practice and can be understood as critical social work.

Social work - according to our thesis - is called upon to adopt its own political position on the basis of scientific findings in order to overcome structural inequalities and to advocate for fair access to innovative forms of housing for disadvantaged groups. What is needed is a political commitment that goes beyond the function of social work as a socio-political instrument and also stands in contradiction to institutional guidelines and professionalization claims.

The symposium will present three different perspectives on how social work can position itself in the context of communal, sustainable forms of housing.

Shared housing projects not only offer alternative forms of housing, but also social infrastructures in which care work is collectively organized. Unpaid care activities in particular - from mutual support in everyday life and childcare to the communal care of elderly or residents with special needs - are at the heart of these housing models. But how are these activities distributed within the communities and what negotiation processes take place? This article examines the social dynamics of communal housing projects with regard to the organization and distribution of unpaid care work. The focus is on the areas of tension between individual obligations, collective expectations and structural framework conditions. It discusses the extent to which such negotiation processes contribute to the reproduction of traditional gender and power relations or whether they develop a transformative potential that goes beyond existing care arrangements.

To provide an empirical foundation, initial findings from problem-centered interviews with residents of communal housing projects in Germany will be presented. The aim is to work out which strategies and structures prove successful in practice and how these models can possibly be used as impulses for a fairer distribution of care work in society.

Precarity is not enough for alliance: between divide and solidarity in social work – Zuzana Broskevičová

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Neoliberal reforms and austerity measures have profoundly impacted the working conditions of social workers, who themselves increasingly face insecurity and economic pressure (Burghardt, 2020; Pentaraki & Dionysopoulou, 2019; López Peláez et al., 2023). The privatization of social services, wage cuts, and job instability have contributed to the phenomenon of in-work poverty, where some social workers struggle for resources and, in some cases, even become dependent on social benefits themselves.

In the Czech context, social services are characterized by a tendency toward "anti-radicalism," meaning passive adaptation to neoliberal cuts rather than active advocacy for change (Valová & Janebová, 2015). The absence of strong trade unions and collective bargaining weakens professional stability and contributes to the fragmentation of the sector.

At the same time, a number of social workers maintain a disciplining, moralizing, and individualizing approach toward clients experiencing poverty, failing to recognize that the systemic pressures they themselves face affect their clients even more severely. On the other hand, their approach deepens the divide between social workers and people in poverty, who often feel misunderstood and perceive social workers as a privileged group. This situation echoes critical perspectives that question the possibility of solidarity among the oppressed based solely on shared precarious conditions, while also problematizing the emergence of class consciousness and common interests in contemporary society.

This paper draws on qualitative research with young people and families experiencing poverty in Czechia and raises the question of how critical awareness of shared interests and precarious living/working conditions can be strengthened in social work without overlooking the privileges and power of social workers compared to their clients. It argues that solidarity does not automatically emerge from personal experience with insecurity, but must be supported by critical analysis and collective organizing to ensure dignified working conditions for both social workers and clients, which can be facilitated for example by participatory action research.

CLAIM – Local Support Center for Migrant Integration: A Step Towards a More Inclusive and Intercultural Community – Elisabete Pinto da Costa, Hélia Bracons & Ana Paula Caetano

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Lusófona University, located in the centers of Lisbon and Porto, is Portugal's largest private university. Since its foundation in 1998, the institution has been committed to education, research, and innovation across various fields of science, culture, and technology, with an interdisciplinary approach and a special emphasis on strengthening Portuguese-speaking countries. As part of Portugal's national policies to promote migrant integration, Local Support Centers for Migrant Integration (CLAIMs) have been established to provide tailored support to migrants by assisting them in accessing services, navigating legal and administrative procedures, and fostering social inclusion through a community-based intervention model.

Recognizing the growing diversity of its academic community and the broader role of higher education institutions in promoting inclusion, Lusófona University established its CLAIM in 2024. Operating across two university campuses (Lisbon and Porto), with both in-person and online support services, this center provides a structured and interdisciplinary approach to migrant integration. The CLAIM at Lusófona University is structured around key intervention areas, including Migrant Support Services, Employability and Professional Integration, Intercultural Mediation, Citizenship and Democratic Participation, Intercultural Mentorship, and Interfaith Dialogue. Through these initiatives, the center contributes to the academic, social, and professional integration of migrants, addressing the challenges they face during the migration process.

This presentation aims to: (1) provide an overview of Portugal's migrant integration policy and the role of CLAIMs in the broader framework; (2) introduce the mission and objectives of the Lusófona University CLAIM; (3) detail the main intervention activities implemented, ongoing, and planned; and (4) present preliminary quantitative results on the center's early months of operation. Data from activity reports and service usage statistics were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to assess participation rates, service effectiveness, and the initial impact of CLAIM interventions. Findings highlight the importance of proximity-based services in enhancing migrants' access to essential resources and strengthening intercultural communities in Portugal.

Given the increasing complexity of migration processes, this study contributes to discussions on how higher education institutions can play an active role in migrant integration policies, reinforcing their role as inclusive and socially responsible organizations. The findings provide insights for policymakers, educators, and social workers seeking to enhance localized support mechanisms for migrants.

Social work and political violence: reflections on three seminars held in Nicosia, Belfast and Sarajevo – Jim Campbell & Vasilios Iakomidis

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Background and purpose of the presentation: there is increasing interest in how political conflicts around the world adversely impact upon, not just the lives of victims and survivors, but ways in which social workers carry out interventions in such extreme, traumatising circumstances. The presentation focuses on a European Association of Schools of Social Work sponsored project designed to explore and contrast the experiences of social workers, social work students and social work educators in the contexts of the political conflicts in Cyprus, Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Summary of the main points of the presentation: the presentation will summarise the key themes that arose across the three seminars involving 28 presentations and around 80 academics, students, practitioners and victims and survivors. The content of the presentations and analysis of subsequent discussions revealed contrasting histories of conflict and diverse experiences of the traumatic effects upon victims and survivors and social workers. The presentation will highlight the key themes that emerged from the seminars, in particular:

- (i) The profoundly traumatising impact of political conflict on the lives of individuals, families and communities
- services and compensation schemes for victims and survivors.
- (iii) A failure by governments and social work agencies to address the causes and potential solutions to the political conflict.
- common coping mechanism such as denial, silence and positions of political neutrality
- (v) The impediments, but also opportunities, for social work educators, students and practitioners to challenge the consensus and build alliances with individuals, families and communities to deliver more appropriate types of interventions.

Conclusions for practice, policy, or further research: the experiences of the seminar series have been important in several respects. Such encounters are often rare in this field, given the complex, often dangerous nature of political conflicts and their impact upon social work practice. It is crucial in such circumstances that there is a transparent, coherent approach to creating safe environments for discussion, in terms of planning and seminar guidelines. However difficult the task, it is important to consider ways of comparing and contrasting, not just the respective histories and current processes of political conflicts, but what impact these have on the role of the social work profession. The contributors to the seminars are seeking to further develop our understanding of these issues by submitting a paper based on the findings to a peer review journal and are building the network to include other areas of political conflict around the world.

Towards socio-spatial approaches in social work: Transforming knowledge, intervention and theory-practice nexus – Marisa Candeias & Elisete Diogo

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Spatial approaches have long provided a foundation for the human and social sciences; however, their role within social work remains underexplored, both in theory and practice. The significance of space in social intervention is underscored by Lefebvre's assertion that it is a construct of social relationships, shaped by human practices, representations, and perceptions. Therefore, social work and social workers assume a pivotal function in the process of socio-spatial transformation.

Within this frame, there is a necessity for a more extensive discourse on the social space model and its pertinence for social work. The model of socio-spatial orientation is regarded as a novel paradigm in social work, and the term 'paradigm' appears to be more appropriate in this context, as it encompasses patterns of thinking, models, values, rules and methods. To realise its full potential, an integrative and interdisciplinary approach is imperative. From this standpoint, social work is conceptualised as a transdisciplinary field, aiming to establish interrelationships with other scientific disciplines such as sociology, urbanism, geography, architecture, and more, to deliberate upon the concept of space. Spatscheck highlights that the critical and reflexive socio-spatial work advocates for regional cooperation at three levels: i) direct work with the addressees should be able to accompany processes of acquisition, education and development in settings such as casework, group work, working with families and community work. The involved institutions should raise the strengths of their target groups and develop structures of cooperation. ii) the institutional structures of social, educational and health-related organisations should be designed to realise supportive frameworks for the development of citizens and communities, their processes of spatial acquisition and their participation. iii) the design of places and spaces should be better communicated among institutions of administration, planning, and urban, social, traffic, education and youth policymakers, thus allowing citizens to participate in transparent and democratic structures.

The present paper sets out the fundamental concepts of socio-spatial approaches, promotes a theoretical and methodological reflection, and discusses ways to strengthen the connection between social work theory and practice in order to move towards this new paradigm. Furthermore, an innovative paradigm can inform effective critical practice, thereby contributing to the implementation of social work values. All stakeholders, including academics, practitioners, students, organisations and clients, are called upon to act in order to effect a suitable socio-spatial transformation.

The conclusions emphasise key implications for social work education, research and practice.

Technological Advancements in Healthcare: A Normative Perspective on Promoting Social Justice – Riu Cascão

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The healthcare sector is increasingly reliant on advanced technology. Artificial intelligence decision support systems (AI-DSS) and robotic systems are being increasingly deployed in the provision of healthcare, saving lives and enhancing the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of patients in Europe.

While AI systems possess the potential to significantly improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare, their deployment raises several ethical and normative challenges. As the sophistication and complexity of these technologies increases, particularly in the realm of autonomous machine learning capabilities, unforeseen risks are emerging. These risks encompass issues such as unequal access to technology, heuristic biases, discrimination, algorithm opacity (“black boxes”), difficulties in allocating liability, data protection and cybersecurity, and technological illiteracy.

This contribution aims to provide a critical analysis of the impact of this technological shift on the rights of patients and social justice in the healthcare domain. This analysis draws upon comparative law, bioethics, international law, and European Law (in particular the EU Artificial Intelligence Act and the European Health Data Space Act Regulation), with the objective of identifying how the law addresses (or ought to address) the challenges of effectively balancing patient rights and safety, public health, and access to affordable healthcare without curtailing medical research, technological advancement, and entrepreneurial incentives.

The contribution aims at presenting a compelling argument for the implementation of AI technology in a human-centred manner, ensuring substantial human oversight and algorithmic transparency in order to promote social justice. This approach should be underpinned by a consistent, balanced, and effective legislative and regulatory framework.

Towards a democratizing 'collective': rethinking intersectional collaboration – Dries Cautreels & Elke Plovie

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Intersectoral networks are promoted in social work policy as an answer to what is considered fragmentation in practice. It is stated that the accessibility of services will increase when professionals work together in a more 'efficient' way & maximize their own expertise while connecting with a policy promoting subsidiarity thus enhancing a 'community turn', aiming at self-responsibility & self-care. This implies that, more than ever, social workers are asked to engage in partnerships yet also experience an impetus to delineate their own tasks to their expertise or sector.

In this presentation we question the emergence & functioning of such formalised networks & elaborate on how they operate, by critically analysing them from the perspective of new public management. This perspective provides insight how these networks tend to focus on managing access to care & welfare, install procedures for collaboration & focus on individual problems yet seem to limit rather than enhance accessibility to support. We will draw on 2 research projects. A first project, an action-research on caring neighbourhoods, had the ambition to disturb this understanding of a formalised partnership & turn it into a coalition of the willing, focusing on collective problems in the neighbourhood & re-positioning social work as an active agent of change. The results of this study indicate that social workers within this coalition are more responsive to the lived experience of people in the neighborhood & more aware of their role in situations of injustice. The second research focuses on vulnerable youngsters with the status of a 'worrying situation' & in an apparent need for measures providing security. They find themselves in a challenging situation, often experiencing (the consequences of) judgmental & excluding rationales in society, policy & care. With closed residential care as a capstone, intersectoral networks are established too. The results of this qualitative study indicate that formal networks seem to legitimise the withdrawal of professionals from taking responsibility countering the intention of collaboration & establishing a 'collective' provides opportunities.

Elaborating on the findings of both studies, we engage in a search for both theoretical & practice opportunities to engage in a true collective. The French tradition of Institutional Pedagogy of Tosquelles offers practice-driven theoretical insights via the concepts of le collectif soignant & disalienation. The theory of Democratic Change of the American political scientist Dzur on participatory democracy aims at cooperation which is politicising in nature with democratizing professionals & organizations. Although distinct at first sight, both theories connect as their fundamentals are inherently political & frameworks are fundamentally democratic, providing opportunities for rethinking collaboration & the collective as a counterweight for neo-liberal logics imposed through formal intersectoral networks.

Ageing in Prison. Challenges and Support Programs for Aging in Prisons – A Literature Review – Eva Chaves, Monica Teixeira, Anna Paula Caetano, Cristiana de Almeida

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This study analyses the dynamics of ageing in a prison context, addressing the challenges faced by elderly prisoners and the effectiveness of social programmes aimed at improving their quality of life. Based on a systematic review of the literature, conducted according to the PRISMA protocol and covering 12 studies published between 2019 and 2024, five central dimensions were identified: insufficient infrastructure to meet the needs of this population, the impact of premature ageing on the prison environment, the limited effectiveness of social programmes, the need for palliative care, and structural and ethical barriers in the treatment of people with dementia. Despite some good practices, significant gaps remain in adapting policies and infrastructures. The conclusion is that ageing in prison requires urgent and integrated reforms that promote dignified ageing, health and social reintegration of older prisoners while ensuring full respect for their fundamental human rights.

The involvement of the police through social work as a materialisation of normative ideas of integration – Zoe Clark & Moana Kahrman

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The public discourse in Germany regarding integration willingness and the criminalization of specific groups contributes to the reproduction and intensification of social exclusion. This systematically diverts the focus away from necessary debates about social exclusion and individual coping strategies of those affected.

Empirical evidence from various countries (Australia, USA, Scotland, Ireland) has shown a significant correlation between residential youth care and criminalization processes, with young people in residential youth care experiencing disproportionate rates of criminalization. In Germany, the data also indicates that young people in residential youth care disproportionately often already have entries in the Federal Education Register compared to their peers.

In light of these findings, the growing tendency of social work to legitimise and use po-lice interventions as pedagogical instruments in residential youth care environments appears particularly problematic. This approach fundamentally contradicts the conception of social work as a “dissenting activity”, which should critically interrogate dominant narratives of “successful” integration while offering young people alternative interpretative frameworks through which to understand their experiences and social positions.

Based on the initial findings of the DFG-funded research project ‘Police as partners in residential youth care? The relationship between residential care and the police as a horizon of experience for young people’ (HeiP), this presentation analyses the problematic interdependencies between the discourse on integration, social work practices and the involvement of the police. The focus is on the impact of these interdependencies on young refugees in residential youth care.

Based on the analysis of qualitative interviews with refugees, the study demonstrates how police experiences are shaped by interpretative patterns of integration discourse. These results in pronounced self-blame and a vehemently and repeatedly formulated positioning as non-deviant. Furthermore, the social position of young refugee under-mine tyoung people’s agency. Given their profound dependency on these institutions, their ability to voice criticism is significantly constrained. Minor refugees experience police violence, but under conditions of the necessity to perform integration within residential youth care, there is no space for dissent.

Reproductive Justice, wāhine Māori (Māori women) and the child protection system in Aotearoa – Kerri Cleaver

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While Settler colonial child protection systems continue to do exactly what they are designed to do, enact well practiced colonial violence upon generations of Indigenous populations, Māori women continue to assert the rights held in our ancestral stories, our songs, our birthing practices, and in our actions. This presentation looks at the foundation of Indigenous women's rights, responsibilities, and restoration to address a crisis of Māori children in the child protection system. It draws on a growing body of work across Aotearoa, New Zealand to revitalise safety systems held in our Indigenous women's knowledges and practices. Through an analysis of State child protection practice and research advice following the infamous 'Hawkes Bay Uplift' (a public expose of the removal of a newborn baby from a young Māori mother,) evidence of continued complicity to whiteness and western familial norms is evidenced. I assert reproductive justice can only be achieved when Māori women's rights are restored. Issues of the encompassment of Māori women by the State, rendering us invisible is critiqued alongside the (re)production of oppressive practices. Touching on the relationships between Indigenous women experiences in Settler Colonial states, a shared experience of reproductive injustice is found, drawing our stories together while nuanced in our differences. The presentation finishes with some practice recommendations applicable across countries, where child protection practice can account for the structural oppression embedded in the system and be reimagined in new ways.

Exhaustion and Distancing: A Study of Burnout in Social Workers – *Cristiana de Almeida & Jacqueline Marques*

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The contemporary professional environment imposes growing challenges, significantly increasing occupational stress and burnout cases. Constant pressure, combined with working and living conditions, can have a profound impact on the mental health of professionals, jeopardising both individual well-being and professional performance. Studies show that burnout manifests through emotional, psychological, and physical exhaustion, depersonalisation, demotivation, and reduced self-esteem, directly affecting the work quality. Social workers, who deal with complex problems and scarce resources daily, are particularly vulnerable to this condition. The literature on the subject presents three central dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, dehumanisation in the relationship with others (cynicism and depersonalisation) and the feeling of professional failure (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Delbrouck, 2006). The general aim of this study is to analyse the presence of burnout among social workers. Specifically, it seeks to i) evaluate the level of emotional exhaustion of these professionals, considering affective, physical and cognitive aspects such as extreme tiredness, overload and a feeling of emptiness and ii) examine detachment from work, observing the existence of cynical attitudes and negative behaviours about professional activities. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), an instrument validated for different occupational contexts, was used for the research. The scale's items were based on the study by Campos et al. (2012) and analysed two fundamental dimensions: emotional exhaustion and detachment from work (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2003). The expected results will contribute to understanding the impact of burnout on social workers, subsidising strategies to mitigate its effects and promote a healthier working environment.

The ecological & the social looking forward to finally meet eco-social justice – Luc De Droogh & Frank Monsecour

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Sustainability is crucial for our common future and we need pathways to a deep transformation for the transition to another more liveable and just world. Is it? Whose common future – the present generation and future generations? Humans or also non-humans? Even rivers can have rights and obligations nowadays ...

According to Kathe Raworth's donut model we are all squeezed in a green space when we want to live in a safe and just space. We must make our present and future lives in this donut space. What is social work's role in all this – in theory and in practice? Is the social (the just) about the inside and the ecological about the outer (safe) circle. How is this relating to social work? Are there no social justice issues related to the outer circle?

Some see connections to social work in the discussions about decolonization and respecting indigenous voices in social work. We can certainly learn something about the dichotomy between nature and culture and how deeply this is entrenched in western thinking and in all kinds of western practices, social work included. Learning from indigenous voices and learning from recent ecological research questions this dichotomy and points out that not only animals have cultures but also that humans have a nature. Should our common future not start with questioning this opposition for our human well-being?

When social workers talk about the social, in practice they speak only about humans. When they have a 'broad vision' – green social work or even eco-social work - the "green" is at best instrumental for human well-being. In Flanders we both participated in the writing of an inspirational text to stimulate further the discussion about eco-social work in Flanders / Belgium for Strong Social Work. It is this text we want to present in the conference as a starting point.

We want to present this text, but also invite all participants in a discussion about it. When you work together with people in the very diverse field of ecology, the social is often meant something very vague. Questions of justice, Fraser's well known trias of recognition, redistribution and representation, are an important source of inspiration to address in theory and practice.

We want to address from a relational perspective how justice questions can be addressed and are already addressed in some ecological practices and in some social practices and that in theory and in practice the same injustices have to be dealt with in social and in ecological practices.

Our contribution is based on our participation in the working group on Just sustainability and on a critical review of the ecological justice literature for the research project in the Biodiverse Call 2023 – entitled Fair Nature.

“My child is born and raised here. He’s from here.” Mothering as everyday practice of contestation by irregularized women – *Pascal Debruyne, Sylvie Van Dam & Kaat Van Acker*

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In few other cases is the private as political as in the practices of mothering by irregularized women. Caring for their often undocumented siblings, is not just providing shelter and food, but also connecting them so society (school, sports, friends,...) striving for personal development, but also providing security in terms of “a future”.

The latter in most cases means “securing papers” and thus a stable residence status. In that sense, everyday practices of mothering – or ‘motherwork’ (Hill-Collins, 1994, Hill-Collins, 2000)- are essentially ‘acts of citizenship’ (Erel, 2011; Erel et.al, 2018; Kershaw, 2010; Trovão, 2017; Brouckaert & Longman, 2018).

In our research about social work-practices of shelter and “future orientation” for undocumented mothers in Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp, we examine the ways in which irregularized mothers navigate their everyday life through a maze of where the private and political entangle. By ethnographic research methodologies, founded on in depth interviews and participatory observation, we attempt to connect “mothering” as part and parcel of citizenship (Lister, 2010; Pulkingham, Fuller, & Kershaw, 2010).

Based on diverse ‘migration pathways’ we illuminate in interviews with undocumented mothers in several social work-practices, we examine practices of care, not only as mothers towards their children, but very often towards other mothers and even society. As such, we delve into care-work as ‘enacting citizenship’ (Isin, 2008). We notice how as these everyday practices of care unfold, they collide with the (also gendered) political ‘rhythms’ of migration policies (Lefebvre and Régulier, 1985: 73; Lefebvre, 1947), leading to uncertainty, fear and waiting.

By methodologically integrating into the lives of undocumented families and everyday social work practices involving them, from the bottom-up we amplify often-silenced voices in policy discussions (Nguyen & Pellow, 2010). In this way, we challenges the current migration regime that dehumanizes migrants into management schemes, regulations, and borders (De Genova, 2002; Farcy & Smit, 2020; Mezzadra & Nunes, 2010), by “putting flesh to the bone” to counter power dynamics of desubjectification.

Researching the relationship between Child Welfare and Protection (in Flanders – Dutch part of Belgium) and poverty – John William Decoene

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Background and purpose: poverty and social inequality have far-reaching consequences for the lives of children and families, and these developments provide major challenges for Child Welfare and Protection (CWP), which intervenes in so many families fighting against poverty. My research focuses on the question of whether, and if so, how Child Welfare and Protection Services can deal with social inequality and poverty as a social and structural problem instead of merely a problem of individual parents and children. My PhD encompasses several empirical sub-studies in which we examine, through qualitative research, how frontline practitioners and policymakers on organizational and governmental levels deal with poverty and what the underlying assumptions and logic are behind their actions. We focus on the frontline social workers and the policy actors of the Agency Growing Up, a governmental organization in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) responsible for child welfare and child protection, which has a public mandate to intervene in families for the sake of the safety of the child, using Signs of Safety. We adapt a theoretical framework, based on the writings of the Italian theorist and political activist Antonio Gramsci (1891 - 1937), on the significance of 'hegemony,' 'common sense,' and 'good sense.'

Conclusion: my research fully exposes the impact of the dominant logic of pedagogicalization as a hegemonic process. For the children and their families, this means that poverty is approached as a problem that must be tackled by themselves and their network. From this approach, poverty becomes an individualized pedagogical problem for CWP, reinforced by Sign of Safety, which focuses on parental behaviour as a critical success factor for interventions and considers poverty as a 'complicating factor' and thus as a problem that merely makes the intervention more complex. Although my research findings point to the absolute omnipresence of the hegemony, nuclei of alternative visions emerge, and under specific research conditions with feedback on research findings, practitioners develop as 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci). They formulate proposals showing just as many strategies for breaking out of the hegemony and causing disruption. Each of these strategies opens up discussions that are topical in CWP and more broadly, in social work. At the same time, they also lead to the construction of a different CWP striving for more social justice. This alternative CWP is based on foundations that are social pedagogical.

Exploring Adolescent & Youth Worker Perspectives in Co-Creating a Smoking Prevention Intervention – *Babette Demeester, Maité Verloigne, Sara Willems, Kenji Leta, Lieve Bradt, Emelien Lauwerier*

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Background: Smoking initiation disproportionately affects certain population groups, including adolescents experiencing societal vulnerability. Co-creation, an innovative approach, contributes to developing tailored interventions that address smoking initiation disparities. For this study, a smoking prevention intervention was co-created with adolescents and youth workers from two youth social work organisations. This paper analyses the perspectives of participants engaged in this co-creation process.

Methods: Data were collected sequentially throughout the process of co-creative intervention design and involved two focus group discussions with adolescents (n=8) and semi-structured interviews with youth workers (n=5). A reflexive thematic analysis was performed.

Results: Three main themes emerged from the data, capturing the co-creation process: active involvement and engagement, creating meaning, and capacity building. These themes were influenced by specific contextual factors (i.e. the physical environment of youth social work organisations and the social context, such as group dynamics) and demonstrated dynamic interactions, rather than existing independently.

Conclusion: This study gives insights into the collaborative dynamics and processes that emerged throughout our co-creation process, enabling us to give recommendations for future co-creation projects. Incorporating innovative and creative methods into the co-creation process, such as the co-creation camp, appeared to be particularly impactful in fostering collaboration, trust, and a safe space for sharing opinions. Key recommendations include prioritizing inclusivity, adapting methods to participants' needs, considering contextual influences, and ensuring the process is both enjoyable and meaningful.

Hidden Harm: Utilising the Ethics of Care for Theory Development – Sarah Donnelly, Louise Isham, Kathryn Mackay, Alisoun Milne, Lorna Montgomery, Fiona Sherwood-Johnson, and Sarah Wydall

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Carer harm occurs when ‘carers experience violence or become subject to controlling or coercive behaviour, either on an incidental or systematic basis, resulting in physical, psychological or sexual harm’ from the person they support (Isham et al., 2021:2). Family carers and professionals report that carers and the person they are supporting may be exposed to additional, or exacerbated, harm by the ‘system’. System-related harms include unrealistic expectations by services and practitioners; being put under undue pressure to ‘carry on’; lack of services and support; and being made to feel ‘undeserving’ or inadequate by some healthcare professionals (Donnelly et al.2025). In Europe, 80 percent of all long-term care is provided by carers (Eurocarers 2024); responsibility for providing care has shifted almost completely away from formal services to families (Fraser 2016). Carer harm has a number of conceptual dimensions; the role played by ‘intentionality’ is the subject of contention, with some evidence suggesting that intent to harm may change over time (Clarke et al., 2015). The nature and longevity of carer harm is also the focus of debate (Donnelly et al.,2025). The importance of engaging with the gendered dimensions (and inequalities) that lie at the intersection of experience of care and violence and the need to move beyond binary conceptions of power(lessness) in family and intimate relationships over the life course have been highlighted (Donnelly et al.2024). Simplistic constructions of an ‘abuser’ and ‘victim’ simply do not fit the more complex, nuanced, relational context of many care dyads, particularly over the longer term (Mackay et al., 2011). Using varied definitions of ‘carer’ and ‘harm’ or ‘abuse’ in research is a key barrier to drawing evidence together and developing shared understandings of key concepts, including that of ‘carer harm’ itself (Isham et al., 2021).Over the last two years, academics across the five nations of the British Isles, have been exploring ways to develop our theoretical and conceptual understanding of Hidden Harm in the Context of Family Caring. This paper reports on a policy analysis of five countries using the Trace methodology. Sevenhuijsen (2004:14) states ‘The main goal of Trace is literally to trace the normative framework(s) in policy reports in order to review and renew these from the perspective of an ethic of care’. We will explore each nation’s domestic abuse, care/support, carers and adult safeguarding policies to identify the presence and absence of care, caring relationships and family carers in these documents; to analyse how these terms are used; and to bring into the open the underpinning assumptions policy makers and politicians are making about carers and cared for persons. Our presentation will outline the Trace method and give examples of the identified underpinning assumptions in policies that may be contributing to a lack of recognition of and response to hidden harm.

Human Rights and Older People – Challenges and Opportunities for Gerontological Social Work – Sarah Donnelly, Zurab Tatanashvili, Laurine Bourgonjon, Freda Quinlan & Griet Roets

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A global transformation is taking place as the world's population is rapidly ageing. An array of challenges are posed by these trends since they affect not only societies and the welfare systems we rely on but also the social work profession. Social work with older people operates in a complex, often fragmented policy and practice environment, which is characterised by change and uncertainty. Social workers have a unique human-rights expertise, which combined with our social justice mandate offers us a formidable vantage point for advocacy work and upholding older people's human rights across continuums of care. This symposium will explore the importance of raising society's awareness of older people's human rights, structural and systemic ageism and the challenges and opportunities for gerontological social work.

The Evolution of Human Rights and Gerontological Social Work in Georgia: Historical Path Dependency and Development of Social Service

Tatanashvili, Zurab & Roets, Griet

Georgia's path dependency in human rights and social welfare can be understood through key historical-genealogical junctures. In the pre-Soviet era, social support relied on family structures, religious institutions, and early state-led charity. Under Soviet rule, a state-controlled welfare model provided universal pensions, healthcare, and housing, although with systemic inequalities and political repression. The post-Soviet crisis was characterized by economic collapse, reducing pension values and access to social services. Since the Rose Revolution, Georgia, modernized social policies, introducing targeted assistance, pension reforms and rights-based orientation in social services. However, recent political shifts threaten human rights and social service development. This presentation connects with the emerging field of gerontological social work and focuses on how responsibility for the welfare of older adults has shifted back and forth from families and communities to the state. While older adults historically relied on familial support and charity, the Soviet period institutionalized it within a centralized framework. The post-Soviet transition severely impacted service provision.

Since 2003, international aid and government initiatives have expanded services, including home care, emphasizing aging in place and a human-rights orientation. However, gaps in funding, uneven geographic access, and limited professional capacity remain key challenges. Recent democratic backsliding in Georgia's legislative and executive branches, hampers effective collaboration between civil society organizations and the government, reducing funding opportunities from international donors, who have been instrumental in introducing and piloting new social services, expanding geographic coverage, and enhancing service quality.

Transforming Residential Elderly Care: A Socio-Spatial Approach to Human Flourishing

Bourgonjon, Laurine & Roets, Griet

Elderly care policy in Flanders focuses on the concept of 'ageing in place'. However, this framework creates a problematic in/dependency dichotomy where continuing to live at home is seen as positive and desirable, while the transition into a residential care facility is constructed as something that should be avoided. As a result, residential elderly care is under significant pressure due to its function as a 'last resort,' reinforced by the image of older people as objects of care that lose their agency (Schiettecat et al., 2023). This research seeks to explore the potential of a gerontological social work orientation in supporting older people to exert influence over when, where, and how the transition takes place (Milne et al., 2024) by reconceptualizing residential elderly care as a space that fosters human flourishing. Drawing on a socio-spatial perspective, this study explores how we can reimagine residential elderly care as a space that upholds interdependence, actorship, and human dignity by embedding older people's interests and life histories into daily care practices. The research approach for data collection involves participatory mental mapping and biographical interviews with residents (with dementia) to uncover how older individuals experience and can shape their life pathways in the context of residential care.

Identifying filial coercive control as a human rights violation: Safeguarding social worker's perspectives on supporting older parents when their adult children strive to control their worlds

Quinlan, Freda & Donnelly, Sarah

For researchers in the area of intimate partner violence, the concept of coercive control has been well-explicated, with feminist scholars using the concept to describe the broad range of non-violent tactics (surveillance, humiliation) utilised by abusive partners to enforce compliance within intimate relationships (Stark, 2007). While the common understanding of the concept of coercive control relates to intimate relationships, increasingly, the phenomena of non-intimate coercive control has been recognized as a significant social problem impacting older adults. This form of elder abuse often occurs in relationships where there is an expectation of trust, with increasing reliance on family carers to provide support to their older parents a possible factor contributing to the occurrence of this little understood social problem. This study utilises critical realism, feminism and critical theory to explore the definition of coercive control beyond the realm of intimate partnerships into the sphere of adult-child to older-parent relationships within the context of human rights. Empirical exploration and verification of this theoretical concept were undertaken through semi-structured interviews with safeguarding social workers across the Republic of Ireland. The use of model and contrary cases illustrated how filial coercive control is distinguishable from other forms of elder abuse and allowed for the verification of the theoretical concept from practice experience

Relational transparency in practice: Injustice in social work comes not from what is openly communicated, but from what remains implicit and unspoken – Gretl Dons

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Transparency, traditionally considered a management concept, has become a guiding framework in social work policy and practice. In our research, we choose to approach transparency as a relational concept, as a prerequisite for promoting democratic partnership with service users and their families and social networks.

Transparency as a key attitude of the social worker is often taken for granted, both by practitioners as by policymakers while our research shows the opposite. We found that the way in which transparency is realized in the everyday practice of social work is a major challenge. Social workers have to deal with various polarities in order to develop a transparent practice vis-à-vis service users. We repeatedly fall into the trap of thinking that these dilemmas can be resolved instead of looking for ways to deal with them in daily practice without losing the fundamental values and ethical standards that social work represents.

Hence, social work constantly has to balance between two poles: control on the one hand and empowerment on the other resulting in a permanent struggle in managing power dynamics. But it is precisely the recognition of that power itself that is inherently problematic. Having examined the impact of neoliberalization on the contemporary discourse of empowerment in social work, we examine social workers' perceptions of power and its influence on the implementation of relational transparency. We argue that achieving relational transparency requires social workers to both acknowledge and make explicit the underlying power relations as social workers are tasked not only with making decisions but also with justifying and articulating these choices. The challenge lies in collaboratively constructing meaning through transparent dialogue with service users, a process that requires social workers to adopt a vulnerable stance.

Streets of Memories: Homelessness, Social Work and the Emotional Geographies of Urban Space – Ippokratis Efsthathiou & Sofia Dedotsi

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This qualitative study, based in Athens, employs in-depth walking interviews with two key participant groups: individuals experiencing homelessness and social workers engaged in frontline interventions. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with policy makers to explore their perspectives on social work's role in addressing homelessness and their engagement with social workers in policy-making processes.

The study explores homelessness and frontline social work through the lens of place, examining how streets, urban spaces, and intervention locations can become repositories of lived experiences, emotions, and personal transformations. Using walking interviews as a methodological tool (Evans & Jones, 2011), the research addresses the deep connection between location and memory, illustrating how places where individuals live, work, and intervene shape both their narratives and their understanding of homelessness.

The walking interviews conducted with individuals experiencing homelessness reveal that streets are not merely physical spaces but emotional and historical landscapes, where people have developed survival strategies, built informal networks, and negotiated their sense of self amid instability. As they walk through familiar places, they recall not just moments of hardship but also instances of resilience, belonging, and identity development. These routes are mapped, not as static locations, but as fluid pathways of memory and meaning, revealing the interplay between place, exclusion, and agency.

For social workers, the streets hold a different kind of significance. The research highlights how intervention sites become deeply personal spaces, where professionals navigate the complexity of systemic barriers, ethical dilemmas, and their own emotional responses to the work. Walking through these locations evokes moments of professional growth, self-doubt, and critical reflection, positioning the street as both a workplace and a site of emotional labor. The findings suggest that the geographies of social work practice are embedded with personal histories of engagement, success, and frustration, shaping the ways in which professionals perceive their role in homelessness intervention.

By emphasizing the innovation of place and location, this study challenges conventional, decontextualized approaches to homelessness research. Rather than viewing social work as a detached practice applied to abstract populations, it highlights how spatial and emotional geographies fundamentally shape both lived experiences and professional interventions.

Media Education in Residential Child and Youth Care – Marvin Fendt

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Theoretical Background: media education is crucial in today's digital world for fostering media literacy and enabling effective digital media use (Wuyckens et al., 2022). In family contexts, it serves as a protective factor against Internet Gaming Disorder, though evidence on effective strategies is inconsistent (Wartberg et al., 2021). In residential child and youth welfare, media education can prevent problems and promote participation (Steiner et al., 2017). This study examines how social workers' media education is influenced by individual and organizational factors, its impact on Internet Gaming Disorder, and contrasts the views of professionals and young people.

Methods: the study draws on two surveys: 319 professionals (63% female, 1% non-binary) in youth welfare institutions were surveyed about their media education practices, the Internet Gaming Disorder levels of their clients, and their institution's media education culture. Additionally, 40 young people (37% female, 10% non-binary) were asked about their media use, perceptions of media education, and Internet Gaming Disorder levels and compared with a subgroup of professionals in the same institutions. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regressions and Mann-Whitney U tests.

Results: while 76% of institutions reported challenges related to digital media, only 39% had a media education concept. Media education strategies such as technical mediation, monitoring, active mediation, and co-viewing significantly predicted Internet Gaming Disorder among young people ($F(5,313)=3.51$, $p=.004$, $R^2_{adj}=.04$) and media education culture ($F(5,313)=8.33$, $p<.001$, $R^2_{adj}=.12$). Professional characteristics like age, gender, and media attitudes significantly influenced the use of co-viewing ($F(3,312)=9.38$, $p<.001$, $R^2_{adj}=.07$), active mediation ($F(3,312)=2.68$, $p=.047$, $R^2_{adj}=.02$), monitoring ($F(3,312)=2.91$, $p=.035$, $R^2_{adj}=.02$), and technical mediation ($F(3,312)=12.03$, $p<.001$, $R^2_{adj}=.10$), but not restrictive mediation.

Young people perceived higher engagement in co-viewing ($U=418.00$, $p<.001$, $r=0.48$), active mediation ($U=318.00$, $p<.001$, $r=0.60$), technical mediation ($U=400.00$, $p<.001$, $r=0.50$), and restrictive mediation ($U=187.00$, $p<.001$, $r=0.77$). They also reported higher levels of Internet Gaming Disorder, especially prolonged use ($U=288.50$, $p<.001$, $r=0.64$) and concealed use ($U=619.50$, $p=.033$, $r=0.23$), while professionals rated their digital competence higher ($U=586.50$, $p=.016$, $r=0.27$).

Outlook: findings underscore the preventive potential of media education and highlight the importance of professional factors. Media education strategies should address young people's needs to enhance media literacy and reduce problematic media use. Recipient perspectives, showing higher awareness of media education and Internet Gaming Disorder, should guide tailored approaches. Future research should focus on systematically promoting and evaluating the implementation of media education concepts in institutions.

The Hidden Continuum: Transgenerational Consequences of Sexualized Violence Against Women and the Role of Social Work – Andrea Fleckinger & Daniela Gruber

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A growing body of research explores the dynamics of transgenerational traumatization, often linked to survivors of the Holocaust, war, or colonization (Seifert, 2021; Mohat, 2014; Brave-Heart, 2011). However, the sociological perspective on the dynamics of transgenerational traumatization of women who have survived sexualized violence remains a niche topic, as does the resulting continuum of violence observed within family systems and wider society.

Building on research on historical and collective trauma, the feminist participatory action research project TRACES (TRANsgenerational ConsEquences of Sexualized violence) examines the socio-cultural factors that facilitate the transgenerational transmission of trauma. By adopting a perspective of situated intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2014), informed by Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 2018), the study embraces a sociological lens to understand these socio-cultural dynamics.

The ongoing TRACES research in Vinschgau, South Tyrol (Italy), examines intergenerational trauma transmission within its historically poor, Catholic-influenced rural communities. First insights will be shared from interviews with grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, revealing the enduring socio-cultural impact of a valley characterized by silent complicity, and the Church's influence in this structurally weak region. These conditions contribute to specific dynamics of silence and shared but unspoken knowledge in the villages, fostering a continuum of violence.

In the presentation, particular focus will be placed on the role of social work in addressing the long-term consequences of transgenerational trauma and the importance of adopting a Transgenerational and Historical Trauma-Informed Approach (THTIA) in social work practice.

Through a close partnership between academia (University of Trento) and civil society organizations (medica mondiale, Forum Prävention, and the Women's Museum Meran), we integrate theoretical frameworks with practical implementation, guided by a Theory of Change in line with the Istanbul Convention.

Let's talk about eco-justice: disruptive voices as a driver for system change – Birgit Goris, Caro Bridts, Saskia Jacobs & Saskia De Bruyn

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In our current time, the world faces multiple environmental threats. They stack up towards a polycrisis. Facing the complexity of the current challenge, most approaches gather different kinds of knowledge, such as technical and industrial skills, as well as architectural, health, educational and sometimes even social knowledge. It leads to a 'Just Transition Mechanism (JTM – European Commission, 2023), stating that "The sustainable transition is not only urgent, it must also be inclusive and socially just."

Multiple authors already stated that not all voices are taken into account when dealing with such complex challenges in society (Fraser, 2023) and not all knowledge is considered equal (Fricker, 2007). Participation is a key-word, but all too much a mere layer of varnish in order to tick boxes. When it's about dealing with climate change, even social workers consider themselves as 'not competent' in the current debate. Society and policy are usually convinced that technical solutions will do the trick.

Gathering data in action-research (Banks, 2019) from two different fields of social work, in the policy-driven 'Urban Lab' in Leuven and the more bottom-up district-based work in Zennelab, Vilvoorde, we try to counter the purely technological based approach towards the climate change debate. Propelled by two colleagues with experiential knowledge in poverty and exclusion we tend to look differently to this crisis. Thriving on the framework of Van Lancker and Otto (2022), we tend to see the ecological crisis as a democratic one. By implementing a social policy that takes into account structural inequalities, which affect the ways in which groups of people can resist these climate changes, a socially just transition can be achieved.

Nonetheless, it's not merely about social justice. Following the ideas of Shivant Jhagroe (2024) we consider disruptive voices of people in the margins of society as a driver for system change. Our so-called sustainable solutions only add to more exclusion and exploitation of people without voice. We investigate how social workers in both practices in Leuven and Vilvoorde, try to take these considerations into the debate by allowing these voices, even if it leads to uncomfortable dissensus in society and policy. We look into their search as to make real new pathways of change become possible.

Teaching to Transgress? Challenges and opportunities for social work and social work education – Dawn Belkin Martinez, Kim Robinson & Anna Gupta

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In this symposium we explore the complex relationship between theory and practice in social work. The theory-practice nexus often presents a problematic dichotomy: theory is either perceived as an impediment to practical social work or as a set of guidelines to be passively implemented by practitioners. This reductionist view diminishes both research and practice to hegemonic activities, rather than recognizing their potential for intellectual dissent and social justice advocacy.

This symposium calls for a reimagining of the theory-practice nexus, arguing that both research and practice should be seen as dynamic, dissenting activities that can actively counter hegemonic thinking. Through a critical examination of the context of social work in Australia, the UK, and the USA, we highlight the need for a paradigm shift that embraces the potential of theory and practice to drive social change. The three countries all have histories of neoliberalism, rising inequalities and, to various extents, rise of the far-right and silencing of dissenting views. These different contexts, the implications and strategies for fostering a more critical and social justice-oriented approach to social work will be explored. Following the presentations, there will be discussion about social work in different contexts and possibilities for transformative change.

Australia (Kim Robinson) - The dominance of neoliberalism is pervasive in universities across Australia. This aligns with a large body of literature that has examined the diminished role of an academic and how it is increasingly bureaucratic and overburdened with administrative tasks. Faced with high stress levels academics are vulnerable to increased pressure to compete with each other and between institutions for scarce resources. Research has documented the resulting record number of poor mental health outcomes for academics, who are part of the 'anxiety machine' (Morrish, 2019). Academics experience disrupted sleep, depression, and burnout. The workloads and expectations for unpaid work on top of busy schedules are simply unmanageable.

In Australia Connell (2019) argues for radical change, and that education is not a commodity. She highlights that the promotion of a customer style culture amongst students in a neo-liberal university context is prevalent. The payment of fees (often exorbitant) for service may influence the interactions with academics, who are positioned as having to provide maximum flexibility to meet students' needs. But Connell argues that 'it is a university's job to serve society, not to agree with it', and that includes critical social work's role in challenging neoliberalism.

Robinson and Macfarlane (2021) note that the power dynamics in neoliberal institutions inhibit challenge, and managers can label academics as 'resistant to change' rather than actively critiquing oppressive bureaucratic systems. They propose several strategies based on Garrett's (2010) work to challenge these practices and contribute to the ongoing project that is critical social work education and research for the next generation. Critical social work provides a space to 'push back' and this workshop will contribute to eliciting participants' strategies.

The USA (Dawn Belkin-Martinez) - The election of Donald Trump as President of the USA delivered a stunning victory to the nationalist and authoritarian movements that support strengthening the structures of racial capitalism and dismantling any remnants of a social safety net. This outcome may have surprised many people; however, this is the playbook from hyper conservative anti-government racist, sexist movements that are growing and capturing the state: from Argentina to Italy. In the USA, we take Trump's declared intention to conduct mass deportations, concentrate power in the executive office, and pursue perceived internal enemies very seriously. And so, the answer to the famous question: what is to be done, is of utmost importance.

While a commitment to antiracist and anti-oppressive practice is now a core competency of social work education, many social workers struggle to explore, discuss and intervene around the effects of systemic oppression with the individuals and families they work with. This presentation introduces the liberation health framework: a social justice-focused method of clinical practice which integrates analysis of cultural, social and political forces with traditional social work models. The theoretical framework and intervention methods will be discussed as applied to social justice focused practice in these uncertain times.

The UK (Anna Gupta) - In Britain 14 years of Conservative 'austerity' policies eroded the social contract and diminished the welfare state. However, hope for meaningful change with a Labour government was soon extinguished by policies reducing welfare benefits for some of the poorest. Social work in Britain has been particularly associated with the State. As supportive elements of the state have been reduced, more intrusive and punitive interventions in the lives of some marginalised groups have increased.

Over the past decade there has also been an increasing recognition of the role of poverty in the problems most families involved in the child protection (CP) system face. Research by Bywaters et al., studies giving voice to families, Krumer Nevo's Poverty-aware paradigm, and parent activism have contributed to furthering understanding of the impact of poverty on families involved with CP services. This presentation discusses some ways in which knowledge exchange, involving people with lived experience, brought together theory and practice to facilitate transformative change. Whilst there has been greater acknowledgement of the role of poverty, actual change in policies and practices is questionable. Drawing on ideas about 'critical hope' this presentation concludes with discussion of barriers and possibilities for future work.

From the Street to Social Inclusion: Technical and Human-Centered Approaches in SCMP's Work with Homeless Populations – *Alfredo Figueiredo Costa & João Belchior*

Casa da Rua” da SCMP

This presentation will showcase the intervention model developed by Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto, particularly through the "Casa da Rua – D. Lopo de Almeida" and the broader Department of Social Intervention. Focused on people experiencing homelessness and extreme marginalization, the session will not only highlight the technical strategies and multidisciplinary frameworks in place, but also reflect on the essential role of humanization in social intervention. Recognizing the individual behind each case and fostering relationships based on dignity, empathy, and trust is central to promoting real social inclusion. By bringing together practical experience and critical reflection, this communication seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of socially just and ethically grounded practices in social work.

Mark Philp's Notes on the form of knowledge in Social Work revisited – Hans Grymonprez, Denoix Kerger & Dieter Oorlynck

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In 2016, we organised at Tissa a small discussion group on the seminal paper of Mark Philp. The basic proposition of his paper, written in 1979, states that under the apparent theoretical freedom, there is form, an underlying constitution to everything that can be said and done in social work. He challenged dominant views and theoretical debates at that time, arguing that if it exists, it exists “because it is a product of a specific situation within a framework, a structure while it is a specific product of a particular social economic and historical situation.” Philp elaborated his thesis in a three-fold way by excavating 1) the relationship between social work and the social sciences 2) the origin of the regime of truth and 3) the creation of subjects. Prior to the Tissa discussion group, we organised two focus-groups with Belgian scholars discussing Philps’ thesis and arguments. Many of his arguments were frankly very critically approached in terms of their reading of the history of social work, their understanding of the epistemology of social work and their positionality in social work. Major political and economic shifts in recent years have challenged social work praxis to its core and scholarly debates between abolitionism and the status quo. In this session we aim to wrap it all together and bring in social work praxis that re-imagines the theory-practice nexus beyond the ‘everything that can be said and done’ boundaries in the mainstream social work discourse.

The Causes of Uncertainty- Child Protection Decision-making under increased organizational complexity – Teres Hjärpe

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Background and purpose: uncertainty and changeability often characterize the cases that come to the attention of social services and are also something that social workers to some degrees are trained to deal with. However, while the organizational complexity affecting the decision-making process is described to increase, scholars in organization studies argue that as pressures increase and resources decrease in human service organizations, as is many welfare organizations today, a common reaction or strategy by the organization is to try to tame and control all the uncertainties, to make costs and work effort increasingly predictable. This article aims to illustrate common causes for uncertainty during child welfare investigations, as described by social workers, and to discuss how these can be understood and managed by social workers.

Methods: the article is based on the research project Social workers' considerations before placements of children in foster care or at an institution, which is ongoing between 2022-2024 on behalf of Lund university and Borås university in Sweden. The qualitative material collected consists of 39 interviews (with social workers who conduct child protection investigations, foster care secretaries and supervisors), 21 observations (at case meetings and case supervision) and 18 investigation documents (Looking After Children- investigations). Analytically, a "backwards" strategy, inspired by Howard Becker's (2008) have been applied, starting from empirical data with findings and asking the question: "What is this a case of?". After that the empirical data have been analyzed informed by literature and theory in an abductive approach (Hammersly 2022).

Findings: the social workers in the present study describe causes for uncertainty at micro (related to the child and family's relations, reactions and life circumstances), meso (organizational categorization, policies, staff turnover and budget matters), and macro (availability and competition dynamics for foster care providers) levels. In each case a unique combination of these causes are considered in concrete.

Conclusions and implications: while social workers are trained to handle and make decisions under uncertainty in relation to micro causes related to child and family circumstances, they are less prepared to handle uncertainty in relation to organizational and macrolevel causes, where complexity is increasing

Understandings of effect and quality in social work research and its implications for social work practice – Nynne Højland Ingebrigtsen

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The question of “what works” is frequently posed by politicians and policymakers, generating interest in how researchers attempt to answer it. This presentation critically examines how a positivist conceptualization of effect, intertwined with ideals of evidence-based practice, influences social work research. This alignment risks steering research toward designs ill-suited for complex fields, leading to findings that are, at worst, misleading and, at best, of limited practical use. This discussion is based on a scoping review of literature on quality and impact in counseling services for children and youth (ages 0-25). A search across seven online databases and Scandinavian gray literature identified articles published between 2013 and 2023. After screening 4,937 articles, 27 were included in the final review. Findings reveal that 22 of the 27 articles focus on text-based counseling (e.g., online chat, text messages), leaving limited research on quality and impact in face-to-face, telephone, and letterbox counseling. The average participant age is approximately 16, highlighting a gap in knowledge regarding both younger children and older youth. Additionally, 24 of the 27 studies predominantly feature female participants, leaving boys’ perspectives largely unexplored.

Notably, most studies use the term “effect” rather than “impact,” whereas gray literature is more likely to use “impact.” The term “effect” is commonly applied in studies using surveys combined with validated measurement tools—24 different ones across the papers—assessing various factors such as psychological distress and quality of life. However, the diversity of measures makes comparisons difficult. Furthermore, studies risk underestimating the full extent of an intervention’s impact, as some outcomes may not manifest within the follow-up period. Several papers claiming to measure effect rely on before and after-designs but lack actual baseline measurements, as the first survey is often conducted after the initial counseling session. Consequently, these studies cannot truly assess effect, despite their intent to do so. Moreover, research primarily examines whether an intervention is effective on a limited set of parameters rather than exploring how and why it works, overlooking crucial contextual factors. As a result, the mechanisms underlying interventions—how they work, for who and under what circumstances—remain largely unexplored. Research on service quality is scarce, and few studies provide practical implications, leaving practitioners with little guidance for improving services. Thus, research fails to support practice by not sufficiently informing the pertinent debate on what constitutes quality and how to ensure it in daily practice.

If we do not translate scientific theory into professional practice, we get de-intellectualisation and hostility towards science: two examples – Hubert Höllmüller

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Pierre Bourdieu's critique of capitalism: the online journal of all social work degree programmes in Austria was named 'soziales Kapital' by these programmes and is the central platform for specialist discourse in social work in Austria. Even if the reason for this name was not explicitly given, it is clearly a reference to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital. It is presumably intended to express the fact that social work is concerned with the 'social capital' of the relevant target groups. As marginalised and poorly equipped social groups, their 'social capital' should be increased, enhanced or 'accumulated'. In line with Bourdieu, increasing this form of capital would facilitate access to financial capital. This is a thoroughly positive view, which - based on theory - would find little contradiction in both the discipline and the profession of social work. Although traditional social work is centred on implementing the entitlements of its target groups to material and financial support (the actual non-take-up of social assistance in Austria is currently estimated at 30% - so there is still a lot to do), in most fields of action it is not financial capital that can be distributed, but 'only' social capital that can be increased. On the subject of cultural capital, the 'inheritance' of academic degrees is still formulated in educational research and educational theory, but then the references to Bourdieu and his critique of social relations come to an end. If the disciplinary and professional community of social work were to thematise itself a little more, then questions about symbolic capital within social work would inevitably arise. For the discipline, we can then ask where we are dealing with 'science capitalists' who are primarily concerned with access to roles and reputation, power of definition and decision-making positions. And in the profession, the perspective opens up as to where symbolic capital could be accumulated in management levels and leadership fields and where it is actually accumulated. Such a symbolic capitalist perspective opens up a new perspective on questions of benefit and aid effects of all the 'aid' that is provided in the system. When having power and the power to be right come to the fore, claims to effectiveness become at least secondary and the bad old management of problems becomes topical again. In many aspects of social work, it is obvious that we are dealing with symbolic capitalism according to Bourdieu. This contributes significantly to the fact that the majority culture of social work is still paternalistic and expertocratic.

'The systemic/constructivist fetish' as a major misunderstanding of Luhmann's systems theory: two terms haunt reflections and self-descriptions of the social work profession in the true sense of the word: 'systemic' whenever connections and pluricausal influences are to be described and 'constructivist' (also somewhat diminishing because it sounds too theoretical) when it comes to the fact that changing perspectives and questioning realities can lead to seeing solutions where none were previously visible. If Luhmann's systems theory is part of the background to the disciplinary reference, the context in which the two phrases are used is limited to attempts to describe phenomena that trigger more astonishment than analysis. Furthermore, there is no mention of the strictness of a theoretical model in which the flow of communication has taken over the meaning and thus the control and subjects only form the environment of social systems. No mention of the imperturbability of system logics and the merely communicated but ineffective fantasy that social functional systems could be controlled. If we were to attempt to model social work as a functional system of modern society, the guiding difference between help and non-help could be used to describe the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, which would make the limitations of any intervention visible. At the level of organisational

systems, the relationship between the self-will and self-preservation of the organisation and the external mandate to achieve this and that could be understood anew and it could be explained why organisational systems in social work are now so good at communicating what they do not achieve while they are so bad at actually achieving something. Organisational systems can scrape along the abyss for generations and shine in terms of communication as if they had always won the gold medal.

As long as we in the discipline of social work do not succeed in discursively declining our central theoretical models and thus transferring them to professional practice, this professional practice will respond to us with de-intellectualisation and hostility towards science.

Action research: a collaborative action approach to developing a grounded theory in social work – Gordana Horvat

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Social work is a science of research, of participation in everyday human life and of continuous investigation in a theoretical and practical sense. The development of theory is based on the exploration of practice, the creation of a theoretical framework and the return to practice. Although theory has emerged from practice, there is often a lack of understanding and connection between theory and practice. Action research is one way to connect theory and practice in social work. Action research creates the potential to involve professionals, but also users, in the joint collection of knowledge from practice and the creation of new theories by connecting them at the action level, thus enabling a better understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. Furthermore, participation, an inductive and non-oppressive approach and a critical approach based on a power perspective form the necessary link for a better synergy of theory and practice. It can be said that a bridge is built between the system and the community, the experts and the users, or the needs and the actual actions. The research conducted as part of my dissertation, which includes an action approach and research with a group of social workers, shows results on several levels. Methodologically, the action approach and the combination of several qualitative methods during the research show a deeper understanding of the research topic of foster care and working with families. Furthermore, on a theoretical level, a grounded theory has emerged, the theory of emancipation and inclusive participation in foster care, which has been linked to specific methods for application in practice. The actions or changes that have taken place during the research show an outcome in several directions: Changes in practice, the development of new skills for social workers and new experiences of professionals in understanding the synergy of theory and practice. The experiences of the professionals who participated in the action research are presented through the research findings in relation to the process of developing grounded theory.

"Sometimes, doing nothing is the most violent thing to do" – Theory as a Practice of Refusal: A Perspective on the Theory-Practice Relationship in Social Work – Mark Humme

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Social work is increasingly under pressure to legitimize itself, whether through evidence-based methods, standardized practice, or political efficiency logics. In this process, theory is often either seen as an obstacle to "real" social work or reduced to a mere application logic. In both cases, it loses its critical function and becomes an instrument for stabilizing the system. Instead of making social contradictions visible, theory is used to optimize existing conditions.

This paper aims to offer a counter-concept to this depoliticization of the theory-practice relationship: theory must not be understood merely as a preparation for practice but as a form of practice itself – specifically, a practice of refusal. If theory is practice, then the theoretical questioning of a practice can already be a political act. The central question is whether real change arises not through hectic activism or purely practical solutions but through the interruption and questioning of the existing order. Not all practice is progressive—many practices, even within social work, reproduce the very conditions they claim to change.

This paper examines how a practice of refusal can take shape within social work. Instead of reflexively searching for solutions to structurally produced problems, a critical social work could consciously refuse to participate in practices that merely manage inequality. What possibilities exist to disrupt hegemonic discourses rather than reproducing them? How can theory function not only as a tool for reflection but as an active disruption of existing narratives?

By exploring theory as practice, this paper argues that social work must be an intellectual and resistant discipline—one that does not merely act but radically questions the conditions of its own actions. This means resisting the temptation of premature solutions and first embracing the courage of negation—the courage not to play along.

Potentials and Pitfalls of International Comparisons in Child and Youth Welfare: A Systems Theory Approach – Onno Husen

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Over the past two decades, international comparisons have gained increasing importance across many policy areas. In social work and child and youth welfare, international exchange has a long tradition and has repeatedly provided new insights for both practice and research. However, the impact and visibility of comparative studies in this field remain vanishingly small. In general, large-scale, theoretically well-founded studies that meet the demands of international comparison while also engaging with social theory remain rare.

This presentation takes a first step toward bridging this gap by introducing a systems-theoretical framework for international comparisons in child and youth welfare, highlighting not only its potential but also its limitations. I adopt a systems-theoretical perspective, drawing on the works of Niklas Luhmann (1977, 1984, 1996) and second-generation systems theorists. From this perspective, child and youth welfare is conceptualized as a subsystem of the broader welfare system, specifically oriented toward children and youth. In this view, a child and youth welfare system constitutes an evolving nexus of communication—or in systems theoretic terms, a social system with a distinct logic that differentiates it from other social systems (Husen 2020).

Within this framework, I will emphasize the role of symbolic media (Steuerungsmedien)—such as knowledge, money, and law—in the autopoiesis of social systems within a functionally differentiated society. In the second part of the presentation, I will outline the fundamental assumptions and requirements of international comparisons, such as the *tertium comparationis*, and integrate them into a systems-theoretical framework with particular attention to theoretical alignments and incommensurability. This leads to the assumption that child and youth welfare is situated at the intersection of functional and segmentary differentiation within social structures.

Finally, I will sketch the potentials and pitfalls of comparative perspectives for both research and practice, aiming to stimulate further discussion with the audience.

Tracking Injustice: The Social Work at Risk Database (SWoRD) and the Criminalisation of Care – *Vasilios Ioakimidis & Konstantinos Roussos*

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Social workers are often at the frontline of human rights advocacy, defending the rights of the most marginalised and oppressed communities. However, their role as human rights defenders is rarely recognised, leaving them exposed to significant risks, including violence, persecution, and criminalisation. This presentation explores the contradictions of social work, where practitioners are expected to challenge injustice while simultaneously operating within state structures that may perpetuate harm.

We draw on findings from the Social Work at Risk Database (SWoRD) project, which monitors and documents threats against social workers globally. Our data reveals 78 documented cases in 20 countries, with two primary risk environments:

State violence and conflict – Social workers operating in authoritarian or war-affected regions (e.g., Latin America, Palestine, China) are frequently targeted for their advocacy.

Neoliberal welfare states – In contexts such as the UK and the US, social workers face scapegoating, chronic underfunding, and growing hostility as the welfare state is eroded.

Despite these dangers, social workers are not formally recognised as human rights defenders under many legal frameworks. This lack of recognition limits institutional protections and leaves social workers vulnerable to political and systemic violence.

This presentation calls for policy reforms, international solidarity, and greater legal protections for social workers. We argue that social work cannot function as a human rights profession without addressing the structural conditions that place practitioners at risk.

By amplifying these issues, we seek to foster collective action among academics, professional bodies, and policymakers to protect social workers worldwide. Ensuring their safety is not just about protecting individuals; it is about defending social justice itself.

EBP in high gear: politicization and scientification of social work in Sweden – Katarina Jacobsson & Anna Meeuwisse

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In a remarkably short period over the last decades, the concept of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) and the related discourses about “what works” have risen to prominence as a set of organizing principles for public policy decision-making in many countries around the world. The field of social work is no exception to this trend. At the heart of the EBP project is an effort to inform social work practice with the best available knowledge and robust evidence. What is defined as “the knowledge of the day” becomes a highly coveted resource.

The overall aim of this presentation is to discuss how the EBP-epistemology is promoted and manifest itself empirically in the case of Sweden. What knowledge is being produced, and who stands to gain or lose from it? What are the consequences for social work practitioners and for social work as a discipline?

A distinctive feature of the Swedish EBP program is the mutually reinforcing processes of “scientification” and “politicization”. The state knowledge bureaucracy – heavily influenced by the EBP community – aims to regulate social work research and practice through funding and incentives for certain types of impact evaluations of interventions. The Swedish EBP case thus represents intertwined movements where a group of researchers influence policy and policy influences researchers.

Departing from the Swedish context, we explore how attempts are being made to influence and guide social work research and practice towards EBP principles, visible in research calls, research applications, Social Technology Assessments, and more. Drawing on government reports, stakeholder documents, and materials from a national research council (Forte), our analysis uses the concepts of “quantification” and “standardization” to examine what appears to be a bureaucratic rather than an academic logic at play.

Findings reveal a concerted effort by the Swedish government and EBP proponents to steer social work research through the promotion of impact studies and standardized methodologies aimed at determining “what works.” Although significant resources have been devoted to EBP, we will show that the gains are highly questionable. This applies to both the question of the validity of EBP methods and the doubtful utility of their results for practice. Apart from sidelining the complexity of social work research and practice, it turns out that the crucial question of what works is seldom answered in a satisfactory way.

Confining the homeless in times of covid-19 crisis: simplifying public action and atonomizing the State – Nicolas Jacquet, Jean-François Orianne, Martin Wagener, Lore Dewanckel, Koen Hermans, Laure-Lise Robben, Griet Roets

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In contemporary European welfare states, homelessness remains a complex social problem. Since the emergence of modern society, public policies to combat homelessness have been developed following three paradigms: emergency-oriented, integration-oriented and punitive-oriented. Based on the findings of a recent research project in Belgium dealing with homelessness in times of covid-19, we explore how social work cope with the drastic digitalization of their practices (to deal with lockdown measures and social distancing protocols) in order to maintain ad hoc strategies to provide goods and services to the homeless. Inspired by the work of the critical scholars Niklas Luhmann and Luc Boltanski, we discuss State rationales and social work institutions' strategies to combat homelessness in this specific period. Our qualitative analysis reveals how modern society, and its systems and subsystems, generate a multi-exclusion phenomenon in the lives of homeless, from which social workers are struggling to overcome with. Furthermore, our results elucidate how the Belgian State had focus on unconditional emergency-oriented strategies in the context of covid-19 crisis by providing unconditional support to the homeless.

Mobilizing network support for homeless people – Samuel Jones

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The article investigates how professional support staff engage in mobilizing social support for homeless people within a Housing First inspired intervention. The empirical foundation consists of 14 semi-structured interviews, of which 12 were conducted with the professional support staff, primarily case managers, and 2 were with management. All worked at the same municipal shelter. The article contributes with insight into three related dimensions of social work with homeless people. First, the uneven landscape of support networks surrounding homeless people, as the professional support staff had different experiences of the value of networks surrounding homeless people. Secondly, the article sheds light on the value of mobilizing instrumental and emotional support through the networks of homeless people. Finally, it outlines the paradoxes of network mobilizations that the professional support staff must navigate. The article presents a theoretical model conceptualizing the difference between stabilizing support networks and destabilizing networks. The model draws on social support theory (House 1981, Heaney & Israel 2008, Song & Zhang 2024) and is inspired by previous research into the support networks of homeless people (Golembiewski et al. 2017, Ayed et al. 2020, Cummings et al. 2022). Networks are dynamic entities that might serve valuable support functions on the streets or in certain social environments but lose their value when material or social circumstances change. Conceptualizing the supportive dynamics of networks might guide professionals in their approach to mobilizing homeless people's network and the dilemmas associated with this mobilization. These insights hope to be of value to the efforts to strengthen social integration of homeless people as a part of Housing First interventions (Quilgars & Pleace 2016).

Understanding pressure in social welfare management: the role of individual and organisational factors – *Sirpa Kannasoja, Janissa Miettinen, Riitta Vornanen, Johanna Lammintakanen, Kati Närhi, & Sanna Laulainen*

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Background and purpose: At the beginning of 2023, Finland reformed its healthcare and social welfare systems, aiming to align services and resources more equitably and cost-effectively. The reform emphasises cooperation and knowledge management. As part of the Nordic welfare state, healthcare and social welfare organisations are responsible for fulfilling statutory obligations, including providing social services and organising social work. These organisations, and thereby their managers are expected to operate democratically, emphasising transparency, accountability, and participation. Simultaneously, managers ensure financial sustainability and efficiency, being accountable for work and operational performance. This multifaceted role exposes managers to diverse and often conflicting expectations and demands from clients, organisations and national actors, requiring them to balance these interests to promote cohesion among stakeholders and drive change for the common good. This study examines the pressure experienced by social welfare managers due to the expectations and demands they face, as well as the organisational and individual factors that predict these pressures.

Methods: Data was collected in spring 2024 through a full census of social welfare managers working in the wellbeing services counties across Finland, with 358 out of 971 eligible managers participating. Hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted, with the final model explaining 30.4% of the variance in the pressure scores.

Findings: The findings revealed that managers experience pressure on average monthly ($M = 3.0$). The experience of pressure was strongly associated with organisational factors, particularly increased financial constraints and strategic management environment. A stronger ethical leadership environment was associated with lower pressure levels. Collaboration between social welfare and healthcare professionals and support for managerial competence did not show a statistically significant relationship with pressure. Upper-level managers experienced more pressure than those in middle management. Among individual factors, opportunities to influence one's work were significantly associated with pressure, but the strongest predictor was ethical strain, which manifested when personal values conflicted with role expectations. Educational background (academic versus vocational), job satisfaction, and team size were not associated with managers' experiences of pressure.

Conclusions and implications: The findings highlight that while workplace well-being initiatives often focus on individual-level interventions, it is crucial to prioritise structural changes. The key is to identify the root causes of ethical strain and strengthen frameworks that support ethical leadership and promote ethically balanced financial principles.

Theory and practice nexus in social work education: Antinomy of Similarities and Contradictions – Anke Karber & Anna Bobe

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This article discusses the connection between theory and practice in social work education. The antinomies of common and opposing forms in teaching contexts will be examined under the following guiding question: What common and opposing forms exist in social work education in the connection between theory and practice?

In the context of linking theory and practice in social work education, a simplified juxtaposition of concept pairs such as knowledge and skills or discipline and profession can often be observed. This not only divides two supposedly distinct areas but also appears to clearly separate the dimensions of action and reflection (Rothland 2020). The active engagement with this tension characterizes the professionalism to be pursued (Kösel 2014; Neuweg 2020). This raises the central question of how a productive engagement between theory and practice can be achieved in education, with a particular focus on learning processes. At the same time, fundamental questions arise regarding the design of practice-oriented components within social work education. However, in-depth didactic theoretical discussions and empirical examinations—especially concerning the theory-practice relationship—are lacking.

As an insight into possible ways of structuring social pedagogical vocational training, using the example of early childhood education training, this article presents findings from a pilot study. The study surveyed teachers about their perspectives on theory-practice connections through guided interviews. The focus was placed on both their associations with the terms "theory" and "practice" and the ways these are structured within learning arrangements. The results show that teachers primarily assign theory and practice to separate learning. However, they also emphasize the necessity of linking both. They see themselves as responsible for creating these connections. To do so, they use various tools depending on the context and define specific actions that they attribute to themselves, their students, or both. Thus, the pilot study's findings provide initial insights into further concretizing the relationship between theory and practice (Bobe/Karber 2023).

In the context of the article's guiding question, this raises inquiries about (additional) formats for practice-based components in teaching settings within social work education and how these can be didactically justified. Additionally, questions regarding responsibilities must be clarified, such as how practice institutions can advise, support, and coach students during practice phases. A governance gap becomes apparent in the organization of these learning environments, as social pedagogical learning locations are designated as such but not structured accordingly. Consequently, discussions are needed on the lack of guidance and organizational structure. These and other questions will be explored within the article, working out the antinomies between common and opposing forms.

Dissenting theory for algorithms in social work: producing critical practitioners through interrogating the algorithmic lifepath – Emily Keddell

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The pre-existing tension between technical skills training and critical education has been intensified by the introduction of algorithmic risk prediction tools into many areas of social work practice. Maintaining a critical understanding of data justice and the ethical issues associated with algorithmic tools, along with retaining professional discretion and a deep understanding of their impact on public citizens are vital elements of producing social justice-focussed practitioners. Yet employers will increasingly seek graduates who are willing to utilize such tools without critique as they become commonplace in social work settings. Drawing on James et al, I develop a model of critical algorithmic literacy with the primary aim of helping students understand the complex intersections of power, technology and their social effects along the developmental lifepath of the algorithm. This lifepath starts from surveillance, and proceeds along data collection, linking, creation and testing of the algorithm, implementation, and then impacts workers and citizens. As these stages are explained, key questions to aid critical analysis are: who is defining the problem that the algorithm is proposed to solve; are you persuaded by it; who has control over its creation; how does the specific algorithm construct risk; are the data internally homogenous and representative; to what degree do workers both understand and have discretionary power to override the algorithm; how transparent are the mechanisms of the algorithm; and what is the impact on families (and how do we know?). Learning to interrogate the algorithm across its developmental lifepath through critical interrogation will be an essential part of producing critical practitioners, and enable them to deconstruct the ever-evolving nexus between research, evidence and practice.

More Justice in Social Work through Self-Advocacy? Yes, but no. What we learn from the Practice of Social Movements and Social Closure Theory – Alexandra Klein & Kathrin Schulze

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When we contemplate social work and the extent of its contribution to the advancement of social justice, historical and contemporary references to social movements emerge as indispensable. How demands and concepts of youth, women's and labour movements have influenced the theories and practices of social work since the early 20th century and how social work established itself as a historical response to social struggles has (now) been well reconstructed (Wagner, L. 2009).

However, having social work position itself as an ally to social movements and as a “fighter for social justice alongside social movements” (Diebäcker/Hofer 2021, p. 25) remains an untenable notion. Being part of the welfare state arrangement, social work will always also be part of the conditions that social movements are directed against. Consequently, when analysing this contradictory relationship between social work and social movements, it is always necessary to ask to what extent this interaction results in a “pedagogising and at the same time depoliticising silencing of social conflicts” (Wagner, T. 2022, p. 13). This perspective draws attention to power asymmetries, unequal opportunities for articulation and influence as well as to political and institutional instrumentalisation of social movements. This viewpoint is particularly pertinent in light of the present prominence of political demands for self-advocacy and self-organisation in the field of social work, as well as legal institutionalisation of forms thereof. The concept of self-advocacy, initially achieved through the efforts of diverse social movements, is discursively linked to aspirations of amplifying marginalised perspectives and, by extension, of fostering a deeper democratisation of social work and enhancing social justice.

It is noteworthy that questions concerning the prerequisites, scope, conditions and possibilities of self-advocacy remain underexplored. Who possesses the means and opportunities to represent themselves or to be represented by self-advocacy initiatives, and under what conditions? What is the significance of intersectional inequalities in this context?

In our lecture, drawing from our own empirical data on the experience of self-advocacy from an actor's perspective and with analytical recourse to considerations of inequality and closure theory, we uncover depoliticising affirmations and status-related selectivity, as well as essentialising individualisations and neo-social shifts in responsibility. The lecture thus reveals contradictions to the current dominant political popularisation of self-advocacy. By integrating theoretical and empirical insights into self-advocacy at the intersection of social movements and social work, it makes evident that the struggle for representation and participation is always also a question of powerful social struggles and conflicts, of inequality relations and processes of closure. In theory, research and practice.

(Peer) knowledge as a nexus between theory, practice and dissent in queer youth work – Nils Klevermann

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Social work operates in the field of tension between the professional knowledge of the professionals, the experiential knowledge of their service users and the structural power relations in which these bodies of knowledge are integrated. Against this background, the question arises as to how knowledge is generated, legitimised and transformed - in particular the knowledge of service users, which has so far received little attention in social work theory, practice and research. In this article, (peer) knowledge is discussed as a productive nexus between theory, practice and dissent.

Queer youth work is a field of social work in which (peer) knowledge is of particular importance. There are two reasons for this: Firstly, queer theory and pedagogy are strongly influenced by queer and other social movements (Engel 2024; Ferguson 2004). Secondly, queer subject formation processes are characterised by knowledge that is often not publicly accessible in a heteronormative society. Queer young people grow up in societies that are still heteronormatively structured. While they have long been understood as a vulnerable group in the scientific view, which is exposed to particular risks in coping with life, their ability to act is increasingly coming into focus (Hillier et al 2020).

Queer youth work plays a special role in this context: it aims to deconstruct gender and desire in a pedagogically guided way and to enable identities beyond a heteronormative and cisgender order. In doing so, it faces the challenge of providing spaces for recognition, protection and empowerment. Queer group work thus becomes a central place for identity formation.

This field of action has become increasingly professionalised in recent years and is located in various institutional and self-organised contexts. Against this background, in my presentation I will explore the question of how peer knowledge enables and limits the educational processes of both the individual subject and the collective as a whole. From a subjectivisation theory perspective (Butler 1990, 1997), it is assumed that subjects do not possess their self-image essentialistically, but rather form it in social practices. In this sense, gender can be understood as a 'doing' that is also dependent on knowledge - knowledge that is not only reproduced in educational institutions, but can also be transformed.

Based on participant observation in three differently institutionalised queer youth groups in Germany in 2024, this article examines the significance of peer knowledge for identity formation processes. The results show that both implicit and explicit knowledge is generated, appropriated and negotiated within the groups. Queer youth work proves to be a place where young people undergo educational processes through (peer) knowledge in dialogue with themselves and others.

Finally, the implications for the pedagogical practice of queer youth work are discussed.

Cross-cultural Social Work meets Ethnographic research on the field: Exploring Narratives of Refugee Women in Greece, Survivors of Gendered Based Violence – Kostantinos Kolovos

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This paper focuses on applied social work and psychosocial support case studies in dialog with risk narratives of refugee women GBV survivors, who were trapped in Greece in their attempt to reach another European country. My attention is to understand from my ethnographic research the constructed -by the women themselves- narrative scenarios in their attempt to articulate their painful experiences, through speech or by staying silent, when seeking support from social workers in the reception facilities in Greek islands and in the mainland. My main purpose is to understand the process of coping with ongoing cumulative traumas, while trauma carriers themselves live in temporariness, waiting for the next step, unable to plan their near future. Most commonly, survival difficulties in host societies, framed by Greek and EU policies have a catalytic impact over the future of refugees. The women's reactions are not only examined after their tumultuous journey, when they arrive in shock in Greece, but I explore the traumatic phases that can extend long after their arrival. Therefore, a key element of this research that converses with practical social work, is the trajectory that each refugee traces upon her arrival in the host country. Special focus is placed on the narrative strategies developed by the interlocutors – beneficiaries, struggling to come to terms with intense traumas that could hardly be phrased and communicated, arising from their experience of forced migration, but also from the everyday invisible borders that they should cross in their road for recovery and integration. Peer support groups and community-based protection services could act as therapeutic, when with respect to the temporality that it is being performed, depending on the empathy of the listener, the location that takes place and the spatiotemporal distance from the traumatic event. Moreover, I try to investigate to what extent the expressed trauma (death witnessing, detention, border crossing, torture, rape) affects the identity of our narrators.

Challenging and Promoting Social Justice for Victims of Labour Trafficking through Critical Social Work – Christina Kösl

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Critical social work offers an essential framework for addressing the systemic issues that enable exploitation and marginalisation e. g. in labour trafficking. A complex social justice issue that challenges traditional boundaries between victimhood and agency, exploitation and survival. Using a multidimensional vulnerability approach, this study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the complex realities faced by trafficking victims, exploring how existing systems can both protect and inadvertently perpetuate exploitation. Specifically, it examines how social workers and law enforcement professionals identify potential victims and advocate for their rights.

To investigate this, the study adopted a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with seven specialised counsellors and four law enforcement representatives. The interviews focused on the practical challenges and strategies used to identify victims of labour trafficking. Data was analysed using Grounded Theory Methodology, which allowed for open coding of emerging themes and patterns, and Situational Analysis, which helped map the interactions between various actors involved in the process. This approach offered a comprehensive understanding of the layered dynamics at play in victim identification and support.

The initial findings suggest a troubling paradox: while the identification of potential victims is intended to provide protection, it can also create new dependencies and vulnerabilities. Victims often rely on the support system for housing, financial aid, and legal services. However, the process of securing these services is often shaped by uncertainty if, how and when support will be granted, depending on the level of knowledge and willingness of public authorities to engage in victim protection efforts.

Moreover, restrictive migration and labour laws exacerbate this vulnerability. For instance, when potential victims from Serbia are treated as illegal migrants in Germany they will be banned to enter the Schengen area. Therefore, they face even greater barriers to legal employment since they no longer can legally enter e.g. Hungary for legal employment. This restriction is creating a cycle of dependency on recruiters and increases the risk of re-trafficking and exploitation.

These findings highlight the role of critical social work in dismantling these cycles of dependency, challenge hegemonic structures, and advocate for policy change in the wider context of migration and labour politics.

Between Theory and Practice: Political Interventions in Social Work with Refugees as an Act for Social Justice – Gesa Langhoop

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Social work is theoretically deeply connected to political engagement, especially as a human rights profession. It has a mandate to promote social justice, which extends beyond individual casework to structural change. However, how is this realized in practice? Social workers supporting refugees face restrictive migration policies in Germany that systematically limit social participation. While advocating for social rights is part of their professional role, institutional and legal barriers often constrain their actions.

This study examines how social workers implement political engagement through policy practice in micro-social-work (e.g. counselling) with refugees. What strategies do they develop to navigate between individual support and structural interventions for social justice? Which forms of intersection of micro- and macro-interventions can be identified? What are the implications for social work policy concepts?

Using qualitative interviews with social workers committed to policy practice, the study explores the intersection of micro- and macro-level social work. It builds on theoretical frameworks such as the human rights-based approach to social work (Staub-Bernasconi), civic stratification theory (Mohr), and the policy cycle model in social work (Rieger).

By highlighting how social workers use their professional mandate to challenge hegemonic structures, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of political social work. It demonstrates that social justice is not merely a normative ideal but must be actively pursued—often in resistance to restrictive policies.

Riots, Race, and Resilience: The Role of Youth Workers in Divided Communities **– Erika Laredo & Mick Charlton**

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This presentation explores the findings from a recent research project, which examines the experiences of youth workers in the aftermath of the 2024 summer riots. Conducted between January and April 2025, this small-scale qualitative study based on 20 interviews with youth workers and explores the extent to which the young people they work with were involved in the disturbances. The research also examines how youth workers responded to the events and addressed the concerns and questions raised by young people during this period of social unrest. The riots exposed deep-seated issues surrounding race, migration, and inequality, which often go unaddressed in mainstream political discourse. By exploring the intersections between these structural issues and the role of youth workers, the research underscores the need for youth work that not only addresses immediate challenges but also engages with the long-term, systemic issues that shape young people's lives.

While the riots were widespread, their occurrence and intensity varied significantly across different locations, offering an opportunity to analyse the diverse factors influencing community responses and the role of youth workers in these contexts. The research highlights the varying experiences of youth workers and the strategies they employed in supporting young people before, during, and after the riots. This exploration contributes to understanding the key challenges faced by youth workers in times of social unrest, while also providing insights into effective youth work practices and strategies.

Emergent themes from the research present a critique of the recent shift in UK youth work toward targeted interventions. Our findings suggest that youth workers feel increasingly constrained by these narrow approaches, which tend to focus more on managing the symptoms of social issues rather than addressing their root causes. Moreover, the research highlights the dangers of the retreat of mainstream political parties from meaningful engagement with issues of race, especially in relation to migration. This political silence has created a dangerous void in which harmful narratives about race and migration can thrive, exacerbating racial divides and enabling divisive rhetoric and policies to become normalised.

Health Risk Social-Science-Research-Project? Health-related Aspects of participatory Teaching and Learnings on the empirical Basis of Students Research Diaries – Markus Lohse & Katrin Naumann

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Purpose of lecture: Our contribution focuses on the conceptual basis "Students as Partners" of a qualitative and quantitative oriented research seminar for bachelor students of Social Work in order to shell out and provide insights and learnings based as well on qualitative and quantitative data into the extent to which research-based approaches in a degree program contribute to the students' ability to conduct research and to their support in the (further) development of professional skills and self-reflection. Two major questions: "Which teaching and learning arrangements have been created and what experiences have been made with them?" will be investigated. At the same time, an attempt is presented to answer the latter, namely the question: "How can research-based approaches contribute to the participation of students and practitioners in the (further) development of professional skills and (self-)reflection?"

Context: During the winter semester 2022/23 and summer semester 2023, a specific course concept was developed to be delivered in a hybrid teaching setting, tested at Mittweida University of Applied Sciences together with Bachelor students. This is based on a participatory teaching-learning approach on the conceptual basis of "Students as Partners". It proclaims – especially in connection with research-based learning – more active participation. Student participation takes effect from the very first moment (lecture/course-day), which is the start of the practical research project. The students were guided by academic lecturer and two of his research assistants in two groups to independently design and role out a research process – starting with formulating a topic of interest, asking a specific research question to be answered finally during a presentation of the results as part of an own field conference. Insights into the students' course diaries on participatory project realization, supplemented by the results of the interim and final course evaluations, will be the centre piece of our lecture, basis of sharing of other teaching experiences.

Method: Questionnaires for online and written surveys were used to collect data at the end of each semester. Other qualitative/dialogue-based instruments focused on the research process and the perception and reflection of project-related challenges of research-based learning in connection with a) a hybrid teaching-learning setting and b) a participatory teaching-and-learning arrangement. A content analysis procedure made it possible to analyse both the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, the dialogue-based feedback "Teaching Analysis Polls" and the chronologically noted diary entries.

Result: This article sensitizes to the perspective of research-based learning in the field of social work empirical research and its studies. To this end, it was investigated whether and, if so, how active participation in the design of research-based learning projects is reflected by its participating students. Surprisingly there are interesting insights into positive and negative health-related aspects, which are good to know for the future of developing teaching and learning settings of doing social science research.

Climate change and the vulnerability of older persons in Croatia: Risks and challenges for the social welfare system – *Mira Lulić, Davor Muhvić & Ivana Rešetar Čulo*

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We live in an era of serious, complex and irreversible climate change, which represents one of the greatest challenges of our civilization. The most vulnerable are most affected by climate change, with elderly definitely being on the top of the list. Croatia is a country with very old population, which deepens the problem. According to the 2021 census, 22.45% of approximately 3.87 million citizens of Croatia are 65 or older. Along with a labour shortage, this results in an increasing need for general and specialized health and social services and programs, which puts an additional burden on the state budget.

During heat waves, which affect almost all parts of Croatia, older persons are exposed to an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes, sunstroke, dehydration, fatigue, additional social isolation, insomnia, increased dependence on help from family, social and health workers. Finally, heat waves cause increased mortality among the elderly. Paradoxically, heavy rains and flash floods are becoming more frequent, especially in cities that do not have well-established drainage systems (e.g. Zagreb, Rijeka, Karlovac, Split). The air in urban areas (e.g. Zagreb, Osijek, Kutina, Slavonski Brod, Rijeka) is extremely polluted, which negatively affects the quality of health and life of older persons with cardiovascular, respiratory and other health problems. Climate change also threatens the mental health of the elderly. Older persons in isolated rural areas (Slavonia, Lika, Banija), do not have access to public transport, which makes physical contact with others and access to health and social care system reduced or completely excluded. There are, also, numerous problems related to the evacuation of older people during weather disasters. Adapting to dramatic climate change is financially demanding, and older people are often poor. According to Croatian Pension Insurance Institute data for 2024, as many as 60% of pensioners in Croatia have a pension of less than 500 euros, which leads to economic vulnerability and financial insecurity of the elderly and makes their adaptation more difficult.

The negative effects of climate change are present in Croatia from 1990s. However, in the era of the Anthropocene, the Croatian authorities still do not have carefully developed sustainable measures, complex guides and plans, and therefore no clear public policies to combat the harmful effects of climate change. The negative impact of climate change on the elderly is a highly multidisciplinary problem. However, social workers are at the heart of the services that are most valuable in the fight against climate change-induced challenges for older persons. Social services need to be strengthened, because social workers are the first line of defence of human rights of vulnerable older people. Additionally and traditionally, they encourage dialogue, detect problems, offer solutions, strengthen empathy, inclusiveness, sensitize the public and ensure intergenerational solidarity and intersectoral cooperation, the elimination of infrastructural inequality, and social justice. All with the aim of making older people visible, stronger and more resilient, and their lives more dignified in times of (climate) crisis.

How doing research as a former practitioner can contribute to reduce hegemonic interlinkages between theory and practice – *Melissa Manzel & Katrin Hermsen*

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Practical experience can profitably influence the development of the research topic and question as well as research style. For doctoral students in social work “The desire to delve deeper into a problem often arises from practice. You come across a certain problem and realize that there is nothing on it in academia yet” states Schroer-Werner (Krüger et al. 2025: 8, translation K.H./M.M.). Especially when structurally interlinked with practice, “research work can connect to current problems in society through practical relevance and deliver applicable results based on robust knowledge” (Müller-Otto/Szczyrba 2025: 63, translation K.H./M.M.).

Based on our dissertation projects in youth welfare as well as forced migration, we will give different examples. Furthermore we will theorize the interlinkages between practice and research as a practice experienced researcher while understanding both as intellectual dissenting activities and thereby reducing hegemonic understanding of practice and theory.

Building the Professional Image: Analysis of Social Work's Presence in the Portuguese Press – Jacqueline Marques & Paula Ferreira

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The media play a central role in disseminating information and constructing social perceptions of reality, influencing opinions and behaviour. In social work, how the profession and its professionals are represented in the media directly affects social recognition and legitimisation. Studies carried out in the UK and USA show that this representation tends to be predominantly negative, often associating social workers with bureaucratic processes and punitive interventions, especially in the field of children. Notable examples include Aldridge's (1990 1994) research in articles as well as the work "Social Work, the Media and Public Relations" by Franklin and Parton (1991) which demonstrate the strong correlation between the image conveyed by the media and the professional practice of social workers, as well as the collective perception of the public they serve. At the beginning of the 21st century, extensive studies of the press, such as those conducted by Reid and Misener (2001), analysed 258 news stories in the US and 141 in the UK, concluding that a significant proportion of the reports portrayed social workers negatively, especially in the context of children, where they were often presented as responsible for removing children from their families. In addition, the representation of the profession in entertainment content has also been analysed, as shown by the studies by Gibelman (2004) in the US and Henderson and Franklin (2007) in the UK, which examined how social workers are portrayed in television series. In Portugal, there is a lack of specific studies on the relationship between social work and public opinion, contrasting with research that indirectly explores collective perceptions of professional identity. Given the influence of the media in shaping public opinion and in the formulation of social policies, it becomes essential that social work actively participates in building its public image, using media strategies to promote a more realistic representation of the profession, its practices and the populations it serves. This study is an exploratory approach to analysing the image of Social Work in the Portuguese press over the last three years. To do this, we selected three of the country's main newspapers - Público, Expresso and Jornal de Notícias - in their online version, to identify the presence of news, reports and opinion articles about Social Work and social workers, as well as understand the image that these pieces convey. The research will begin with an exhaustive survey of the news pieces published in these newspapers during the period under analysis, by searching the search engines of the newspapers' online platforms for the terms "Social Worker" and "Social Work". The journalistic pieces will be analysed using the content analysis technique, a systematic methodology that makes it possible to identify and quantify the occurrence of words, phrases or themes considered central to the investigation.

Bridging Gaps in Disability Services: A European Social Registry for Enhanced Mobility and Inclusion – Konrad Meisner, Klaus Miesenberger, Maximilian Punz, Martin F. Reichstein, Melanie Schaur

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Fundamental rights in Europe guarantee freedoms such as the right to move, work, and access services, and ensure protection from discrimination, including for persons with disabilities (Ehlers, 2014). However, contradictions between European and national laws create challenges in fully realizing these rights. Legal frameworks like the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) and the Amsterdam Treaty (Article 13 EC) aim to address the rights of persons with disabilities (Ellis et al., 2018; Ferri, 2020). Yet, discrepancies between national and EU regulations result in barriers to accessibility and mobility for disabled persons (Bowman, 2006). Persons with disabilities often remain as “invisible citizens” due to a lack of harmonized legal provisions (Barnes & Mercer, 2005).

A significant issue is the absence of a centralized registry for social services across Europe. While EU laws facilitate the free movement of citizens, national welfare systems often fail to harmonize, limiting disabled persons’ ability to access benefits or services when moving between Member States (Van Der Mei, 2020). Additionally, no comprehensive directory exists for cross-border information on services for persons with disabilities (Schädler et al., 2024; Meisner et al., 2024). This lack of coordination creates barriers to service access across countries.

To address these challenges, this paper proposes a European Social Registry, which would centralize data on social services, enhancing accessibility for disabled citizens. The registry would use an AI-powered web crawler to collect and organize data from various online sources like search engines, social media, and service provider websites. Web crawlers efficiently categorize data by service offerings, keywords, and location (Najork, 2009; Olston & Najork, 2010). Since language varies across regions, the registry would incorporate legal terms, slang, and professional jargon to improve data quality (Kumar et al., 2018). AI algorithms would refine the search process, prioritizing relevant data and improving accuracy over time (Bhattacharjee et al., 2024; Shalev-Shwartz & Ben-David, 2014).

A user-friendly interface is essential for both social service providers and citizens to navigate the registry effectively. User-centered design practices should be followed, involving stakeholders like service providers and citizens in the development process to ensure accessibility (Resnick & Vaughan, 2006; Sobiesiak et al., 2002). Continuous updates and training are necessary to maintain data accuracy and ensure ongoing usability (Budin, 1988; Manning, 2015).

The European Social Registry could significantly improve the mobility and inclusion of persons with disabilities, enabling them to fully exercise their rights across the EU. By centralizing social service data, the registry would address current inefficiencies and provide a more accessible, transparent system for all citizens.

Integrating theory and practice in social work internships: a critical pedagogical approach – Daniela Monteiro, Carla Tralhão, Antonela Jesus & Maria Irene Carvalho

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This study is embedded within a project-based learning (PBL) pedagogical methodology based on the principles of the Gold Standard PBL model proposed by Larmer and Mergendoller (2015). This approach fostered active learning and enhanced students' capacity for critical reflection and analysis regarding the interplay between theory and practice in the social work field. The study's central focus is the intervention context of social workers, particularly internship supervisors, and is underpinned by Karen Healy's Dynamic Model of Practice (2014; 2022). This framework contributes to developing critical and dissident thinking, challenging the constraints of practicality, bureaucratic structures, and "established categories" within the social work field (Becker, 1991).

The internship in welfare organisations is central to students' professional socialisation, providing them with a space to develop their capability and integrate social work knowledge, skills, and values. However, this context can enhance and limit the development of analytical, reflective, and critical skills. Professional practice in these organisations can sometimes reveal disruptions between the profession's principles and organisational culture.

We want to respond to the question: What theoretical knowledge underpins the practice of social work internship supervisors? This study adopted a qualitative approach, involving students from two Portuguese universities - one public and one private - located in different regions of the country and their internship social work supervisors, who belong to various areas and organisations. A total of 24 student interns and 24 social workers took part, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between theory and practice in organisational contexts. We interviewed the social workers' internship supervisors. We analysed their views on how theory connects with practice. At the same time, a mixed questionnaire was administered to the students to understand the learning acquired during the experience and the difficulties encountered in integrating theoretical references into professional practice. To analyse and process the data, we used categorical thematic analysis. The research's ethical assumptions were met.

The results show that although the students recognise the importance of theory in grounding professional practice, its presence is not always clear or explicit and varies according to the social workers, contexts and areas of intervention. Based on the data collected, the theoretical framework adopted, and the pedagogical experience carried out, a methodical observation guide on institutional functioning was co-constructed with the students, paying special attention to their manifest and latent functions. It is a valuable tool for analysing the challenges and possibilities of integrating scientific knowledge into professional practice for social workers and academic internship supervisors.

**Positional struggles in research practices that address ‘the political’ in social work
– Jan Naert, Denoix Kerger, Delphine Levrouw, Bart Van Bouchaute, Hans Grymonprez, Didier Boost, Elke Plovie**

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In recent years, politicization in social work has gained increased attention in Flanders and internationally, both in terms of theorisation, research, and practice. This workshop idea originated from a group of social work researchers and lecturers who are engaged in politicizing work within their respective fields and in close connection to ‘this field’. Through experience and the ‘hard way’ this group adopts a more radical stance towards the evolution in social work and society. From this perspective on politicization, a countermovement is developing against the dominant neoliberal rationality that threatens social work ‘from the outside’ but also undermines social work practices and relationships ‘from within’.

This countermovement demands a positioning that entails a critical and activist lens, frequently focusing on institutional and broader societal logics. It also demands social work professionals and researchers who wish to engage with people in vulnerable situations. The act of taking position frequently collides with the logics and power dynamics against which they resist. A major question arises how such collisions affect one’s position and subjectivity, as well as on the relationship to the institutional contours wherein people navigate.

In this symposium, we aim to focus on ourselves confronted with these logics, starting from the problematization of our own position within the contours of institutions such as universities, colleges, or commissioning organizations where we conduct research or develop practices for based on their premisses. What does it mean to attempt to give shape to the idea of politicization and question power relations while we ourselves are caught in neoliberal logics and struggle with the ambivalence of neoliberal subjectivation? Through research examples and personal narratives within the contours in which we operate – starting from the conflict with institutional logics – we will address our own subjective experiences, but also extend this to explore practical and research-oriented avenues for returning to a collective analysis and the construction of praxis as a countermovement.

A Discourse Analysis of Young Carers Providing Care for Family Members in Japan: Revealing Discrepancies between Public Policy and Lived Experiences – Karin-Ulrike Nennstiel, Tomoo Nakata, Masami Nakata & Yusuke Ohara

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In recent years, the problem of children and youth caring for family members has gained growing attention. In Japan, a national survey by MHLW and MEXT (2021) revealed that approximately 6% of eighth-graders are young carers. Such caregiving experiences might contribute to future career development, but they rather show detrimental effects on mental health and education. Therefore, policy measures have been taken to address these risks.

This paper analyzes the narratives of two young individuals who have provided care for their parents. It aims to show the imbalance between their experiences and current policy interventions and to explore potential future measures. For analysis, a qualitative approach was employed, incorporating both ChatGPT-assisted analysis and interpretive work of the researchers. Informed consent to the use of the data was obtained from all participants.

The analysis reveals several key characteristics. First, the young carers emphasize the importance of maintaining parent-child relationships and strongly desire to avoid damaging these familial bonds. They consider their caregiving role essential for maintaining family relationships and irreplaceable, impeding the involvement of other supporters. Second, they seek external support based on equal, reciprocal relationships rather than hierarchical ones and understanding of their specific conditions. Third, they avoid disclosing their family member's illnesses to outsiders, fearing social prejudice and stigma.

As the analysis illustrates, there is a widespread tendency in Japan to hide family issues for concerns about privacy and the stigma attached to illness and welfare. This makes it extremely difficult to identify young carers. Policy is largely limited to the establishment of consultation services, requiring young carers to actively seek help. The government delegated the responsibility for measures to local governments, who often hesitate to take any steps. While school social workers are expected to play a key role in identifying and supporting young carers, their deployment varies by municipality, and their authority is limited. Peer support groups organized by former young carers may provide an effective form of external support, though maybe difficult to access.

In the future, school social workers with more authority assigned to every school might facilitate the identification of young carers. However, this would require legislative reforms the government hesitates to induce. Initiatives providing both care recipients and young carers with information about available support services could show alternatives to relying solely on family members to care recipients and awaken young carers to their right to choose their own life paths. Such awareness-raising might encourage young carers to shift their focus from maintaining parent-child relationships at the expense of their own well-being to their own life, promoting the autonomy and independence of the entire family.

Digital arrangements of Bildung as spaces of distributed practices of negotiating inclusion and exclusion – Klara-Marie Niemann & Nadia Kutscher

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Digital arrangements of *Bildung* (cf. Fujii et al. 2022; Fujii et al. 2024) in formal, non-formal and informal contexts (Burton und Brown 1979; Kutscher et al. 2003; Iske und Klein 2005) are becoming increasingly important in social work. The talk drafted here analyses from a theoretical perspective, how these arrangements function as an interface between theoretical knowledge and practical action. It argues, that this interface can both reproduce hegemonial structures as well as offer potential for resistance or subversion.

The paper analyses how digital arrangements related to participation in *Bildung* in social work blur the boundaries between formal, non-formal and informal contexts of *Bildung* and create new challenges for social work. A spectrum of forms of instruction, appropriation and others opens up when looking closer at the hybridity (Fujii/Kutscher 2022) of distributed ‘*Bildung*’ practices in settings in social work. This hybridity requires a new understanding of educational modalities in social work and their implications as in this spaces of enabling or reducing participation in the context of social inequalities are being negotiated ‘below the radar’ (cf. Zillien und Haufs-Brusberg 2014; cf. Helsper 2021; cf. DiMaggio und Hargittai 2023; O’Neil 2016)).

The talk moreover argues that the division into formal, non-formal and informal education may represent an artificial separation that does not adequately capture the complexity of processes of *Bildung* in the context of digitality. Instead, a perspective is proposed that takes into account the interconnectedness (cf. Iske und Fromme 2022) of distributed practices in social work related to digitality. This will be shown based on ethnographic research in media pedagogy in the context of open youth work as well as with young refugees in residential care taking practices such as coping with dealing with authorities, orientating oneself, doing homework. By examining the structures of these settings and the participating entities in those settings (such as humans and digital media) the conditions for participation and empowerment as well as for exclusion and disablement are being analysed. A model of subjective, media-related and structural resp. institutional conditions based on empirical findings will be presented aiming at a deeper understanding of the underlying structures that reproduce participation or exclusion. Thus, it will be shown that the mere focus on a theoretical systematization of informal, non-formal or formal forms of education cannot grasp those underlying structures and a more differentiated approach is necessary to understand the entanglement of conditions that enable or exclude from participation in social or educational contexts.

Allies in Community Advocacy: Social Workers and grassroots initiatives in the political struggle for post disaster justice – *Dimitra Papadopoulou*

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This research examines the interventions of social workers in the aftermath of the devastating wildfire in Northern Evia in 2021, comparing their role with the self-organized initiatives of volunteers and residents. The failure of state preparedness and intervention in addressing the crisis after the disaster led community members to organize bottom-up initiatives, while in many cases, they collaborated with social workers who were working in the field of the disasters.

Using a qualitative methodology, the study includes 30 semi-structured interviews with both groups of participants, which were conducted in person. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns in the experiences and responses of participants, which aims to identify, organize, and present recurring meanings found in the interview transcripts (Tsiolis, 2018).

In recent years, social workers in Greece have started to involve increasingly in crisis management, despite lacking training in their undergraduate education and irrelevant to the disasters job descriptions (Papadopoulou & Teloni, 2022). Moreover, many of them personally experienced the consequences of the disaster, taking on the roles of both caregivers and victims.

The lack of adequate state intervention and the limited capacity of social services created a gap which local communities tried to fill with self-organized interventions. The first months after the wildfire, residents, volunteers, unions, and social workers mobilized through solidarity actions and political advocacy, addressing both the immediate humanitarian relief and the long-term recovery of the area.

The research highlights the collaboration between social workers and self-organized initiatives within the community, who joined forces to support the affected individuals and communities and advocate for their rights. Through their collective efforts, they exerted pressure on both local and central authorities, ultimately achieving the implementation of measures for the reconstruction of the community.

In conclusion, while disaster management is primarily the responsibility of the state, the research underscores the importance of involving local communities both in preparedness and in post-disaster reconstruction, amplifying the voices of those affected. Finally, this research offers an opportunity for re-imagining social work and collective action through the lens of environmental justice.

The role of degrowth in ecosocial work: A scoping review and research agenda – Luca Pavani & Amy Shackelford

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Ecosocial work offers a transformed approach to social work that emphasises the interconnection of economic systems on ecological and social justice. Mainly on the periphery of social work, this shift towards ecocentrism highlights the need for social work to embrace alternatives to growth-centric economic structures which cause the over extraction and overconsumption of natural resources and increased inequality around the globe. By identifying the economic sphere as critical, ecosocial work promotes alternative models that reimagine a postgrowth world, mainly through degrowth, as a specific paradigm that has potential for alleviating ecological and social harm. A common concept in ecosocial work literature, degrowth is characterized as a critique and alternative to the growth paradigm rooted in neoliberal capitalism and instead promotes alternatives, such as circularity, mutual aid and a universal basic income. Yet, a lack of clear conceptualization and practical examples of degrowth in social work is evident.

This study uses a scoping literature review to explore the RQ: ‘How does social work define degrowth conceptually and practically?’ We conducted a search in Scopus initially identifying 54 articles. Using additional inclusion criteria we screened the abstracts for relevance to social work and degrowth and narrowed the selection to two papers. A supplementary manual locator search in Google Scholar identified a further five papers. The final corpus was analysed thematically using an extraction table to map key themes and tensions at the intersection of social work and degrowth.

Building on ecosocial work scholar Boetto (2017), our findings highlight 3 key dimensions through which degrowth aligns with the ecosocial work approach. 1) Ontologically, social work should move away from growth-oriented welfare models and integrate decolonial and participatory approaches to ecological justice. 2) Epistemologically, professional knowledge increasingly draws on localised, grassroots and Indigenous practices, emphasising economic, environmental and social sustainability. 3) Methodologically, ecosocial work engages at micro, mezzo and macro levels, from strengthening community reciprocity to policy advocacy and divestment from growth-driven economies.

Our scoping review allows us to propose a research agenda that emphasises the need for empirical investigation of degrowth practices at all levels of social work intervention. Theoretical and empirical analysis is important to determine whether degrowth processes remain niche practices or can be integrated into mainstream social work, in order to assess the transformative potential of the discipline. In addition, comparative research on degrowth in the global north and south is essential to identify social work’s role in promoting a global model of economic equality, which must consider implications of colonisation and diverse socio-political contexts.

The (In)Visible Faces of Alcoholism: the role of Social Work in social services – Inês Pinto

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Alcoholism is one of the biggest public health problems worldwide and in Portuguese society, because of its prevalence, severity and social impact. This reality requires the adoption of more effective assessment and intervention strategies.

The Social Service, due to the diversity of the organizational and problematic contexts in which it intervenes, may have, along with other professional disciplines, a relevant role in its approach.

In this sense, was carried out a qualitative research with a descriptive and comprehensive study of the life trajectories of alcoholic patients and the performances of not only the support and social monitoring services, as well as the Social Work professionals.

Methodologically, based on convenience sampling, in a first axis, 62 interviews were carried out with alcoholic patients, accompanied by Self-Help Groups, Therapeutic Communities and/or Temporary Reception Center. The goal of those interviews was not only to recognize the social problems most associated with alcohol consumption, but also to map the contexts in which the patients move. It was also intended to identify the institutions to which patients most resort throughout their history of consumption and the situations in which suspicions and signs of alcoholism are most evident.

The data collected were analysed from a biographical perspective, which allowed the reproduction of consumption trajectories and institutional paths and, simultaneously, the recognition of effective (or not) practices of screening, referral and prevention.

A second axis was based on the focus group technique, integrating 9 social workers from distinct institutions, working closely with alcoholic patients. From the constitution and moderation of an homogeneous group, it was intended to seize the perceptions, practices and perspectives of social workers in this specific problem, to identify and understand the factors that influence their performance.

The results of this investigation confirm, by one hand, the systemic and multidimensional relationship between alcoholism and social factors and problems. On the other hand, different trajectories of patients were identified in terms of consumption and their relationship with services, pointing to the extension of the natural history of the disease and late intervention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation.

The reality and the professional discourse also illustrate the needs and difficulties that confine social intervention in this context, namely in terms of human and physical resources and institutional link, as well in what concerns to the recognition of the disease and its specificities and complexities.

The relevant role of self-help groups was also noted, especially as informal support structures throughout the intervention, since the preventive strand to the community reintegration.

Participatory Methods in Socio-technical Transformations: A Social Work Perspective on a Practice Research Project in Social Robotics for Health Promotion in Long-Term Care – Elisabeth Rass

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The increasing digitization of society affects population groups that have so far had little contact with digital technologies. This is particularly relevant in sectors with severe staff shortages, such as long-term care, where technological innovation is often seen as a means to improve service provision. Against this backdrop, social robotics has emerged, raising both hopes and concerns. In this arena, participatory methods can serve as a way of intellectual and practical counterpoint to top-down implementations that ignore the everyday realities of care. This presentation explores the potential and challenges of implementing participatory approaches in a practice research project developing applications for robotic-based health promotion in group settings in care facilities. The applications aim to support the physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being of residents and are co-designed with residents and social service professionals who lead the group activities.

From a social work perspective, we argue that social work offers valuable methodological and ethical insights for shaping socio-technical change in ways that promote social inclusion rather than simply reproduce existing inequalities. The presentation reflects on the participatory processes involved, including strategies for meaningful engagement of staff and residents, and discusses how social work can challenge hegemonic narratives of innovation and efficiency by foregrounding relational, context-sensitive knowledge. The project illustrates how social work can actively contribute to shaping digital innovations in ways that are responsive to the needs and contexts of those affected.

Towards a Systemic Understanding of Complex Support Needs – Reflections on and From the Disability Field – Martin F. Reichstein

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When individual support needs are not directly tangible for professionals, the concept of complexity is often used in practice. This can create the impression that all individual support needs inherently involve complexity. If this argument is followed, however, the distinctiveness of concepts is lost, which rightly point out that what is special about the living conditions of persons with disabilities and complex support needs lies in the intertwining of social exclusion practices with a narrow view of needs for assistance, therapy and support (cf. Fornefeld, 2021, p. 20). Understanding the nuances of support needs is essential for enhancing care systems and addressing the root causes of social exclusion, especially among persons with disabilities.

The complexity of individual support needs results from the fact that addressing them can require “highly individualized, flexible, and time-consuming support” (Terfloth, 2016, p. 257). The importance of professional social services in this case results, on the one hand, from the specialist knowledge that professionals may need and, on the other hand, from the fact that, in the case of persons with disabilities, a large proportion of persons with particularly severe or multiple impairments do not have viable personal relationships. In particular, contacts to persons without disabilities are often limited to relatives or service employees (cf. Kamstra et al., 2015, pp. 253–255; Seifert, 2017, p. 84). Accordingly, the possibilities for accessing informal support are severely limited.

The contribution outlined here reflects individual support needs – including, but not limited to, those of persons with disabilities – in four categories. Based on Rittmann's (2014, p. 34) systemic differentiation, simple, complicated, dynamically complicated and complex support needs are discussed. Similarly, individual support needs are considered in terms of whether they require professional services or can be dealt with through contacts in the personal network.

The contribution outlined here aims to show that not every need for support that appears complex at first glance is actually complex. In certain cases, complexity may be addressed effectively through targeted support, professional cooperation, or the use of technology. Here, too, there is a need for further efforts in the area of theory building and practice development in the fields of social work.

Access All Areas? Digital and Analog Pathways Towards Social Services in Rural-Industrialized Areas – *Stephan Krayter, Sarah Lorber, Konrad Meisner, Martin F. Reichstein, Leonie Sunar & Lars Wissenbach*

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1. Introduction

Access to social services is a cornerstone of democratic societies. However, disparities in resource distribution and bureaucratic complexities create significant challenges, particularly in acute crises. In this symposium, we summarize the results of several studies on access to social services that we conducted between 2023 and 2025 in a rural-industrialized region in Westphalia. Our research is located at the intersection of socioinformatics and social work in order to gain a holistic perspective on analog, hybrid and digital models of social service provision.

2. On Access to Social Services in Rural-Industrialized Areas: Individual Perspectives (

Stephan Krayter

Following Knecht & Schubert's resource taxonomy (2012), we distinguish between personal and environmental resources to analyze how individuals overcome existing barriers when it comes to social services access. Effective access also requires efficient knowledge management and expertise sharing (Ackerman et al., 2013, 2014). Informal information channels are often vital for service seekers, underscoring the importance of tacit knowledge and relational dynamics.

The study builds on the concept of "invisible work" (Suchman, 2007; Ming et al., 2023), capturing the hidden efforts required to access services, such as navigating complex systems, managing emotional burdens, and coordinating support networks. It further contrasts "situated work" (actual practices) with "projected work" (idealized workflows) (Suchman, 2007), highlighting gaps in service design.

We conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with social service users from various fields, addressing a range of aspects related to service access. Our findings reveal that social service access relies heavily on informal networks and serendipitous encounters rather than structured pathways. Invisible work, such as acquiring knowledge, articulating needs, and leveraging social roles, poses an additional burden on service seekers and their families, exacerbating inequalities. Digitalization presents both opportunities and risks: while it can streamline access and coordination, it must align with user needs and community values. Participatory design is crucial to ensuring inclusivity, flexibility, and responsiveness in digital service infrastructures. By centering on lived experiences, digitalization can enhance social service accessibility while addressing its inherent complexities.

3. Traveling With Obstacles: How to (Not) Reach Social Services With Public Transportation

Konrad Meisner

When individuals – as for example many social service users – lack the financial means to afford private transportation, their ability to participate in society is significantly restricted (Berg & Ihlström, 2019). Systemic barriers – such as inadequate infrastructure – can make their situation even worse (Johnson et al., 2022; Placzek et al., 2021; Steinfeld & Steinfeld, 2017). A lack of accessible transportation can not only prevent individuals from receiving the services they need (Allard, 2008) but generally limit participation.

Our research aimed to determine whether public transportation is a limiting factor in accessing social services. To do so, we simulated the traveling experience of individual service users collecting data using Google Maps. Our data includes connections for the three municipalities in rural-industrialized Westfalia. The key variables analyzed were travel time, number of changeovers, walking distances, waiting time, and corresponding private vehicle travel times.

Our findings highlight the significant barriers that public transportation poses for individuals in rural-industrialized districts, particularly addresses of social services. Long travel times, frequent transfers, and unpredictable waiting periods make accessing essential services difficult, especially for vulnerable populations such as low-income individuals, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The reliance on private transportation underscores the inadequacy of existing public transit options in these regions. Addressing these challenges requires targeted improvements in rural public transport infrastructure to ensure equitable access to social services and greater mobility for all residents.

4. Can't We Just Do Things Differently? Digital and Hybrid Access to Social Services

Martin F. Reichstein

Supplementing or replacing social services with hybrid or digital solutions is not a panacea. However, it is generally plausible that digital media can make services operating in rural areas more accessible and strengthen the formal and informal networks of service users.

International studies increasingly show that digital social services can work well where they are not permanent or not exclusively digital. This means that they must be linked to the real world - in other words, they must relate to the place of residence and/or the reality of life of their (potential) addressees. They can then help to facilitate transitions to analog forms of support or bridge waiting times. In this context, the use of (video) telephone applications, chat groups and forums seem conceivable. Digital tools and databases can enhance professionals' access to knowledge about social services, improving their ability to refer users effectively.

At the end of the symposium described here, opportunities but also risks and side effects of digitally mediated social service provision in rural-industrialized areas are discussed. The basis for the analysis is once again the interviews and the results of workshops in the project region.

Exploring Students' Motivations for Pursuing a BA in Social Work – Georgiana-Cristina Rentea

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Identifying and understanding the factors that determine the choice of social work as a field of study can have implications both for education (e.g., how the curriculum is structured) and for the profession (e.g. preparation for professional practice). The objective of this study is to explore the motivations of social work students regarding their choice of social work as a future professional career.

Twelve third-year female students, aged between 20 and 22, from one of the largest universities in Romania, agreed to participate in individual interviews at the end of their final year of study. The research participants belong to a generation whose academic journey was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed since March 2020. Consequently, the first half of their three-year undergraduate studies (cohort 2020-2023) was conducted exclusively through remote communication tools due to these restrictions.

The students who participated in this research mentioned a mix of factors that influenced their decision to study social work and pursue a professional career in this field, in accordance with the social work research literature. Their choice of social work as a field of study was primarily influenced by their general orientation towards the social sciences, but also by altruistic motivations, such as the desire to support individuals in need. Empathy was mentioned by some respondents as a key personal characteristic. Additionally, in some cases, students' choices were shaped by personal life experiences (e.g., foster care) or by interactions with social work students, graduates, or professionals.

Enabling Spaces as Counter-Hegemonic Practice: Social Work between Structure and Emancipation – *Christian Reutlinger & Carlo Fabian*

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In socio-spatial work, enabling spaces are understood as places that enable people to actively appropriate and shape their living environment. They provide spaces in which marginalised groups can find their voice, articulate their own needs and develop collective strategies for action. Enabling Spaces are thus situated between structure and freedom, between institutional framing and emancipatory practice.

From an anti-hegemonic perspective, enabling spaces offer the opportunity to challenge hegemonic orders by facilitating self-organisation, participation and alternative forms of coexistence. Social work has a central role to play here – it can act as an ‘enabler’ by opening up spaces, providing resources and accompanying processes of reflection. At the same time, it must be aware of the danger of reproducing hegemonic structures itself when it prescribes certain practices or regulates access.

The article uses concrete examples – such as girls’ cafés as safe spaces for female empowerment or neighbourhood meeting places – to discuss how social justice can be promoted through the creation of empowering spaces. It reflects on the extent to which these spaces actually develop emancipatory potential, or whether they remain constrained by institutional frameworks.

By conceiving of enabling spaces as dynamic sites between self-determination and framing, the presentation contributes to the debate on counter-hegemonic strategies in social work and asks how socio-spatial practice can contribute to transforming social inequality.

(De-)Institutionalisation of family in the horizon of social transformation and social justice – Martina Richter

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The family is regarded as a historically created, welfare state-formed and legally codified institution of care. In recent times, the family has increasingly become the focus of public attention. Ideas of 'responsible parenthood' (Kaufmann) are becoming increasingly established, which entails an orientation towards professional standards with regard to parental behaviour in everyday life. Performance demands are finding their way into the family and expect parents to provide 'optimised' support for children's development. Depending on their resources, families have different, milieu-specific ways of meeting these demands. This responsabilisation of the family is countered by an expansion of social institutions such as social services and all-day schools, which open up counselling in the form of so-called 'educational partnerships', but also promote access to the family and address expectations of 'good' parenting.

Constructing a Community Diagnosis: Lessons learned from socio-spatial knowledge creation in social work and primary health care education – Griet Roets, Sara Willems, Matthias Blondia & Tineke Schiettecat

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In the field of social work and primary and public health care research, policy and practice development, the urgency of interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration has been stressed in order to take into account, tackle and change the often socially unjust structural and collective circumstances of individual ‘service users’ or ‘patients’.

Our presentation therefore focuses on the theoretical contribution of constructing a ‘community diagnosis’ as a key public mandate for social work and primary and public health care professionals according to a socio-spatial professional orientation, which frames socially unjust structural and collective circumstances as dynamic and changeable rather than a ‘mere context’ or wallpaper of (local) social policy and practice development. In terms of theoretical and interdisciplinary knowledge creation, the construction of a community diagnosis requires the interweaving of theoretical and conceptual knowledge in the fields of primary and public health care, social work and social pedagogy, and architecture and urban planning. The community diagnosis makes a critical analysis of the socio-political and systemic quality of the community, and enables a vital role of social work and health care professionals who have discretion as boundary spanners.

Our presentation will cast light on how we have worked on these theoretical topics in the context of a course on interprofessional collaboration between social work and primary health care students. In the course, we plugged the theoretical concepts into empirical fieldwork while focusing on the construction of a community diagnosis in collaboration with our students and a residential care facility for citizens with multiple care and support needs.

Social justice through temporal practices of exclusion of children from education in schools in Germany. Critical perspectives on social work in schools – Pia Rother

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Time as a category of analysis is a neglected category in social work research on middle childhoods and in education (Bildung). This contribution focuses on the education of children and elementary school as a central place of socialization and basic education for 'all children' as well as the equalizing reproduction of society (Heinzel, 2019; Parsons, 1968). Using empirical data from a qualitative research project (11 interviews with classroom-based, supportive social workers - UBUS specialists), dimensions of inequality are identified that arise through temporal practices of inclusion and exclusion by classroom-based support from social workers in elementary school (Rother et al., 2024). The temporal practices of 'doing time' (Lingard & Thompson, 2017) are used to discuss the chrononormative power of school time regimes (Forneck, 2010) which also influences social work in schools, the perspectives of pedagogical actors and their interweaving with inequalities of institutionalized childhoods. These findings are discussed critically from the perspective of social work in schools.

Dissent through Conspiracy – Counternarratives of the Far Right Challenging Social Work Practice – Jana Sämann & Zoë Clark

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Social work is an attractive target for far-right narratives. In particular, critical approaches and social justice-oriented theories are attacked as ‘false knowledge’, ‘political agenda’ or positions that allegedly exceed the profession’s mandate. A reductionist and depoliticized understanding of social work as merely a helping profession reinforces this effect, as it aligns with right-wing conspiracy theories of a so-called ‘left-wing agenda’ in social institutions—allegedly undermining traditional values or introducing socialist policies.

The European far right which emerged in the aftermath of National Socialism, has since the 1960s sought to redefine itself under the label of the ‘New Right’ or ‘Nouvelle Droite’. This self-designation serves not only to distance itself terminologically from National Socialism but also marks a strategic shift: rather than focusing solely on party-political struggles for parliamentary majorities, the movement has engaged in a distinctly metapolitical battle over societal narratives and interpretative sovereignty. Since the new referencing of the ideas of a Conservative Revolution in the 1950s, a set of consistent conspiratorial counter-narratives has been deployed, allowing the far-right to position itself within a proclaimed ‘culture war’. Unlike Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, which is rooted in egalitarian considerations, this far-right approach is fragmented into a mosaic of conspiracy claims.

These conspiracy narratives are emotionally charged; their ethno-nationalist appeal is not rationally constructed but felt. Accordingly, they tap into and amplify everyday fears, asserting interpretative dominance over cultural perceptions of daily life—eventually extending this influence into social institutions. The far right specifically targets social trigger points such as economic inequality, gender and family relations, and, in recent years, childhood and youth. This is expressed through a conspiratorial rejection of Marxist theory and social constructivist perspectives in childhood studies. Furthermore, an explicit enemy concept is constructed, directed at educational and social work institutions, which are accused of indoctrination and ideological manipulation. While gender remains a central focus of far-right discourse, there has been a recent shift towards positioning the child as the primary site of ideological struggle. Different age groups are framed in distinct ways: children are portrayed as vulnerable and in need of protection from an alleged sexualization via what is derogatorily termed ‘gender ideology’, whereas adolescents are framed as a potential threat, perceived as politically indoctrinated actors.

The lecture examines the fundamental conspiratorial logics of far-right dissent and illustrates them with examples from civic education and child protection—both highly contested areas of social work practice and central to political struggles over ideological influence.

A practice research to foster critical reflection on interventions to tackle housing crises – Mara Sanfelici

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This presentation offers an example of how the nexus theory-research-practice can be enacted through a practice research participated by two groups of municipality social workers, in the context of a wider study focusing on housing issues, funded by their municipality. The study involved professionals in critical inter-vision sessions (Ioakimidis, 2023), in which we discussed their written “case studies” describing situations of people with housing problems and interventions carried out to help them. The critical reflection method proposed by Fook (2002) guided the steps of “de-constructing” and “re-constructing” cases, through an outline for the analysis that included four types of questions (Fook, 2002): reflective, reflexive, deconstructive and critical questions. The deconstruction of the intervention allowed to highlight discourses, representations, power relations involved, unveiling tensions and ethical dilemmas about care and control, as intersecting dimensions constructed at the micro, meso and macro level. The case reconstruction aimed to formulate hypotheses on how to carry out interventions that can critically detect, account for and try to tackle the impact of systemic vulnerabilities related to different sources of privilege and oppression, and to show possibilities for the construction of dialogic processes that can convey recognition at the micro and the macro level. The overall goal is to use the results to foster critical thinking at the organizational level, to inform future policy practice interventions and build new knowledge on how to foster resistance "from

Participation, partnership, and sharing: Young women's suggestions for social work practices with adolescent girls in care – Nour Shimei

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Despite widespread recognition of the importance of involving children and youth in shaping practices that affect their lives, translating participation from principle to practice remains challenging. This study focuses on the perspectives of young women who experienced the welfare system as adolescents, highlighting professional practices that promote participation, partnership, and sharing in addressing challenges faced by adolescent girls in care.

The study explored how social work practices can better support adolescent girls by incorporating their voices into the care process. It sought to conceptualise practices that promote meaningful participation, empowering girls as active agents in their care and decision-making processes.

This research employed a participatory action research approach, engaging 25 Israeli women aged 18 to 29 who had encountered the welfare system during adolescence. These women had faced adversity, including poverty, social exclusion, and violence. Data collection involved in-depth interviews and group discussions, where some participants transitioned into co-researchers. They collaborated in analysing findings, presenting at seminars, and suggesting actionable recommendations for social work practice.

The analysis revealed that adolescent girls' ability to participate meaningfully in their care hinges on social workers' proactive engagement, expressed through three interconnected practices:

- (1) Participation: Girls emphasised the need for social workers to adopt a "standpoint of hope," demonstrating unwavering commitment, persistence, and belief in their potential. The absence of such support often led to feelings of abandonment and despair.
- (2) Partnership: Collaborative decision-making was crucial. Participants highlighted the importance of being involved in writing social reports, ensuring their perspectives were accurately reflected. Transparent documentation practices were essential for fostering trust and promoting shared responsibility.

mainly involving relatable experiences. This practice humanised the professional relationship, dismantled power hierarchies, and reinforced trust and empathy.

The study underscores the importance of shifting social work practices from traditional, top-down approaches to collaborative, participatory models. By embracing participation, partnership, and sharing, social workers can foster more equitable relationships with adolescent girls in care, enhancing their agency and well-being. These findings have implications for youth care policies and training, advocating for systemic changes and prioritising young people's voices in decision-making processes. This research contributes to reimagining the theory-practice nexus in social work. It highlights how participatory practices not only bridge theory and practice but also function as acts of resistance, challenging exclusionary welfare structures.

Social Work and Revolutionary Change: The Role of Portuguese Social Workers in the Aftermath of the April 25 Revolution (1974-1976) – Pedro Gabriel Silva

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This presentation examines a pivotal moment in Portugal's history—the April 25 Revolution of 1974—and its impact on social work during the country's transition from a decades-long right-wing dictatorship (Estado Novo) to democracy. Focusing on the radical phases of revolutionary change, the study explores how social work professionals engaged with socio-political transformation, shifting from a conservative foundation under the authoritarian regime to a politically committed practice in the mid-1970s. The analysis begins with a brief historical contextualization of Portuguese social work, tracing its conservative origins under Estado Novo, its gradual renewal in the late 1960s, and its subsequent radicalization during the revolutionary period. Drawing on Tarrow's Political Opportunity Structure framework, the study argues that the revolution created structural conditions enabling social workers to adopt radical practices, while their activism, in turn, reinforced broader socio-political change. Drawing on the data and results of a doctoral research concluded in 2023, two key cases illustrate this dynamic: (1) the involvement of social workers (both students and professionals) in urban housing movements and (2) their participation in the cooperative movement linked to agrarian reform struggles in rural areas. Through these examples, the presentation highlights how social workers contributed to grassroots mobilization and socio-political activism, demonstrating the profession's contribution to shaping revolutionary transformation. By revisiting these episodes, the study highlights how Portuguese social workers transcended traditional roles, embracing a vision of social work as a politically engaged practice. Ultimately, the presentation contributes to broader debates on the relationship between social work, social movements, and revolutionary change, offering insights relevant to contemporary discussions on radical social work in times of political crisis.

Knowing to bridge: Portuguese social workers' perspectives on the gap between theory and practice – Paula Sousa & José Luís Almeida

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Understanding the gap between theory and practice is a constant challenge in social work; therefore, the views of Portuguese social workers on this gap were analysed. A study was conducted between 2022 and 2023 that explored the perspectives of Portuguese social workers on this crucial relationship.

Using a mixed methods approach, an online survey tool, 'LimeSurvey', was administered to 334 social workers (180 complete responses, 154 partial responses). Qualitative analysis of 173 responses to the statement "In practice, theory is different" revealed three dominant perspectives: complementarity (35%), necessary adaptation (30%) and structural constraints (20%).

Social workers who emphasise complementarity (61 responses) argue that theory provides a scientific basis and strengthens professional identity, while practice enriches theoretical understanding. Those who highlight the necessary adaptation (52 responses) emphasise the importance of adjusting theoretical knowledge to the specificities of the case and complex realities. Respondents who identified structural constraints (35 responses) point to bureaucratic barriers, scarcity of resources, and institutional pressures that limit the application of the theory.

The study reveals that although most social workers recognise the value of theory for skilled intervention, they identify significant challenges in its practical application. The results suggested the need for (1) a stronger integration of theoretical education and practical training; (2) the development of adaptable intervention methodologies; and (3) structural improvements in social service delivery systems.

The results contribute to the understanding of theory-practice dynamics in social work, highlighting the importance of maintaining theoretical foundations while developing practical skills to address complex social realities. This research provides insights for social work education and professional development in Portugal.

Mapping Theory in Social Work: An Analysis of Theoretical Frameworks in Quantitative Studies – Luka Stanić, Tea Ritoša & Vanja Branica

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Understanding the use of theoretical frameworks in social work research is essential for advancing the field, ensuring methodological rigour, and guiding evidence-based practice. This review aimed to identify which theories and theory types, according to Payne (2014), are used in quantitative social work research and to assess gaps in their application.

The study examined quantitative research from 12 top-ranked social work journals, as classified by the JRC. A stratified random sampling approach ensured representativeness, proportionally selecting 365 articles from a population of 7,000. This sample size was determined to achieve a 95% confidence level with a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. Of these, 115 articles met the criteria for quantitative studies.

Findings show that 54.78% of the 115 studies clearly employed a theoretical framework. The most prevalent category was systems/ecological (35%), including the socioecological model, person-in-environment approach, risk/resilience framework, financial capabilities framework, biopsychosocial model, conservation of resources theory, and stress process model. Critical social change perspectives appeared in 25% of studies, drawing on intersectionality theory, minority stress theory, critical race theory, and heteronormativity. Cognitive-behavioural theories featured in 22% of studies, including the cognitive behavioural model, theory of planned behaviour, social learning theory, and the cognitive-behavioural model of loneliness. The social development category accounted for 8%, using theories such as social determinants of health, social capital theory, and life course theory. Humanistic/existential approaches were found in 3%, including person-centred care and the social model of disability. No studies applied psychodynamic, crisis and task-centred practice, empowerment and advocacy, or feminist theories.

This review highlights that most studies draw on systems, critical, and cognitive-behavioural perspectives. This suggests a systems-based understanding of social phenomena which enables the study of social issues from multiple perspectives and informs interventions at different system levels. However, gaps remain. While ecological theories explain relationships between system levels, they often lack specificity in detailing processes within each level, making it challenging to develop theoretically grounded interventions. Nevertheless, these theories encompass a variety of factors that may inform social work practice, including biopsychosocial and financial factors. Furthermore, the absence of a feminist perspective suggests that gender-based oppression remains understudied.

Findings indicate that social work research relies on multiple theoretical perspectives rather than a singular social work theory. However, 45% of studies did not clearly state any theoretical framework. To enhance the field's empirical foundation, researchers should prioritise explicit theoretical grounding in quantitative studies.

Navigating Compliance and Dissent: The Impact of Standardized Methods in Child Welfare Investigations – Tonje Steen, Edda Stang, Hilde A. Aamodt and Marianne Buen Sommerfeldt

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Background and purpose: This presentation explores the implications of evidence-based and standardized tools in Centers for parents and children within the Norwegian child welfare context. It derives from our project: Centers for parents and children – a helpful investigation for whom? We focus on two parts of the main project which illustrate how the implementation of evidence-based tools impacts practice and displaces critical analysis. Both cases highlight different reactions of dissent and compliance to policy documents and standardized tools. This aligns with the conference theme “The Nexus of Theory, Practice, and Dissent”.

In the first case, we examine the view of knowledge expressed in the new mandate for these centers, showing how the instruction to separate investigation from support arises from this view. We problematize how the validity of investigating parents' care competence presupposes that they receive help and guidance. The second case explores professional dilemmas when exercising a mandate based on the authorities' interpretation of the “least intrusive intervention”. We explore how the new mandate affects communication about home-based versus inpatient investigations for vulnerable families and examine the impact of bureaucratic guidelines and standardization on assessing proportionality.

Methods: The empirical data consists of focus group and individual interviews with 64 employees and individual interviews with 25 parents from seven different centers across the country. This presentation is based on interviews with employees.

Findings: The first article's findings highlight that employees feel they have to “sit on their hands” during investigations of parents' care competences. They perceive the mandate as clearly separating investigation from support. However, they find it problematic to strictly separate investigation from aid and support in practice. Employees express role conflict and dissent regarding the mandate, struggling with the requirement to remain passive observers during investigations, which conflicts with their desire to help parents.

Employees recognize that their assessments construct a reality, making it impossible to observe without being part of the reality they are investigating. Not offering support, help, and guidance objectifies both parents and employees, reducing employees to mere observers under a mandate that no longer values relational work as essential for investigating parental competence. From the second article employees question what the mandate considers the most or least intrusive intervention, and for whom, when investigating a child's care situation. Employees express concern about whether the mandate adequately considers the severity of the situations faced by vulnerable families referred to the centers. Additionally, employees dissent regarding the directive to prioritize home-based investigations over inpatient investigations at the center.

Rethinking Access and Power in Research with Vulnerable Youth: A Challenging Path Towards Intellectual Dissent – Signe Steensbæk

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This presentation explores institutional dynamics in negotiating research access to youth in vulnerable situations, drawing from one of the few studies that gained access to video-recorded child protection meetings. It offers critical insights into the power relations between researchers and institutional gatekeepers, expanding our understanding of the gatekeeping process in social work research. By analyzing these dynamics, the presentation provides new methodological insights that are particularly valuable for researchers working in unfamiliar or sensitive contexts, such as negotiating access to vulnerable populations.

The question of how research and practice can be intellectual dissenting activities that challenge hegemonic thinking and contribute to social justice is central to this presentation in various ways. First, it reveals that institutional gatekeepers, e.g., social workers and managers responsible for protecting vulnerable individuals, interpret vulnerability and protection differently. These differing interpretations significantly impact a researcher's access to youth in vulnerable situations. The negotiation process, therefore, becomes a site of intellectual conflict, where researchers must challenge institutional norms and question the status quo. This form of intellectual dissent is crucial in resisting hegemonic perspectives on vulnerability and protection, as it requires researchers to advocate for alternative, justice-oriented views that prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized youth.

The presentation also highlights researchers' challenges in building sustained relationships with gatekeepers. Massive staff turnover and heavy workloads within institutions create a fragile research environment where research access can fluctuate over time. Thus, researchers cannot rely on these relationships as a stable and continuous room for intellectual dissent in negotiations for access. This underscores the need for researchers to adapt and respond to changing dynamics while maintaining their commitment to research integrity. In this context, intellectual dissent is not just about challenging institutional norms but also about being resilient in the face of logistical challenges and maintaining ethical standards in research.

Finally, this presentation points out that due to the often fragile nature of the youth research environment, the most experienced and resilient gatekeepers usually control youth access, influencing the data collected. This observation raises important questions about power and control in research. By calling for greater transparency in negotiations with gatekeepers, the presentation urges researchers to critically engage with these power structures and resist the barriers they create. In doing so, research becomes a tool for intellectual dissent, challenging the institutional logics that hinder social justice.

Doing Social Work: Ethnographic research as theory development and critical reflection of practice – Rebekka Streck, Kathrin Aghamiri & Ursula Unterkofler

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What constitutes Social Work is a central question in theory building. If Social Work wants to be more than an ideal idea, we cannot answer this question without looking at Social Work practice. The oral presentation introduces "Doing Social Work" as an approach to theorizing Social Work through ethnographic fieldnotes. In addition to the basic theoretical and methodological characteristics of the approach, we present four modes of Doing Social Work, which have been developed based on a comparison of different ethnographic studies in different fields: Deciding in uncertainty, playing with ambiguity, using categories of difference, and disciplining everyday.

As a theory grounded in the practice of social work, this approach makes it possible to link the development of theory with the challenges of practice. At the same time, the question can be asked: Is what is happening here actually intended? In this respect, ethnographic fieldnotes are an excellent starting point for critically analysing social work with practitioners. This brings social and professional contradictions into focus. At the same time, it thinks criticism out of the concrete situational circumstances of social work.

In the presentation, we will first use practice fieldnotes to show what is typical of social work. Building on this, we will show how the claim to social justice is reflected in the fieldnotes on the one hand, but is also subject to concrete limits at the same time. Together with practitioners, these practice protocols can be used to discuss how social justice can be pursued at the micro, meso and macro levels.

In this respect, Doing Social Work is an approach to critical social work, because social work comes into view as part of power relations.

Mission (Im)Possible: Deinstitutionalization Against All Odds – Mitja Svete, Kaja Zoran, Juš Škraban, Aida Hajdarević Novak & Polona Kopmajer

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The deinstitutionalization process in Slovenia has accelerated in recent years, driven by pilot projects supported by the European Social Fund. One such project was a transformation of a social care institution Dom na Krasu, implemented from 2020 to 2024 with a mission to resettle at least 70 people with disabilities from the institution back to the community, establish new services, and develop personalized support systems. The Social Protection Institute had a consultation role in the project, using action research paradigm. This approach proved to be essential in this dynamic environment, allowing for ongoing evaluation, methodological flexibility, and responsiveness to unforeseen circumstances. The process of transformation of the institution was quite complex because during the project we faces numerous challenges, including shifting political will, leadership changes, staff turnover, resistance from civil society, and the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. All external factors ultimately confirmed the project's key finding that for more successful transformation of the institution the main condition is not accepting new users in the institution. By the end of the project, following the relocation efforts, only 75 of the initial 119 residents remained in the main building—60 in open units and 15 in the secure ward. During the project, 44 residents were successfully resettled into community-based settings. Unfortunately, a similar number of residents (43) passed away during the transformation period. These numbers indicate that introducing a moratorium on new admissions to the institution would have significantly supported the process of closing the main building.

In our presentation, we will highlight the key actors involved in the transformation process and their respective roles, providing an overview of how the project unfolded. We will present key findings, focusing on the impact of the transformation on the quality of life of service users, as well as the working methods that proved effective in guiding the process and managing external challenges. These included strategic planning, assemblies, person-centred planning, and risk assessment. Furthermore, we will highlight action research as several concepts were proven to facilitate the action research in the project, such as “problematization” (Paulo Freire), “the search for the problem” and “getting the commission” (Gian Antonio Gilli). Finally, we will outline the main organizational changes and the development of community-based living arrangements, as well as changes for user-based perspective. The transformation of the institution is a very complex process but it is a mission possible.

Minorities' Attitudes toward Social Work: Acculturation, Social Worker's Group Belongingness and Social Work Service Use – Eugene Tartakovsky

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Purpose: This study examines social work with minorities from the client's perspective. It investigates factors that affect members of minority groups' contact with social workers and their satisfaction with the contact. The study is based on the acculturation theory.

Method: The study was conducted in Israel and used representative samples from the country's three largest minority groups: Palestinian Israelis (n = 631), immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU, n = 848), and ultra-Orthodox Jews (n = 940).

Results: A larger proportion of immigrants from the FSU and Palestinian Israelis had contact with social workers compared to the majority population, while ultra-Orthodox Jews were not different from the majority. Stronger adherence to the majority cultural practices was associated with more contact with social workers among FSU immigrants and ultra-Orthodox Jews but not among Palestinian Israelis. Older age and higher education were associated with more contact with social workers in all groups. Satisfaction from contact with social workers was lower in all minority groups than in the majority population; however, Palestinian Israelis reported the highest satisfaction from contact with social workers compared to other minority groups. Stronger adherence to the majority cultural practices was associated with higher satisfaction from contact with social workers in all groups. Among Palestinian Israelis, stronger adherence to minority cultural practices also contributed to the satisfaction from contact with social workers. The social worker's belongingness to the client's minority group was associated with higher client satisfaction in all minority groups.

Conclusion: The present study advances our knowledge by applying the acculturation theory to research in social work with minorities from the client's perspective. The study results demonstrate that clients' adherence to the majority and minority cultural practices predict their contact with social workers, choice of social workers, and evaluation of their services. Thus, the present study demonstrates that the acculturation theory can provide a solid theoretical framework for research on social work with minorities.

The study reveals two phenomena common to social work with different minority groups. In all minority groups participating in the study, the minority clients' adherence to the majority culture and the social workers' belongingness to the clients' minority group were associated with higher satisfaction of clients from contact with social workers. These factors probably decrease cultural differences between minority clients and social workers and increase mutual understanding and rapport. Thus, social services should aim to strengthen minorities' adherence to the majority culture on the one hand and increase the number of social workers from different minority groups on the other hand.

The Evolution of Human Rights and Gerontological Social Work in Georgia: Historical Path Dependency and Development of Social Services – Zurab Tatanashvili

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Georgia's path dependency in human rights and social welfare can be understood through key historical-genealogical junctures. In the pre-Soviet era, social support relied on family structures, religious institutions, and early state-led charity. Under Soviet rule (1921-1991), a state-controlled welfare model provided universal pensions, healthcare, and housing, although with systemic inequalities and political repression. The post-Soviet crisis (1992-2003) was characterized by economic collapse, reducing pension values and access to social services. Since the Rose Revolution (2003-2023), Georgia, modernized social policies, introducing targeted assistance, pension reforms and rights-based orientation in social services. However, recent political shifts (2023-2025) threaten human rights and social service development.

This presentation connects with the emerging field of gerontological social work and focuses on how responsibility for the welfare of older adults was shifting back and forth from families and communities to the state. While older adults historically relied on familial support and charity, the Soviet period institutionalized it within a centralized framework. The post-Soviet transition severely impacted service provision. Since 2003, international aid and government initiatives have expanded services, including home care, emphasizing aging in place and a human-rights orientation. However, gaps in funding, uneven geographic access, and limited professional capacity remain key challenges. Recent democratic backsliding in Georgia's legislative and executive branches, hampers effective collaboration between civil society organizations and the government. It also reduces funding opportunities from international donors, who have been instrumental in introducing and piloting new social services, expanding geographic coverage, and enhancing service quality.

To grapple with dualisms of theory and practice? Displaying children's rights as a standard in residential childcare – Elisabeth Thomas & Claudia Equit

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Objectives: The planned lecture discusses an extensive qualitative project for theory development in the area of residential childcare. The focus is on so-called participation and complaints procedures, which have been implemented in many countries in the area of residential childcare in order to safeguard the participation rights of children and adolescents. The lecture will present an theoretical approach on complaint procedures in residential care and implications based on the theoretical insights.

Project: The planned lecture presents the project “Participation in Residential Care” funded by German Research Foundation. The objective of the research project is to investigate participation dynamics of and opportunities to complain for young people in different residential care facilities in several regions within Germany. For Hence, underlying power dynamics residential communities of young people with refugee status and local adolescents were analyzed. The sample includes 27 residential care facilities in six different federal states in Germany (in total more than 90 interviews). Every case includes focus groups with young people, with staff members, and expert interviews with the senior managers. The interviews and focus groups were analyzed using the documentary method by Bohnsack (Bohnsack et al. 2019).

Results: The study shows that the organizational cultures in the residential groups determine whether and to what extent children and youth can exercise their right to complain and participate in everyday life. The results form the basis for a theoretical approach to complaints in implementing children's and youth's rights: participation standards such as complaints procedures ensure the organizations' scope for action. Whether and to what extent these standards also secure the participation rights of children and youth in residential care remains at the providers' discretion. The results of the study are comparable with other studies in different countries about complaints procedures in out-of-home care and in child welfare. Therefore, the lecture points to the circumstance, that displaying children's rights is a standard in residential care.

Finally, the article critically examines a dualistic understanding of theory on the one hand and practice on the other. Given worsening living conditions of young people in child protection and alternative care in many European countries, the question is raised as to whether an important momentum of social pedagogical research lies precisely in the theoretical investigation of social work organizations and in the development of evidence-informed settings.

Critical social work in working with older people – what happens in practice? *Suzana Tomašević*

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The increase in the number of older people increases the need for the development of services and different forms of care for older people. The role of social work in the field of work with older people is most recognized in the institutional form of care, and in recent years also in the non-institutional form in Croatia. Social work as a practice-oriented profession and academic discipline plays a key role in the development of care for older people. Theoretically, the development and provision of services is aimed at ensuring accommodation capacities and services in the home environment of the older people, focusing on the needs of the older people, but in practice the development is going in a different direction. The example of older care in Croatia shows that the development of the system is accompanied by fragmentation and a lack of services, the focus is on the market, the price of services and the lack of manpower, and the quality of services and the needs of the older people remain in the background. The lack of research in the field of social work with older people indicates a lack of questioning and critical engagement with the system we know today. The question arises as to whether social work practice with older people is oppressive and focused on social control or whether there is resistance among social workers to the established patterns of guidance prescribed by the system that are detrimental to older people? Activism and research in social work are key to critical social work. Social workers should be aware of their responsibility to help shape social policy and point out the inadequacies of social policy in its practical implementation. Social workers have knowledge and experience of working with older people in the field and it is their duty to advocate for the rights of older people at different levels in the community. This presentation will focus on the following questions: How does the care of older people work in Croatia and how do social workers find answers to the current demographic changes and the protection of the rights of older people? Part of the answers to these questions will be based on a literature review and data collected as part of the research for the doctoral thesis.

Migration in an Era of Climate Change and Environmental Disasters – Mariza Tzortzi

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Migration has historically been a fundamental mechanism for human survival and adaptation in response to continuous environmental changes. However, while the increasing frequency and intensity of climate events and disasters are expected to drive mass population movements in the coming years, and as states seek solutions to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, an uncomfortable truth must be acknowledged: for many people worldwide, environmental conditions have become so hazardous that staying in their former communities is no longer an option (Vince, 2022).

This study, examines the impact of flooding in Thessaly, Greece, during the severe weather event “Daniel”, in September 2023, on population movements. The purpose of the research is to highlight the lived experiences of those affected and the changes in their lives one year after the disaster. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to systemically record and interpret the experiences of the participants. The research questions focus on their perceptions of the disaster, their experiences with relocation, the support networks they utilized, and the broader changes in their lives one year after the catastrophic event. Among the data collected, particular emphasis was placed on the shortcomings of the state apparatus in preventing and managing the catastrophic phenomenon, the possible role of social workers with these populations, and how factors, such as class, play a decisive role in disaster recovery.

The research findings revealed that relocation was driven not by the disaster itself but by its consequences. Major factors included severe home damage, job and resource loss, housing shortages, and fear of future disasters. The case of “Daniel”, led to three important conclusions: (a) disasters fuel migration, (b) relocation is often the only means of survival, (c) disasters inevitably brings loss. On the other hand, the self-organized initiatives within the community that were recorded serve to strengthen the argument that, in times of crisis, the altruistic traits of people emerge to such an extent, that, even amid the severity of the disaster, they create “small paradises built in hell” (Solnit, 2009).

Today, more than ever, it is evident that the current environmental reality poses a direct threat to justice, human rights, and life itself, while environmental refugees/immigrants remain overlooked in political agendas. Thus, bringing visibility to environmental issues and understanding them primarily as matters of social justice is both a challenge and a responsibility, in alignment with the values and radical foundations of the social work profession.

Re-imagining young caring: towards an inclusive definition and support practices – Lena Van Bergen

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Young carers are defined as young people who take care of a loved one with a long-term illness, substance misuse, a disability or another support need. Available research shows how young carers face many difficulties, but also see some positives aspects of their role, such as a closer connection with the care receiver. Young carers also report a need for support, varying from receiving more information, to contacts with other young carers and therapy.

In principle, the definition of young carer includes those young people that act as language brokers for their parents, or those that contribute to the income and household administration of their families in poverty, since they fill a need for support. However, these groups are often ignored by researchers and practitioners. Young carers associations and researchers most often recruit and collect statistics based on the condition of the care receiver. On the one hand, this clear-cut definition leaves those young people who are likely most vulnerable and oppressed, because they are living in poverty and/or a member of a minority, invisible and unsupported. On the other hand, a clear and limited definition is vital for researchers and policymakers, so they might prefer it to be based on a criterium such as the care receiver's condition.

My research focuses on a grassroots young carers organization in Flanders, ZoJong!. Founded and run by young carers themselves, mostly on a volunteer basis, they organise support and do advocacy work. I am myself a volunteer at ZoJong! since 4 years, and have lived experience as a young carer. ZoJong! has been raising awareness related to the term 'young caring' in Flanders for the past 6 years, based on the definition with the limited set of care receivers' conditions. Thus, young carers are defined as those caring for someone with a chronic illness (including mental health issues), disability or addiction. As a consequence, ZoJong! and other similar organizations might inadvertently reproduce existing inequalities by not focusing on children and young people carrying out caring tasks because they live in a family in poverty or with a migration background. Focus groups with volunteers also revealed a discomfort with this definition, which decenters the young carer, because most of the words focus on the care receiver instead. The goal of my research is to re-examine the concept of young carer, given the potential pitfalls described above. Is it useful to young carers and their support trajectories, despite the limited self-identification in given contexts?

I will present critical reflections based on my experiences at ZoJong! and the available literature. I will also discuss some preliminary results based on focus groups with volunteers, participant observations and interviews with young carers.

Community building and social spatial quality of the living environment – Chantal Van Lieshout

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Recent years have seen a revival in the employment of community builders in the Netherlands, a phenomenon attributable to an escalating level of attention being directed towards communities and community development by policy makers and politicians. Through the implementation of both social and physical interventions, policy is endeavouring to cultivate a sense of community, particularly in neighbourhoods where the concept of communal living has been subject to pressures due to various factors. The notion of community and community development is predicated on the premise of social engineering as a means to address social challenges.

For the duration of two years, an ethnographic study was conducted in an urban setting with the objective of investigating community development practices. The focus of this study was on a specific neighbourhood where both spatial and social interventions have been implemented in recent decades with the aim of fostering a stronger sense of community within the local population.

The purpose of this presentation is to share the findings of research conducted on the subject, using the social spatial quality perspective of the living environment to analyse the data. This is an interdisciplinary concept that builds on the work of M. Jacobs and others, connecting with experienced reality and having a critical eye for the dynamic interplay between physical, spatial, sociocultural and political forces. From a social spatial perspective, insight is gained into the dynamic interplay of forces. Consequently, space is no longer perceived as a mere backdrop, but rather as an active ingredient in community development.

Doing democracy: the relationship between the work of Jane Addams and Albert Dzur – Mariël van Pelt & Marcel Spierts

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This contribution focuses on the significance of Jane Addams' and Albert Dzur's work for thinking about social work and democratic change. We also test the relevance of their thinking for current practice by comparing their theories and what we have learned from an analysis of different democratic practices for our book 'Democracy closer by'. In doing so we focus on the question how public professionals can work as democratic professionals and what this looks like in practice when they and their institutions share tasks, knowledge and power. Jane Addams is best known for her settlement work at Hull House and her social engagement with the women's movement and the peace movement. Her work was based on sociological empirical research and informed by philosophical grounding and reflection. In her philosophical reflections, Addams mainly reflects on the meaning of democracy. A key text constitutes her 1902 book *Democracy and Social Ethics*. In it, she opposes a liberal conception of democracy that claims an equal vote for all, but in the meantime allows privileges to persist. Addams contrasts this with the idea of democracy as a way of life, where everyone is involved in decision-making based on his or her own unique contribution. For Addams, democracy is a socio-ethical practice: identification with common destiny. This involves opening up to the pain and suffering of the less fortunate. Key concept in caring for others is 'sympathetic understanding': being mindful of the experiences of others. Addams' understanding of democracy is grounded in a lived, experienced and varied practice of community work and social betterment. Dzur presents a political theory of democratic change, focusing on citizens engaging with institutions to address social issues effectively. This is a form of everyday democracy; Dzur also refers to it as middle democracy or participatory democracy. As part of the everyday practice of living and working, it involves establishing relationships and fostering proximity and thus opening up spaces (places in the neighbourhood, classrooms, consulting rooms) to the public as civic spaces. In recent work he expresses the need for prefigurative practices, of which the work of Jane Addams from her settlement house is an excellent example. We explore the relationships in Addams' and Dzur's thinking and their significance for the theory-praxis nexus within social work.

Moral distress: (self-) care-aspects for young social workers – Susanne Vaudt, Katja Weidtmann & Gunter Groen

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“Social work as a profession can be justified by its orientation towards the idea of social justice.” (Böllert et al. 2018: 516). Those who take on professional responsibility for other people, such as social workers, are often confronted with high levels of stress. Working with users in complex life situations with growing social inequality is challenging. In addition, there are typical structural stressors in the workplace such as difficult financial conditions, an ever-increasing shortage of skilled workers and the associated strong deadline and performance pressure, shift work and on-call duty. Work requirements are also growing due to complex collegial and interprofessional cooperation (Vaudt et al. 2025). Especially for professionals at the start of their career, the mentioned factors may also induce a high level of moral distress as a form of psychological tensions. This phenomenon known from the nursing sciences is also important for social work. It occurs when professionals find themselves in situations in which their professional ethical convictions can no longer be reconciled with the demanding (stressful) conditions of their work. In cases of such moral distress, social workers are forced to act contrary to their professional beliefs, values and standards in their everyday work (see Jameton 1993; Mänttari van der Kuip 2016; Schäper 2023; Groen et al. 2024: 39). This particular form of distress caused by growing moral discomfort is often not heard by the organization or is (dis)valued as a personal problem of individual professionals. As a result, these employees may experience a painful dynamic with feelings of anxiety and guilt, regret, frustration or helplessness (Morey et al 2020: 1310; Klotz et al. 2022; Riedel et al. 2023). In order to mitigate moral distress with its negative effects on health, well-being and thus also job satisfaction, motivation and productivity, the key question is: How to promote self care activities among employees? Or more specific: What can caring employers do to mitigate the effects of moral distress, particularly among social work professionals at the start of their career? The results of an empirical survey among younger social workers are presented and possibilities for social services to reduce moral distress are discussed.

Digitalization in Social Work: A quality framework for socially just and inclusive digital support and care – Jana Verplancke & Tom Seymoens

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Digital technologies are playing an increasingly significant role in social work and the broader welfare sector. While digitalization offers opportunities for accessible, efficient, and inclusive care and support services, it can also entrench or even reinforce existing structural inequalities. How can we ensure that digital care is not only technologically advanced but also ethically responsible and socially just?

Our research, conducted by the People, Society, and Digitalization research group (Artevelde University of Applied Sciences) and the Psychology and Technology research group (Thomas More University of Applied Sciences), focuses on developing a quality framework for digital care and support services in Flanders. This framework defines minimum quality criteria and maturity levels regarding privacy, data security, accessibility, user-friendliness, and digital inclusion.

The framework was developed through a systematic approach between Sept. '23 & June '25:

- A narrative literature review and 10 expert interviews as a foundation.
- A three-round Delphi panel with 48 experts to reach a consensus.
- Further refinement through four focus groups (N=25) and two additional expert interviews.

Results and Impact: The resulting quality framework consists of three interconnected pillars:

1. Technology – Criteria regarding the reliability, security, and accessibility of digital applications.
2. Organization – Structural conditions for implementing digital tools within welfare organizations.
3. Professionals – The role of social workers as critical actors who evaluate the use of technology, ensuring it meets the needs of vulnerable groups.

In total, 125 criteria were identified within these three pillars. 86 were defined as minimum quality standards, while the remaining 39 serve as guidelines for further optimization.

Relevance to the Conference Theme: The TISSA conference theme, "Re-imagining Social Work and Social Justice: The Nexus of Theory, Practice, and Dissent", invites critical reflection on the relationship between social work and technology. While policymakers and technology developers emphasize efficiency and scalability, our research highlights the need for socially just and critical technological choices in social work. Digitalization in social work organizations is often presented as a neutral or inevitable progression. However, this perspective frequently overlooks structural inequalities. This quality framework empowers social workers, organisations, and policymakers to consciously and critically implement technology, ensuring inclusive, accessible, and socially just support services. Rather than passively adopting digital trends, our research underscores the role of social work as an active and critical force in shaping the future of the welfare sector.

Positions of social work(ers) in a (shrinking?) civil space – Griet Verschelden, Shana Sabbe, Nathan Hermans, Siebren Nachtergaele & Lieze De Middeleir, Cis Dewaele, Mart Willekens & Veerle De Schrijver

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Re-imagining the theory – practice nexus raises the question of social work's knowledge base, which consists of different types of knowledge on which social workers rely to in developing and implementing their practice. In this symposium, we want to reflect on urban experiential knowledge (see also Blondeel, 2023) as a source of knowledge, and explore if and how these lived experiences can contribute to a social work practice and policy based on dissent and social justice.

We investigate social work practices that explicitly start from the humus layer in deep urban society and which explicitly take into account a broad and diverse group of citizens. These grassroots social work practice in urban environments operate on societal and urban challenges, and try to find responses to situations of injustice in the multi-layered and plural urban fabric. We discuss the position of social work(ers) by focusing on the question if we can see these practices as public practices in a (shrinking?) civil space.

This point of view is inspired by the concept of public pedagogy of Gert Biesta and the concept of civil space, described by Pascal Gielen. In the work of philosopher of education Gert Biesta (2012) *public pedagogy* is seen as an enactment of a concern for “publicness”, which we can interpret as a concern for the public quality of human togetherness, or the possibility of actors and practices to become public. The cultural sociologist Pascal Gielen differentiates between a public and a civil space. Public space is primarily seen as a discursive space of words, of debate and of valuable arguments (the field of deliberative democracy). Civil space, on the other hand, is the domain in which citizens try out ideas formulated in the public domain from the bottom up (the field of agonistic democracy, see also Mouffe, 2013). Democracy is about doing together, building and organising.

In this symposium we ask the question how urban experiential knowledge and lived experiences can help us to gain insight in practices of interruption and the formation of civil space. Can these practices challenge, disrupt and break-up existing power relations? What roles do social workers and policymakers take on in these grassroots urban practices, based on which professional logics? What is their interpretation of a participatory climate in practice and policymaking, and which culture(shift) does this require to contribute to a socially just and transformative social work? What meaning do we give to experiential knowledge and lived experiences in social work practice and research, and how can we position these different kinds of knowledge and experiences in social work practice and theory?

Is the untapped terrain of the transformational potential of outreach a barren wasteland or fertile ground?

Cis Dewaele

Over the past decades, there has been a significant increase in outreach practices in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium) as well as internationally. In Flanders, this evolution is not sector-specific; rather, the renewed focus on the real-life context of people in a vulnerable situation manifests itself in various fields, including social work, youth work, services for homeless individuals, support for undocumented migrants, (mental) healthcare, ... The central question guiding this study is: "What are the rationales of and preconditions for a qualitative outreach policy on a federal, Flemish and local policy level?". One of the findings points out that policy makers see outreach as a method, as well as a way of transforming social work, assistance and care into a pro-active, real-life context-based work guided by proximity. They describe flexibility of workers and structural embedding of a team in the organisation and local network and policy as essential preconditions for qualitative outreach but, lastly, admit not creating those preconditions. Therefore we can conclude that outreach practices lack a policy framework that enables flexibility of workers and organisations on the one hand and the transformational potential of outreach practices on the other.

Navigating Freedom, Citizenship, and Art: Youth-Oriented Artistic Free Spaces as Experimental Civil Spaces

Mart Willekens

Promoting artistic practices among young people is a key focus across various policy domains, including culture, youth, and urban development. These initiatives take on diverse forms, yet they often share a common goal: to create 'artistic free spaces' for youth—places where young people can take the initiative to engage in artistic expression, sometimes supported by youth workers, artists, or cultural educators. Policymakers frequently justify these spaces as environments that foster personal development and active citizenship. However, prioritizing such goals can be at odds with the notion of 'freedom', which is a defining characteristic of these spaces. Furthermore, these spaces are shaped not only by ideals of freedom and citizenship, but also by a strong commitment to artistic expression. Together, these three abstract concepts—freedom, citizenship, and art—provide the building blocks for creating 'artistic free spaces' for young people as specific modalities of the civil space. Bringing them together can be a challenging task, which requires a balancing act from the actors involved in co-creating these spaces. Based on in-depth interviews with youth workers, artists, and cultural educators who initiate and maintain these spaces, this study explores how they navigate and give meaning to these concepts in their daily practice. The interviews are part of the PartY project (*Participatory Art for Youth*), which investigates participatory art practices as a vehicle for youth engagement and social inclusion.

Museums as Civic Spaces: Towards Sustainable Participation

Veerle De Schrijver

Museums stand at a crossroads: do they remain institutions that present narratives, or evolve into spaces where meaning is continuously renegotiated? Participation is not just a strategy for audience diversification—it requires a fundamental shift in power dynamics. This calls for structural openness, where visitors become co-owners of museum narratives rather than passive observers.

However, realizing this ambition is challenging. Participatory processes need time to grow organically, beyond rigid policy frameworks or project-based funding. Museums must critically assess their openness to interruptions that challenge dominant narratives. Participation is not just about listening but about engaging in radical dialogue, where museums evolve through reciprocal exchange.

Yet, participatory work often remains siloed within education or public engagement departments, limiting its institutional impact. Without a willingness to embrace friction and dissent, participation risks becoming superficial. Museums must reconsider their democratic role: can they foster brave spaces where critical voices are actively encouraged?

This presentation will explore concrete case studies to examine how museums can embed participatory practices sustainably, reinforcing their civic role.

Making Space for Dissent and Plurality : How Grassroots Youth Practices Open(-up) Public Space

Shana Sabbe, Lieze De Middeleir, Nathan Hermans, Siebren Nachtergaele, Griet Verschelden

In this presentation we focus on grassroots practices connected with the lifeworld of young people in the multilayered and plural urban fabric. This contribution is about questioning who has the right to speak, which voices are heard and which voices disappear in urban contexts (see also Kaulingfreks, 2017; Aaslund, 2024; Spivak, 2010). We investigate in what ways do these grassroots youth practices open-up space for different voices, stories and aesthetics in which there is room for difference, dialogue and action. In what ways can we enable and support these practices? What kind of collaborations and alliances with social workers, (youth) institutions and policymakers are needed ? We bring innovative frameworks as ecosystemic thinking, platform design, soft cartography. We share insights from collaborative research in practices on youth work, community sports, culture and living lab, and conclude with dilemma's for social work(ers).

Transforming Welfare: The Role of Social Shops in Dignity, Sustainability, and Social Inclusion in Portugal – Catarina Vieira da Silva & Ana Oliveira

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In Portugal, social shops play a vital role in addressing social vulnerability by providing essential goods such as clothing and household items to individuals and families in need. However, they are not merely spaces of material assistance; they serve as platforms for social inclusion, empowerment, and sustainability. Many social shops adopt innovative models that promote dignity, reduce stigma, and engage the broader community through participatory practices such as barter systems and volunteering.

This paper examines findings from a focus group study involving representatives from social shops across four municipalities in Portugal, highlighting the role of social shops and volunteering as a site of critical engagement and structural transformation. The study demonstrates how these community-driven initiatives transcend traditional welfare models, fostering empowerment, sustainability, and civic participation. By analyzing the experiences of social workers, policymakers, and volunteers, we argue that social shops are not merely distributive mechanisms for material aid but act as collaborative spaces where individuals co-produce social responses, contesting top-down welfare approaches. Participants emphasized the importance of these initiatives in advancing circular economy principles, reducing stigma through dignified service provision, and responding dynamically to shifting social needs, including the increasing demands of migrant populations. Implementing barter systems, personalized assistance, and financial self-sufficiency strategies underscores how these initiatives disrupt passive welfare paradigms, positioning service users as active agents of change rather than passive aid recipients. Volunteering has emerged as a crucial aspect of this transformative process, with volunteers actively fostering ethical engagement, solidarity, and collective agency. Rather than serving as supplementary labor within bureaucratic structures, volunteers in social shops participate in reciprocal learning processes that empower both individuals and communities. This reconceptualization of volunteerism challenges its traditional instrumentalization, promoting a participatory model that prioritizes justice, inclusion, and critical thinking reflexivity.

By framing social shops as sites of resistance against technocratic and depoliticized social work, this paper advocates for rethinking the theory-practice relationship. Rather than viewing theory as a strict framework for implementation, our findings indicate that practice generates critical knowledge, providing alternative strategies to tackle structural inequalities. This study promotes a refreshed perspective on social work as an intellectual and dissenting field, offering immediate assistance while encouraging long-term societal change through grassroots innovation and participatory action.

What to know and what to assess in kinship foster care? – Kaisa Vuolukka

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In my Pd dissertation (2024) "Child protection social workers assessment and decision processes in kinship family foster care" social workers expertise was combined about knowledge and theory. There was some critical information to collect about child's life and environment but also understanding and interpretation about kin relationships, attachment and traumas.

In Finland child's placement to kin family is based on law (Child Protection Law 417/2007) and United Nations Children's Rights but it is also culturally expected. Kin or family is assumed to be a safe place and "place of safety against evil world". On the other hand, family is not always safe for a child and children can face different kind of neglect by family members. That is why it is interesting and important to understand what is necessary to know about kin or kin family as a child protection placement. Kinship family foster care is one option when child's placement and living is considered in child protection services. It always should be a child's best interest.

Social workers assessment focus is what is to factually know about child's life and important relationships and kin parents for decision-making. Relationships between different family members can support child's welfare but also challenge it if adults in child's network are argumentative.

It seems that at kinship foster care social workers appreciate parenthood where parents are sensitive, offer cultural "good parenting", child is taking good care of and have possibility to meet their parents. Kin family offers child familiar environment for good well-being and attachment. Social workers appreciate child's possibility to get attachment and kin family is supposed to offer that, sometimes without question.

But there are also challenges being a foster parent. For example, kin foster parents are often older and have health problems, maybe social problems and their parenthood is sometimes inflexible. Also conflicts between family or kin members can be stressing for a child or kin parent. Parenting can be intergenerational and social workers concerns are what it is to know about family events and how these events might infect the kin parents' parenthood.

On the other hand, being a kinship foster parent is a semi-professional position what is legally defined, but it is implemented by practice just being "ordinary parent" without professional education. Usually, kin family take care of children who often has vulnerable experiments. Although there were no scales ect. used for assessing attachment or traumas -it was mostly based on social workers expertise which can vary.

Revealing, Critiquing, and Moving Beyond Hegemonic Thinking and Practice: A Haraway-Inspired Approach – Hanne Warming & Sarah Alminde

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This paper presents an analytical model inspired by Marxist feminist scholar Donna Haraway. We argue that this model can facilitate the revelation, critique, and transcendence of hegemonic thinking and practice in social work. Our argument is substantiated through a case study illustrating the model's effectiveness in analyzing social work with children in conflictual parental separation cases in Denmark.

The Haraway-inspired analytical model is founded on an understanding of phenomena as multi-patterned, structured by negotiations of meaning, and shaped by both compliance with and deviation from norms. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on diversity, conflict, ambiguities, and dilemmas rather than merely identifying or settling on patterns and coherence. The model distinguishes between three types of practices based on their relationship to normative expectations: popular, oppositional, and inappropriate practices.

Popular practices align with hegemonic thinking and social work norms, rendering them unquestioned and often perceived as best practices. In contrast, oppositional practices constitute direct and overt resistance, typically provoking repressive responses. Situated between—or perhaps within a different dimension—are inappropriate practices. These practices neither fully conform to nor directly oppose hegemonic norms. Instead, they offer implicit critique by demonstrating alternative modes of thinking and practice that transcend existing norms and related dichotomies.

Drawing on experiences from a project aimed at enhancing child participation in social work within conflictual parental separation cases in Denmark, we illustrate how this model facilitates movement beyond hegemonic thinking and practice. Furthermore, we discuss how the political "glocal" (global and local) context of social work simultaneously creates opportunities for and presents challenges to such transformative processes.

Kraft-Copilot - a joint project across institutional boundaries to strengthen self-care and resilience – Barbara Wedler, Sandra Schulz & Katrin Naumann

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The aim of the project is to strengthen the self-care of young informal carers (Young Adult Careers - YAC). Young adults are considered particularly vulnerable because, in addition to their typical age-related tasks, to their typical age related tasks, they also take on the responsibility of caring for loved ones. Using social media, contacts via self-help groups and citizens' councils, contact was made with the YAC's and their needs and requirements were identified. The results of this participatory work are being used to develop an AI-based app. With the help of the app, YACs can "put together" the support they need in their current form, regardless of institutions, location and time.

The first media presentations on self-care for YACs will be introduced in the presentation.

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