



**Book of Abstracts
Plenum Conference**

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TISSA 2026

Welcome to Warsaw, Poland

Welcome!

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Teaching Social Work in Times of War: From Neutrality to Moral and Pedagogical Responsibility - Nuzha Allasad Alhuzail

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Contemporary social work education is increasingly required to demonstrate measurable “impact,” often defined through managerial and technocratic indicators. In contexts of war and political conflict, however, such narrow definitions risk obscuring the ethical core of social work education: challenging structural inequality, amplifying silenced voices, and fostering justice-oriented professional practice. This presentation argues that teaching social work during war is not merely a pedagogical challenge, but a fundamentally moral and political act.

Drawing on autobiographical methodology and critical pedagogy, the presentation examines how war and prolonged political conflict enter the social work classroom at emotional, relational, and structural levels. Conflict does not remain external to academic life; it shapes students’ identities, fears, access to resources, and capacity for learning, while simultaneously constraining educators through institutional expectations of “neutrality.” The autobiographical lens is used not as personal testimony, but as an analytic tool to critically examine pedagogical practices, power relations, and the boundaries of professional responsibility under conditions of ongoing violence.

The presentation critically interrogates neutrality as a dominant pedagogical stance in higher education during conflict. While often framed as professionalism or safety, neutrality functions as a mechanism of silencing that erases minority experiences and reproduces structural injustice. In contexts where vulnerability is unevenly distributed and political realities directly affect students’ lives, neutrality becomes ethically problematic and incompatible with social work’s commitments to human rights and anti-oppressive practice.

Building on theories of connected boundaries and the concept of the “use of self,” the presentation proposes a model of expanded yet ethically grounded pedagogical boundaries. This approach does not promote unregulated self-disclosure, but rather reflective integration of personal, emotional, and professional knowledge. Central to this model is the recognition of personal and indigenous knowledge as legitimate pedagogical resources for preparing future social workers to engage meaningfully with complex, conflict-affected realities.

The presentation concludes by reframing impact through justice, ethical responsibility, and collective empowerment, positioning social work educators as public intellectuals and agents of change.

Identity Crisis, Coping Strategies, and Help-Seeking among Arab-Palestinian Adults in Israel Following the 7 October War - Raghda Alnabilsy

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Theoretical Background: Adolescents in conflict zones, particularly Arab-Palestinian youth in Israel, face unique challenges during wartime that significantly impact their identity formation, sense of belonging, coping strategies, and attitudes toward formal services. As members of a marginalized, collectivist minority, they experience inequalities that shape their views on support systems. This lecture examines the experiences of Arab-Palestinian adolescents exposed to violence following the events of October 7, 2023, and how these experiences influence their identities and coping strategies.

Methodology: The study involved six focus groups with 34 Arab teenagers, varying in age, religion, gender, and geographic location.

Findings: Three key themes emerged: 1) Identity Crisis, initially, adults felt a sense of belonging to Israeli society, but as the conflict escalated, they increasingly identified with the Palestinian people due to their marginalization. 2) Coping Strategies, this identity crisis was accompanied by feelings of fear, persecution, and silencing, leading to disappointment regarding coexistence with Jewish society. 3) Alienation and Lack of Support, many Arab adults feel alienated and unaware of formal support systems, leading them to avoid seeking help from institutional sources.

Implications to social work: This research highlights how socio-political contexts influence identity formation among Arab adolescents from a marginalized minority group and reveals their coping mechanisms in the absence of appropriate formal resources. The study underscores the importance of developing knowledge, training, and intervention methods tailored to these socio-political contexts. Such efforts are essential for enhancing the well-being and mental resilience of Arab-Palestinian adolescents during times of war and political conflict.

Academic Teachers' Attitudes Toward State Higher Education Policy of Poland and Ukraine - Roman Androszczuk

The Maria Grzegorzewska University

This presentation examines how contemporary higher education policies function as disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms shaping academic subjectivities in Poland and Ukraine - two post-communist countries with distinct trajectories of neoliberalization and institutional stability. Drawing from ongoing comparative doctoral research, I analyze how academic teachers navigate and resist neoliberal governance regimes that prioritize standardized metrics, entrepreneurial self-management, and accountability systems over scholarly autonomy and collective knowledge production. The study employs a constructivist-interpretative methodology complemented by Foucauldian critical analysis (power/knowledge, governmentality, disciplinarization, technologies of the self) to investigate how policy language constructs "regimes of truth" about what constitutes valuable knowledge, valuable scholars, and valuable universities. Through online questionnaires and in-depth interviews with academics across diverse institutional contexts, the research reveals how neoliberal governmentality operates through: panoptic surveillance systems (parametrization, impact factors, h-index, continuous audits and evaluations); normalization mechanisms creating entrepreneurial academic subjects who self-monitor and optimize their "academic capital"; and disciplinary techniques that transform universities into factories of measurable outputs rather than spaces of critical inquiry.

The comparative dimension illuminates critical differences between Polish and Ukrainian academic contexts. While Poland exhibits advanced neoliberalization of higher education, Ukraine presents a hybrid case where war conditions, institutional instability, and post-totalitarian legacies create unique forms of governance. Ukrainian academics face compounded challenges, navigating institutional chaos amid ongoing conflict while simultaneously experiencing pressure toward European standardization and neoliberal reform models. This reveals how geopolitical crisis can both intensify and disrupt disciplinary mechanisms. The research identifies how academics develop alternative "technologies of the self" as forms of micro-political resistance: slow science practices rejecting productivity metrics; collective care networks and solidarity practices among precarious academics; sabotage of metrics through publishing in non-indexed journals or open-access platforms; "living in truth" (Havel) openly naming the fiction of excellence discourse and ranking games; participatory methodologies centering community needs over citation counts; and exit strategies creating independent research collectives outside institutions enforcing neoliberal norms.

This research contributes to critical scholarship on higher education by extending Foucauldian analysis beyond Anglosphere and Western European contexts into post-communist and conflict-affected regions. It challenges higher education systems to: recognize the violence of universal metrics applied across diverse institutional contexts; develop participatory governance models centering academic community voices in policy-making; acknowledge the incompatibility between neoliberal governmentality and genuine academic freedom; and create space for alternative knowledge production modes that resist entrepreneurial subjectification and embrace collective, care-based scholarship.

Towards a new understanding of impact in child protection services – the struggle of municipal network cooperation in Germany - Amy-Louise Buse

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Following several tragic child protection cases in Germany and the subsequent introduction of the Federal Child Protection Act (2012), child protection services have undergone significant professionalisation. Initial reforms focused primarily on legal regulation, institutional responsibilities, and internal procedures. Today, child protection faces a second major development task: the sustainable, structural anchoring of cross-jurisdictional cooperation at the municipal level.

Although cooperation between youth welfare, health services, schools, the judiciary, and other actors is legally required, research and practice indicate that it is still predominantly realised on a case-by-case basis rather than as a strategic, network-oriented approach. At the same time, child welfare services—like many areas of social work—struggle to secure political and financial support, as preventive and cooperative measures are difficult to legitimise through conventional, quantitative impact indicators. Previous attempts to demonstrate impact through numerical evidence have often reinforced intervention-oriented practices, leading to rising costs and neglecting individual needs, local resources, and the social environments of children, young people, and their families in critical situations.

This paper presents a practice-oriented, participatory understanding of researching the impact of child protection networks that critically engages with prevailing technocratic notions of impact in municipal child protection. Rather than treating impact as a narrowly measurable outcome, the approach conceptualises municipal child protection networks as a form of social innovation and as an arena for democratic, participatory governance. The research aims to empirically explore how cross-jurisdictional networks function, under which conditions they contribute to preventive and empowering practice, and how their effects can be meaningfully understood, documented, and legitimised.

This approach will be tested in a research project that examines child protection as a shared responsibility based on cooperation, resource sharing, and negotiated common goals. Methodologically, it will combine participatory elements with qualitative and structural analyses, positioning researchers as reflective change agents engaged in knowledge co-production with practitioners and municipal actors.

By challenging dominant impact logics and foregrounding relational, process-oriented and participatory dimensions of change, the paper contributes to a broader debate on how social work research can reclaim its transformative potential. It argues for an understanding of impact that aligns with social work's human rights-based and client-centred principles, and that values collective learning, prevention, and solidarity over compliance with managerial expectations. In doing so, the contribution speaks directly to the conference's call to rethink impact, research practice, and the public role of social work.

Implementing antiracist competences in teacher training through action research - Anna Aluffi Pentini

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This action research study investigates the intercultural competences of pedagogues in preschool and primary schools. It draws on Fend's (1975) conceptualisation of school climate as the dynamic interplay between legal and institutional structures and the interactions among students and teachers that shape teaching and learning processes.

A positive school culture is understood here as the manifestation of shared basic assumptions and values that facilitate both individual and collective developments of practice. Despite institutional commitments to inclusivity, the research sought to trace persistent discriminatory practices among teachers, which not only undermine these intentions but also legitimise instances of discrimination, thereby presenting a significant but often invisible barrier to fostering genuinely inclusive environments.

The research adopted an action research methodology aimed at a more critical awareness of practice contradictions and thereby improve competences. It employed a mixed-methods approach to operationalise the concept of intercultural climate as a composite of organisational frameworks and individual attitudes and consequent actions of teachers. Specifically, a checklist was developed and applied, comprising both quantitative and qualitative items, asking teacher trainees during internships to critically observe multicultural school contexts. This instrument facilitates systematic reflection on the experiences of pupils from diverse backgrounds like ethnicity or ability, and provides a framework for discussing classroom practice in relation to governmental and ministerial regulations.

The checklist is structured into three distinct sections: (1) guidance for developing critical reflections on intercultural issues; (2) items for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data to enhance the depth and rigour of school environment observations; and (3) prompts for general reflection on the internship experience. Through this methodological framework, the study aimed at bridging the gap between policy and practice, emphasising the importance of explicit value articulation and everyday enactment of inclusive principles.

Analysis of the data collected over a two-year period confirmed Bandura's theory of moral disengagement, highlighting and explaining the phenomenon whereby individuals maintain a positive self-concept while engaging in exclusionary or inhumane behaviours towards those deemed outside their in-group.

The study underscores the necessity for schools to articulate the values underpinning pedagogical coexistence in practical terms and to cultivate a sustained commitment among future educators to the implementation of these principles. Group discussions of the completed worksheets further motivated participants to propose classroom interventions aimed at enhancing the participation of students from migrant backgrounds (and possibly with other diversities) and challenging prevailing teacher attitudes.

User perspectives as knowledge production – a driving force to develop social work and social work research. How to make visions to reality and sustainable experiences - Maja Andersen

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From a practice research perspective, this presentation explores how user perspectives can constitute a research framework for knowledge production to develop social work and promote changes in the professional practice in modern social work. A research framework that not only conducts user's experience-based knowledge but promotes the opportunities for developing a democratic and co-operative process where service users get a productive role in research.

The purpose of the presentation is to empirically and theoretically explore and discuss how user perspectives can constitute a research framework with service users in social work. The empirical data stems from a process called "on-the-job-training" which took place in a Danish Municipality from 2016-2020. The data collected during the process consists of observations notes, interviews and focus groups with participating practitioners and participating service users.

Changes in social work must be anchored in practice if the ambition is to develop working relation between service users and professionals. Due to this ambition, we have created a research method which is situated in observation studies and direct supervision. These learning processes are situated in practice and might be implemented through methods like "on-the-job-training". This method is a process that aims to pass on learning and new approaches to the frontline social workers. It is based on an empowering approach where the service user perspective must be the baseline for all communication and interventions.

Based on presentations of our research experiences involving service users, we reflect upon the possibilities and barriers in the collaborative processes. More specifically, we reflect upon how rethinking empowering strategies can be a way to create partnerships between researchers, professionals and service users. Partnerships that might/might not release another kind of knowledge as well as that might/might not increase the implications of changes in social work practice. In all, the drive of the presentation is to discuss how user perspectives as a practice research framework in social work can be a driven force to integrate and develop professional practice in social work and social work research.

Questions to be discussed are how involvement of service users and professional social workers as co-researchers constitutes a powerful dynamic and how this relationship can be a possibility for social change. Service user perspectives might be a core value and a strategy to challenge the professional social worker in practice. This calls for reinventing the professional social worker role, the concept of help and how to collaborate with the people who need help from the welfare state. An approach that creates social change in practice – qualifying professional social work, creating valuable collaboration and creates space for service users to take power and ownership of their own lives.

Social Change in Social Work Organisations: Empirical Findings on Leadership and Management Practices in the Face of (Sexualised) Violence - Fabienne André, Sarah Henn & Fabian Kessl

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To what extent can social work organisations be agents of social change? To answer this question, it is of particular relevance to consider leadership and management of social work organisations. Therefore, in an ongoing project, we are investigating how leadership and management respond to cases of violence within their own organisation. We interpret the ways in which violent situations are handled and suspected cases as an expression of a necessary, blocked or rejected social change. Previous research on the critical reappraisal of sexualised violence in social work as well as educational organisations (e.g., Forschungsverbund ForuM 2025; IICSA 2022) has shown that leadership and management practices are of fundamental relevance here. The available findings indicate not only a lack of responsibility for uncovering and dealing with violence but also strategies of delegating responsibility. The interesting question now is to what extent these and other reactions indicate a willingness to change, or a lack thereof. It is also necessary to ask whether current leadership and management practices are typical for the field of social work and social services.

Conceptual ambiguities in current research and theory are already apparent in terminology. Different terms should be usable to define different practices and different understandings. Terms such as 'leadership', 'management', but also terms like 'supervisor' or 'mentor', sometimes refer to the same thing, and in other situations they refer to different things.

In our paper, we would like to answer the question of leadership and management in social work and social services empirically. The organisation under study has to deal especially with cases of power abuse between leaders and staff a few years ago. Since 2023, the new management has been trying to establish a new culture in the organisation, on the basis of an 'open communication', 'new procedures', and more comprehensive information throughout. The first findings show that although a transformation is perceived within the organisation, there is no consistent interpretation. On the one hand, visible changes are reported; on the other hand, persistent continuities remain. So, the question is, how to enable and sustain social change in a social work organisation, and to what extent different strategies, like a top-down one in the investigated case, have a sustainable impact on the organisational culture. Our paper will elaborate existing ambivalences and reflect on them in relation to concepts and theories of leadership and management in research and practice in general.

"How did the boot get on the table?" - The situation of child protection and directions for improvement in Hungary - Rácz Andrea

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Hungarian child protection has been plagued by scandals for many years, with inadequate care conditions and regular abuse and sexual exploitation of children. When professionals speak out about exposure and undignified working and care conditions, they too face retaliation. Child protection has become a political issue in recent years, with little focus on public policy.

Nearly 24,000 children and young people live in child protection, and according to data from the Central Statistical Office (KSH), in 2023 a total of 21,428 minors and 2,387 people over the age of 18 received specialized child protection services, 70% of whom are raised in a foster parent network. The aim of the presentation is to build on the results of three qualitative studies conducted by the author in recent years (Rácz, 2022; 2023; Rácz&Bogács, 2022), to analyze system anomalies from the perspective of professionals and those in care, how child protection services are able to address the problems of children and young adults affected by child protection, compensate for childhood disadvantages, and promote successful social integration. According to the results, young people are critical of the system and the professionals working in it, as they often feel that they do not receive meaningful help, are not listened to, and their views are not taken into account. Their situation is made more difficult by the negative image of them in society, which has been exacerbated by child protection scandals in recent years and, in particular, by the presidential pardon case that shook the profession and Hungarian society as a whole. This stigmatization affects not only the primary target group of child protection, but also the professionals working with them. The protective voice of society is growing stronger today, while the responses to professional problems are inadequate political responses and tightening of regulations.

Power-critical perspectives in the analysis of categorisation practices in youth welfare services - *Pascal Bastian*

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The presentation introduces a relational approach to examine case histories in youth welfare services by reconstructing the categorisation work in child and youth welfare (Molnar et al. 2021) from a praxeological and critical perspective. The focus is on analysing how human and non-human actors – including professionals, clients, documents and institutional artefacts – shape differentiation and categorisation processes in social practices and how these processes influence the construction of needs for assistance, clients and risks.

Instead of focusing on professionals as sole decision-makers, the entire network of actors is brought to the fore (Latour 2005), in which power relations arise and are reproduced not only between individuals, but also through artefacts and organisational logics. The methodological framework is based on the actor-network theory (ANT) and its approach of locating power not as a theoretical assumption but as an empirical result of relational practices and modes of ordering (Law 2013) within the network (Latour 2008). In this context, categorisations as dynamic processes play a special role in case work in the creation of power relations as a result of routines, translation practices and the materiality of documents and files.

The central concern of the presentation is to highlight the relevance of a power-sensitive research approach that uncovers the often hidden mechanisms of marginalisation and passivity within the network, while also reflecting on the researchers' own position. The resulting methodological and methodical questions will be discussed in order to open up new perspectives on power-sensitive social pedagogy and to better understand its complex, powerful categorisation processes.

From Expertocracy to Shared Responsibility: How Experiential Knowledge Creates Transformative Impact - Susanne Iris Bauer & Iris Bauer & Tatevik Mamajanyan

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Peer involvement—bringing the Experiential Knowledge of Experts by Experience into services—emerges as a game changer in both social-psychiatric care and migration-related social work. Drawing on two independently conducted dissertation projects at UAS Fulda, this paper rethinks “impact” in line with TiSSA’s call: not as technocratic performance, but as cultural change, epistemic justice and collective empowerment. We ask: How does Peer Involvement generate impact beyond numerical indicators, and which conditions enable Experiential Knowledge to translate into sustained change in services and organisations?

We synthesise two empirical datasets. Project A on Experienced Involvement in social-psychiatric care (Bauer, 2025) includes three focus groups, 19 expert interviews and 485 questionnaires. Project B on mechanisms of defence and overcoming alienation contributes (Mamajanyan 2024) six qualitative interviews, nineteen participatory Future Workshops and four feedback discussions. Across both projects, three mechanisms of transformative impact recur. (1) Epistemic expansion: Experiential Knowledge challenges deficit-oriented framings and broadens perspectives reciprocally, with impact decisions in services. (2) Relational reconfiguration: peer roles shift interactional norms from compliance and control toward trust, recognition, adherence and shared responsibility—especially in moments of crisis, transition and conflict. (3) Organisational learning: participatory formats translate micro-level changes (language, routines, accessibility, role understandings) into meso-level shifts when mandates, resources and qualification pathways are in place.

At the same time, implementation is contested. Barriers include tokenistic involvement, professional gatekeeping, unclear responsibilities, and precarious funding that undermines continuity. These tensions raise ethical questions (representation, remuneration, safeguarding, role conflicts) and methodological challenges (how to evidence cultural change without reducing it to metrics).

We conclude that peer involvement should be treated not as an “add-on”, but as a rights-based, democracy-strengthening approach aligned with the UN CRPD and catalyzing the committed goals. For researchers as change agents and constructeurs of research-designs, this entails combining measurable outputs with participatory narratives of transformation, making power relations explicit, and producing knowledge that can travel into practice, education and public debate, providing an additional resource for decision making.

Postponed Praxis and Deferred Change? Professionals Imagining the Future of Residential Care - Toon Benoot

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Recent data from Flanders show that the introduction of personal budgets has not led to a large-scale shift away from residential care. Instead, full-time residential placements have increased, with people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities (PIMD) remaining the most represented group. These trends highlight an urgent need to understand everyday practices within residential care settings.

The presented study focusses on how professionals working in residential care define good care and support for people with PIMD; how they attempt to realise this in their daily practice, how they anticipate an upcoming renovation and construction project, and how this shapes their expectations of change.

The findings draw on a three-year qualitative research project on the transformation of residential care. This paper presents interview data from 12 professionals working in a residential facility where extensive ethnographic fieldwork was conducted. Interviews explored professional perspectives on care practices, organisational change, and the perceived impact of future infrastructural developments.

Professionals identify numerous practices and interactional patterns they wish to change. However, they tend to postpone addressing these issues, framing meaningful transformation as something that would occur only after addressing physical and spatial conditions in the construction project. As a result, change is imagined as a future event rather than a pedagogical, ongoing, everyday process.

The respondents suggest that the transformation of residential care is deferred to infrastructural change, rather than approached as continuous praxis. This has serious implications for shaping the future with and for PIMD.

Building trust in digital relationship within Child welfare Services - Teresa Bertotti

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The relationship between professionals and service users in social work and unfolds across both explicit and implicit dimensions, including communicative, relational, emotional, and ethical aspects. The growing introduction of digital tools into professional practice does not merely modify communication channels; it profoundly affects modes of presence, the management of professional boundaries, the timing and spaces of the relationship. Technology-mediated communication can expand opportunities for contact and accessibility, but it can also generate ambivalence, communication overload, and new forms of vulnerability. In this context, it becomes important to examine how new digital languages are interpreted and used within services, and how they contribute to redefining dynamics of participation, responsibility, and trust.

The actual study builds on a previous study conducted by the same research group, on the use of digital tools (ICTs) during the pandemic. That research highlighted how ICTs reshapes interactions in Child welfare services. Interviews with practitioners, parents, and children revealed three main impacts: blurring of institutional spaces, challenges to the professional agenda, and shifts in role representations. Moreover, social workers responded to critical incidents by either reasserting authority or opening negotiations, suggesting that digital interactions can trigger a rebalancing of power and create opportunities for more democratic communication (Bertotti et al., 2025). The research here presented focuses on an in-depth case study, within one of the previously involved municipalities, where service mobile phones for practitioners have been introduced to support and enhance communication with parents and children and it aims to examine the transition and changes produced by the introduction of service mobile phones. It represents a strategic opportunity to explore expectations, perceived opportunities, concerns, and emerging practices linked to digital communication, including the building of trust.

The longitudinal design - with a first phase preceding the implementation of the devices and a second phase conducted approximately 6–8 months later - enables a comparative examination of anticipations, early adaptations, and subsequent reflections on practice. Data are gathered through semi-structured interviews with social workers working in child welfare and protection services. Given that these services are inherently shaped by multiple and often asymmetrical power relationships, understanding how mobile devices and other digital platforms influence the development, negotiation, and maintenance of trust between practitioners, children, and families becomes crucial. Based on these results, the presentation will provide insight into how technology not only changes communication patterns but also shapes relational dynamics and the foundation of trust in professional practice.

Peer work(ers) in institutions for the (formerly) homeless in Vienna - Anja Bischeltsrieder, Marianne Skopal, & Alexander Eder

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Background and purpose: In 2019 a new training program was launched for formerly homeless people to become peer counselors in support services for homeless or formerly homeless people. The “Fonds Soziales Wien” (FSW), which is responsible for all services for homeless people in Vienna, embedded peer work in its 2022 strategy for (ending) homelessness. In 2024 the FSW commissioned the University of Applied Sciences Vienna to conduct a qualitative research study on the status of peer work in Viennese institutions for the homeless.

The main objective of this evaluation is to analyze the impact of peer work at the client level and to highlight potential ways in which existing experience and knowledge can be incorporated more effectively into the further development of homeless support services in Vienna.

By the time of the TISSA conference, the research project will be nearing completion. We would like to introduce and discuss our findings and to hear about research and/or experiences with peer work from other countries and other areas of Social Work.

Methods: The study started in 2024 and will be finalized in late summer / early autumn of 2026. It is a qualitative contract research with a sample of 57 guided interviews with clients and peer workers. In addition, four focus groups were conducted with peer workers, two focus groups with clients, one with social workers, one with support workers and one with management. We added two round-table discussions to evaluate the findings and methods with different relevant stakeholders.

Findings: The study findings so far show that peer work comes with a lot of positive aspects for clients and teams, but also with some challenging aspects. The more specific the area of work is defined for every peer worker, the easier it can be for teams to integrate peer work into their routines and to seek ways of combining professionalization and empowerment.

Our presentation at the conference will address the opportunities and challenges that arose from the research assignment and research design, such as creating various research settings, the selection of participants and the interpretation of the results.

Relevance for the TISSA 2026 conference: With Peer workers a completely new professional group is emerging. This enriches and challenges Social Work settings and thus is “challenging the status quo”. By examining how peer roles are institutionalized within formal support systems, our study contributes to broader debates about how social work can foster innovation without reproducing new hierarchies of expertise. It thus speaks directly to the TISSA 2026 theme of “aligning impact with justice, and linking social change to collective empowerment rather than to compliance”.

“That’s It” – An experiment in the everyday welfare landscape of an underprivileged neighbourhood, viewed through a socio-spatial lens - Matthias Blondia, Evelyne Deceur, Tineke Schiettecat & Griet Roets

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Triggered by a practice-based signal document from a local mental health platform — articulated under the telling title “We are the first and the last line” — and responding to persistent patterns of non-take-up of social rights among residents living in situations of socio-economic vulnerability, “That’s It” (Da is’t! in Dutch) was established in the autumn of 2023 as a neighbourhood-based welfare experiment in the Watersportbaan community of Ghent. The initiative addresses a growing gap between outreach work and institutional welfare provision, in which complex and intertwined support needs tend to “fall between the folds” of existing systems. “That’s It” is a recurring, joint consultation session, organised by the different welfare and care actors in the neighbourhood, in low-threshold, hospitable places of everyday social infrastructure. Stepping away from the existing dominant — but structurally inadequate — referral logics, the initiative is based on sustained presence, gentle outreach and non-intrusive engagement, aiming to prevent escalation by addressing layered needs at an early stage.

The experiment has challenged, and in turn been challenged by, the status quo of institutionally driven practice, as the same services are organised formally in a nearby welfare office, exposing the difference between (spatial) proximity and (experiential) accessibility, as well as the tension between bureaucratic efficiency and lived realities. Crucially, however, “That’s It” succeeded in becoming structurally embedded within Ghent’s neighbourhood-based urban regeneration programme and has more recently been recognised within the city’s governance framework as a transferable model for other neighbourhoods, though the limits of such replication have not yet been fully considered.

Analytically, this contribution draws on the landscapes of care framework — i.e. matter-, mind- and powerscape — to examine how the “That’s It” case moved across (and simultaneously reshaped) its interconnected local scapes. This analytical lens helps to understand how the initiative evolved from a situated neighbourhood alarm signal into a structurally anchored and potentially scalable policy practice. The study examines how physical settings, lived meanings and institutional power relations intersected in shaping specific forms of accessibility to care and welfare support. The analysis highlights how everyday neighbourhood spaces function as critical interfaces where fragmented support systems of care can be temporarily reconfigured, with professionals acting as boundary spanners between residents’ lifeworlds and policy frameworks. Finally, by situating care explicitly within the socio-spatial fabric at the neighbourhood level, the case illustrates how urban regeneration programmes can operate not merely as physical interventions, but as policy vehicles for reconfiguring care landscapes in ways that enhance social justice and prevent non-take-up.

School Attendance Problems as a Probationary Field for Professional School Social Work - Lara Bokelmann

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Background: Regular school attendance is a central prerequisite for educational participation and social inclusion. However, studies show that school attendance problems are more common among young people with special educational needs, contradicting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which obliges Germany to ensure equal access to education. School attendance problems are understood as multidimensional, shaped by individual, familial, school-related, and societal factors. Collaboration between schools, families, and support systems is therefore crucial, yet little is known about how it is organised in cases involving school-absent adolescents with special educational needs. This study examines how cross-actor collaboration is structured in handling school attendance problems within this group, focusing in particular on school social workers as key mediators between school and family.

Methods: The study follows a qualitative, multiperspective, exploratory design based on the Grounded Theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). Data were collected using problem-centred interviews following Witzel (2000). Five cases of school-absent adolescents with special educational needs in emotional and social development or learning, all attending special schools, were examined. Interviews included adolescents, their mothers, class teachers, school social workers, and additional professionals such as social pedagogical family support services. First, cases were analysed using person-environment analysis (Schulze, 2003). A subsequent cross-case analysis led to the development of a substantive, data-grounded theory.

Results: The analysis resulted in the core category 'School attendance problems as a probationary field for professional school social work'. Schools thus emerge as both rigid and flexible systems characterised by their own institutional logics. Within these structures, school social work is embedded in relationships of dependency, which can push genuinely social-pedagogical practice by school social workers partly into the background. At the same time, adolescents and their families experience their perspectives as marginalised and report perceived injustices.

Discussion & Implications: The findings suggest that developing an independent social-pedagogical perspective is more challenging within the school context than in explicitly social-pedagogical organisations. School social workers are therefore required to maintain their professional identity and actively contribute it to case work. While some results are consistent with national and international studies, others diverge and warrant further research. At the same time, the findings underline the importance of systematically incorporating adolescents' subjective perspectives, particularly experiences of perceived injustice, into cooperative decision-making and strengthening their active involvement.

Young people's engagement despite (or in defiance of) a democracy under threat - Karin Böllert & Oliver Bokelmann

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Young people are politically active in various fields of social work and contribute greatly to civil society. Many experience community and recognition, but some also experience hostility or stress, especially in times of endangered democracy. A nationwide quantitative study on youth engagement aims to work with young people to develop concrete protection and prevention concepts for voluntary engagement. It provides an insight into the diversity of young people's engagement, allows conclusions to be drawn about their motivation, and answers the question of what (professional) support young volunteers need in order to maintain their engagement despite hostility in a democracy under threat.

“Doing Group Work, Undoing Illegalisation”: A Participatory Ethnography of Collective Social Work with Undocumented Migrants - Didier Boost

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Across Europe, exclusive welfare and border(ing) regimes are increasingly forcing those framed as “outsiders” into states of permanent precariousness and liminal legality (Menjívar, 2006; De Genova, 2002). Within this geopolitical order, those without legal status are systematically dehumanised, reduced to expendable commodities, and relegated to subsist in deplorable conditions (Kesby, 2012; Kmak, 2020). This implies that - rather than subjects of universal human rights - undocumented migrants often become politically constituted as abject, racialised and illegalised subjects whose lives are inferior and disposable (Round & Kuznetsova, 2016; Boost, 2024). Even social work, ostensibly a champion of human rights, is increasingly co-opted into those violent border regimes (Persdotter et al., 2021), potentially serving as an instrument of migration control and reinforcing narratives of illegality and undeservingness (Farmer, 2021; Hermansson et al., 2022; Humphries, 2004; Jönsson, 2014).

While critical social work scholarship has increasingly begun to acknowledge and inquire into these realities, existing studies have largely concentrated on individual casework, ethical dilemmas and advocacy-work. This paper accordingly addresses an enduring gap in the literature by shifting the focus to group work as a site for fostering critical consciousness, processes of political subjectivation and collective resistance. It also reflects on how the researcher is or can be implicated in these processes.

Concretely, I draw from – ongoing and long-term – participatory ethnographic research in an “Association Where People in Poverty Raise their Voice” in Belgium, where bi-weekly group sessions with undocumented migrants are organised and facilitated by social workers. Since September 2025, I have been structurally involved in this praxis, navigating a trifold role of academic, volunteer and social worker, and combining participant observations with interviews with undocumented migrants, practitioners, and analysis of group-produced artefacts and activities.

While still in development, this paper and presentation will (most likely) seek to weave together insights from sociology of emotion and interaction rituals (e.g. Summers-Effler, 2002; Collins, 1990) with critical pedagogy and scholarship on conscientisation (e.g. Freire, 2000). Through this lens, “undoing illegality” does not suggest that group work can simply cancel migration law. Rather, it refers to the ways in which, through collective practices of naming, feeling and acting, group work unsettles the category of the “illegal migrant” as a naturalised, stigmatised identity, and opens spaces where illegalised people can appear and be recognised as political subjects and members of the local community. In doing so, I hope to contribute to current debates on politicising social work and the role of collective, affective practices in challenging border regimes from below.

A Critical Analysis of the Transformation of Documentation Practices, Power Relations, and Professional Autonomy - Kim Bräuer

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The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into social work is promoted as a response to staff shortages, growing documentation requirements, and efficiency pressures within welfare systems. AI-supported documentation tools—such as automated text generation for developmental reports—are presented as promising objectivity, standardisation, and administrative relief. At the same time, these technologies constitute a profound socio-technical transformation of professional practice, raising critical questions about power relations, professional autonomy, and ethical responsibility in social work.

Focusing on sheltered workshops for persons with disabilities, this contribution examines how AI - documentation practices that are central to participation planning and professional judgement. Developmental reports are not merely administrative artefacts; they translate legal requirements, professional interpretations, and relational knowledge into decisions that directly affect the lives of disabled persons. The introduction of AI into these processes therefore has implications that extend far beyond efficiency gains.

The study asks: How do social work professionals in sheltered workshops experience and evaluate the use of AI in the creation of developmental reports, and what consequences do they perceive for professional autonomy, power relations, and ethical practice? The analysis draws on three interconnected perspectives: documentation as a core professional practice; AI as a socio-technical “co-actor” shaping professional decision-making; and critical approaches to ethical and inclusive AI governance. Rather than treating AI as a neutral tool, we conceptualises it as embedded within organisational rationalities and accountability regimes that may reconfigure professional responsibility.

Empirically, the study is based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews with social workers employed in sheltered workshops. Our findings reveal a nuanced and ambivalent picture. Participants acknowledge the potential of AI to reduce repetitive administrative tasks and to free time for relational and pedagogical work. At the same time, they express concerns about the erosion of contextual and relational knowledge, the loss of individualised understanding of service users, and shifting responsibilities when algorithmically generated texts influence professional assessments.

Fears of de-professionalisation are particularly salient, as AI systems may pre-structure interpretations and redefine what counts as “valid” knowledge in documentation practices. Ethical issues—such as data protection, accountability for errors, and the risk of excluding individual lived experiences of persons with disabilities—further intensify these concerns. Professionals emphasise the need for human oversight, training, and participatory involvement in the design and implementation of AI systems.

Research on Social Work Support for Unaccompanied Minors in Germany: What Dominates the Discourse? - Jana Katharina Bürger & Veronika Rosenberger

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Background: Social work support for unaccompanied minors (UMs) is highly diverse, ranging from taking UMs into custody and providing psychosocial support to bureaucratic assistance and transnational social work. The field is highly politicized and polarized, and support is never neutral within it. Different forms of support determine which needs become visible and how power dynamics organize support practices. Research on social work with UMs in Germany include practice, conceptual and empirical publications. This raises the question which topics and perspectives dominate the research discourse: Whose voices are visible, whose remain silenced, and how research reproduces inequalities. This presentation provides insights into the discourse on social work research with UMs in Germany. It aims to identify dominant topics, missing perspectives, and research gaps.

Method: A scoping review (PRISMA-ScR) was carried out for the purpose of this research. Various databases (e.g., Web of Science, PsycInfo, and WISO) were systematically searched. Grey literature was manually added. Of the 1,162 papers screened for eligibility, 388 full texts were analyzed. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined using the PICOS framework. Twenty-six studies that met the inclusion criteria (e.g., published between 2015 and 2024; empirical studies; Germany) were included in the final synthesis.

Results: The included studies provide important information on the type of social work provided for UMs and how it is experienced by social workers and youth. Various research gaps were identified. However, the focus of this presentation is not only on the included studies but also on the excluded studies (n = 774). It becomes clear in this context that many articles on UMs in Germany were not empirical (n = 231), nor did they focus on social work support for UMs, but rather other forms of assistance (n = 24). Instead, the focus was on the practice discourse as well as theoretical considerations. The scoping review revealed that certain themes, such as support concerning integration aspects, received more attention, while research on support related to substance abuse, family relationships, and gender issues was less prevalent. Various reports on practice projects were excluded from the scoping review due to a lack of empirical robustness. However, these projects may provide valuable insights into social work practices.

Discussion: A nuanced analysis of the literature helps understand the themes and positions dominating the academic discourse on social work support for UMs in Germany. Despite the need for empirical research in this area, knowledge generated from practice reports or conceptual articles is important for understanding social work support for UMs in Germany and should not be underestimated. The scoping review highlights the need for critical social work research on underrepresented and invisible topics.

From Dismissal to Dialogue: Advancing Epistemic Justice and Recognising Spirituality as a Site of Social Change in Social Work and Health Care - Patricia Carlisle

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Spirituality is increasingly recognised as an important yet often overlooked dimension of holistic social work and health care. In contexts shaped by rapid social change, uncertainty, and shifting cultural identities, questions of meaning, purpose, and connection remain central to people's lived experiences. This abstract synthesises findings from two studies exploring spirituality, health, and social work practice. One study focuses on spirituality and mental health in social work practice, from which four peer-reviewed journal articles have been published. The second study examines the experiences of healthcare chaplains delivering spiritual care, and of people accessing chaplaincy services; the study report is being finalised with journal submissions planned. Drawing on international literature, both studies, undertaken in Northern Ireland, offer shared implications for social pedagogy, professional practice, and systemic change.

The first study investigates how spirituality features in the narratives of mental health service users and social workers. Grounded in epistemic injustice theory, it highlights how service users' understandings of their spiritual experiences are often dismissed or marginalised within psychiatric and social care settings. Despite increasing emphasis on person-centred practice, participants reported that their meaning-making was constrained, limiting opportunities for dialogue, recovery, and identity affirmation. The findings point to the need for social workers to engage more openly with spirituality as part of values-based practice, meaning making, and respectful knowledge exchange.

The second study explores chaplaincy and spiritual care within Northern Ireland's post-conflict healthcare system. Survey and qualitative data suggest service users (staff, patients, and family members) valued chaplaincy support for its emotional, relational, and spiritual contributions to holistic care. Chaplains, however, reported ongoing challenges, including inconsistent integration within multidisciplinary teams, limited workforce capacity, and insufficient recognition of spiritual care as a core component of health and social service provision. These findings emphasise the importance of culturally competent, inclusive, and proactive spiritual care in a society negotiating complex religious and political legacies.

Together, these studies highlight the need for stronger integration of spirituality across social work and health care. They identify opportunities to address systemic inequalities, promote epistemic justice, and embed spiritual care within pedagogical frameworks and professional cultures. By engaging with spirituality as a site of identity and meaning making, social workers and educators can strengthen their capacity to support diverse communities and contribute to social change within increasingly complex social landscapes.

“They keep doing what they know won’t work”: a search through practice for transforming institutional logics in secure youth care - *Dries Cautreels*

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Historically, youth care policies were shaped by the perception of children as incompetent & potentially dangerous. Child protection aimed at safeguarding their vulnerability & preventing future criminal behavior. This conceptualisation of childhood paved the way for paternalistic & disciplinary state interventions, leading to children’s laws in various western countries early 20th century & a strong reliance on residential care. However, residential care was gradually questioned, a.o. inspired by Goffman’s or Foucault’s critique on residential care & reinforced through the proliferation of human rights.

Residential care for young people thus became contested & regarded as a last resort, with home counselling, community-based & foster care as the first means, and residential care as ultimum remedium. However, conceptualising residential care as last resort has led to a plethora of non-residential interventions, yet these alternatives do not necessarily replace residential youth care. A persistent institutional logic of placement thus remained & was reinforced by a risk-avoidance & containment-pedagogy.

This persistent institutional logic was recently strengthened in Flanders with the introduction of secure care or closed residential youth care for youngsters in a troublesome situation & in need of ‘security’, although the consequences of secure care have been heavily criticised. Therefore, rethinking secure care & the underlying institutional logic is to be advocated for, urging to critically consider how we can question, ‘escape’ or transform this logic to realise children rights & rights-based youth care.

This lecture builds upon a qualitative research project 2023-2025 involving 3 youth care organisations in Flanders trying to establish an alternative for secure care: intensive trajectories without a priori closed residences as means &/or goal thus inherently questioning the institutional logic. The research started with a document analysis & took further shape through semi-structured qualitative interviews with young people and/or their families, support workers & staff from both the three organisations & Flemish policy, extensive ethnographic field work & focus groups.

The findings provide insight in how institutional logics in youth care (at large) can be transformed & how an alternative can be realised. A supported interpretation of security hereby implies that this alternative is by no means a standardised process: tinkering with & embracing a perspective that is unclear from the outset seems to offer opportunities to achieve a shared interpretation & conceptualisation of security.

Transforming institutional logics can hereby be considered a constant as a never-ending challenge, requiring constant critical analysis of logics, regimes & practice. We conclude by elaborating on Institutional Pedagogy as a theoretical framework with this institutional analysis at its core as it may provide a lever for impact & social change.

Social Pedagogy, AI and Child Well-being: Youth Mainstreaming and Digital Inclusion in the Age of AI – Egle Cileliesine & Aukse Petruskeviciute

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Background and purpose:

Artificial intelligence is increasingly integrated into educational systems and shapes the environments in which children and young people learn, interact and participate. International frameworks define AI competence as knowledge, critical understanding and ethical responsibility required from learners (UNESCO 2024) and emphasise inclusive and human-centred approaches to digital transformation (UNESCO 2021; OECD 2019).

This study examines how AI-related themes, digital tools and platforms are integrated into social pedagogical activities in schools and day-care centres working with children and young people. It analyses whether these practices reflect principles of youth mainstreaming and digital inclusion, particularly in relation to participation, agency and democratic competence.

Methods:

The study is based on document analysis of 240 social pedagogical activity and lesson plans developed by teachers and social pedagogues in schools and child and youth day-care centres. The materials were collected across several professional development cycles focused on Life Skills education and participation-oriented practice. A qualitative–quantitative coding framework was applied to identify the presence of AI-related themes and digital tools and to analyse their pedagogical function in relation to participation and democratic competence.

Findings:

AI-related and digital elements are present in a substantial proportion of the analysed activities. Their use is fragmented. Digital tools are most frequently applied for information presentation and task support, occasionally for interaction, and only rarely for co-creation or participatory engagement. Participation is primarily framed at the level of classroom or group interaction rather than through structured mechanisms enabling children and young people to shape digital practices.

Conclusions and implications:

The findings indicate that while AI-related elements are incorporated into social pedagogical activities, their integration remains uneven and predominantly instrumental. The implementation of youth mainstreaming principles in AI-related educational practice is therefore limited.

The romanticisation of suffering and self-destruction in the emo subculture – an analysis of cultural discourses and narratives - Zuzanna Chałubińska

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Contemporary discourses on teenage subcultures increasingly emphasise the aestheticisation of suffering. This is especially true of the emo subculture, which since the beginning of the 21st century has been associated with music characterised by a rebellious attitude towards life, unconventional appearance and a specific lifestyle. The narrative surrounding emo also includes the romanticisation of mental illness and self-destructive behaviour, which pose significant challenges in terms of perspectives on youth, mental health and emotions. In media and popular discourse, the emo subculture is often presented as an environment that aestheticises suffering, suicide and mental crisis.

The speech is theoretical and analytical in character and based on an analysis of the literature on the subject. The aim is to critically present the romanticisation of mental illness and self-destruction not as a one-dimensional threat, but as a complex cultural phenomenon that serves expressive, identity and community functions among young people. This approach requires in-depth reflection and interpretative caution in studies of teenage subcultures, including the emo subculture.

An important element of the presentation will also be a reflection on the functions that narratives of suffering can serve for young people who identify with the emo subculture. Analysis of the literature on the subject indicates that the aestheticisation of depression can be a form of emotional expression, a tool for identity building and an element of community creation, rather than merely an affirmation of self-destruction. In this context, the study will also discuss research on the romanticisation of mental health issues in popular culture and social media.

Empowering Women in Multiethnic Neighborhoods: A Relational Social Work Approach to Community Regeneration - *Francesca Cirillo*

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This paper explores the role of migrant and minority women as key actors in community regeneration processes, with specific attention to the implications for social work practice. It investigates the hypothesis that women play a central role in building and sustaining social ties in multiethnic urban contexts, acting as relational “bridges” between countries of origin and settlement and connecting diverse cultural and social worlds. From a social work perspective, their agency represents a strategic yet often under-recognized resource for fostering social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

The study is based on the case of “The World in a Neighborhood,” a Community Work project launched in 2012 in the Satellite district of Pioltello (Milan, Italy), an area characterized by spatial segregation, high concentration of migrant residents, and limited interaction with Italian-born inhabitants. Within this context, the project implemented initiatives aimed at activating resident women through participatory and empowerment-oriented strategies grounded in Relational Social Work theory (Folgheraiter 2011, 2017; Donati 2010) and aligned with international intercultural frameworks.

The research draws on 43 qualitative interviews conducted with women participants, practitioners, and other stakeholders involved in the project. Data were analyzed through a three-step interpretative process: identification of core themes, exploration of participants’ perceptions of change, and assessment of the methodological contribution of Relational Social Work in supporting collective action and empowerment.

Findings indicate that women—often motivated by caregiving responsibilities and motherhood—are more likely to initiate and sustain collective initiatives, create inclusive spaces, and strengthen trust-based networks across ethnic boundaries. Their engagement has contributed to an “expanded sense of community” and to processes of relational regeneration that counteract isolation and marginalization. However, the study also highlights structural constraints and the need for intentional professional support to transform informal participation into sustainable community leadership.

The paper contributes to international social work debates by demonstrating how gender-sensitive community work can enhance integration processes and by providing practice-based insights for professionals working in contexts marked by migration, diversity, and urban marginality. It suggests that social services should move beyond assistance-oriented models and invest in empowerment strategies that recognize women as co-producers of social change.

The Mirage of Social Work Reform - A Documentary Analysis of the Structural Reorganizations of the General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection of Sector 5, Bucharest – Florina Corina Constantin

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Organizational changes within the General Directorates of Social Work and Child Protection should be determined by the need to streamline public services, adapt to local socio-economic realities and optimize resources.

The mechanism in which changes are made in the structure of public administration in Romania is represented by reorganization processes, usually initiated by decisions of local or county councils.

This paper is part of a larger research project, which will be approached through both qualitative and quantitative methods. The first phase of the study consists of a documentary analysis, focusing on the reorganization processes carried out within nine General Directorates of Social Work and Child Protection in Romania.

The case study presented analyzes the reorganizations within the General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection, Sector 5 - Bucharest, covering the period between 2019 and 2025. The selection of the General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection of Sector 5 for this case study is strategic, as this institution has undergone repeated reorganization processes, furthermore, Sector 5 of Bucharest is characterized by significant social diversity and high degree of social vulnerability among the community.

This documentary analysis examines the evolution of the institution's organizational chart, highlighting the discrepancy between formal reorganizations and real operational needs. The study reveals that administrative changes — such as renaming departments or relocating services — essentially preserve the old basic structures without solving the substantive problems. Within the context of Sector 5, characterized by extensive vulnerable communities, simply changing the names of services does not make up for the chronic shortage of social work specialists; the efficiency of the intervention depends on the number of fieldwork professionals, rather than administrative artifices of organizational charts, on the hierarchical rearrangement of some offices.

Although organizational charts change frequently, systemic problems (underfunding, lack of qualified personnel, and bureaucracy) remain constant, the institution's specialists remain buried in carrying out the same procedures, moreover, reorganization may bring additional responsibilities, without leading to visible improvements in the specialist's direct intervention or providing greater accessibility to the services that that community needs.

This analysis shows that the structural changes implemented within the General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection Sector 5 (and, by extension, across the entire Romania child protection system) remain to a large extent, an exercise in institutional window dressing. Although organizational charts are periodically redesigned to respond to political or legislative pressures, the dysfunctional core of the system remains intact.

Social Work as an Agent of Change in the Integration Pathways of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFMs): A Critical Study of the Misalignment between Migratory Needs and the Structures of the Reception System - Irene Dal Ben, Vincenzo Salerno and Ornella Vidoni

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In contemporary social work research, the pressure to demonstrate impact through measurable numerical indicators often risks obscuring the discipline's deeper mission: the critical analysis of the structures that reproduce inequalities. In line with calls to reclaim researchers' roles as "agents of change," this contribution interrogates dominant narratives surrounding the integration of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFMs), shifting the focus from mere institutional compliance to collective empowerment and social justice.

The study focuses on reception contexts in the Triveneto region of Northern Italy, along the Balkan Route, where a systematic tension emerges between state-defined integration models and the lived biographies of the minors. The Italian system tends to structure pathways based on mainstream educational models characterized by long timeframes and rigid access criteria. These often clash with the urgency expressed by UFMs — primarily from Bangladesh, Pakistan, North Africa, and the Balkans — to enter the labour market quickly. This urgency is not indicative of educational disengagement but is rooted in a transnational "migratory mandate" aimed at financially supporting family members and repaying debts incurred during the journey.

The study adopts a qualitative approach designed to give voice to those often silenced in institutional narratives. Through interviews with UFMs, social workers, and educators, alongside analysis of Individualised Educational Plans (IEPs) and local policy frameworks, the research explores the extent to which structural rigidity within the system may generate new forms of exclusion. Findings indicate that the failure to incorporate the migratory mandate into social planning processes renders institutional pathways insufficiently "credible" in the eyes of the minors. When transnational economic pressures are not acknowledged, UFMs may be pushed toward informal labour markets or, in more critical cases, illicit circuits, thereby undermining protection efforts. Social work practice thus operates within a constant tension between bureaucratic constraints and the need to mediate with the real-life trajectories of young people.

From an activist and imaginative research perspective, the study calls for a rethinking of reception practices beyond standardisation. Social work must assert an advocacy role in order to address administrative barriers and negotiate flexible, responsive pathways that include families of origin within the educational process. Only by aligning research impact with social justice can reception be transformed from a mechanism of control into a vehicle for meaningful social change.

A systemic, social work approach to mental health data and outcomes in Northern Ireland - Gavin Davidson

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Routinely collected information about social work in Northern Ireland has traditionally focused on activity data and individual feedback with no standardised approach to providing information about relevant factors, such as deprivation and trauma, or outcomes. This presentation will outline the process of developing a Regional Mental Health Outcomes Framework and the role of social work researchers as 'agents of change' in informing and influencing the Framework and its implementation.

The Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 for Northern Ireland identified the need to "develop a regional Outcomes Framework in collaboration with service users and professionals, to underpin and drive service development and delivery." This process was led by the Department of Health and included social work researchers who were commissioned to complete three reports to inform the development of the Outcomes Framework. These reports were complemented by a series of workshops and meetings with service users, carers, staff and researchers to discuss their perspectives.

The first report was a rapid review of international approaches to data and outcomes. It highlighted that some frameworks are narrowly focused on clinical outcomes, such as symptoms and risk, and do not provide information on context, inputs, processes or wider outcomes. It suggested that there should be a more holistic approach which includes measures of wellbeing, quality of life and other indicators identified by service users as important. It also identified the need to include data on the social determinants of mental health and their role in individual outcomes.

The second report, commissioned by the Department of Health, involved the development of the Framework. It suggested that the approaches in other countries tended to focus on either population level data or individual level data without integrating those levels. It therefore recommended that the Framework should integrate data on: the social determinants of mental health; population level needs; resources and inputs; activities and processes; professional reported outcomes; and personal reported outcomes.

The third report focused on the implementation process which highlighted: the crucial importance of involvement; the identification and selection of measures; the information systems requirements; the structures, processes and resources for implementation; and the need for the ongoing development and support for the Outcomes Framework.

This process illustrates that through engagement with policy-makers and drawing on international cooperation, involvement and evidence it is possible to inform and influence change from a systemic, social work perspective. Having data on the social determinants of mental health, as well as individual outcomes, does not guarantee that those issues will be appropriately prioritised but it should at least allow the ongoing societal debates to be better informed.

From 'service user' to co-researcher: A voyage in recognizing the value of different knowledge - Saskia De Bruyn

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The search for recognition of experiential knowledge is an ongoing process in the field of social work practice, research and education. Participation is essential to meaningfully include the knowledge of people who experience social exclusion. An increasing number of policy makers, social workers, educators and researchers are engaging in efforts to integrate this knowledge. But to what extent do we include this knowledge in a just way?

Several authors still portray these colleagues and their contributions as merely 'voice' (Krumer Nevo) or refer to them simply as 'service users' (Aaslund, 2014). From the perspective of experts by experience, it often feels as if they are being used merely to tick the participation box. They are cast as passive service recipients rather than recognised as active and indispensable contributors. Without recognition of their knowledge, they cannot fully co create or participate as equal colleagues from start to finish.

In our recent research on climate justice, we collaborated as colleagues, each bringing different forms of knowledge. Such knowledge collaboration is more difficult than it appears, especially when approached with full commitment. We noticed several difficulties in structures and in the minds of people. First of all, including all forms of knowledge in research or other work cannot rely solely on willingness or on colleagues participating only on an ad hoc or voluntary basis. It requires structural embedding within teams, professional roles and organisational frameworks. Furthermore, following Fraser's (2000) understanding of recognition, it must involve questions of position, power, and broader societal definitions of what counts as 'knowledge'.

Finally, working together by including all forms of knowledge is a way to fully realise our role as democratic professionals in social work (Dzur, 2018). This implies an ongoing, authentic search for where such work challenges or even disrupts existing social structures. Within our small research team, we experienced both struggle and growth in developing a profound understanding of the value and necessity of including all forms of knowledge.

We therefore seek to enter into dialogue with the TISSA audience about the challenges, discomforts and opportunities we experienced to foster shared learning and further refine the practice of integrating all forms of knowledge.

"And Justice for All!" Crafting political space for social work with illegalized migrants - *Pascal Debruyne*

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Social work's engagement with undocumented and illegalized families forms a crucial arena for pursuing social justice within increasingly restrictive migration and welfare regimes (Bendixsen & Näre, 2024; De Genova, 2002). In contemporary Europe, welfare state bordering regulates access to social rights through residence, migrancy, and citizenship, thereby stratifying entitlements and life chances (Bendixsen & Näre, 2024). These boundaries transform the welfare state from a guarantor of solidarity into a mechanism of exclusion.

Simultaneously, processes of illegalization construct "migrant illegality" as a legal and political condition, not an individual fact. This production naturalizes hierarchies between citizens and illegalized outsiders, while transferring responsibility for structural exclusion onto those affected (De Genova, 2002). Undocumented families become both deportable and excluded from welfare, rendered visible as problems yet invisible as rights-bearing subjects. Within this paradox -echoing Metallica- "Justice is lost, justice is raped. Justice is gone"; revealing the contradiction of a system promising universality while enacting exclusion.

This paper explores how social work can reclaim its political agency by creating spaces of contestation in solidarity with illegalized migrants. It asks: how do social work organizations and undocumented families enact political practices that resist welfare bordering and illegalization in everyday life? And how can participatory, praxis-oriented research generate political spaces within social work itself (Lather, 1986; Fine, 2007)?

The research combines mapping and participatory action research with social work agencies and undocumented families. First, political acts and strategies are identified through focus groups examining how participants negotiate access to support and recognition. This mapping provides a conceptual overview of everyday political practices. Second, participatory action research facilitates co-creation of counter-practices that confront what Rancière (1999) calls "the Police"—the assemblage of power distributing roles and visibilities in the social order. Drawing on feminist and critical traditions, the study emphasizes engagement, reflexivity, and co-production of knowledge (Lather, 1986; Fine, 2007).

Epistemologically, the project challenges hierarchies of expertise by decentering academic authority and foregrounding the experiential insights of undocumented families and practitioners. This amplifies voices often silenced in policy and scholarly discourse. (Cheah, et.al., 2023) Conceptually, the study advances debates on illegalization and welfare bordering; methodologically, it strengthens justice-oriented, participatory approaches in social work (Bendixsen & Näre, 2024; De Genova, 2002; Rancière, 1999; Van Acker et al., 2021). In doing so, it reimagines "justice for all" beyond the confines of citizenship.

Accountability and learning in collective efforts to tackle homelessness: developing an ecosystem approach - Harm Deleu

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Across social policy domains, there is a growing tendency to assume that tackling complex social issues requires cross-sector and cross-organisational cooperation. In our contribution, we focus on homelessness interventions emerging from ‘collectives’, involving collaborations between multiple organisations and institutions, often referred to as ‘collective impact’ coalitions (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Building on Ebrahim’s (2019) conceptualisation of ecosystem strategies, we understand collaboration as an orchestrated effort aimed at building collective capacity for generating systemic change. In order to monitor and evaluate these contributions, the literature points to at least four basic requirements: (1) a shared problem analysis at the system level detailing the possible roles of relevant actors, (2) an interdependent change model, (3) collective accountability for shared goals and (4) substantial investment in the capacity to organise an ecosystem strategy.

Empirically we focus on three case studies of collaborative coalitions in Flanders that address homelessness: A Way Home coalitions, the chain approach to homelessness in the city of Antwerp (KADANS), and the North Limburg homelessness coordination council.

In line with Ebrahim, our case study research shows that challenges in collective impact coalitions shift over the coalition’s lifespan. Early phases require establishing a shared mission and assessing the projects’ viability, whereas later phases demand a more systematic assessment of impact, focussed on (intermediary) client outcomes and, eventually, on system change. Our study also underscores the importance of backbone functions in the ecosystem: mandated partners who coordinate collaboration (community backbone), document outcomes and communicate the change narrative (evidence backbone), and engage with public authorities (policy backbone).

Taking into account the tensions between accountability and learning in conducting impact evaluations (Cools & Raeymaeckers, 2020), we put forward an approach that does not seek to judge these practices on quantitative impact metrics alone. Rather, it aims to support reflexive accountability, and above all, to foster learning. We therefore take a position against a purely ‘positivist’ research approach, in favour of participatory approaches, aiming to offer contextualised practical insights, rather than proof of causality, to realise social rights.

KEYNOTE - It Takes a Village to Map Social Work's Impact: Repositioning Impact Evaluation as Interpretive and Participatory Practice - Jan Depauw

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Across contemporary welfare systems, social work research is increasingly expected to demonstrate impact through measurable outcomes and evidence-based indicators. While such demands respond to legitimate accountability concerns, they also shape what counts as valid knowledge and meaningful change. When impact is equated with quantifiable effects, the relational, contextual and normative dimensions of social work risk being reduced to simplified metrics.

In this presentation, I argue that the debate on impact is not merely methodological but also ontological and epistemological. It concerns how we understand the nature of social work practice and how we claim to know its effects. Social work unfolds through situated interactions, evolving relationships, contextual negotiations and moral commitments. If this is so, impact cannot be fully captured through attribution logics that isolate variables and seek linear causal proof.

Drawing on my doctoral research, I explore what it means to shift from attribution to contribution as an evaluative orientation. This shift foregrounds mechanisms, context, relational dynamics and meaning-making processes.

Central to the presentation is ACCUMI, a participatory and reflexive approach to impact evaluation developed within a Community of Practice involving practitioners, volunteers and service users. Rather than positioning evaluation as retrospective measurement, ACCUMI embeds it in collective reflection. Through iterative dialogue, co-analysis and programme theorising, stakeholders articulate implicit theories of change, identify contextual mechanisms and examine how impact unfolds over time. Evaluation thus becomes not only a way of showing impact, but a process that shapes and cultivates it.

Conceptually, I frame this repositioning as hermeneutic. Impact is not simply detected; it is interpreted within specific lifeworlds. Knowledge develops through dialogue and reflective engagement with practice. This perspective challenges hierarchical evidence models and reopens space for social work research as a public and critical practice aligned with justice and solidarity.

Because measurement frameworks shape what can be seen, named and valued, the co-construction of evaluation instruments becomes a crucial epistemic act. When stakeholders jointly formulate indicators and debate meaningful transformation, they participate in defining impact itself. Evaluation instruments are not neutral devices; they structure attention, frame interpretation and guide practice. The presentation invites participants to reconsider whether the core challenge lies in refining measurement tools or in rethinking the epistemic foundations that define "impact."

From risk to rights biographies: case file building as a pedagogical strategy in youth care - Lore Dewanckel

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Social policy and social work interventions in the field of youth care are increasingly driven by discourses of 'risk'. Central to the risk paradigm are underlying and ambiguous notions of 'youth at/as risk', with young people both protected against external risks and increasingly regulated as a potential sources of risk themselves. In this study, we invoke the notion of 'risk biographies' to approach case files as a site where risk is constructed and may turn into a biographical feature of youngsters in the care system. However, there is also research evidence that risk biographies may be resisted by practitioners that aim to recentre youth care's fundamental orientation towards youngsters' welfare, needs, and rights. We focus on case file building as an essential element of the realisation of the right to youth care in a risk-oriented context. Building on a conceptualisation of 'documents as agents', we deploy a different approach of looking at case file building where it can become a professional tool and source for participatory dialogue. To study case files 'as agents', a multi-method qualitative methodological approach is needed. We triangulate insights from case file analysis, interviews with professionals and youngsters, and ethnographic fieldwork in a youth care organization that pays particular attention to the case file building process. Whereas most case file research in child and youth services takes a quantitative and decontextualized approach, our aim is to focus on case file building as a practice and process situated in an institutional context. We reflect on how a multi-method approach allowed us to examine its potential as a critical pedagogy for professionals to act as advocates of youngsters by reflexively and dialogically engaging them (and their families) as co-creators of their files as 'rights biographies' that orient professional interventions towards the realization of their welfare and rights. We focus on 4 main topics emerging from the case file building process and analysis itself: (1) ownership, (2) problem construction, (3), accountability, (4) reflexivity.

Conducting engaged research in the context of a cross-national project: Reflections on finding your own voice while still fulfilling project deliverables - *Bas Dikmans*

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This individual presentation discusses two novel research phenomena. First, a growing number of researchers across academia are making use of participatory approaches, which are diverse and can be grounded in different epistemologies (i.e., directed at engaging participants directly in research or at addressing forms of inequality within an emancipatory framework). At the same time, PhD researchers are increasingly writing their dissertations as part of externally funded research projects, which has individual benefits in terms of research collaborations and learning trajectories. Nevertheless, these projects are often evaluated and funded on the basis of pre-defined deliverables, which is mostly incongruent with how participatory research is designed, as this type of research tends to be less analytically clear-cut, often rejecting uni-directionality or strict hierarchies.

It is within this tension that this individual presentation will be based: I am a postdoctoral researcher, who is a trained anthropologist and adult educational scientist, and during my PhD research I was involved in a cross-national project, spanning 4 countries. At the same time, my fieldwork took place in 2022-2023 with older adults in two disadvantaged Brussels' neighborhoods. During this presentation, I will reflect on my own PhD trajectory, and mainly the first two years of my research, where I had to navigate the tension between being an engaged researcher in the neighborhoods I was studying and fulfilling set project aims. As such, I will discuss strategies I used for finding my own voice within pre-established structures.

Questions that will come up in this presentation center around why it is important, particularly when working with disadvantaged groups, to find space for inclusivity and participation, and when and how to achieve this, but more particularly I want to focus on how I sought to navigate alignment with collective project goals, while maintaining epistemological, methodological and analytical autonomy as much as possible.

Mainly, I want to highlight two key strategies that I found useful: 1) An ethnographic mindset, such as being regularly present and having small talks with residents and professionals, before, during and after interviews took place (in addition to organizing more formal introductory presentations and debrief sessions) provided me with the opportunity to get to know participants, gain trust and understand their perspectives, 2) the inclusion of a participatory methodological tool during data collection, which in my case were life diagrams, made it easier to explore participants' lived experiences.

With this presentation, I hope to inspire a discussion on how to navigate being an early-career as a researcher in 21st century academia, while reflecting on how 'impact' in a local context can be realized through finding your own methodological space within often rigid and unflexible project designs.

Hidden Carer Harm across the British Isles - A TRACE Policy Analysis

- Sarah Donnelly

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Across Europe, 80% of all care is provided by family carers. The responsibility for providing care has increasingly shifted away from formal services to families. Emerging research has shed light on the issue of bidirectional care within family caregiving relationships with the evolving concept of ‘carer harm’ (Isham et al., 2021; Donnelly et al. 2024). Family carers and professionals report that carers and the person they support may be exposed to additional or exacerbated harm by the ‘system’, which includes the policy and legislative framework. This paper offers an analysis of the nature of policy as it relates to ‘carer harm’: abuse and/or harm of family carers (carers) supporting a relative with care and support needs. The analysis is situated on the nexus of policies relating to: family care, domestic abuse and adult abuse/adult safeguarding. The authors represent all five of the countries that make up the British Isles and are motivated to conduct this work by growing evidence that carer harm is an increasing, yet largely unacknowledged, issue. This paper reports on a policy analysis of five countries using the Trace methodology. The overarching aim of this policy analysis was to bring to light assumptions about and silences around carer harm across the most relevant social care policy areas in the British Isles.

The key questions were:

- To what extent is harm to carers (whether perpetrated by individuals, organisations or systems) rendered visible in the policies surrounding care, caring, safeguarding and abuse, across the five nations of the British Isles?
- How do the ways that “harm” is understood within these policies contribute to the visibility or invisibility of carer harm?
- How do the ways that “care” is understood within these policies contribute to the visibility or invisibility of carer harm?
- How might carer harm be reframed, using an ethic of care, in policy, to improve the recognition and responses to this hidden concern?

To answer these questions, we used the Trace method (Sevenhuijsen 2004) of policy analysis.

Findings and Conclusions: Carer harm is rarely acknowledged and there is a complete lack of recognition of the direct harm that can be inflicted by the cared for person on the carer. The visibility of carer harm across all policy areas is minimal, and when it is acknowledged, there is a failure to frame it within both its structural and relational contexts. Across the policy documents, the conceptual tensions between viewing care as a private moral duty versus a rights-based entitlement are evident. The structural and gendered realities of harm remain underexamined, leaving the most pervasive and cumulative forms of harm, those embedded in the organisation of care itself, largely unaddressed. We conclude that the proceduralisation of protection, coupled with the moral valorisation of care, sustains a policy environment in which harm is invisible within the ordinary functioning of welfare support and family life.

Relational transparency as a driver of social change in a grassroots project for homeless young adults - *Gretl Dons*

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Relational transparency as a driver of social change in a grassroots project for homeless young adults
In social work, transparency is increasingly approached as an instrument for accountability and risk management. This interpretation, grounded in a managerial logic, stands in tension with the pedagogical core of social work, in which dialogue, participation, and democratic relationships are central. This paper starts from a relational understanding of transparency as an ethical–political practice that contributes to social change, rather than as a neutral method or communicative technique.

Drawing on auto-ethnographic research embedded in a grassroots shelter initiative for homeless young adults in Flanders, we examine what happens when we try to embed relational transparency consistently in practice. The analysis focuses on a case involving financial guardianship and reveals how professional knowledge, institutional logics, and legal frameworks function as technologies of power that reproduce inequality and dependency, while being presented as “neutral,” caring, and rational.

By approaching relational transparency as language in action, we demonstrate how social workers not only act within systems but also—often unconsciously—legitimate them. Inspired by Foucault and Žižek, we analyse how ideological assumptions about vulnerability, autonomy, and professionalism take shape in everyday practices, and how making these assumptions explicit can create space for counter-power, participation, and critical awareness.

Who's to Blame: Female and Male Rape Myths in Italy and Germany - Nicol Ellecosta

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Rape myths are stereotypes and prejudices that excuse sexual assault and blame victims, often rooted in sexist and traditional gender role beliefs. These myths help maintain social inequality. While most research on acceptance of rape myths (RMA) focuses on Anglo-American cultures, there are few comparative studies across different cultural settings.

This doctoral research examines differences in RMA between Italian and German participants. The study involved 651 participants (323 from Italy and 328 from Germany). To ensure comparability, the same questionnaire, including demographic questions, was administered to both groups to examine potential differences in the prevalence, structure, and predictors of RMA. The research tool employed in this study comprises the Italian- and German-translated versions of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Subtle Version (IRMA-S) and the Male Rape Myths Scale – Revised (MRMS-R). To assess whether traditional gender beliefs influence RMA, the System Justification–Gender scale was used. Furthermore, the BIDR-6 scale was used to determine potential social desirability bias in responses.

Confirmatory factor analysis verified the validity of the translated scales. The results also revealed interesting differences in the acceptance of rape myths between the two samples. First, the Italian sample showed lower acceptance of female rape myths than the German sample. However, the opposite was found for male rape myths. In both samples, men show higher levels of RMA, regardless of the victim's gender. Overall, male rape myths are more widely accepted than female rape myths in both samples.

Beyond descriptive and prevalence analyses of the phenomenon, the study also investigated potential contributing factors related to RMA. In both samples, acceptance of female rape myths correlated with a higher likelihood of endorsing male rape myths, and vice versa. Additionally, adherence to traditional gender roles and male gender identity were significant predictors of rape myths.

The connection between the consideration of social problems by management and politics and the safeguarding of social cohesion in Poland and Germany - Marta Czapnik-Jurak & Jörg Fischer

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The connection between the consideration of social problems by management and politics and the safeguarding of social cohesion in Poland and Germany.

The perception and articulation of social problems have a major impact on the way in which social problems are addressed. The process of articulating needs, developing and planning welfare state responses, practical implementation, and evaluating success and effectiveness is always influenced by how society deals with social challenges in general and how members of society stick together socially. The quality of social cohesion, along with other factors such as material resources and political support, has a decisive impact on how social problems are tackled.

Based on our own research, we want to show how social cohesion affects the perception and management of social challenges and how professional and political leaders want to and can influence this interaction.

Using the Polish study, we will show how malnutrition manifests itself in different social and institutional contexts and how it is perceived from the perspectives of various stakeholders. Particular attention will be paid to children and young people. Food security is one of the key dimensions of societal development and its disruption contributes to the accumulation of social problems, including growing social inequalities and polarization. Malnutrition is systemically overlooked because it is most often identified exclusively with a lack of food (quantitative malnutrition) rather than with the poor nutritional quality of available food (qualitative malnutrition). We can demonstrate that hunger among children is often normalized rather than recognized as a social problem requiring systemic measures.

A German study based on a survey of East German social administration managers shows which individual characteristics contribute to the ability and willingness to influence social cohesion. According to the study, social problems do not only consist of an objective component, but are also shaped by the perceptions and approaches of senior administrative officials. In particular, the overarching goal of creating social cohesion is heavily dependent on the administration's own patterns of thinking and acting. We show how this perception is influenced.

Both examples serve as a basis for analytically questioning the connection between management and politics taking social problems into account and ensuring social cohesion.

Understanding change in life conduct systems: Why process research matters for assessing impact in outpatient family support - Valentin Frangen

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Outpatient family support *(ambulante Hilfen zur Erziehung*) is under increasing pressure to prove its effectiveness. The research logic established for this purpose primarily measures the outcomes of professional interventions. This provides important insights, but it obscures how changes in the life conduct of service users actually come about and what role factors beyond the intervention play in this. It is therefore not surprising that what happens between the beginning and end of a support program - the support process - is often described as a "black box" (Grasshoff, 2024; Klawe, 2006).

This paper presents the initial findings of an ongoing PhD project that explores the question: How and why do changes occur in the life conduct systems of service users in the course of outpatient family support? The study inquires into important events and developments in life conduct systems (Sommerfeld et al., 2011) over a period of 8 to 12 months. In seven cases, separate interviews are conducted with service users and professionals at intervals of six to eight weeks. The longitudinal perspective allows for differentiations that retrospective surveys cannot provide—for example, between what is experienced as helpful in the course of the support and what proves to be sustainable.

Initial empirical observations show that changes in life conduct arise from the interaction of various areas of life - not just those addressed by the professional. Developments in the service user's life, such as a change of job, a move, or a separation, can trigger changes in parenting issues that the professional may address but did not cause. Conversely, opposing dynamics in other areas of life can undermine the work of the professional. Professional action that focuses only on one aspect of life conduct may then remain merely symptomatic treatment.

It also appears that changes in life conduct emerge where the institutional time logic of the support and the biographical dynamics of service users coincide - this also indicates that impact does not depend solely on the intervention, but on conditions that go beyond it.

The presentation will use initial empirical findings to show that a purely intervention-centred understanding of impact is insufficient for understanding how changes in life conduct systems occur during outpatient family support. The process research focused on here, with a systemic understanding of impact - in which impact is understood as the result of the interaction of various system elements, not as the linear result of an intervention - can help to reveal the paths to change in the life situations of service users.

Defending Inclusion: Practices of Knowledge Production in Social Pedagogy and Education Research in Germany and the U.S. - Steffen Geiger

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Knowledge plays a pivotal role in modern knowledge societies. In this context, science and research as an institution have the task to produce and disseminate knowledge through socially legitimised methods. Furthermore, they are seen as the basis of social innovation processes and as a “dynamic force of social change” (Merton 1968, p. 585). Social pedagogy as a scientific discipline, thus, influences educational practices and processes of support as well as social structures. The production of knowledge is also related to define and reflect relevant terms and concepts. This is especially relevant to inclusion. The term has been strongly discussed in recent years and inclusion has substantially influenced the interpretation of social reality. However, with the rise of right-wing governments, such as in the U.S., and right-wing populist movements, such as in Germany, the idea of inclusion is questioned and challenged. Social pedagogy and education research in general can be influenced by such developments, as science and the production of knowledge is embedded in social contexts.

Against this background, the question arises as to how social pedagogy positions itself in the context of inclusion, how the concept is constructed by research and which discursive practices are used in this process. To identify the unique discursive practices of social pedagogy, a comparison is made between the discipline of general education research. Furthermore, a comparison between Germany and the USA appears particularly productive in light of current political discourses. In doing so, 203 articles with inclusion in the title in five German and five U.S. American academic journals have been analysed with a discourse and a sequence analytical approach (Keller, 2011; Strauss 1994).

The results reveal that in both countries a similar understanding of inclusion exist that is focused on the realisation of participation for all. However, social pedagogy in Germany has a special focus on normative argumentations and reflections and system-related structures, whereas general education has a stronger focus on empirical investigations of beliefs and understandings of inclusions of professionals. But both disciplines refer to human rights to justify inclusion. In the U.S., a large part of the articles presents results of empirical investigations with a focus on beliefs and didactics, too, but the articles refer the national political and legal frame. Against this back-ground, discourses in Germany and the U.S. especially promote inclusion and social justice. However, the results also show that social pedagogy in Germany uses different discursive practices to argue for inclusion compared to the U.S. This is especially related to the specific cultures of science (e.g. Keiner, 2011). But both education research and social pedagogy are strong institutions to defend inclusion against right-wing actors.

No 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' without 'Redistribute, Recognize, Represent' - Birgit Goris

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Climate change and social inequality are among the major challenges of the 21st century. These issues are closely interconnected, as addressing climate change should mostly be considered a matter of (re)distribution. As early as 1987, the Brundtland Report highlighted the link between economic growth and climate change, noting that the poorest countries are the most severely affected. A key concept in this debate is sustainability, which should be understood as a political and value-driven notion (Block & Paredis, 2015), which shapes the social outcomes.

Current climate policies use the term 'sustainability' in a non-transformative way and therefore reinforce the social inequality in climate change rather than diminishing it. Other researchers stated that those living in the most vulnerable positions in society don't contribute as much to climate change, but they suffer most from the consequences, in policy measures as well as in the effects of the climate change itself. (Chancel, 2017; Jhagroe, 2024; Vanhille, Goedemé & Verbist, 2019; Van Lancker & Otto, 2022; Lebbe & Apostel, 2023). Climate policy needs a democratic debate in order to make it a socially just transition.

According to the international definition of social work (IFSW, 2014), social workers strive to promote social justice. However, regarding the climate issue, the profession has remained relatively silent. Several authors (Jansen & Willems, 2024; De Jong & Springhuizen, 2025) have explored the link between social work and climate policy. In these contributions, the role of social work is often delineated around specific themes such as climate disasters, energy poverty, energy transition, mobility, and housing renovation. Frequently used concepts in this context include "Green Social Work" (Dominelli, 2012; Kuiper, Broekhuis & Santpoort, 2022) and "ecosocial work" (De Brabander, 2023; Närhi, Matthies & Hirvilammi, 2025).

In 2026, the question therefore remains what the position of social workers in different areas of social work is regarding the climate issue. How do they define this eco-just society? How do they consider their role in achieving this social justice? What do social workers nowadays contribute to this goal? In which way do they consider the knowledge of people living in the most vulnerable situations in society as absolutely necessary in this democratic debate?

To answer these questions, we conducted a closed-ended quantitative survey, supplemented by a limited number of open-ended questions. The aim of this large-scale survey among social workers in diverse fields of practice in Flanders and Brussels, is to gain insight into the role of social workers, social work organisations and their collaboration with colleagues with experiential knowledge. We continue and adapt the approach, effectuated in the Netherlands (2023, Movisie).

KEYNOTE - Research as Critical Intervention: Reflexive Effects of Studying Far-Right Influence on Social Work - Eva Grigori & Viktória Borda

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Across Europe, social work is increasingly shaped by neoliberal welfare reforms, political polarisation and welfare-chauvinist shifts promoting renationalisation, performance-based governance, conservative family norms and punitive labour-market and anti-poverty policies. Positioned at the interface of policy and practice, social work is directly affected by political redefinitions of access to resources, belonging and deservingness. Far-right influence rarely appears as explicit directives. Rather, it is experienced as shifts in atmosphere, common sense and professional boundaries, and through changing client trajectories that translate political pressure into everyday practice. This paper draws on the research project Social Work and Far Right Influences in European Democracies (SoFRiED), which investigates far-right influence on social work in Germany, Austria and Hungary. Rather than presenting SoFRiED solely as a mixed-methods empirical study, this paper conceptualises it as critical intervention in a politically contested field, arguing that participation in the research process itself produces impact.

Studying far-right influence generates reflexive, political and emotional effects not only for practitioners but also for researchers. Making this field visible involves unevenly distributed and not fully controllable exposure, including professional risk in politically polarised contexts. Research as critical intervention is a shared yet unevenly distributed risk, raising ethical questions about positionality, vulnerability, and responsibility. Simultaneously, the project's transnational, collaborative design fosters international solidarity and collective sense-making, facilitating novel analytical perspectives and political imaginaries.

At the level of practice, the research intervenes through naming, politicisation and forced reflexivity. Experiences often described as diffuse pressures or individual coping problems are reframed as political phenomena linked to welfare-state restructuring and de-professionalisation. By rendering these dynamics speakable and analysable, the research legitimises them as professional concerns. The research encounter further interrupts routines and invites ethical self-positioning regarding professional autonomy, democratic participation rights and the boundaries of social work under far-right pressure. Participation thus becomes a reflexive event that unsettles normalisation, even without overt mobilisation.

In line with the conference theme, the paper proposes a broader understanding of impact—not only as measurable change, but as the capacity of research to unsettle and politicise professional practice under conditions of democratic and institutional pressure. It invites discussion on how social work research can inhabit this critical role without collapsing into advocacy or instrumentalisation.

KEYNOTE - Directions of development and challenges of social work in Poland – Ewa Grudziewska

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Contemporary social work in Poland is undergoing intense transformation as a result of social, demographic and cultural changes, as well as the growing diversity of needs among people receiving institutional support. One of the important but still insufficiently addressed areas is working with neurodiverse individuals, including those on the autism spectrum, with ADHD and other neurodevelopmental differences.

The aim of the presentation is to analyse the directions of development of social work in Poland in the context of growing awareness of neurodiversity and to identify the challenges it poses for professional practice and the social support system. The paper will discuss issues related to the need to adapt social work methods to the diverse communication styles, cognitive functioning and sensory needs of clients, as well as the importance of an approach based on the strengths and respect for the subjectivity of neurodiverse people.

Particular attention will be paid to systemic challenges such as insufficient staff training, limited availability of specialist training, lack of consistent working standards and insufficient cross-sectoral cooperation. The presentation also reflects on the role of social work in counteracting the social exclusion of neurodiverse people and in building inclusive social services that respond to contemporary social needs.

Night shelter evaluation as contested policy research - Hans Grymonprez

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Evaluations of social work practice are frequently framed as neutral exercises in evidence generation. Yet in practice, they often function as political instruments that stabilize preferred narratives rather than interrogate structural failures. Drawing on Uggerhøj's critique of practice research as an inherently political space (2011) this paper problematizes the assumption that commissioned policy research can ever be methodologically or ethically innocent.

Our study of a locally commissioned night shelter evaluation exposes how "outsourced research" frequently carries unstated agendas: legitimizing predetermined decisions, deflecting responsibility, or managing reputational risk. Researchers and policy officers (in this case socialized into similar epistemic research culture) are subtly steered toward acceptable framings of homelessness, while more disruptive analyses are deprioritized or procedurally neutralized. Reflexivity is invoked rhetorically but rarely applied to interrogate the political economy of the commission itself. Also the researchers agency comes under scrutiny as they have to navigate various agenda's.

Attempts to "bring in service user voices" reveal further tensions. People using night shelters hold divergent, sometimes contradictory experiences shaped by trauma, street economies, survival strategies and (previous) interactions with shelters. Treating these voices as a homogeneous data source risks tokenism and erasure. Instead of celebrating participation, we show how institutional constraints frequently reduce lived experience to a legitimacy device that supports, rather than challenges, existing service models.

We argue for a more confrontational practice of co-construction—one that does not romanticize collaboration, but instead foregrounds conflict, asymmetrical power, and the possibility of questioning the commission's terms. By mapping the historical relationships between researchers, policymakers, and homelessness services, we illuminate how methodological choices are conditioned by political histories, organizational loyalties and researchers agency.

This presentation calls on TISSA scholars to critically resist the depoliticization of research and to reclaim policy research as a space where contestation, discomfort, and structural critique are not obstacles but essential conditions for truth-telling.

Context Counts: Improving the analysis of intersectional socio-economic contexts in Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews - Anna Gupta

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There is growing consensus that families' socio-economic circumstances are not a background issue but should be viewed as a key causal factor in the emergence of child maltreatment. Despite increasing evidence of the negative impact of poverty, poor housing and other related factors on parenting and children's development, the significance of poverty remains contested in child protection policies and practices. The dominant narrative of individual responsibility and blame discounts the systemic impact of poverty, resulting in agency priorities, structures and models of practice that exacerbate the very issues that child protection interventions aim to address.

Child maltreatment rates are known to reflect multiple connections between families' socio-economic circumstances and social categories which reflect people's identities, such as gender, ethnicity, age and disability. An intersectional analysis provides a way to understand how multiple marginalised identities interact within structures of power and systemic inequality. Class is one of the dimensions of an intersectional approach; however, if overly focussed on social identities, an intersectional analysis can lack necessary attention to material deprivation linked to poverty and related hardships.

A key mechanism with the aim of improving child protection practice in England has been statutory reviews of cases involving significant harm or death. Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) identify learning from these cases and make influential recommendations for interagency policy and practice locally and nationally. This presentation will discuss a research study 'Context Counts' that analysed how the intersectional socio-economic context of families' lives was understood and addressed in LCSPRs. The study included 1) quantitative content analysis of LCSPRs (239) within a set period; 2) a qualitative reflexive thematic analysis of a sample of LCSPRs; 3) a series of workshops with families, practitioners and policy makers.

Whilst many LCSPRs mentioned socio-economic descriptors, most frequently housing related issues, there was little evidence of professional practice or analysis in the reviews that engaged with how these factors intersected with other social inequalities and impacted the lives of the children and their families. The recommendations of reviews most frequently focussed on better communication between professionals thereby only providing a very partial and superficial analysis of how child protection can be improved. This study makes recommendations for how LCSPRs can better incorporate an intersectional socio-economic approach. Through various dissemination activities with practitioners and policy makers it is hoped that LCSPRs can be improved and by changing the way LCSPRs are undertaken, child protection practice will also be impacted.

Making Violence Tellable: Narratives of Harm in Child and Youth Care - Anna Hamer

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In social work and social pedagogical research, harm and violence are often treated as identifiable phenomena that can be assessed and evaluated. This paper questions this assumption by asking under which discursive and interactional conditions experiences become narratable and recognisable as violence. Rather than assuming violence as self-evident, the analysis examines how its meaning is produced in and through storytelling.

The paper draws on narrative interviews with young people who had been placed in highly coercive forms of out-of-home care. It explores how accounts of harm emerge within available interpretive frameworks of responsibility, education and normalisation. While some experiences are explicitly marked as violence, others are narrated as necessary intervention, discipline or even support. The absence of the term “violence” does not indicate the absence of injury; it points to the normative boundaries that shape what can be articulated and acknowledged.

This refers to subject positions, discursive expectations and social classifications that regulate what can be told and how it can be told. Narrating harm is understood as a situated practice that unfolds not only in relation to broader welfare discourses, but also within the specific interactional setting of the research encounter. The interview situation itself provides particular addressings and expectations that may subtly frame how participants position themselves and their past experiences.

Methodologically, the paper foregrounds narratability as an analytical lens connecting biography, discourse and interaction. By examining how violence is rendered visible, reframed or left implicit within narratives, the contribution argues for a reflexive understanding of social work research as a practice that participates in shaping the conditions under which harm becomes intelligible.

Social Rehabilitation as a Path to Autonomy and Empowerment: The Role of Social Pedagogues and Social Workers in Community-Based Services for People with Disabilities - Magdalena Hanková

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Community-based social rehabilitation (CBSR) services in the Czech context support people with disabilities in developing specific capabilities and skills in nine areas related to daily activities essential for achieving autonomy: exercise of rights, safety, work and self-actualization, social relations, eating, coping with everyday tasks and self-care, communication, autonomy, and health care. Social workers, often educated in social pedagogy, act as agents of change, as their interventions contribute to the empowerment of people with disabilities in these domains. It is therefore essential to involve service users in monitoring and evaluating CBSR outcomes to assess the long-term impact of interventions on their ability to manage daily activities autonomously. This paper is based on an empirical study by Hanková, M., Kroutilová Nováková, R., Martinčová, J., & Hricová, A. (2025). Social Rehabilitation to Strengthen the Autonomy and Self-Sufficiency of Disabled People: Pre–Post Study. *Research on Social Work Practice* (online first).

Research Questions

- (1) To what extent are nine monitored areas addressed for study participants in relation to achieving their autonomy in community living?
- (2) What changes were observed in the nine monitored areas for study participants?
- (3) In which of the nine monitored areas have study participants showed the most and least significant changes?

Methodological Framework Mixed-methods design with two waves of data collection (2020-2021) was employed, involving structured rating interviews with individuals with disabilities (N2020 = 105, N2021 = 95) and semi-structured interviews with their social workers (N2020, 2021 = 16). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test for paired samples was used to analyze quantitative data. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to validate quantitative findings and provide an interpretative framework for differences observed between the two measurement periods.

Improvements were quantitatively observed and qualitatively validated across all monitored areas ($p < 0.001$ for all domains), with the most notable gains in communication (premean = 2.95; postmean = 3.27; Cohen's $d = 0.619$, $p < 0.001$) and eating (premean = 3.07; postmean = 3.35; Cohen's $d = -0.38$, 95% CI [-0.56, -0.21]). The lowest difference was observed in the domain of social relations (premean = 2.82; postmean = 3.02; Cohen's $d = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$).

The findings demonstrate the positive impact of CBSR interventions on the autonomy of individuals with disabilities. Despite significant improvements across all nine monitored areas, substantial positive changes across multiple domains were identified in 25 % of participants, indicating the interconnectedness of acquired skills. Further investigation focusing on this subgroup would be valuable in identifying additional variables that may predict the positive impact of CBSR interventions on participants' ability to manage daily activities autonomously.

“Expanding the Spectrum”: Insights from the Formation of Hearing Voices Groups - Eyal Harel

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Background: Hearing voices and other non-ordinary experiences are commonly pathologized as psychosis/schizophrenia symptoms. In contrast, the Hearing Voices Movement (HVM) reframes these as meaningful human variations, emphasizing peer support and lived-experience knowledge. While hundreds of Hearing Voices Groups (HVGs) operate worldwide with positive impacts, the model remains nascent in Israel, offering unique insight into early implementation within its conservative/neoliberal and partly humanistic field. This study aims to unsettle dominant pathologizing narratives, analyzing challenges and opportunities in implementing critical perspectives. It explores participants' and facilitators' experiences, focusing on meaning, coping, identity, and group dynamics. **Methods:** This critical-phenomenological study foregrounds marginalized perspectives, aligning with an activist research practice. 14 Israeli HVG participants & facilitators (most with lived experience) were recruited via purposeful sampling. Semi-structured interviews used Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, integrated with narrative elements, to identify recurring patterns and participants' narratives of meaning.

Results: Five themes:

1. The groups provided a safe, containing space, fostered deep listening and belonging.
2. An identity-formation: shifting from shame to pride, reclaiming “madness” and “normality,” fostering empowerment, articulating critical perspectives.
3. Culturally-situated narration and meaning-making toward voice-hearing, developing coping strategies.
4. HVGs as liminal spaces, marked by plural meanings; flexible roles; and polyphonic approach to diverse perspectives. Facilitators held these in a stable setting.
5. Facilitators' dialectical roles balancing leadership with partnership, combining professional and lived-experience expertise, experiencing liberation.

Discussion: The findings suggest HVGs enabling participants to move from isolation and stigma toward belonging, empowerment, identity formation, and meaning-making. These dialogical, liminal, polyphonic, and safe arenas foster expanded agency, mutual liberation, and co-created knowledge. Applying Freirean pedagogy, this study positions HVG facilitators as practitioners of critical-collaborative practice challenging the mono-psychiatric approach. Facilitators co-create spaces where participants become subjects of their own meaning-making. HVGs provide cultural infrastructure expanding the legitimate repertoire of meanings available for non-ordinary experiences, moving beyond the bio-medical model to collective transformation of valid knowledge about the self. These dynamics unfolded in a unique cultural context, representing the first implementation step of a critical alternative.

Implications: HVGs demonstrate how community-based spaces can serve as sites of epistemological resistance, amplifying marginalized voices and generating alternative knowledge that challenges dominant narratives.

Being normal or deviant in a digital citizenship: An interactionist perspective on handling communication with digital authorities - Teres Hjarpe

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Citizens are increasingly expected to manage digital communication with authorities, yet are not necessarily able to do so for different reasons. The aim of this study was to explore how citizens experience and handle digital welfare services they depend on and what happens at the intersection between personal competences and societal expectations; here referred to as 'a digital citizenship'. A total of 72 participants were interviewed in open semi-structured interviews individually or in group. From an interactionist perspective and informed by the concepts 'social acceleration', 'social breakdown/social reconstruction', and the Goffmanian approach to self and stigma, four strategies to handle shortcomings in digital communication with authorities were identified. In a context where citizens were expected to be digitally prepared, these strategies have implications for/connections to how citizens' define/present themselves in relation to being 'normal'. The conclusions drawn were that communication with digital authorities needs to be more oriented towards diversity and practicality, facilitating a combination of digital and analogue options and thereby safeguarding both technological development and social sustainability.

Wartime Workplace Integration Experiences of Newly Qualified Social Workers - Yael Hochman

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The transition from academia to professional practice is widely recognized as a challenging period for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs). Empirical literature consistently identifies substantial personal, professional, and organizational challenges that NQSWs encounter during this transition, highlighting that this transition is embedded within broader socio-political and organizational structures that both enable and constrain professional development and shape normative expectations regarding competence, resilience, and professional responsibility. However, little attention has been paid to how this transition unfolds amid large-scale collective traumatic events, contexts in which intensified structural and emotional demands are framed as normative through dominant professional narratives, shifting responsibility onto individuals and limiting critical examination of organizational and systemic arrangements. To fill this gap, the present qualitative study explores this transition as perceived and articulated by Israeli NQSWs within a shared traumatic reality (STR). Three online focus groups were conducted with twelve Israeli NQSWs who entered the workplace shortly before and during the 2023-25 Israel-Gaza war. Thematic analysis of the data revealed the complex and often unsettling experiences of NQSWs, shaped by multiple challenges arising from the convergence of their early-career status and wartime context. Three main themes characterized the NQSWs' experiences: (1) Heightened ambivalence about the transition; (2) Disruption of professional socialization; and (3) Protecting others vs. self.

These findings offer a nuanced understanding of NQSWs' experiences of integrating into the workplace during wartime, highlighting their invisibility and vulnerability, and the ways structural and organizational arrangements exacerbate these challenges. Prevailing transition-to-practice models insufficiently address the developmental, emotional, and professional needs of NQSWs in STR contexts, revealing a critical gap in both higher education and organizational preparation. The study underscores the importance of cultivating organizational cultures that balance urgent service delivery with explicit recognition of NQSWs' developmental and emotional needs. Such practices are vital not only for supporting NQSWs' immediate functioning during crises but also for fostering resilient professional identities, sustaining long-term competence, and challenging normative assumptions that obscure systemic responsibility. By making these dynamics visible, the study positions social work researchers and educators as agents of change, advocating for systemic reforms that align professional preparation with the realities of shared traumatic contexts.

Action research on young homeless adults - Hubert Höllmüller

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The number of homeless young adults (aged 18-30) is rising in Austria. In Vienna alone, there are approximately 4,000. There are no figures for the rest of Austria. While the city of Vienna has switched its homeless assistance to the concept of housing first with opportunity houses, the rest of Austria continues to work traditionally with emergency shelters. In Klagenfurt, the self-help association MOMO has been in existence for two years, where young adults – all of whom are broken care leavers – try to overcome their challenges themselves with the voluntary support of social workers. For the past year, there has been a cooperation between MOMO, the association little home Deutschland, and the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences, Department of Social Work. Following a pilot project in which the first little home 2.0 was built in Klagenfurt in the summer of 2025 with the support of little home Deutschland, in collaboration with students and MOMO members, a second little home will now be built in May 2026 as part of an ERASMUS Intensive program. At the same time, efforts are being made with officials from the city of Klagenfurt and the Poverty Conference to organize a site for homeless young adults where these little homes can be set up and used under the auspices of the MOMO association.

Another public relations tool for this project is a book of interviews with broken care leavers, who talk very openly and reflectively about their experiences in child and youth welfare, which were unsuccessful for them. This action research project thus comprises four groups: the support systems that have not been effective in the past and present; the people affected, who are organizing themselves to improve their situation; the social space of a state capital, where homelessness is manifest and solutions must be found; and universities in Slovenia, Germany, and Austria, which are researching the topic with their students as part of an intensive program and linking it back to theory. In addition, however, they are also preparing and implementing concrete solutions. The aim is to take concrete steps in a complex problem area through scientific discourse. This should serve the following purpose: “As researchers, this role as ‘agents of change’ risks becoming constrained when impact is defined primarily in managerial or technocratic terms. What is needed is space for a more activist, critical, and imaginative research practice. Research should not only describe social realities; it should also question and unsettle them. It should open new political and conceptual possibilities instead of merely confirming institutional expectations.”

Life-Course Policy Gaps in Disability Support: Rethinking Social Impact for Families of Persons with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities in Romania - Sandica Ion

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In contemporary social work research, social impact is increasingly assessed through short-term, measurable indicators. However, such approaches often fail to capture how fragmented disability policies shape the long-term trajectories of vulnerable families. This paper argues that meaningful impact must be evaluated across the life-course, particularly in contexts where services for persons with disabilities remain structurally underdeveloped.

The paper draws on two qualitative studies conducted in Romania. The first explored the needs of families raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Eleven categories of needs were identified, including access to specialized services, integration, financial security, information, respite, and emotional support. Parents described navigating fragmented systems, insufficient professional coordination, and limited early intervention services, resulting in chronic stress and socioeconomic vulnerability.

The second study examined caregivers of adults with intellectual disabilities and highlighted a critical policy blind spot: the absence of structured future planning mechanisms. Aging parents reported profound anxiety regarding their adult child's care after their death. Supported housing options, formal planning tools, and professional guidance were largely unavailable. Most families had no concrete plan, not due to lack of responsibility, but due to systemic gaps and limited institutional trust.

Across both studies, findings reveal continuity in policy insufficiency from childhood to adulthood. Early service gaps evolve into restricted adult integration pathways, culminating in insecurity for aging caregivers. These cumulative deficiencies challenge technocratic definitions of impact that focus on isolated interventions without considering longitudinal outcomes and intergenerational consequences.

This paper proposes a life-course policy framework for evaluating impact in disability services. Social impact should not be measured solely by program outputs but by structural continuity: coordinated early intervention, accessible adult services, formalized future planning support, and sustainable community-based care models. Without integrated policy alignment, families absorb the burden of care, transforming a collective responsibility into private risk.

By centering lived experience within policy analysis, this contribution demonstrates how qualitative research can inform systemic reform and expand the meaning of impact from compliance-driven metrics to long-term social security and dignity.

Police contacts in residential youth care: Methodological and research-ethical reflections - Moana Kahrmann & Tilman Lutz

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We present selected quantitative and qualitative findings from the project “Police as partners in residential youth care? The relationship between residential youth care and police as a horizon of experience for young people” (duration: 2023-2026), funded by the DFG (project number 529484681), led by Zoë Clark (Siegen University) and Tilman Lutz (HAW Hamburg). Quantitatively, 863 managers of residential youth care facilities were surveyed regarding structural characteristics, reasons for and rationales behind police involvement, as well as dimensions of pedagogical work. At the same time, 37 episodic interviews were conducted with young people from these residential care homes to reconstruct how police-related experiences and their pedagogical processing shape the young people's self and other-positioning.

In addition to central findings, e.g. connections between police involvement and educational orientations and structural characteristics as well as experiences of de-thematization of police contacts by professionals, we focus on selected research-ethical and research-practical dimensions regarding the conference theme:

The first dimension concerns reification as a methodological and research-ethical dilemma. The “explicit as well as implicit introduction of content to be investigated, anticipated knowledge stocks, or stereotypes into the research process” (Gabriel et al. 2021, p. 9, trans. MK & TLI) carries the risk that difference is not analyzed as a relational, contextualized characteristic, but as a fixed attribute. Using empirical material, we demonstrate how young people position themselves against potential deviance attributions and expected stigmatizations. Beyond the risk of reproducing essentialist attributions, the interviews reveal positioning strategies and narrative techniques through which participants engage in stigma management and assert their voices.

The related second dimension focuses on the possibilities and limitations for young people to (re-)position themselves as subjects with legal and indivisible rights – both in the narrated concrete situations with police in residential youth care and in the interviews themselves. This raises the question of what spaces exist for articulating critique, claiming rights, or expressing dissent under conditions of institutional dependency.

The presentation discusses what these findings and reflections may mean for understanding researchers as “possible agents of change”. One thesis is that research can also unfold its transformative potential by making subjective experiences within everyday institutional practices visible. A central challenge in this regard (and in general) lies in developing methodological approaches that remain cautious toward reification while simultaneously creating spaces for the interpretive sovereignty of service users/addressees.

Social pedagogy and social work in Poland- disciplinary and professional relations - Ewa Kantowicz

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The development of theory and practice on the border of social pedagogy and social work in Poland and various forms of academic education to the field of social work resulted in a discourse on the possible relationships between social pedagogy and social work as specific fields of theory and practice of social action, whose disciplinary and professional identity is still in the process of development and dynamic changes. The aim of the presented article is to explore the discussions on the subject of research on the border of social pedagogy and social work, which emerge specific epistemological and normative issues.

Undertaking the discourse on social pedagogy as a "metatheory" of social work and social work as a scientific-professional activity, I point to the importance of social pedagogy, which is an important area of theory and practice present in the professional activities of social workers and training programs for social work. The exemplifications of theoretical approaches analysed in the presented text are of a review nature and are a voice in a broader debate on the relationship between social pedagogy and social work (also on the European ground) and encourage reflection on possible changes in the creation of new paradigm of the discipline of social work as parallel to the (social) pedagogy of the field of social sciences.

Normalisation: a critical discourse towards a social-pedagogical Dutch youth care - Rogier Kattenberg

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In the Dutch youth act of 2015, the government aims for (youth) care services to be 'demedicalized, unburdened and normalised'. Normalization in this case means not unnecessarily framing and problematizing behaviour in medical terms (often referred to as medicalization) and thereby reducing the appeal on (mental) youth care. This is in response to the explosive growth of the Dutch youth care system, both in terms of services offered and in the number of children receiving support. In the youth act the Dutch government upholds a vision that youth care and welfare work should be organized as close as possible, with municipalities being closest to its citizens.

The Youth Act reasserted a transformation towards a social pedagogical discourse in Dutch youth care. Advocates of this social pedagogical perspective resort to well-known one-liners such as 'it takes a village to raise a child' – which emphasizes the idea of shared responsibilities in childrearing and the importance of taking into account the context around children when dealing with problems and adversity.

In order to trigger this transformation the focus was based on another aim in the youth act namely strengthening the social-pedagogical context around children and their families. However, a medical discourse is still hegemonic in youth care provisions. In order to move towards a social pedagogical discourse, dominant narratives have to be analysed and alternative discourses have to be introduced. In this research, we aim to explore how a social pedagogical discourse aims to get a foothold in professional (Dutch) youth care practices. We do this together with professionals, policymakers, parents and young people. We do this following PAR (participatory action research) guidelines within two Dutch municipalities, in order to co-produce knowledge and bring about changes in social practices.

This research project started in April 2024; during the Tissa conference I will elaborate on the first data. This data consists of reflections on the theoretical exploration by participants and how it compares to their social practices. Also, I will discuss and reflect on the research setup, explain the Dutch context, methodological challenges and opportunities, as well as to critically reflect on the concept of normalisation with an international audience. Leading questions are:

1. How can participatory research effectively influence social practices – such as talking and acting towards challenges we encounter in the lives of professionals, parents and young people - while research is still ongoing?
2. How can normalisation and a social-pedagogical discourse be meaningfully positioned within contemporary youth care systems or welfare provisions?
3. What answers, logics or narratives does a social pedagogical discourse formulate in response to a hegemonic medical discourse in Dutch youth welfare provisions?

Reimagining Group Supervision as a Transformative Space in Social Work Education - Avital Kaye Tzadok

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Professional supervision is a core arena in which social work students learn practice skills and position themselves in relation to social structures that shape service users' lives. Yet research has largely focused on dyadic supervision, leaving the pedagogical potential of group supervision underexplored, particularly in the early stages of professional formation. This study examines group supervision with first-year undergraduate social work students as a site where educational impact, critical reflection and collective learning are co-produced, and where supervisors negotiate their role as potential agents of social change.

Using a qualitative design, group interviews were conducted with experienced supervisors who facilitated supervision for 28 student groups (3–4 students per group). Verbatim transcripts were analyzed thematically to explore how supervisors understand and enact group supervision at the intersection of institutional expectations (efficiency, assessment, standardization) and commitments to social justice and student empowerment.

Supervisors described interrelated challenges in facilitating group supervision for first-year students. They emphasized the need to balance individual attention to students' learning needs with the cultivation of a cohesive, trusting group climate, and highlighted dilemmas around confidentiality when sensitive material is shared. They reported difficulties linked to group heterogeneity (differences in social locations, prior experience and commitment) and the complexity of offering constructive feedback while attending to power relations, vulnerabilities and sometimes tense group dynamics under time-limited conditions.

Alongside these obstacles, supervisors identified substantial opportunities that position group supervision as a powerful pedagogical and impactful practice. Collective discussion of field experiences enabled students to learn from one another's successes and struggles, turn diverse placements into shared resources for reflection, and question taken-for-granted norms in agencies. Group supervision was experienced as a supportive emerging professional network in which students could normalize difficulties, practice giving and receiving feedback and experiment with new professional positions. Peer interaction fostered the development of core professional competencies—critical thinking, ethical sensitivity, reflexivity and collaboration—while strengthening interpersonal capacities such as empathy and mutual responsibility. Compared to individual supervision, the group format was seen as a more efficient use of supervisory resources that simultaneously expanded the reach of supervision's impact. Overall, the findings portray group supervision as a context in which meaningful professional communities and social connectedness are formed, and in which students develop both practice skills and a collective capacity to engage with the structural conditions shaping social work.

The role of educating professionals in the helping professions in reducing the stigmatisation of gender-diverse individuals - *Kath Khangpi boon*

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Transgender and non-binary individuals represent a vulnerable demographic who, following their coming out, face heightened risks of social marginalisation, homelessness, loss of employment, or the severance of personal relationships. Recent years have seen increased visibility of this group, yet this has been accompanied by a rise in transphobic attacks and the stoking of moral panic.

Despite a positive legislative shift in the Czech Republic in 2026—whereby surgical sterilisation is no longer a prerequisite for the legal recognition of gender—significant systemic hurdles remain, notably the mandatory psychiatric diagnosis and the requirement for the dissolution of marriage or registered partnerships. These stringent conditions not only contravene human rights but also perpetuate long-term stigmatisation. Such stigma permeates the helping professions where, coupled with a general lack of institutional interest and informed understanding of gender identity, a respectful and inclusive approach is frequently absent. Furthermore, negative experiences with support services may act as a barrier, preventing individuals from seeking the care they need in the future.

The path to improving the status of gender-diverse individuals in the Czech Republic lies in changing attitudes at the systemic, societal, and individual levels. Comprehensive education on gender identity plays a key role. It is essential to increase the level of information available to social, health, and other support services regarding the specific needs of transgender and non-binary individuals. This can be achieved through university courses, practical courses for direct care workers and social service management, and other forms of education. However, it is also important to involve gender-diverse individuals themselves, as they are best able to communicate their own needs, and face-to-face conversations with them have the potential to reduce transphobic attitudes.

Digital leveling module for humanities and social sciences students from Ukraine - Michael Klassen

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The research project to be presented involved the development of a digital chatbot module designed to teach the Person-in-Environment (PiE) model to Ukrainian social work and psychology students working with populations affected by war.

This project brought together students from Ukrainian and German universities to study social work and psychology, and to develop practical, profession-oriented competencies for providing psychosocial support to people affected by war and displacement. We designed and implemented a digital learning module in the form of a Telegram chatbot that teaches the practical application of the Person-in-Environment (PiE) model. The chatbot provides access to structured learning materials and practical tools, regardless of the students' location or study format (on-site, remote or hybrid), which is a critical feature given the security threats and instability of social infrastructure in Ukraine.

The module was co-developed and piloted with Ukrainian students who have personal experience of war and displacement. Technical design choices prioritised low-bandwidth accessibility and offline resilience to accommodate the varied internet conditions across Ukrainian regions. Building on prior research collaborations, the project established the methodological and institutional foundations for sustainable cooperation with Ukrainian universities and researchers.

The evaluation comprised participant ratings of the chatbot's informational visualisations, accuracy, and professional utility, as well as pre- and post-measures of PiE knowledge and practical skills. User ratings were very positive: 30% rated the bot's effectiveness as 10/10, 50% as 9/10 and 20% as 8/10. Post-test results showed measurable knowledge gains in the application of the PiE model, with the largest improvements being seen among students with little or no prior exposure. Those with existing PiE knowledge reported further, albeit smaller, gains, mainly in practical competencies. To ensure sustainability, the digital module is being incorporated into higher education curricula for use by practitioners, such as social workers and social pedagogues. Once the pilot has been completed, the chatbot will continue to operate autonomously, and the content and structure of the module can be adapted in response to user feedback and curricular updates. This project demonstrates the potential of low-threshold digital tools to support cross-border capacity building in psychosocial care for populations affected by armed conflict.

Understanding the Un-Accessibility of Self-Advocacy: Social Inequalities and Gaps in Representation in Residential Child and Youth Welfare - Alexandra Klein

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Recent legal reforms in Germany have increased political and institutional efforts to strengthen self-advocacy structures in child and youth welfare. However, inequality and participation theoretical informed perspectives reveal that current transformation processes fail to adequately address central questions of representation and access: To what extent do young people perceive themselves as represented by these structures? And how accessible is self-advocacy for those it is intended to serve, particularly for children and adolescents who are not already organized within such initiatives?

At the same time, existing research offers only limited insight into how multidimensional social inequalities, including age, migration and disability, shape access to and perceptions of self-advocacy in residential child and youth welfare. Addressing this lack of knowledge, the lecture draws on a participatory research project conducted in cooperation with the Rhineland Palatinate State Youth Welfare Council (Landesjugendhilferat Rheinland-Pfalz), a self-representation body of children and young people in residential care. Using group discussions with children and adolescents in residential care, the study examines three interrelated questions: the significance attributed to self-advocacy, experiences with existing self-advocacy structures, and the gaps in representation and barriers that emerge and are negotiated as un_accessible.

Based on these data, the presentation discusses how self-advocacy oscillates between symbolic importance, limited influence, and social exclusivity. Access is constrained by both structural barriers, such as limited information and power asymmetries, and symbolic exclusions, including the perception that self-advocacy is intended for confident, articulate, or well adapted young people. At the same time, the analysis highlights how self-advocacy structures may either open up or restrict access for children and adolescents who are marginalized in multiple ways.

The concept of un_accessible is introduced to capture these ambivalences. It refers not merely to the absence of access but to the processual and often simultaneous production of openness and closure, of belonging and non-belonging, within struggles over visibility and influence.

By integrating inequality and participation theoretical perspectives, the paper demonstrates that self-advocacy structures do not necessarily produce emancipatory effects. The analysis contributes to social pedagogical and social work debates on the conditions and limits of participatory practice and calls for a socio-political transformation that understands self-advocacy not as a formal requirement, but as a transformative practice that systematically includes those who have so far experienced it as un_accessible.

Social Work and the Politics of Welfare State – From Progressive Political Ethos to Administrative Mindset - Tuomo Kokkonen

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Social work defines itself as a profession committed to protecting vulnerable individuals and promoting equality. Historically, the Nordic welfare state has been a strong ally for social work in this mission. Following Silvia Staub-Bernasconi's well-known division of the three mandates of social work – the mandates given by the clients, by the state, and the profession – it can be said that in Nordic welfare states and social work have cooperated well together. In its classic form Nordic welfare state has provided social work a robust foundation in securing social and human rights through legislation and by supporting social work education and research.

This paper analyses the political relationship and tensions between Finnish social work and welfare state. In Finland social workers are typically employed in public welfare services, while social work taking place in third sector organisations and private companies has been minimal. Finnish social work has also been very strongly guided by legislation and social administration. Despite occasional tensions between social work profession and public policies, the profession has been able to feel that its mandate given by the state has been ethically and politically correct. Public policies have improved the well-being of the most vulnerable citizens and social inequality have been relatively low.

Empirically, the analysis is based on nationwide interviews of 24 experts of structural social work in 20 wellbeing services counties. The interviews focused three themes: state of structural social work, practices of knowledge production, and thirdly future of social work. In Finland structural social work is included in social legislation. However, unlike in most other countries, structural social work in Finland is not radical or citizenship centered. It is rather rooted in practices of social planning. Structural social work is understood as a 'knowledge work' praxis that gathers information for decision making in social reforms. Thus, structural social work bears great responsibility for cooperation between social work and public policies especially in area of social services.

The findings reveal increasing tension between social work and the welfare state. Inadequate social services, as well as problems in public health care and social security benefits are reflected in the information gathered in structural social work. However, experts of structural social work no longer see the information they produce being used to plan social reforms or developing services. Rather, the information produced is utilized in allocating savings in public policies and services. These findings reflect a neoliberal transformation of the welfare state and a political divorce between social work profession and the state. It is also important to note that this development risks hollowing out the profession's mandate in the eyes of clients and vulnerable individuals and groups.

Radical Social Work Pedagogy as Research Impact: A Reflexive Study of Teaching Human Rights and Social Movements in Social Work Education - *Konstantinos Kolovos*

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This paper presents a research-informed reflection on the undergraduate course Human Rights, Social Movements and Social Work taught at the Department of Social Work, University of West Attica (Greece), positioning teaching as a site of knowledge production and social impact. In response to increasing demands within social work to demonstrate “impact” through measurable outcomes, the paper argues for a critical re-conceptualisation of impact beyond technocratic or managerial indicators. Drawing on radical and critical social work, it frames education as inherently political and ethically accountable, fostering activist identities and solidarity-oriented approaches to social change.

The study is grounded in a reflexive, qualitative research design that conceptualises the classroom as a critical inquiry setting. The pedagogical intervention combined (a) structured lectures on human rights frameworks, welfare state debates and advocacy; (b) dialogical learning processes; (c) systematic use of documentaries and selected scenes from fiction films as pedagogical elicitation tools; and (d) participatory involvement of representatives from social movements and service users’ organisations (LGBTQI+, Roma, migrant/refugee communities). This approach aligns with epistemic justice and co-production principles by challenging hierarchical divisions between academic knowledge and lived experience.

Empirical material was generated through multiple sources: fieldnotes from teaching sessions, reflective memos, student written assignments and structured classroom discussions recorded through summaries (with attention to ethical safeguards). Analysis followed an iterative thematic approach, focusing on shifts in students’ interpretive frameworks, ethical reasoning, political positioning and imagined professional action.

Findings indicate a substantial transformation in students’ critical capacities and interpretive repertoires. Students moved from individualising explanations of stigma and exclusion towards structural, rights-based and intersectional analyses. They increasingly articulated advocacy and collaboration with movements as legitimate and necessary elements of social work practice, rather than peripheral “extra” activities. Visual media facilitated affective engagement and “imaginative research practice”, supporting students’ ability to connect lived experience to macro-level structures and to formulate new research questions.

The paper contributes to debates on impact by proposing an alternative model of evidencing and legitimising social impact through radical pedagogy, co-production and epistemic justice and offers a methodological contribution by operationalising film-based elicitation and movement participation as integrated tools for research-informed teaching in social work education.

The paper concludes that radical social work pedagogy constitutes social impact, advancing collective empowerment through research–teaching–community links.

Beyond the Ideal Victim: Agency, Recognition, and the Politics of Labour Trafficking - Christina Kösl

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Background and Problem: Critical social work offers an essential framework for addressing the systemic issues that enable exploitation and marginalisation e. g. in labour trafficking. A complex social justice issue that challenges traditional boundaries between victimhood and agency, exploitation and consent within neoliberal market logics. Furthermore, the approach to identification of victims is subjected to a prevailing criminal law approach and logic which is largely constrained by a technocratic "ideal victim" schema; a construct that demands passivity, total submission, and a clear-cut binary between "innocent and deserving victims" and "illegal migrant workers." In practice, this logic fails to account for the complex social realities of migrant workers who often navigate a continuum of exploitation, survival, and agency. This study unsettles these dominant narratives by examining how the "ideal victim" schema acts as a barrier to justice and rights as well as a barrier to address the wider systemic structures that enable exploitation.

Methodology: Adopting a qualitative approach, this research investigates how victim support services (n=10) and law enforcement representatives (n=8) construct and negotiate the subject positions of potential victims. Data were analysed using Grounded Theory Methodology and Situational Analysis, allowing for a mapping of the layered interactions between institutional actors and their interpretive authority.

Findings: Four Reconstructed Subject Positions The study identifies four concurrent subject positions that coexist and shift fluidly across different actors: market-conforming position, autonomy-ascribed position, self-sacrificing position, depersonalised and disenfranchised position. These findings demonstrate that subjectivities are shaped by the attribution of vulnerabilities, both personal and systemic, that are often decoupled from the individual's actual decision-making power. Crucially, these positions frequently compete with the "ideal victim" requirement, especially when individuals display "bonded consent" even in the absence of alternatives.

Implications: The specific consequence of these fluid positions competing with the "ideal victim" schema is a systemic failure of identification and often misclassification as illegal workers/migrants which also hinders the prosecution of perpetrators. On a structural level, this supports the status quo that deems exploitation preferable to absolute poverty, further entrenching the marginalisation of migrant workers. I provide the conceptual tools necessary to advocate for victimisation through the lens of structural exclusion from regularised labour markets by dismantling cycles of dependency, challenge hegemonic structures, and advocate for policy change in the wider context of migration and labour politics.

The Impact of Interventions by Social Pedagogues and Social Workers in Social Activation Services on Parental Competencies - Radana Kroutilová Nováková

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Social Activation Services (SAS) for families with children represent an important instrument of family rehabilitation, aiming to support children through assistance to their families and prevent their removal. Social workers and social pedagogues act as agents of change by strengthening parental competencies and stabilizing the family environment. This study evaluates the impact of SAS on key areas of parental functioning, including self-care, household management, communication, exercising rights, employment, social relationships, and safety. This paper is based on the study by Kroutilová Nováková (2020). Evaluation of the Impact of Social Activation Services on the Lives of Client Families. *Sociální práce*, 20(3), 59–68.

What is the SAS interventions impact on the lives of participating families? Based on this, 4 sub-questions were formulated: What levels do participating families achieve in the monitored areas of parental competencies? In which monitored areas are families most and least successful? What changes occurred in areas supporting the development of parental competencies? Which monitored area(s) showed the most significant improvement(s)?

A longitudinal, quantitatively oriented evaluation study was conducted from 12/2016 to 12/2018. The research sample included 30 families, with 4 repeated measurements. A structured rating interview was used to assess the impact of SAS interventions in 7 monitored areas of parental competencies. The level of parental competencies was assessed on a scale ranging from “not at all” (1 point) to “definitely yes” (10 points). The effectiveness of interventions was evaluated using paired proportion comparisons and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for paired median comparison.

The average scores in the monitored areas ranged from 4.41 to 6.08 points. The highest mean values were found in self-care (6.08) and nutrition and household management (5.96). The lowest values were observed in safety (4.41) and social relationships (4.64). Statistically significant improvements between the initial and final evaluation phases were observed in self-care ($p = 0.04$), nutrition and household management ($p = 0.023$), communication ($p = 0.004$), exercising rights ($p = 0.012$), and employment and self-realization ($p = 0.014$). Improvements were also observed in social relationships ($p = 0.286$) and safety ($p = 0.948$), but these were not statistically significant.

The findings indicate the effectiveness of SAS interventions in participating families, as parental competencies improved in five examined areas. Safety and social relationships showed the lowest scores and no statistically significant progress. These results suggest that if family safety deteriorates during rehabilitation, SAS providers should reconsider their intervention strategies in order to ensure full protection of the child.

Categories of epistemic agents building testimonial trust and distrust in relations between children, parents, and social workers in child protection - *Joni Lähde*

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In child protection services, children, parents, and social workers find themselves on the edge of uncertainty. The situations are complex, and the narratives of the parties involved are often contradictory. Therefore, it is essential to consider why the accounts of some individuals are trusted while those of others are not. This is a crucial question for attaining epistemic justice. Although new research has emerged regarding knowledge production and assessment in child protection, there remains a lack of multi-voiced research that integrates the perspectives of children, parents, and social workers.

I approach knowledge production through the concept of epistemic agency, which refers to an agent's capability to acquire, produce, and share knowledge. In this presentation, I will examine the categories of epistemic agents that are significant for epistemic trust in the relations between children, parents, and social workers within child protection. I will focus on the testimonial dimensions of these agents, specifically on which categories of agents are classified as reliable and trusted based on their characteristics or behaviors. This analysis is based on an article currently in progress, which is part of my doctoral research.

The research data were collected through interviews with children, parents, and their social workers involved in child protection at a specific service point in a city in Finland. A total of 59 interviews were conducted, most of which were individual interviews with children, parents, and social workers from the child protection service point. The remainder consisted of group interviews with teams from the same and different child protection service points. Through category analysis, I have identified identity and attribute categories related to epistemic credibility – and thus to testimonial trust – that emerge in the relations between children, parents, and social workers.

Based on this examination, three categories of epistemic agents emerge in child protection: those with strong, weak, and contradictory testimonial credibility. Strong credibility is attributed to children, parents, and social workers who appear open and even vulnerable; they transparently discuss problems, acknowledge their mistakes, and maintain contact. In the cases of children and parents, there is an emphasis on appearing threatened or victimized: when seen as such by social workers, they are considered more credible. Weak epistemic agency is attributed to those – especially parents and social workers – who seem closed off, unwilling to acknowledge their mistakes, threatening, or evasive. Particularly for younger children, contradictory epistemic agency is constructed according to the perspectives of social workers, parents, and the children themselves: children have no reason to lie and do not falsely report difficulties within their families; however, they are easily manipulated and may rely too heavily on their imagination.

From Disclosure to Empowerment? Vireal-Digital and Performative Narratives on Childhood Sexual Violence - *Susanne Lang*

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Since the #MeToo movement, survivors of sexualized violence have become central actors whose digital practices and narratives enable forms of collective action and empowerment by building networks and shaping recognition politics. While prior studies have largely focused on isolated hashtag campaigns, we analyse vireal-digital and performative survivor-led narratives around childhood sexual violence.

To this end, we draw on life-world orientated research and scholarship on the digitalization of culture, to ask how platform-specific publics structure forms of visibility and collective articulation in discourses on childhood sexual violence. We take Instagram as an analytical entry point, as it has become a central platform in Germany through which survivors of childhood sexual violence connect and collectivize.

Empirically, we draw on network and discourse analysis, departing from selected major survivor accounts on Instagram.

First, we show how survivors use Instagram's image-centred formats to share visual, aestheticized, and performative content, thereby foregrounding bodily and affective dimensions of childhood sexual violence that have remained marginalized in public discourse. Second, we analyse hashtags of medical-diagnostic categories (e.g., dissociative disorders, #dissociation) that are used as forms of collectivization. While the use of these categories increases visibility and connectivity to broader discourses, it also frames experiences of childhood sexual violence as individualized consequences, potentially obscuring broader social and structural causes. Third, we point to the need of counselling agents to expand their professional services and acknowledge survivors of sexual violence as experts in their own right in order to become agents of change.

Based on these findings, we argue that survivors' digital practices and narratives expand the boundaries of what can be publicly articulated and foster collective empowerment, while remaining constrained by national and international recognition politics that may produce new forms of invisibility and taboo.

Building Resistance Through Culture, Dialogue and Youth Voice - *Erika Laredo*

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This paper argues that in a context of intensifying social polarisation, economic precarity and increasingly punitive narratives about young people, radical youth work must reclaim culture as a terrain of struggle. Drawing on critical pedagogy, dialogical youth work traditions and participatory arts practice, the paper examines a youth-led Living Museum project positioning young people as epistemic agents, cultural producers and theorists of their own experience.

Grounded in a Freirean understanding of dialogue as praxis, the project moves beyond tokenistic or consultative participation, enacting co-production, shared authorship and critical interrogation as core pedagogical processes. Each participant selects a personal object representing memory, identity or belonging. These objects function as cultural texts through which histories of place, migration, class, race and resistance are explored. Through performance, filmmaking, oral history and live interpretation, young people transform these artefacts into acts of public meaning-making that challenge deficit narratives and assert cultural authority.

Central to this is the recognition that stories do not circulate equally: questions of who is heard, who interprets, and who is authorised to speak are embedded within wider social and institutional power relations. The Living Museum disrupts these hierarchies by inviting audiences into conversation rather than passive spectatorship. Young people act as guides, curators and interpreters of their own narratives, generating dialogical encounters that unsettle institutional authority and expand democratic possibility.

The project also foregrounds resistance as a cultural and relational practice. Through structured dialogue, peer interviewing and collective reflection, participants challenge internalised stereotypes and co-construct new understandings of belonging. This cultivates relational power, the shared capacity to name experience, build solidarity and imagine alternatives. Importantly, the project prioritises young people facing structural barriers to arts participation. In doing so, it resists neoliberal and managerialist narratives of “impact” that reduce youth work to behavioural outcomes or measurable indicators. Instead, it affirms joy, experimentation, dissent and collective creativity as legitimate and necessary components of youth development and democratic life. The Living Museum thus enacts a prefigurative politics: modelling relational, dialogical and culturally plural futures within the present.

By positioning cultural production as a mode of inquiry, resistance and social pedagogy, the project reclaims the role of youth work researchers and practitioners as agents of social change. It challenges institutions to move beyond symbolic inclusion towards shared authorship, accountability and structural transformation.

The right to participate in child protection: farce or voice - Ursula Leuthold

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In the country that brought children's rights forward it seems appointed to look critically at a highlighted child's right: The right to be heard (Art. 12 UN CRC). In the context of child protection, the dominant narrative leaves no doubt that this claim offers great benefits. Measured on the exact claim, research shows regularly the failures of its fulfilling.

The starting point for the presented project turned the prepositions around. If the general problem is that there is not enough participation in child protection, it appears promising to look closely at a critical case, that is at child representation, where children's participation should present itself. Following a theoretical frame composing of childhood and children's rights studies as well as Alfred Lorenzers socialization theory, the case study aimed to investigate how children exercise their right to participate in child representation in child protection proceedings concerning out-of-home care.

Data were generated through conversations with children and participant observations of meetings between children and the child representant. The database is composed of six cases, including data from nine interviews and four participant observations. Seven children and youth from 8 to 17 years agreed to take part in the study. Depth hermeneutics was used to analyze the data in interpretation groups. The potential of the deep hermeneutic method lies in reflecting on valid standards, clarifying prejudices, dismantling ideologies, raising awareness of forgotten connections, and thus setting in motion a critical-reflexive emancipatory theory formation.

Case analysis shows that the contradictory child protection arrangement limits the capacity of children to act, moreover demands a performance of children that is systemically unseen by adults. Against this objectivation, children make use of the characteristics that are attributed to the category children by surprising, reworking and by undermining the attributes. It can be shown how much children know about their positioning, their minor status and how child-adult relations in this arrangement are laid out. The case analysis points to an understanding of the participation right as a living right. It means that children use their (limited) capacity to influence their care relation and the new- or re-organization of care relations that are the result of the out-of-home care proceeding. However, participation is also used by adults to bring children to cooperate with the measures authorities see to fit. The possibilities to participate become double-edged and offer not in itself an emancipatory moment. The case analysis shows that participation can also be a farce. Drawing on Hirschman's theory of exit, voice and loyalty, the study concludes that participation should rather be pictured as voice in terms of a protest. Child protection proceedings should embrace the protest of children and find ways to make the proceeding more protest attuned.

Risk, Decision, and Refusal: Rethinking the Role of Science in Social Work Practice - Delphine Levrouw & Mark Humme

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Contemporary social work practice is increasingly shaped by demands for professionalism, measurability, and accountability. These demands crystallize in standardized procedures, protocolling, and the expansion of managerial and institutional logics of governance in everyday casework. As a result, social workers are placed under growing pressure to make rapid, objective, and efficient decisions based on predefined problem definitions, target architectures, and system rationalities. In this context, science and research are primarily mobilized as instruments to secure practice through evidence-based methods, reduce uncertainty, and legitimize decisions.

This lecture criticizes such an instrumental understanding of science, arguing that it subjects theory and research to a logic of functionalization that neutralizes critique. When scientific knowledge is evaluated mainly in terms of its immediate practical usefulness, it loses the distance necessary to render visible the power relations, frictions, and ambivalences inherent in social work practice. Critique unfolds its effectiveness precisely in the productive tension between science and practice—and for social work, the real danger lies not in this conflict, but in its disappearance.

Drawing on Žižek (1989, 2005, 2016), the lecture conceptualizes the relationship between science and practice as one of productive non-identity. While practice is structurally compelled to act and decide, science fulfills a different function: organizing distance and enabling reflexive interruption. From this perspective, critical social work scholarship neither serves as a paternalistic guide for practice nor retreats into academic self-referentiality, but operates as an autonomous form of practice that irritates those taken-for-granted assumptions through which practice becomes fixed in routines, evidence semantics, and managerial certainties.

Theory thus appears as a practice of refusal—not as a withdrawal from responsibility, but as an active interruption of the imperative to translate every diagnosis immediately into optimizing interventions. Drawing on examples from youth welfare services, particularly in the context of risk assessment and decision-making, the lecture demonstrates how this perspective resists the demand that science must always be useful and directly applicable.

**KEYNOTE - Early Diagnosis and Support for Children with ASD -
International Team Chaired by Joanna Madalinska-Michalak, Agnieszka-
Siedler et al.**

This presentation showcases a set of open-access toolkits developed within a European project to support the inclusion and meaningful participation of children. The resources are intended for a broad range of professionals who are not experts in this field, including teachers, social workers, care professionals, psychologists, therapists, physiotherapists, and other practitioners working with children and families. The presentation highlights the project's key outcomes and demonstrates how the toolkits can support child-centred and inclusive practice across different professional settings.

The Necessity of School Social Workers in Educational Institutions in Thailand – *Madee Limsakul*

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School social work has increasingly been recognised as a professional field in Thailand and has gained growing importance in responding to the complex and multidimensional problems faced by children and young people in school settings. Historically, the role of school social workers has overlapped with that of guidance teachers and student support services. More recent developments, however, indicate clearer professional differentiation between these roles. Guidance teachers primarily focus on academic counselling and career guidance, whereas school social workers emphasise child protection, psychosocial support, and case management for students experiencing complex difficulties. School social workers also function as key intermediaries linking families, schools, communities, and relevant government agencies in order to reduce barriers to students' learning. Internationally, school social work is implemented through three main models: (1) formally established school-based social worker positions, (2) social workers assigned at the school district or local authority level, and (3) systematic collaboration between schools and external social service agencies. In Thailand, however, there is currently no unified national policy or comprehensive systemic framework to guide the implementation of school social work across the education system, resulting in fragmented practice. Nevertheless, the increasing complexity of problems affecting children and young people, together with emerging empirical evidence from recent studies, underscores the necessity of integrating social workers into the education system. Given existing policy and structural constraints, the immediate nationwide establishment of school-based social worker posts may be difficult to achieve. A more feasible policy option for the Thai context is the deployment of social workers at the school district or local authority level to support multiple schools within a defined area, beginning with pilot initiatives in high-need areas and subsequently scaling up to additional schools in the future.

The Voice of the "Present Absentee": Reflective Research on Strategies of Resistance and Social Change Against Institutional Oppression in Academia - Ibrahim Mahajne

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This presentation offers a reflective-critical analysis of a pioneering study (The Silence of the "Present Absentees": Arab Lecturers in Israeli Academia).

The original research exposed a systematic and deliberate failure within Israeli higher education institutions, manifested as the qualitative oppression of Palestinian-Arab minority faculty. This oppression, occurring through mechanisms of exclusion (in promotion, academic climate, professional autonomy, and student relations), leads to the overwhelming "silence" of the majority of these lecturers (the "present absentees").

This proposal focuses on the scholarly and activist response to these institutional oppression structures, seeking to examine:

1. How can critical research become a tool for resistance and social change, even at the cost of losing institutional recognition and academic credit?
2. What are the professional and political implications of the choice to publish critical research concerning a minority in the oppressed language (Arabic), thereby prioritizing internal community impact over hegemonic systemic credit?
3. How does the hostile reaction of the academic establishment toward this research reflect the silencing mechanism imposed on the creation of innovative knowledge within minority groups, and how can this be analyzed using principles of social pedagogy and critical social work?

The original study employed an extensive exploratory-qualitative methodology (in-depth interviews with the majority of Arab lecturers). The current presentation is based on a reflective and meta-analytical critique of the research process, its publication (in Arabic), and its institutional reception (or lack thereof).

Conclusions and Implications:

- Resistance Through Language: The activist choice to publish in Arabic, despite Hebrew's hegemonic status, constitutes an act of active resistance. In terms of critical social work, this is an intervention that promotes empowerment and internal discourse development within the population dealing with the oppression.
- Silencing and De-Legitimization: The institutional reaction (attempts to silence, or de-legitimization of the findings) confirms the radical significance of the research. This reaction is a tangible reflection of the institutional power seeking to preserve the oppressive structures.
- Coping Mechanisms: The study identified three distinct voices among the lecturers: those denying the oppression, those normalizing it (minority), and the silenced majority (the "present absentees"). The discussion will focus on the implications of this silencing for both the study population and pioneering researchers, and examine how social pedagogy and social work can provide the motivation and tools to challenge hegemonic and oppressive knowledge, and to create innovative knowledge that voices authentic and silenced narratives

Working the in between: grassroots connectors, institutional whiteness and researcher positionality in Amsterdam Southeast - Kelly Matthijsen & Fariël Ben Abdelaziz

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Recent urban social policies in Western Europe seek to address inequality by “governing through community” (Rose, 1996), yet the voices of marginalized residents, particularly people of color, remain underrepresented in research and policy. In the Netherlands, growing recognition of grassroots professionals as ‘connectors’ between communities and the social work field is reshaping participation and support. Often locally rooted and not always formally trained as social workers, these grassroots professionals are positioned as intermediaries between municipalities, welfare organizations and citizen initiatives, tasked with linking policy to residents’ lived experiences (Vollebergh et al., 2021). My ethnographic research in Amsterdam Southeast explores how these community-led actors employ (radical) community development practices in this context, and how such practices both challenge and risk reproducing racialized participation inequalities.

I enrich dominant Western community development approaches with decolonial perspectives that highlight how coloniality and institutional whiteness shape participation, dividing populations into those deemed deserving and those framed as problematic. Preliminary findings show that Dutch community and social work practices, despite progressive intentions, may reproduce racialized logics by expecting communities of color to conform to white, normative standards of (civic) participation.

A decolonial approach to community development interrogates how colonial histories structure power relations in Western Europe, challenges Eurocentric frameworks and systemic power imbalances, and creates space for alternative, non-Western forms of knowledge. Drawing on Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy (1970), I conceptualize radical community development as a dialogical and emancipatory praxis in which professionals, researchers and community members collectively develop critical consciousness and act upon structures of oppression. From this position, I use my role as researcher to support community struggles for social justice.

This session centers my positionality as a researcher situated between municipal actors, welfare organizations and grassroots community connectors. I discuss how I navigate field power relations and institutional whiteness, and how I seek to act as an ally rather than a detached observer. Methodological and ethical tensions—around co-production, accountability and risks of reproducing colonial logics—are opened for shared reflection.

In an interactive format, I will present brief ethnographic vignettes and invite participants to work through dilemmas related to social change, epistemic justice and the politics of researcher involvement. Together, we will consider how community-oriented social work research can move beyond documenting inequality towards supporting collective struggles for racial and social justice and strengthening the voices of communities of color in urban policy processes.

Supporting Access to Social Services for People with Complex Needs: Design Principles for Centralized Referential Consultation Framework - Konrad Meisner

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Accessing social service systems remains difficult for many individuals, particularly for people with complex support needs living in rural regions. Clients often depend on unsystematic personal searches or informal referrals between services, which can delay timely and appropriate support. A centralized referential consultation service, for example via telephone or digital tools, may help individuals and professionals to identify suitable services more effectively.

This study addresses three research questions: (1) What are key requirements for an effective centralized referential system? (2) How can knowledge about such a system be disseminated efficiently? (3) Which actors need to be educated to ensure sustainable use?

A three-step qualitative research design was applied. First, twelve interviews were conducted in the rural-industrial region of Siegen-Wittgenstein (Germany), focusing on successful entry pathways into social service systems. Second, the identified cases were analysed and discussed in a multi-professional group involving academics from social work and human-computer interaction as well as practitioners. These discussions explored functional conditions and strategies for fostering awareness. Third, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) was used to identify critical configurations enabling effective access.

Results show that clients' needs vary substantially. Barriers include limited digital literacy, internal conflicts, shame, and insufficient system knowledge. Informal support networks such as family, friends, and leisure-related contacts, alongside mainstream services such as school social work, emerged as key facilitators. These findings suggest that a centralized consultation framework should integrate both formal and informal support structures.

A centralized referential consultation system could improve timely and meaningful access to social services in rural regions and support both clients and professionals in navigating cross-system referrals more efficiently.

Economic Abuse towards Arab-Palestinian Women in Israel - Tal Meler

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This paper focuses on economic abuse against Arab-Palestinian women in Israel, with particular attention to coerced debt imposed by partners or ex-partners. It examines how financial control, deception, and forced indebtedness operate as mechanisms of domination that persist during and after intimate relationships, often leaving women in long-term situations of economic vulnerability without adequate legal or institutional protection.

Drawing on qualitative feminist research, the study explores how patriarchal norms, civic exclusion, and structural neglect shape women's experiences of economic abuse within intimate partnerships, especially among women situated at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and minority citizenship status. Economic abuse is analyzed not only as an interpersonal practice but also as a structurally enabled harm that is insufficiently recognized within existing legal and welfare frameworks.

Based on semi-structured interviews and legal case analyses (n=22), the paper examines cases in which women were coerced into debts without their informed consent, including loans, guarantees, forged signatures, and the misuse of joint financial arrangements. The findings illustrate how coerced debt restricts women's autonomy, limits their access to credit, housing, and employment, and continues to bind them to abusive partners even after separation. The analysis highlights women's coping strategies, interactions with state institutions (such as welfare agencies, courts, and debt enforcement mechanisms), and the cumulative effects of institutional inaction.

The paper contributes to feminist and socio-legal scholarship on violence against women by foregrounding coerced debt as a central yet under-recognized form of economic abuse. It underscores the need for targeted legal recognition, regulatory safeguards, and policy interventions that address the specific vulnerabilities of minority women facing coerced indebtedness. While grounded in the Israeli context, the findings speak to broader global debates on gender, debt, and the privatization of risk within intimate relationships.

Creeping Zombification at Czech Labour Offices: What could be Done with Diminishing Discretion Resulting from the Digital by Default Approach? - Jiří Mertl

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In the presentation, I would like to point out the recent outcome of the labour/welfare offices reform that introduced the principle of digital by default into the Czech social and institutional context. In social work, there has been a debate about the digital gap issue, i.e. many target groups lose opportunity to apply for social assistance because they do not have material or skill capacities to meet the digital by default demands. However, this debate veils completely another, more sinister, effect of digital by default. Based on interviews with officials/social workers at the offices, it is obvious that the digitalisation process adds up to the neoliberal zombification process, which is based on the premise that in order to get rid of a public institution it must be kept alive but dysfunctional at the same time to make it collapse. The informants described how they have lost the discretion ability to influence their clients' cases due to the system of control that hybridises digitalisation with multi-level mutual human control. In this system, social workers produce digital documents based on clients' applications that are controlled by other social workers in another part of the Czech Republic, and, at the same time, social workers who originally produced documents control other social workers. Social workers are disillusioned and frustrated by this situation as their discretion is effectively lost. My question is: how to optimally utilise this research? There are possibilities of media involvement and supporting the organisation of social workers, but this tradition is very weak in the Czech Republic and social workers are rather passive (and fearing of any retaliation). So I would like to ignite a discussion what could be done with this situation and what are experiences from the other contexts.

Young vulnerable transpersons' meeting with welfare professionals - *Filip Mujinovic*

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We live in a rapidly changing society where social constructions are continuously challenged and reinterpreted. One of the most significant developments over the past 20 years is our understanding and articulation of gender. For welfare professionals, this shift can be difficult to navigate, as many lack the knowledge and tools needed to understand and support the trans people they encounter in practice.

Trans people are estimated to be between 0.5–1% of the population, yet they are significantly less likely to achieve a qualifying education, obtain stable employment, and report an increased level of loneliness. They also experience more discrimination and lower overall wellbeing compared to cisgender people (VIVE, 2022). This indicates that many young trans people will encounter social systems, particularly within a Danish universal welfare system.

Our research therefore aims to explore the diverse experiences that young trans people have with welfare professionals in a Danish context. The target group is vulnerable young people under the umbrella term trans, and the study has been conducted in two different organizations: a preparatory basic education program (FGU) and an activation center for individuals under 30. Our work is inspired by a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach, with ideals of co-creating knowledge guiding the process.

To ensure genuine co-creation, we prioritized that the young trans participants' own voices shaped the research process. Existing research is grounded in professional perspectives, but there is limited insight into young people's own experiences, challenges, and views on what actually supports them. This was central to our inquiry.

We therefore developed a research design in which participants created the interview guides themselves and interviewed one another. This ensured that the research questions were meaningful to them and reduced the power asymmetry that our roles as researchers and former social workers might otherwise create.

In addition, we conducted participant observations at the FGU to build relationships and gain insight into the young people's interactions with each other and with their teachers. At BIFU, we facilitated dialogue workshops where the young participants used the space for reflection, generating rich empirical material. Finally, we held three creative workshops in which the young trans participants produced visual expressions symbolizing their encounters with welfare professionals, facilitated by a trans artist.

Youth perspectives and meaningful communities as driving forces in social work - Maja Müller

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Social work with young people at risk of exclusion and youth policies primarily focus on getting these young people back on the “right” track by pushing them to find a job or start an education (Aaltonen et al. 2017). Political initiatives and social services and support towards young people outside education and labour market often build on top-down perspectives that only focus on whether the young person enters education or employment. In this presentation we argue that in this way welfare policies and social work may miss the opportunity to address broader aspects of young people’s well-being such as mental health, life quality, social relationships and independent living. We point out that to make social change, social work should focus on the youth perspectives on social support and what they need and identify as meaningful in their own context.

The presentation is based on a research project involving young people outside education and the labour market in a Danish context. The research project emphasizes the young peoples’ narratives about social exclusion mechanisms throughout their schooling and up to their current situation today. Furthermore, it entails the young peoples’ perspectives on social support, and their suggestions to improve the welfare practices to include them better in society. Through participatory research the presentation builds on 15 biographical interviews in the age 15- 29 years old, and future workshops with 30 young people to provide insights into young, marginalised people’s experiences of social inclusion and exclusion.

In the latest future workshop in 2026, it became clear that the young people at risk – who did not know each other in the beginning of the research project – connected and benefited from the social setting of the future workshop. They were all neurodivergent challenged but still they participated actively, connected, listened to each other, acknowledged each other and most of all reflected each other. They pointed out that they needed more settings and meaningful communities as the future workshop we facilitated – spaces where they could meet like-minded and peers, despite the very different challenges and social problems they also experienced.

On this background we discuss how social initiatives (and social workers and social work researchers) can build social productive relationships, meaningful communities, bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) and a sense of belonging among youth at risk, that in the end can work as steppingstones to social inclusion in society. The presentation ends with a debate about what are meaningful social initiatives seen from the young people at risk, and how youth perspectives can be a driving force to develop meaningful social initiatives and changes in social work to include youth at risk in society.

KEYNOTE - Ethnographic Perspectives on Consequences of Social Work - Chantal Munsch

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Social work has consequences for service users: for their identities, their everyday lives, their social relations, their plans and biographies. The term “consequence” thus draws attention to the fact that consequences often differ from the institutional objectives of social work. While evaluation research aims to measure whether and to what extent the specified objectives are actually achieved with specific methods, research on unplanned consequences requires an open, exploratory approach.

In my presentation, I will argue that ethnographic research can make a valuable contribution to the study of unplanned consequences of social work. The presentation is based on discussions and research projects in the DFG Research Training Group “Consequences of Social Assistance” at the University of Siegen, as well as on my own ethnographic research project on exclusion as an unplanned consequence of community work.

Due to its open and exploratory approach ethnography is well suited to researching previously overlooked consequences of social work. Ethnography attempts to observe the supposedly familiar as if it were unusual and strange. It also makes it possible to analyze the effects of fields (e.g. norms, positions, or materiality) and social practices. Through their involvement, ethnographers can gain insight into the forces to which participants are exposed in the field. With their precise descriptions of small details, ethnographers can make visible the production of consequences which is often overlooked in ongoing everyday business.

Ethnography is particularly suitable for researching consequences that are not outspoken. There may be various reasons for consequences staying implicit: people affected being hardly listened to due to their social position; consequences contradicting the norms of institutions; consequences being so self-evident that they are overlooked; or consequences occurring in fleeting, complex interactions that are difficult to grasp in everyday practice.

Using brief examples from ethnographic projects, I will illustrate that consequences are not only produced by professionals using methods or by service users who want to realize their own ideas, but also by everyday practices and field-specific sociologies. The 1st example shows how exclusion becomes an unintended consequence of community work because of a specific habitus of making plans in a citizen round. The 2nd example illustrates the field effect of the collective believing of the effectiveness of the project’s stated objectives – which has the consequence that other, unfulfilled needs are overlooked. The 3rd example shows the unintended othering in a café for homeless people, whose stated principle is to treat everyone equally

Realist Evaluation in Reintegration: Exploring Opportunities in an Uphill Battle - *Liesbeth Naessens*

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In a policy landscape increasingly shaped by populist narratives around crime and punishment, the dominant metric for evaluating detention remains recidivism, an outcome that neglects the complex social, relational and contextual dynamics that shape reintegration. This presentation shares preliminary findings from an ongoing realist evaluation of a small-scale, community-embedded transition house supporting individuals returning from incarceration to society. The transition house aims to offer a humane alternative to large-scale incarceration, guided by a strong human-centered mission.

Rather than asking whether someone reoffends, this study analyses how, why, and under what conditions reintegration processes unfold. Using realist methodology, we explore context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) configurations through participatory observation of everyday practices (e.g., shared meals, informal conversations, activities in the community), focus groups with professionals, and interviews with residents during and after their stay in the transition house.

This research addresses a pressing challenge in contemporary social work: how to generate meaningful, context-sensitive knowledge in a climate where penal policy is often driven by fear, simplification and populist thinking. By foregrounding lived experience and contextual factors, realist evaluation offers a powerful counterweight to reductionist metrics and opens space for more nuanced understandings of what 'successful' reintegration entails and the many challenges it involves.

The presentation highlights the potential of realist evaluation to inform more just social work interventions in the penal field and the capacity of social work (research) to act as a critical voice in justice reform, advocating for approaches that prioritize dignity, relationality, and humanity. Furthermore, this raises the question of how an approach that foregrounds context, mechanisms, and lived experiences can provide a counterbalance in a society oriented toward risk thinking, and can be given greater prominence both within society at large and in policy.

Making Collaboration Work: Coordinating Professional Learning Communities Across Disciplines in Higher Education. Lessons Learned from a Qualitative Group Interview Study - Katrin Naumann

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Context: The proposed lecture recognizes that professional learning communities (PLCs) are becoming increasingly prominent in higher education as a means of fostering teaching development and professionalization. However, empirical insights into coordination practices—particularly within discipline-specific and cross-university contexts—remain limited. This presentation addresses this research gap using the example of the Saxon joint project “Participatory Implementation of Digitalization in Disciplines: Competencies Connected” (D2C2, 2021–2025). The D2C2 project aimed to establish and coordinate discipline-specific communities in five disciplines—computer science, health and social sciences, engineering, psychology, and art and design—to develop and enhance digitally supported teaching and learning scenarios. Among other formats, the project included Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and, in some cases, adopted the “students as partners” approach.

Research question and method: This qualitative study aims to identify the challenges perceived by coordinators of the discipline-specific professional learning communities (fPLCs) in D2C2, as well as the strategies employed to address them. Furthermore, the study explores how project structure, university context, and community composition influence coordination tasks. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative, transcribed group interview with five fPLC coordinators representing the aforementioned disciplines. The data were analysed using a circular, deconstructive coding approach with inductive category development, followed by systematic classification in relation to the existing literature.

Results: To begin with, the analysis indicates that challenges are largely dependent on the following: composition of the fPLCs, their structural integration within the university, and the overarching joint project. Another key finding is that recurring staff turnover, limited time resources, maintaining member motivation, and a low institutional appreciation of teaching development were consistently identified as key obstacles. The final aspect to consider is that coordinators responded with (the use of) adaptive, context-sensitive strategies, including needs-based topic selection, the use of digital exchange formats, and individualized support for educators.

Objective of the presentation: This contribution argues that individual coping strategies are limited in their capacity to offset structural barriers. It identifies key requirements for sustainable framework conditions to strengthen the recognition of professional teaching development, including reliable resources and organizational support. The qualitative findings offer empirically grounded insights to help enhance the design and governance of future discipline-specific and cross-university PLCs.

Making Critique in Critical Social Work: Practices of Knowledge Production - Klara-Marie Niermann

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This paper presents key findings from my doctoral dissertation *Contours of Critique: Observational Modes and Practices of Knowledge Production in Critical Social Work Theory*. The study examines how critique is produced, stabilised, and transformed within theoretical contributions to critical social work. Rather than treating critique as a normative position or political attitude, the dissertation conceptualises critique as a set of epistemic and methodological practices that shape what can be observed, articulated, and problematised within the field.

The analysis focuses on two closely connected dimensions: modes of observation and practices of knowledge production. Drawing on a reconstructive analysis of central texts in critical social work theory, the study investigates how specific observational frameworks render social problems visible, how distinctions are drawn, and how theoretical objects are constituted. At the same time, it examines the practical conditions under which critical knowledge is produced, including academic positioning, disciplinary self-descriptions, and implicit assumptions about practice, politics, and subjectivity.

The findings show that critical social work theory is characterised by heterogeneous and sometimes competing forms of critique. These differ not only in their normative orientations, but more fundamentally in their observational logics and epistemic assumptions. The dissertation identifies recurring patterns in how critique is framed, such as tensions between structural analysis and moral positioning, between reflexivity and prescription, and between distance from and proximity to professional practice.

By reconstructing these patterns, the paper contributes to a clearer understanding of how critical social work theory operates as a specific form of theoretical practice. It argues that analysing critique at the level of observation and knowledge production allows for a more precise engagement with theoretical differences, beyond questions of political alignment or methodological preference. The paper concludes by discussing the relevance of this perspective for ongoing debates on theory formation within social work and social pedagogy.

Strengthening Thailand's Foster Care System: Key Success Factors and Challenges in the Transition from Residential Child Care to Family Settings - *Panrat Nimaloung*

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Internationally, foster care is increasingly prioritised as a fundamental family-based care structure, designed to provide children with stable and nurturing environments. In contrast, within the Thai welfare context, foster care is often recognised as almost a last resort of alternative care, with residential child care (RCC) remaining the predominant model. This study investigates the complex process of integrating children from RCC into foster care in Thailand, whilst exploring the mechanisms through which foster carers facilitate successful transitions and maintain placement stability. Furthermore, it identifies systemic weaknesses and proposes strategic pathways for improving the national foster care framework.

The research is grounded in three primary theoretical concepts: attachment theory, the sociology of childhood, and family practices. These frameworks are applied to analyse the intersections of child behaviour, developmental milestones, and the practicalities of fostering, alongside the protection of children's rights regarding provision and participation. By synthesising these theories, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how foster families can support children's emotional and social needs without the risk of placement breakdown.

A qualitative methodology was employed, utilising focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with a comprehensive range of social care stakeholders, including social workers, child-care practitioners, and senior administrators. To ensure the inclusion of children's voices, direct observations and interviews were also conducted with foster children, identifying key factors for successful integration from their lived perspectives.

The thematic analysis identified five critical pillars that influence the fostering journey: attachment and bonding, the conceptual understanding of foster care, the transition process from institutional to family settings, practical challenges and solutions, and contributions towards systemic reform. The findings suggest that successful integration requires more than just placement; it necessitates robust pre-transition preparation and ongoing professional support. These results carry significant implications for policy development, advocating for a shift towards family-based care and the implementation of standardised support protocols to enhance the well-being of vulnerable children in Thailand.

Social work education in times of democratic backsliding: Insights from a scoping review - Urban Nothdurfter

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Since the beginning of the millennium, democratic systems have faced extraordinary challenges. European societies have experienced an intensification of anti-democratic tendencies, including populism, authoritarian discourses, racism and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions, within a broader global context marked by a decline in the number and quality of democratic states (Freedom House 2019; V-Dem Institute 2021). These developments directly affect the terrain of social work, reshaping welfare policies, public discourse and the everyday conditions under which social workers practice.

Despite these challenges, limited attention has been paid to how anti-democratic tendencies are addressed within social work education, and systematic knowledge remains scarce regarding the extent to which educational programmes and pedagogical approaches prepare future professionals to engage with them critically. Understanding how education responds to democratic backsliding is, however, essential for strengthening the profession's capacity to foster democratic resistance and sustained democratic commitment. Without such critical engagement, there is a risk of reproducing patterns from the profession's troubled past in which social work has not always acted as an emancipatory force, but at times has been complicit in oppressive or exclusionary projects (Ioakimidis & Wyllie, 2023).

The proposed presentation reports on the preliminary findings of a scoping review investigating how anti-democratic tendencies are conceptualised, problematised, and translated into pedagogical practices within social work education research, based on an analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025.

Preliminary findings suggest that, while anti-democratic dynamics are widely discussed in relation to broader socio-political contexts, explicit engagement with social work curricula, teaching strategies and pedagogical models remains limited. Existing contributions tend to focus either on anti-democratic tendencies as external threats to professional values or on the need for individual ethical resilience, with comparatively less attention to their structural and epistemic implications within educational systems themselves. Furthermore, empirical evidence on how such tensions are addressed and contested within educational settings remains underdeveloped.

In identifying conceptual clusters and blind spots, the review aligns with a more reflexive and publicly engaged approach to research, attentive to the de-intellectualising and technocratic dynamics that have reshaped welfare and professional education in neoliberal contexts. From this perspective, social work education can be a space in which the profession's critical and democratic vocation is actively cultivated and sustained (Singh & Cowden, 2009).

Learning to Feel “Not Enough”: A Socio-Pedagogical Perspective on Low Self-Worth in Adult Life, with Implications for Social Work – Anna Odrowąż-Coates

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Low self-worth is a powerful predictor of depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, yet it is still predominantly approached within psychology as an individual or intrapsychic problem. From a social pedagogical and socio-educational perspective, this focus is too narrow. I aim to reconceptualize low self-worth as a socially produced, relational, and educationally mediated phenomenon that develops through lifelong socialization processes in families, schools, universities, workplaces, and welfare institutions. Grounded in social pedagogy's emphasis on dignity, recognition, and relationality, the presentation argues that self-worth is not simply a personal trait but a form of social knowledge learned through interaction, evaluation, and cultural norms. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from sociology of education, social pedagogy, gender studies, and critical psychology I will argue how feelings of being “not enough” emerge through everyday pedagogical practices such as comparison, assessment, normalization, and subtle forms of symbolic exclusion. Special attention is given to adult women, particularly those with high educational capital (students, professionals, leaders, and mothers of students), who are often positioned as successful and privileged, yet experience intensified performance pressure and contradictory gendered expectations. These tensions make them especially vulnerable to chronic self-doubt, shame, and self-criticism. The analysis shows how educational success does not protect against low self-worth, but can, under certain cultural conditions, intensify vulnerability through heightened standards of perfection, responsibility, and emotional self-regulation.

The paper introduces social pedagogically relevant analytical categories such as: socially situated shame as a response to normative educational and gendered expectations, relational validation and invalidation as key mechanisms in the formation of self-worth, micro-interactional degradation in educational and professional settings, culturally patterned self-criticism as a learned moral disposition, symbolic violence embedded in “neutral” practices of evaluation and achievement... These concepts are directly relevant for social education and social work, as they highlight how institutional practices can unintentionally reproduce emotional vulnerability and social exclusion even when no overt oppression is present.

From a social work perspective, the presentation challenges the tendency to individualize low self-worth as a personal deficit to be corrected through therapy or resilience training. Instead, it emphasizes the need for: Educational and welfare institutions that cultivate recognition, psychological safety, and relational trust; Social pedagogical practices that strengthen collective dignity rather than competitive self-evaluation; Preventive work that addresses structural and cultural sources of shame, not only its individual consequences. By reframing low self-worth as a product of educational and social relations, the paper positions social pedagogy as a key field for understanding and transforming the emotional foundations of inequality. It shows how self-worth is deeply connected to people's sense of agency, belonging, and social participation, all of which are central aims of social education and democratic social work.

“Hearing Us Changes the Story”: Young Arab-Palestinian Women’s Reflections on Research Findings on Childhood Abuse and Barriers to Service Use in Israel – *Shira Pagorek Eshel*

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Young Arab-Palestinian women abused in childhood often stand at the intersection of vulnerabilities related to gender, age, class, minority status and socio-political marginalization in Israel. Their perspectives on how abuse is embedded in family, community and institutional relations – and how services respond or fail to respond – are still underrepresented in scholarship and practice. This presentation examines a participatory component within a mixed-methods study on childhood abuse and its consequences among Arab-Palestinian young women in Israel. The study combined a nationwide survey of 482 young women aged 18–25 with qualitative interviews with 20 young women and 20 social workers, exploring prevalence and meanings of abuse, barriers to help-seeking and the role of social and institutional contexts.

Two focus groups (n=20) were conducted in two localities in Israel and included participants who were receiving community-based services for young women at risk at the time of participation. In each meeting, researchers presented core quantitative findings and selected interview excerpts on cultural, familial and institutional barriers to disclosure and help-seeking. Participants were invited to share their responses, situate the findings in their own lives and local realities, and formulate recommendations for families, communities and state institutions.

Qualitative analysis of the focus group protocols yielded three themes. First, from individual tragedy to collective social problem: hearing the prevalence data and narratives led participants to reframe abuse from a private family issue to a structural problem linked to patriarchal norms, family honor, socio-economic marginalization, access to weapons and institutional neglect. Second, from silencing to conditional voicing: participants described long-standing fear of disclosure but also viewed sharing and listening to others’ stories as a pathway from vulnerability to strength, highlighting admiration for survivors’ courage and the potential of testimony to generate change. Third, from abstract rights to concrete demands: discussion moved from general references to “mentality” to demands for continuous accompaniment from early childhood, enforcement of compulsory education, safe and confidential services and state responsibility for Arab-Palestinian young women’s safety.

The analysis suggests that inviting marginalized Arab-Palestinian young women to react to research findings about their group creates a space in which interpretive authority is shared, context-informed understandings of abuse and resistance are articulated, and grounded recommendations for practice and policy are developed from within their lived realities. This participatory component illustrates how research encounters can document the consequences of childhood abuse while nurturing political awareness, a sense of entitlement to rights and safety, and more responsive frameworks in social work and related fields.

Who is Allowed to Narrate Inequality? Autosociobiography and the Conditions of Articulation - Susanne Pawlewicz

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In recent years, socio-autobiographical writing has gained increasing visibility. Authors such as Annie Ernaux and Didier Eribon intertwine personal life histories with analyses of social origin, making class relations, symbolic violence, and habitual dispositions explicit objects of narration. This paper examines to what extent autobiographical sociology can be understood as a transformative practice in processes of social change and under which structural conditions its critical force remains limited.

Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic violence, autobiographical writing is not approached as expressive self-affirmation but as a reflexive practice that renders social genesis visible and unsettles naturalised orders of inequality. By turning one's own class position into analytical material, a shift in perspective becomes possible that may reconfigure both individual self-understandings and collective patterns of perception. In this sense, autobiographical sociology can be seen as a medium in which writing subjects potentially become "change agents" – not through moral appeals, but by de-privatising social experience and embedding it within structural relations.

At the same time, this genre is highly demanding. The capacity to articulate one's biography in socially intelligible form presupposes cultural capital, institutional recognition, and linguistic legitimacy. Autobiographical-sociological texts predominantly circulate within academic and literary fields, where their critical thrust may be moderated by aesthetic and scholarly norms. Academic incorporation thus entails a risk: structural critique becomes visible, yet may simultaneously be domesticated and partially depoliticised.

Against this backdrop, the paper asks whether and how autobiographical sociology can be conceived as a collective impulse for social transformation beyond individual narratives of upward mobility among the educationally privileged. Social sustainability, in this perspective, does not primarily consist in writing about justice, but in critically interrogating the very conditions of articulability: Who possesses the language in which inequality can be named? Which institutional spaces enable – or constrain – such articulation? Autobiographical sociology thus emerges as an ambivalent practice, situated between emancipatory potential and structural limitation.

Surname and the identity of women. The patrilineal tradition of taking a husband's family name at marriage and societal changes – Joanna Pawłowska

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In many social contexts, a woman's adoption of her husband's surname after marriage is perceived as an obvious, seemingly neutral custom and a woman's private decision. The aim of the speech is to critically analyze selected results of doctoral research based on the assumption that surnames (like given names) can serve as important identity symbols. From this perspective, the tradition of adopting husbands' surnames, which require women to change this symbol, does not appear as a neutral custom but as an element of entrenched power structures and a form of symbolic violence against women. This practice may be part of a deeply rooted patrilineal tradition that reproduces gender inequalities and perpetuates normative family models, patterns of femininity and masculinity, and power relations, shaping women's identity and thus maintaining the status quo of social relations.

The project is theoretically grounded in perspective of social pedagogy and critical pedagogy, complemented by a feminist approach. This approach allows for the analysis of the surname choice not only as a patriarchal practice normalizing the prevailing social order, but also as a potential area of resistance to dominant narratives about family, marriage, and femininity. The study addresses a theoretical and empirical gap in Poland, integrating the experiences of contemporary Polish women into broader debates on identity, gender, and symbolic violence. The empirical foundation of the project is an original socio-psycho-pedagogical case study, enabling the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative part included semi-structured interviews with 50 married women representing various surname strategies. This was supplemented by quantitative research on a sample of almost 500 women, aimed at identifying factors influencing women's surname choices after marriage. The research findings indicate that women's surname choices are strongly embedded in the context of social norms, institutional expectations, and internalized gender patterns. Choosing a surname after marriage is a space for negotiation between autonomy and compliance with the prevailing social order. The findings also reveal that the pressure to adopt one's husband's surname is often internalized and socially naturalized, masking its structural nature. At the same time, the study reveals the existence of negotiation strategies and a kind of resistance that challenge the naturalized character of this patrilineal tradition.

The author points that the social impact of research on women's names and identities can include revealing hidden structures of inequality, expanding the language used to describe marginalized female experiences, and strengthening critical awareness essential for social pedagogy. This study thus aligns with the vision of the researcher as an actor of social change and research as an engaged practice that not only describes social reality but also opens up space for its transformation and strengthens the collective empowerment of groups ignored in dominant discourses.

Writing Our Way Through the PhD: Collective Autoethnography for Wellbeing - Magdalena Pietrzak, Ewa Duda-Maciejewska, Julia Zbróg, Jagoda Apanasewicz, Jan Gierzyński, Patrycja Mika

EARLY CAREER WORKSHOP 'National Day'

A large body of research shows that doctoral studies are often associated with high levels of stress, uncertainty, and isolation. Yet many of the emotional and relational dimensions of the doctoral journey remain unaddressed within the academic environment. This interactive workshop invites doctoral researchers to engage in collective autoethnographic analysis as a way of reflecting on and making sense of their lived experiences of doctoral education. Participants will actively engage in guided reflection supported by generative AI tools, and discussion in small groups. Together, we will explore how collective autoethnography can serve both as a research methodology and as a practice of self-understanding, validation, and community building. To evaluate the potential impact of the workshop, participants will be invited to complete brief research measures before and after the session. Depending on participants' interest and consent, the workshop may also form the basis for a collaborative autoethnographic publication, allowing attendees to further develop their reflections into scholarly output. The workshop requires active participation and is intended for doctoral researchers interested in reflecting their academic experiences, connecting with peers, and exploring new possibilities for wellbeing, and knowledge production.

“Civil society and accessibility of primary care: brokering and advocacy for people in situations of underprotection” - *Elke Plovie*

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Interest in the de-institutionalisation of care is growing: support in primary care should take place closer to daily life, within the community and in collaboration with local networks. This shift is reinforced by demographic developments, the rise of chronic conditions, and policy ambitions to keep care affordable. At the same time, primary care continues to face challenges in terms of accessibility. For certain groups, the path to primary care remains difficult: they find themselves in situations of underprotection and can be described as underserved or even unserved populations. Although they formally have the right to support, in practice they encounter barriers such as administrative complexity, financial obstacles, language and cultural differences, mistrust, mobility issues, or inadequate alignment between existing services and their lived realities, resulting in necessary and appropriate care not being reached.

There is a wide range of initiatives in civil society at the zero or informal care level: informal, often volunteer-based practices and citizen-led initiatives ranging from neighbourly support, food distribution points, and charitable assistance, to self-help organisations and low-threshold community meeting spaces. These actors reach so called “hard to reach groups” and, due to their proximity to people living in underprotected situations, can play a crucial role in facilitating and guiding them toward primary care.

This paper examines such civil society practices based on the ACCESS UP research project, one of the four research lines within the Academy for Primary Care. Drawing on ethnographic research in two contexts, we map how civil society actors contribute to primary care accessibility: (i) Tienen, a city in a more rural region with an industrial past and pronounced challenges related to poverty and diversity, and (ii) Goujonissimo, an integrated welfare and health centre in the Kuregem–Biestebroek neighbourhood of Anderlecht, characterised by high density and social vulnerability.

The comparison of both cases sheds light on the strategies used to enhance primary care accessibility. We distinguish two broad clusters of strategies: (i) brokering, in which civil society actors attempt to bridge the gap between primary care services and people living in underprotected situations. They mediate within the often institutionally complex landscape of primary care; and (ii) advocacy, in which civil society actors aim to achieve structural changes in primary care provision. Throughout the analysis of both clusters, we highlight both the potential and the pitfalls of these strategies. We provide insight into how practices navigate between individual and collective approaches, between system reinforcing and system changing strategies, and show how brokering and advocacy can create opportunities for transformation. Finally, we discuss the necessary preconditions, tensions, ambiguities and challenges faced by civil society actors.

The Systemic Coercive Bind: A Critical Realist Analysis of the Generative Mechanisms of Filial Coercive Control - *Freda Quinlan*

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This research addresses the theoretical deficit in adult-child-to-parent abuse by investigating the generative structures facilitating domestic entrapment. Utilising a Critical Realist ontology and the process of retrodution, the study identifies the ‘Real’ causal mechanism of Power through Control. Findings are based on qualitative interviews with 20 safeguarding social workers in Ireland regarding their conceptualisations of filial coercive control. The research identifies a complex generative structure comprising the perpetrator’s desire for dominance, the intention to control, and a systemic entitlement to parental resources. These forces are activated by structural enablers—ageism, paternalism, and patriarchy—compounded in Ireland by the housing crisis (‘forced proximity’) and constitutional protections of property rights. Together, these produce an emergent social reality: the Systemic Coercive Bind.

This bind operates through three integrated mechanisms. First, Relational Exploitation weaponises the ‘Parental Project’ and the stigma of the ‘failed parent’ to induce relational marginalisation. Second, Manufactured Dependency orchestrates material and custodial entanglement to transform the home into a site of restricted liberty. Third, The Deceptive Façade enforces pre-emptive compliance, resulting in a ‘calculated surrender’ of autonomy. This culminates in Abuse Fatigue, where the parent adopts the perpetrator’s narrative to avoid conflict.

These findings significantly challenge the ‘will and preference’ standard of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. Social workers highlighted that a parent’s expressed will is often a performative survival strategy—a requirement of the bind—rather than independent self-determination. By reframing these dynamics as a ‘liberty crime’ (Stark, 2007), this paper argues for a shift toward Relational Autonomy. This necessitates moving beyond ‘snapshot’ capacity assessments toward a rigorous evaluation of the power dynamics and structural enablers that curate the parent’s environment as a prerequisite for authentic safeguarding.

Transdisciplinarity and transformation in co-creative processes with children and youth - *Anna Lena Rademaker*

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Co-creation processes have the potential to deconstruct lifeworlds whether as grassroots movements or as processes endorsed by those in power, and to empower them to effect change in social lifeworlds. They should be designed with open-ended aims, but in a co-creative sense, the definition of the challenges and thus the issues to be addressed and the solutions should also be part of the joint, method-led process. This raises the question of how to critically engage with real power mechanisms that reproduce structural injustices and that risk muting the voices of participants.

In our workshop, we aim to spotlight co-creative processes in career guidance for adolescents, community child- and youth work, and health promotion. Using these examples, the underlying theoretical approaches of participatory and transformative research and practice should be examined in greater depth and critically situated within the discourse on co-creation processes. The question remains to what extent real transdisciplinarity through co-creation, as a form of shaping power, can alter political and conceptual structures.

The ensuing discussion will be opened with a method of co-creative practice and research, followed by an exchange on the opportunities and limits of participation and co-creation. Where does participation make a difference? What is the difference between participation and co-creation? Where is systemic change needed? What spaces do co-creative processes open (the power of the small), and how can empowerment make a difference? And how can formal power and the power to shape be addressed?

Staying or Leaving: How Relationships Influence Staff Turnover and Employee Retention in Services for People with Disabilities and Challenging Behaviour - Elisabeth Rass

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Staff turnover is a persistent problem in professional support settings for people with disabilities and challenging behaviour. This issue is further exacerbated by the growing shortage of skilled social workers. At the same time, the notion of 'impact' in contemporary social work is increasingly shaped by managerial logics of control. However, this focus neglects the fact that social work is fundamentally a relationship-based profession, deeply embedded in social contexts. The relationships between practitioners and clients, within teams and with supervisors are a core structural condition of professional practice and therefore need to be more thoroughly integrated into organisational and leadership concepts within social work and the social economy.

Addressing the classic human resource management issue of staff turnover, this paper argues that a purely managerial perspective is insufficient for understanding or fostering employee retention in social work. The analysis draws on 29 semi-structured interviews with staff members, managers and clients from residential services for people with disabilities and challenging behaviour. The study examines the circumstances in which employees leave or remain in their roles within these services.

The findings suggest that decisions to resign often result from the accumulation of organisational stressors. Social relationships and the perceived ability to perform 'good work' in the interests of clients are particularly important factors. Managerial concepts that frame retention mainly in terms of organisational commitment or individual resilience fail to consider these specific aspects of social work practice. Consequently, research can act as a critical resource by highlighting the relational contexts of social work and providing an empirical basis for leadership and working conditions that are sensitive to the relationship-focused nature of the profession.

Leaving Care Around the World: Insights from the Global South and Global North - Tehila Refaeli

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This presentation is based on the new book "Leaving Care Around the World: Policy, Practice, Research, and Youth Participation" (Oxford University Press, January, 2026). The presentation will provide a screening of international examination of care-leaving systems across 32 countries from the Global North and Global South.

Our comparative analysis highlights a persistent implementation gap between legislated policies and their practical application in both Global North and Global South contexts. While many countries in the Global North have established formal legislation for care leavers, implementation remains inconsistent, creating what Munro et al. (2024) described as a "postcode lottery" of service provision. In the Global South, legislation is often absent entirely, with NGOs frequently filling crucial service gaps despite limited resources and sustainability challenges.

Extended care—a provision allowing young people to remain in out-of-home care past the age of 18—receives considerable attention. Despite documented benefits, actual uptake is notably low in many regions. Cultural beliefs about independence, insufficient resources, and bureaucratic constraints all limit the effectiveness of extended care programs. Closely linked to this, aftercare services, including financial support, mentoring, housing assistance, and job training, range widely in availability.

Our discussion will also demonstrate how contextual factors influence care-leaving experiences across cultures. In collectivist societies, challenges related to identity and family ties may be more pronounced, while priorities for support services vary significantly between regions.

The chapters of the book also reveal concerning data gaps across all regions, with many countries lacking even the most fundamental information about care leaver populations and outcomes. This absence of reliable data represents a significant barrier to developing evidence-based policies and targeted interventions, particularly for vulnerable subgroups such as indigenous youth and ethnic minorities. Moreover, cross-country comparisons are complicated by varying terminologies and cultural perceptions.

Our international overview provides, for the first time, a comparative analysis of care leaver associations, which advocate for youth rights, improve services, and promote participation in decision-making. While present across all Global North countries, these associations exist in varying degrees throughout the Global South.

Our presentation will call for expanded international guidelines and encourage investment in extended care, early preparation, and inclusive aftercare. It recommends strengthening data collection, fostering global dialogue, and aligning support for care leavers with what is typically available to their peers in the broader population.

Preparedness for Professional Practice: Perspectives of Graduating Social Work Students - Georgiana Cristina Rentea

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Social work is an academic discipline and a practice-based profession that promotes social change, social cohesion and the empowerment of people (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). This study explores social work students' preparedness for professional practice, their future career aspirations and related concerns. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students just before the completion of a three-year undergraduate social work programme (BA) at a university in Romania. The findings indicate that students are generally satisfied with their degree, valuing its content and outcomes both professionally and personally. Analysing critically their theoretical learning and placement experiences, participants recognise the importance of theory for understanding professional practice, first during practice placements/fieldwork and later as future professionals. At the same time, they mentioned ambivalence about their preparedness to access the workforce and report a range of concerns, including fears of professional failure and emotional strain. Many participants also mentioned a strong intention to continue with a master's programme in order to further develop their competence and sense of preparedness. The findings highlights implications for structuring social work curricula to better support students' transition into professional practice, as well as for employers in relation to graduates' expectations regarding induction, supervision and continuing professional development (CPD).

Belonging and Barriers: Co produced Insights on Disability and Resettlement in Regional Australia - Kim Robinson

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The number of internationally displaced people is increasing due to war, conflict and climate change. While there are no official international statistics on the global prevalence of disability in the refugee and resettled population, 2020 data suggested 12 million people seeking refuge had a disability. This paper draws on a co-produced qualitative research project in a regional community in Australia with people from Afghan Hazara and Karen refugee backgrounds with lived experience of disability themselves or as a carer. Our methods attest to promoting social justice and social change via collective empowerment and can inform social work pedagogy and research.

The presentation will highlight the innovative research methods which involved the Project Management Team comprising bi-cultural workers, settlement and disability service providers and academics, a lived experience Advisory group, and a mixed lived experience and provider co-design group. The project was underpinned by bi-lingual community consultations and interviews in the language of participants. The project team developed a co-designed research proposal using an iterative, cyclical Action Research approach.

People with disability and carers from Karen and Afghan Hazara refugee backgrounds were interviewed three times by a bi-cultural worker from their community. Holding regular forums and training and collaborating with experienced bi-cultural workers is key to ensuring relevant, supportive and appropriate services to people from refugee backgrounds. In addition, we employed artists to illustrate the key themes that were identified from the interviews and used them in subsequent interviews to check for relevance of imagery and cultural appropriateness. The co-design working group utilised Systems Thinking in Community Knowledge Exchange (STICKE) (<https://iisri.deakin.edu.au/project/sticke/>), a tool that illustrates the way insights surrounding complex issues can be obtained, shared, analysed and tracked through systems thinking. This illustrative technique is shared with participants, highlighting key themes and connections between issues, and providing participants with opportunities to make connections between complex interactions at various levels, including micro, meso, and macro. The themes will be presented from both groups in detail.

The research findings suggest we must focus on the barriers to long-term resettlement of refugees with disabilities in regional communities. The presentation contrasts this lived experience with recent published research to identify similarities, new issues and improvements for policy makers and service providers. It highlights key issues requiring urgent attention to enable access to health and disability services for people from refugee backgrounds living in regional areas. Upholding dignity and rights-based care in this context is a basic human right for all and core to critical social work.

Agency Of Syrian Refugees in the Family-/Parental Reunification Process - Veronika Rosenberger

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Family reunification is an exemplary field where politics, law, human rights and social work intersect. A recent illustration of this is the two-year suspension of family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, which was adopted in June 2025 despite objections based on human rights. In this context, family reunification is governed by caps intended to make mobility 'manageable' in technocratic terms.

This mode of governance is what becomes superficially visible in public debate. Lived experiences and relational complexities risk being reduced to what can be counted. In this context it's also recognizable that refugees' perspectives remain underrepresented in research (e.g. Seidl et al. i.E.). Against this backdrop, this presentation aims to explore how refugees experience the reunification process and how they interpret the involvement of social pedagogy.

Social pedagogy plays a central role here, particularly in child and youth welfare. It is the legal, ethical and professional obligation of practitioners to act in the best interests of the child, and to young people throughout the reunification process. While policy regimes prioritise metrics, social pedagogy is confronted with the relational consequences these structures impose on lived realities.

The data is based on 23 narrative interviews with young refugees from Syria across Germany, focusing on their experiences with the process of family-/parental reunification. The analysis followed an exploratory approach in line with Reflexive Grounded Theory (Breuer et al. 2019). The researcher's positionality as a social pedagogue is explicitly acknowledged; the project is situated within critical migration research and guided by research-ethical reflexivity in working with participants' narratives. Preliminary findings suggest that refugees perceive the family reunification process as being characterised by social inequality and discrimination. Furthermore, the study identifies key resilience factors that shape how young people cope with these conditions. Concurrently, the data suggest that young people may perceive social pedagogical practitioners as surrogate family figures, reliable sources of care and stability.

Yet social pedagogy operates within a field of tension: while providing essential support, it can also contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities through professional expectations. These dynamics are shaped by broader institutional structures, which create conditions of dependency. Expectations of neediness, for instance, may restrict young people's agency and limit their self-determination in coping with the reunification process.

This tension reveals that social pedagogical practitioners support those affected, but at the same time is involved in reproducing social norms and power structures. A critical look at these power relations and the ambivalent role of social work is therefore essential in order to make family reunification more equal in the future.

Prospects for a more human future - the aesthetic of the possible in transformative social work - *Elvira Schulenberg*

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Universities of applied sciences as agents for sustainable development processes, play a key role in achieving the goals of the United Nations Decade of Sustainability. In order to eliminate the structural causes of epistemic injustice and strengthen diversity, participation and sustainability, transformative social work addresses social needs.

Inquiries and critical assertions concerning the conceptualization of a prospective society are predicated on the not-yet and affect utopian imagination and aesthetic principles, which assume a pivotal role in the promotion of a more human future.

Based on the work of Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), my contribution will address the question of how the transformative potential of social work can be tapped by Bloch's "principle of hope" and the categories "possibility" and "not-yet".

A critical rethinking of Bloch's concept of "nature alliance" is imperative for transformative sustainability science and take an emancipatory approach. This approach must be transdisciplinary and take into account the notion of an open, changeable, and malleable present and its transitional forms. A critical analysis of prevailing social conditions thus establishes a theory-practice approach that does not consider the objectives of intervention in isolation from the analysis of contemporary and prospective social conditions.

Within a discussion of scientific ethics in the Anthropocene, the proposal reconstructs Bloch's "ethics of change" as an orienting framework for transformative research. The principle of an „ethics of change“ will be linked with the development of a "sense of possibility" and Bloch's conception of an "prospective research into what is possible" as equal transformative education and partisan research practice for residues (Lefebvre).

In order to critically question the present and future, aesthetic mediators help to anticipate sustainable futures. I will illustrate the relevance on a research project and the implementation of a participatory social space analysis. This will be placed in the context of questions about socio-spatial significances in Bloch's understanding of the production of the "not-yet." The use of photographic techniques to code „limit situations“ (Freire) and their visualisation and verbalisation within dialogical-emancipatory action research will demonstrate the relevance of utopian methodologies for transformative social work research, prospecting a more humane future.

Bridging the Gap? Post-Migrant Perspectives on Structural Inequities in Child and Youth Welfare - *Inga Selent*

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Child and youth welfare services offer a wide range of social services. They address young people who find themselves in very different life situations and have had different experiences. At the same time, the professionals and organisations themselves seem to exhibit only limited diversity. Against this backdrop, the framework conditions of the child and youth welfare system will be examined to identify which dominant institutional narratives and professional paradigms may unintentionally reinforce structural inequalities and marginalise voices. From a post-migrant perspective, the focus is therefore on practices and organisational structures that may reproduce inequalities in the support system.

Reconfiguring Knowledge Production and Impact in Social Work Research and Pedagogy: The Merging of Knowledge Model - Jordan Shaibe & Orna Shemer

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Contemporary social work research and education are increasingly required to demonstrate impact through measurable outcomes, often privileging administrative and evidence-driven indicators over critical engagement with power, inequality, and lived experience. This tension raises fundamental questions about what counts as impact, how future social workers are trained to understand and enact social change, and whose knowledge is legitimized within academic and professional settings. This session explores how social work research and pedagogy can reclaim a critical and transformative role by reconfiguring knowledge production processes themselves.

The session focuses on the Merging of Knowledge (MoK) model, which brings together academics, practitioners, and experts by experience in structured processes of collaborative inquiry. Through dialogical engagement, MoK creates spaces in which hierarchical epistemic relations are unsettled and alternative forms of knowing can emerge. Drawing on multiple-case study of MoK-based courses implemented within the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, the presentation examines how this model generates forms of impact that are relational, ethical, and pedagogical, rather than narrowly outcome-driven.

Three interrelated contributions of the MoK model to social work research and pedagogy will be discussed:

1. Redefining impact through epistemic justice: By positioning experts by experience as co-researchers, MoK challenges the monopoly of academic and professional expertise. Impact is reframed as a transformation of epistemic relations, enabling practitioners, academics, and students to recognize experiential knowledge as legitimate and consequential.
2. Cultivating reflexive practitioners and researchers: MoK-based dialogue requires students, researchers, and practitioners to critically examine their own positionality and the power dynamics embedded in knowledge production. This reflexive practice supports the education of social workers equipped to interrogate, rather than reproduce, systemic inequalities.
3. Linking theory, practice, and pedagogy as sites of social change: Rather than treating theory as an abstract framework to be applied, MoK understands theory as emergent from dialogue between practice and lived experience. Within the educational setting, this approach enables students to experience knowledge production as a collective, contested, and socially situated process.

By positioning MoK as both a knowledge production process and a pedagogical practice, this session contributes to broader debates on how social work researchers and educators can act as agents of social change and public knowledge producers. The presentation concludes by considering the implications of MoK for social work education, research, and practice, arguing that dialogical engagement with experiential knowledge is central to sustaining justice-oriented forms of impact and collective empowerment.

From Lived Experience to Pedagogical Transformation: Integrating Young Women's Knowledge into Social Work Education through Theatre-Based Practice - Nour Shimei

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Integrating lived experience into social work education is increasingly recognised as enriching learning processes and challenging established knowledge hierarchies. Yet the implications of such pedagogical practices for how social impact, expertise, and knowledge legitimacy are understood remain insufficiently explored. This presentation draws on a classroom-based practicum that positioned young women receiving welfare services as participants in social work education through a collaboratively designed pedagogical process.

Using a first-person action research framework, we – as lecturers, social workers, and researchers – reflect on this teaching initiative and introduce a nine-step pedagogical model developed retrospectively from practice. The model emerged from sustained collaboration between an academic setting and young women with lived experience of welfare and alternative care systems and was implemented within a BA social work practicum seminar.

Two core pedagogical principles emerged from the analysis:

- (1) the integration of lived, academic, and professional knowledge, and
- (2) the deliberate shifting of roles and positions within the learning process.

Theatre-based participatory methods functioned as a central pedagogical medium for enacting these principles. These methods supported structured dialogue, reflexive engagement, and relational forms of learning among social work students, young women with lived experience, educators, and practitioners. Rather than treating lived experience as illustrative narrative, the pedagogical process enabled its recognition as a form of knowledge capable of shaping educational interactions.

The analysis considers how such practices unsettle conventional assumptions about expertise, authority, and learning in professional training. In doing so, the study engages broader debates on social impact by examining how micro-level pedagogical arrangements may reconfigure whose knowledge is legitimised, how roles are negotiated, and how possibilities for critical reflection and transformation emerge within educational spaces.

The presentation will outline the nine-step model through examples from practice and reflect on the methodological, ethical, and institutional challenges involved in integrating lived experience into social work education.

Creating digital social stories as a tool of working with/for children with ASD – Agnieszka Siedler & Ewa Odachowska-Rogalska

EARLY CAREER WORKSHOP ‘National Day’

Co-funded by EU under EARLY-ASD Project • 2024-I-PL01-KA220-HED-000246304

During the workshop you will enhance your knowledge about Autism Spectrum, and you will find out how and why to create Digital Social Stories for Working with Children with ASD. A workshop dedicated to professionals and students within social work, education and related fields, as well as for individuals developing their teaching competencies in working with children. Why is it worth joining?

- You will learn how to create Digital Social Stories
- You will become familiar with open-access online tools for working with children with ASD.

Social Work: A Blurred Concept. The Questionable Image of Social Work - Daniela Cornelia Stix

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Social Work is expected to operate not only at the microsystem level but also on broader, systemic scales: engaging in public debates, challenging structural inequalities, and representing the interests of its clients. Yet how can Social Work as a profession and academic discipline demonstrate impact and bring about change when it remains largely invisible and is often conflated with all kinds of social activities or used as a synonym for social infrastructure?

In my presentation, I will provide a brief insight into my research on press releases from Germany's major welfare associations and the largest Social Work providers. This study forms part of a broader media-scientific research into the public image of Social Work. Press releases from 2022, 2023, and 2024 were analyzed, along with the statutes of the welfare associations. For the methodological design of this part of the analysis, a qualitative-descriptive approach was chosen. To uncover recurring strategic patterns, content-analytical categories were developed and supplemented with frequency counts. A hermeneutic analysis of the press releases and statutes also proved necessary during the process. In the sense of participatory validation of the research findings, the results were additionally discussed with two PR officers in interviews, which were also analyzed using content-analytical methods.

At the first level of analysis, it was revealed that the terms *s/Soziale Arbeit* (and the historically grown expressions *Sozialpädagogik* and *Sozialarbeit*) appear only rarely across all press releases in the post-pandemic period. Even more strikingly, the content analysis showed that the references rarely pertain to the profession or the academic field of Social Work (*Soziale Arbeit*); the majority of these mentions primarily refer to general social activities or social infrastructure – so-called social work (*soziale Arbeit*). Therefore, at the second level of analysis, a hermeneutic approach was applied to determine whether Social Work or social work was actually meant in the press releases as well as in the statutes.

Both the fact that *s/Social w/Work* is rarely mentioned in the press releases, and the fact that it is often unclear in both the press releases and the statutes whether Social Work is meant as a profession or an academic discipline, or simply as any form of social activity or infrastructure, are findings that raise the question of how such a publicly blurred understanding of Social Work can have any political impact.

Building on these insights, I aim to discuss experiences, perceptions, and research findings from other countries regarding the visibility and representation of Social Work internationally, and what this means for our mandate to contribute to social discourse, critique structural inequalities, and advocate on behalf of clients.

Affects in child protection: Emotional demands, affective orders and professional practice - Samantha Stolz & Klara-Marie Niermann

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Child protection is often framed as a field governed by rational–normative decision-making, while affective dimensions such as fear, shame, anger, powerlessness, exhaustion, or a strong sense of duty are marginalised or individualised as personal weaknesses. This paper places affect at the centre of analysis, conceptualising emotions not as private states of individual workers but as expressions and effects of organisational, discursive, and societal conditions in contemporary child protection. In morally charged and uncertain contexts, such as suspected (sexual) violence or neglect, affects provide crucial insights into tensions, contradictions, and limits of what is considered professionally feasible and acceptable.

Empirically, the study draws on group discussions with child protection professionals in child and youth welfare, originally conducted within a master’s thesis and re-analysed here. The group setting reveals collectively shared interpretations, affective atmospheres, and negotiations over which feelings may be displayed, legitimised, or silenced. Using open, inductive coding, the analysis examines how practitioners discuss or circumvent their affective experiences and what meanings they attach to these affects for professional action, self-understandings, and relationships with children, parents, and organisations. Both explicit emotion terms and more implicit affective markers, such as metaphors, humour, distancing, or breaks in narrative flow, are considered.

Theoretically, the paper draws on concepts of emotional labour and affective economies, linking these to critical social work research on risk, control, and responsibility. It asks: Which affective “rules” and expectations emerge in the discussions? How are fear of making the wrong decision, shame about perceived failure, and exhaustion articulated and regulated? How do these affects point to organisational contradictions, for instance between the mandate to protect, limited resources, and media or political scrutiny, and how are they used to mark the limits of what is bearable or to stabilise and unsettle professional positions?

The paper provides three contributions: (1) empirically grounded insight into affective orders in child protection; (2) a theoretical framing of affects as structurally and discursively produced phenomena within child and family social work; and (3) discussion of implications for practice, organisational support, and social work education. In line with the conference theme “Social work and social pedagogy: research, impact and social change,” it argues that an affect-sensitive perspective deepens understanding of professional strain and resilience, while opening critical perspectives on how social work organisations might acknowledge, contain, and productively engage with the emotional labour at the heart of child protection, beyond purely managerial notions of “impact.”

Navigating Adversity: Resilience Mechanisms Among At-Risk Arab Emerging Adults in Israel - Yafit Sulimani-Aidan

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Background: At-risk young adults Arabs in Israel navigate the period of emerging adulthood while confronting multiple challenges within their life context, encompassing interpersonal, sociocultural, and socio-political dimensions. However, a growing body of research supports the emergence of resilience among at-risk youth, highlighting that some young adults achieve positive outcomes due to both individual and environmental factors.

Objective: This study aims to develop a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms involved in fostering resilience (achieving positive outcomes despite challenging circumstances, coping successfully with traumatic experiences), during the transition to adulthood, with a specific focus on at-risk young adults Arabs in Israel.

Methods: The final sample consisted of 35 at-risk young adult Arabs in Israel. Eligibility criteria included young adult Arabs aged 18-29 who receiving formal support by the ministry of social services and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Data were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three-stage coding: open, selective, and theoretical, combining inductive and deductive reasoning.

Results: The findings revealed two themes: (1) Personal resilience processes refer to the ways in which young adults overcome challenges and barriers through their own initiative and internal resources. These processes include breaking cultural norms, developing self-reliance and responsibility, and engaging in reflexivity; (2) Contextual resilience processes encompass two key elements: the supportive role of mothers, and the important role of social workers as sources of guidance and emotional support.

Conclusions and implications: The findings suggest that exposure to risk among ethnic minority young adults may enhance both individual agency and the use of environmental assets within their collective context, which also faces social discrimination, as well as increase their reliance on traditional and community-based coping mechanisms. Recommendations for practice emphasize the importance of interventions that focus on the assets and strengths of young adults Arabs at both personal and ecological levels.

Who owns social change? Institutionalisation, norms and interpretive boundaries in the Living Library - Aneta Szarfenberg

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This presentation is based on an empirical study of the institutionalisation of the Living Library – a bottom-up, dialogical method of non-formal education aimed at counteracting prejudice and social exclusion. In this study, institutionalisation is not understood as formalisation, but as a process of shaping norms, rules and roles, and of gradually disseminating them in ways that allow the initiative to persist, be replicated and function across diverse local contexts.

The analysis draws on four complementary theoretical frameworks: interactional framing (how meanings and definitions of the Living Library are negotiated), the recursive model of institutionalisation (how repeated dialogical practices become stabilised as rules and routines), diffusion of innovations theory (how and why the method spreads to new locations), and the concept of the commons (which material and immaterial resources are protected through institutionalisation). The presentation is guided by research questions concerning how shared understandings of the Living Library are constructed, who defines its rules, and how the boundaries of the method are established and maintained.

At the core of the presentation is the argument that institutionalisation stabilises not only practices, but also particular ways of talking about social change. Through standards, handbooks and recognised procedures, some interpretations of the Living Library become legitimate and authoritative, while others are gradually marginalised. As a result, boundaries are drawn that determine who can organise the Living Library, which events are recognised as “real” Living Libraries, and which practices no longer fit within the accepted definition – especially in situations where social realities change faster than institutional frameworks can adapt. This leads to the key question: does institutionalisation protect the idea, or does it protect a particular version of the idea?

The presentation is based on qualitative research including document analysis (such as standards and training materials), ethnographic observations and interviews with organisers involved in different stages of the Living Library’s development. By conceptualising institutionalisation as a socio-pedagogical process that both enables the dissemination of social change and produces mechanisms of exclusion through interpretive boundary-making, the presentation contributes an empirically grounded, critical perspective to current debates on impact, legitimacy and responsibility in social change research.

Contextual Drivers of Rights-Based Social Service Development for Older Adults in Georgia - Zurab Tatanashvili

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This presentation looks at how rights-based social services for older adults are actually taking shape in Georgia, and what helps or hinders their development in practice. While the policy framework increasingly reflects international human rights standards, the reality on the ground is more complex.

The presentation explores the gap between formal commitments to rights-based approach and their everyday implementation. Efforts such as deinstitutionalization and the expansion of community-based services indicates important progress. At the same time, services for older people remain limited in scope and unevenly distributed, with a strong reliance on family care. In such conditions, ideas like autonomy, participation and dignity often depend less on formal rights and more on what support is actually available.

Particular attention is paid to factors that are often overlooked in policy debates: the working conditions of social workers, high caseloads, managerial pressures and the limited space for professional judgment. It also considers how broader political and institutional developments influence the ability of practitioners and organizations to advocate for older adults.

The Georgian case suggests that rights-based service development is not simply a matter of adopting the “right” policies. It is shaped by everyday practice conditions, resource constraints, and wider social and political dynamics. Understanding these contextual drivers is essential if rights-based approach is to move beyond formal commitments and become meaningful in the lives of older people.

‘School Fit’ as a Relational Achievement: Reconstructing Educational Responsibility in Residential Care - Elisabeth Thomas

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Educational trajectories of young people in residential care is often discussed in terms of disadvantage, such as limited support, personal challenges, or school absence. While these factors matter, focusing solely on them risks oversimplifying how schooling actually works for this group. This presentation reconceptualizes „school fit“ as a relational and situational achievement that results from the shared practices of young people, residential care professionals, and teachers.

Based on interviews (n=13) with young people, teachers, and residential care professionals, this study used the Documentary Method (Nohl, 2017) to reconstruct the orientations that shape everyday schooling practices. „School fit“ is not a fixed individual trait or a simple alignment between needs and institutional expectations. Instead, it emerges in relational dynamics across young people, residential and school settings, where (partially) shared orientations enable workable participation in everyday schooling.

Successful participation in school - understood here not in terms of grades or formal certificates, but as regular and functional attendance and participation in everyday school life - depends on how these different perspectives and practices come together. When „school fit“ is achieved, mediation, negotiation, and discretionary decisions ensure that everyday school life works for everyone involved. When „school fit“ is not achieved, participating in everyday school life becomes difficult and regular school attendance is threatened or subject to exclusion processes. „School fit“ is co-produced through the interplay of all actors, and young people are neither passive recipients of rules or structures nor solely responsible for their educational trajectories.

By highlighting the relational and situational nature of „school fit“, this presentation challenges the narrow understanding of schooling processes of young people in residential care, according to which they are more or less solely responsible for successful participation in school and for simply adapting to school structures. Instead, using the developed concept of „school fit“, it draws attention to how responsibility, agency, and support are distributed between young people, residential care groups, and school contexts. This reveals what school attendance actually looks like for young people in residential care and what successful participation in school can depend on, and what factors can promote or hinder this.

Welfare bricolage at the urban margins: navigating homelessness, squatting and social work - *Jef Timmermans*

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This paper (in progress) builds on ethnographic research conducted for my master's thesis, spending several months – often day and night – studying homelessness, squatting, and social work in Nieuw Gent, a social housing neighborhood in Ghent. By foregrounding the lived experiences, strategies and everyday practices of people experiencing homelessness who squat (PEHS), alongside those of local residents and social workers, this research uncovers the nuanced realities, challenges, and possibilities of homelessness and squatting, situated within a dominant criminalizing discourse and policy context.

To make sense of this complex intersection of homelessness, squatting and social work, I draw on the concept of 'welfare bricolage', understood as "a creative mobilisation, use and re-use, of wide-ranging resources, including various knowledge resources and multiple ideas, materials and networks" (Phillimore et al., 2016). Using this lens, we analyse the narrative 'vignettes' of four diverse participants, co-written throughout the ethnographic fieldwork, which illustrate their personal trajectories, experiences, and housing pathways.

This study positions PEHS as a distinct yet heterogeneous subgroup within the broader homeless population, underscoring the need for differentiated and personalized forms of support. Therefore, this article examines the ambivalent and often fragmented relationship between them and our welfare system, focusing on how they navigate between (in)formal and (il)legal forms of care and assistance, mobilizing their right to housing and social support. At the same time, it highlights how PEHS negotiate, disrupt, and challenge the welfare system itself, emphasizing the important yet under-researched individual, collective, and political agency of PEHS and the diverse ways they 'struggle along' (Desjarlais, 1994), resist (Bouillon, 2003, 2009, 2011; Bouillon et al., 2012; Lancione, 2020), and navigate (Vigh, 2009) their precarious housing and living conditions, shaped by broader welfare and housing structures. Through this approach, the study situates personal and collective experiences within wider structural systems, power relations, and dynamics, creating space for a more social and thus boundary-breaking view and perspective for social support and action regarding PEHS.

In this presentation, I will discuss the progress of this article, offering a look into the everyday, yet ambiguous and contested living environments of PEHS. By uncovering their everyday practices and strategies, I will situate squatting as an act of welfare bricolage. In doing so, I strive towards a social work perspective on squatting, grounded in the fundamental right to housing, exploring potential pathways toward the (re)politicization of social work, oriented toward social justice and human dignity.

Social-justice-informed public management: From resistance and hybridity to a pragmatic reconstruction of the critical - Shachar Timor-Shlevin

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This presentation combines social work scholarship, management and organizational studies, and a sociology of professions framework to clarify and develop a conceptual framework for critical managerialism in public social services.

Background and Purpose: The current affinity of public social service management toward neoliberal and market-based approaches is considered an impediment to the implementation of critical approaches promoting social justice. Addressing this issue, the social work field mainly presents critical calls for "resistance" and opposition to neoliberal approaches. Alternatively, a compromising frame developed in the sociology of professions calls for a hybrid integration of critical and neoliberal approaches for social service operation. However, both perspectives fall short in conceptualizing a sustainable framework for critical managerialism in current public services. This presentation addresses these gaps by exploring the experiences and practices of social service managers who promote social-justice-informed objectives in public welfare services in Israel, illustrating their nuanced approaches to upholding critical perspectives within a market-based managerial field.

Method: This presentation is based on qualitative research with 32 welfare service managers in Israel involved in poverty-aware programs. The Poverty-Aware Paradigm is a critical framework for direct social work practice that has been implemented in the Israeli welfare system since 2015, involving more than 2,000 social workers and 40,000 families across approximately 170 municipalities. This wide scale of implementation enables an exploration of social-justice-informed managerial practice. Interviews focused on the managers' experiences, perceptions, and practical examples of social-justice-informed managerialism, which were then analyzed using thematic coding.

Findings: The findings illustrate two main modes of pragmatism related to the construction of social-justice-informed managerialism. First, at the level of direct managerial operation, managers use their familiarity with social policies and marginalized populations to communicate social-justice-informed perspectives to municipal or state stakeholders. These efforts are engaging and connective, favoring dialogue over resistance. Second, managers reframe critical perspectives as pragmatic, moving away from theoretical purism toward a direct commitment to citizens, focusing on sustaining the commitment of local authorities to inclusive and accountable civil service.

Conclusions and Implications: The discussion analyzes these cases of pragmatic managerialism using the organizational framework of paradox theory (Smith & Lewis, 2011) to offer a preliminary understanding of social-justice-informed managerial practice for social services.

Italian regional differences and child protection: how does the history of Italian reunification impact child protection today? - Sara Teresa Tornielli

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Following Italian unification in 1861, Marxist historians, including Gramsci, offer a counter-hegemonic view of the events leading to the creation of the Kingdom of Italy: Gramsci, in his writing on southern Italy, points out how the capitalist interests of the more industrially developed North treat the agricultural south of Italy as an “internal colony”, with economic policies aimed at furthering the interests of the industrialised north at the expense of the people of the South. These issues still persist in Italy, causing ever greater inequality between the Northern and the Southern regions. People living in Southern Italy have lower incomes, the South faces a lack of structural investment in its infrastructures, and Southern Italians have worse educational attainment both in terms of length of schooling and quality of education. High youth unemployment and high migration towards the North or towards other countries also affect the South (ISTAT, 2023). These inequalities, historically understood through the lens of colonialism, greatly influence social work practice today: they shape the availability of welfare services, the legitimacy of state intervention, and, ultimately, the everyday practice of child protection. National questionnaire and focus group research was carried out in Italy to investigate social work practice when removing children from their families to place them in residential care. The focus groups gathered together professionals from different areas of Italy, allowing for a comparative analysis of results from Centre-North regions and Southern ones. Although similar perspectives on child removal were evidenced in all focus groups, key differences can be identified and analysed through the lens of decolonising social work. A key finding from focus groups in Southern Italy was the perception of a lack of resources to support families before and after child removal. Social workers in the South more often reported concern regarding the costings of residential care placements. Southern social workers appeared to have a more positive outlook on cooperation with law enforcement during child removals: they were perceived as allies in child protection due to their power and to families’ acceptance of their authority. Perceived power, therefore, appeared to be lower for Southern social workers than the rest of Italy; this may be due to lingering mistrust of state control and intervention in family life in the South, where the state is not perceived as having citizens’ best interests at heart. Finally, Southern social workers reported feeling “left alone” to deal with difficult issues such as “educational poverty”, meaning inter-generational early school leaving, a concern that did not seem as prevalent in other areas. Read through a decolonial lens, the differences emerging from Southern focus groups reflect the structural marginalisation historically produced by Italy’s internal colonial relationship between North and South.

Cultivating critical professional agency: reflective and dialogical practices in social work education - *Mira Välimaa*

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Social work is increasingly required to demonstrate its impact, respond to complex social problems, and act in ethically accountable ways in increasingly unequal social contexts. At the same time, the profession's mandate extends beyond individual casework to engagement with institutional conditions and participation in broader societal debates. Such professional agency cannot be reduced to technical skills or procedural competence. It requires reflective judgement, dialogical capacity, the ability to situate one's practice in relation to power and structures, and the confidence to critically justify professional decisions. In this presentation, we explore how these capacities can be deliberately fostered during social work education.

We draw on two reflective and dialogical pedagogical approaches in social work education: the reflective team and participatory assessment. The reflective team, originating in Tom Andersen's systemic family therapy, creates a structured yet open dialogical space in which participants articulate and listen to multiple perspectives. Knowledge emerges relationally: understandings are refined as they are voiced, heard, and reconsidered in the presence of others. The method fosters attentiveness, reflexivity, and tolerance of plurality, capacities that underpin professional social work practice.

Participatory assessment, in turn, invites students to engage actively in evaluating their own competence and professional conduct. Students learn to identify strengths and areas for development, relate their learning to professional criteria and ethical principles, and articulate the reasoning behind their choices. Such practices cultivate evaluative judgement and reflective decision-making, capacities that future social workers need in order to act responsibly in uncertain and complex situations and to critically examine the institutional conditions shaping their work.

Taken together, these approaches can be understood as complementary pedagogical practices that strengthen students' professional identity and their understanding of social work as a field situated at the intersection of client work, organisational frameworks, and societal structures. The issue, therefore, is not merely about teaching methods, but about the kind of professional agency social work education seeks to cultivate and the societal role for which it prepares future practitioners.

**“When you talk to other young carers, we all share the same frustration, and... Some of those things can actually be addressed”:
young adult carers in Flanders taking action for social change - Lena
Van Bergen**

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Young carers are defined as young people who take care of a loved one with a long-term illness, substance misuse, a disability or another support need. Available research shows how young carers face many difficulties, with the situation impacting their mental health, education pathways and general quality of life. Young carers also report a need for support, varying from receiving more information, to contacts with other young carers and therapy. However, political theorists such as Joan Tronto also problematize the situation of caregivers in a more fundamental way, critiquing the way care responsibilities are allocated.

My research focuses on a grassroots young carers organization in Flanders, ZoJong!. Founded and ran by young carers themselves, mostly on a volunteer basis, they organize support and do advocacy work. I am myself a volunteer at ZoJong! and have lived experience as a young carer. I have been conducting my PhD research at this organization, following the trajectories of several young carers through interview and participant observations at activities there. Through these methodologies, I have gained insights into their trajectories of finding support, but also of meeting other young carers and understanding that many of their problems are not individual or family-based, but rather collective and political. ZoJong! then became a base for a collective struggle of a few of these young adult carers, for example through actions during the Flemish ‘Week of the Young Carer’. This echoes Tronto’s call to break the boundary between morality and politics: on the one hand, there are the care decisions young carers make behind closed doors, on the other hand, the political reasons why they are the ones having to undertake this care work. Together with other young adult carers they meet at ZoJong!, participants in my research decide to take action to denounce and change the structural conditions that cause injustices for them and their care receivers. For example, they notice that their schools lack empathy, attention and flexibility to their circumstances as young carers, focusing solely on their grades instead. Tronto identifies these issues as symptoms of a generalized disregard for (those who do) care work and argues for a care ethic.

In this presentation, I will further elaborate on this politicization of young (adult) caring at ZoJong! through Tronto’s feminist ethics of care lens. This will include a critical examination of the limitations of this process: for example, the diversity in the ‘active’ group of young carers is very limited (gender, age, ethnicity and social class), so blind spots are inevitable. Secondly, advocacy efforts by young carers themselves arguably do not always address the root causes of the problems they face. Despite being imperfect, this practice nonetheless reveals the transformative potential of peer support organizations to make structural injustices visible and to challenge the depoliticization of care.

Community Development as a Socio-Spatial Practice: An Ethnography of Material, Cultural, and Political Embeddedness in a Dutch Neighbourhood - *Chantal van Lieshout*

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In recent years, the so-called community turn in the Netherlands has led to a renewed appreciation of the concept of 'community' within policy, politics, and research. Community development is positioned as a key strategy for addressing a wide range of societal challenges, with responsibilities increasingly being shifted onto local communities. Through social and physical interventions, neighbourhoods are sought to be strengthened, while community development professionals are expected to contribute to the creation of resilient and inclusive living environments. These developments, however, are accompanied by tensions between policy pressures, organisational rationalities, and the everyday lifeworlds of residents, and may moreover result in processes of depoliticisation of community development.

Against this background, a two-year ethnographic study was conducted in an urban context, aimed at examining practices of community development. The focus was on a specific neighbourhood in which both spatial and social interventions have been implemented over recent decades in order to foster a stronger sense of community among the local population.

The purpose of this presentation is to share the findings of this research from a socio-spatial perspective, in which community development is understood as a relational, socio-spatial, and political process. Drawing on Low (2016) and Massey (2005), space is conceptualised as dynamic, multiple, and permeated by power relations: a continuous process of encounter, friction, and negotiation. In line with contemporary theories of community (among others Bauman, Cavell, and Cohen), community itself is likewise conceived as open, unfinished, and relational, formed through everyday interactions and mutual dependencies. Community development therefore appears not as an instrumental project, but as a practice of becoming, in which meaning, relationships, and space are constantly reproduced.

Community development thus constitutes a normative and politically charged practice that touches upon questions of social and spatial justice, ownership, and collective agency. Professionals operate within this field of forces as boundary workers who open up democratic space, challenge power structures, and create conditions in which residents can emerge as political subjects and exert influence over their living environment.

This approach not only offers an analytical lens for understanding urban community formation, but also provides a framework for action for community development professionals working in complex and politically charged contexts.

From Malta to Blankenberge: Youthful Lines of Flight in a Landscape of Deprivation - *Caroline Vandekinderen*

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Our qualitative case study is embedded in Watersportbaan, a disadvantaged neighbourhood dominated by high-rise social housing in Ghent (Belgium), where multiple social problems converge. This area exemplifies how neo-liberal policy reforms led to uneven spatial development, transforming the neighbourhood into a backdrop of (in)fastructures that reproduce concentrations of social inequalities.

Our research examines the aspirations of young people in this deprived neighbourhood. Drawing on Appadurai's (2004) notion of the capacity to aspire, we move beyond an individualised understanding of aspiration and conceptualise them instead as culturally and socially embedded capacities. This perspective enables us to analyse the material, symbolic, and relational resources that shape young people's ability to formulate and pursue future-oriented projects. Accordingly, our study attends not only to the perspective of young people, but also to the broader socio-institutional context in which aspirations are formed. We map the local urban context, including the role of social professionals who work with youngsters within the locality.

Methodologically, we adopted an interpretative research design combining two complementary qualitative methods. Informed by urban ethnography, we conducted sustained fieldwork in the neighbourhood to document how young people and social professionals negotiate everyday practices, mediate between institutions and life-worlds, and navigate urban inequalities. We carried out qualitative semi-structured interviews to explore processes of meaning-making. Young people participated as central informants, based on the premise that their lived experiences constitute valuable sources of knowledge. We also incorporated the perspectives of social professionals engaged in their lives. This multi-actor approach enables us to situate personal trajectories within the broader discursive and structural contexts.

Our study shows that many of the young people are situated in contexts of profound deprivation, marked by precarious housing conditions, disrupted educational trajectories, experiences of abuse, and financial problems that constrain hopeful imaginaries of the future. At the same time, our findings reveal how these young people attempt to unsettle fixed structures and imposed identities by pursuing diverse lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980): booking a one-way ticket to Malta, developing an alter ego online, or imagining the coastal city of Blankenberge as futural setting. Although such strategies may initially appear irrational or undesirable, they often function as productive forces through which young people articulate possibilities beyond their immediate circumstances. Importantly, we observed how social engaged with them as meaningful expressions of aspiration. Moreover, they created enabling spaces, relational contexts that expand participation and imagination of youngsters.

Digitalization, Impact, and Social Change: Rethinking Technostress, Inclusion, and Research Responsibility in Social Work - Nadine van der Meulen

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In contemporary social work research, “impact” is increasingly framed through measurable outcomes, efficiency indicators, and evidence-based metrics. While such approaches promise accountability, they risk obscuring the deeper transformative mission of social work: to challenge inequality, amplify marginalized voices, and contribute to social change. This paper critically examines digitalization in social work as a key site where these tensions become visible.

Based on an ongoing mixed-methods PhD project in Germany, the paper analyzes digitalization as a socio-political process that simultaneously produces stress, exclusion, and new possibilities for solidarity and inclusion. Empirically, the study draws on 50 qualitative participatory interviews and a complementary quantitative survey with social workers and organizational representatives. The findings reveal a paradox: digitalization is experienced as a major driver of technostress—through constant availability, data protection uncertainties, and increased documentation—while also offering relief when embedded in inclusive, ethically grounded, and participatory structures.

Theoretically, the contribution combines Critical Social Work, Actor–Network Theory, and perspectives from Disability Studies and neurodiversity research. This framework highlights how digital technologies are not neutral tools but actively shape professional autonomy, health, and participation. Particular attention is paid to the experiences of marginalized professionals, including disabled and neurodivergent social workers, whose perspectives challenge dominant narratives of digital “progress.”

The paper argues that the impact of social work research should not be reduced to technocratic indicators. Instead, impact must be understood as a relational, political, and collective process that aligns digital transformation with social justice. From this perspective, inclusive design, the right to disconnect, digital ethics education, and participatory co-creation of technologies are not optional add-ons but core elements of socially responsible digitalization.

By positioning researchers as public intellectuals and potential change agents, the contribution calls for a re-politicization of digital social work research. It demonstrates how critically engaged, participatory research can generate impact that goes beyond compliance—strengthening collective empowerment, professional well-being, and democratic participation. In doing so, the paper aligns digital transformation with the emancipatory foundations of social work and social pedagogy.

Self-care strategies in mixed-aged teams with young social workers: When is it too much, when too little? - Susanne Vaudt

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Social services are currently facing profound demographic and social changes with organizational consequences. The labour market for social work professionals has increasingly become an “applicants’ market.” Young social work professionals are rare and change jobs more frequently. While most social work activities are meaningful, necessary, and fulfilling, they are also often particularly challenging and can be personally stressful and exhausting. To remain motivated and satisfied at work and maintain long-term mental health, preventive self-care is necessary on an individual level (Groen et al. 2024; Vaudt et al. 2025).

In our current research project MentalPro HAW-EuropaNetzwerke (2025-2026), promoting self-care and mental health among young social work professionals is the central topic. This presentation provides findings from our qualitative study with social work students, professionals and managers in Hamburg, Germany. The majority of students and graduates from our Faculty of Social Work and Early Childhood Education show a pronounced awareness of self-care aspects. There is a strong desire for a good work-life balance. In this context, they explicitly emphasise the importance of setting personal boundaries. From a self-care perspective, this should be seen as a positive way of protecting oneself from excessive work demands.

In practice, however, personal boundary-setting strategies regularly contradict users' expectations and are not naturally understood by all team colleagues, especially those who are older and more experienced who are often older. They may interpret boundary setting by young social work professionals not as a necessary step in self-care, but as a lack of their commitment and personal weakness (Marchand et al. 2025, 53). Individual knowledge about personal attitudes toward self-care behaviour can vary greatly within a team. What seems appropriate to some team members may be perceived by others as too little or too much. This raises the question of how to achieve good teamwork despite differences on this topic. In other words, how can successful teamwork be ensured when team members understand and evaluate self-care behavior differently? This presentation highlights different aspects of salutogenic leadership and concludes with practical recommendations.

Accessibility, non-take-up and children's rights in social protection - Martin Wagener

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The presentation is based on research conducted as part of a collaboration between a university (UCLouvain CIRTES) and a field-based research-action-training service (RIEPP Asbl) during two research projects covering three years on the non-take-up of support services around (peri-)natality, early childhood education and care services (0-3 years) and leisure services (3-12 years). In addition to the lack of available places for children, there is also the question of the quality of these services and their adaptability to the diverse needs of families. Hence the interest in studying the issue of non-take-up and, more specifically, that of non-demand, which allows us to go beyond considerations of accessibility and question the relevance of public provision.

Underlying this is the need to adapt the services offered to families in order to help reduce the risk of families giving up their rights and to strengthen the implementation of children's rights. More broadly, it is also a question of building collaborative research partnerships across disciplines and with other actors in the field to develop knowledge that is both more localised and more relevant.

Techno-optimism or Technostress? Social workers' attitudes towards and experiences of Artificial Intelligence in Finland - Marcus Weckström

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This paper explores the relation between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and social work by focusing on social workers' attitudes toward and experience of using Artificial Intelligence in their professional practice in Finland. Earlier research has shown that Nordic populations adopt digital tools less critically than populations in continental and southern parts of Europe. Techno-optimism can also be identified in the Finnish government program (2023), which demands that welfare counties implement digital and AI tools in social and healthcare whenever possible.

At the same time, media reports and research show that many professionals in the social welfare sector suffer from technostress caused by poorly functioning digital tools combined with heavy workloads. Finland has a rapidly ageing population, and the country has an interest in keeping people working as long as possible. The aim of the study is to understand the relation between AI and social work. This knowledge can be used at different societal levels, from practitioners to decision-makers, during a period of rapid technological change when many juridical and ethical aspects related to AI and professional conduct are not yet resolved. There is limited empirical knowledge about how social workers perceive and engage with AI-based tools in their everyday professional practice. In Finland, basic enquiries have shown us that different welfare counties are at different stages in how they have taken AI tools into use.

The empirical study is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with 30–40 social workers in three different bilingual welfare counties in Finland, representing different stages in the implementation of digital and AI tools. Data will be analysed using qualitative content analysis focusing on professional reasoning, perceived opportunities and risks, and ethical concerns. We are especially interested in the boundaries (red lines) that social workers may draw between duties that can involve the use of AI and duties that cannot. Our presentation at TISSA aims to provide a preliminary outline and identification of key patterns in how social workers understand the role of AI in professional practice and how AI tools may affect professional autonomy, client relationships, discretion, and decision-making. The role of social workers in the Nordic countries is strongly connected to the use of public power, since most social workers are employed in the public sector.

The study is part of a project funded by four Finnish bilingual welfare counties and the University of Helsinki and is situated at the Helsinki Practice Research Center in social work. It contributes to current debates on digitalisation and professional practice in social work. The theoretical framework will, in addition to the earlier mentioned concepts of techno-optimism and technostress, tentatively be influenced by concepts from critical theory and the sociology of professions linked to professional knowledge.

Integrative forms of therapy in a Psychiatric Clinic - Barbara Wedler

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Research context: Integrative forms of therapy are becoming increasingly important in psychiatric care as they complement traditional pharmacological and psychotherapeutic treatments by incorporating body-oriented, creative, and mindfulness-based methods. The Zschadraß Psychiatric Clinic offers a wide range of these services and uses them regularly to treat patients with depression, anxiety disorders and addictions. Despite their growing use, there is a clear need for research into how effective these methods are perceived to be. This mixed-methods study, conducted as part of a university research project, is the first to systematically examine the perspectives of both patients and professionals in everyday clinical practice. Theoretically, the study is based on biopsychosocial, salutogenic and body psychotherapeutic models, as well as the concept of self-efficacy.

Research questions and methodology: The study aims to capture the subjective experience of the effectiveness of integrative forms of therapy from multiple perspectives. This gives rise to two central research questions:

- 1) How do psychiatric professionals assess the effectiveness of integrative forms of therapy based on their professional experience?
- 2) How do patients assess the subjective effectiveness of integrative forms of therapy?

A mixed-methods design was chosen for the methodology. The qualitative element comprises guided interviews with expert therapists, nurses, and senior medical staff who actively use integrative methods. Structured content analysis according to Mayring and Kuckartz was used for the evaluation. The quantitative element was based on a standardised questionnaire survey of inpatients who had participated in integrative programmes. This survey recorded the frequency of use, perceived effectiveness and satisfaction, as well as the participants' socio-demographic and diagnostic characteristics. The evaluation is still ongoing.

The results show a consistent picture: integrative forms of therapy are rated positively by both patients and professionals. Five of the six quantitative hypotheses were confirmed. These relate to the use and effect of integrative services in the clinic, their connection with different diseases, their specificity, and willingness to continue using them.

Qualitative analysis: The interviews make it clear that integrative procedures are particularly effective in promoting attention, body awareness, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation — in other words, psychosocial factors. At the same time, limitations were identified, such as excessive demands, a lack of stability, and structural restrictions.

Overall, the study shows that integrative forms of therapy contribute significantly to the stabilisation of psychiatric patients' subjective experience and are perceived as a valuable addition to standard care.

Extreme social withdrawal – a silent pandemic, invisible also in social work? - Katja Weidtmann

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These days the upbringing of young people is marked by various challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects, climate crisis, lack of jobs and affordable housing. These challenges are accompanied by serious social changes such as demographic change, digitalization, political polarization, changing gender and family images. These exemplary potential stressors not all young people can cope with resiliently. Maladaptive reactions include reduced well-being, increases in loneliness, mental health disorders, and social withdrawal. Social withdrawal can reach extreme levels (ESW) and then is defined as withdrawal into one's own room or living space for a period of at least 6 months without participation in school, training, or work. With those affected usually being cared for by their families. ESW typically begins in adolescence, with individual, developmental psychological, familial, and social factors considered to be the causes. Mental disorders can play a role or develop during ESR, which often lasts for years or decades. People in ESW and their families suffer greatly, and their risks of physical and mental illnesses increase. Since the 1990s, ESW has been described and researched primarily in Japan as hikikomori, and support systems are most developed there. In recent years ESW has been described increasingly also in Western countries, an increase is suspected. Inaccessibility, shame and fear of stigmatization make it difficult to determine prevalence, and high numbers of unreported cases are assumed. Worldwide prevalence estimates range from 1% to 6% (Amendola, 2024). In Europe, there are hardly any findings on the occurrence, experiences, and support of people in ESW and their families.

In Frankfurt (Germany), interviews were conducted with social workers having points of contact with people in ESW and their families in various fields of action and parents living for years with their affected children. Social workers reported high levels of family stress, problems getting access to the young people in ESW and their lack of motivation to accept support. The parents described the origin and development of ESW, their very high burden concerning family life as well as interactions with private contacts, difficult feelings, and administrative, financial, and legal problems. In addition to their own failed attempts to end their child's ESW, they strived for help from medical and social services. The gaps in the German support systems seem striking – concerning the professionals' expertise, missing adequate, accessible and flexible formats, and unclear responsibilities by various authorities. Ideas are derived to improve the support for young people in ESW and their families.

Amendola, S. (2024): Clarifying the position of hikikomori in mental health: Is hikikomori a variant of already-known mental health disorders? *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, 18: 1-18

Moments of democratization in qualitative social research - Frederike Weß

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In my Contribution, I will discuss the democratic potential of qualitative social research that goes beyond the production of knowledge and the depiction of peoples realities as well as structural barriers to participation.

After years of working in political education with migrants and refugees, I decided to focus my PhD on the question of how people from autocratically ruled countries acquire democratic culture after migrating to Germany. During my qualitative research with so-called Russian-Germans, a group of migrants who came to Germany after growing up in the Soviet Union, there was evidence that beyond analyzing personal democratization processes, the research itself has democratizing potential.

In the acquisition of democratic culture as a combination of competences and values, participatory democratic theories assume that “civic skills” are learned through everyday experiences of having a voice and feeling appreciation for ones opinions in private life, in educational institutions and at work, as well as in explicitly public spaces (e.g. Almond/ Verba 1972; Pateman 1985; Barber 2003; Honneth 2023). In this Social work practice plays a decisive role through participatory conceptualization, which aims to empower people and create community. I argue that Social work research can play a role in this acquisition of skills as well.

It is about the experience of participating in research for the interviewees themselves. Apparently, for many Russian Germans I interviewed, it was the first time they were offered the opportunity to tell their personal life stories and reflect on their own migration experiences.

The realization that their own biography was of interest to a researcher repeatedly caused irritation and reflects the self-image of a group of people who, due to their "silent" integration, are repeatedly referred to as „rolemodel migrants“ for they are invisible. This usually refers to high employment rates, good German skills and education as well as income levels which are significantly higher than those of migrants from other countries of origin. Yet this uncovers a very problematic understanding of what a « good migrant » is and stands opposed to the idea of a democratic culture – and social work as a profession to strengthen that culture – that aims to empower every citizen to have a voice in public life. My research shows that not only didn't Russian-Germans experience their integration as silent, but that as part of German society they have strongly shaped the communities they integrated into.

I would like to elaborate on this, supported by excerpts from my collected data, in order to illustrate that researchers become change agents, not only in the publication of findings or the communication of knowledge through teaching, but also by opening up spaces for narration and opportunities for actual perspective-taking, which I consider to be significant moments in the establishment as well as the acquisition of democratic culture.

Researching for Social Change? Power, Trust and Positionality in Social Work - Laura Wenzel, Vanessa Schwenker, Claire Woods & Philipp Sandermann

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In social work research, a shared focus on practice makes questions of social change a key point of reference across the field. Claims to social change do not simply articulate research aims. They also carry normative and epistemic commitments that influence the framing of social problems, knowledge, and intervention. Crucially, these claims rely on assumptions about how researchers and research participants interrelate with the professional and public fields that social work research addresses and through which it gains legitimacy.

Against this background, our talk will examine two prominent methodologies—a) impact research and b) participatory research approaches—through which claims to social change are legitimized in social work research. In impact research approaches, legitimacy is primarily grounded in standardized methods, effectiveness criteria, and highly theory-laden, yet positivist references to what is of influence (Grinnell & Unrau, 2010) and therefore counts as knowledge for “what works.” (Drisko & Grady, 2015) Trust is predominantly placed in procedures and measurements, and epistemic authority is organized around specific forms of fact and evidence production. In participatory and addressee-oriented research (Bortoletto, 2017; Flanagan, 2020; Godden, 2025), legitimacy is more strongly tied to proximity, lived experience, and relational engagement. Here, trust functions as an epistemic resource, and authority is enacted through participation and representation.

While these two methodologies differ greatly in how they mobilize trust, they show similarities in how they organize power by defining what counts as valid knowledge and how responsibility for social change is distributed. To better understand these similarities, it is crucial to focus on the respective positionings of social work researchers. In both methodologies, researchers are positioned as “agents of change,” authorized not only to produce knowledge but to render it relevant, usable, and transformative for practice and society. Concurrently though, the researchers' influence on the actual development of research stays underexposed. Researchers are thus not valued primarily for knowledge production as such, but for its anticipated impact and applicability, which entails a specific call to researchers to be “more than researchers” and “make a difference.” Furthermore, these positionings are embedded in hierarchical and precarious academic structures, shaped by funding dependencies, temporary employment, and career-stage inequalities. Enduring relations of power and trust structure their relation to research participants, professional communities, practitioners, and the wider public. We will conclude our talk by exploring how a more explicit, power- and trust-sensitive reflection of researchers' responsibilities and dependencies might help to clarify the conditions, limits, and options that go along with claiming social change as a goal of social work research.

The Social and the Cultural in Socio-Cultural Work: Neoliberal and Critical Reconfigurations of Two Foundational Concepts in Belgium (Flanders) - Mart Willekens

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This paper conceptualises socio-cultural work as a socio-historical and political enterprise. It departs from the assumption that neither “the social” nor “the cultural” exist in any substantive or essential form. Instead, both are continuously produced through ethico-political discourses that generate specific myths of the social. By analysing these discursive formations, the paper seeks to disentangle how different meanings of both concepts have been constructed, appropriated, and transformed over time, and how the cultural commons perspective can reclaim them by offering a non-substantialist conceptualisation of both concepts. First, this perspective is situated within a critical-emancipatory paradigm which has roots in both critical theory and pedagogy. Next, it traces how this paradigm relates to three other dominant discourses that regulated socio-cultural work policies in urban contexts throughout history: a romantic-humanist paradigm centred on Bildung and moral integration; a formal-administrative paradigm oriented toward governability and social control; and a neoliberal paradigm that reframes culture and social relations as productive and economic resources. The cultural commons perspective explicitly aims to counter neoliberal and formal-administrative logics, while simultaneously reframing core concepts such as participation, emancipation, and inclusion that also informed the romantic-humanist paradigm. This paper sets out to disentangle how these concepts take shape within different paradigms and how they can be mobilised within a critical-emancipatory agenda. In doing so, the paper contributes to current debates in social work and urban sociology concerning the loss of the “social,” suggesting that what is at stake is not its disappearance, but the ongoing struggle over its meaning and political direction.

About to Be Doing Biography/Interview: Positioning negotiations in the interview situations with German rap fans – *Celia Wolter Rodriguez*

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In this contribution, I question the narrative-biographical interview as a situated research practice that produces 'field-specific biographizations' (Dausien & Kelle 2005). Specifically, I investigate how requirements of doing biography and doing interview in the context of German rap are reproduced and negotiated in the logged interview situation. The aim is not just to reflect on the interview situation's influence on the interview, but to consider the additional field notes (Postskript) as a source of insight, whereby I include my own positioning practices as a researcher.

The premise of the situational co-construction of the life story in narrative-biographical interviews is widely acknowledged within biographical research but has only been explicitly investigated to a limited extent. This co-construction does not only begin in the interview itself, but rather already through mutual positioning in the interactional situation leading up to the recording. I argue that these positioning practices can be analyzed in the post-interview field notes, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the interactional situation, as well as the field and research logics. In this context, I reflect on the field notes of the interview situations in which I conducted two narrative-biographical interviews with adolescent German rap listeners. Following the approach of Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, it is possible to analyze positioning negotiations in monological formats by considering both the positioning (interactions) of the characters within the narrative and the positioning of the narrator through this narration. Building on this I discuss in which ways the construction of the field notes is interconnected with relational research and field discourses, which exhibit overlapping traces both in the interaction and in the writing.

The analysis indicates that similar (research) discourses are present in both sets of field notes, but that my position as a legitimate researcher is deployed differently in relation to the respective positioning actions of the interviewees. The negotiations of the interviewee position reveal the interview as a challenging situation, with legitimacy being addressed on one hand through the speaker position – at the intersection of German rap and biography – and on the other hand through the narrative competence – as an active interview ability. Thus, the exchanges of biographical and situationally vulnerable self-thematizations appear as ways to create legitimate closeness in the interview situation, while this closeness is only presented fragmentarily in the field notes as a reaction to interactional requirements. This allows to deduce tensions between the discourses within which I legitimize myself in the interaction situation and those within which I legitimize myself in the field notes. I interpret their concomitance as an ambivalent dual requirement on an epistemological as well as on a research-ethical level.

KEYNOTE - Pedagogies of Solidarity: lessons from Community Schools in Latin America - Maria Cecilia Zsögön

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In contemporary social work and social pedagogical research, impact is increasingly defined through measurable and standardised indicators. This paper challenges such narrow framings by examining community-based schools in Latin America as spaces of transformative educational and social impact that exceed technocratic evaluation models. Drawing on qualitative analysis of ten community schools across Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Guatemala, and Paraguay, the paper explores how education rooted in community participation, cultural identity, and collective knowledge production operates as an agent of social change.

The schools analysed implement diverse pedagogical approaches, including intercultural bilingual education, agroecology, popular education, democratic governance, mobile schooling, and arts-based practices. Across contexts, learning is embedded in local cosmologies, ecological relationships, oral traditions, and political struggles, fostering autonomy, reciprocity, solidarity, and critical consciousness among students and communities.

The paper argues that the primary impact of these initiatives lies not in quantifiable outcomes, but in their capacity to strengthen collective identities, sustain local knowledge systems, and challenge structural inequalities. Methodologically, it raises questions about how such relational, cultural, and long-term impacts can be conceptualised and legitimised within dominant research frameworks. By foregrounding community schools as pedagogical and political projects, the paper calls for a redefinition of impact in social pedagogy and social work; one aligned with justice, collective empowerment, and transformative social change.

The daily challenges faced by foster caregivers - Kamila Zdanowicz-Kucharczyk

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In Poland foster caregiver is so necessary in his role of providing care for children who, for various reasons, lacked it includes the following types of foster families: related, non-professional and professional. It is worth noting that the situation is different for kinship foster families, non-professional foster families, professional foster families and caregivers of family foster homes. Taking into one's home a child from a family, a grandchild, a granddaughter is not the same as taking in a child from a foreign family with some difficult background. It requires caregivers to have specialized pedagogical, psychological, often medical knowledge. Of course, such knowledge is also useful in related foster families, but it is nevertheless a child from a family. Much of the work is done intuitively, traditionally, as it has been for generations in this family. In a professional family, or in a family foster home, already establishing a relationship with a child can be problematic, as they can often have trouble trusting adults after experiencing many difficult situations. In presentation I present these problematic situations, which foster caregivers must to deal with.

Overcoming the Evidence Based Paradox in the Evaluation of Interventions with Homelessness: Reflections and Methodological Insights from a Practice Research Project - Anna Zenarolla

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Social work with people experiencing homelessness represents a major challenge for welfare services, not only in terms of direct intervention but also regarding its evaluation and, consequently, its political legitimation. In work with this target group, not only has intervention grounded in a neoliberal, performance-oriented logic proven ineffective, but so has the evidence-based (EB) approach that, in coherence with the same neoliberal perspective, often guides its evaluation. Rather than fostering a proactive and welcoming attitude among practitioners, this approach tends to encourage the projection onto service users of managerialist expectations and performance standards through which interventions and, more broadly, social policies are assessed. As a result, instead of helping to counteract and reduce situations of severe marginalization, social services may exclude them from their sphere of action, paradoxically contributing to their persistence or worsening.

This paper aims to reflect on both the potential and the challenges involved in identifying evaluation methods and tools capable of going beyond immediately observable evidence, adopting instead an understanding of evidence as a stimulus to look further and more deeply. The analysis is based on documentation collected during a participatory action research project conducted between February 2024 and February 2026 with 21 social workers and educators from seven Territorial Areas in the eastern part of the Bergamo province, engaged in work with people experiencing homelessness. The project aimed to support multidisciplinary teams in the activation of One-Spot Centers envisaged by the National Plans for Social Interventions and Services 2021–2023 and 2024–2026, as well as by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, within the framework of Essential Levels of Social Provision.

The project involved sharing with practitioners the theoretical and methodological foundations of an innovative approach to homelessness intervention—the “lateral” approach known as Syde by Syde—and the co-construction of tools for monitoring and evaluating its implementation. Adopting a practice research methodology, the project established a group of co-researchers consisting of the 21 practitioners and two academic researchers. Through bi-monthly meetings combining theoretical input, group discussion, individual and small-group work, and field activities, participants collectively developed and tested monitoring and evaluation instruments in their everyday practice.

The analysis of practitioners’ oral and written reflections during the meetings, together with the monitoring forms completed during field implementation, made it possible to identify methodological insights relevant for the evaluation of poverty alleviation interventions inspired by the lateral approach.

SYMPOSIUM - Social workers and social movements - theoretical and empirical advances – Håvard Aaslund, Christian Kjeldsrup, Kathrin Schulze, Jessica Toft, & Rudi Roose

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Collective action continues in response to austerity, social policy changes, and right-wing populist politics that directly affect social workers and the communities they serve. Solidarity with marginalized groups is a fundamental principle of social work, and points to the need for collective responses grounded in human rights and social justice. Despite a long tradition of supporting community-based work, the extent to which social work has critically examined its relationship with collective action varies significantly across national contexts and professional traditions.

In the face of collective action, social workers contend with simultaneously being actors of care and control. This symposium focuses on these misalignments, contradictions, and tensions.

Presentations:

1. Short introduction: The urgency of social welfare protest. - Håvard Aaslund

The presentation will introduce the topic of the symposium and its relevance by pointing to different global trends. Civil society will need to take on a greater burden of care, while marginalized people continue to struggle for social justice, inspired by the social movements of the last few decades.

2. Are social workers more likely to participate in social movement activities? - Christian Christrup Kjeldsen & Håvard Aaslund

Scholars have argued that social work needs to be grounded in human rights, social justice, and new social movements. However, evidence of social work students' or in practice practitioners' attitudes does not show any substantial support for political activism or social justice, and research has shown that institutional values hamper social workers' possibilities for activism, or that protest groups against social work or child welfare are dismissed by social workers. Different countries also offer different political opportunities for protest and activism. Likewise, different countries support political self-efficacy through their social work education differently.

This paper aims to explore differences in social movement participation, political self-efficacy and protest between social workers and other well-fare state professionals across European countries. We analyse data from European Social Survey, accessible large scale assessment data and national registers. The results are discussed in relation to professional and institutional differences, political regimes, and opportunities.

3. Professionalisation of social work as a barrier or leverage for collective action – Rudi Roose

The professionalisation of social work can contribute to enhanced legitimacy and institutional recognition, yet it also has generated tensions with collective action for social change. Professionalisation may hinder collective engagement by reorienting social work toward individualised case management and technical expertise, thereby obscuring the structural roots of social problems.

Emphases on neutrality, evidence-based practice, and professional boundaries can depoliticise social work and discourage overt political action, including solidarity with service users and social movements. Moreover, increasing alignment with state and organisational agendas may constrain practitioners' capacity to challenge dominant policy frameworks, while professional hierarchies and specialisation risk fragmenting solidarity within the profession itself. Drawing on critical social work perspectives, this presentation argues that professionalisation can contribute to the co-optation of social justice language without enabling meaningful collective mobilisation. The analysis highlights the need for reflexive and politically engaged forms of professionalism that actively resist depoliticisation and re-centre collective action as a core dimension of social work practice.

4. Social Work as an "Open Archive" of Social Conflicts: Epistemic Inequalities and Collective Action in Roma and Sinti Communities – Kathrin Schulze

This paper examines the ambivalent relationship between social work and social movements through the example of Roma communities in Germany. Historically, the Roma and Sinti civil rights movement articulated sustained critique of social work institutions, particularly regarding racialised knowledge, professional authority, and the marginalisation of experiential knowledge.

Drawing on Susanne Maurer's concept of social work as a "memory site of social conflicts" (Maurer 2017), the paper conceptualises social work as an "open archive" (ibid.) in which epistemic struggles are sedimented, contested, and re-negotiated over time. From this perspective, conflicts between social work and Roma and Sinti self-organisations reveal both the reproduction of epistemic inequalities and possibilities for critical learning.

Empirically, the paper links historical conflicts with current forms of collaboration between Roma-led initiatives and social work, highlighting social work's ambivalent position between domination, resistance, and emancipatory potential.

5. A Radical Global Imagining: Professional Social Work Unions – Jessica Toft

Recent scholarship has highlighted the potential of professional associations to enhance social workers' collective agency, yet one significant organizational form remains underexplored: the social work union. While unions are well established in related human service professions, their role in social work has received limited comparative attention. This omission is striking in a global context marked by democratic decline, rising authoritarianism, and expanding neoliberal governance, where social workers are increasingly positioned to implement austerity, disciplinary, or unjust policies. This contribution addresses the need to comparatively examine the historical, political, and organizational conditions shaping the profession today, with particular attention to unions as sites of resistance. We seek to re-envision the possibilities of social work unions as vehicles for professional solidarity, resistance, and democratic agency."

SYMPOSIUM - Social Practices of Belonging and Agency in Communal Living – A Practice Research in Germany – Monika Alisch, Martina Ritter, Jakob Domke, & Madeline Brandt

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In view of the growing number of people in Germany who are barely able to find adequate housing on the market, contemporary research on housing must be understood as social criticism and as an intervention in practice that must pursue a transdisciplinary approach. Social work as a discipline has rarely been included in this research to date. Forms of communal housing and living have so far been regarded as approaches that exist in niches of housing demand. However, they are also interpreted as "solutions" to the housing crisis, which, however, pay little attention to issues of social inequality and injustice as well as the socio-spatial conditions for implementing such solutions. In order to make such forms of housing accessible to marginalised groups, the concept of housing must be expanded: we understand housing as a social practice and activity that also takes into account issues of social relations beyond the front door, namely in the neighbourhood as a social and spatial concept and in local public space. Expanding the concept of housing is important for analysing practices of belonging and the ability to act in one's own interests. It also opens up a perspective for social work in the field of housing by examining not only initiatives-designed projects (intended communities of housing) but also practices of local forms of living together (unintended communities of housing). In the spirit of transformative social work, ideas and practices of solidarity in cohabitation can thus become the starting point for future interventions. Our contributions to the symposium focus on various aspects of the transformative potential of communal forms of living, based on the empirical findings of the research project SaFe HOUSING.

1. Social Work as Agents for Transformation: Supporting Caring Communities in Housing/Alisch, Ritter

The idea of "caring communities" aims at a concept of shared responsibility between the state and civil society for tasks of caring for one another – which is understood as a task of living in a broader sense. Until now, individuals have been neglected as subjects in such community-building processes. It is necessary to work out how such communitisation works in everyday life. How can people who are already integrated into other strong communities (e.g. church communities) be integrated without it remaining a "good deed" of neighbourly help?

Caring communities in our sense would not only be intended housing projects that have consciously come together as a community, but also local socio-spatial arrangements in which people share their everyday lives and the necessary tasks of care and provision, but do not see themselves as a residential community (un-intended caring communities). These could be or become future models of living. Based on initial interim results from interviews with actors in the context of such un-intended caring communities, we will discuss how social work can reflect on (in terms of social inequality and inclusion) and help shape such civil society-driven transformation processes.

2. Communal Housing Projects as Social Spaces for the Experience of (Collective) Agency/Domke

Agency in Critical Psychology is understood as the ability, to collectively gain control over the respective individually relevant living conditions. It is a central element of what distinguishes humans and is tightly connected to the issue for Social Work, how a social space should be arranged in order for its subjects to control their living conditions. Social spaces are understood as spaces constituted

by people for relationships, interactions, and social conditions, which are to be understood as the result of processes of action. Neoliberalization of European societies and a seeming lack of alternatives to existing political, economic and social developments are inhibiting processes of change and thus the experience of (collective) agency which necessary includes the experience that societal conditions are human-made and modifiable. In this context, various intended communities of living are understood as not only an answer to individualization and the housing crisis, but as attempts to (re-)gain political agency – directly by facilitating solidary relationships and providing reliable third spaces and indirectly by acting as prefigurative, democratic and communal role models. Based on empirical studies in the field of communal living, this transdisciplinary contribution discusses the potential of communal housing projects for Transformative Social Work as social spaces of possibility which in turn enable the development of a collective social capacity to act.

3. Beyond Tasks: Mental Load and the Social Organisation of Care in Communal Housing/Brandt

Intended communal housing is often discussed in terms of shared spaces, solidarity and alternative ways of living together. Much less visible is the everyday work through which these arrangements are sustained. This presentation focuses on the interrelation of unpaid care work and mental load. Drawing on feminist care theory that conceptualises care as responsibility and social practice, and on recent studies on mental load as cognitive and emotional coordination work, it argues that care practices cannot be analytically understood without considering mental responsibility, anticipation, coordination and the assumption of responsibility. Communal housing is approached as a social niche in which care is organised and renegotiated beyond familial arrangements. The presentation draws on interview sequences from an ongoing doctoral project and takes an illustrative look at everyday situations in which care and mental load become practically effective - such as when responsibility is taken for granted, implicitly expected, or articulated only in moments of tension or conflict. In doing so, it explores how small, everyday shifts in responsibility and care emerge within such niches, pointing to the transformative potential of communal living.

SYMPOSIUM - Encroaching authoritarianism, shrinking civic space and social work resistance – Pascal Debruyne, Bart Van Bouchaute, & Jan Naert

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Youth care can be understood as a field within the social work arena. Similar to the broader context of social work, the youth care sector faces significant pressure due to New Public Management logics, which manifest as large-scale institutionalization and an emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, and reductive quality measurements as funding prerequisites. Today, these logics have become increasingly common and accepted. Furthermore, various manifestations of these tendencies exert substantial pressure on organizations, social professionals, and especially young people and their contexts.

The cost of youth care is often described as too high. The sector confronts long waiting lists, increasing complexity in the problems faced by young people and their families, rising levels of aggression, individualization and diagnostic categorization of systemic issues, a declining number of professionals entering the field, and high staff turnover—particularly among youth care workers in residential settings. Additionally, dominant evaluation frameworks often presume a predefined finality in youth care, implicitly advocating for a normative societal ideal while obscuring the inherently uncertain, relational, and time-intensive nature of care practices. This uncertainty, central to ethical youth care, becomes invisible under outcome-driven logics that reduce quality to quantifiable indicators.

Rather than breaking the cycle through proactive strategies developed with those affected, these challenges are frequently addressed with the same New Public Management approaches repeatedly. A defensive and conservative strategy appears to dominate.

More voices in the field seem to acknowledge the problematic situation. This aligns with a movement visible in academic discourses within social work, where current discussions about the foundational principles of social work are increasingly prominent. We refer to discussions on the politicization of social work and the call for a more dissenting social work profession

We contend that social work and youth care require a radical and critical pedagogical perspective. Grounded in a vision of social justice, we interrogate institutional logics without offering definitive answers. We will present themes such as building connections, fostering collective action, and questioning institutional logics, alongside actions that counter hopelessness. We aim to present 'attempts' or 'tentatives' derived from our practical experience and research in the field, seeking to disrupt the dominant hegemonic care order. This workshop is not grounded in fixed data; rather, it is a synthesis of our collective experiences in practical work and research.

SYMPOSIUM - Transdisciplinarity and transformation in co-creative processes with children and youth – Anna Lena Rademaker, Carlo Fabian, & Alexandra Engel

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Co-creation processes have the potential to deconstruct lifeworlds whether as grassroots movements or as processes endorsed by those in power, and to empower them to effect change in social lifeworlds. They should be designed with open-ended aims, but in a co-creative sense, the definition of the challenges and thus the issues to be addressed and the solutions should also be part of the joint, method-led process. This raises the question of how to critically engage with real power mechanisms that reproduce structural injustices and that risk muting the voices of participants.

In our symposium, we aim to spotlight co-creative processes in career guidance for adolescents, community child- and youth work, and health promotion. Using these examples, the underlying theoretical approaches of participatory and transformative research and practice should be examined in greater depth and critically situated within the discourse on co-creation processes. The question remains to what extent real transdisciplinarity through co-creation, as a form of shaping power, can alter political and conceptual structures.

The ensuing discussion will be opened with a method of co-creative practice and research, followed by an exchange on the opportunities and limits of participation and co-creation. Where does participation make a difference? What is the difference between participation and co-creation? Where is systemic change needed? What spaces do co-creative processes open (the power of the small), and how can empowerment make a difference? And how can formal power and the power to shape be addressed?

SYMPOSIUM - Reclaiming impact: rethinking research, impact and social change – Chris Swerts, Marianne Schapmans, Pieter Cools, Griet Verschelden & Siebren Nachtergaele

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In contemporary social work and social pedagogical research, a lot of reluctance is expressed towards the concept of impact and how to measure this in practice. In the dominant approach impact research is seen as an evaluative measuring instrument, which is often a quantitative, rational-utilitarian instrumental interpretation in terms of social effects of social work practices. In this symposium we present a view on impact and social change which differs from this dominant approach. This approach contains five starting points.

- First, impact is in this approach seen as interpretive to value social work practices in their own right.
- Second, impact is contextual and multi-dimensional.
- Third, the notion of impact is multi-directional.
- Fourth, we need attention to unexpected, unintended and unwanted impact.
- Fifth, the notion of impact is co – creative and relational.

In this symposium we reclaim the concept of impact by discussing impact research in different social work practices, related to the role of social workers and researchers in social change.

Contributions

Co-Impact and knowledge ecology: understanding and shaping impact together - Chris Swerts and/or Marianne Schapmans

The Co-Impact framework (Banks et al., 2017) offers an alternative to dominant narratives of impact that rely on linear, output-driven, end-point thinking. It rejects the idea of impact as a one-way delivery or a discrete and measurable 'result'. Instead, impact is understood as emergent: it takes shape in the relational spaces where people meet, learn collectively, and examine their practices. Drawing on Banks et al. (2017), we distinguish three interconnected forms of impact (participatory, thematic and collective impact), which capture different levels of learning and relational change. We operationalized this approach through the development of a Co-Impact Canvas (EQUALITY, 2025), a reflective tool that supports researchers and practitioners in making explicit why they act, how, with whom, based on what assumptions, and what they understand by meaningful change. A case example in this presentation illustrates how a relational and ecological approach can make impact visible while surfacing underlying values, power dynamics and knowledge sources that often remain implicit in dominant impact thinking. To deepen this perspective, we introduce knowledge ecology as a lens for understanding how impact is coproduced through the interplay of multiple ways of knowing (academic, practice-based, and experiential wisdom).

Looking for impact beyond the programme: the example of utilizing theatre techniques for learning Dutch as a second language- Pieter Cools

Current discussions on social impact evaluation and effect measurement mostly focus on the impact of individual programmes and organisations (cf. Chen, 2022). While fruitful on many fronts, it fails to grasp the effects of unfolding, socially innovative practices.

Socially innovative practices are often, and increasingly, developed through short term project funding. In such short time frames, the realization and assessment of 'social impact', proves arduous for various reasons. However, the core ideas and change mechanisms of social innovations often outlast their specific projects as they find their way to new projects, actors, contexts and target groups. To better appreciate and understand the impact of unfolding innovative practices in the social sector, we draw on the idea of 'social innovations as messages' (Evers & Brandsen, 2016) to track how generic program mechanisms and principles impact a broader social system.

Empirically, this contribution builds on participatory action research on the use of theatre techniques and playful exercises for learning Dutch as a second language in Flanders, Belgium. Combining the perspective of 'collaborative impact' (Banks et al., 2017) and the idea of learning and dissemination as impact, we use this case to explore how the impact of socially innovative practices can be made visible beyond individual programmes and projects.

Moments of impact: from effect to affect – Griet Verschelden and/or Siebren Nachtergaele

In this contribution, we talk about moments of impact (Nachtergaele et al, 2024). This concept is inspired by dramaturgy and refers to the moment, situation, or event that triggers the dramatic momentum leading to the climax. It is a pivotal moment in which something seemingly small but meaningful happens, setting something in motion.

According to the pedagogue Gert Biesta, impact begins with touching or being touched, which he aptly describes as the "sound of surprise" (Biesta, 2017). This means that the moment appeals to you, touches you or sticks with you (Thompson, 2009). The notion of affect and the process of affecting is a key aspect of our approach to impact. In this light, impact cannot be described in terms of effects, but rather as affects. In other words, the ability of social work practices to affect citizens, social workers, policy and society. Working with affect makes it possible to reveal how people and society become aware of new possibilities and imaginations, without clinging to their own experiences, meanings and the existing social order. We share insights from collaborative research in youth (cultural) work and participatory art practices.

SYMPOSIUM - To act or not to act, that is the question. Disrupting the hegemonic order in Child Welfare and Protection: Collective attempts to create a counternarrative in research and practice – Jan Naert, Dries Cautreels, Dieter Oorlynck, Delphine Levrouw, Elke Plovie

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Youth care can be understood as a field within the social work arena. Similar to the broader context of social work, the youth care sector faces significant pressure due to New Public Management logics, which manifest as large-scale institutionalization and an emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, and reductive quality measurements as funding prerequisites. Today, these logics have become increasingly common and accepted. Furthermore, various manifestations of these tendencies exert substantial pressure on organizations, social professionals, and especially young people and their contexts.

The cost of youth care is often described as too high. The sector confronts long waiting lists, increasing complexity in the problems faced by young people and their families, rising levels of aggression, individualization and diagnostic categorization of systemic issues, a declining number of professionals entering the field, and high staff turnover—particularly among youth care workers in residential settings. Additionally, dominant evaluation frameworks often presume a predefined finality in youth care, implicitly advocating for a normative societal ideal while obscuring the inherently uncertain, relational, and time-intensive nature of care practices. This uncertainty, central to ethical youth care, becomes invisible under outcome-driven logics that reduce quality to quantifiable indicators.

Rather than breaking the cycle through proactive strategies developed with those affected, these challenges are frequently addressed with the same New Public Management approaches repeatedly. A defensive and conservative strategy appears to dominate.

More voices in the field seem to acknowledge the problematic situation. This aligns with a movement visible in academic discourses within social work, where current discussions about the foundational principles of social work are increasingly prominent. We refer to discussions on the politicization of social work and the call for a more dissenting social work profession

We contend that social work and youth care require a radical and critical pedagogical perspective. Grounded in a vision of social justice, we interrogate institutional logics without offering definitive answers. We will present themes such as building connections, fostering collective action, and questioning institutional logics, alongside actions that counter hopelessness. We aim to present 'attempts' or 'tentatives' derived from our practical experience and research in the field, seeking to disrupt the dominant hegemonic care order. This workshop is not grounded in fixed data; rather, it is a synthesis of our collective experiences in practical work and research.