

Urban diversities: Challenges for social work

Guidebook Community Service Learning



Odisee
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



UNIVERSITY
OF APPLIED
SCIENCES
UTRECHT

TURKU AMK
TURKU UNIVERSITY OF
APPLIED SCIENCES



UNIVERSITY of
DEBRECEN



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**



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Introduction

From 2019 to 2021, five European higher education institutions designed and piloted a blended course on 'Urban Diversities: Challenges for social work' as part of an Erasmus+ project. The course aimed to bring together students, residents, practitioners and lecturers to develop a new understanding of urban complexities. This co-creative work is needed to identify and refine skills for recognising and effectively working with urban tensions and polarisations.

One of the central pillars of the course consisted of a community service learning (CSL) trajectory in the cities where the universities are located, combined with online transnational exchange to share these local experiences.

This guidebook gives insight into the set-up and maintenance of a CSL project and the needs and benefits for the different stakeholders involved. The guidebook took shape through our Erasmus+ project and combines insights from the literature and from our pilot. The first part of the guidebook outlines the CSL model, its challenges and some tips and tricks to avoid pitfalls and threats. The second part focuses on urban complexities and the related challenges for social work education. The final section provides arguments why CSL is an attractive, alternative pedagogy for urban social work education.

1. Community Service Learning (CSL)

Community Service Learning contrasts with the classical ways of teaching and learning in the classroom, as it focuses on real-life learning environments (Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011). Students serve society by engaging in a concrete community. The primary aim is to encourage reflection on lived experiences and not to demonstrate competences in practice. Unlike internships, the competences that students eventually acquire depend to a large extent on what they have experienced and what they have learned. Another important difference is that the learning process is not only focused on the students, but is extended to all stakeholders on the field.

Unlike internships, you are not constantly assessed for competences. You are free to be there and to be meaningful to others, to do things, like volunteer work. You act, do something instead of delivering and proving. You do something according to your own choice. You can be yourself. (Student Adinda)



Although multiple understandings and practices of community service learning co-exist (Butin, 2006), many models include three basic principles.

First, the student's learning process is driven by **civic engagement**, by a desire to put social justice into action, and a willingness to serve a valuable social cause that transcends his or her self-interest (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Second, the learning process takes place in and with a group or community. A conscious effort is made to ensure that all stakeholders

participate in and benefit from **this cooperative and multiple learning** process (Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011).

Third, the construction of knowledge is highly **reflexive and experiential**, anchored in the needs and rights of the people and communities involved. Within this evidence-informed practice perspective, equal weight is given to experiential knowledge of service users, wisdom of practitioners and research evidence (McLaughlin & Teater, 2017).

This guidebook guides the reader through a joined, transnational effort to apply these three principles in the complexities of real urban life.

Civic engagement

While a classical, practicum-based pedagogy still largely relies on the idea of acquiring well-defined skills through training and supervision (Tsang, 2008), community service learning is grounded in often complex and indeterminate practices of civic engagement. It is therefore closely related to general community service or volunteering, its setting and underlying motivations.

During an internship, I have to check a list of competences. Here, I can simply guide the students to the essence, to what really matters in the work field. Those two students came along and I could help them experience the basic commitment of social work. That commitment is crucial because it helps you not to give up. (Community worker Anna)

In CSL, students commit to a project to serve a higher purpose or ideal that will benefit individuals, groups or communities. They carry out tasks, launch initiatives, organise events, disseminate information, bring people together, and support vulnerable people by guiding them and listening actively and attentively to their priorities, wishes and experiences.

CSL anchors the learning process of the student in society and places the student in the role of an active citizen who develops civic competencies and responsibilities. The difference with generic community service is that community service learning connects services and service users with academic learning.

Everyone adopted some key attitudes. Everyone took the attitude of equality and respect, and did not place themselves above anyone else. I think that was important, because you also noticed that the service users felt this. The things they said, they wouldn't have said, if it wasn't for this feeling of equality. (Student Meriem)

Learning in the real world

CSL privileges experiential learning in real life situations, which initiate and become the material from which a learning process develops.

For example, social work students accompany children in homes to a parents' evening, or unaccompanied asylum seekers to a school. Social work and law students may give legal advice to welfare clients in a community centre in an economically disadvantaged neighbourhood. Ideally, this provides an opportunity to learn about a variety of issues, including poverty, class and exclusion in superdiverse neighbourhoods; and about language barriers and issues of

social psychology in the home context. They can learn about the complexities of migration law, human rights, labour law, social rights law, anti-discrimination law and even property law.

All these interrelated issues stem from what students experience in practice, not just from academic literature and classroom notes. They learn how to formulate pertinent questions by listening to the concrete needs of residents and service users. Students explore how different disciplines and topics are intertwined, enhancing their ability to reason practically in response to these multiple needs.

The more abstract and theoretical material of the traditional classroom takes on new meaning when the student has the opportunity to “try it out”, in the “real” world. At the same time, the student benefits from the opportunity to connect the service experience with the intellectual content of the classroom. By emphasising collaboration, democratic citizenship and moral responsibility through service-learning, higher education connects with the wider community and enables students to contribute to meeting society’s urgent needs. (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000, p. 25).

Not value neutral

Anchored in civic engagement, CSL is not value neutral, but explicitly aims to promote civic engagement and democratic ideals and engage in social justice (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Meens, 2014); all of which resonate strongly with the ideals of social work education (Lowe & Reisch, 1998). Whether CSL succeeds in achieving these goals has been subject of much research and debate (Annette, 2008; Donaldson & Daughtery, 2011; McMillan, 2020).

Challenges

There are three main challenges to consider when trying to live up to CSL’s ambition for meaningful civic engagement.

1. The need for a common basis of civic engagement.

During the CSL experience, students need to connect to a common framework of civic engagement. This comes from discussions, practices and role models within an organisation, a citizens’ collective or a specific project. The stronger the bonds of engagement, the richer the CSL experience for the student. However, these bonds can easily be disrupted by conflict, diverging interests between stakeholders, implicit power relations or by an underlying, implicit culture of distrust.

2. The role of the lecturer/mentor.

The lecturer is invited to be a role model of what it means to be and act as a responsive citizen. The legitimacy and credibility as a leading and authoritative mentor in CSL depends on this exemplary role.

The relationship with the lecturer was also different. He was also there in the field. He was also there to be of significance to others. There was much more open communication. We had more of a say in the process. You could be yourself more. (Student Olga)

There was less distance. And it wasn't, like in general, a lecturer-student relationship, but more of ... I saw him less as a lecturer and more as a person, as someone who was also involved in the project. That was very positive for me. (Student Malika)

3. Clarifying the idea of citizenship

If CSL is about anchoring learning in civic engagement, then critical reflection is needed to explore the nature and experience of citizenship. For example, what does it mean to be a citizen when you accompany children to school, or when you provide legal advice to disadvantaged communities? What makes students responsive, responsible and competent citizens in these specific contexts?

These questions are not always easy to answer because the concrete interpretation of citizenship in practice is often controversial. It depends on the broader socio-political environment, the value base of the 'citizen' and the interaction between the variety of contexts and power structures in which community service takes place (Annette, 2008). One of the most important aspects of the learning process is to reflect and articulate the multiple meanings of citizenship (the ideals, virtues, competences).

Tips and tricks

1. Give students time to connect with residents, stakeholders, service users and social workers. Give them time to learn, act, chill, celebrate, discover themselves as part of an engaged community. It is preferable to allow students one day a week of uninterrupted engagement in the field.
2. Persuade social workers to organise moments of debriefing that allow participants to give feedback to each other and further explore whether each is still on the same track. An option could be to organise a workshop in which the participants can draw up a charter or an ethical framework, which can be used as a compass for further action.
3. Enable the lecturer/mentor to join the students in their civic engagement in the field. Advise the lecturer/mentor to see themselves primarily as a fellow citizen present in the field to help and support rather than evaluate.
4. Regularly ask students how and to what extent they experience themselves as fellow-citizens, and how this experience relates to their role as future social workers. Also ask what it takes to live this experience as an active citizen.

Cooperative and multiple learning

The second characteristic of CSL can be associated with new ways of innovative knowledge building in small, horizontally organised structures, or with grass roots experiments of deliberative democracy. CSL shares with these approaches an explicit **participatory and co-creative** style of learning (Meens, 2014). CSL takes place with a variety of stakeholders: professionals in the field, service users, residents or active citizens in communities, as well as lecturer/mentors (Gelmon et al., 1998). As Clayton and colleagues (2013) point out, “service learning pedagogy requires and fosters learning – often transformational, paradigm-shifting learning – on the part of everyone involved, including faculty” (p. 245).



The learning environment is one that promotes reciprocity and facilitates a process of **mutual and multiple** learning. Of course, this does not mean that everyone should always agree with each other’s point of view. That reciprocity implies a shared sense of equality, the willingness to listen to each other and the recognition that each has something to learn from the other and that only in that way we can get the full picture (Miller-Young et al., 2015). Therefore, the learning environment should promote and support differentiated learning paths according to the needs and interests of each stakeholder. Implementing CSL should not only reserve mentoring and guidance for students, but should also extend to all stakeholders involved in cooperative learning (Claes et al., 2021).

This idea of cooperative or participative learning implies a recognition that those on the receiving end of policies and practices experience both the intended and unintended consequences of such policies and practices. CSL **takes residents’ and clients’ experiences seriously**. As Beresford and McLaughlin (2020, p. 518) note, “to ignore this perspective is to negate any identified recommendations for change as at best partial and at worst mis-informed”.

Effective participatory learning leads to a focus on key community issues, more innovative problem solving and community-owned results. This shared sense of equality is particularly challenging in a neo-liberal context where the commodification of knowledge has become an important asset.

The CSL experiment taught us that reflection can take different forms depending on the context and the type of intervention. While in a “walk and talk” CSL trajectory intense reflection on conversations and encounters was often made possible through careful transcription and initial interpretation of audio recordings. Other moments of reflections were informal and occurred during telephone conversations between the lecturer/mentor and social workers. Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis and its limitations inevitably led to an alternation between real life reflective encounters and online meetings.

The scale and plurality of collective reflections also changed constantly, depending on the variable circumstances. While some reflection meetings took place in a fairly large group with a variety of stakeholders (students, residents, lecturers, social workers), most reflection moments took place in small groups. In these small groups, the variety of perspectives was also variable. While in the weekly sessions of digital storytelling the perspectives, and consequently the learning processes, were multiple and highly cooperative, the weekly online sessions between lecturers and students and the regular conversations between lecturer and social work professionals were more exclusive. This limited inclusiveness had a number of reasons. The finality of the meeting (preparation or debriefing of an intervention) easily narrowed the plurality and scale of reflexive participation. In addition, time constraints and the absence of expected residents were responsible for the selectivity of collaborative learning.



This diversity in form, scale, and inclusiveness of reflexive learning seems inevitable and in line with the CSL idea of multiple learning. However, at least two threats to CSL arise when this variety is not well managed. First, there is a risk of losing an overview of all these processes, which weighs heavily on the ability to map and systematise these learning processes. Secondly, there is a risk of missing links and communication gaps between the stakeholders involved, which can easily lead to confusion, uncertainty, lack of transparency and conflicts. CSL then contributes to urban complexity rather than addressing it.

Tips and tricks

1. Be as transparent as possible when initiating and communicating these processes of reflexive learning.
2. When inclusion is limited, motivate and argue transparently.
3. Be sensitive of the risk of over participation.

Reflexive learning

A third CSL characteristic relates to pedagogies of experiential learning, which in social work literature are closely linked to the idea of practice wisdom (Samson, 2015; Tsang, 2008).

Experiential learning is often seen as a **fluid process** of producing informal ‘tacit’ knowledge that is subjectively acquired through ‘hands on experience’ (Oi-Ngor, Cheung, 2015; Gillard et al., 2020). Experiential knowledge is **socially situated** and not separate from who people are and can be shaped by experiences of power and other intersectional locations of disadvantage, advantage, oppression and privilege.

Reflexive learning takes students **out of their comfort zone** and places them in a situation where they are urgently called upon to learn new skills, question self-evident attitudes, and challenge internalised norms and values (Dochy & Segers, 2018; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Experiential learning can be confronting, as participants in such a process are often confronted with their own vulnerabilities, prejudices and self-evidences that have blocked their ability to learn.

Resident Aisha had participated in a trekking adventure with of a group of young people from a boxing club. Looking back at this experience, she says: “The most important lesson I learned occurred while walking in the snow and on the ice: Step into the imprint of the person before you, for they have preceded you in their journey. But also leave your imprint behind, so that someone else can follow in your footsteps. This insight also applies to life itself. Follow the path of those who have succeeded, but also leave a trace for others. Following in the footstep of someone means that you can ask others for help. Why not do it if somebody else can? I am not too proud to ask for help. But I also think that in society we can always help other people. No one can survive alone, but some of us are too proud. Trekking in the mountains is hard. And that is why you sympathise with others. They are probably also tired, irritable or suffering. You fully acknowledge your weaknesses, but also your strengths. One person has carried my backpack, another has encouraged me. And the kindness of others has sparked the kindness in me. (Claes et al., 2020, p. 228, authors’ own translation)

As the quote illustrates, experiential learning is highly **embodied learning**. It requires events that touch a person at a deeper, existential level. The learning process presupposes reflexive distance in order to intensify self-understanding (the ability to rely on the capacity for kindness) and to deepen understanding of the world (human interdependence). Reflexive learning through experience is an essential feature of CSL. It takes place within a context of community service and civic engagement and is triggered by strong experiences felt in such contexts. In CSL, reflexive learning is not limited to personal experience and to personal growth. As CSL strives for cooperative and mutual learning, it often facilitates opportunities

for collective experiences and collective reflection, or at least the sharing of personal reflections in a dialogical setting.

*The essence to me is the capacity of hyper-listening, the capacity of really listening, of really hearing what has been said, instead of hearing what you think to have heard.
(Community worker Anna)*



In social work practice, many situations give rise to reflection. Most practical questions do not offer ready-made solutions. A good understanding is needed in order to choose the right approach. This has to do with instrumental but also ethical perspectives: what is right in this situation and am I doing the right thing? When a plan is implemented, does not stop but continues. Social work is a profession in which one often encounters unstructured: complex situations that are difficult to

understand and standard solutions that are lacking. Reflection occurs when social workers deal with a problem that cannot be solved by logical reasoning. It starts with a problem or a feeling of unease, which requires further investigation, and where the right questions are indispensable for a better understanding.

Reflection is a 'key element' in learning from experience (Moon, 2004) that helps to avoid repeating the same actions and experiences and helps to learn from and change experiences. Donald Schön (1998) distinguishes two forms of reflection applicable to social work: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. **Reflection-in-action** takes place at the same time as action takes place. Reflection-in-action coincides with executive action, it promotes a different view of a situation, a reformulation of a problem with the help of knowledge derived from practical experience (theories in use). **Reflection-on-action** occurs after action, at times when you have the opportunity to look back at what happened, with more distance, using multiple perspectives.

You can reflect alone and you can also reflect together with others, which brings multiple perspectives into focus and enriches your own reflection. Joint reflection in international cooperation - which is the case in our project - goes further because you are confronted with other cultural and political contexts that make you aware of your own person and world view. It can contribute to the disappearance of the obviousness of your own frame of reference and instead lead to the emergence of new horizons of meaning. As such, reflection contributes to

meaning-oriented learning processes and a revision or reinterpretation of the meaning of previously acquired knowledge.

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

For this reason reflexive learning does not fit well with traditional, conventional, competence oriented pedagogy. Rossiter (2005) argues that competence-based pedagogies are reductionist and emphasise technical and prescriptive methods, thus pressuring social work academics to be less academic and more technical. As such, they tend towards a consensual agenda that negates the importance of **critical reflective practice** or and awareness of the inequalities and power differences within society. Hurley and Taiwo (2019) have proposed a critical-competence curriculum for social workers in Canada to try to bridge the gap between critical social theory and the positive aspects of competence education.

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

Digital storytelling: an instrument for reflexive learning

There are various instruments to stimulate reflexive learning in different stakeholders. One of the most intensive reflexive tools experimented with in Brussels is digital storytelling. Digital stories are short, powerful stories in which a person tells something that really matters to him or her. The stories often revolve around strong life-defining memories, an intense scene from a distant or recent past. Or they evoke a dream, a strong wish or aspiration. A special feature of digital stories is that they can be distributed in short videos. By means of storyboard, the narrator has translated each line of his story into a powerful image (a photograph, a collage, a drawing or painting). The narrator has also recorded his voice. An easy accessible application enables a creative match between the story and the visual.

Because digital stories try to convey what is considered essential, storytellers and their audience can find each other in a short space of time. Real, authentic stories move, touch, trigger and captivate their audience. They carry a message from heart to heart to create an affective environment of shared, strong and vulnerable humanity. The idea to collect digital stories from service users came from the conviction of both community workers and a Odisee lecturer that short visual stories are a useful, pedagogical and political tool to unlock the invisible world of people who depend on a minimal basic income. Moreover, it opened a space of encounter and dialogue with the staff of the municipal centres for social action, or other selected target groups.

Digital stories are the result of a specific collective methodology called digital storytelling. The process is specifically designed not only to empower the individual storyteller as an actor and director of his own story, but also to strengthen the participating group as a whole. Participants strengthen each other by actively listening to each other, by acknowledging and appreciating the uniqueness of each story, but also by supporting each other in finding the right words and images, or by respectfully working together in the often difficult re-enactment of hurtful scenes and memories from the past.

Tips and tricks

1. Reflexive learning requires trust and emotional safety. Organise informal settings between students, mentors, residents, and social workers to get to know each other better.
2. Be transparent about the overall goals of the learning process. Explain how the learning process has the potential to benefit all participants involved.
3. Make time for preparation and debriefing of the reflection sessions, not only for students but also for residents or service users in vulnerable positions.
4. Take into account that each participant has his/her own time and speed of learning. Try to accommodate these different temporalities of learning.
5. Be aware that reflexive learning is valuable but also vulnerable in contexts of social deprivation.

2. Urban settings

This chapter will introduce you to the specific urban context, its complexity and epistemic challenges. This basic knowledge is necessary if you want to implement CSL in an urban setting. Adapting CSL to the urban complexity inevitably involves challenges and adjustments. To concretise our basic insights, we provide illustrations from our pilot in five cities.

Urban complexity

Despite the long and intertwined history of social work and the city, the intersection between the two has so far been ignored or taken for granted in the literature on social work and social work education (Shaw, 2011; Williams, 2016). This is surprising, given that for the first time in history, half the world's population lives in urban areas (56.2 percent in 2020), a number that is expected to increase further in the future (Demographia, 2020). Increased and increasing urbanisation will inevitably bring many challenges for social workers and social work education, as we know that a person's neighbourhood or place of residence can influence social issues and life chances. Moreover, there is a demonstrated link between place, space and socialisation (Atkinson et al., 2012; Kelaher et al., 2010; Netto et al., 2017; Tonkiss, 2013).

Another important consequence of urbanisation is the awareness of an increasing complexity of problems and challenges that need to be addressed. The term 'urban complexities' refers to an accumulation and intersection of conflicts and fault lines between individuals, groups, cultures, classes, communities, networks, but also between groups and their institutional and political environments (governments, criminal justice systems, schools, social service providers, youth care). The complexity, fluidity and particularity of these conflicts reflect the intricacy of their causes.

Despite the diversity and plurality of processes of urbanisation, we identify five key transitions that contribute to urban complexities:

- unprecedented demographic shifts through global migrations leading to superdiverse urban populations;
- huge disparities in access to basic human rights and public services destined to support or protect these rights;
- renewed strategies of oppression and domination;
- the emergence of counterbalancing innovative trends;
- the increasing valorisation of lived experiences and experience-based knowledge (Claes et al., 2021).

Rachida is a second generation Belgian-Moroccan mother who lives in Brussels. She recently moved to a neighbourhood near the Brussels canal and the Brussels-South train station. Rachida has been living in Molenbeek, one of the 19 municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region, for almost twenty years. Rachida does not feel very safe in her street. She does not feel comfortable with the house huskers, the drug trade and the street sales of stolen objects, probably organised by men from the Tunisian and Libyan community. Recently, a community of Syrian gypsies moved into her neighbourhood. Rachida notices hostile looks from Syrian men. Children are late up at night and large groups occupy the park at the border of the canal. She is especially worried about her second daughter who does not wear a headscarf. She is regularly insulted and harassed on the street. A few months ago, two ambulance vans were parked near her apartment, and Rachida saw police cars coming from everywhere.

I heard the voices of women, screaming and shouting. From my window I saw six Syrian women and a man with a child. They were all dragged out of a flat by the police. I heard my neighbour, a man from Lebanon who sells car, say to other people: "He killed his wife". The crime had been committed in a flat housing a large family of Syrian refugees who had come to live here a year ago. Meanwhile, members of the Syrian community gathered in the streets. When traffic was allowed again, a group of about 50 Syrians gathered near the flat where the tragic events had taken place. The streets were filled with carpets. I saw members of the Syrian community praying and mourning.

Rachida expressed her helplessness in this situation, but also her disillusionment with the local authorities.

Me and my neighbours, we are all powerless. We cried on each other's shoulders. What we need is safety. I left my previous apartment because of what I went through when I witnessed the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, and then I come here, and again a part of Syria haunts me. We had to bear the consequences of IS there, and now we have the refugees here. They cram the neighbourhood with Syrian people. They place heavily traumatised families in communal flats, with almost no professional support.

How do we educate social workers in order to appropriately address the needs of Rachida, her neighbours and the Syrian families?

2.1 Superdiversity

Contemporary cities are attractive to newcomers from all over the globe. Through their (informal) arrival infrastructures, urban geographies can absorb, at least temporarily, successive and simultaneous migration waves (Saunders, 2011; Schrooten & Meeus, 2020). Many urban areas across Europe are characterised by increasing ethnic and cultural diversity, “not only because the number of new identities is growing, but also because identities are becoming more complex and fluid than ever” (Taşan-Kok et al., 2017, p. 8).

Some accounts of urban diversities see them as a driver of growth and social progress, while others point to a growing fear of immigration and segregation. This fear increases when social investments aimed at promoting spaces for multicultural coexistence are scarce or have been cut. This can lead to the tensions between different ethnic, cultural groups, between second generation migrants and newcomers, but also between minority groups and their institutional environment (schools, municipal authorities, social services), which are supposed to provide access to their rights and needs.

The case of Manchester

In Manchester the students worked with a community youth project in the Levenshulme area of the city. From their research for the needs analysis, the students learnt that Manchester is a culturally diverse city, with a rapidly growing population of children and young people. Levenshulme is located four miles out of the city centre, and has an established history of migrant settlement, with a long standing, multi-generational population of Irish, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage (MCC, 2016). The area is traditionally working class, and the surrounding wards score highly on the indices of deprivation (gov.uk, 2020).

Over the last 20 years Levenshulme has attracted a growing number of young professionals and families, including people with African, European, and Middle Eastern heritage. This is due in part to the availability of affordable housing and propensity of local parks and green spaces. In Levenshulme schools, pupils represent over 21 spoken languages. The area has a community of Roma families who experience notable discrimination from other members of the community. In the past 5 years the process of gentrification has escalated, and the area has seen a rapid increase in house prices and growth in the service and hospitality industry, despite significant cuts and disinvestment in local municipal services.

The children and young people who attend the youth project represent the cultural diversity of the community, and many have lived or have family in several different countries including the UK. The youth and play sessions are regularly attended by Roma girls and boys, despite these children belonging to an ethnic group typically described as ‘socially excluded’ or identified to be less likely to ‘engage’ with education (Matras, 2020). Yet these same children voluntarily and enthusiastically attend the youth project experience, and demonstrate a tangible sense of ownership and belonging within the organisation. Simultaneously they also report feeling much less ‘welcome’ in other, more established, ‘official’ community services. This sense of un-belonging within the wider community could be regarded as symptomatic of the children’s limited ‘legitimised’ social and cultural capital, due to the intersecting factors of their age, class, gender and ethnicity.

Much of the work of the youth organisation is based on developing social, educational and leisure opportunities, and encouraging citizenship and participation in the community. The project leader reflected on the trust and respect that has developed, over time and across generations, between the workers, the young people and their families. This is supported by a diverse staff team who are also residents of, and thus invested in, the area; and aided by an inclusive approach that recognises strengths and nurtures relationships.

During their needs analysis the students noted tensions between those characterised as long-standing (ethnically and economically disadvantaged) residents, and (middle class, affluent) 'newcomers'. This was illustrated by a public disagreement about the introduction of a traffic reduction scheme, favoured by some as a means of tackling air pollution and climate change, and disliked by others due to the perceived redirection of traffic to areas with lower cost housing. The students also identified complaints on local social media platforms about people contravening COVID regulations, with comments focusing on the age and ethnicity of alleged rule breakers. The students heard how the latter point had become a focus of work for the youth project with conversations taking place to explore the discriminatory sentiments and evidence of such claims, and to support young people to remain safe in the community. The students and local CSL facilitators reflected on their own positionality in relation to age, gender and ethnic identities, recognising the themes seen in Levenshulme within their own lives and communities.

2.2 Dualisation

While there are many advantages for people living in cities, there are also large differences between population groups, which can lead to a two-tier system of social services. Insured people have access to public services, while uninsured marginalised populations lack the necessary access or care. Urban sociologists argue that contemporary cities are 'dual' cities with many internal divisions (Castells, 1989; Sassen, 2001). The city, in Tonkiss' (2013, p. 20) terms, "'embeds injustice'" in spatial scale, with distinct geographies of inequality in terms of income, housing, social class, security, mobility, opportunity, consumption, power and privilege. According to Beauregard (2018), because of these contrasts, cities have multiple faces and there are sometimes several cities in one (see also Szirmai, 2019). In this sense, the precarious access of certain (groups of) city dwellers to their basic rights is a particular challenge. Moreover, cities are also often the scene of increasing polarisation in access to political, economic and cultural rights between the societal mainstream and those 'others' including minorities, differentiated along 'ethnic' or other lines (such as gender, age, religion, sexuality, language, legal status, length of stay and life course position) (Van Ewijk, 2011), as well as ethnic segregation (Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2016; Vertovec, 2011).

Brussels: a dual city in transition

The city of Brussels can easily be described as an ideal case of urban complexity. Brussels is the capital of Belgium and of Europe. With a population of approximately 1 200 000, it is a cosmopolitan area with a dense, superdiverse and growing population.

Brussels has a fragmented and segmented political structure. Several authorities are active on the territory of the Brussels-Capital Region: three community commissions, one region, two communities, the federal government, nineteen municipalities and supranational and international institutions. These different authorities each exercise their own powers on the same territory, but they are also interdependent. For example, a particularly complex division of powers has been worked out for personal matters. The labyrinthine character of these interacting local, regional and federal policy levels shapes the urban complexity of Brussels and is complemented by a rich, organically developing web of bottom-up initiatives and new ways to reinvent urban solidarity.

Brussels has sharp, geographically visible contrasts between rich and poor. Most poverty indicators show that the proportion of people living in poverty is higher in the Brussels Region than in the other two Belgian regions (Schrooten et al., 2017). Within Brussels, this poverty is distributed in a very unequal social and spatial manner. On the one hand, there are large differences between the impoverished city centre and the richer periphery. On the other hand, Brussels also has a large internal geographical, social and economic dualisation between the western and eastern neighbourhoods, with poverty being strongly concentrated in the 'poor crescent' or the 'croissant pauvre', a crescent-shaped zone on the northwest side of the city centre (Vandermotten et al., 2009).

2.3 Strategies and discourses of domination

In urban environments of increased density and diversity, conflicting needs and interests easily arise. Powerful groups are generally more inclined and able to secure their access to precious resources. Each urban geography has its own specificity, and the impact of these strategies is as changeable as the city itself. In a complex urban reality, these strategies intermingle, but generally at least three typical lines can be discerned.

The first is a **strategy of neglect**, which means that urban areas and their populations are left to their own fate. As a result, entire urban areas are weakened in their political resilience to claim a redistribution of resources and rights. Residents of these neighbourhoods experience neglect as a lack of respect and feel condemned for living in unpopular or poor urban areas. Some residents abandon their hopes or respond with non-conformism, internalising stereotypes and thus perpetuating processes of (self) exclusion (Claes et al., 2020; Jamouille & Mazzocchi, 2011; Kemp, 2011).

The second strategy is one of **containment and displacement**. Privileged social classes that control government bodies or powerful economic actors use state or economic power to contain and, in some cases, displace the deprived and oppressed. These efforts may aim to confine disadvantaged groups to certain areas. They may also encourage or simply force people to move so that the neighbourhood can become more economically attractive again. This is also captured in the concept of gentrification, which is “the process by which higher-income households displace lower-income [households] of a neighborhood, changing the essential character and flavour of that neighbourhood” (Florida, 2017, p. 5). At the same time, these powerful actors strip these people of their dignity and full citizenship by depriving them of secure housing (Appadurai, 2013).

The third strategy is **othering**, and scapegoating. This strategy targets specific minority groups (refugees, religious minorities, populations with a migration background, unemployed, people depending on a replacement income). These images of the 'other' are often contrasted with images of the 'us', as people with different values that threaten our lifestyle, identity, institutions and traditions (Coleman 1995; Petersson 2003).

The case of Debrecen

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Nagysándor settlement in Debrecen was the city's brickyard, where the poorest inhabitants lived. After the closure of the brickworks in the 1950s and 1960s, the small, low-comfort flats of the brickworks' workers were occupied by gypsy families, creating a high-density, low-prestige segregation on the outskirts of the city.

The settlement was clearly characterised by a strategy of neglect. The predominant gypsy population that lived on the site of the old brickworks was left to its own devices.

Even in the years after the millennium, more than half of the resident population had not completed primary school. Only 40 percent of those aged 15-64 were working, and almost half of households had no one working. Social assistance was the main source of income for a significant proportion of households. The number of regular social assistance recipients per 1000 inhabitants was more than twice the city average.

The low quality of public services and the structure of the population meant that the colony had a very low prestige. The residents experienced many forms of prejudice and exclusion from the residents of the "big city". As a result of the hopeless situation and constant stigmatisation, the residents of the colony developed a "colony identity and self-image", which deepened the group boundaries between 'us' and 'them' and intensified the process of self-exclusion.

In the 1990s, the settlement's attractiveness increased significantly with the construction of an industrial park in the vicinity of the settlement, and a process of gentrification began as land prices rose and the middle class moved in. The part of the city that had been a Roma colony in previous years became a target for investors. The Roma population was displaced and the land and building plots were occupied by wealthy individuals and economic actors. The main factor contributing to the displacement was the increase in land prices and rents, but the gradual dismantling of public services (e.g. the closure of the school) also accelerated the process. The new residents have effectively used a displacement strategy and induced the people who used to live there to move away, making the area even more economically attractive.

This process of gentrification has been reinforced in recent years by the construction of a motorway next to the colony and the arrival of more multinational companies in the neighbouring industrial area.

The identity of the 3157 people living in the Nagysándor settlement is now characterised by dualities. How long people have lived there plays a decisive role in shaping their self-identity and their network of relationships. In recent years, a serious conflict has developed between the 'old settlers' of low-status and the 'newcomers' of higher status. These conflicts have built on the social fault lines that have existed in the settlement since the 1960s between Roma and non-Roma.

The conflicts between old and new residents have gradually intensified in recent years. The new residents regard the old residents as too noisy, disorganised and threatening to them, while the old residents regard the new residents as "outsiders" who do not fit into the settlers'

natural support system and who threaten the old residents' way of life with their presence, their new rules and their dominance.

2.4 Social and political innovations

Despite the processes of dualisation, gentrification and domination strategies described above, recent studies show that cities are also places of hope, development, social mobility, solidarity and empowerment. Cities benefit people and their well-being in many ways (Bai et al., 2012; OECD, 2015; Wienke & Hill, 2013). They provide (survival) strategies for people living in precarious situations (homelessness, addiction, illegality). Cities become hubs of innovation and creative platforms for forging change and new forms of urban solidarity. As such, they offer opportunities to engage with and mobilise resources for change and to form creative spaces, relational networks and strategic alliances between different actors and for the potential of co-produced (social work) knowledge (Schrooten & Van den Broeck, 2018).

In response to these forms of social innovation, (at least some) public discourses and policies tend to adapt their strategies. Public actors become more pragmatic, facilitate solutions at the local level, enable platforms of negotiation of needs, or simply incorporate bottom-up formulated claims into their political agendas. With regard to cultural and religious diversity, Boccagni (2020, p.14) argues that at the local level, and especially in metropolitan areas, cultural and religious diversity are critically negotiated in relation to the assimilative pressures and expectations of receiving societies. [...] Local public policies are necessarily more sensitive to the problems and social dynamics arising from the settlement of foreign-born populations, rather than to principled statements.

Despite the compensatory opportunities and tensions inherent in social and political innovations, the identified domination strategies can easily weaken these innovations. Attempts to redistribute resources and rights are by no means guaranteed and remain uncertain and insecure.

2.5 Valorisation of experience-based knowledges

A final trend is related to knowledge building and the understanding that knowledge and power are inextricably linked. As Gillard et al. (2020) argue, “the power to act in certain ways, to claim resources or to control others depends on the ‘knowledges’ currently prevailing in a society”. (p. 41).

Recently, social work practitioners, as well as researchers, have advocated for the recognition of experience-based knowledge (Beresford, 2000; Gillard et al., 2020; McLaughlin & Teater, 2017). This wisdom is generally personal, tacit and context-specific. It is encapsulated in stories, metaphors, jokes, rap songs, and it is always embedded in concrete lived experiences. From the perspective of political and social justice, this experience-based knowledge holds at

least two promises. The first revolves around power relations. Capturing and mobilising this street wisdom can help oppressed groups gain political power, and claim a seat at the negotiation table for a more just redistribution of resources and rights. The second revolves around ethics. Capturing and mobilising fundamental ethical intuitions, which underpin these practical wisdoms, can give oppressed groups moral status and thus provide an ethical framework for modern urban life.

This trend of revalorising the wisdom of social work's service users and the communities in which it is embedded, recognising the everyday experiences of people struggling for their basic needs in superdiverse and densely populated urban environments, has become increasingly visible. It can be noticed in socio-artistic projects (Huss, 2017), participatory research (Beresford and McLaughlin, 2020), ethnographic studies (Zaviršek, 2006), experiments and platforms of deliberative democracy (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2015), efforts by schools of higher education to encourage first generation of working-class students (The scholarship hub, n.d) or supporting young people who have been in care to access higher education (GM Higher, n.d.).

Epistemic challenges

Urban complexities presents social work with many challenges. They challenge underlying normative standards and implicit frames of mind. But above all, they raise a number of specific epistemic challenges. There are:

1. The difficulty to have of a clear and fresh understanding of these complexities;
2. The issue of aligning different types of knowledges to respond to these tensions;
3. A lack of available practical wisdom to properly navigate these tensions and fault lines. Schools of higher education and academic institutions throughout Europe have not yet systematically incorporated this knowledge into their curricula and are still searching for the right pedagogical approaches to enable students and lecturers to identify, refine and even produce this knowledge.

CSL proposes an alternative pedagogical approach that promises to address these challenges. In the final chapter, we test this promise against our experiences.

4. The value of CSL in complex urban settings

In this chapter, we will present four arguments in favour of experimenting with CSL in complex urban settings. We will provide some preliminary evidence from our pilot experience that support these arguments.

CSL has inclusive potential

In diverse urban settings, the dangers of exclusionary mechanisms in the construction and distribution of knowledge that enables residents to survive and thrive in the city are numerous. Through its emphasis on multiple and cooperative learning, CSL introduces students to inclusive and reciprocal learning processes. This epistemic sense of equality is necessary for social workers in their pursuit of greater equality in dual cities.

A CSL experience from Debrecen

The CSL method used in the pilot programme was an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of the dangers of exclusionary mechanisms and to strengthen cooperation between the families living in the settlement. The focus of the pilot was on strengthening cooperation between families with young children and exploring common interests and values. Besides the students, the parents and the professionals working with them were active participants in the mutual learning process.

A great advantage of the method is that we [the professionals and the target group members] are also part of the process. The resource-based approach and the practical orientation are other advantages. It was also important to share own experiences... We are living and working in a very narrow world. It is therefore very important to learn about these new methods and to try them out in practice. Hungarian social work is mainly casework and the development of CSL programmes, working with communities would be very important. (Social worker)

CSL enables a new understanding of urban complexities

By prioritising civic engagement in CSL and thus putting the hierarchical scheme of internships in brackets, students fully open themselves to the lived urban realities of others without wondering whether they will be positively judged on their competencies. This openness makes them more sensitive to the ethical call of these complex realities. As a result, they better feel the ethical urgency to reach a fresh and renewed understanding of the city.

As community workers we are often faced with unexpected and unforeseen problems that pop up in the midst of other activities. Difficult issues arise often at the wrong moment. You're surprised and deprived of routine patterns to respond appropriately to these problems. These complexities make us unsure. Having a space of reflection on one's experiences and sharing conceptual knowledge helps gaining self-confidence in order to address unforeseeable issues in the future. (Community worker Melissa)

CSL enhances the ability to coordinate different kinds of knowledges

In her book 'Social Work and the City', Charlotte Williams emphasises the importance of knowledge of the city and its spatial dynamics. This knowledge is crucial for social workers to become actors within these spatial dynamics. Knowledge building is then an important aspect of the spatial practice of urban social workers. However, Williams does not give many ideas about what these vital types of knowledges are, and how they should be adequately combined. A plausible answer could be the idea of a multifocal knowledge base (Schrooten & Veldboer, 2021): a combination of a broad sociological view of urban transitions, combined with more partial and contextual field knowledge. But this still raises the question of which specific type of knowledges should be combined, and for what purpose.

CSL promises to provide interesting answers here. After all, by broadening the scope of the learning process to different stakeholders (students, residents, social professionals, lecturers), it becomes cooperative. By strengthening experiential knowledge, the ability to appropriately coordinate different types of knowledges is increased.

An example from Brussels

This claim was confirmed in the Brussels CSL experience, learned as a privileged interaction between conceptual knowledge, on the one hand and narrative, experience-based knowledge on the other. Key concepts such as urban transitions, resilience, vulnerabilities and needs helped us to get stories and experiences going, but also to systematise these experiential knowledges in a broader context. And conversely, stories from the world of residents or service users helped us to refine our concepts.

In April 2021, the lecturer gave an online class to students and a community worker about Hartley Dean's distinction between thin and thick needs. Thin needs are defined as needs that a person must fulfil in order to survive (hygiene, food, water, shelter, safety). Thick needs are needs that enable people to develop as full human beings. This conceptual distinction was immediately understood by the community worker as an analytical framework to interpret the deeper meaning of each individual experience of dependency and powerlessness of a service user, but also to detect similarities between different stories. The conceptual framework was seen as a useful tool to uncover in a more systematic way what service users called 'the invisible part of their iceberg'.

During the discussion between students, community workers and service users, it also became clear how the digital stories and narratives made it possible to refine the conceptual distinction

between thin and thick needs. Service users pointed out how thin needs (shelter) and thick needs (love, sexuality, personal development and the capacity to fully assimilate one's own space) interact, and how a strict, hierarchal dichotomy between thin and thick needs could hurt their case. It could easily support a political discourse that a minimum replacement income only serves thin needs and service users only deserve to survive rather than the fulfilment of thick needs.

CSL helps retrieving practice wisdom

In social work research, there is a considerable literature on what is called 'practice wisdom', a term that refers to the ability of social workers to know how to judge, decide and act in concrete and specific situations. This practice wisdom is not limited to a correct understanding and interpretation of the environment. Practice wisdom is more than the sum of theoretical concepts, empirical knowledge and a set of practical tools. It refers to a certain inner ability to find the right orientation and the right match between different types of knowledges in order to determine one's own course of action in a concrete and uncertain situation. This inner disposition can be acquired individually or collectively, but in any case the individual or group should develop practice wisdom through experience, through repeated exposure to challenging and uncertain situations. Practical wisdom can come in different forms. It may manifest as a tacit, unarticulated ability to know how to do things. But often practice wisdom implies a deliberate practice in which an individual or a group interrupts their course of action and has to reflect on the situation, discursively discern salient features of the context, articulate relevant values and principles to find an appropriate course of action.

It is hardly surprising that in complex urban settings, with their accumulation of intersecting fault lines, practice wisdom plays a central role in the practice of urban social work. It emerges as the capacity of social workers to navigate a variety of urban spaces, as well as a multitude of mental worlds of citizens. Practice wisdom enables social workers to anticipate conflicts, defuse tensions and position themselves as full actors in the city, as space makers, bridge builders, community builders, policy influencers.

Through its setting of cooperative and multiple learning, as well to its focus on learning by experience, CSL embodies an attractive pedagogical approach for the acquisition of practice wisdom. Our idea, argued for in Claes et al (2021) was that it is reasonable to expect students, professionals and residents to be called upon to reflect cooperatively on a difficult and uncertain situation, to make meaning of this situation together, but also to open up to each other's perspectives and inner urban representations.

An example from Brussels

The CLS experience in Brussels taught us a lot about the importance of reciprocity and horizontality between learning participants as a fertile ground for acquiring practice wisdom in complex urban settings. During a workshop with residents, social workers and a student, one

participant, Lena, told a series of stories and concerns in which the near and distant past were mixed and mingled. It was quite a challenge to understand the meaning of the stories, how they related to each other. There were fragments of scenes from her past in Africa where she easily moved from one household (one kitchen) to another and exercised her collective parental authority (not only for her children, but also for the children of her neighbours). There was a scene in Brussels in the corridor of her social housing complex, where she felt afraid of the young people who hung around there, who she knew already as kids. There was another scene in her apartment between her and her neighbours, who both lived in cramped accommodation, so she lent the living room of her apartment to them so they could invite some friends over.

In a reflection meeting after the workshop, the student and her lecturer tried to make sense of this fragmented story as an essential element of acquiring practice wisdom about living in a dense, superdiverse social housing complex. They based their reflection on the students' personal experiences and transcriptions of the audio.

The open, horizontal discussion between student and mentor, and the difference in familiarity with the case (only the student had attended the workshop), revealed how the reciprocity in the conversation, the experiential knowledge of the student, and making room for the perplexity of lecturer led to a reflexive process of collective understanding of the overall meaning of the fragmented story. This resulted in pieces of wisdom on two levels. First, the practical understanding of the meaning of Lena's story. Student and lecturer now understood that Lena regretted being cut off from her African past in which the kitchen of the neighbours symbolised solidarity and a shared space of education. Instead, she now passes through the corridor of her social housing block on a daily basis, which regularly reminds her of her loss of shared parental authority. Second, by making sense Lena's story, bits and pieces of Lena's own wisdom have come to light. Through the cooperative reflection of student and lecturer, Lena's capacity to spontaneously reinvent solidarity in a deprived and dense urban setting where living space is scarce, and the where sharing and exchange of space binds bonds and a sense of collectivity is revealed.

The CSL experience in Debrecen

In Debrecen, understanding the essence of the colony's identity, exploring the inner layers of the conflict and identifying possible ways of dealing with it required much discussion and direct experience on the part of the students. Although this was limited during the pandemic, the students tried to get to know the local community through personal contacts. Each student made contact using household data sheets and met at least 10 households in the village and their members. Through personal stories, they gained a lot of experience about the manifestations of prejudice, the everyday routines of how conflicts work, and the emotional and cognitive structures behind the situations that arise.

During the experiential learning, the students also received a lot of help from social worker professionals, who helped them to interpret and contextualise what they heard from the target group.

The CSL experience in Manchester

In Manchester, students facilitated a workshop with young people to find out about their experiences of attending the local youth project. This included trying to capture why young

people attended a youth club in a library on a Friday night when this seemed an unusual choice for young people. Many of the young people attending the project are those who might be considered 'hard to reach' including those from Roma and Asian communities who would not usually share social and community activities. The students were also working with the young people to identify what they would like to see improved in terms of the setting, the activities and the relationship with the youth workers.

Finding their way to an unfamiliar building in an unfamiliar location and introducing themselves to a group of professionals and young people provided the first opportunity for practice learning. The students and local facilitator reflected on both the way this mirrors what they may expect in future practice and how the citizens might also experience unfamiliar settings and the importance of the ownership young people feel over the space where they meet. This highlights the value of students learning about communities with citizens in their own spaces and environments.

The experience provided students with valuable practice learning around relationship development and the time this can take, for example through being involved in games and through witnessing the relationships the youth workers had developed with the young people, sometimes over a period of years.

The students had prepared activities to encourage the young people to share their views, feelings and experiences. These varied in their effectiveness and allowed students to reflect on the experience of trying different methods to engage people they work with. The professional working with the students described youth work as being like 'playing Jazz' because you have to be ready to improvise. Trying different approaches and working with the citizens so they could identify the ways they would like to explore and communicate their experiences allowed students to learn from citizens about better ways of working with young people. One student, on reflecting on their experience and how it was difficult to get the young people to talk to them, recognised that this is part of social work practice.

Through young people representing the youth group as an animal, students learnt about how the group felt like family; they felt it offered strength but also comfort. In responding to quiz questions, the young citizens talked about the community they live in and the importance of food, family and friendship. This allowed students to understand the significance of the group in this particular community, particularly in terms of the relationships that have been developed between young people and with the youth workers.

The young people talked about the history of their relationship with the youth workers and the project. Youth workers had begun by working with young people by going to where they chose to meet in the local park. Originally the young people were viewed as causing trouble by entering the local library space, this was eventually used as a formal space for meetings and the way this had developed as a space for the youth project provided a sense of ownership.

Community Service Learning for students in Manchester took the form of witnessing, experiencing and showing genuine curiosity. Work with both the citizens and the professionals allowed them to see the strength of relationships and the time they had taken to develop, experience the setting where work with young people took place, experience the difficulties around engaging with young people and learn from the experiences of those who were supported by the project as well as those who worked within it.

Checklist

We end this guidebook with a checklist that can be used when organising Community Service Learning. Especially in a course in which several universities participate, it is recommended to use this checklist to coordinate the different CSL trajectories. The checklist includes several questions about the practical aspects of CSL, but also about the three basic principles: civic engagement, cooperative and multiple learning, and reflection.

General information

1. Title of the CSL trajectory
2. Period during which CSL takes place
3. Student target group (in which course / year are the participating students?)
4. Local course to which CSL is linked
5. Number of credits students obtain by participating in the course
6. Cooperating organisations
7. Number of participating students
8. Number of participating lecturers

Content

9. Short description of the urban setting
10. Short description of relevant urban themes, challenges, complexities
11. Short description of the CSL trajectory
12. Nature of the expected activities in the field

Basic principles of CSL

13. Content of civic engagement
14. Underlying goals, ideals, values of civic engagement
15. Who are the actors of cooperative learning?
16. What are the expected settings of cooperative learning?
17. How does cooperative learning contribute to addressing urban challenges and complexities?
18. How is reflexive learning on experience organised and promoted?

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