Towards cross-cultural social work: a teaching approach for development of intercultural competences

Hacía un trabajo social intercultural: un modelo didáctico para el desarrollo de competencias interculturales

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Abstract:

The professional skills demanded of social workers by contemporary society must una-voidably include the capacity to apply knowledge, to know how to act and acquire the appropriate new competences for listening and taking care of people coming from different cultures. With regard to the training of future generations of social workers it must be remembered that they will have to deal with an increasingly globalized society and face the new demands placed upon the profession by the presence of a greater number of people migrating to Italy in increasingly greater numbers.

Teaching experimentation carried out as part of the degree course in Social Work at the University of Palermo over the last ten years has already been moving in the direction of integrating, first of all, an awareness of the need for professional, trans-cultural knowledge and, consequently, also urgently planning and providing an improvement for the future generations of professionals. From this experience a teaching approach is being developed that consents the integration of an academic education with transcultural skills and achieve greater effectiveness precisely by paying more attention to the diversity of the lives of the subjects in the caring relationship. Training in intercultural skills may lead to two objectives: ensuring the quality of care for the migrant population, in terms of equal opportunities and non-discrimination; transmitting a sense of security to social workers in dealings with the migrant population, whilst reducing stress and limiting erroneous behaviour.

The intercultural quality of social services, with the possibility of carrying out cross-cultural social work, will enhance services for migrants (e.g. assistance for social integration, protection of cultural specificities, prevention of violence and discrimination); it will also bring about the rejuvenation of indigenous communities, by reassuring its wary citizens and transforming the whole concept of citizenship, in the social rather than legal sense.

Keywords: social work; migration; intercultural competences; professional training.

Resumen:

Las herramientas profesionales de los trabajadores sociales requeridas por la sociedad contemporánea deben inevitablemente incluir la capacidad de aplicar el conocimiento, de saber cómo actuar y de adquirir nuevas competencias apropiadas para escuchar y para atender a las personas provenientes de diferentes culturas. En relación con el entrenamiento a las futuras generaciones de trabajadores sociales, se debe recordar que tendrán que negociar con una sociedad cada vez más globalizada y afrontar las nuevas demandas hacia la profesión, por la presencia de un número de inmigrantes en Italia en cifras cada vez más altas.

La experimentación didáctica llevada a cabo como parte del curso de grado en Trabajo Social de la Universidad de Palermo, en los últimos diez años, ya se ha estado movilizando hacia la integración, en primer lugar, de una conciencia de la necesidad del conocimiento profesional trans-cultural y consecuentemente, como urgentemente, de una planeación y provisión del mejoramiento para las futuras generaciones de profesionales. A partir de esta experiencia se ha estado desarrollando un modelo de enseñanza que permita la integración de una educación académica con las herramientas trasnsculturales y el logro de mayor eficacia, prestando precisamente mayor atención a la diversidad de las vidas de los sujetos en la relación de aiuda social.

Entrenar en herramientas interculturales puede conducir a dos objetivos: asegurar la calidad de la atención a la población inmigrante, en términos de brindar igualdad de oportunidades y no-discriminación; transmitir un sentido de seguridad a los trabajadores sociales para generar acuerdos con la población inmigrante, mientras se reduce el estrés y los comportamientos erróneos limitantes.

La calidad intercultural de los servicios sociales, con la posibilidad de llevar a cabo un trabajo social transcultural, mejorará los servicios para los inmigrantes (e.g. asistencia para la reintegración social, protección de las especificidades culturales, prevención de la violencia y de la discriminación); igualmente, traerá consigo el rejuvenecimiento de comunidades indígenas, tranquilizando a sus ciudadanos cautelosos y transformando el entero concepto de ciudadanía, en un sentido social más que legal.

Palabras clave: Trabajo social; inmigración, competencias interculturales, entrenamiento profesional.

1. General issues: migrations, services, social work

Cultural diversity in contemporary society is bringing about changes in institutions and in actual interaction, entailing multi-directional adjustments in basic social struc-

tures and institutions. This mutating world requires people to acquire and develop intercultural competences, to manage diversity in interaction and to foster favourable transcultural relationships. Moving towards the acceptance and coexistence of this diversity entails introducing structural changes in society and political institutions (Torres 2011). Migrant access to (and exclusion from) welfare services has been widely discussed (Calavita 2005; Barn 2008; Zincone 2011; Baldwin-Edwards 2012: Saraceno et al 2013). Currently, national policies seem unable to decide what to do for immigrants, concentrating almost exclusively on entry and security issues; in fact, it may be noted that interventions aimed at containment or refoulement of migrant flows do receive significant financial resources, whereas the inclusion and integration of legal immigrants is seen as a secondary investment (Barberis 2010). Furthermore, multicultural societies face challenges related to the management of plurality and services offered to citizens. The existing models of social services and welfare benefits were created years ago and have not kept up-to-date with social change, nor have they adjusted to the transition from multicultural to intercultural societies (Friesenhahn 2008).

Some of these critical issues regard, specifically, the organization of services. Social services represent a microcosm of wider society and are not resistant to the influence of dominant norms grounded in myths and stereotyping of 'others' from a different background. The services often have to go along with management practices that standardize procedures and which, while supposedly aiming for efficacy and efficiency, limit and over-formalize the time spent with those they assist. For migrants, the possibilities for intervention are also restricted and standardized by the Law, making difficult the recognition of various rights and their customs, culture and values. Professional competences and know-how are put to the test (Mazzetti 2003; Tognetti Bordogna 2004; Spinelli 2005; Di Rosa 2013) both by the extra-ordinary assistance demanded in the context of the emergency caused by migration and the "ordinary" assistance required by those who have already settled in Italy. General organisational weaknesses in case-management, individualisation and accessibility could be particularly relevant for a population with limited, linking, social capital (i.e. skills and knowledge to interact with institutions). The problem of access to social services (but also to social work in general) has been highlighted by several case studies (Bracci and Cardamone 2005; Ferrari 2010; Barberis and Boccagni 2014). There are several difficulties related to material aspects (linguistic, organizational), but also relational (risk of incomprehension, of conflicts stemming from differing views of the world). It seems clear that the social worker today has to operate in a state of uncertainty, torn between professional ethics on the one hand and inadequate attention to policy on the other, exacerbated by the very peculiarities of the profession, which is not based on technical formulae, but on listening, on attentiveness and the ability to handle constantly fluctuating situations.

These problematic issues can jeopardize the ability to provide effective help and the possibility of establishing a relationship of trust, which is essential for developing an adequate care process. Professionals are feeling a need for retraining and

support from their institutions (Di Rosa 2015), and are trying to adapt their "ordinary" models to the specific needs of the new clients. The high risk of the helping process failing amplifies the professionals' feeling of isolation and sense of inadequacy, as regards both their own competences and the means at their disposal to cope with the migrants' needs. This problem brings into play issues related to personal identity and, therefore, also embraces stereotyping and prejudice, something which certainly needs to be acknowledged and learnt how to manage (Campanini 2002). The more diverse and fast-changing the profiles of immigrant clients are, the greater is the difficulty for social workers' cognitive categories to keep pace and the greater, ironically, is the potential for overreliance on culture-based stereotyping. Unsurprisingly, practitioners tend to approach immigrant clients' culture as a ritualised principle, more often than a proxy of their distinctive backgrounds (Barberis and Boccagni 2014: 81). In other words, there is a risk that migration may present a demanding challenge for the professional category, if no immediate recourse is made to wide-scale professional updating, and until professionals are specifically trained to tackle these issues by overcoming the widespread lack of specific knowledge in the intercultural field.

2. Didactic experimentation

2.1. Intercultural competences: theoretical structure of reference

The centrality of such learning is expressly affirmed in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: "Intercultural competence should be part of citizenship and human rights. The competent public authorities and education institutions should make use as far as possible, of definitions of key competences for intercultural communication in order to develop and implement studies teaching programs and orders at all levels of the education system, including the training of teachers and educational programs for adults." (Council of Europe, 2008: 46). Intercultural competences can be grouped together (Byram 1997; 2008) as: a font of knowledge (of another culture), capacity to understand (aptitude for interpreting and contact), capacity to learn (aptitude for discovery and interaction), capacity to be (curiosity and openness), capacity to commit (aptitude for critical thinking on the cultural level). In general, the term "intercultural competence" suggests a condition of possessing adequate know-how for relating to people from specific cultures, and not simply general knowledge regarding the issues that normally arise in contact with people from different cultures; a welcoming approach needs to be displayed, which may then foster the creation and maintenance of relationships with "others"; there is a need for the ability to use this acquired know-how and this welcoming approach in interaction with individuals belonging to different cultures (Leeds-Hurwitz and Stenou 2013).

From the theoretical point of view, a collection of studies is presented regarding this topic, including an overview of the lines of thought of various authors who have

developed theories and models about intercultural competence, whilst emphasising its multi-dimensionality (Chen and Starosta 1996; Sundermaier 1999; Martínez, Martínez and Calzado 2006; Purnell and Paulanka 1998; Fantini 2007; Spitzberg and Changnon 2009; Deardoff 2006; Lavanco y Hombrados Mendieta 2009; Grant and Portera 2010; Onorati 2011; Barrett 2011). With regard to the application of intercultural competence in the field of social work, the model proposed by Cohen Emerique (2011) is taken as a point of reference, along with the guidelines worked out by the Council of Europe.

2.2. Organization of the course

The training course is arranged into 15 modules and is intended for second-year students studying for a university degree in Social Work; the same educational pattern is applicable to continuing training and upgrading of social workers operating in the sector or those who want to qualify to work in the area of migration. Three steps were individuated by Cohen Emerique (2011) for developing a process of transcultural aid (decentralization, discovery of the reference framework of the "other" and mediation regarding the symbolic meanings of the events), and with reference to these, the proposed contents were divided into three general areas, encapsulated in the three competences deemed as essential: **discovering, knowing, building**. From the teaching point of view, the course envisages both individual study and development of professional skills, in such a way as to motivate students and professionals at both the level of mind set and "skillset" (Bennett 1993; 2003).

The themes are addressed through reading, theoretical analysis, lab activity and personal and group activities:

- the hidden impact of personal prejudices and racist attitudes when listening,
- the importance of cultural differences in the understanding of the feeling of distress and in risk evaluation,
- the necessity to overcome cultural stereotyping while knowing how to handle the variable element involved in belonging to different worlds,
- the interpretation of the models and the services of social work in the contexts of multicultural interventions,
- the issues related to orders coming from institutions and possible conflicts with one's professional mandate,
- the advantages and disadvantages of using formal or informal cultural mediators.

Classroom laboratories and fieldwork
- simulation in professional settings of interviews with clients of non-Italian origin,

- team evaluation of problematic cases involving foreign clients,

- group analysis of cases found in relevant literature.

Field work:

- participating as observers in social services dealing with foreign clients (hospitals, healthcare centres, communities, etc.)

- research carried out in contexts characterized by multiculturalism (local neighbourhoods, small towns)

A. Discovering

The encounter with subjects from different ethnic, cultural, social and economic backgrounds, in this case, in fact, immigrants, represents something very different from the diversity offered by the disabled or the elderly, being less widely-known and understood; this might generate ambivalent feelings in the operator: fear, pity, curiosity, but also indifference and piousness (Tognetti Bordogna 2004), and consequently foment the risk of adopting non-universalistic practices (Spinelli 2005). The aim of the process of discovery is to lead to objective knowledge of "others". In this part of the course, extensive work is carried out on personal representations of diversity, perceptions and opinions with regard to the presence of the migrant in one's own country. The discovery is based on the cultural competences that, through research and observation, favour the understanding of cultures different from our own. Only by recognizing the stereotyping and the prejudices which we harbour, at times unconsciously, and resolving them with an authentic interest for different social and cultural realities, can we face, in a positive way, the attitudes of fear, refusal and suspicion that often characterize our "non-relationship" with them. In fact, personal work is the necessary pre-condition for subsequently tackling issues regarding: resistance to those perceived as being different, and to listening to information that calls into question one's own values, the difficulty in comprehending one's internal dynamics in response to inconceivable, never-before encountered situations and the internal conflict with one's own prejudices.

In this phase, in a non-judgmental context, analysis is carried out, of the most frequent difficulties, such as reluctance to acknowledge competences in persons with different skills, especially if these are unknown or not very well-known; failed attempts to enter into empathy with persons possessing value-systems and life-styles that are somewhat unconventional. All this leads us to an awareness of the fact that the providing of services that are not influenced by one's own culture and traditions actually does not exist; only by starting from this assumption is it possible to compare oneself with the "other" in a helping relationship. The possibility of exploring one's own cultural background and becoming aware of it is therefore what allows operators to establish a relationship (Geng and Awa 1992).

At the same time, this course of action enables professionals to discover the influence of their own ethnic and cultural origins on their professional activity. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on the burden of one's own scale of values and priorities when identifying the importance of the client's needs and problems. Therefore, the extent of the cultural connotations of all the criteria adopted as standard in order to understand and intervene, becomes much clearer. (Spinelli 2005). These contents are developed during an experimental course of action that envisages a succession of activities arranged into four modules:

A.1- Personal work as a necessary precondition in a professional environment for dealing with:

- resistance to listening to information that calls into question our own values;
- the effort to understand the dynamics that present facts that we deem unimaginable and with which we have never before confronted;
- internal conflict with one's own prejudices;
- resistance to accepting the competence of others who possess different skills;
- the difficulty of empathizing with people possessing systems of values and lifestyles so distant from those we know (Tarsia 2010).

A.2 - Know oneself in order to know "others": the rediscovery of the necessity to know oneself, to be able to define one's own identity and one's own background.

- Guided reflection in groups on the levels of the Iceberg of Cultural Orientations" (Katan 1999:171) to know how to distinguish superficial traits from deeper affiliations.
- Dynamics in pairs or in small groups to encourage reflection on one's own definition of identity and sense of belonging.
- Interpersonal conversations, exploring how, even among colleagues, all are different and "foreign" compared to each other (it often happens that subjects discovers they are also "foreign to themselves").

A.3 - The "other" in fantasies, stereotypes and individual fears.

- Individual exercises to discover the image you have of the life of the "other" and the consequent mechanisms of selection/exclusion that stem from this.
- Group work to discover and neutralize the stereotyping that accompanies us in our contact with people we do not know or who we consider "other" because of their colour, culture or language.
- Group work about the representation of the foreigner in contexts of belonging (family, work, leisure time).

A.4 - Migrants and communities, old and new belonging: experiences involving observation and description of the students' own backgrounds.

- Analysis of the effects of the presence of foreigners on the sense of belonging to communities.

- Investigation into the presence and the dynamics of the sense of generalized threat.

- Reflection on how in every community the sense of belonging is developed and defended.

A.5 - Media and public communication: research (in newspapers, books and on the web) into cases that exemplify the power that the media and public communication have in the construction of the representation of the migrant/foreigner (Dal Lago 1999). Various materials are taken into consideration: advertisements, political communications, passages taken from books (including historical ones). At the same time, students devote time to searching for images or speech on the internet attempting to manipulate public opinion regarding migrants. The aim of this part of the course is to stimulate a critical view towards sources of information and to encourage the students to have a different relationship with "news".

B. Understanding

The process of understanding is based on knowing the subjects and their environment, through communication and direct comparison, which are necessary when we want to establish horizontal relationships which are not dogmatic and "one way" but problematic, stimulating, and respectful of the richness and the complexity within them. This is an essential step for creating a trusting relationship between the professional and the migrant, this trust in its turn being decisive for a successful care process. The path towards knowledge in an intercultural key consists in an approach from one towards the other, with the support of a mediator, with the aim of improving communication and finding common ground to resolve the conflicts regarding pressures of change (inevitably undergone by all migrants), whilst maintaining the functions of social and educational action.

This educational dimension concerns the need to interpret the "other", autonomously and knowingly elaborating the culture that emerges from meeting people who are different from oneself. The aim is to create the possibility of generalizing, in a constant interaction between diversity/equality and the transferability of the knowledge acquired.

B.1 - Elements for understanding migrants

The exploration of specific aspects of the migration (Losi 2000): the reason for the departure; the route taken and the risks and possible traumas and losses; the duration of their stay; their expectations; the elements of success or failure along the migratory path.

The theme of culture shock (Olberg 1960): its social and psychological consequences, psychological distress, marginalization, maladjustment, all the possible results of a failure to integrate or the unresolved conflict of belonging to two worlds.

B.2 - Special focus and vulnerabilities

The differences are spotlighted in four specific areas: the typical problems of newly-arrived immigrants, the tensions or efforts undergone by long-term residents, the relational problems between first and second generation immigrants, the integration processes of males and females. Certain areas of vulnerability, in particular, are individualized and examined in depth, distinguished by the specific moment of the access to the social services. A distinction should therefore be made between vulnerability demanding more immediate attention, such as the moment of arrival in the host country (with priority, for example at the moment of disembarkation for minors - women - asylum seekers) and the vulnerability that develops subsequently, through lack of success in integration. This could embrace critical areas such as work, accommodation, access to services, access to justice. Long-term vulnerability is also examined, in particular as regards second generations, who face problems related to integration into the school environment or into peer group in leisure time. Among the various aspects under examination, a focus is also placed on the fragility of family relationships in migration, analysed both at the level of the couple (with relative risks of gender violence) and the inter-generational level (relationships with adults and with their countries of origin). In this regard, various issues are tackled, including: development of identity and sense of belonging –inter-generational bonds– the continuity of traditional practices.

Examinations at the end of this phase will take the form of exercises analysing case-studies and will aim to inhibit students from re-producing standardized answers. The operator must consider all these aspects on an individual level and not according to the category of migrant with whom they are dealing, putting themselves "in their shoes" and exploring the individual stories which, because of the multitude of factors involved, render each individual unique and original.

B.3 - The mediation resource

During observation of real-life cases, space is also allocated to in-depth examination of the potentiality and risks linked to the juxtaposing of cultural mediators. In

specialised, low-threshold counters/ immigration centres social workers, intercultural mediators and, sometimes, guidance counsellors constitute common local policy options (Barberis and Boccagni 2014: 79). Very often the solution found in the social services only provides support to professional cultural mediators, rather than providing training in the intercultural field for full-time personnel. Regarding the use of cultural mediators, after a presentation of the roles and duties of this new professional figure, not only are the opportunities offered by this type of collaboration presented, but also the problems involved in employing mediators. On the one hand, these stem from a lack of a clear definition of the role, both in a legal framework and with regard to the duties and functions of this figure, and on the other, from the effort involved for professionals who are not used to this type of collaboration, not accustomed to having to work alongside external personnel. The greatest difficulty in fostering professional cooperation between social workers and mediators, consists in significant local variations, the differences according to catchment area, function, institutionalisation. (Tosi 2010).

The excursus on mediation concludes with a short analysis of the different functions that intercultural mediation can have, chosen for their close dependence on national migratory policies and the political choices relative to the receiving of migrants (Di Rosa 2005).

C. Constructing

Often when we work in multicultural contexts we encounter several difficulties. Many of these come about because, even though motivated by the best of intentions, social activity and intervention suffer from a lack of previous, careful analysis of the single motivations, interests and problems, and above all, a lack of consideration for the importance of active participation, both at the individual level and the group level, in the integration process. The construction process requires conceptualizing measures for action, for building together, for action research, for operational strategies; it should be based on the concept of doing things with "others" (not for "others"), which means having the possibility of sharing and cooperating, even though sometimes it might be necessary to create objective conditions to favour this. It is clear that this is actually a shift in paradigm with regard to the social intervention, to the extent that diversity is understood and accepted as a point of departure in the search for positive interaction and bidirectional co-assessment and growth.

C.1 - Innovative approach

The social worker's efforts, therefore, should not be restricted to providing answers to specific issues of intervention and services, but should be directed towards an innovative approach based on acknowledgement and participation (which cannot

be separated from the fostering of social rights), towards achieving equal opportunity and the enhancement of subjective resources.

Acquiring knowledge on the specificities of other cultures, however, should not constitute an exemption from further efforts at communication, since there is the risk of rendering the operator passive and dominated by reasoning that leads to tolerating differences merely to avoid eventual clashes and conflict; on the contrary there should be a major commitment to the relationship with the "other", analysing the lifestyle and values that characterize his/her cultural affiliation. This furthers the opportunity to build a profession, through progress towards the full application of the ethical principles of respect for diversity, human rights and action for social justice, and through the enhancement of professional skills and their application in key transcultural methods and techniques. Only in this way can social work play its part in spreading a culture of acceptance and respect for differences, thus curbing the spread of stereotyping and prejudice towards migrants and, at the same time, contributing to the implementation of social policies and interventions geared towards the pursuit of substantive social justice.

C.2 - Ethical and political issues

From the point of view of the profession's specific principles, starting from the research results from Tarsia (2010) on social workers, in particular in the aspects concerning the building of trust and a caring relationship; the most ethical issue policies covered by Spinelli (2005) are then examined, especially the question of the institutional mandate and the possible conflict with the ethics of the profession, with the consequent risk of institutional racism. During training, participants have the opportunity to rediscover their ethical roots in the profession: the final part of the course is reserved for the reading of the code of ethics and the definition of social work, not only restoring the profession's ethical foundations, but also exploring the potential yet to be expressed or retrieved when encountering the contemporary world (Dominelli 2010).

A social work that is ready to interact with different cultures is also a social work that, whilst rediscovering relational profundity, re-examines its own foundations and its adhesion to values such as dignity for all mankind and social justice (Nussbaum 2013). Working with migrants, regardless of nationality, offers an opportunity to repossess a social work focused on the defence of human rights, capable of making its contribution to generating structural change in the society in which it operates; by working towards real integration it may become a promoter (and protagonist) of shared citizenship between immigrants and the indigenous population.

Working for social justice and coexistence among cultures is much more than simply assisting migrant clients. Transcultural social services provide for the migrant population in terms of health, social services, social integration processes in local

neighbourhoods or schools, prevention of violence and discrimination, etc.; this implies, above all, working with the native population, aiming at social reassurance, avoidance of stereotyping and prejudice; it also means working simultaneously on both migrants and nationals, educating them for a democratic coexistence and redefining the concept of citizenship in a social sense. "The intercultural work constitutes, by definition, one of the areas of strategic access to the operation of institutional systems and their capacity to respond to emerging social needs related to integration, equity, access to resources (...) should have among its eminent purposes, as well as among its effects, the strengthening of the degree of confidence that individuals accord to institutional systems and, more generally, between individuals themselves" (Onorati 2011: 41). Following the thought of Onorati implies operating in the prospect of a new basis of trust through the intervention of social workers, rethinking their role as "trusted speakers" (Mutti 1998) at the service of society.

3. A summing-up: towards cross-cultural social work

Meeting people from different cultures inevitably involves calling into question one's own acquired knowledge, but it is equally true that it also hints at the potential for growth in the professional social work, it being essential, during the care process, to integrate the specific details regarding the migrants' life stories and their relationship with both the host society and the social services. The uncertainty that social workers and services are currently experiencing might offer a valuable opportunity to introduce greater flexibility and greater effectiveness by dealing with the migrants in a way that takes into consideration their cultural specificity.

Intercultural competence implies overcoming personal and professional prejudices on the part of the social assistants, improving understanding and awareness of diversity, culture, marginality and exclusion, adapting to particular individual situations and their own modes of operation. The code of ethics states that the profession is founded "on the value, on the dignity and uniqueness of all people, respect their universally recognized rights and on the affirmation of the original qualities of the people: freedom, equality, social, solidarity, participation" (Deontological Code for Social Workers of Italy, 2002). In practical terms, however, not always are these ethical and deontological principles easy to realize; in fact, while it is true that the presence of different cultures acts as a catalyst in the processes of change in society, this is equally valid for the professional category. This conclusion refers principally to the social workers' perception regarding their ability to build significant relationships with clients, and the way in which they perceive the issues involved (Dominelli 2005).

In recent years, social work has paid greater attention to the relational dynamics between cultures. There is greater awareness of the emergence of new training needs which develop expert knowledge based on giving importance to the understanding of

differences as an essential condition for the construction of a relationship with migrant clients. Working with immigrants offers a challenge and, at the same time, an opportunity to provide a social service that is authentic, based on the defence of human rights and real integration, encouraging shared citizenship between foreigners and the indigenous population.

To achieve this, it would be appropriate to foster multidimensional and synergistic change, with the participation of the academic world, in the social and institutional contexts in which social workers operate: "Educational institutions must prepare their students for these kinds of challenges which they probably will meet as social workers in a multicultural society. Social work students must be given the competence needed to work with a diverse population in a well-informed and culturally sensitive manner" (Bø 2015: 562). There are more training courses, masters and specializations dedicated to working with migrants. University programs, which until recently did not include specific courses for preparing social workers to interact with people belonging to other cultures, are starting to offer courses in migration and the dynamics of cross-cultural assistance, though the content of these courses varies greatly from place to place. It might therefore be opportune for the university, first of all, to integrate cross-cultural knowledge in its courses and, consequently, to urgently provide for training of the new generations of professionals.

Today, there is a preventive function in proposing and developing training-courses regarding the afore-mentioned issues, in preparing people to live and interact in multicultural societies; at the same time, the helping function deals with tackling the problems involved in receiving and integrating migrants. In the long term, training can also have the important function of "social recovery", resuscitating a sense of citizenship and participation in resolving the problems emerging from conflict in contemporary society.

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