Social work research as a practice of transparency- edition 2025

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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To what extent can personal social networks contribute to the further development of institutional networks?

The thesis aims to identify the potential that personal social networks can offer institutional networks in order to promote their further development and optimal utilization of their capacities. A theoretical approach will be created by incorporating the network theories of Granovetter (strong/weak ties) and Burt (structural holes) as well as Bourdieu's elaborations on social capital. I would like to present my research approach.

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Prison Sexuality and the Role of Social Work

The Swiss discourse on prison sexuality still seems to be dominated by heteronormative and binary norms and the diverse social discourse on sexuality has not yet arrived in prison sexuality discourse. Social work has also been involved in the drawing of differences and construction processes since its beginnings. Social work functions on the one hand as an instance for dealing with differences and at the same time participates in the construction of otherness. However, the discipline of social work has so far failed to generate general knowledge about sexuality for social work as well as specific knowledge about heteronormative and binary-sex construction processes of professionals.

This PhD project is divided into 3 studies. Following on from the research gap, study 1 investigates whether and how plural discourses of sexuality affect the discourse of sexuality in prisons. The related research question is as follows: 'How does the plural sexuality discourse influence the official and unofficial sexuality discourse in the German-Swiss penitentiary system?' Study 1 uses 16 expert interviews and document analysis to reconstruct the prison sexuality discourse.

Following on from the research gap, study 2 investigates whether and to what extent the discourse on prison sexuality influences the case understanding, i.e. the case construction, of prison social workers. The related research question is as follows: 'How does the prison sexuality discourse in the German-Swiss penitentiary influence the social-worker case understanding?' Study 2 uses 25 case vignette interviews and subsequent problem-oriented interviews to investigate the influence of the prison sexuality discourse on the social work case understanding of prison social workers.

Following on from the research gap, study 3 investigates whether and to what extent prison sexuality discourse influences social workers' understanding of the case, i.e. the case construction of prison social workers' understanding of sexual violence. among male prisoners. The related research question is: 'How does the discourse on prison sexuality in the German-Swiss penitentiary system influence the social worker's understanding of the case of sexual violence among male prisoners?' Study 3 conducts two case vignette interviews with the same 25 social workers as in study two and then explores in problem-oriented interviews what prison social workers know about sexual violence between male prisoners and whether the prison sexuality discourse influences the social workers' understanding of the case of sexual violence between prisoners.

The PhD project contributes to bridging the existing disciplinary research gaps on sexuality and social work by investigating knowledge on heteronormativity and binarity in the penitentiary system, heteronormativity and the role of social work in the penitentiary system, sexual violence in the penitentiary system and the role of social work.

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Theorising the socio-spatial transformation of residential elderly care: creating a space for older citizens to enjoy living there in interdependency and for professionals to enjoy working in an interprofessional collaboration.

As a response to the worldwide ageing megatrend, international research, policy and practice are, from a cost-saving perspective, focusing on concepts as ageing in place. The shift from formal to self-care and informal care entails a problematic dichotomy between independent and dependent older people. Driven by efficiency- and safety-thinking, as well as the one-sided architectural design, older people end up in residential elderly care as a 'last resort' that is heavily under pressure.

It is therefore of vital importance to develop knowledge on how residential care settings for older people can have strategies to move beyond the notion of being dependent, and instead apply a broader perspective of interdependency and actorship of older people. Research in the field of gerontological social work shows that the move to residential care also goes along with losses in actorship since older people are often being considered as objects of care in residential care instead of political subjects.

Additionally, the idea of pursuing cost-efficiency in residential care facilities is reinforced by the predominant medical professional orientation, with reference of nurses being the main group of professionals working in this sector. It is therefore important to develop knowledge on how professionals in residential elderly care can use interprofessional strategies to avoid that the efficiency and safety logics interfere negatively with the autonomy and actorship of residents in residential care.

The objective is to contribute to these gaps from a social-spatial theoretical perspective: 'place' not only refers to a given physical-spatial place where things happen, but is redefined as 'space' with reference to the symbolic meaning of socio-spatial relationships that foster the human flourishing of a diversity of people. This perspective captures the interactive and relational interdependences of individuals with their social and material environment, and creates the possibility to see that older persons are more than just someone involved in care-receiving, but that they continue to be part of broader, socio-spatial relations in society. Additionally, this orientation is of vital meaning to enable a shift in organisational cultures as it creates room for interprofessional experimentation, innovation and less regulation.

This qualitative research takes place in the public care organisation Leie & Schelde [Zorgband Leie & Schelde], in East-Flanders, Belgium. A multi-method research approach is used to gain in-depth knowledge and to theorise the socio-spatial transformation of residential elderly care facilities. (1) Ethnographic research serves as overarching research approach and is combined with (2) biographical interviews and (3) focus groups.

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Exploring Critical Pedagogy Theory in Action: Comparative Ethnography of Social Work Education in Germany and Ireland.

This comparative ethnographic study investigates how critically informed social work educators enact critical pedagogies within the socio-cultural and institutional contexts of Germany and Ireland. Drawing from an integrated theoretical framework of Critical Pedagogy, Critical Theory, and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), this research examines the interplay between critical pedagogical practices and their structural contingencies, focusing on how educators both engage with and challenge these structures. Furthermore, the study explores social work students' experiences, perceptions, and engagements in these critical pedagogy-enacted classrooms.

 The study's theoretical underpinnings, emphasising issues of positionality, power dynamics, reflexivity and the ethical-political imperative, shape both the construction of the object of study (research problem/questions) and the research design constructed for its pursuit (research design/methodology). The core research problem emerges from the critical pedagogical premise that education is inherently political, serving either to dominate or liberate. CHAT further situates critical pedagogy within complex historically-evolving activity systems, allowing for an exploration of how both intersubjective (social integration) and external contextual factors (system integration) shape its enactment. Thus, the agency of educators and students, as they resist, interact and negotiate with each other and their environment engaging critically with both pedagogical and institutional constraints, will be explored.

 Guided by Critical theory's ethical-political imperative, this research aims not merely to produce knowledge for political transformation and emancipation. The ethical-political imperative of the research also encompasses the research process itself and how the researcher and the participants are changed and transformed through this process. Consequently, the research design, employing a comparative ethnographic approach encompassing Germany and Ireland, and utilising researcher observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, adopts a dialogical and critical hermeneutic approach to data construction and analysis.

 This involves, in alignment with the principles of critical pedagogy, overcoming the juxtaposition that reifies the participants' insider perspective and the researcher's outsider perspective and places one (usually the latter) over and against the other (usually the former). Thus, dialectical integration is sought, where the fluidity of the insider/outsider dichotomy is foregrounded and where neither the participants' perspectives nor the researcher's perspective is taken at face-value or as objective representations of the phenomena, but rather interrogated reflexively and critically for potential ideological distortions, given the socio-cultural contexts of their production. In this sense, the principles of critical pedagogy are enacted in the research process exploring the enactment of critical pedagogy.

Power dynamics play a central role in this dialogical approach, necessitating that the researcher navigate and reflect upon their positionality and how they shape the research process. Reflexivity here is both a methodological and ethical requirement, facilitating an analysis that remains attuned to the complexities of power in knowledge creation.

By anchoring the research questions and methodological framework within Critical Pedagogy, Critical Theory, and CHAT, this study offers theoretically informed insights into the enactment of critical pedagogies in social work education. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the development of liberating, transformative, equitable, and reflective practices within social work education and, by extension, the field of social work itself.

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Navigating community work practices: Boundary demarcation strategies in contexts of informality

This empirical study investigates boundary demarcation strategies among visitors within community work practices, emphasizing the role of informality. Informality, characterized by fluid and undetermined interactions, allows individuals to introduce new ways of doing things, build common understandings, and engage in meaning-making (Misztal, 2000). We explore how participants in these informal practices engage in boundary demarcation strategies to address two key questions: (1) How are symbolic and social boundaries created and maintained within informal practices? (2) What criteria are distinctive in these boundary demarcation strategies, and how is meaning attributed to them?

Relational settings, such as community work practices, are all infused with (subtle) forms of exclusion, arising from the "creative efforts people make in establishing, maintaining, negotiating, transforming and terminating interpersonal relationships" or 'relational work' through interactions (Zelizer, 2012, p. 149; Blokland, 2017). By adopting a boundary work perspective, we investigate the generative aspects of social networks in shaping demarcation strategies or processes of exclusion where visitors delineate social, cultural and physical boundaries (Blokland, 2017; Gieryn, 1983; Wekker, 2020). These strategies guide interactions and influence dynamics of in- and exclusion within community work practices (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Grant and Mandell, 2016). Such categorizations of worthiness and deservingness emerge at the intersubjective level, but also materialize through practices (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019).

This research employs ethnographic methods within a critical case study of a community centre in a highly vulnerable urban neighbourhood in Flanders. To uncover boundary demarcation strategies, we combine participant observations (180 hours during 5 months), ethnographic interviews (n = 75), and semi-structured in-depth interviews based on ongoing sampling (n = 19) (O'reilly, 2012). This approach facilitates trust-building with a vulnerable population, captures contextualized behaviours, and address meaning-making (Small & Calarco, 2022). The inductive ethnographic approach helped us oscillate between real-life situations and experiences, theoretical accounts and concepts, and meanings participants attributed to these. The data (fieldnotes and transcripts) were analysed according to the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Our findings reveal that participants in community work practices draw symbolic and social boundaries based on categorical ascriptions and notions of deservingness. Participants vary their boundary demarcation strategies along a continuum of relationship intensity, going from fleeting encounters to intimacy (Blokland, 2017; Misztal, 2000). Starting with encounters, boundaries are drawn based on categorical ascriptions differentiating themselves from 'visible others', characterized by religion, ethnicity, disabilities and perceived bad hygiene. These boundaries do not soften with increased familiarity or shared activities but change in substance. Intensified social relationships enable then more nuanced boundaries based on CARIN-criteria such as control, neediness, attitude, reciprocity, and identity within exchange and pure relationships, thus challenging the deservingness of other visitors of recognition and resources within the community centre (Blokland, 2017; Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Van Oorschot, Roosma, et al., 2017).

The results suggest that individuals within community practices actively engage in relational work by demarcating symbolic and social boundaries, thereby influencing group formations and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within community centres based on the intensity of social contacts.

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Impact Evaluation of Social Work as a Reflexive, Relational Practice of Co-Production of Knowledge through the Use of a Program Theory

Background
Social work practice and research are increasingly challenged to demonstrate their impact (Cools & Raeymaeckers, 2020; Depauw et al., 2024; Mathys et al., 2024). However, the emphasis on showcasing impact is growing faster than our understanding of how to achieve it (Mosley & Smith, 2018). This PhD-project integrates insights from earlier studies (Depauw et al., 2022; Depauw & Driessens, 2016; Depauw & van Dop, 2015; van Dop et al., 2016) and ongoing research (Depauw & De Vroey, in preparation) to develop more refined and relevant approaches for measuring the impact of social work.

Co-Creation in Knowledge Production
A strict, narrow approach to evidence-based practice is often deemed unsuitable for social work. Instead, scholars advocate for co-creative forms of knowledge production (Gray et al., 2009; Mosley et al., 2019; Nutley et al., 2008). Yet, there are but a few examples of social work practices experimenting with diverse impact evaluation methods. This project connects insights from the learning network Impact Evaluation and Impact-Driven Action in Social Work (Depauw et al., 2023) with international academic knowledge on constructing program theories collaboratively with relevant actors to measure social work impact.

Work Package 1: We provide an overarching perspective on the challenges and lessons learned by social work practices when evaluating their impact.

Development of Measurement Instruments
While many social work practices are relatively successful in developing program theories, significant challenges arise in the final stages, such as selecting appropriate measurement methods or instruments. Relevant, valid, and reliable instruments for social work remain scarce (Maas & Liket, 2011; Mathys et al., 2024). Our earlier work has developed tools for quantifying empowerment, offering tailored approaches to measure social work impact. Examples include the Service User Psychological Empowerment Scale (SUPES) (Depauw & Driessens, 2013), the Buddy Empowerment Scale (BES) (Depauw & Wuyts, 2018), and the gender-sensitive iteration of the SUPES in the MIRIAM-project (Asselberg et al., 2017).

Work Package 2: While the BES has been validated in ArmenTeKort and an ESF project (ArmenTeKort, 2020; Schalembier, 2023), an article on the Confirmatory Factor Analysis for publication in an A1 journal remains to be written.

Involving Experiential Experts
Through joint reflection, stakeholders increasingly act as co-producers of knowledge about impact (Depauw et al., 2023; Mathys, 2023). Although experiential experts are frequently involved in data collection, their role in data analysis remains underexplored (Driessens & Lyssens-Danneboom, 2022).

Work Package 3: We adapted La Méthode d'Analyse en Groupe (Van Campenhoudt et al., 2005), to enable a joint analysis of the achieved impact from various knowledge perspectives (Depauw & De Vroey, in preparation).

Conclusion

Work Package 4: Through this PhD I will (1) identify research gaps, (2) aggregate and academically contextualize several practice oriented studies and instruments that are aligned with social work practices, (3) involve staff, professionals and clients in tailoring instruments and a method of participative analysis, and (4) employ program theory as a unifying framework.

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The voice of children left behind on the phenomenon of parental labour migration

It is almost two decades since the first scientific articles (Toth et al., 2007; Sandu 2010; Pantea 2012) were published in Romania, pointing out the problems, but also the benefits of children left behind (CLB), because of parental labour migration. This phenomenon is a worldwide dimension, mainly found in countries with medium or low-income level, with a focus on negative outcomes on CLB; this evidence was also provided by an umbrella review that I realized. The aim of my thesis focuses on the impact of parental labour migration on CLB at a biopsychosocial level. Thus, in the next period I will focus on qualitative research, in which, through art-based methods, this research seeks to understand the phenomenon from the children's perspective.

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Complex trauma and Evidence based practice: A clinical, ethical and epistemological case for integrating client expertise

Current discourse around trauma calls for an understanding of how people with complex trauma histories have experienced helpful and unhelpful individual and systemic responses, clinical or otherwise. Epistemic injustice theory (Fricker, 2007) compels integration of lived experience testimony (Experts-by-Experience) into research methodology to inform problem conceptualization and evidence based treatment. Integration of lived experience knowledge with scientific empirical resources and clinical models facilitates more just and equitable hermeneutical resources. This approach generates a domain where interlocutors can offer testimony that may cross paradigmatic lines. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2022) invites contributions from "knowers" that may reflect multiple viewpoints on the experience of help seeking in response to the impacts of trauma which may or may not align with conclusions drawn from nomothetic research approaches. Thinking through epistemic points of tension and disciplinary polarization foregrounds the collective goal of assisting those who have been impacted by violent and overwhelming experiences with nuanced consideration.

Social workers in the mental health field are often caught in the crossfire between scientific empiricism that informs the systems they work in and postmodern or critical discourses that challenge biomedicalized taxonomies of pathology. Debates around trauma related diagnoses in the DSM-V and endorsement of "evidence-based" treatments for trauma by the American Psychological Association illustrate this tension. As discourse evolves, neoliberal impacts on symptom nosology and "evidence based" treatments commodify diagnostic categories, as access to resources are contingent on conformity to these constructs even while their scientific and social validity is often challenged.

Critical theorists justifiably note the susceptibility of those impacted by mental health issues to epistemic injustices, yet sometimes deny that diagnoses can advance the creation of hermeneutical resources that can benefit traumatized people through social legitimization that is conducive to just recourse for material impacts. New materialism theory offers a means of reconciling philosophical frictions between scientific realism and social construction in the construal of psychological distress. Barad's (2007) agential realism dispels the duality of matter and meaning. They offer an ontology and epistemology that circumvents the debate about addressing trauma through positivist or constructivist avenues, instead paving a way to justify integration of elements of both in informing mental health responses to trauma. Epistemic injustice theory (Fricker, 2007) propels methodology that centers lived experience in more comprehensive conceptualizations of the impact of trauma. Epistemic injustice theory can inform cross-disciplinary considerations around trauma, as credibility can be attributed to multiple epistemologies. Social workers have an obligation to be cautious about dispelling the testimony of clients about experiencing and healing from trauma in the interest of advancing their own ideological agendas. Interpretative Phenomenological Methodology facilitates the inclusion of lived experience into mental health epistemologies to complement other expertise. Reckoning with theory underpinning research methodology that has the capacity to legitimize or de-legitimize clinical and systemic responses to trauma facilitates the advancement of social justice and appropriate assistance for our clients.

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Navigating the gendered geopolitics of the EU's Temporary Protection: Return trajectories of Ukrainian women between Belgium and Ukraine

Starting from Ukrainian women's unique return trajectories between Belgium and Ukraine in the context of the EU's Temporary Protection, this research project investigates how interlocking power scales produce distinct imaginaries that shape the women's trajectories in different ways. As an exceptional measure to offer protection throughout the EU to mainly Ukrainian women fleeing Russia's war in Ukraine, Temporary Protection (TP) has introduced a legal framework that allows for a unique type of pendular return mobility of Ukrainians between host states and Ukraine. Differentiating between different power scales shows how TP was activated on the supranational scale of the EU, applied differently according to the national context of the member states, and translated to social service provision on the trans- and subnational scales, implementing the series of rights beneficiaries gain when acquiring TP status.

Aside from this interaction of different power scales, TP has also revealed specific imaginaries attached to both the female socio-demographic profile of Ukrainian refugees, and to a feeling of cultural and geographical proximity to refugees who 'look like us'. Upon activation of TP, discourses of deservingness of protection based on gender and on belonging to a racialised and essentialised Europeanness, laid bare gendered and geopolitical imaginaries that spurred this immediate act of solidarity. TP's explicit temporality, with its current extension until March 2026 having already exceeded its original maximum duration of three years, will allow to closely follow the role of these imaginaries when questions of protection turn into expectations of return. Starting from the idea that different power scales produce different gendered and geopolitical imaginaries, this research project seeks to investigate how these imaginaries shape questions of both integration and return and in this way affect Ukrainian women's return trajectories on the personal scale.

In the context of the TISSA PhD sessions, I will focus on further exploring the theory-praxis nexus inherent in the concept of 'the imaginary' that underlies my research. Following Mälksoo's (2010) conceptualisation of security imaginaries, I define geopolitical and gendered imaginaries as referring simultaneously to a 'field of meanings' and a 'field of social power' (p. 32). As a field of meanings, imaginaries 'provide an organised set of interpretations' to make sense of, in the case of my research, one's own and others' place within a broader geopolitical field and of gender roles and gendered expectations. At the same time, as a field of social power, imaginaries work 'to produce social relations of power through the production of distinctive social identities' (Mälksoo, 2010, p. 32). Central to both Mälksoo's more recent conceptualisation of security imaginaries (2010), and classic theorisations of the social imaginary that she builds on (Castoriadis, 1987; Taylor, 1995; 2004), is the mutually constitutive relationship between imaginary and practice: imaginaries enable practices and identities, but are also reproduced through the performance of these practices (Mälksoo, 2010, p. 32).

For the purpose of the PhD session, I will engage specifically with the implementing role of social work actors on the sub- and transnational scales. Starting from the observation in the literature that the criteria determining access to social services reveal not only who is perceived deserving of support, but also 'who is believed to belong' (Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021, p. 441), I will seek to explore how theorisation about imaginaries and their inherent theory-praxis duality can translate to my methodological approach when investigating this scale.

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'Enabling Welsh medium provision to individuals who receive services and their carers, through social worker training'

Research Background:
As a Professional Doctorate student at the Open University, UK, the research topic relates to students' conceptual and practice learning on the Social Work Degree in Wales. Alongside ensuring that students are able to study and practice through the medium of Welsh or English, according to their linguistic preference; legislative and policy factors provide the 'macro' context for the research. The Welsh Government's - 'More than just Words' (2015) Strategy has influenced the rationale for choosing this topic. The basic objective of the Strategy and its central concept of the 'Active Offer' is that individuals can access public services in the Welsh language, without the need for individuals to have to ask for it. The focus will be on students' understanding of the 'Active Offer' principle and how this is enacted during practice with individuals who receive services and their carers.

The research literature in Wales has mainly been based on ethnographical approaches in healthcare (Roberts, 1994: Roberts & Burton, 2013: which have explored practitioners' use of Welsh with individuals receiving intervention. From a cross-cultural, perspective, the 'Active Offer' principle features in Canadian research literature, with comparable legislative foundations and strategies (Drolet et al, 2014). The Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS) published the 'Reference Framework' in order to continue their work on raising health workers' awareness of their practice in the field of the 'Active Offer'.(Lortie et al, 2012).

Theoretical underpinnings:
The research project is a qualitative study from an interpretive – constructionist perspective [Crotty,1998]. Using a 'Participatory Action Research' method and a narrative approach, a Community of Enquiry framework [Andrews et al , 2015 and Muirhead, 2018] will be used to empower social work students to express their own views regarding their learning and understanding of the Welsh language and context. A storytelling approach reflects an ontological perspective that is dependent on building an understanding of the self from the participants' individual social and interpersonal experiences at a particular point in time.

How theory impacts my research questions and methodology
Using visual means as part of the operation of the Communities of Enquiry can help the researcher and participants communicate over linguistic and cultural boundaries. Using different creative methods such as drawing, photographs or handiwork [Mannay, 2016] enables individuals to see a familiar situation from a completely different perspective. The discussions surrounding visual/physical artefacts can produce 'rich data' from participants' memories and stories. With a focus on listening to 'student voices', the aim is for social work students at the OU in Wales, are able to understand and 'actively offer' services without individuals having to ask for intervention in the Welsh language.

Being at the initial recruitment phase, having recently gained ethical approval, no raw data has as yet been gathered. A series of 4 workshops, employing narrative approaches are planned for delivery from January to June 2025. It's hoped that by participating in the various activies, the students will be able to reflect upon areas of practice development and identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in the current teaching arrangements.

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Working title: "Practice in contradictions. On processes of a critical professional understanding of social workers - resistance, conflicts and consequences"

The decline in economic growth, an increase in overall debt and growing inequality within capitalist societies are some of the symptoms of crisis that have emerged in recent decades. This has not left social work unaffected. Social cuts and the increasing commodification of social work make it more difficult for social workers to fulfill their mission and political mandate. Right-wing populist discourse is becoming increasingly socially acceptable in Germany and does not stop at social work. As a result, critical social workers in particular are facing major challenges. Assuming that social work is governance, the question arises as to how social workers develop a critical understanding of the profession and how they deal with political contradictions in their practice in times of multiple crises. The ability to reflect critically and the development of a critical awareness are essential conditions for social workers to deal with the contradiction between their own socio-critical stance and a system-preserving mission. Looking at the history of the German social work movement, different trends in social work were already emerging at the time of the "'68 movement". Nevertheless, a unifying factor was a critique of society with the aim of changing existing conditions.

In my PhD project, I am investigating the question of how social workers develop a critical understanding of their profession. Other relevant sub-questions also arise: To what extent do social workers come into conflict with their political demands and what are the consequences of this? What significance do social conditions in times of multiple crises have on the handling of contradictions in practice?

To this end, I conduct biographical-narrative interviews with practitioners and evaluate them using the grounded theory method. The aim is to link biography and political stance with processes of a critical understanding of the profession by practitioners. It is important to me to look at processes of subjectivation that are critical of discrimination from a dialectical materialist perspective. To this aim, I make use of the idea of a post-structuralistically informed historical materialism. In this way, biographical processes as well as economic factors and societal developments can be taken into account when developing the research question. One gap that the planned PhD project aims to fill is the relationship between the personal political positioning of the practitioners, the practice within their wage labor relations and their mission. In the sense of Reflexive Grounded Theory (RGT), I will always try to record and reflect on my own positions, functions and contradictions through my own practical experience as a social worker with the help of memos. For my qualitative survey, it is important to me to contrast the different political positions of the individuals involved, the heterogeneous fields of social work and their employment conditions. This study aims to test the thesis of whether critical social workers recognize contradictions and how they decide to react to them.

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Safeguarding in Adult Social Care and Coercive Control: Perspectives from victims, (and Adult Social Work Practitioners From Two Local Authorities)

Background
 There is a dearth of research in England directly investigating what impact the criminalisation of coercive control has had on adult safeguarding. Research is required to understand how Adult Social Care (ASC) can continually improve its services, promote good practice, and collaborate effectively to safeguard adults experiencing coercive control (Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, 2021).

 Aims & objectives
 To understand how local authority ASC services undertaking safeguarding processes can better support women with care needs who are victims of coercive control.

Research Questions
 RQ1. How do different local authorities carry out safeguarding enquiries under s42 of the Care Act 2014 where there are allegations of domestic abuse?
 RQ2. What is the nature, patterns and impact of coercive control in the lives of women with care needs, and consequently, their support needs?
 RQ3. What are their experiences of support from ASC services and to what extent does this meet their needs?
 RQ4. How do social workers in ASC understand, recognise and respond to coercive control in the context of adult care assessments and support, including through multi-agency working practices?
 RQ5. What (if any) are the gaps and dissonances between the needs of victims/survivors and the support offered by services, and (any) examples of good practice?
 RQ6. How can safeguarding processes and ASC support services be adapted to improve responses to victims of coercive control who have care needs?

Methods
This will be a phenomenological study using a triangulated methods for data collection entailing life/relationship histories with survivors supplemented by case file analysis, followed by semi-structured interviews with ASC professionals.
 By drawing upon lived experiences of an under-researched category of survivors (women with care needs) and practitioner perspectives, this study will aid a comprehensive phenomenological understanding of the problem, to develop research-informed models of safeguarding, protection planning and client-focussed outcomes.

Justification of Methodology
As a practitioner, I often observe the metaphorical revolving door of domestic abuse (DA) cases. Real outcomes were only achieved after I had taken a deep dive into survivors' life histories. Previously undisclosed stories of their past lives enabled me unpick the complex web of the DA.

I will be adopting a phenomenological approach in analysing the data. In this approach the researcher takes on the special responsibility of transforming and mapping these stories as they explore the different phenomena in their lives (Mills and Birks, 2014).

The analysis will focus on how survivors describe their life experiences as free as possible from societal constructed meanings (O'Leary, 2014). This is to facilitate a move away from the perception of the ideal victim. As a practitioner, I hear all too often statements like, "she is not willing to engage". It is important to understand that victims are doing all they can to keep safe and cope with the 'burden of coercion'.

 An advantage of life histories method is that it throws light on how women negotiate their exceptional gender status; the relationship between them and, 'said status'; and between them and their society (Bloom & Munro, 1995).

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Social work expertise and its' change, place, and role in Finnish substance abuse outpatient treatment

Finland has a decades old social work tradition in substance abuse outpatient treatment and rehabilitation. Finnish service system is built on multidisciplinary expertise starting from the 1950's where social work waded an independent position from medical expertise. (Laitila-Ukkola 2005; Toikko 2005, 183).

1st of January 2023 legislation in Finnish substance abuse service changed. That made concepts of treatment and rehabilitation to health care concepts. The change seems to have a major impact in substance abuse social work in many levels and there is a longstanding fear that medicalization will permanently changed the role of social work in substance abuse outpatient work (Kuusisto & Ranta 2020, 112).

In my dissertation the aim is to conceptualize substance abuse social work expertise and its change in Finnish substance abuse outpatient treatment services. Dissertation includes four articles, first a literature review summarizing the research of substance abuse outpatient treatment and pointing out its' changes. The second and third articles are based on empirical data from questionnaire and focus group interviews with social and health care work professionals.

In the second and third article research questions are "How is social work expertise seen as a part of substance abuse outpatient treatment?" "How do social and healthcare professionals see social work expertise in multi-professional work in substance abuse outpatient treatment?" Lastly in the summary article I will conceptualize and discuss based on the research results the role(s) of social work expertise in substance abuse outpatient treatment.

Theoretical framework of the dissertation is based on critical realism. Critical realism provides an opportunity to study the relationships between actors and structures and the emergent properties of phenomena.

As the study and its methodology are built to understand and explain the changes in social work expertise in a multilayered way, it seems appropriate to use Bhaskar's DREI- model to describe how results can be reached. (See Pekkarinen & Tapola-Haapala 2009, 195–198; Bhaskar 1978, 125; 1979, 165; 1986, 68.)

To further analyze the data, Layder's (1993) research map is used. Research elements are 1. Context, where the research focus is on Macro social organization, 2. Situated activity: research focus is on Intermediate social organization work setting, substance abuse social work in public social and health care system in Finland. 3. Setting: research focus on social activity: Face-to-face activity, symbolic communication by skilled, intentional participants implicated in the context and settings. Emergent meanings, understandings and definitions of the situations as these affect and are affected by context and setting. Lastly 4. Self, where research focuses on Self-identity and individual's social experience, as these are influenced by the context, setting and situated activity, interacting with the unique psychobiography of the individual. History penetrates all four elements as time and changes are connected to each dimension of the map. (Layder 1993, 8, 72.)

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Advocacy in Social Work with Transgender Persons in Thailand

Transgender individuals in Thailand face profound challenges despite the country's international reputation as an LGBTQ+ inclusive destination. The lack of comprehensive gender recognition laws compels many transgender people to live with identities misaligned with their legal documents. This incongruence perpetuates systemic marginalization, workplace discrimination, and barriers to accessing services, leaving transgender individuals vulnerable to social and institutional inequities. This research examines the critical role of social workers in advocating for transgender rights, focusing on their efforts to address these systemic issues through policy engagement, public education, and direct support for individuals.

Social workers are vital at the intersection of policy and practice, leveraging their expertise to challenge structural inequities and foster inclusive social policies. As frontline advocates, they address the immediate needs of marginalized communities while driving systemic change to promote equity. This qualitative study explores how social workers contribute to advocacy for transgender individuals, particularly in navigating the legal and social barriers that hinder gender recognition and full inclusion. The research seeks to identify actionable strategies that strengthen the role of social workers as catalysts for systemic change, ensuring that the rights and dignity of transgender individuals are respected and protected.
 The study employs a robust qualitative methodology, incorporating thematic analysis of data gathered from semi-structured interviews. Key participants include social workers who influence and shape the discourse on gender recognition and equality in Thailand. Semi-structured interviews provide deep insights into individual experiences and a collective understanding of the challenges and strategies employed by stakeholders. This methodological approach enables a nuanced examination of the successes and obstacles encountered in advocacy efforts for transgender individuals.

Expected findings and contributions from this research illuminate the multifaceted intersection of social work, human rights, and policy reform within the Thai context. Social workers are uniquely positioned to engage in grassroots advocacy and policy development, fostering public awareness and driving systemic change. Their collaboration with policymakers and civil society organizations is instrumental in designing and implementing inclusive gender recognition laws. Nevertheless, the study identifies significant challenges, such as limited institutional support, pervasive societal stigma, and the lack of evidence-based guidelines for transgender-affirmative practices. These barriers highlight the urgent need for targeted capacity-building initiatives and the development of comprehensive advocacy frameworks to empower social workers in their efforts.

This study significantly contributes to the social work literature by providing evidence-based recommendations aligned with international standards for promoting gender recognition and equity. It emphasizes the integration of human rights and social justice principles into social work education and practice as essential to advancing the well-being of marginalized populations. The findings also underscore the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration to achieve legal and social reforms, demonstrating the importance of unified efforts among social workers, policymakers, and civil society actors.

By examining the unique contributions of social workers in Thailand, this research advances the global discourse on inclusive social work practices. It offers practical insights for overcoming systemic challenges and fostering a more equitable society. The study calls for enhanced advocacy strategies, informed policymaking, and the integration of transgender-affirmative approaches into social work practice, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender identity, can access their fundamental rights and fully participate in society.

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Prevent, Channel, and Safeguarding Against Radicalisation in Social Work.

In England and Wales, the Prevent strategy forms one 'P' of the government's overall CONTEST strategy for counterterrorism (Prevent, Pursue, Prepare, Protect). Beginning in 2003 as a response to 9/11 and later 7/7 attacks in 2005, the Prevent strategy has undergone several evolutions and controversies. These have ranged from accusations of Islamophobia from the 2000s to the controversial independent review which argued that Prevent was too preoccupied with right-wing extremism. Further to this, the strategy itself has evolved with key pivots in 2011 to focus on non-violent extremism, to a Prevent statutory duty since 2015 that obligates local authorities to identify and respond accordingly. If a Prevent referral is accepted at assessment it is passed to Channel, the multi-agency panel that is the operational arm of Prevent, to risk assess and plan an intervention for someone at risk of radicalisation. Research around Channel's work shows a severe paucity of publications and academic rigour. The current research is an in-progress PhD, using semi-structured interviews with Channel practitioners to understand the presenting issues and how Channel conceptualises them. The latter is where theory plays a significant role, such as Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus alongside interpellation as described by Althusser. These theory influenced the research questions by examining the tension between seeing radicalisation as a safeguarding issue and under the lens of a structure vs agency debate. The field of radicalisation has long faced epistemological struggles and as a relative newcomer to the field, social work can bring a lot of methodological rigour whilst upholding social work values when applying theory to practice.

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Intersectionality and older people: Understanding the complex needs of marginalised communities in qualitative research

Conducting qualitative research in marginalised communities is difficult and can also be ethically challenging. In the context of public health, marginalised communities who disproportionately suffer from discrimination based on different identity markers such as socio-economic class, disability, religion, race, and ethnicity may distrust public health institutions. Historical patterns of systemic discrimination can also create an environment of institutional distrust on the part of minority ethnic communities. This distrust is heightened during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 and cost-of-living crisis. Additionally, as intersectionality risk theory illustrates, minority ethnic communities who are at the intersection of multiple axes of subordination are more susceptible to the risk that is accompanied by such crises.

My research explores the experiences of older minority ethnic people in the United Kingdom throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting this research in times of crisis creates its unique set of methodological challenges and ethical questions. Finding solutions to the specific methodological and ethical challenges of engaging in qualitative research with marginalised communities in times of crisis is vital, because research into these communities at such pivotal times offers important information that can be of use in future (for example, health and environmental) crises.

This presentation aims to discuss how I navigated these challenges throughout my qualitative research which is informed by intersectionality risk theory. This is done by elaborating on the choice of qualitative research methods in relation to the particularity and vulnerability of the respondents as older minority ethnic people, a critical reflection on how to ensure that their agency and perspective is centred, and a discussion of the role of my positionality as a Black migrant woman conducting research into this topic with these respondents. Acknowledgement of power dynamics is also key in engaging the respondents. Lastly, as older minority ethnic people are at the intersection of multiple grounds of discrimination (age, ethnicity, race, and religion), this can offer a unique set of challenges for qualitative researchers who wish to centre this demographic in research. Hence, some of the reasons leading to the hesitation of older minority ethnic people in the UK for engaging in qualitative research related to crisis are explored.

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Navigating the UK's asylum regime amidst legal uncertainty

By drawing on ethnographic research in Calais, this presentation explores how people on the move navigate the uncertain legal landscape of the UK's post-Brexit asylum regime. It addresses two questions: how do people on the move make sense of the UK's changing asylum laws? And how do they cope with and respond to the prolonged uncertainty and the consequent struggles it entails? By situating people on the move in broader social relations, networks and contexts, this presentation provides a deeper understanding of the collective effort and shared knowledge that they rely on to respond to uncertainty. Additionally, the presentation emphasises the role of civil society actors providing socio-legal support in Calais and documents their struggles to circulate reliable information in an uncertain 'moving environment' (Vigh, 2019).

While the laws passing through parliament and the political rhetoric about imminent flights to Rwanda triggered stress and anxiety for people on the move in Calais, their determination to reach the UK remained unwavering. We argue that the ambiguity and crevices found in migration laws allow for practices and perceptions of possibility, which in turn enable people on the move and actors providing socio-legal support to fill these gaps with their own understandings, perspectives and biases.

The central research question is informed by Vigh's (2009) concept of social navigation, often used in social sciences to study dynamic, volatile or opaque contexts. This framework provides a compelling lens through which to examine the period of rapid legislative change in the UK. We conceptualise our field site in Calais as a 'precarious transit zone' (Hess, 2012), a concept that helps capture 'the complexity, unsteadiness, and multi-directionality of many migrational 'transit-biographies' (p.1). While most studies on such precarious transit zones (Ansems de Vries & Guild, 2019; Collyer, 2010; Hess, 2012; Schapendonk, 2017) have primarily focused on the destitute living conditions of migrants (Buchanan-Smith, 2018; Davies et al., 2017; Welander, 2021), we also recognize these areas as sites of struggle and solidarity (Hess & Kasparek, 2017).

Additionally, the research draws from the interdisciplinary field of socio-legal studies that examines how legal systems interact with social realities. Our aim is to understand how people on the move understand and experience the law, as well as the legal challenges they encounter. More broadly, the research is grounded in critical border studies and builds on the literature on the externalization of migration policies (Collyer & Shahani, 2023; Morano-Foadi & Malena, 2023, Weber & Pickering, 2014).

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Employment of Social Administrators in Albania and the Youth Guarantee Policy for Successfully Transitioning from School to Work

Employment is considered one of the most significant events in an individual's career and personal life, yet it also represents a global challenge, one that has been exacerbated by recent financial crises. This challenge appears to affect young people particularly hard, with recent graduates often facing the highest levels of unemployment. According to INSTAT data from the first quarter of 2023, 13% of young people aged 25-29 in Albania are not active in the labor market.

The profession of social administration and social services has a relatively recent history in Albania, and, combined with various other factors, this has led to limited public awareness and knowledge about this field. Given this, one of the latest youth employment initiatives introduced is the Youth Guarantee Scheme, which focuses on NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training). This policy, implemented by the Albanian government, aims to improve labor market conditions, enhance job quality, and raise employment standards.

This study seeks to conduct an in-depth analysis of employment trends among social administrators aged 20-29 in Albania. Specifically, it will explore the role and impact of the Youth Guarantee Scheme on the employment of social administrators identified as NEETs. The focus is on the challenges and difficulties social administrators face while entering the workforce, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee Scheme as a recently implemented active employment policy.

The study aims to:

Identify key factors related to the chosen profession and the socioeconomic environment that shape the efforts of social administrators to integrate into the labor market.
Highlight the main challenges faced by social administrators in achieving employment.
Assess the effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee Scheme from the perspective of its beneficiaries.
To achieve these objectives, the study will be descriptive and explanatory, aiming to describe the current situation of social administrators in the labor market and explain its characteristics in relation to the challenges of the profession. A mixed-method approach has been chosen for this study.

Quantitative data will be gathered through a standardized and validated questionnaire administered to 400-500 social administrators, while qualitative data will be collected through interviews and focus groups involving 35-45 social administrators who have completed the Youth Guarantee Scheme. These participants will be monitored at intervals of 6, 12, and 18 months post-completion.

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Theoretical Frameworks of Social Work in Supporting Migrant Families with Children with Disabilities: Systemic and Psychosocial Perspectives

Refugee families with children with disabilities face multifaceted challenges that require thoughtful and targeted interventions. This paper examines the application of need theory, systems theory, and a participatory approach in the psychosocial support of these families.

Theories of needs (Maslow's hierarchy, Alderfer's ERG theory) provide a framework for identifying and prioritizing needs, while systems theory enables the analysis of the influence of family dynamics and the social environment on adaptive capacity. The participatory approach strengthens the involvement of families in support planning and decision-making, contributing to their empowerment and long-term integration.

The analysis demonstrates that the combination of these approaches allows for effective psychosocial support focused on the needs of families and their active participation in processes of change.

Keywords: need theory, systems theory, participatory approach, psychosocial support, refugees, children with disabilities, social work.

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Neurodivergent Social Workers

As more and more people in Australia identify as neurodivergent, both with or without a diagnosis, it is reasonable to expect that increasingly social workers and social work students will also identify as neurodivergent. In fact, given the link between a keen sense of social justice and neurodivergence, it is likely that there will be a higher representation of neurodivergence within social work, a profession grounded in social justice and anti-oppressive practice.

As a social work lecturer, I teach a first year unit and a practice skills unit. In all my classes I disclose that I have ADHD and share a little about what this means for me as a social worker (and to prepare students for some of my eccentricities as a lecturer). In my classes, I am regularly approached by neurodivergent social work students who are genuinely concerned about whether they will be able to practice meaningfully as social workers and support their own health at the same time. Fears include burnout, empathising too much, keeping up to date with record keeping, over stimulation in open plan offices, and managerialist workplaces, to name only a few.

In my practice skills classes neurodivergent students seek strategies for maintaining eye contact when they are not comfortable with it or how to keep an ADHD mind from chasing threads of thought when they need to keep their focus on what their client is telling them. They also want to know how to keep their body still as they know is socially expected of them, when they need to fidget to focus the mind.

I began by sharing my own strategies and experiences, but quickly found this was insufficient as I am only one neurodivergent person. Yet when I sought strategies in the social work literature I found none. This led me to begin a PhD process researching the experiences of neurodivergent social workers, with a view to later exploring the implications of my findings for both social service organisations and social work education. In the PhD ACT sessions I would like to discuss my research thus far.

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Research on the Role of Social Work in Harm Reduction Approach in Day Care Centre for People who Use Drugs

The research focuses on the harm reduction approach to drug use as a part of public health strategies and explores the role of social work within this framework. It outlines the main principles, methods, and activities that social workers engage in when working with individuals who actively use drugs. Specific attention is given to persons at risk of social exclusion, who have experienced discrimination, are economically disadvantaged, and require supportive interventions to improve their social and health functioning.

The theory of harm reduction approach aims to decrease both the individual and societal consequences of drug use through evidence-based interventions that address risky behaviours and living conditions associated with drug use. The interventions included in this approach are substitution maintain treatment programs; needle and syringe exchange programs; supervised drug-use sites (commonly referred to as "injecting rooms"); drug overdose prevention; outreach work; peer education and health promotion; testing, vaccination, and treatment of drug-related infectious diseases; and interventions for stimulant users. It is important to note that harm reduction does not replace the necessity for treatment; rather, it complements treatment by effectively addressing the diverse health and social challenges posed by drug use. Research demonstrates that harm reduction activities are more successful when implementing specific social work interventions in the setting of Day Care Centre for People Who Use Drugs. Individual actions are more effective when combined as part of a comprehensive public health policy that promotes healthier lifestyles and safer social environments. Harm reduction is a pragmatic approach designed to mitigate the detrimental effects of drug use through a combination of evidence-based, targeted interventions tailored to local contexts and needs. Harmful drug use encompasses both individual consequences (such as addiction, overdose, or the contraction of infectious diseases) and broader social and economic issues (including crime, healthcare costs, and high HIV prevalence). The approach aims to balance individual and societal needs. In this regard, social work interventions are crucial for the realm of harm reduction and social work itself is evolving from practice to theory. The main theoretical constructs for social work in harm reduction could shift societal attitudes and influence policies to improve the quality and accessibility of support services for individuals with rug misuse.

The primary findings for social work in the harm reduction field presented in this research are based on a two-year study on social work practices in the Day Care Centre for People Who Use Drugs in Sofia, Bulgaria. Therefore, there are conclusions presented as guidelines and recommendations for structuring social work in harm reduction programs in the country. By examining drug use within its broader context, the social work practice in harm reduction aims to support individuals in making incremental changes that lead to reduced health and social risks. Strategies are tailored to the individual's goals, resources, and motivation. The research findings show that the role of social work in implementing this approach is crucial; it not only structures and enhances the effectiveness of activities carried out with individual clients but also works to empower excluded communities.

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Seniors in the World of New Technologies: Barriers, Needs, and Effective Solutions

The development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the 21st century is advancing at an extraordinary pace, revolutionising the way people communicate, work, and use information resources. The evolution of the Internet, the increase in computing power, the development of artificial intelligence, and the expansion of mobile devices are creating entirely new solutions. More and more businesses and institutions are moving their products and services into the digital space. As technology advances, it becomes crucial to ensure equal access to new technologies for the entire society. In Poland, the level of digital literacy varies greatly, especially by age group. The oldest age group, i.e., people over 60, is the weakest in this respect. Senior citizens are often perceived as a digitally excluded social group. This perception arises not only from stereotypes but also from real statistics on technology use by older people. Digital exclusion, also known as the 'digital divide' or 'e-exclusion,' is a global issue referring to the gap between those who have access to information technology and those who do not or cannot use it. In the context of seniors, digital exclusion is a particularly significant issue, affecting their daily lives, level of social participation, and access to information and services.

The study aims to examine the current situation of older people in the context of new technologies and to understand the causes of digital exclusion among seniors in Poland by analysing the barriers to using new technologies as perceived and reported by older people. The research is quantitative in nature and involves conducting standardised interviews with seniors. During the interviews, seniors are asked about their experiences using new technologies, how they acquire digital knowledge and skills, and what types of digital services they use. The interviews also explore the difficulties and barriers that hinder seniors from using new technologies. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify solutions to encourage seniors to become more digitally active and to help them enhance their digital skills. Seniors are also asked to suggest changes that could support them in using new technologies.

The outcome of the study includes the formulation and presentation of solutions to counteract digital exclusion among seniors and the preparation of recommendations for institutions and entities offering e-services to ensure they are user-friendly and safe for older adults.

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Social work practice in 2024 - A grounded theory of different modes of decision making, knowledge and other professional implications for social work in Tyrol (Austria)

Since 2020, social problems in Europe have increased. Studies indicate that this rise is particularly evident among vulnerable groups and social work clients, also in Austria. Consequently, social workers are in daily contact with those most affected by high socio-economic tensions. In light of these indications, this PhD project aims to examine the characteristics of social work (SW) practice in the present era and to investigate how SW decision-making, knowledge and professional attitudes evolve in response to the prevailing socio-political context in western Austria.

Following the identification of a research gap through a scoping review in 2023/24, a qualitative study was conducted in 2024 with social workers from across the federal state of Tyrol. In order to develop grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss), the study focused on three distinct areas of social work: (1) child and youth welfare, (2) homelessness and (3) health-related social work. The initial survey instrument required the participation of 19 social workers who were instructed to document all their daily work experiences in a practice diary over the course of a week. The documentation could be written or oral and participants chose a week between July and October 2024. Subsequently, a semi-structured, narrative interview was held to enable joint in-depth reflection on the experiences and insights emerging from the journaling. In the second survey, a further 23 professionals engaged in a case vignette specific to their clientele, employing the Thinking Aloud method (Ericsson & Simon). Again, a follow-up interview was conducted to further explore their engagement in the case vignette through retrospective Thinking Aloud. All data is currently undergoing open coding and subsequent categorisation in order to reconstruct patterns of the manifold typologies of social work practice. The preliminary analysis indicates the existence of various professional types, the use of different sources of knowledge, and multiple foci in the daily practice of social workers in Tyrol. Further, the data illustrates disparate approaches to theoretical frameworks and scientific theories or methods. Additional phenomena, such as a distinct intra- and inter-institutional connection between social workers for practice-reflection, are also emerging in the open coding. For the TiSSA PhD ACT 2025, these insights will be elaborated in greater detail to provide first-hand evidence to the discourses on the theory-practice nexus and the various professional types of social work.

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Artificial Intelligence and Inclusive Communication: Evaluation of a Training Approach for Ethical Discursive Practices.

State of the Art Discussion Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly pervasive in all aspects of daily life. A growing number of decisions are delegated to AI-based systems, particularly those leveraging Machine Learning (ML) techniques. The diversity of contexts in which these technologies are employed underscores the urgency of reflecting on their ethical and social implications (Shelby et al., 2023; Xue et al., 2024). At a large scale, automated AI-driven systems can exacerbate systemic discrimination and disadvantage specific social groups or individuals (Ferrer, Van Nuenen, Such, Coté, & Criado, 2021). Notably, gender, race, and disability serve as significant social markers of discrimination, potentially limiting individual development and perpetuating exclusionary educational and occupational practices (Fiorucci, Pinto Minerva, Portera, 2017). The academic literature and international guidelines highlight the need for further research and in-depth analysis of mitigation strategies in ML and Natural Language Processing (NLP) (Ferrer, Van Nuenen, Such, Coté, & Criado, 2021; EU 2021; Camilleri 2023). Addressing this complex challenge and fostering the development of human-centered and socially sustainable AI necessitate the generation of theories and tools through interdisciplinary and holistic approaches capable of capturing such complexity (Morin, 1993; Zhang & Han Yu 2023).

Research Objectives and Theoretical Framework The research aims to assess the effectiveness of a functional communication training program targeting researchers and engineers specializing in AI-based software systems. The training promotes non-marginalizing discursive practices and non-essentialist, non-patriarchal lexical alternatives (hooks, 1994) to support the development of more ethical and inclusive technologies. The theoretical framework is rooted in engaged pedagogy (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2003), enriched by the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and Hall's (1997) theory of representation. Engaged pedagogy aligns with international guidelines for human-centered AI, advocating for ethical technologies as a means of democratizing information and advancing social justice (Marjanovic, 2021). The discourse on equity, social justice, and inclusion is intrinsically linked to complexity and intersectionality. Interdisciplinary research has demonstrated that the multidimensional nature of discrimination complicates the formulation of effective solutions, necessitating an integrated approach that bridges the humanities and STEM disciplines. Intersectionality and interdisciplinarity are essential for developing coherent projects that avoid tokenism and schismogenesis (Bateson, 1987; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2020). Hall's (1997) work contributes to this analysis by illustrating how communicative practices, including those mediated by AI, can reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies and power structures. Metaresearch studies suggest the need to investigate the "hidden epistemologies" embedded in discursive practices that perpetuate the image of the vulnerable subject (Quagliata & Bianchi, 2022). The non-neutrality of language, amplified by sociocultural changes, necessitates a multi-axial and critical approach to analyze the values and messages conveyed through communication, ensuring that every individual can fully develop their inclinations and potential (Ongini, 2019). Finally, the research is grounded in sociological, psychological, and pedagogical literature, which highlights how adherence to the social order is a historical and reproductive process shaped by formal and informal educational agencies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Giancola & Salmieri, 2020).

Description and Discussion of the Research Methodology The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a functional communication training program for researchers and engineers specializing in AI-based software systems. A combined

methodological approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods is adopted to ensure maximum internal validity. Specifically, for qualitative aspects, the study employs Constructivist Grounded Theory, recognized for its effectiveness in exploring complex phenomena and their ethical implications (Charmaz, 2014). This approach ensures coherence between epistemology and methodology, which is essential in a dynamic and complex context where co-construction of meaning and critical interrogation of phenomena and interpretative categories are fundamental. Grounded Theory has proven useful in identifying reductive and marginalizing discursive practices (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1965), providing flexibility and recursive interaction between theory and practice, a feature that supports continuous adaptation in both intervention and evaluation phases. The quantitative approach, incorporating survey administration, will facilitate large-scale data collection, while ethnographic diaries, memos, and observations will be employed to collect more detailed qualitative data. Focus groups will be conducted to explore participants' opinions and interpersonal dynamics in depth. The study follows a longitudinal research design spanning one year, during which participants will be continuously monitored. The final evaluation will involve a second round of survey administration (both closed- and open-ended questions), whose results will be analyzed alongside observations and ethnographic diaries to provide a comprehensive multidimensional assessment. The overall project duration is three years.

Expected Outcomes The anticipated outcome is the assessment of the effectiveness of a functional communication training program designed for researchers and engineers working on AI software systems. The training aims to counteract marginalizing communicative practices rooted in patriarchal structures, with a particular focus on gender, disability, and migration issues. Specific objectives include data collection to evaluate the intervention's impact on participants' awareness of language and discursive practices. If the intervention proves effective, the data will be analyzed to understand how it has influenced participants' mindsets and worldviews. Additionally, the effectiveness of the proposed lexical alternatives will be assessed in promoting inclusive practices and fostering critical thinking beyond patriarchal essentialism. Finally, the approach seeks to empower participants, enabling them to act as change agents within their respective organizations or professional communities. Future research developments may include examining the long-term impact of the training, analyzing how participants transfer the acquired competencies to their daily professional practices and to what extent the intervention contributes to the sustainability of inclusive practices over time.

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A Critical Analysis of Economic Sanctions Policy: A Case Study of Afghanistan with a Focus on Right to Health

The past six decades are a witness to a surge in the use of both unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions, as 27% of countries are under sanctions today as compared to 4% in the early 1960s (Rodriguez, 2023). While economic sanctions policy aims to achieve political compliance from the targeted state, it can have massive humanitarian consequences, both due to economic conditions and direct impact on public services (Ozdamar & Shahin, 2021).

In case of Afghanistan, post-NATO withdrawal in 2021 and Taliban's return to power, the pre-existing economic sanctions on the Taliban's leaders came into effect. Economic sanctions by the US and its allies, the UN, and the EU have had a crippling impact on the economy and financial system, translating into a public health crisis of gigantic proportion (Glass et al., 2023). As a result of economic sanctions policy, as foreign development funding came to a sudden halt, along with the economic and banking crises, there have been direct and indirect impacts on the accessibility and affordability of essential services for Afghans, particularly healthcare (MSF, 2022). The overnight suspension of development funds and humanitarian aid has caused havoc on the hospitals and clinics, with an acute shortage of essential medicines and medical supplies (MSF, 2022). 15.8 million Afghans are dealing with crisis levels of food insecurity (WFP, n.d.). 41% of children are stunted and one in three girls are anemic (UNICEF, n.d.). While the humanitarian needs keep increasing, the already burdened public healthcare system of Afghanistan has further weakened, nearing a collapse.

Several research gaps exist including a minimal peer-reviewed literature on consequences of economic sanctions policy on Afghanistan post-2021, impacts of the policy on human rights of Afghans, particularly right to health, viable alternatives to the policy in context of Afghanistan, strategies to cope with the failing health system, and the role of social work profession. Two important research questions that arise— (1) How does the economic sanctions policy impact the right to health of population of Afghanistan? and (2) Is impact on right to health of population of Afghanistan, an unintended consequence of economic sanctions policy?

This research paper utilizes two theoretical frameworks-inverted liberalism theory of sanctions, which helps in developing an understanding of the effectiveness of sanctions on Afghanistan, and human rights framework which puts into perspective the impact on right to health of Afghans. The research methodology utilized include —(1) a critical policy analysis which includes analyzing the economic sanction policy imposed on Afghanistan within the theoretical frameworks, identifying policy objectives and the complex implementation mechanisms linking the economic sanctions policy and right to health of Afghans, with a special emphasis on a multilayered impact on women and girls, and (2) examining empirical data from the case study of another targeted state, Iraq in 1990s, for predicting outcomes in Afghanistan and drawing lessons for policymaking. This is followed by recommendations on alternatives to economic sanctions policy in Afghanistan and the potential role of the social work profession in protecting human rights of civilians under authoritarian regimes.

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What is the role of social workers in removing children from their families in order to place them in residential care and what is children's lived experience?

In Italy, law 184 regulates alternative care arrangements for children whose parents are unable to care for them within child protection contexts. This research aims to investigate the removal of children from their parents' care in order to place them in residential care contexts, both in emergency situations (ex art. 403 cc) and following a judicial decision by social services. Scientific writing about child removal has focused on decision-making, identifying high levels of workers' discretionality in the decision to remove, as well as highlighting the demographic and case factors most likely to lead to removal into care. In addition, literature has evidenced best practices in child protection to avert child removal, as well as assessing the level of involvement of parents and children in their own care plan. There is scant national literature dealing with how children are removed into residential care: how the removal is planned, how it is executed, which professionals are involved and which accommodations are made for children of minority ethnic background. This research aims to answer these questions through a national closed-question questionnaire of child protection and emergency duty social workers in Italy, to investigate their practice relative to the most recent removal they have carried out. This questionnaire will be administered online and will be based on the governmental guidelines on child protection and residential care, as well as key indicators to assess participation. The survey will differentiate between emergency removals and planned placements, with the aim of gathering information on both interventions. The questionnaire's answers will be analysed using quantitative analysis software STATA. In addition, in order to gather in depth, qualitative information about social work practice, the researcher will undertake a period of research within a specialist social work team dealing with child removal interventions in the city of Milan. The purpose is to carry out participant observations, unstructured interviews and practice research with social workers within the Relational social work framework of "reciprocity". Finally, qualitative semi-structured interviews with care leavers will highlight the voice of experts by experience. The data from both the case study research and the semi-structured interviews will be analysed with MAXQDA through the lens of anti-oppressive social work practice. The research will adopt an anti-oppressive and relational social work framework, aiming to assess the levels of participation and empowerment of children and families during the planning and execution of the removal and entry into residential care, using scientific Hart's ladder of participation for parents involved in child protection and the Lundy model of children participation with children. The aim of this research is to describe current social work practice in this field from the perspective of social workers and children, to improve our knowledge of practice processes and the implementation of relevant governmental guidelines.

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Resistance of lecturers against neoliberalisation in social work programs in Flanders & The Netherlands as a contribution to repoliticisation in social work

In Flanders and the Netherlands, there is a lively debate about the repoliticisation of and in social work (e.g. Van Bouchaute & Vanderhulst 2022; Van Bouchaute & Van Pelt, 2022). To support this politicisation, questions arise about the support by social work programs of the Universities of Applied Sciences. How can they contribute to repoliticisation through their education, research and services? A straightforward, instrumental investigation into that supply and demand seems obvious (e.g. using the models of Weis-Gal & Gal, 2020).

Yet we do not choose it. This instrumental approach is problematic because it neglects all kinds of dynamics within and outside these programmes that fundamentally influence their possible contribution to the politicisation in social work. We need to develop a more reflexive analysis of the relationship between the programs in Universities for Applied Sciences and the (de)politicization in social work. Central to this critical analysis are processes of neoliberalisation in the programs of social work in the Universities of Applied Sciences. Specific, visible neoliberal evolutions take place within a shifting discourse manifesting a new normative rationality, no longer restricted to the economic field, but penetrating all domains of life (Brown, 2009, 2015 – drawing on Foucault, 2004, Lemke 2002). This neoliberal rationality undermines democracy itself as it "disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as homo oeconomicus (Brown, 2015: 31, italics in original). By abolishing democratic citizenship, neoliberal rationality attacks the democratic principle that everyone can question and disturb the existing order as an equal to anyone else (Rancière, 2017), in other words: the possibility of politicisation as such.

There is growing recognition that shifts to neoliberalism in social work practice also affect social work education "and are reflected in numerous ways, including: the depoliticization of social work education and practice, prioritization of interventions dedicated to individual (i.e. client) change at the expense of social change, an emphasis on evidence-based practice as the gold standard for education and research, and the embrace of competency-based educational standards focused on measurable outcomes to ensure compliance and accountability (Morley et al., 2017; Reisch, 2013b)." (Cherry et al., 2021: 2). A growing body of literature is now shifting attention to what social work education can do to challenge neoliberalism in teaching students (e.g. Brown, 2016; Fenton, 2014, 2019; Herrero & Charnley 2020; Joseph 2021; Kamali & Jönsson, 2019; Morley, 2016; Morley et al., 2017; O'Keeffe & Assoulin, 2021; Preston & Aslett, 2014; Rossiter, 2005; Wallace & Pease, 2019; Wehbi & Turcotte, 2007; Wehbi, 2009). This research contributes to this emerging literature by delving deeper into the central role of lecturers in practices of resistance within these programs. While there is a lot of critical literature on the negative effects of neoliberalism in academia and on the need of countering these negative trends, "it is surprising how little critical analysis there is about how we, academics, are deeply entangled with the very same neoliberal ethos that we point out as a "cause" of our many troubles." (Valero et.al. 2019: 136).

A deeper insight in resistance under neoliberal rationality starts from an understanding of how the governance of precariousness consists of a dialectical relation between the governance of precarity and the self-governance by ambivalent subjects.

For a better understanding of the power effect of neoliberal governance on lecturers, we elaborate on the interdependence between managers and lecturers, inspired by the work of Brown (2015) and drawing on Judith Butler's thinking on precarious life (2006).

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Unraveling the relationship between structural quality and process quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: the impact of caregiver-child ratio and pedagogical coaching

The quality of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) plays a crucial role in shaping children's developmental outcomes (Vandenbroeck, 2004). High pedagogical quality in ECEC is essential for fostering positive developmental outcomes, with two key dimensions: structural quality such as caregiver- child ratio and staff qualifications and process quality that focuses on the interactions between caregivers and children (Janssen et al., 2016; Leseman et al., 2022). While the quality of ECEC in Flanders is generally good, particularly in emotional support, there is room for improvement in areas like educational support and group socialization (Vandenbroeck et al., 2024). Ensuring high process quality requires a reduction in the caregiver-child ratio and adequate pedagogical coaching (Devlieghere et al., 2023; Vandenbroeck et al., 2024).

Over the years, the childcare sector has faced a persistent shortage of available spots, leading to government policies focused on expanding access to childcare (Vandenbroeck, 2024). This approach is rooted in developmental psychology and the concept of 'return on investment', where early investment in children is seen as beneficial for their future development, educational success, and societal contributions (Graham, 2011; Leseman et al., 2022). However, the emphasis has largely been on increasing the quantity of childcare spaces, often at the expense of quality. The need for professionalization in childcare has not always been recognized (Vandenbroeck, 2024). The development of childcare and education systems cannot be separated from broader societal, historical, and political contexts. Today, we live in a welfare state that is occasionally under pressure, which significantly affects discussions on education and pedagogy. Within ECEC, the focus is often on productivity, with childcare seen primarily as preparation for later life. This shift has led to a growing emphasis on efficiency, aiming to achieve outcomes quickly (Vandenbroeck, 2024). As a result, social pedagogy has been reduced to "doing things right", neglecting the more fundamental question of whether we are "doing the right things." (Dewey, 1916). This has resulted in high caregiver-child ratios and insufficient staff qualifications, issues that persist today (Vandenbroeck et al., 2024). Moreover, policies that prioritize working parents often make it harder for children from families in vulnerable situations to access quality childcare. However, it is these children who benefit from quality childcare (Vandenbroeck, 2024). These issues raise an important question: "Does the current childcare structure – with high caregiver- child ratios and low staff qualifications effectively meet the needs of children, caregivers and parents?".

This research adopts a reflective approach, grounded in the principle of "doing the right things", seeking to go beyond traditional methods, challenge existing evidence, and explore new possibilities for improving ECEC. The study integrates Dewey's theory and uses a mixed-methods design to comprehensively examine how structural and process quality are interrelated. Quantitative data will be collected through observational assessments of caregiver-child interactions and the effectiveness of pedagogical coaching. In addition, qualitative interviews with caregivers and pedagogical coaches will provide insights into how coaching interventions and caregiver-child ratios impact the pedagogical quality.

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Communitywork in a social spatial perspective

The background
In the Netherlands, we have developed a particular and well-established tradition of state-supported social engineering through physical and social interventions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Wekker, 2020). After the Second World War, neighbourhoods became the new framework for social intervention after an era of pillarisation and social segregation at the local level. This was particularly the case in working-class neighbourhoods (Rogaly & Taylor, 2009).

In line with this trend, there has been an increase in the use of communities and community work as an instrument of government in the pursuit of a wide range of policy objectives, including public health, education, the environment, health care and social services.

At the same time, we see that these communities need to be established in neighbourhoods where there is an accumulation of problems, making it difficult and challenging to connect people with each other or with informal or formal organisations. The question is whether the desired reality that politicians and policy makers want to realise in these neighbourhoods matches the experiential reality of community work practice.

The knowledge objective of this research is to gain a realistic and nuanced picture of community work processes from the ground up.

Theoretical basis
Due to the knowledge objective of this research, I chose an urban ethnographic design, which is characterised by an unstructured and open approach.Thus, I did not start from a theoretical framework or a predefined research design (Evers, 2015, Soenen, 2013, Eriksen, 2004, Roosens, 1997), but rather from a broad question and an open attitude. An urban ethnographic study focuses specifically on the effects that the urban context has on coexistence. Consequently, social life in a city cannot be understood without considering the context in which this urban social life is embedded. An urban ethnographic study not only studies the city from the inside, but also focuses on developments from the outside and the impact of these developments on the experiential reality of the inhabitants, including the perspective of time and place (Manella, 2019, Abbott, 1997, Kloos, 1981).

To guide the analysis of my empirical material, I have chosen a social-spatial perspective in order to be able to interpret and describe the so-called emic perspective in a more objective way (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, Kottak, 2011). This socio-spatial perspective is interdisciplinary, drawing on academic disciplines such as urban anthropology/sociology, social geography, urban planning and social work, a socio-spatial perspective. A socio-spatial perspective is multifaceted and can be interpreted in different ways. I use this perspective to gain insight into how processes of community work are influenced by physical, social, cultural, economic and political factors. Within a socio-spatial perspective, 'space and place' are central concepts alongside the choice of lifeworld perspective and the role of power and power inequalities (Low, 2017, Guest, 2003).

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The Perspectives of Foster Families and Professionals on the Implementation of Foster Care in Albania

Research Problem:
The United Nations Convention on the Children Rights, ratified by Albania, emphasizes every child's right to optimal development. Albania's National Strategy for Children (2021–2026) prioritizes alternative care for children without parental care, including foster care. Foster care has been piloted in 2010 in Tirana by the non-profit organization Bethany Social Service and in Shkodra by the non-profit organization Every Child through a UNICEF project. Despite legislative frameworks, the creation of a pool of foster families and adequate professional support remains a challenge, impeding the fulfillment of children's needs.

Residential institutions host the majority of children without parental care, often termed "social orphans" due to their biological parents' presence. Deinstitutionalization efforts, such as the National Plan (2020–2022), aimed to transition children to family-based care, yet foster care remains underdeveloped, with only 12 foster families in the country. This research seeks to examine the perspectives of foster families and professionals to improve foster care implementation.

Research Aim and Objectives:
The study aims to investigate foster families' and professionals' perspectives, particularly social workers, to enhance foster care in Albania. Specific objectives include:
1. Exploring existing services for children without parental care and identifying gaps.
2. Understanding foster families' needs, behaviors, and perceptions.
3. Examining professionals' roles and challenges in foster care services.
4. Identifying best practices in Albania and internationally.

Methodology:
The research employs qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Key participants include foster families, social workers as the main professionals, central and local governments, social service providers of public and nonpublic institutions, etc. A sample of 20–40 participants will be involved, depending on data saturation. Data analysis will utilize qualitative analysis to examine the foster care service implementations.

Literature Review:
The research builds on the principle of children's best interests, incorporating Albanian legislation (e.g., Family Code, Law on Child Protection, Law on Social Services) and international frameworks (e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Guidelines on Alternative Care, 2009). The literature review will encompass both national and international studies, research articles, and reports to provide a comprehensive analysis of foster care systems and strategies for strengthening services through a proactive social work approach, emphasizing family and community support systems.

Ethical Considerations:
The study ensures confidentiality, voluntary participation, non-discrimination, and transparency. Findings will be shared with participants before publication, adhering to ethical standards for children's rights, foster families, and professional stakeholders.

Conclusion:
 This research aims to provide actionable insights for improving foster care services, contributing to policymaking and enhancing the roles of professionals and foster families in Albania's child welfare system.